Grim
HOLLOW
THE CAMPAIGN GUIDE
5th
Edition Fantasy
GHOSTFIRE
GAMING

THE SEA OF TURMOIL
CINDERGAST
VOLGEN
FORT KENTIGERN
BORGUND
COLD IRON KEEP
THE VALIKAN CLANS
KANDAR
SOLHEIM
HRIST
THRULL
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RAEVO
LANDHAUS
GRÄFFENDAM
MALKOVIA
THE GREY SPINE
FALLOWHEART
DUESENBERG
WALSTEIN
THE BURACH EMPIRE
THE OSTOYAN EMPIRE
THE BLACK MIRE
GRABENSTEIN
ULSTENBURG
CROWSBEND

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RAULAND
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NOV OSTOYA
THE GROVE MAZE
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TOL LEYEMIL
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THE THOUSAND RIVERS
BONNESEAUX VILLAGE
COROVA
CHARNAULT KINGDOM
TOL KERDYWEL
HOUIVILLE
CASTINELLAN PROVINCE
MORENCIA
TOLETUM
DARK OAK GROVE
MIST TEMPLE
THE SHADED HAVEN
MONT DE LANCEY
FARO
GULF OF LIONS
SHATTERD PEAKS
EMBER CAIRN
THERPENA
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INTRODUCTION

WELCOME, GAMING ENTHUSIAST!
If you're reading this then you are most likely an avid fan of tabletop roleplaying games, dark fantasy, and—hopefully, after you read this book—Grim Hollow. Inside, you will find the world of Etharis, a labour of love and passion made possible entirely by the support (and hard work) of gamers just like you.

What started as a home game with a few friends has become a living, breathing world, brought to life by the 4,523 backers who made our dream a reality. From a late-night gaming session to a successful Kickstarter campaign, the journey so far has been a whirlwind of challenging and rewarding experiences.

This guide and the world of Etharis are our take on dark fantasy for a modern gaming table. In a time of flattened storytelling, where antagonists are hollow and heroes can never really fail, we sought to create something real and immersive. Inside we have included the tropes we love, the themes we find thought-provoking, and the storytelling techniques we find effective. We hope you enjoy them and come to share our passion for this world.

This is our first book and we have learned a lot. We are incredibly proud of the work we have done, and the results laid before you. However, this is just the beginning for this hopeful little startup from Down Under, and we would be sincerely grateful to continue this journey with you. Now, as a part of our ever-growing community, we hope to see you next time, for whatever fantastical plane of existence our imaginations conjure next.

With that, we are incredibly excited to share our creation with you. We hope you are just as excited to read it. So, from one eager nerd to another, happy gaming!

Oh, and welcome to Etharis. We'll see if you survive...

WELCOME TO ETHARIS

"Only a few warriors remain. Defenders of humanity against the horrors of the dark. Their numbers dwindle with every new moon. You see, this world belongs to the darkness, and darkness will not give it up easily."

FROM ITS DEEP AND FORBIDDING FORESTS, where horrible beasts lurk, to the hulking and impenetrable mountains ranges where lost legacies lie, the landscape of Etharis is formidable. However, the true monsters of this land can be found in the degenerating cities of old, where humanity clings to survival.

The world of Etharis is the official world for the Grim Hollow setting. Here, players will find a few familiar and many unique tropes of the fantasy genre.

Before embarking in this unforgiving land, it is important to establish several defining features of Etharis and the Grim Hollow setting.

Darkness and Obscurity

Large swaths of Etharis are shrouded in darkness, supernatural and otherwise. In the farthest north the sun is hidden half the year in the natural progression of seasons. It's no surprise, either, that the deep halls of the dwarves are plunged in darkness. But the darkness shrouding the land of Ostoya is more sinister and magical in origin, and in the forests of the Charneault Kingdom, the dense mist that covers the land is the work of benign spirits—or at least spirits that bend to the will of mortals, for good and evil. The people of all these lands have adapted to a hostile environment. Punishing storms are frequent across the land, foreshadowed by howling winds and then drenching rain. Where the sun never dries the ground, mud is a constant fact of life. The crops that grow are strange and bitter. For most people, there is no safety outside the radius of a torch's glow.

The Land is Dangerous

Civilization dot through the land as islands of light surrounded by the unforgiving terrain of shadowy forests, rough mountainscapes, and sinking bogs. Travellers are often met with suspicious gazes by locals who have never left the isolation of their home village.

Relentless threats assault humanity. Vicious creatures hunt wandering children and armed travellers alike, many of whom are never heard from again. Sinister forces seek to twist mankind's nature to their whims, leaving them forever changed.

Travel is a perilous endeavour, especially at night (in lands fortunate enough to enjoy a sunlit day). Armoured columns of merchant caravans transport goods, nervously guarded by mercenaries who refuse to deviate from known roadways. Travellers caught in the dark are forced to lodge at the remote roadside inns for extortionate prices. Local guards are quick to leave them in the dark if they do not have the coin to pay.

A Lost Pantheon

In their never-ending struggle to control Etharis, the deities of the world fought what they could not defeat, and ultimately turned on and destroyed each other. With but few knowing this truth, many believe that the gods abandoned a forsaken world or never existed in the first place. The only remnants of their reign are their surviving lieutenants—surviving lieutenants—the Arch Seraphs and Arch Daemons—and the forces they control.

Arch Seraphs overlook the world with a righteous zeal, granting powers to a select few who fight in their crusades. Separated from their deities for so long, many of them have deviated from what they once represented, twisting their ideals into whatever suits their cause.

Arch Demons take delight in a world overrun by shadow and decay. Freed from the deities' power, they relish opportunities to feed their appetites. They take keen interests in mortal lives, often living among them, making deals and twisting fate to ensure threats to their existence are destroyed.

A Sickening Plague

Sickness and malnutrition are common and expected throughout the land of Etharis. However, there is one illness that is feared above the others. The Weeping Pox is widespread across the western coasts of the continent and frequently strikes harbours and coastal settlements. Distinguishable by the deep red lesions it creates in the skin of the infected, the disease is a death sentence for most.

The few who can cure the plague guard their secret closely and extract the highest prices for their intervention. The price of deliverance, for those with the choice, may be a noble estate, eternal service to the Arch Seraph of Mercy, or something far more precious.

Fear of the Arcane

Superstition and prejudice run deep. In most towns and villages across Etharis, magic is seen as both wondrous and frightening. Whether understood or not, the arcane is mistrusted and often blamed for problems ranging from the failure of a season's crops to the success of a rival's business. Many innocent people have been caught on the wrong end of superstition.

The fear of magic runs deeper in some parts of Etharis than others. In the southern region of Castinella, this fear has manifested into an organized crusade against the arcane: the Arcanist Inquisition. The inquisitors are dedicated to destroying the arcane and anyone who stands to defend it.

Not all of Etharis despises spellcasters. Many cities house great colleges dedicated to the art of magic. Within these cities' walls, spellcasters can apply for a permit to practice. These permits dictate where a mage can cast spells, what type of spells they can cast, and other specifics. The process to apply for such a permit is often frighteningly bureaucratic, and many spellcasters choose to hide their abilities instead.

Glimmers of Hope

Etharis as a campaign setting is not meant to be relentlessly bleak and depressing, or to wallow in cruelty for its own sake. Small victories become heroic when they take heroic effort to achieve. No one in Etharis is safe by default, so any safety the characters win or give to others is a true blessing. No one in Etharis is good by default, so moments of genuine grace are worth celebrating – and can come from unexpected places. Amid profound darkness, even the smallest lights have value.

This is Your World Too

The stories you tell in Etharis belong to you and your game group. We promise not to come yell at you if you get details of the world "wrong" or change them to suit your own game – in fact, that's the point! We've intentionally left questions for you to answer and conflicts for you to decide. The details in this book are meant to start your imagination running, and to save you the work of imagining a multi-faceted world from scratch. Etharis will change the moment your characters set foot in it, so embrace your power to reshape it.

RACES OF ETHARIS

IN AGES PAST, THE ELDER RACES SPREAD OVER Etharis and carved out separate kingdoms for themselves. Then the humans came, and all but annihilated the other races in their relentless drive to multiply and expand.

Today, humans are still the most numerous and powerful race in Etharis. The elder races survive either in isolated remnants of their own domains, or incorporated into larger human kingdoms. But it is an age of crisis, and some see the opportunity to claw back what their ancestors lost.

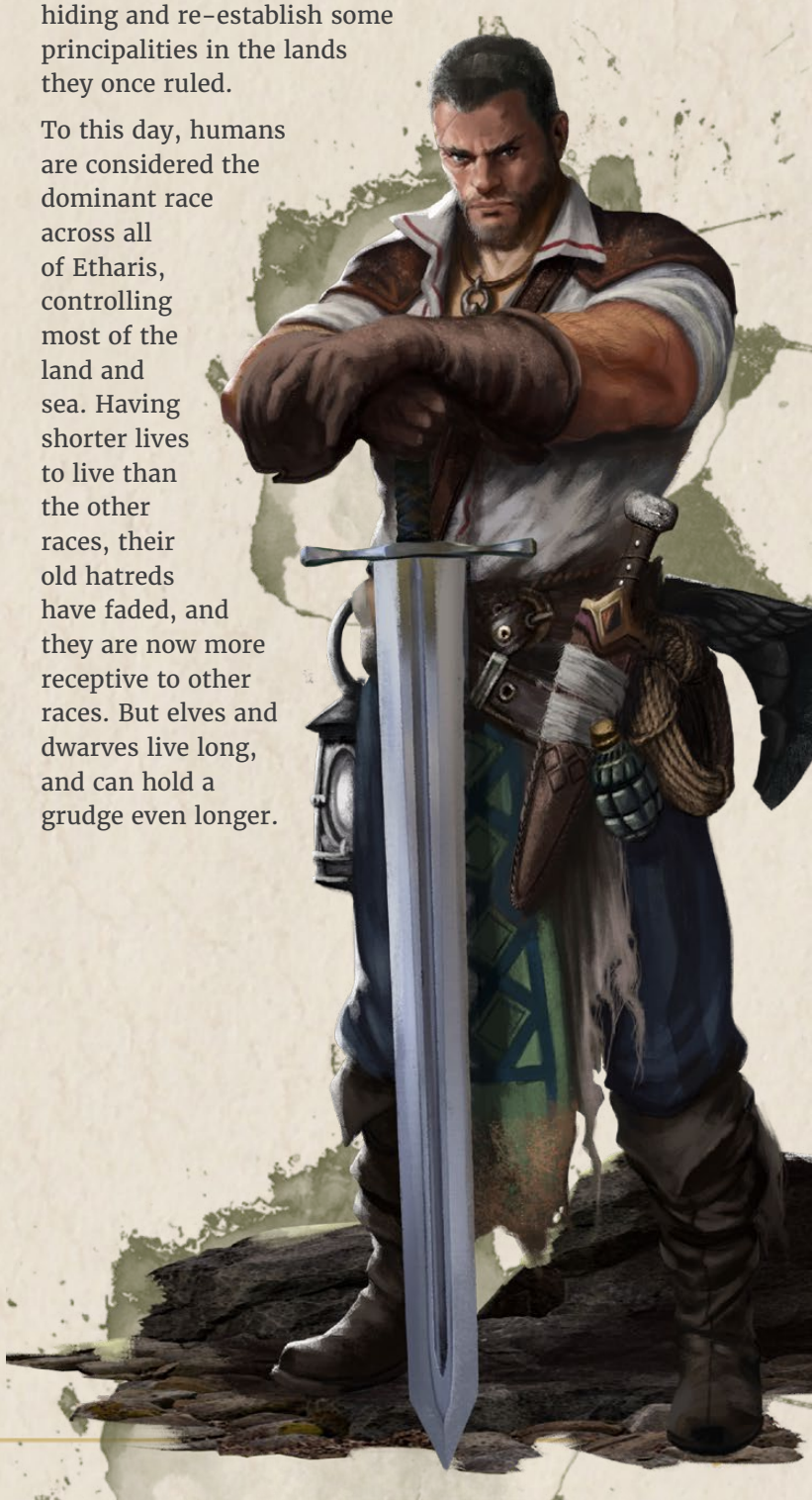
Though they are reduced in number, members of the elder races are a common sight anywhere in Etharis. Perhaps because they so often live on the fringes of human civilization, they also make up a disproportionate number of its adventurers.

Humans

While the elves and the dwarves were the first races to claim lands in the world of Etharis, the versatile race of the humans were the ones to survive and dominate. Humans nowadays can be found from the frozen and inhospitable tundra of the North to the scorched plains of the South. Emerging from the temperate forests of central Etharis, now known as the Bürach, humans were not considered a threat by other races. Left unchecked, their numbers quickly grew. It was their adaptable nature and adventurous mindset that quickly led them to expand beyond their homelands. By the time the great kingdoms of the elves and the mighty thanedoms of the dwarves realized the violence that inevitably follows the humans, it was already too late. The eyes of the human leaders fell greedily on the prosperous lands of the elves and dwarves. The great Era of Expansion, also known as the Great Purge, had begun and humans were here to stay. Different tribal armies marched simultaneously north, south and west; no land was safe. Unable to unite or react in time, the dwarven and elven monarchs watched as human warriors swarmed and usurped their lands. The human race emerged victorious after countless generations of bloodshed that changed Etharis forever.

In victory, they showed little mercy to the elder races. They entirely dismantled the elven kingdoms, pushing them deeper in the forests. They drove dwarves from their homelands, forcing them to hide deep beneath the mountains. The humans would have stopped at nothing, if conflict from within had not forced their armies to a halt. Having exterminated all the other kingdoms, the warlords turned against each other, each claiming the High Throne that would later become the Imperial Throne of Altenheim. This second Great Era, known as the Era of Descent, lost even more lives to its endless carnage. The result was the disintegration of the human race into fractious kingdoms. The Second Era considerably weakened the kingdoms of the humans, allowing the other races to emerge from hiding and re-establish some principalities in the lands they once ruled.

To this day, humans are considered the dominant race across all of Etharis, controlling most of the land and sea. Having shorter lives to live than the other races, their old hatreds have faded, and they are now more receptive to other races. But elves and dwarves live long, and can hold a grudge even longer.



Elves

The proud and elegant elves were among the first people to dwell among the forests of Etharis. Their long history is lost in distant eons, and even elves with their long lifespans do not fully know their true origins. Tall, graceful, and extraordinarily beautiful, they claimed the forests and river lands of Caer Neiada, in what is now the Charneault Kingdom, creating magnificent kingdoms deep within the woods.

Blessed with keen eyesight and a great talent for archery, they have created a long-lasting tradition of rangers to protect their kingdoms from outside threats. Their deep knowledge of the woodlands further complimented their deadly and silent armies, making them a force to be reckoned with in these early days. Living for eons, however, the elves gradually became arrogant, often isolating themselves from the other races—especially humans, who they considered primitive and barbaric, failing to recognize them as a plausible threat.

The Era of Expansion cost the elves dearly. Their kingdoms were turned to dust, and many of their forests were turned to ash. Even though their bows were precise, they were outnumbered and unable to defend themselves on all fronts as war-hungry armies burned their sheltering forests. The elves lived for decades as nomads, trying to hide in the few remaining forests on the outskirts of the human civilization. However, their sorrow and grief for the lost beauty of their home empowered them to recreate it. They turned to the arts. Heartbreaking songs of their lost paradises would echo among the trees in the night. Most importantly, though, they turned to magic. The forest spirits that had once guided them were not vanquished, and were eager to aid old friends. They bestowed the elves with their magic—the power to restore their lands to their ancient beauty.

Dwarves

Ancient and dauntless as the mountains they call home, the dwarven race stepped onto the land of Etharis alongside the elves. Unlike the elves, however, the dwarves built their kingdoms deep within the mountains of what is now the Bürach Empire. Adept with metalworking and jewel crafting, the dwarves created countless cities in the hills and two impressive, impenetrable capitals in the oldest mountains of the continent, the Rock Teeth and the Grey Spine. The veins of mithril and gold were rich beneath these mountains and dwarven crafters quickly became famous across Etharis.

During the wars of the Era of Expansion, the dwarves barricaded themselves within the fortresses of their two greatest cities: the tiered city of Stehlenwald and the now ruined city of Grebenstein. The dwarves of Grebenstein were besieged by the human warlords who would later lay the groundwork of the Bürach Empire.

Though the dwarves fought valiantly for their homelands, the Bürach warlords uprooted their thanedom and claimed their vein rich mines.

The second dwarven kingdom of Stehlenwald, however, endured the siege. Rather than share the fate of their cousins to the north, the Stehlenwald Dwarves dug deeper into the heart of the mountain. There, their miners laid eyes upon a new metal which was impenetrable to the arrows of their enemies; adamantine. With armour and weapons of impeccable craftsmanship, the dwarven battalions managed to push the invaders back to their homelands, but at a great cost: half of their population was exterminated, either by the war or by famine. Isolation within the mountains was their only option for survival.

By the birth of the various human kingdoms, the proud dwarves of Stehlewald had begun to recover their numbers. When they emerged, they realized that the political landscape had dramatically changed. They were surrounded and vastly outnumbered by the armies of the Bürach Empire. The dwarven emperor realized there was only one way for his race to survive and prosper, and struck a deal with the Bürach Empire. They would surrender their lands and become members of the Bürach, as long as they could govern themselves independently.

Some older dwarves still cannot forget that the human race once tried to eradicate them. As they say, it is easier to move a mountain than a dwarf. But though there is still a deep rivalry between humans and dwarves, the Stehlenwald province of Rauland will be there for the Bürach Empire in times of need—an oath none expect to be broken.

Half Orcs

Orcs in the world of Etharis exist only as villains in fairy tales told to scare naughty children. They were described as violent brutes who lived only to inflict mayhem on everyone. Nevertheless, orcs roamed Etharis even before the dwarves and the elves, and their description in the fairy tales preserves a sinister truth. No one knows why the orcs disappeared from Etharis en masse, except that the last of them were seen in Valika, before they were presumably slain or bred out. However, all know the ominous reminder of their dark and violent past.

The half-orcs of Etharis are tall, daunting, and fierce warriors. Some say that these humanoids are the result of breeding between early human tribes and the last orcs. Others say they are the creation of a lost war god who wanted to immortalize his own image. In any case, the half-orcs combine the best out of their two parts: the formidable resilience of an orc, and the adaptability of a human.

The only part of Etharis where half-orcs gather under any form of organization is in the frozen north among the Valikan Clans. There, nomadic tribes of humans, half-orcs, and giants roam the northern wastelands. The unforgiving climate seems to suit half-orcs and encourage humans to accept them for their hardiness. The other field where a half-orc can thrive is war. Half-orcs are often found among the raiding parties of the Valikan clans.

Outside of Valika, half-orcs are a rare sight, but they can be found across the various cities of the continent. The stereotypes involving their ancestors, combined with their intimidating appearance, strike fear among the other races, so that half-orcs are rarely accepted or trusted despite their capabilities. Warriors of other races often prefer to mock what they fear, all the while hoping they will never have to face an angry half-orc on equal terms.

Half-Elves

Half-elves are among the later races to walk the land of Etharis. Before the Era of Expansion, humans and elves occasionally crossed paths. Some humans could appreciate the beautiful songs and poems of the elves, as the elves could appreciate the adventurous side of humanity. The results of these bonds were the ever-wandering half-elves. They are easily noticed by their less pronounced pointed elfin ears, combined with a bulkier but still elegant human frame. As with half-orcs, half-elves seem to have taken the best of their progenitors. Taller than the average man, elegant and graceful, they seem to possess the aptitude for the fine arts from their elven side along with the lust for adventure from their human side. What life could be better for them than the lives of wanderers, traveling artists, and merchants?

However, even though most of the first half-elves were results of love between the two races, such pairings were still considered taboo by the two sides. In the midst of war, most elves could not understand how someone could fall in love with a savage, while few humans could forgive anyone who would mingle with the enemy. The first half-elves were cast out by both sides.

Initially, the lifestyle of the wanderer suited them. Their talent in theater and music made wandering troupes of half-elves among the most famous to exist. Furthermore, half-elves could act as natural intermediaries between humans and elves. However, most half-elves keep the burdens of their souls well hidden. They learnt how to wear the mask of happiness, often dressing with bright colours and dazzling jewelry, accompanying their stylistic choices with an outwardly flamboyant, optimistic attitude. But if one is lucky enough to gain the trust of a half-elf, they will often see that the heart of a

half-elf is full of sorrow. Wandering the continent is a lifestyle that fits them, but they can never call any place home. Considered outcasts by both humans and elves, they think themselves cursed, eternally strangers, with no hope of claiming any land as their own.

Dragonborn

Children of the dragons, as their name states, dragonborn walk with pride through a world that greets them either with fear or admiration. They look very much like dragons, with thick scales covering their bodies, sharp claws, and fangs which they can use as weapons.

Though they lack wings, they are strongly built and stout with colours resembling those of their ancestors.

Some claim that this race must be the most ancient among all races. In the Era of Expansion, they were settled in a small kingdom caught amidst the bloody conflicts between humans and elves. This conflict led to the destruction of the only place they truly belonged to, the city of Ember Cairn. However, this noble race managed to survive. Eons passed as the dragonborn prayed to the dragon gods to restore their kingdom, and the dragon gods did not answer. Wrath grew among the Dragonborn, as well as desperation. They stopped praying to their dragon lords and their religion, the Sacred Flame, was abandoned.

The dragonborn, however, pious and spiritual by nature, needed something to believe in. A new religion was offered to them by Castinellan missionaries who were spreading the word of their new religion, that of the Divine Seraphs. Finding it close to the dragonborn ideals of virtue and determination, they quickly embraced the new religion and became its most zealous followers. Sharing the same beliefs with the humans of the Castinella Provinces, they were quickly incorporated to the empire, becoming subjects of the Castinellan theocracy.

Castinella awarded the dragonborn a small region of their ancestral land to call their own. Dragonborn rebuilt the ancient city of Ember Cairn, a city made entirely of granite. Many dragonborn from across the continent flocked to the city and began to worship the Divine Seraphs. This city became a site of religious pilgrimage for dragonborn across the continent. With their ancient prayers finally answered, the dragonborn were drawn to the paths of clerics, missionaries, and inquisitors, to spread their new beliefs with burning passion and burning fire when necessary. The land of Etharis will hear the dragons roar once again.

Gnomes

Ingenious and full of energy, gnomes are considered to be distant cousins of the dwarven race. Even shorter than the dwarves and not equally bulky, this small-framed race compensates for the lack of muscle with ever-working brains and a great aptitude for invention. Even though their inventions have a bad habit of blowing up, no one can stay mad at a gnome. Their cheerful attitude, curiosity, and humor puts the gomes among the most likely to have a good feast or a carefree dance.

Apart from their joyful side, they have created some of the most impressive mechanical wonders of Etharis. Cannons, automatons, flintlocks, and explosives are all reputed to be results of gnomish brilliance. If you are looking for a gnome in a populated city, you just have to wait for the explosion to guide your steps.

During the Era of Expansion, gnome settlements outside the shelter of mountains were annihilated by human warlords, forcing them to seek shelter in the neighboring dwarven city of Stehlenwald. There they shared the fate of their dwarven cousins as countless human armies besieged the tall stone walls of the city.

The surviving gnomes pushed the dwarven thane to dig deeper, in a last attempt to find new metals or an escape route beneath the mountains.

As the dwarves were gazing upon the newfound adamantine, the gnomes were staring at the other veins of the mountain, their ingenious minds hatching a plan to win the war.

The gnomish alchemists worked day and night, mixing the gifts of the mountain until they invented a new weapon: explosives. As the dwarves charged in their impenetrable shining adamantine armours, they were backed up by the sound of explosions as the gnomes hurled cannonballs and dynamite at the enemy. The humans quickly scattered; the effects of the explosives had struck fear into their hearts. The battle was won but the losses for both gnomes and dwarves were great. The gnomish race followed the dwarves in the Stehlenwald kingdom into their centuries-long isolation. When the dwarven king voluntarily joined the Bürach empire, the gnomes followed. Today, with trade reaching all across the empire, the gnomes can lay hands on even more exotic and volatile materials, pushing (or blowing) their science to new heights each passing day.

Halflings

At one time humankind, being an unstoppable force in Etharis, earned the enmity of most races. All who tried to oppose them were met with destruction. One race, however, chose not to contest the humans' ascendency, but instead decided to cling to their backs for survival.

The Era of Expansion did not affect the population of halflings like it did other races. Even though the halflings did not agree with the violent ways of the humans, they fell silent, deciding that being subservient to the stronger and better-armed human armies would guarantee their survival. After the division of the humans into different empires and kingdoms, halflings fit in perfectly, many acquiring positions as librarians, bookkeepers, teachers, or scholars.

Shorter and weaker in stature than dwarves, halflings are a peaceful race. What most of these tiny folk seek in life is a place to settle in peace and quiet, far away from the atrocities of war. They enjoy good music, fine food, and a good laugh when they can.

This does not mean that this race shuns adventuring. Tales of halfling rogues or scholars, seeking ancient and hidden knowledge, are some of the most famous there are.

Unlike gnomes, however, they care little for jewels or inventions. Halflings use the lore they gather to build impressive libraries on specific subjects. Within the countless volumes of these libraries lie generations of knowledge pertaining to the halflings passions, from cooking to brewing, bee keeping, and much more.

ADVANCED WEAPONS

MONSTERS AND NIGHTMARISH CREATURES lurk throughout the dark world of Etharis. To combat them, civilization seeks any advantage it can find. From the mighty inventions of the dwarves to the ingenious and mad creations of the gnomes, an array of advanced weapons have been devised. The Advanced Weapons table below details weapon characteristics, including their unique properties.

Advanced Weapon Training

Advanced weapons are difficult to master, and as a result require more specialised training than even martial weapons. Characters gain proficiency in Advanced Weapons when they reach 3rd level and have proficiency in all Martial Weapons. If a character gains proficiency in Martial Weapons at a later level, then they also gain proficiency in Advanced Weapons.

Advanced Ammunition

Just as Advanced Weapons are favoured by expert warriors, so are specialised forms of ammunition. Characters with proficiency in Advanced Weapons can use Advanced Ammunition in its respective weapon. In addition, any character can use Advanced Ammunition in simple and martial ranged weapons of their respective type as well.

Advanced Weapon Properties

Blackpowder. Blackpowder weapons fire projectiles with ear-splitting noise, shredding armour with deadly force. When fired, Blackpowder weapons emit a deafening crack audible 300 feet away. Unfortunately, Blackpowder weapons often become useless when wet. If a Blackpowder weapon is exposed to heavy rain, submerged, or drenched in water by a similar means, then it cannot fire. A character cannot use this weapon again until they complete a short rest in dry conditions.

Brutal. Brutal weapons are designed to subject an adversary to the most harm. When you score a critical hit against a creature with a Brutal weapon, you can add an additional weapon damage die to the damage dealt.

Cumbersome. Cumbersome weapons are difficult to wield but are effective tools for those strong enough to wield them. When making an attack with a Cumbersome weapon, you must use your Strength modifier for both the attack and damage rolls.

Guard. Guard weapons are made to fight defensively, often designed with a long reach or flat surface for parrying. While wielding a Guard weapon, whenever a hostile creature moves within your reach, and you did not move on your last turn, you can use a reaction to make a weapon attack with a Guard weapon against that creature. If the attack hits, then it deals no damage, the creature immediately stops and its speed becomes 0 until the end of its turn.

Momentum. Momentum weapons are designed to deliver devastating attacks as part of a charge. When you hit a creature with a Momentum weapon, and you have moved 20 feet or more in a straight line this turn, you can upgrade the damage dice to the weapon's momentum dice value.

Repeater. Repeater weapons fire rounds in quick succession, either using multiple barrels or quick reloading mechanisms. When you take the attack action with a Repeater weapon, you can use a bonus action to attack again with the same weapon. You don't add your ability modifier to the damage of the second shot, unless that modifier is negative. You can make this bonus action even if the weapon has the Loading property.

Swift. Swift weapons are renowned for their utility in recovering from missed attacks. When you miss an attack with a Swift weapon, you gain advantage on the next attack roll you make with that weapon against the same target.

Scatter. Scatter weapons are capable of devastating multiple enemies at once. When you take the attack action and successfully hit a creature with a Scatter weapon, measure the weapon's Scatter range from the square (or point of impact) that the target you hit occupies. All creatures other than the original target that fall within the weapon's scatter range must make a Dexterity saving throw against your Scatter DC. Upon a failed save, they take damage equal to the ability score modifier you used to hit with the weapon (minimum of 1). Damage dealt this way is the same type as the weapon that you hit with.

Scatter Save DC = 8 + your proficiency bonus + the ability score modifier that you use to determine damage for this weapon.

A weapon's Scatter range and shape are mentioned in its statistics. For example, a Flame Bellows has a range of 15 feet and a Scatter range of 15 feet. This means the weapon can hit a target within 15 feet, and upon a hit, a 15-foot cone extending beyond the target will determine those hit by the Scatter effect, up to a total distance of 30 feet.

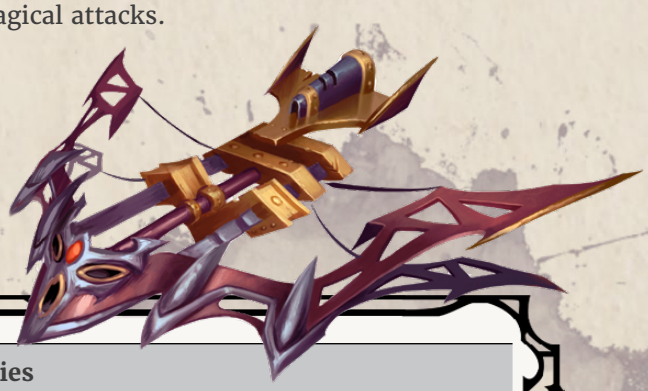
Specialised ammunition can have one weapon property with (A) next to its name. This property is applied when the ammunition is purchased or crafted, and cannot be changed.

Armour Piercing (A). When you roll to hit a creature with an Armour Piercing weapon or ammunition, if the target is wearing heavy armour or natural armour that exceeds 17, then you receive +2 on your attack roll to hit that target.

Blessed (A). When a creature that is a fiend, fey, or undead is hit with a Blessed weapon or ammunition, that creature's speed is reduced by 10 feet until the end of their next turn. Additionally, they cannot take reactions until the end of their next turn.

Incendiary (A). When you hit a creature with an Incendiary weapon or ammunition, the target takes an additional 1d4 fire damage.

Silvered (A). Attacks you make with silvered weapons or ammunition count as magical for the purpose of overcoming resistance and immunity to non-magical attacks.



Name	Cost	Damage	Weight	Properties
Advanced Melee weapons				
Cavalry Hammer	500gp	1d8 Bludgeoning	3lb.	Versatile (1d10), Momentum (1d12) Armour Piercing
Sabre	500gp	1d8 Slashing	2lb.	Swift, Finesse
Claymore	500gp	2d6 Slashing	7lb.	Brutal, Heavy, Two Handed
Polearm	500gp	1d12 Piercing	12lb.	Guard, Heavy, Reach, Two Handed
Advanced Ranged Weapons				
Blackpowder Pistol	200gp	2d4 Piercing	4lb.	Ammunition (range 25/100), Blackpowder, Loading, Light
Blackpowder Rifle	500gp	2d6 Piercing	10lb.	Ammunition (range 80/300), Blackpowder, Loading, Two Handed
Repeater Crossbow	750gp	1d8 Piercing	7lb.	Ammunition (range 80/300), Loading, Two Handed, Repeater
Blunderbuss	750gp	2d6 Piercing	10lb.	Ammunition (range 20/30), Scatter (line 10), Blackpowder, Loading, Two Handed, Cumbersome
Flame Bellows	750gp	2d6 Fire	11lb.	Ammunition (range 15), Scatter (cone 15), Loading, Two Handed, Cumbersome

Ammunition	Cost	Weight
Advanced Ammunition		
Paper Cartridge Bullets (20)	3gp	2lb.
Bellows Canister (20)	5gp	4lb.
Specialised Ammunition (A)		
Arrows (5)	100gp	1/4lb.
Bolts (5)	100gp	1/4lb.
Paper Cartridge Bullet (5)	250gp	1/2lb.

Feats

From the immeasurably talented swordsmen of the Castinellan Blade Artisans to the ferocious Valikan Berserkers, Etharis is home to many individuals of deadly expertise. Feats are a great way to represent a character's honed skills or natural talent in a specific discipline. Characters may gain a feat of their choice at certain levels, in place of an ability score modifier. Any prerequisites for the feat must be met before it has been selected. If under any circumstances a character ceases to meet the prerequisite of a feat, they may not apply any benefits derived from it until they once again meet the prerequisites.

Blackpowder Expert

Prerequisite: Proficiency with advanced weapons

You are well-versed in the use of Blackpowder weapons and wield them with deadly efficiency. You gain the following benefits:

- You ignore the loading property of Blackpowder weapons with which you are proficient.
- Whenever a hostile creature moves within 10 feet of you, and you did not move on your last turn, you can use a reaction to make a ranged weapon attack against that creature.

Blood Hound

Prerequisite: Wisdom 13 or higher

Your keen senses are heightened beyond that of most people. Whether these senses were heightened through training, through the loss of other senses, or they simply matured as you did, you gain the following benefits:

- While conscious, whenever a creature that is small or larger moves, within 10 feet of you, you immediately become aware of its presence.
- Your attack rolls do not have disadvantage against invisible creatures that you are aware of.
- You have advantage on Wisdom (perception) and Wisdom (survival) checks that rely on sound or smell.

Hulking Figure

Prerequisite: Strength 13 or higher

You are a broad and formidable size for your race, either due to extensive training or natural build. You gain the following benefits:

- You count as one size larger (to a maximum size of large) when determining your carrying capacity and the weight you can push, drag, and lift.
- When you hit a creature with a melee attack, if you used your strength modifier to hit the creature, you deal an additional 1d4 damage. This damage is of the same type as the weapon attack.
- Whenever you attempt a Charisma (intimidation) check against a creature of your size or smaller, you can add your Strength modifier to the result.

Iron Gut

Prerequisite: Constitution 13 or higher

You eat like a giant and drink like a fish. Years of punishing your stomach and liver have led to a powerful fortitude. You gain the following benefits:

- You have advantage on Saving Throws against being poisoned.
- Upon completing a long rest, you regain 1 additional spent Hit Dice.
- As an action, you can spend Hit Dice to heal yourself, as if you have taken a short rest. You can use this ability a number of times equal to your Constitution modifier (minimum of 1) per long rest.

Lightning Caster

Prerequisite: The ability to cast at least one cantrip

Your rapid-fire style of casting cantrips allows you to weave magic with uncanny speed, granting you the following benefit:

- Whenever you cast a cantrip that can only target a single enemy, you can use your bonus action to target two enemies within 5 feet of one another instead.

Nimble Physique

Prerequisite: Dexterity 13 or higher

You are small and thin for your race. You have a mysterious and consistent ability to avoid danger. This feat grants the following benefits:

- As long as you are not wearing armour, you may take the dodge action as a bonus action. You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Dexterity modifier (minimum of once) per long rest.
- You can fit and squeeze through spaces as though you were one size smaller than you are.
- Moving through spaces occupied by allies does not impose movement penalties.

Nocturnal

Due to extensive exposure to the dark, and possible supernatural abilities, you have an unmatched ability to fight adversaries in the dark. You gain the following benefits:

- You gain Darkvision with a radius of 60 feet. If you already have darkvision, then the radius of your darkvision increases by 30 feet, to a maximum of 120 feet.
- You have advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks while in dim light or non-magical darkness.

Scatter Weapon Master

Prerequisite: Proficiency in Advanced Weapons

Through many hours spent using these destructive weapons, whether on the training grounds or setting hag huts ablaze, you have gained immense experience with scatter weapons and gain the following benefits:

- Critical hits double the damage dealt by the Scatter property on a failed save.
- When making an attack with a weapon with the Scatter property, you may choose any number of targets to gain advantage on saving throws caused by your attack.
- You ignore the Loading quality of Scatter weapons with which you are proficient.

Thrown Weapon Master

You excel at thrown weapons and gain the following benefits:

- When you take the attack action to throw a weapon with the Thrown property, you may immediately use a bonus action to make two more attacks with a Thrown weapon. These must also be thrown attacks. You may use this ability a number of times equal to your dexterity or strength modifier per short rest.
- If you throw a weapon as part of an attack, you may immediately draw another one-handed weapon as part of that attack.

Weaver of Maledictions

Prerequisite: The ability to cast at least one spell

You have learned how to use effigy dolls when cursing your targets. These dolls take 8 hours to create and can only be used on the target that the effigy was created to resemble. Only you can benefit from dolls you have created. When you use an effigy doll you gain the following benefits:

- The target of the curse has disadvantage on their initial saving throw.
- The target of your curse does not know that you tried to curse them upon a successful save against being cursed.

Witch Hunter

You have honed and perfected your skills fighting against spellcasters. You gain the following benefits:

- Whenever a hostile creature targets you with a spell, make a Wisdom saving throw against the spellcaster's spell save DC. On a success, the creature must choose a new target or lose the spell. This does not protect you from area effects, such as the explosion of a fireball.
- Whenever you hit a spellcaster with a melee attack, the target's speed is reduced by 10 feet until the beginning of your next turn.
- You have advantage on saving throws against being cursed.

Spells

Etharis hosts a menagerie of magical creatures and spellcasters. Ranging from terrifying liches to ancient Primordials, many of these fearsome entities wield immense arcane powers. Below is a collection of new spells available to players and GMs found within the world of Etharis.

Spell Lists

The following spell lists show which spells can be cast by characters of each class. A spell's school of magic is noted in parentheses. If a spell can be cast as a ritual, the ritual tag also appears in parentheses.

Bard spells

Cantrips (0 Level)

Illusory Instrument (illusion)

1st Level

Assisted Aim (enchantment)
Intaglio (transmutation, ritual)

Cleric Spells

Cantrips (0 Level)

Holy Word (evocation)

1st Level

Assisted Aim (enchantment)
Intaglio (transmutation, ritual)

2nd Level

Life Tether (necromancy)

5th Level

Greater Animate Dead (necromancy)

8th Level

Undead Enthrallment (necromancy)

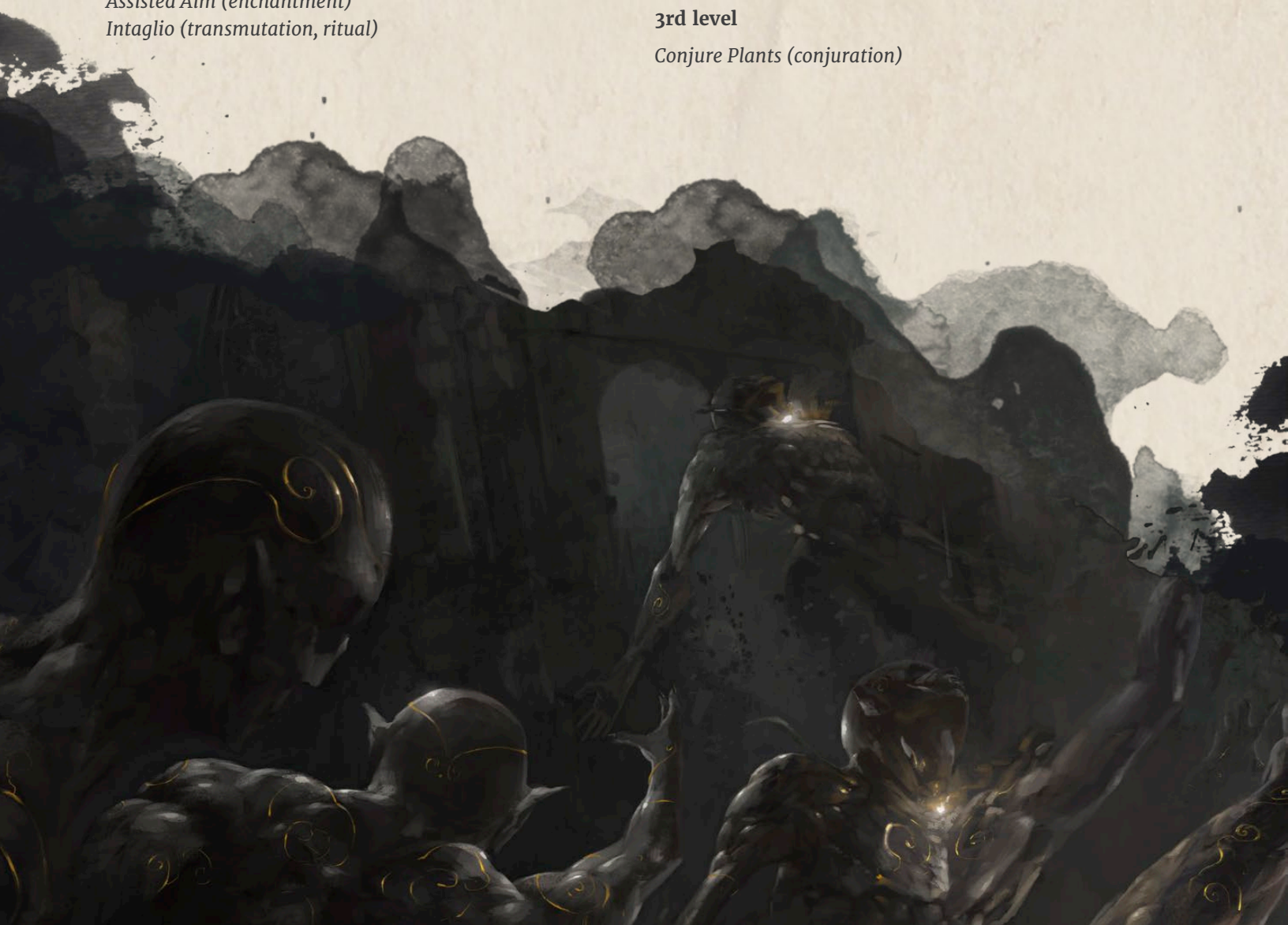
Druid spells

1st level

Assisted Aim (enchantment)

3rd level

Conjure Plants (conjuration)



Paladin spells

1st level

Assisted Aim (enchantment)
Intaglio (transmutation, ritual)

Ranger spells

1st level

Assisted Aim (enchantment)

3rd level

Conjure Plants (conjuration)

Sorcerer spells

2nd level

Dazing Blast (evocation)
Life Tether (necromancy)

3rd level

Mirror Spell (abjuration)

Warlock spells

Cantrips (0 Level)

Illusory Instrument (illusion)

2nd level

Dazing Blast (evocation)
Life Tether (necromancy)

3rd level

Conjure Plants (conjuration)
Mirror Spell (abjuration)

8th level

Undead Enthrallment (necromancy)

Wizard spells

1st level

Intaglio (transmutation, ritual)

2nd level

Dazing Blast (evocation)
Life Tether (necromancy)

3rd level

Mirror Spell (abjuration)

5th Level

Greater Animate Dead (necromancy)

8th level

Undead Enthrallment (necromancy)

Spell descriptions

The spells are presented in alphabetical order.

Assisted Aim

1st-level enchantment

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 30 feet
Components: V, S
Duration: 1 minute

You invigorate up to three creatures within range with improved accuracy. Each targeted creature gains +1 to hit for all ranged weapon attacks they make. Additionally, targeted creatures may double the normal and long range of weapons they are wielding.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, you can target one additional creature for each slot level above 1st.

Conjure Plants

3rd-level conjuration

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 60 feet
Components: V, S, M (the leaf of an Elder Tree or a piece of crystallised sap for each creature summoned)
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

You channel the powers of the Primordials to animate a number of plants within range. These plants must be in an open and unoccupied space. If no space is available, then the GM may choose to have plants rapidly grow as a result of the spell. In this case the GM also chooses how many plants grow. Choose one of the following options for what appears:

- One plant of challenge rating 2 or lower
- Two plants of challenge rating 1 or lower
- Four plants of challenge rating 1/2 or lower
- Eight plants of challenge rating 1/4 or lower

Each plant is considered an elemental in addition to its other types, and it becomes a normal plant again when it drops to 0 hit points or when the spell ends. The animated creatures are friendly to you and your companions. Roll initiative for the animated creatures as a group, which has its own turns. The creatures obey any verbal commands that you issue to them (no action required by you).

If you don't issue any commands to them, they defend themselves from hostile creatures but otherwise take no actions. The GM has the creatures' statistics.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using certain higher-level spell slots, you choose one of the animating options above, and more creatures appear: twice as many with a 5th-level slot, three times as many with a 7th-level slot, and four times as many with a 9th-level slot.

Dazing Blast

2nd-level evocation

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 60 feet
Components: V, S
Duration: Instantaneous

A wave of forceful energy leaves your palms and travels towards your target. Make a spell attack against a creature. If you hit the target, they take 2d6 force damage and must succeed at a Constitution saving throw or become dazed until the end of their next turn.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, the damage increases by 1d6 for each spell slot above 2nd.

Greater Animate Dead

5th level necromancy

Casting Time: 1 minute
Range: 10 feet
Components: V, S, M (a drop of blood, a piece of flesh, a pinch of bone dust, and a black onyx stone worth a least 75gp for each level of CR you animate).
Duration: Instantaneous

This spell may only be cast at night. Choose a corpse, or a number of corpses, within range that are equivalent the size of the creatures you are animating (the GM will determine how many corpses are required). You can animate a number of large or smaller undead creatures equalling a total challenge rating 2 or lower.

On each of your turns, you can use a bonus action to mentally command any creature you made with this spell if the creature is within 120 feet of you. (If you control multiple creatures, you can command any or all of them at the same time, issuing the same command to each one.) You decide what action the creature will take and where it will move during its next turn, or you can issue a general command, such as to guard a particular chamber or corridor. If you issue no commands, the creature only defends itself against hostile creatures. Once given an order, the creature continues to follow it until its task is complete. The creature is under your control for 24 hours, after which time it stops obeying any command you've given it.

To maintain control of the creature for another 24 hours, you must cast this spell on the creature again before the current 24-hour period ends. This use of the spell reasserts your control over 1 creature you have animated with this spell, rather than animating a new one. Additionally, casting this spell in this manner does not require spell components with a GP cost.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 7th level or higher, you can animate or reassert control of an additional CR worth of undead creatures created with this spell. When you cast this spell using a 9th level spell slot, you can animate or reassert control over an additional two CR worth of undead creatures created with this spell. Additional creatures must be animated with sufficient corpses or bones.

Holy Word

Evocation cantrip

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 60 feet
Components: V, S
Duration: Instantaneous

You mutter a word of the divine under your breath, being careful not to speak it any louder, for such celestial power is not for the tainted and unworthy. Make a ranged spell attack against the target. On a hit, the target takes 1d8 radiant damage. If you hit an undead, fiend, or fey, then its speed is reduced by 10 feet and it cannot take reactions until the end of its next turn. This spell's damage increases by 1d8 when you reach 5th level (2d8), 11th level (3d8), and 17th level (4d8).

Illusory Instrument

Illusion cantrip

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Touch
Components: V, S
Duration: 10 minutes

You create an illusionary copy of a mundane musical instrument. The copy of the instrument takes on the shape of your fondest memory of the instrument, such as the first flute you owned, or the half harp gifted to you by a loved one. This illusion moves as its physical counterpart would, but it is weightless and is tangible only to the caster of the spell. This instrument may be used as a spellcasting focus. This illusory instrument dissipates if the spellcaster moves 10 feet away from it or chooses to end the spell. As a bonus action, you can command your instrument to create one of the following effects:

- Mimic basic sounds heard on a daily basis, such as a bird chirping, footsteps, or a slamming door.
- Automatically play a basic beat at the tempo of your choice.
- Record anything played on it, and play it back on a loop.
- Record and play back any noise that it could pick up within 15 feet, such as conversation, a royal decree, or a snoring party member who swears that they don't.

Intaglio

1st-level Transmutation (ritual)

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 5 feet
Components: V, S, M (a quill or a vial of ink)
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

You transform a piece of parchment into a duplicate of a text or symbol. While concentrating on this spell, you can use an action to trace your hand over any non-magical text or imagery on a surface within range. You imprint the text or imagery onto parchment you provide, choosing how to resize or crop it. This spell copies a single page with each action, and cannot copy sections larger than 9X12 inches at a time. When copying a spell book, you can do so using the same method as you would replace a spell book, except the time and gp requirements are both halved.

Life Tether

2nd-level necromancy

Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 120 feet
Components: V, S
Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute.

The target must make a Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, a sickly green ethereal tether forms between you and your target. Whenever you take damage, each tethered target takes half that amount as necrotic damage. Damage dealt this way is distributed after any damage resistances or immunities are applied. If a target with a tether drops to 0 Hit Points, they are no longer affected by the tether. As a bonus action, you can move the tether from one fallen foe to another target. The new target must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or also be subject to the effects of this spell. A target may only have one tether attached to them from any instance of this spell at a given time.

At Higher Levels. When casting this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher, the number of tethers created is increased by one for every two slot levels above the 2nd.

Mirror Spell

3rd-level abjuration

Casting Time: Reaction (which you take when you see a creature within 60 feet of you casting a spell)
Range: 60 feet
Components: V, S
Duration: Instantaneous

You attempt to copy and cast a spell that you can see being cast. If the targeted spell is 2nd level or lower, then the spell is automatically copied. Copying a spell of 3rd level or higher requires a successful ability check using your spellcasting ability. The DC equals 10 + the spell's level. On a success, the spell is copied, and you cast that spell at the lowest level it can be cast. You can only copy spells of a lesser or equal level to the spell slot used to cast Mirror Spell. You can choose new targets for the copied spell. The following rules apply:

- You cannot copy your own spell.
- You can only copy spells cast by creatures.
- For all intents and purposes, you are the original caster of the mirrored spell, and your spellcaster ability modifier is used if required. The same is true for saving throw DCs and attack modifiers.

At Higher Levels. You can cast this spell using a spell slot of 4th level or higher. If you do, you can copy a spell of equal or lower level.

Undead Enthrallment

8th-level necromancy

Casting Time: 1 hour
Range: 10 feet
Components: V, S, M (a clay pot filled with brackish water, another clay pot filled with grave dirt, and a black onyx stone worth at least 500 gp for each corpse)
Duration: Instantaneous

This spell can only be cast at night. Choose a corpse, or a number or corpses, within range that are equivalent to the size of the creature you are animating (the GM will determine how many corpses are required). Your spell imbues the target with a foul mimicry of life, raising it as an undead creature. You may choose for the target to become an undead creature of CR 3 or lower (the GM has the creature's game statistics).

On each of your turns, you can use a bonus action to mentally command any creature you made with this spell if the creature is within 60 feet of you. (If you control multiple creatures, you can command any or all of them at the same time, issuing the same command to each one.) You decide what action the creature will take and where it will move during its next turn, or you can issue a general command, such as to guard a particular chamber or corridor. If you issue no commands, the creature only defends itself against hostile creatures. Once given an order, the creature continues to follow it until its task is complete. The creature is under your control for 24 hours, after which it stops obeying any command you've given it.

To maintain control of the creature for another 24 hours, you must cast this spell on the creature again before the current 24-hour period ends. This use of the spell reasserts your control over 1 creature you have animated with this spell, rather than animating a new one. Any creature you have maintained with this spell for 30 days remains permanently under your control. You may only control a maximum of four creatures with this spell.

Curses

From punishing afflictions to poetic justice, curses are synonymous with dark fantasy. Within Etharis, curses are powerful spells reserved by dark casters for those they feel have truly wronged them. Curses channel dark emotions and vengeance, and grow in power when cast with spiteful intent. Woe befalls the fool who takes hag pacts lightly.

Curse Spell List

Curses are dark magic fueled by malice and other hostile emotions. While they are not restricted to characters by alignment, casting a curse is an evil deed. The following classes add all curses to their spell lists:

- Bard
- Cleric
- Druid
- Sorcerer
- Warlock
- Wizard

Components

Casting a curse requires spell components that bear a specific connection to the target of the curse. When casting a curse, the spellcaster must have all required components in their possession, regardless of any spellcasting focus or components pouch they possess.

Shadowsteel

Shadowsteel is a dark combination of metallurgy and insidious sorcery. Due to its ability to hold dark magic, Shadowsteel is a required component for dark mages looking to cast curses. As each curse requires a component made of Shadowsteel, the availability of the resource can be tailored to your campaign, depending on how available your GM wishes curses to be.

Curse Strength Table

Curses are spells of dark emotions and twisted fate, gaining power depending on the circumstances of their use. A curse cast with the dying breath of a betrayed lover will bear considerably more power than a run-of-the-mill curse.

When determining the spell DC of a curse, use the spellcaster's DC and consult the table below for modifiers:

Knowledge of the Target	Save Modifier
Secondhand	-10
Firsthand	-5
Familiar	0

Target's Transgression	Save Modifier (only the highest applies)
Broke a deal	+2
Sworn enemy	+7
Egregious betrayal	+10
Desecrated your home	+8
Spiteful envy	+5

These are examples of modifiers for curses, based on the relationship between the caster and the target. A GM can modify or expand these to suit the needs of their game.

Triggering Event

Curses often have no immediate effect upon casting. Curses lie dormant within a target until they complete a task or action that satisfies their triggering event. For example, a target cursed with the curse of ravenous hunger will suffer no effects until they consume their next meal. Upon completing the Triggering Event, the target will automatically start the effects of the curse at stage 1.

Stage Progression

While curses are dangerous magic, they take time to reach full power. Curses develop in 3 stages. As a curse progresses through the stages, it becomes more harmful to the afflicted. Whenever a cursed creature fails an escalation check, they advance to the next stage of the curse. The effects of a new stage are in addition to those of previous stages. If an effect contradicts another, use the effect from the greater stage.

Escalation

Escalation represents the curse gaining power as time goes on. At dawn once a day, a cursed creature must make an escalation check to see if their curse escalates. To pass, a creature needs to roll an unmodified d20, and obtain a score greater than the number of checks they have made on this stage. On a failed save, the cursed creature applies the effects of the next stage of the curse, in addition to any previous stages.

For example, a creature who has just been cursed makes an escalation check the following dawn. They must roll greater than a 1. The next day the DC will increase to 2, and so on. If, on the 5th dawn, they roll a 5 or less, the curse escalates to the second stage. They apply any new effects and reset the DC to 1.

Culmination

All curses have a culmination. This is the final intent of the curse, and often involves transforming the victim into a twisted creature, barely resembling who they once were. Culminations are truly evil effects and are almost always permanent. When a creature fails an escalation check at stage 3 of a curse, they apply the effects of the curse's culmination. They continue to apply the effects of the previous stages, but cease making escalation checks. Once a curse's culmination has been reached, it can only be cured with the use of a wish spell.

Curing

Once they have begun, curses are notoriously difficult to cure. Many adventurers have fallen to a curse before they were able to gather the components to cure it. As a result, it is not unheard of for travelling mystics to carry multiple curing ingredients with them, to sell for exorbitant prices.

To cure a curse, a cursed creature must be targeted with the remove curse spell. In addition, a number of cure components are required equal to the number of stages their curse has escalated to. For example, a curse that has escalated to stage 3 requires 3 cure components as well as a remove curse spell.

The following items outline a number of cure components that can be found within the world of Etharis. A GM can include additional components based on their setting, campaign story or game mechanic they wish to include.

Hag's promise. A potion brewed by hags, purposely named confusingly.

A strand of hair from the lost but not found. From a pillow or other possession of a lost person.

A twice-murdered raven. A raven that has been killed, resurrected, then killed again.

The highest pinecone of a forest. Found with a lot of climbing.

A clock which runs backwards. Casting slow and haste on a timepiece will cause it to tick backwards.

A black pearl, harvested but a week ago. Found with a lot of swimming.

A book that has never been read. From a publisher or printing press.

A rose that grows in darkness but not sunlight. A rare flower known as a Black Rose.

A life willingly given. Someone willing to sacrifice themself to cure the cursed.

Wish. A wish granted by a spell or entity.

Curse Descriptions

The following curses have been sorted alphabetically.

Curse of Conceited Obsession

6th-level Enchantment (curse)

Casting Time: 1 hour
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (a thread from the bed of your target, a handful of teeth, and a Shadowsteel gilded mirror worth at least 1,000 gp, all of which the spell consumes)
Duration: Until cured

This spell curses a creature on the same plane of existence as you with an obsessive self-infatuation. The target must make a Charisma saving throw against the spell's DC, which is modified by the Curse Strength Table. On a successful save, the target becomes aware that somebody attempted to curse them. On a failed save, the target becomes cursed and is unaware of this. Upon the completion of this curse's triggering event, the target automatically advances to stage 1 of this curse.

Triggering event. The next time the cursed creature looks into a mirror or reflective surface, it spontaneously cracks.

Stage 1. The cursed creature is compelled to stop and admire themselves whenever they see their own reflection.

Stage 2. The cursed creature becomes obsessed with looking for and finding its own reflection wherever it goes. Additionally, the cursed creature has disadvantage on attack rolls.

Stage 3. The cursed creature is driven to find or, if necessary, build a location where it can see its own reflection from many angles. The cursed creature is compelled to remain in this location and admire itself. Additionally, attack rolls against the creature gain advantage.

Culmination. Upon failing the final escalation check, the cursed creature twists into a deformed figure and becomes a **Weeping Willow.** If the creature is a player character, they become an NPC under the GM's control.

Curse of Damned Aging

4th-level Necromancy (curse)

Casting Time: 1 hour
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (a childhood possession of the target, a pint of blood, and a Shadowsteel stopwatch worth at least 1,000 gp, all of which the spell consumes)
Duration: Until cured

This spell curses a creature on the same plane of existence as you with withering and horrific aging. The target must make a Strength saving throw against the spell's DC, which is modified by the Curse Strength Table. On a successful save, the target becomes aware that somebody attempted to curse them. On a failed save, the target becomes cursed and is unaware of this. Upon the completion of this curse's triggering event, the target automatically advances to stage 1 of this curse.

Triggering event. The next time the target changes clothing, they find multiple wrinkles, grey hairs and liver spots they did not previously have.

Stage 1. The cursed creature is compelled to rest when the occasion permits it, becoming lethargic and lazy.

Stage 2. The cursed creature becomes feeble as their muscle mass begins to deteriorate. The cursed creature has disadvantage on Strength saving throws.

Stage 3. The cursed creature starts to age rapidly, becoming decrepit. The cursed creature's Strength score becomes 6, unless it was already lower.

Culmination. Upon failing the final escalation check, the cursed creature twists into a deformed figure and becomes a **Body Snatcher.** If the creature is a player character, they become an NPC under the GM's control.

Curse of Foul Blight

4th-level Necromancy (curse)

Casting Time: 1 hour
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (a shred of the target's clothing, a chunk of rotten flesh, and a Shadowsteel jewellery box worth at least 1,000 gp, all of which the spell consumes)
Duration: Until cured

This spell curses a creature on the same plane of existence as you with a putrefying and stinking pox. The target must make a Charisma saving throw against the spell's DC, which is modified by the Curse Strength Table. On a successful save, the target becomes aware that somebody attempted to curse them. On a failed save, the target becomes cursed and is unaware of this. Upon the completion of this curse's triggering event, the target automatically advances to stage 1 of this curse.

Triggering event. The target searches their backpack, clothes drawer, or wherever else they store their garments, they find an infestation of insects.

Stage 1. The cursed creature is afflicted with a minor cough. Whenever they speak more than a few words at a time, they break into a fit of coughing.

Stage 2. The smell of putrescence lingers in the air around the cursed creature. Food and drink quickly spoil, jewellery tarnishes, and wood rots within 10 feet of the cursed creature. Additionally, the cursed creature has disadvantage on Charisma saving throws.

Stage 3. The cursed creature's skin becomes riddled with pock marks, pustules, and lesions. Insects flock to the cursed creature, infesting their clothes. The cursed creature's Charisma score becomes 6, unless it was already lower.

Culmination. Upon failing the final escalation check, the cursed creature twists into a deformed figure and becomes a **Plague Carrion.** If the creature is a player character, they become an NPC under the GM's control.

Curse of Ill-Fated Fortune

5th-level Divination (curse)

Casting Time: 1 hour
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (a shred of the target's clothing, a splinter of bone, and a collection of Shadowsteel dice worth at least 1,000 gp, all of which the spell consumes)
Duration: Until cured

This spell curses a creature on the same plane of existence as you with lethal bad luck. The target must make a Dexterity saving throw against the spell's DC, which is modified by the Curse Strength Table. On a successful save, the target becomes aware that somebody attempted to curse them. On a failed save, the target becomes cursed and is unaware of this. Upon the completion of this curse's triggering event, the target automatically advances to stage 1 of this curse.

Triggering event. The next time the target walks through a doorway or up a flight of stairs, the target stubs their toe, bruising it badly.

Stage 1. The cursed creature falls victim to minor inconveniences and bad luck. Shops they wish to visit close just as they arrive, equipment breaks at inconvenient moments, and other unfortunate events befall them.

Stage 2. The cursed creature becomes a beacon of bad luck as otherwise harmless setbacks become increasingly dangerous. For example, objects constantly seem to be placed in their way. Additionally, the cursed creature has disadvantage on Dexterity saving throws.

Stage 3. The cursed creature becomes dangerously accident-prone, as even the simplest tasks have unforeseen life-threatening consequences. The cursed creature's Dexterity score becomes 6, unless it was lower already.

Culmination. Upon failing the final escalation check, the cursed creature twists into a deformed figure and becomes a **Herald of Calamity**. If the creature is a player character, they become an NPC under the GM's control.

Curse of Insatiable Greed

5th-level Enchantment (curse)

Casting Time: 1 hour
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (a coin that the target has previously possessed, the tail of a rat, and a Shadowsteel crown of thorns worth at least 1,000 gp, all of which the spell consumes)
Duration: Until cured

This spell curses a creature on the same plane of existence as you with a bitter and self-destructive greed. The target must make a Wisdom saving throw against the spell's DC, which is modified by the Curse Strength Table. On a successful save, the target becomes aware that somebody attempted to curse them. On a failed save, the target becomes cursed and is unaware of this. Upon the completion of this curse's triggering event, the target automatically advances to stage 1 of this curse.

Triggering event. The next time the target completes a long rest, they notice they have lost a valued item.

Stage 1. The cursed creature becomes compelled to steal trinkets they do not own.

Stage 2. The cursed creature finds a secret place to start stashing their hoard, and becomes anxious about leaving the location of their hoard for extended periods of time. Additionally, the cursed creature has disadvantage on Wisdom saving throws.

Stage 3. The cursed creature is driven to transform their hoard into a labyrinth of possessions and treasure they have stolen. The cursed creature cannot leave this labyrinth. Additionally, the cursed creature's Wisdom score becomes 6, unless it was already lower.

Culmination. Upon failing the final escalation check, the cursed creature twists into a deformed figure and becomes a **Verminous Abomination.** If the creature is a player character, they become an NPC under the GM's control.

Curse of Lost Sentiment

4th-level Enchantment (curse)

Casting Time: 1 hour
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (a lock of hair from someone the target loves, an animal's heart, and a Shadowsteel idol worth at least 1,000 gp, all of which the spell consumes)
Duration: Until cured

This spell curses a creature on the same plane of existence as you with the loss of memories and horrific madness. The target must make an Intelligence saving throw against the spell's

DC, which is modified by the Curse Strength Table. On a successful save, the target becomes aware that somebody attempted to curse them. On a failed save, the target becomes cursed and is unaware of this. Upon the completion of this curse's triggering event, the target automatically advances to stage 1 of this curse.

Triggering event. The next time the target sleeps, they suffer nightmares of a person they treasure abandoning them.

Stage 1. The cursed creature begins forgetting events that have occurred within the past few days, as well as the names of acquaintances.

Stage 2. The cursed creature forgets all but their closest companions. The curse begins creating twisting the creatures mind, creating delusions of hidden threats and scheming rivals. Additionally, the cursed creature has disadvantage on Intelligence saving throws.

Stage 3. The cursed creature completely forgets their closest companions, who they are, and any goals they once possessed (including curing the curse). The curse twists their mind into madness and fabricates delusions of a great conspiracy only the cursed creature can prevent. The cursed creature is compelled to take any action they believe necessary to uncover this conspiracy. Additionally, the cursed creature's Intelligence score becomes 6, unless it was already lower.

Culmination. Upon failing the final escalation check, the cursed creature twists into a deformed figure and becomes a **Dream Whisperer.** If the creature is a player character, they become an NPC under the GM's control.

Curse of Ravenous Hunger

5th-level Enchantment (curse)

Casting Time: 1 hour
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (a morsel of food that belonged to the target, a sun-dried slug, and a Shadowsteel dining plate worth at least 1,000 gp, all of which the spell consumes)
Duration: Until cured

This spell curses a creature on the same plane of existence as you with painful and unending starvation. The target must make a Constitution saving throw against the spell's DC, which is modified by the Curse Strength Table. On a successful save, the target becomes aware that somebody attempted to curse them. On a failed save, the target becomes cursed and is unaware of this. Upon the completion of this curse's triggering event, the target automatically advances to stage 1 of this curse.

Triggering event. While eating their next meal, the target bites their tongue and their mouth fills with blood.

Stage 1. The cursed creature is gripped with an insatiable appetite.

Stage 2. The cursed creature becomes compelled to eat inappropriate items such as coins, flowers, glass, dirt. Additionally, the cursed creature has disadvantage on Constitution saving throws.

Stage 3. The cursed creature becomes ravenous and is compelled to consume the flesh of humanoids. No other food will satiate its starvation. The cursed creature's Constitution score becomes 6, unless it was already lower.

Culmination. Upon failing the final escalation check, the cursed creature twists into a deformed figure and becomes a **Bloated Gastromorph.** If the creature is a player character, they become an NPC under the GM's control.

Curse of Uncontrollable Wrath

6th-level Enchantment (curse)

Casting Time: 1 hour
Range: Self
Components: V, S, M (a weapon that belonged to the target, a severed hand, and a Shadowsteel knife worth at least 1,000 gp, all of which the spell consumes)
Duration: Until cured

This spell curses a creature on the same plane of existence as you with an uncontrollable temper and lust for violence. The target must make a Wisdom saving throw against the spell's DC, which is modified by the Curse Strength Table. On a successful save, the target becomes aware that somebody attempted to curse them. On a failed save, the target becomes cursed and is unaware of this. Upon the completion of this curse's triggering event, the target automatically advances to stage 1 of this curse.

Triggering event. The next time the cursed creature wields a weapon or spellcasting focus, an old wound of theirs reopens.

Stage 1. The cursed creature becomes easily agitated and aggressive.

Stage 2. The cursed creature becomes obsessed with violence. The thrill of solo battle intoxicates them, and their demeanour toward their allies sours as the curse grows. The cursed creature cannot benefit from the spells or abilities of allies.

Stage 3. The cursed creature is driven to insatiable bloodlust, unable to rest while there are enemies to slaughter. The cursed creature cannot complete a long rest.

Culmination. Upon failing the final escalation check, the cursed creature twists into a deformed figure and becomes an **Avatar of Slaughter.** If the creature is a player character, they become an NPC under the GM's control.

Variant Mechanics

The following is a series of variant rules that can be implemented for thematic or mechanical purposes. These rules are not necessary, and each table should feel comfortable playing their game the way they enjoy it. However, you may find that the following rules assist you in facilitating a dark fantasy setting.

Stabilisation

When a character at 0 hit points regains hit points, they instantly become conscious and heal as per usual. However, they are still incapacitated until the end of their next turn.

Concentration Checks

Whenever you fail a concentration check, you gain the dazed condition until the end of your next turn.

Bleeding

Bleeding creatures cannot regain hit points from spells or abilities. A bleeding creature can only regain hit points by consuming hit dice or completing a long rest.

Dazed

If you are concentrating on a spell and become dazed, you lose concentration on that spell and it immediately fails. While dazed, you cannot concentrate on spells.

Race Proficiencies

Dwarven blackpowder training. You have proficiency with Blackpowder weapons when you reach 3rd-level.

Gnome specialist training. You have proficiency with Scatter weapons when you reach 3rd-level.

TRANSFORMATIONS

MANY CREATURES HUNT THE NIGHTS OF Etharis. While many are twisted beasts of hatred born from darkness, some were not always so.

The following ruleset provides players the ability to become grim monsters of the dark themselves. From dread-inducing werewolves to all-powerful liches, the following transformations are available to characters who meet the required prerequisites.

While transformations make for great roleplay opportunities, at no point do they provide an acceptable excuse to hurt the enjoyment of other players at the table. If you want to create a conflict between two player characters, it is imperative that you discuss this with the table (and particularly your GM) first.

Beginning a Transformation

Individuals rarely choose to transform into beings of the night. Instead, they have it forced upon them. Foul curses, horrific experiments, and the diabolical machinations of fiends, vampires, and other dark agents are all examples of how a character might start a transformation. However, there are times when a character may wish to begin a transformation of their own volition. Perhaps they have succumbed to the lure of power, or they see it as the only way to achieve a greater goal.

Regardless, the first step in any transformation should be a discussion with your GM. Make your intentions clear, as the transformation may not be suitable for the setting or story your GM is running.

The next step in a transformation is to ensure you meet all the prerequisites of the transformation. There are 2 types of prerequisites: mechanical and roleplay prerequisites. Mechanical prerequisites can be ability score, spellcasting, and other feature requirements. Roleplay prerequisites are the in-game actions required by a character to start a transformation. It is recommended that this milestone be reached within the game rather than through a backstory. However, you may wish to discuss alternative avenues to pursue a prerequisite with your GM.

Boons and Flaws

When you have achieved all the required prerequisites of a transformation and reached your first transformation level, you gain all the boons and the flaw of the first level. These constitute the beginning of the changes from the transformation. The boons and flaws of these iconic monsters come from folklore, pop culture and our own imagination. If they differ from an existing trope or stat block, it is because they represent a variation unique to Etharis.

A Blessing or a Curse?

Within the dark fantasy world of Etharis Transformations are representative of the gothic and body horror elements of the world. As a result, they should increase a character in power but ultimately be rooted in tragedy, as the setting demands. However, if you are not playing in a dark fantasy setting or you want your Transformation to feel more like a blessing than a curse, discuss with your GM the possibility of removing some or all the flaws associated with your Transformation. Alternatively, feel free to tinker with the boons and flaws with your GM. Transformations should suit the needs of your campaign, not the other way around.

Leveling Up

Characters that have successfully completed a transformation can continue the process by increasing their transformation level. The character must achieve a milestone before gaining a transformation level. Each type of transformation has an example list of possible milestones that are thematically unique. Talk with your GM to come up with applicable milestones for your campaign and how you can achieve them.

When you increase your transformation level, you choose one boon from that level, or a lower level, provided you meet that boon's prerequisites. You gain the new level's flaw as well.

Universal Milestones

The following milestones are examples that can apply to all (or most) transformations:

- Undertaking an exceptionally evil (or good) act.
- Completing an ancient ritual.
- Obtaining a powerful artifact.
- Being cursed by a dark agent.
- Being exalted by a patron or god.

Suggested Class Level to Transformation Level

While transformations are milestone achievements and each level comes with a flaw, transformations still represent a significant increase in power. For this reason, it is recommended that players and GMs use the following level table as a guide for when players should be able to level up a transformation. After all, only the strongest survive such an ordeal.

Transformation Level	Recommended Class Level Range
1	1–4
2	5–10
3	11–16
4	17–20

Not all transformations will be able to follow this recommendation due to prerequisites. In this case, characters can reach higher transformation levels at higher class levels.

Removing a Transformation

Reversing a transformation is an incredibly difficult process. The changes that have occurred in a character have fundamentally altered their biology, and perhaps their mind. However, anything is possible in a magical world. To cure a transformation, treat it as a curse from the curses section. The curse level of a transformation is equal to the character's transformation level.

Rather than casting remove curse with the cure components, the regenerate spell must be cast with the cure components instead. A character that has reached the 4th level of a transformation, or that has been transformed for longer than one year, can only be cured by a wish spell. If a character is killed and resurrected, the GM decides if they are resurrected with transformation levels.

Aberrant Horror

A cloaked figure flees through the dimly lit city streets. The guards appear to have the upper hand, until she turns to greet them—a hulking mess of spines, claws, and gnashing maws.

Lightning cracks. A mad doctor bellows in triumph as a once-deceased woman rises. With three fleshy tentacles sprouting from her back, his newest creation is complete. Thunder booms as the woman approaches the doctor menacingly, tendrils extended. Not all successful experiments end well.

Aberrant Horrors are the result of a humanoid becoming an aberration. Able to break free from the physical restrictions imposed upon them by the Material Plane, they shift the components of their form at a whim. This makes Aberrant Horrors terrifying to behold, especially in battle. Many adversaries have been caught off-guard when a seemingly defenceless opponent grew rows of gruesome spines before their eyes.

Becoming an Aberrant Horror

Each Aberrant Horror is defined by one key question: what happened to them? Some individuals make pacts with ancient entities for powers that have unforeseen effects. Others awaken after being defeated by an unnatural monster, surprised that they have been spared, only to feel something writhing in their stomach. Many tropes of body horror can be used as inspiration for an Aberrant Horror.

Once your origin has been determined, you can consider what your character's motivations are regarding their transformation. As their power grows and manifests, they may feel they have lost what makes them fundamentally themselves. Perhaps they decide to take revenge on the entity responsible for their transformation, or perhaps they perceive their transformation as a gift.

Transformation Features

An Aberrant Horror has the following transformation features:

Prerequisites

Ability Scores: Constitution 13
Roleplay: You must have had an encounter with an Aberration, magical anomaly, or some other plausible reason to have become an Aberrant Horror. Discuss with your GM how you can achieve this in your backstory or in-game.

Some of your abilities will require your target to make a saving throw to resist their effects. The saving throw DC is calculated as follows:

Transformation Save DC = 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Constitution modifier

Level Milestones

The following are examples of possible level milestones for the Aberrant Horror:

- Defeating a powerful Aberration and absorbing its power.
- Undergoing a dangerous and costly experiment.
- Surviving a magical mishap.
- Acquiring the strength to give birth to a more powerful version of yourself, which then consumes your old self.
- Fulfilling an eldritch prophecy written in the stars.

Transformation level 1

Starting at 1st level, you gain the following Transformation Boons and this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Aberrant Adaptations

Your body can twist and reshape itself as you will it, changing body parts into dangerous weapons or useful tools, and regenerating after damage. This ability is represented through Adaptations.

Basic Adaptations

At 1st level, you gain the following adaptations:

Chitinous Shell. As a bonus action, you can develop a hard, crustacean-like shell. When you use this adaptation and are not wearing heavy armour, you gain a +2 to AC. However, this reduces your speed by 10 feet. This adaptation lasts for 1 minute or until you are knocked unconscious. On your turn, you may use a bonus action to end this Adaptation.

Eldritch Limbs. You can transform one or both of your arms into a weapon of thick muscle, sharp claws, or hardened bone. When you make an attack, you can use this Adaptation. If you do, you gain the following features:

- You can choose what type of damage your unarmed attacks will cause, from Piercing, Bludgeoning, or Slashing. Your arm becomes a claw, tusk, or bone club, depending on the damage type chosen.
- You may roll a d6 in place of normal damage for unarmed strikes.
- You cannot hold any object in the affected arm. This includes, but is not limited to, weapons, shields, and spellcasting focuses. Any object you are holding merges into your adaptation or immediately drops to the ground. The GM may decide if they feel the object is too large to merge.

This adaptation lasts until you become knocked unconscious. On your turn, you may use a bonus action to end this adaptation.

Transformation Boon: Aberrant Form

Your Constitution score increases by 2 and your Strength score increases by 1. An ability score cannot be increased beyond 16 this way.

You become an Aberration in addition to any other creature types you are. Spells and abilities that affect Aberrations of a specific CR have no effect on you.

Transformation Flaw: Unstable Mutations

Your body becomes malleable and struggles to maintain any one physical shape. Upon completing a long rest, you must roll 1d100 on the Unstable Form table and apply the effects of the result, determined by your transformation level. These effects last until you complete another long rest. If you roll the same result on the table more than once in a row, roll again until a new result is rolled.

Transformation Level 2

At 2nd level, you can pick one of the following Transformation Boons. In addition, you also gain this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Efficient Killer

When you make an unarmed attack while you are benefiting from the Eldritch Limbs adaptation, you can gain one of the following effects depending on the type of damage you chose:

Piercing. You can launch a razor-sharp barb from your arm. Make a ranged attack at a target within 30 feet. Upon a hit, the target takes piercing damage equal to 2d6 + your Strength modifier.

Bludgeoning. You can manifest a long tentacle, tipped with a hardened bone club. Your unarmed attack deals an additional 1d6 bludgeoning damage. When you hit a creature with an unarmed attack, you can then attempt to damage another creature within 5 feet of the original target. If the original attack roll would hit the second creature, it takes bludgeoning damage equal to 1d6 + your Strength modifier.

Slashing. Your arm forms a row of viciously hooked claws and talons. Your unarmed attack deals an additional 1d6 slashing damage, and the target must succeed at a Constitution saving throw. Upon a failed save, the target gains the bleeding condition for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself upon a success.

Transformation Boon: Other-Worldly Tendrils

Starting at 2nd level, you can use a bonus action to grow a long, tendril-like appendage out of your body that you are proficient with. On subsequent turns, immediately after taking the attack action, you may use a bonus action to have the tendril attack an enemy within 10 feet of you. If you do, make an unarmed melee attack using your Strength modifier. On a hit, the target takes bludgeoning damage equal to 1d4 + your Strength modifier.

The tendril lasts until you become unconscious. On your turn, you may use a bonus action to retract it. In addition, you gain the following Adaptations:

Toxic Spray. A lamprey-like mouth opens at the end of a tendril and sprays a noxious toxin. When you attack a creature with one of your tendrils, you can choose to use this Adaptation and forgo dealing damage. If you do, instead of rolling to hit, the target must make a Constitution saving throw against your Transformation Save DC. On a failed save, they become poisoned. A creature that has failed this saving throw makes another Constitution saving throw at the end of each of its turns. On a successful save, it is no longer affected by this Adaptation.

Constrict. A tendril wraps tightly around the target. When you hit with a tendril attack, and the target is large or smaller, you can choose to use this Adaptation. If you do, the attack deals no damage and the target is grappled. Until the grapple is ended, the tentacle cannot be used against other targets.

Hypnotic Trance. A tendril flashes a myriad of coloured bioluminescent lights, attempting to disorient the target. When you attack a creature with one of your tendrils, you can choose to use this Adaptation and forgo dealing damage. If you do, instead of rolling to hit, the target must make a Wisdom saving throw against your Transformation Save DC. On a failed save, all attack rolls against the target have advantage, until the start of the affected creatures next turn. A creature that has failed this saving throw makes another Wisdom saving throw at the end of each of its turns. On a successful save, it is no longer affected by this Adaptation.

Transformation Boon: Situational Evolution

You can use an action to grow gills and flippers, thin hairs on your extremities to climb walls, or a layer of rapidly-regenerating flesh. You gain the following Adaptations:

Scopulae. Your climbing speed becomes the same as your walking speed. You can climb vertical objects, while leaving one hand free.

Gills and Flippers. Your swim speed becomes the same as your walking speed, and you can breathe underwater.

Regenerative Tissue. At the beginning of your turn, you regain hit points equal to your Constitution modifier if you have no more than half your hit points left. If you take fire or acid damage, then this Adaptation has no effect at the beginning of your next turn.

These adaptations last until you become unconscious, use a different one of these Adaptations, or use a bonus action on your turn to end the Adaptation.

Transformation Flaw: Hideous Appearance

Your appearance has grotesquely transformed. You may be a hulking mass of flesh, adorned with countless eyes, or a bone-and-tusk-covered natural weapon. Regardless of your true form, you're horrific to behold. You can suspend this form and manifest the appearance of the humanoid you once were, but this is taxing and requires concentration. This form is not permanent, and moments of stress are likely to reveal your true nature. Your true form is revealed in the following situations:

- Concentrating on a spell.
- Gaining the unconscious condition.
- Entering hallowed ground.
- Choosing to reveal yourself.

In events of extreme emotional or physical stress, a GM may call for a Constitution saving throw with a DC of their choosing to see if you maintain your humanoid form.

Non-evil creatures that witness your true form become instantly hostile to you, unless the GM decides otherwise.

Transformation Level 3

At 3rd level, you can pick one of the following Transformation Boons, or pick a boon from a lower level that you meet the prerequisites for. In addition, you also gain this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Wings

Beginning at 3rd level, you can grow large, twisted wings of mutated flesh. You gain the following Adaptation:

Wings. As a bonus action, you can manifest a pair of distorted, fleshy wings. You gain a fly speed equal to your current speed. These wings recede after 10 minutes. You can reabsorb them as a bonus action on your turn, and they reabsorb automatically if you are knocked unconscious. You can manifest your wings while wearing medium or light armour if it is made to accommodate them. You cannot manifest your wings while wearing heavy armour.

Once you use this Adaptation, you cannot use it again until you complete a short rest.

Transformation Boon: Additional Tendrils

Prerequisite: Otherworldly Tendrils

You are able to grow an additional tendril. On subsequent turns, you may use a bonus action to attack with each tendril you have grown. The tendrils can all attack the same target or different ones. Make a separate attack roll for each tendril.

When you reach the 4th level of this transformation, the number of tendrils you can manifest is increased to three.

Transformation Boon: Enhanced Hypertrophy

You may roll a d8 in place of normal damage for unarmed strikes. The base damage dice for your adaptations, like Efficient Killer and Otherworldly Tendrils becomes one base die higher. For example, an adaptation that deals 2d6 damage would become 2d8 damage instead.

Transformation Flaw: Unstable Existence

The nature of magic is beginning to unravel your material form. Whenever you roll a natural 1,2 or 3 on a saving throw against a spell or magical ability, you reveal your Hideous Appearance.

Transformation Level 4

You can pick one of the following Transformation Boons, or pick a boon from a lower level that you meet the prerequisites for. You also gain this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Savage Predator

Beginning at 4th level, whenever you roll to hit a target and score a natural 20, you may deal an additional 6d6 damage. This damage is the same type as your weapon. In addition, each creature of your choice that is within 30 feet of you must succeed a Wisdom saving throw or become Frightened of you for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Transformation Boon: Master of the Deep

Prerequisite: Additional Tendrils

On your turn as an action, you can rapidly grow and launch hundreds of tiny tendrils from your body. Each creature of your choice within 15 feet of you must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, they suffer one of the following effects of your choice for 1 minute. You can choose different effect options for different creatures:

- Become poisoned.
- Speed becomes 0.
- Attacks against them have advantage.

Once you use this feature, you cannot use it again until you complete a short or long rest.

Transformation Boon: Extremophilic Conditioning

Starting at 4th level, your body has learned to adapt to extreme conditions, allowing you to survive where most would perish. On your turn, as an action, you can use the following Adaptation.

Metamorphosis. You rapidly change your body's biophysical and chemical composition in reaction to your environment. Choose one of the following options:

- You are resistant to Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing damage. When determining falling damage, you take 1 bludgeoning damage for each 10 feet fallen in place of normal damage (maximum of 20 bludgeoning damage).
- You are resistant to Fire, Lightning, and Acid damage. You are immune to the effects of extreme hot climates.
- You are resistant to Cold, Thunder, and Poison damage. You are immune to the effects of extreme cold climates.

This adaptation lasts until you use this Adaptation again.

Transformation Flaw: Entropic Abomination

The very essence of magic aggravates the unstable nature of your aberrant body.

Whenever you fail a saving throw to a spell or magical ability, roll on the Unstable Mutation table. If the result is less than your current unstable mutation effect, then replace it with the new result.

Unstable Mutation Table

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Effect
01–05	01–08	01–09	01–11	Your body starts to become formless. You have disadvantage on Dexterity saving throws.
06–10	09–16	10–18	12–22	You start to become rigid and brittle, making resting less effective. When you consume a hit dice, you do not add your constitution modifier to the result.
11–15	17–24	19–27	23–33	Your body starts sweating a viscous substance that hardens quickly. You cannot doff armour or change clothes. Dropping, stowing, or interacting with an object requires an action.
16–24	25–32	28–36	34–43	You immediately throw up a thick, black ichor and begin feeling nauseous. You do not benefit from the effects of any food, drink, or potions consumed.
25–32	33–40	37–45	44–52	You are only able to form one-word sentences in a guttural voice you do not recognise. You can still cast spells with verbal components.
43–40	35–48	46–54	53–61	Your legs become unresponsive and difficult to move. Your movement speed decreases by 10 feet.
41–48	42–56	55–63	62–70	Your body begins fighting against any form you take. You cannot make reactions.
49–56	57–64	64–72	71–77	Your arms periodically have a will of their own, causing your reaction speed to slow while you regain control of them. You have disadvantage on Dexterity ability checks to determine initiative order.
57–64	65–72	73–80	78–84	Your skin quivers and shifts, while your appearance constantly changes. Every 30 seconds a defining feature of appearance changes, such as hair colour, facial features, or body proportions.
65–81	73–83	81–89	85–91	Nothing happens.
82–91	84–92	90–95	92–96	You become immune to the grappled and restrained conditions.
92–100	93–100	96–100	97–100	If you would gain hit points from a spell or ability other than your own, you gain that many hit points plus your Constitution modifier instead.

Aberrant Horror transformation progression

Level 1

Gain all boons and this flaw.

- Aberrant Adaptations
- Aberrant Form
- Unstable Mutations

Level 2

Choose one boon and gain this flaw.

- Efficient Killer
- Other-Wordly Tendrils
- Situational Evolution
- Hideous Appearance

Level 3

Choose one boon and gain this flaw.

- Wings
- Additional Tendrils
- Enhanced Hypertrophy
- Unstable Existence

Level 4

Choose one boon and gain this flaw.

- Savage Predator
- Master of the Deep
- Extremophilic Conditioning
- Entropic Abomination

The Fiend

A smirking, well-dressed man of unknown origin appears in a time of great need. He extends his hand and a contract manifests in a golden flash. With a quill floating by his side, he remarks, "Of course I can fix your dilemma. After all, who do you think caused it in the first place?" For a solution to a world of problems, the man asks for only two things in return: a signature and an eternity of servitude.

Hellfire swirls up a Fiend's arms as she laughs maniacally. In a single motion, she launches waves of fiery death at the legions of lesser Daemons sent to rein her in.

Those who perish twist and harden into charred, blackened figures with bright molten cores. The Fiend laughs again as she snaps her fingers and each figure explodes into another wave of fiery destruction.

Many tales are told in Etharis of the power of Fiends and the dangers of their contracts. Regardless, every year a champion rises, a prodigy is born, or some individual makes a deal for their soul in exchange for Lady Luck to be on their side.

To a Fiend, a soul is a delicious meal with an invigorating aftertaste. Most importantly, a soul contains the power to sustain their transformation.

Becoming a Fiend

A mortal can become a Fiend in a variety of ways. Some forfeit their souls and become one upon death. Others undertake excruciating rituals to transform into one. However, your character becomes a Fiend constitutes their contract. Communicating with your GM about creating deals with mortals in their story is a great way to roleplay your influence within the game world. As a Fiend, you should consider what your character's motivations are and which NPCs they can use to achieve their goals.

Transformation Features

A Fiend has the following transformation features:

Prerequisites

Ability Scores: Charisma 13
Roleplay: You must have made a pact with a Fiend, undergone an infernal ritual, or have some other plausible reason to have become a Fiend. Discuss with your GM how you can achieve this in-game.

Some of your abilities require your target to make a saving throw to resist their effects. The saving throw DC is calculated as follows:

Transformation Save DC = 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Charisma modifier

Level Milestones

The following are examples of possible level milestones for the Fiend:

- Defeating a greater rival Fiend and taking their place in the hierarchy.
- Ensnaring a particularly powerful or influential soul with a contract.
- Establishing a cult of worshipers who offer their strength to you.
- Establishing a portal between the material plane and the Netherworld.
- Killing or corrupting a Seraph.

Transformation Level 1

Starting at 1st level, you gain the following Transformation Boons and this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Gifts of Damnation

You have acquired the ability to bind your first mortal to your will. You can create a contract to bind their soul to you, feeding on its power. However, you will not gain the benefits of this gift until you have bound a mortal with a contract.

To bind a mortal's soul to you and grant them a Gift of Damnation, you must first create a contract for that gift. A contract requires magical ink and paper worth 50gp for each Transformation level you have acquired, and you must meet the prerequisites listed. In addition, you and the mortal must both sign the contract willingly, fully aware of the costs involved. Once signed, Netherworld entities give the benefits of the gift to you, and the mortal receives the named benefit within 7 days. You do not have to provide this benefit yourself. For example, upon signing a contract for a Gift of Unfettered Glory, you will receive the benefits listed under the gift. The mortal who signs will receive glory and no in-game mechanical bonuses, provided by the dubious powers of the Netherworld.

While you may have any number of contracts in your possession, you can only benefit from one at a time. Upon the completion of a long rest, you may swap the contract you are currently benefiting from for an alternate contract that you have bound a mortal to and signed.

On your turn, as an action, you can call upon the Netherworld to reveal to you the exact location of a creature that has signed one of your contracts, providing they are on the same plane of existence as you.

A contract you hold lasts for 7 years or until the mortal that signed it dies. At which point it bursts into flames and you cannot receive any benefits from it.

Transformation Boon: Fiendish Form

Your Charisma score increases by 2 and your Intelligence score increases by 1. An ability score cannot be increased beyond 16 this way. You become a Fiend in addition to any other creature types you are. Spells and abilities that affect Fiends of a specific CR have no effect on you.

Transformation Flaw: Planar Binding

Your body and soul are bound to a fiendish plane of existence. You have disadvantage on death saving throws as the plane attempts to pull you back to it. If you would be killed, your soul has been dragged back to a plane of existence of the GM's choice. This plane is your new home, and you become an NPC under the GM's control.

If you are on the fiendish plane responsible for your transformation, this flaw has no effect.

Transformation level 2

Starting at 2nd level, you can pick one of the following Transformation Boons. You also gain this level's Transformational Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Brand of the Chainer's Gaze

As a bonus action on your turn, you can brand a creature within 60 feet of you with a fiery mark that diminishes their resolve. The target must make a Wisdom saving throw, and on a failed save they are branded. Whenever a creature branded in this way makes a saving throw, they must roll 1d6 and subtract the result from their saving throw. A creature remains branded this way for 1 minute. The brand disappears if the creature is knocked unconscious, enters hallowed ground, or is targeted by the *remove curse* spell. You may use this feature a number of times equal to your Charisma modifier (minimum of 1). You regain all uses of this feature when you finish a long rest.

Transformation Boon: Brand of the Tyrant's Hellfire

As a bonus action on your turn, you can brand a creature within 60 feet of you with a fiery mark that exudes hellfire. The target must make a Charisma saving throw, and on a failed save they are branded. Whenever you hit a creature branded in this way with an attack, you deal an additional 1d6 fire damage.

A creature remains branded for 1 minute. The brand disappears if the creature is knocked unconscious, enters hallowed ground, or is targeted by the *remove curse* spell. You may use this feature a number of times equal to your Charisma modifier (minimum of 1). You regain all uses of this feature when you finish a long rest.

Transformation Boon: Brand of the Deceiver's Guile

As a bonus action on your turn, you can brand a creature within 60 feet of you with a fiery mark that twists their senses and perspective. The target must make an Intelligence saving throw, and on a failed save they are branded. Whenever a creature branded in this way attempts to attack you, they must roll 1d6 and subtract the result from their attack roll.

A creature remains branded this way for 1 minute. The brand disappears if the creature is knocked unconscious, enters hallowed ground, or is targeted by the *remove curse* spell. You may use this feature a number of times equal to your Charisma modifier (minimum of 1). You regain all uses of this feature when you finish a long rest.

Transformation Flaw: Hideous Appearance

Your appearance has grotesquely transformed. Your skin becomes red and leathery, and vicious horns, teeth and nails erupt through the surface of your skin. You can suppress this form and present the appearance of the humanoid you once were, but this is taxing and requires concentration. Moments of stress are likely to reveal your true nature. In the following situations your true form is revealed:

- Concentrating on a spell.
- Gaining the unconscious condition.
- Entering hallowed ground.
- Choosing to reveal yourself.

In events of extreme emotional or physical stress, a GM may call for a Constitution saving throw with a DC of their choosing to see if you maintain your humanoid form.

Non-evil creatures that witness your true form become instantly hostile to you, unless the GM decides otherwise.

Transformation Level 3

Starting at 3rd level, you can pick one of the following Transformation Boons, or pick a boon from a lower level that you meet the prerequisites for. You also gain this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Alluring Deceit

You gain mastery of deception and hollow promises. You gain proficiency in Deception and Persuasion. If you are already proficient in either of these skills, then your proficiency bonus is doubled for ability checks using that skill.

This ability has no effect on a skill if the proficiency bonus is already doubled.

Magic that would determine if you are telling the truth always indicates you are being truthful, and you cannot be magically compelled to tell the truth.

Transformation Boon: Infernal Resistance

You gain an imposing fortitude, drawing on Netherworld energy. If you would take magical damage from a spell, ability, or weapon, you can use your reaction and take half the amount of damage instead. You cannot use this feature against damage from silvered weapons.

Transformation Boon: Nether Blade

You can use a bonus action to summon a dreaded Nether Blade. The blade takes the form of a simple or martial weapon that deals slashing damage of your choice. Attacks made with the blade deal fire damage and gain the following features:

- Attacks you make with the blade deal an additional 2d6 fire damage.
- The blade emits flames that create bright light in a 5 foot radius and dim light for an additional 5 feet.
- You cannot be disarmed of the blade.

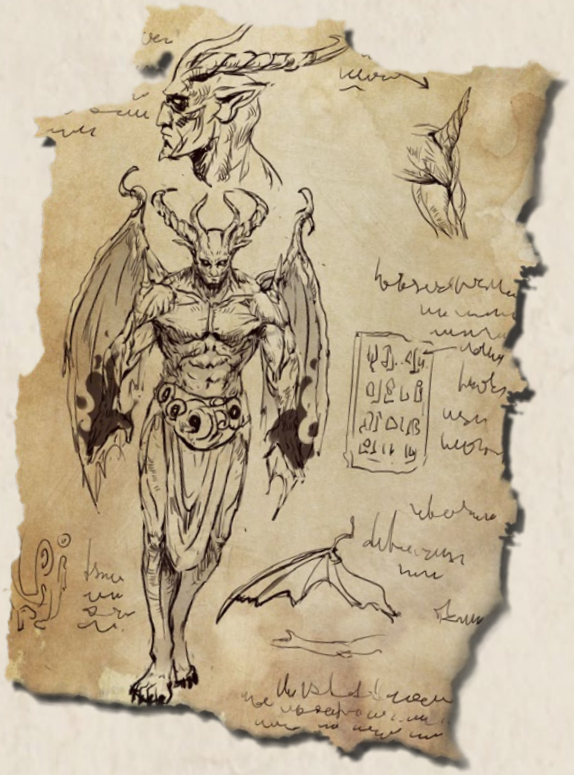
You can unsummon the blade at any time by using an action. If you unwield the blade, it immediately unsummons.

Transformation Flaw: True Name

Your fiendish transformation is complete, and you are reborn. You must choose a new name for yourself, which becomes your true name. You receive a talisman of brimstone and brass with your true name inscribed in infernal on it. A creature within 10 feet of you that knows your true name, can use an action and speak your true name in an attempt to bind you to their will. If they do, you must make a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, you become charmed by the creature, and must complete all commands they issue to you to the best of your ability. You remain charmed for 8 hours. If the creature that bound you dies, this effect ends.

Transformation Level 4

Starting at 4th level, you can pick one of the following Transformation Boons, or pick a boon from a lower level that you meet the prerequisites for. You also gain this level's Transformation Flaw.



Transformation Boon: Commanding Obedience

Whenever a hostile creature you can see within 30 feet of you fails a saving throw due to a spell of 1st level or higher that you control, you may command that creature to kneel. On that creature's turn, it must face you, then kneel and end it's turn. While kneeling, the creature is considered prone. If the creature is immune to the prone condition, then the creature just ends its turn.

Transformation Boon: Brimstone Pyrolysis

When you inflict fire damage against a hostile creature and reduce it to 0 hit points, you can immolate that creature and turn them into a Brimstone Statue.

Brimstone Statue. A Brimstone Statue is the scorched remains of a corpse whose essence has burned out. A Brimstone Statue is the same size as the creature before it died, and uses the following statistics:

- Armour Class: 10
- Hit Points: 10
- Speed: 0
- Damage Immunities: poison, psychic

A Brimstone Statue that is reduced to 0 hit points falls apart and is destroyed. It does not detonate.

Detonate. On your turn, as an action, you can detonate one or more Brimstone Statues that you have created. When a Brimstone Statue detonates, it is destroyed, and each creature other than you within 10 feet of the statue must make a Dexterity saving throw. A target takes 3d6 fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Transformation Boon: Infernal Summoning

On your turn as an action, you can tear open a portal to the Netherworld and summon up to 4 Imps. These Imps are each summoned into their own unoccupied space within 30 feet of you.

The summoned Imps are friendly to you and your companions. They all act directly after you in the initiative order. They obey any verbal commands that you issue to them (no action required by you). If you don't issue any commands to them,

they defend themselves from hostile creatures, but otherwise take no actions. The Imps disappear in a shower of ash and embers after 1 hour, or if they are reduced to 0 hit points. The GM has the Imps' statistics.

Once you use this ability, you cannot use it again until you complete a long rest.

Transformation Flaw: Pull of the Netherworld

Your new native plane attempts to pull you to it, laying claim to your form. Whenever you roll a natural 1 on a saving throw against a magical spell or ability, you take 1d6 force damage per two character levels in addition to any other damage or effects you would suffer, as your native plane attempts to unbind you from the Material Plane. For example, a 6th level Fighter would take 3d6 force damage. This damage ignores resistances and immunities.

Gifts of Damnation – Contracts

Gifts of Damnation are named after the benefits you can offer mortals in exchange for their souls. As the name suggests, these gifts offer mortals only short-term benefits and usually end in tragedy. To a Fiend, however, these gifts represent the powers you can gain by offering certain contracts and gaining the power of a soul. You can choose gifts that are thematic for your character, or that you like the benefits of, providing you meet the requirements.

Gift of Unbridled Power

Prerequisite: 4th Level of Fiend Transformation

Upon completing a short rest, you can spend 1 Hit Die and regain any number of spell slots whose total is equal to or less than the result of the Hit Dice. If you do, you suffer psychic damage equal to the number of spell slot levels you regained. You cannot use this ability again until you complete a long rest.

Gift of Unfettered Glory

When you hit a creature with a melee attack or melee spell attack, you can add your Charisma modifier to the damage dealt.

Gift of Joyous Youth

At the beginning of your turn, if you have no remaining Hit Dice, you can choose to make a DC 10 Charisma saving throw. On a success, you regain 1 spent Hit Die. If you fail, you suffer 1d6 psychic damage.

Gift of Liberating Freedom

Prerequisite: 2nd Level of Fiend Transformation

As a bonus action, you can manifest a pair of leathery wings. You gain a fly speed equal to your current speed. These wings recede if you dismiss them as a bonus action on your turn, or if you are knocked unconscious. You cannot manifest your wings while wearing heavy armour. You can manifest your wings while wearing medium or light armour if it is made to accommodate them.

Gift of Unsurpassed Fortune

Whenever a creature makes an attack roll, skill check, or saving throw within 20 feet, after the GM has rolled but before they have determined the result, you can use your reaction to roll a d20. If you roll a 10 or higher, the attack roll, saving throw, or skill check immediately fails. You cannot do this again until you complete a long rest.

Gift of Unconditional Love

Prerequisite: 3rd Level of Fiend Transformation

Whenever a creature fails a Charisma saving throw due to a spell or magical ability you control, you can use your reaction to gain temporary hit points equal to 1d10 + your Character's level. You cannot do this again until you complete a short rest.

Gift of Expansive Knowledge

Prerequisite: 4th Level of Fiend Transformation

When you complete this contract for the first time, you learn additional spells from the cleric, warlock, or wizard spell list equal to your Charisma modifier. You must have a spell slot level equal to or greater than each of these spells. While you have the effects of this contract and no other contract active, you know these spells in addition to your total Spells Known.

Gift of Prodigious Talent

Prerequisite: 2nd Level of Fiend Transformation

Choose two of your skill proficiencies. Your proficiency bonus is doubled for any ability check you make that uses either of the chosen proficiencies. This ability cannot double your proficiency bonus on a skill whose proficiency bonus is already being doubled.

Gift of Second Chances

Prerequisite: 3rd Level of Fiend Transformation

If you are reduced to 0 hit points, you can use your reaction to roll a Hit Die. If you do, your hit point total becomes the Hit Die result instead. You can't use this feature again until you complete a long rest.

Fiend Transformation Progression

Level 1

Gain all boons and this flaw.

- Gifts of Damnation
- Fiendish Form
- Planar Binding

Level 2

Choose one boon and gain this flaw.

- Brand of the Chainer's Gaze
- Brand of the Tyrant's Hellfire
- Brand of the Deceiver's Guile
- Hideous Appearance

Level 3

Choose one boon and gain this flaw.

- Alluring Deceit
- Infernal Resistance
- Nether Blade
- True Name

Level 4

Choose one boon and gain this flaw.

- Commanding Obedience
- Brimstone Pyrolysis
- Infernal Summoning
- Pull of the Netherworld

The Lich

The screams of souls torn from their bodies echo over the electric crackling of forbidden magic. A skeletal form rapidly stitches flesh and muscle to its frame, creating a seemingly living man – a man from an age and kingdom long gone. A man who has conquered death and risen again to enact his insidious will from millennia ago. The screams stop and are replaced with murmurs, as the corpses of the fallen arise as undead.

An ancient figure slowly turns the pages of a decrepit tome possessing forbidden cosmic knowledge. Tracing a bony finger over the inscription, the figure turns its head, revealing a gaunt, deathly face. "I do not receive company often," it rasps, slowly locking eyes with a broad-shouldered warrior. The warrior makes no movement or gestures, save for his eyes, which dart rapidly around the room in search of an escape. "Oh, do not struggle. It will be over soon." The deathly figure continues, raising itself up from a crouch. The very fabric of the room appears to warp and shudder with the figure's power and authority.

A Lich is to the arcane what a king is to their Kingdom: undisputed, absolute power. Resting upon a throne of raw, world-rending spellcasting potential, a Lich comes as close to a God as any mortal could imagine. However, this awe-inspiring power comes at a dear price. Immune to the effects of age but not time, a Lich is destined to exist without living for eternity. While this drives some Liches mad and others evil, it makes them all physically decrepit and feeble. Time itself takes their body from them until they are reduced to a skeletal head, passively watching the world pass them by.

Becoming a Lich

Across the Multiverse there are many ways to become a Lich, each determining the type of Lich the mortal becomes. However, within Etharis there is only one type of Lich, as there is only one known method of ascending to Lichdom: The Ritual of Dread. The process of this ritual is a well-guarded secret, entrusted to only a handful of mortals at any one time. The process of the ritual involves several despicable acts including murder, the brewing of a vile concoction, and even one's own death. However, it is the process of tearing one's soul from the body that is most despised, for this process involves the sacrifice of something truly dear to a mortal, and no substitute will be accepted. For some, it is the death of a cherished loved one. For others it is a family legacy. Regardless of the sacrifice, unless the Dreadscape spirits deem it worthy, Lichdom will not be granted.

Transformation Features

A Lich has the following transformation features:

Prerequisites

Ability Scores: Intelligence 16
Spellcasting Ability: You must have the ability to cast 7th level spells.
Roleplay: You must complete the Ritual of Dread. The process of this ritual is partially described, but left intentionally vague so it can be tailored to your setting and campaign. Discuss with your GM how you can achieve this in-game.

Some of your abilities require your target to make a saving throw to resist their effects. The saving throw DC is calculated as follows:

Transformation save DC = 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Intelligence modifier

Level Milestones

The following are examples of possible level milestones for the Lich:

- Discover ancient and dark arcane knowledge.
- Consume the soul of an exceptionally powerful spellcaster.
- Build a monument to your power to serve as a giant arcane focus.
- Create an army of undead.
- Kill a god.

Transformation Level 1

Starting at 1st level, you gain the following Transformation Boons and this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Harvester of Souls

You have gained the ability to tear the soul out of creatures you kill and consume it for its invigorating effects. Whenever you reduce a creature to 0 hit points, if you are on the same plane of existence as your phylactery, its soul is captured and your phylactery becomes charged. On your turn, as an action, you can consume any number of charge levels from your phylactery to regain a single spell slot. When you regain a spell slot in this way, the spell slot's level is equal to one third of the charge you consumed, rounded down.

Transformation Boon: Undead Form

Your Intelligence score increases by 4 and your Wisdom score increases by 2. An ability score cannot be increased beyond 22 this way. You become an Undead in addition to any other creature types you are. Spells and abilities that state effects or conditions specifically regarding Undead of a specific CR have no effect on you.

If a spell or ability other than your own would cause you to gain Hit Points, you gain that many temporary Hit Points instead. If you are reduced to 0 hit points and fall unconscious as a result, any healing you receive will stabilize you and leave you on 1 hit point and unconscious. You stop aging. You are immune to any effect that would age you, and you cannot die from old age. You do not require air, food, drink or sleep.

Transformation Flaw: Phylactery

You have successfully torn your soul from your body and trapped it in a suitable object. The object must be a trinket or item no larger than 1 square foot in size. This item becomes your phylactery.

Phylactery. A phylactery is an enchanted vessel containing a Lich's soul. Additionally, a phylactery is a conduit for the Lich to feed on captured souls.

A phylactery has the following statistics:

- Armour Class: 18
- Hit Points: 90
- Speed: 0
- Damage Immunities: poison, psychic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non-magical sources.
- Damage Resistances: necrotic, cold, thunder, lightning, force, fire.

While a soul is stored in your phylactery, the phylactery is considered charged. Its charge level is equal to the CR of all the creatures whose soul you have captured. To store a new soul in your Phylactery, add the CR of the creature you killed to your Phylacteries charge level. The souls of creatures with a CR of less than ¼ are not great enough to charge your phylactery. Your Phylacteries charge level cannot exceed 27.

If your phylactery is reduced to 0 hit points, your soul is lost; you crumble to dust and are killed outright.

If you are killed and you control a charged phylactery on the same plane of existence, your phylactery's charge is consumed and your body is reconstructed within 5 feet of your phylactery 7 days later. If you are killed and your Phylactery does not have a level of charge, you are reanimated 7 days later as a Demilich under the GM's control.

Transformation Level 2

Starting at 2nd level, you can pick one of the following Transformation Boons. In addition, you gain this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Puppet Master

Undead creatures of CR 1 or less that you animate with spells or abilities become permanently under your control. In addition, other creatures cannot gain control of undead creatures you raised.

Transformation Boon: Lichdom of the Arcane

Whenever you kill any creature with a spell, you may apply an additional effect depending on the damage dealt. Any effects with range are centred on or measured from the killed target, and if required, use your Transformation save DC.

This ability cannot be used when you kill a construct, undead, or any creature without a soul. The following are the effects caused when you use this ability:

Fire. The target is vaporised into a cloud of ash and smoke The space that the creature died in, and each space within 5 feet of it, are considered heavily obscured for 1 minute. Winds of moderate or greater speeds (at least 10 miles per hour) also disperse the cloud.

Necrotic. As the soul of your enemy leaves their body, you are able to siphon off part of their life force. You regain hit points equal to your Intelligence modifier (minimum of 1), plus your character level.

Poison. Target a creature within 10 feet of the killed creature. That creature must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or gain the poisoned condition for 1 minute.

Transformation Boon: Rift to the Dreadscapes

You gain the ability to open a rift to the Dreadscapes. As an action on your turn, you can choose a point within 5 feet of you to open the rift. Once opened, the rift stretches out from that point to a 20-foot-radius sphere. When a creature other than you enters the rift's area for the first time on its turn, or starts its turn there, it must make a Constitution saving throw against your Transformation DC. On a failed save, the creature suffers 10d10 necrotic damage, or half as much on a successful save. Undead creatures are immune to damage from this ability. The rift remains open for 1 minute, but closes if you become unconscious. Once you use this ability, you cannot use it again until you complete a long rest.

Transformation Flaw: Hideous Appearance

Your appearance has grotesquely transformed. Your skin has become rotten and pale, while your figure has become gaunt and hunched, radiating a ghastly aura. You can suppress this form and present the appearance of the humanoid you once were, however this is taxing and requires concentration. Moments of stress are likely to reveal your true nature. In the following situations your true form is revealed:

- Concentrating on a spell.
- Gaining the unconscious condition.

- Entering hallowed ground.
- Choosing to reveal yourself.

In events of extreme emotional or physical stress, a GM may call for a Constitution saving throw with a DC of their choosing to see if you maintain your humanoid form.

Non-evil creatures that witness your true form become instantly hostile to you, unless the GM decides otherwise.

Transformation level 3

Starting at 3rd level, you can pick one of the following Transformation Boons, or pick a boon from a lower level that you meet the prerequisites for. You also gain this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Relentless Undead

Whenever an undead creature you control is reduced to 0 hit points, it may immediately move up to its full speed and make an attack action before dying. This feature has no effect if the creature has been reduced to 0 hit points by radiant damage.

Transformation Boon: Arcane Supremacy

You become an exemplar of arcane power. When you cast a concentration spell, if you are already concentrating on one concentration spell, you do not lose concentration of that spell; instead you gain one level of exhaustion. If you are already concentrating on more than one spell, this feature has no effect. If you cast a third concentration spell during this time, you lose concentration on one of the two spells. Once you use this feature you cannot use it again until you complete a long rest.

Transformation Boon: Staff of the Dreadscapes

Starting at 3rd level, you can use an action to summon a deathly staff made of blackened bone and twisted rotwood. The staff is the same as a quarterstaff, with the following features:

- Necrotic damage dealt by you ignores resistance to necrotic damage.
- Your Spell Save DC and Transformation DC are both increased by 2.
- Food and non-creature plants the staff touches wither and decay.

You can unsummon the staff at any time with the use of an action. If you un-wield the staff, it immediately unsummons.

Transformation Flaw: Necromantic Dystrophy

Your body has become dependent on consuming souls, otherwise it becomes withered and frail. If you go more than 24 hours without converting 4 CR worth of souls from your Phylactery into spell slots you gain the following effects:

- You cannot use the dash, dodge, or disengage actions. You cannot use these actions as bonus actions.
- You cannot use your reaction to make opportunity attacks.
- You cannot disguise your hideous form feature.

Upon converting the required amount of souls into spell slots, you are no longer affected by the aforementioned effects.

Transformation Level 4

Starting at 4th level, you can pick one of the following Transformation Boons, or pick a boon from a lower level that you meet the prerequisites for. You also gain this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Lord of Undeath

Whenever you reduce a humanoid to 0 hit points, you can choose to reanimate it. If you do, the creature rises at the beginning of its next turn as a zombie permanently under your control, following verbal commands to the best of its ability.

Transformation Boon: Arcane Omniscience

You have mastered the arcane arts. You know every spell from the wizard's spell list and can prepare a number of these equal to your Intelligence modifier. Spells prepared this way do not count towards the maximum number of spells you can prepare. Upon completing a short rest, you can change one or more of these prepared spells for another spell from the wizards spell list.

Transformation Boon: Deathly Being

You become immune to poison damage, as well as bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from non-magical attacks. In addition, you cannot become charmed, poisoned, paralysed, or frightened.

Transformation Flaw: Weight of Ages

The weight of time is degrading for your Lich form and only the consumption of many souls can stay its effects. If you go more than 24 hours without converting 8 CR worth of soul from your Phylactery into spell slots you gain the following effects:

- You cannot use the attack action.
- If you move on your turn, you cannot use a bonus action or reaction until your next turn.
- If you use a bonus action on your turn, your speed becomes 0 until your next turn.

Upon converting the required amount of souls into spell slots, you are no longer affected by the aforementioned effects.

Lich Transformation Progression

Level 1

Gain all boons and this flaw.

- Harvester of Souls
- Undead Form
- Phylactery

Level 2

Choose one boon and gain this flaw.

- Puppet Master
- Lichdom of the Arcane
- Rift into the Dreadscapes
- Hideous Appearance

Level 3

Choose one boon and gain this flaw.

- Relentless Undead
- Arcane Supremacy
- Staff of the Dreadscapes
- Necromatic Dystrophy

Level 4

Choose one boon and gain this flaw.

- Lord of Undeath
- Arcane Omniscience
- Deathly Being
- Weight of Ages

Lycanthrope

A howling call is heard across thatched rooftops, summoning the pack to assemble. Below, a man tears at his clothes as moonlight shines down on him. The hunched figure screams in pain, begging his family to run. With muscles bursting and razor-sharp claws forming, his transformation is underway.

Rain pours through the forest canopy as a woman falls to her knees in exhaustion. Unable to run further, she accepts her fate and awaits the monsters of the dark. Instead, she hears a thunderous roar as a hulking figure tears through the undergrowth with impossible strength. The hulking, bear-like figure then turns to the woman and grunts, “Are you lost?” offering a paw in aid.

Lycanthropes may appear to be ordinary humanoids, but behind the veneer of humanity there is a pivotal struggle between beast and man. For most, it is a matter of time before they lose this fight and transform into a monstrous hybrid, half-animal and half-humanoid. Most Lycanthropes recall very little of their time transformed, often waking in a strange location, covered in blood and tattered clothes. However, as some Lycanthropes grow, they learn to balance both natures, using their curse as a gift.

Becoming a Lycanthrope

In Etharis, there are two documented methods of contracting the Lycanthropic curse. The first is being bitten by a Lycanthrope and not curing the curse before it takes hold. The second is to complete a druidic ritual known as the Lunar Sacrament. Once you have become a Lycanthrope, consider how your character feels about the curse. Do they wish to cure it before it progresses too far? Do they wish to understand it and make peace with the beast that resides within?

Transformation Features

A Lycanthrope has the following transformation features:

Prerequisites

Ability Scores: Strength 13
Roleplay: You must have contracted the Curse of Lycanthropy. This usually comes from being bitten by a Lycanthrope and surviving the encounter. Alternatively, you may have completed the Lunar Sacrament and been imbued with Lycanthropy. Discuss with your GM how you can achieve this within your backstory or in-game.

Some of your abilities require your target to make a saving throw to resist their effects. The saving throw DC is calculated as follows:

Transformation Save DC = 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Strength modifier

Level Milestones

The following are examples of possible level milestones for the Lycanthrope:

- Establishing a pack of other Lycanthropes.
- Killing an Alpha Lycanthrope.
- Gaining control of your animalistic urges.
- Unleashing the beast within and losing your humanity.

Transformation Level 1

Starting at 1st level, you gain all the following Transformation Boons and this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Hybrid Transformation

As an action, you may transform into a monstrous hybrid: half-beast, half-sentient. While in your hybrid form, the following rules apply:

- You can't cast spells or concentrate on spells. Your ability to speak is reduced to short, basic, guttural responses.
- Your stats remain the same as your humanoid stats.
- Any armour you are wearing merges into your Hybrid Form or immediately drops to the ground. The GM may decide if they feel the armour is too large to merge.
- While transformed and not wearing any armour or using a shield, your AC equals 10 + your Constitution modifier + your Dexterity modifier.
- While transformed you can use weapons and equipment as normal, unless specified elsewhere.
- You roll a d6 in place of the normal damage for your unarmed strikes. Attacks using your claws deal slashing damage instead of bludgeoning damage.
- When making the attack action you may substitute one attack to make an unarmed bite attack. If the attack hits, you deal piercing damage equal to 1d8 + your Strength modifier. If you make a bite attack, you cannot make another until the beginning of your next turn.
- If you made the attack action, as a bonus action you may make an unarmed claw attack or bite attack, provided you have not already used your bonus action.

Your hybrid form lasts for a number of hours equal to your Constitution modifier (minimum of 1) and ends early if you are knocked unconscious or reduced to 0 hit points. You can end your Hybrid Form by using an action on your turn.

Transformation Boon: Shapechanger's Form

Your Strength score increases by 2 and your Constitution score increases by 1. An ability score cannot be increased beyond 16 this way.

You become a Shapechanger in addition to any other creature types you are. Spells and abilities that affect Shapechangers of a specific CR have no effect on you.

Helpless Creatures

The defenceless and downtrodden are met with a modicum, of sympathy by most. However, to the bestial side of a Lycanthrope, these creatures represent prey. This Transformation refers to helpless creatures in multiple instances. For game purposes a helpless creature is a humanoid that is unconscious, restrained, blinded, paralized or frightened. Additionally, creatures that are so vulnerable in their current situation, they are completely defenceless are also considered helpless. For example, a disarmed and defeated enemy, pleading for mercy. In these instances the GM decides if the creature is considered helpless or not.

Transformation Flaw: Lust for the Hunt

The savage nature of your curse sometimes causes you to lose control. These ferocious tendencies are a constant struggle between you as a humanoid and the beast within. When you are in your hybrid form, you must succeed at a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw at the beginning of each turn or lose control. If you are in the light of a full moon, you automatically fail this saving throw. If you fail this saving throw, you are subjected to the following until you succeed:

- You must move toward the closest non-player creature you can see, smell or hear, prioritising helpless creatures. If you end your movement and no non-player creature is within 5 feet of you, then you must use your action to dash toward one.
- If there is a non-player creature within 5 feet of you and you have not used your action, you must make a melee attack against it, prioritising helpless creatures.
- If you made a melee attack against a creature, and that creature is still alive, then you must use your bonus action to make an unarmed claw or bite attack against the same creature.

Additionally, if you are subjected to the light of a full moon you must succeed at a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw or automatically turn into your hybrid form and cannot transform back until dawn. If you succeed in this saving throw, you are immune to its effects for 24 hours.

Transformation Level 2

Starting at 2nd level, you can pick one of the following Transformation Boons. You also gain this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Iron Pelt

While in hybrid form, you have resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from non-silvered, non-magical sources.

Transformation Boon: Hunter's Howl

While in your hybrid form, you can use a bonus action to let out a loud howl and mark a creature within 60 feet as your prey. A creature remains marked this way for 1 hour, or until it dies. While a creature is marked as your prey, you gain the following benefits:

- Whenever you hit the marked creature with a melee attack, you deal an additional 1d6 damage. This damage is the same type as the attack.
- You have advantage on any Wisdom (Perception) or Wisdom (Survival) check you make to track your prey.

You may use this feature a number of times equal to your Strength modifier (minimum of 1). You regain all expended uses of this feature upon a short or long rest.

Transformation Boon: Kindred Form

You gain the ability to transform into the animal form representative of your Lycanthropy type, known as your Kindred Form. You follow the same rules as the Hybrid Transformation feature and any feature that specifies the hybrid transformation, unless specified otherwise.
You can only transform into the kindred form representative of your Lycanthropy. Each Kindred Form gains the following rules:

- You cannot speak.
- You cannot take any actions requiring hands, except your Transformation capabilities.
- You can only use unarmed claw and bite attacks.

- You automatically succeed at all saving throws relating to the Lust for the Hunt flaw.

Other than being larger, you are indistinguishable from a regular animal of your Kindred Form.

Kindred Form - Bear

Your kindred form takes the shape of a large bear. While in your kindred form, you gain the additional features:

- You can speak to and understand other bears.
- When you make any saving throw, you can add your Constitution modifier to the result.
- Your hit point maximum increases by 15 hit points.

Kindred Form - Wolf

Your kindred form takes the shape of a ferocious dire wolf. While in your kindred form, you gain the additional features:

- You can speak to and understand other wolves.
- When making an attack against a creature, if an ally is within 5 feet of that creature and not incapacitated, you have advantage on that attack roll.
- Your speed increases by 20 feet, to a maximum of 60.

Transformation Flaw: Silver Sensitivity

You have developed a debilitating sensitivity to silver. While in your Hybrid or Kindred form, you have vulnerability to silvered weapons. In addition, you cannot have resistance to attacks made with a silvered weapon.

Transformation Level 3

Starting at 3rd level, you can pick one of the following Transformation Boons, or pick a boon from a lower level that you meet the prerequisites for. You also gain this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Titanic Vigor

Your hit point maximum increases by an amount equal to twice your character level, and it increases by 2 every time you gain a character level.

Additionally, when in your hybrid form, you gain 5 temporary hit points at the start of your turn.

Transformation Boon: Predatory Leap

Your jump distance is doubled.

In addition, in hybrid form, if you jumped more than 5 feet and land within 5 feet of a creature, you can immediately take the attack action to attack that creature. On a hit, the target must make a Strength saving throw or become prone on a failed save. You can decide to automatically grapple the target if they fail their save.

Transformation Boon: Bestial Savagery

You have embraced the animalistic side of your transformation. While in your Hybrid Form, you gain the following benefits:

- Your unarmed attacks deal 1d8 slashing damage and are considered magic attacks.
- Your AC increases by 1.
- You are immune to the charmed and frightened conditions.

Transformation Flaw: Fraying Memories

You have begun to suffer the effects of sharing a mind with two personalities. Memories of less practical significance have been lost to new ones of midnight hunts. You have disadvantage on Intelligence ability and skill checks recalling information or knowledge.

Transformation Level 4

Starting at 4th level, you can pick one of the following Transformation Boons, or pick a boon from a lower level that you meet the prerequisites for. You also gain this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Savage Instincts

You have developed an unrelenting thirst for bloodshed and carnage. While in your hybrid form, if you hit a creature with an unarmed attack, and it is missing any of its hitpoints, the base damage die is increased to 1d12.

Transformation Boon: Kindred Affinity

Prerequisite: Kindred Form Transformation feature.

You have reached true harmony with your Kindred Form, achieving a state of peace most Lycanthropes never find. You gain the following benefits while in your Kindred Form:

- You can speak.
- You can cast spells without needing to provide their verbal or somatic components. Additionally, you can cast spells without needing to provide material components, provided they do not have a gold cost.
- Friendly creatures within 20 feet of you have advantage on Wisdom ability checks and saving throws.

Transformation Boon: Unstoppable Rage

You have become a visage of unkillable carnage and slaughter even other Lycanthropes fear. When you are reduced to 0 hit points and you are not killed outright, you are not knocked unconscious. You can take your future turns as though you were not at 0 hit points and are affected by all spells, abilities and features as normal. While you have 0 hit points, taking damage causes death saving throw failures as normal, and three death saving throw failures can still kill you.

Transformation Flaw: Predatory Nature

You have begun to realise the true cost of your transformation. The beast within has gained more control of your body than you have. While you can control it at times you know it cannot be contained forever, and when it breaks free, it will delight in any slaughter it can find. You gain the following features:

- If you can see, hear or smell a helpless creature, you gain disadvantage on all Wisdom saving throws.
- At the beginning of your turn, if you can see, hear or smell a hostile or helpless non-player creature, you must succeed a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or be transformed into your Hybrid Form. If you succeed this saving throw, you become immune to this effect until dawn.
- Whenever you kill a creature and you are in your Hybrid Form, you cannot transform back into your humanoid form until dawn the next day. Although you can transform into your Kindred Form.

Lycanthrope Transformation Progression

Level 1

Gain all boons and this flaw.

- Hybrid Transformation
- Shapechanger's Form
- Lust for the Hunt

Level 2

Choose one boon and gain this flaw.

- Iron Pelt
- Hunter's Howl
- Kindred Form
- Silver Sensitivity

Level 3

Choose one boon and gain this flaw.

- Titanic Vigor
- Predatory Leap
- Bestial Savagery
- Fraying Memories

Level 4

Choose one boon and gain this flaw.

- Savage Instincts
- Kindred Affinity
- Unstoppable Rage
- Predatory Nature

The Seraph

Incense burns dimly, as muffled coughs echo through the musty room. Loved ones hold each other as a bedridden woman exhales for the last time, her scarred face bearing the mortifying lesions of the Weeping Pox. Her family sobs, too lost in their sorrow to notice how the smouldering embers radiate and shine. A woman with flowing robes and platinum hair approaches, radiant energy emitting from her folded, angelic wings. "Hold on for but a moment my child," she whispers. "Mercy has been granted."

With a thunderous boom, the Seraph's hammer collides with a skeletal abomination. Shards of bone scatter across the dilapidated chapel floor as the monster roars in pain. Gritting her teeth, the angelic figure proclaims, "By all that is holy, you will be vanquished!" Golden fire erupts from her hammer as she prepares for another strike.

Seraphs are mortals who have transformed into Celestial representations of a virtue or ideal. Exalted by a higher power, Seraphs are selected by divine beings after long and patient observation, confirming that the mortal displays pure character. Seraphs are selected from noble martyrs, tireless crusaders, or other exemplary individuals who are prepared to become the physical manifestation of righteousness.

Becoming a Seraph

To be chosen by an Arch Seraph is to become a vessel for the principles they uphold. This is a charge not to be taken lightly, and those who display righteousness with the intention of becoming a Seraph are usually overlooked for this reason. When becoming a Seraph, consider why your character was chosen. Do you display hidden merit? Are you devoted to a cause they will value?

Transformation Features

A Seraph has the following transformation features:

Prerequisites

Ability Scores: Wisdom 13
Roleplay: You must have been exalted by an Arch Seraph, divine cosmic energies, or have some other plausible reason to have become a Seraph. Discuss with your GM how you can achieve this in-game.

Some of your abilities require your target to make a saving throw to resist their effects. The saving throw DC is calculated as follows:

Transformation Save DC = 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Wisdom modifier

Level Milestones

The following are examples of possible level milestones for the Seraph:

- Defeating a powerful force of darkness.
- Create a hallowed landmark for pilgrims.
- Establish a parish of worshipers who uphold your virtue.
- Establish a portal between the Material Plane and the Empyrium.
- Redeem a soul that was considered beyond redemption.

Transformation Level 1

Starting at 1st level, you gain the following Transformation Boons and this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Celestial form

Your Wisdom score increases by 2 and your Constitution score increases by 1. An ability score cannot be increased beyond 16 this way.

You become a Celestial in addition to any other creature types you are. Spells and abilities that affect Celestials of a specific CR have no effect on you.

Transformation Boon: Angelic Wings

You have manifested feathered wings. You have a flying speed equal to your normal speed. You cannot wear armour or clothing that has not been modified to accommodate your wings.

Transformation Flaw: Planar Binding

Your body and soul are bound to a divine plane of existence. You have disadvantage on death saving throws as the plane attempts to pull you back to it. If you would be killed, your soul has been taken back to a plane of existence of the GM's choice. This plane is your new home, and you become an NPC under the GM's control.

If you are on the divine plane responsible for your transformation, this flaw has no effect.

Transformation Level 2

Starting at 2nd level, you can pick one of the following Transformation Boons. You also gain this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Divine Retribution

When you or an allied creature you can see within 30 feet takes the attack action, you can use your reaction to imbue them with holy zeal. Immediately after the target completes the attack action, they can make an additional attack as a bonus action. On a hit, the hit target takes an additional 1d8 radiant damage. You may use this feature a number of times equal to your Wisdom modifier (minimum of 1). You regain all uses of this feature when you finish a long rest.

Transformation Boon: Divine Clemency

When you or a creature you can see within 60 feet takes damage, you can use your reaction to cast a spell of 1st level or higher. This spell must target the damaged creature and restore hit points to it. You may use this feature a number of times equal to your Wisdom modifier (minimum of 1). You regain all uses of this feature when you finish a long rest.

Transformation Boon: Divine Expedition

At the beginning of another creature's turn, you can use your reaction to move yourself up to your speed or allow an ally that you can see, within 60 feet, to move up to their speed. Movement made this way does not cause attacks of opportunity. You may use this feature a number of times equal to your Wisdom modifier (minimum of 1). You regain all uses of this feature when you finish a long rest.

Transformation Flaw: Divine Appearance

Your appearance has radically transformed. Your body radiates a divine glow, while your wings are prominent and powerful appendages. You can contain this form and present the appearance of the humanoid you once were, but this is taxing and requires concentration. Moments of stress are likely to reveal your true nature. In the following situations, your true form is revealed:

- Concentrating on a spell.
- Gaining the unconscious condition.
- Entering desecrated ground.
- Choosing to reveal yourself.

In events of extreme emotional or physical stress, a GM may call for a Constitution saving throw with a DC of their choosing to see if you maintain your humanoid form.

Evil humanoid creatures that witness or hear about your true form become instantly hostile to you and are compelled by malice to destroy you, unless the GM decides otherwise.

If the creature is scared of you or decides that you are too powerful to fight, it will attempt to harm you in another way, but will not give up on destroying you.

Transformation Level 3

Starting at 3rd level, you can pick one of the following Transformation Boons, or pick a boon from a lower level that you meet the prerequisites for. You also gain this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Radiant Strike

Whenever you hit a target with a melee attack, you deal an additional 1d6 radiant damage to the target. This damage increases to 2d6 if the target is a Fiend, Fey, or Undead.

Transformation Boon: Cleanse Affliction

When you cast a spell that restores hit points to an ally, you can also remove one condition being inflicted on them by a spell or ability.

Transformation Boon: Bow of Celestial Judgement

You can use a bonus action to summon a powerful bow made of divine light. The bow is the same as a longbow, except attacks made with it deal radiant damage and have the following features:

- The bow does not use ammunition. Instead, when the wielder draws the bowstring, an ethereal arrow of radiant light forms.
- Attacks with the bow deal an additional 1d8 radiant damage. Against fiends, fey and undead, the bow deals an additional 2d8 radiant damage instead.
- The bow's radiant form emits bright light in a 5-foot radius and dim light for an additional 5 feet.

You can unsummon the bow at any time with the use of an action. If you unwield the bow, it immediately unsummons.

Transformation Flaw: Beacon to Darkness

You have become a Seraph of noted virtue and divinity. This has made you a target for all that is dark in the world. Whenever you or an ally within 30 feet commits an act of greater evil, such as murdering a helpless innocent, a small amount of darkness attaches itself to you, and you gain 1 corruption point (to a maximum of 5). Whether the act constitutes greater evil is determined by the GM. Whenever you make an attack roll against an evil creature, or make a saving throw against a spell or ability from an evil creature, subtract the number of corruption points you have from the roll. Whenever you complete a short or long rest, and have prayed for at least 1 hour, you can reduce the number of corruption points you have by 1.

Transformation Level 4

Starting at 4th level, you can pick one of the following Transformation Boons, or pick a boon from a lower level that you meet the prerequisites for. You also gain this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Aura of Holy Purge

You emit an aura of righteous fervour. This aura radiates up to 20 feet from you while you are conscious. When you or an ally within range of your aura hits a hostile creature, they can choose for that hit to be a critical hit instead. Once a creature has benefited from this feature, they cannot benefit from it again until they have completed a long rest.

Transformation Boon: Aura of Merciful Blessing

You emit an aura of invigoration and fortitude. This aura radiates up to 20 feet from you while you are conscious. When you or an ally within range of your aura is reduced to 0 hit points, they are reduced to 1 hit point instead. Once a creature has benefited from this feature, they cannot benefit again until they have completed a long rest.

Transformation Boon: Aura of Empyreal Valor

You emit an aura of swiftness and bravery. This aura radiates up to 20 feet from you while you are conscious. When you or an ally within range of your aura makes a Dexterity ability check to determine initiative, they can add +5 to the result. In addition, on that creature's turn they gain advantage on attack rolls against any creature that hasn't taken a turn in the combat yet. Once a creature has benefited from this feature, they cannot benefit again until they have completed a long rest.

Transformation Flaw: Pull of the Empyrean

Your new native plane attempts to draw you to it, laying claim to your form. Whenever you roll a natural 1 for a saving throw against a magical spell or ability, you take 1d6 force damage per 2 class levels in addition to any other damage or effects you would suffer, as your native plane attempts to unbind you from the material plane. For example, a 6th level Fighter would take 3d6 force damage. This damage ignores resistances and immunities.

Seraph Transformation Progression

Level 1

Gain all boons and this flaw.

- Celestial Form
- Angelic Wings
- Planar Binding

Level 2

Choose one boon and gain this flaw.

- Divine Retribution
- Divine Clemency
- Divine Expedition
- Divine Appearance

Level 3

Choose one boon and gain this flaw.

- Radiant Strike
- Cleanse Affliction
- Bow of Celestial Judgement
- Beacon to Darkness

Level 4

Choose one boon and gain this flaw.

- Aura of Holy Purge
- Aura of Merciful Blessing
- Aura of Empyreal Valor
- Pull of the Empyrean

Vampire

A lone figure clad in burnished steel greets the roaring infantry as they charge through the breach in the castle's walls. In a flash of black mist, the figure appears in front of the soldiers, striking them down with inhuman speed.

Candlelight flickers as a hooded adviser leans over an ornate throne, whispering machinations into her lord's ensnared mind. The chamber erupts in commotion as the lord announces further powers be granted to the resident merchant's guild.

Vampires are creatures of cursed blood and tragic existence. Exquisite food, a warm summer's breeze, and growing old with loved ones are all luxuries a Vampire will never experience. Unable to enjoy many of the fineries of life as they once knew it, Vampires often become bitter creatures, filled with hate for everything they once loved.

Becoming a Vampire

Vampires are spawned into the world when a mortal contracts the Sanguine Curse, dies, and is reborn undead. There are a variety of ways to contract the curse. A Vampire may have offered their blood to a loyal servant, powerful ally, or loved one they wished to elevate. More commonly, a Vampire may have bitten you, and you survived the Vampire's attack long enough to contract the Sanguine Curse before perishing and being reborn. Other methods include ancient and dark magic, as well as powerful but cursed magical artifacts. Regardless of how you have become a Vampire, you should discuss with your GM what type of Vampire you would like to become, and how it can be implemented in the campaign.

Transformation Features

A Vampire has the following transformation features:

Prerequisites

Ability Scores: Dexterity 13
Roleplay Milestones: You must have contracted the Sanguine Curse, whether by being bitten by a Vampire, offered their blood, completing the Sanguine Ritual, or by another plausible method. Discuss with your GM how you can achieve this in-game.

Some of your abilities require your target to make a saving throw to resist their effects. The saving throw DC is calculated as follows:

Transformation Save DC = 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Dexterity or Charisma modifier

Level Milestones

The following are examples of possible level milestones for the Vampire:

- Establish a coven of vampire spawn.
- Drink the blood of a legendary monster.
- Learn the great secrets of vampirism from a Vampire Lord.
- Learn to embrace your Hideous Form and lose the ability to conceal it.
- Discover the lost crypts of an ancient vampire and consume its essence.

Transformation Level 1

Starting at 1st level, you gain the following Transformation Boons and this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Blood Fury

You have become possessed by the thirst that grips all Vampires. In combat, this thirst drives you into an insatiable frenzy of bloodshed. Whenever you deal combat damage with an unarmed strike or a melee/ranged weapon to a target that can bleed, and is not undead or a construct, you gain one Fury Point. You may only have a maximum of 4 Fury Points at any time. Upon completing a short or long rest, the number of Fury Points you have is reset to 0. These points are used by certain abilities that you can learn through your transformation levels.

Blood Fury Abilities

You can spend Fury Points (FP) to use the following abilities. The entries below detail their names, Fury Points cost in parentheses, and features:

Fanged Bite (1FP). On your turn, immediately after you take the attack action, you can use your bonus action to make a special unarmed bite attack. You can use your Dexterity modifier instead of strength to hit with this attack. This attack deals piercing damage equal to 1d4 + your Strength or Dexterity modifier. The target must then succeed at a Constitution saving throw or take 2d6 necrotic damage. You regain hit point equal to the necrotic damage dealt this way. This attack generates 1 Fury Point as normal. If this attack reduces a humanoid creature of size Medium or smaller to 0 hit points, you gain 3 Fury Points instead.

Calculated Strike (1FP). When you hit with a melee weapon attack, you may use this ability before damage is dealt. If you do so, you may add 1d6 of the same damage as your weapon to the damage result. If this ability is used, no Fury Points are generated for this attack.

Vampiric Mist (2FP). As a bonus action, you can disappear in a puff of shadowy mist and teleport up to 30 feet to an unoccupied space you can see.

Unearthly Reflexes (1FP). After you have rolled a Dexterity saving throw, but before the GM has determined the result, you can use your reaction and take half damage on a failed save, and no damage on a successful one.

Deathly Horror (3FP). As a bonus action, you can emit a ghastly distortion of your true form. A creature of your choice within 30 feet of you must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or become Frightened of you for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. A creature that succeeds on its saving throw is immune to this ability for 24 hours.

Transformation Boon: Undead Form

Your Dexterity score increases by 2 and your Charisma score increases by 1. An ability score cannot be increased beyond 16 this way. In addition, your creature type changes to undead. Spells and abilities that state effects or conditions specifically regarding Undead of a specific CR have no effect on you. If a spell or ability other than your own would cause you to gain Hit Points, you gain that many temporary Hit Points instead. If you are reduced to 0 hit points and fall unconscious as a result, any healing you receive will stabilize you and leave you on 1 hit point and unconscious. Furthermore, you cannot die from old age and you do not require air, food or drink.

Feeding

Transcended beyond mortal needs, vampires do not need to eat. However, the gripping nature of their curse requires them to feed on the fresh blood of humanoids. A task they undertake with delight.

On your turn, as an action, you can make an unarmed bite attack against an unconcious, restrained or charmed humanoid. If you do so, the target is drained for 1 pint of blood and bears a bite mark on the location you bit them. This attack does not wake sleeping creatures or end the effect of spells and abilities. A creature bitten this way gains a level of exhaustion, which can only be removed with the use of a greater restoration spell.

A vampire that does not feed within the required time goes into an unconscious feeding frenzy, under the GM's control. The next time they sleep or enter a trance they attack all nearby living creatures and attempt to feed on them. A vampire remains in this state until they have drained a creature completely (killing them), at which point the vampire falls unconscious for 4 hours.

Transformation Flaw: The Sanguine Curse

The sanguine curse has taken a hold on you. As a result you gain the following features:

- You cannot enter a residence you do not own without an invitation from one of the occupants. If you enter a residence involuntarily such as by being dragged into one, you take 1d10 psychic damage at the start of your turn while you are inside it.
- You gain Darkvision (60 ft.) if you do not already have it.
- While in sunlight, you have disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.
- You must feed every 7 days.

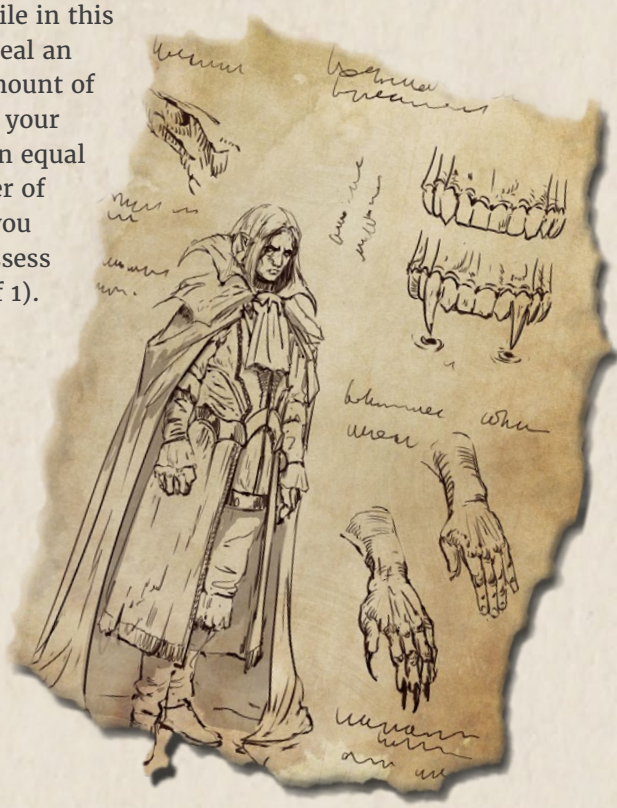
Transformation Level 2

Starting at 2nd level, you can pick one of the following Transformation Boons. You also gain this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Dread Knight Combat Training

You become trained in the martial ways of the Dread Knights. As a bonus action, you may enter, exit, or change combat stances. While in a combat stance, you gain the features of that stance.

Offensive. While in this stance, you deal an additional amount of damage with your melee weapon equal to the number of Fury Points you currently possess (minimum of 1).



Defensive. While in this stance, you gain a bonus to your AC equal to half the number of Fury Points you currently possess (minimum of 1).

Accuracy. While in this stance, you gain a bonus to hit with your weapon attacks equal to half the number of Fury Points you currently possess (minimum of 1).

Additionally you may use Dexterity instead of Strength for the attack and damage rolls of any melee weapon with the slashing damage type.

Transformation Boon: Sanguine Magic

Prerequisite: The ability to cast spells.

Your curse corrupts the magic you cast. Whenever you deal non-necrotic damage with a spell or cantrip, you can choose to deal necrotic damage instead of that spell's normal damage type. Furthermore, whenever you deal damage with a spell or cantrip, you gain one Fury Point (maximum of 1 per turn).

Additionally, you gain the following Blood Fury abilities:

Cast in Blood (1 FP). The next time you cast a damage-dealing cantrip, you can add your charisma modifier to the damage you deal.

Sanguine Spellbinding (3 FP). The next time a creature makes a Charisma, Intelligence, or Wisdom saving throw against a spell you have cast, it has disadvantage. If a spell affects multiple creatures at the same time, you choose which creature is affected.

Transformation Boon: Shapechanger

You can use an action to polymorph into a Tiny bat or back into your normal form. While in bat form, you gain the following features:

Your walking speed is 5 feet, and you have a flying speed of 30 feet.

If you have sunlight hypersensitivity, it is reduced to sunlight sensitivity: while in sunlight, you have disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks, but take no damage from direct contact with sunlight.

While in bat form, you can't speak. Any object you are holding or armour you are wearing merges into your bat form or immediately drops to the ground. The GM may decide if they feel the object cannot merge.

If you become unconscious in bat form, you revert back to your vampiric form.

Additionally, you can use an action to turn into mist. Whilst in mist form, you gain the following features:

You cannot take any actions, speak, or manipulate objects.

You are weightless, have a flying speed of 20 feet, can hover, and can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there.

In addition, if air can fit through a space, then you can as well. You cannot pass through liquid, and this does not give you the ability to cross running water.

You have advantage on Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution saving throws, and are immune to all non magical damage, except any damage you take from sunlight.

Any object you are holding or armour you are wearing merges into your mist form or immediately drops to the ground. The GM may decide if they feel the object cannot merge.

If you become unconscious in mist form, you revert back to your vampiric form.

Transformation Flaw: Hideous Appearance

Your appearance has greatly altered from its original features. The first signs were the fangs that started to protrude from your upper row of teeth. You have no reflection in mirrors or other reflective surfaces. With dry, pale skin and occasional burns from the sun, you can hide your true appearance by concentrating on your pre-vampirism appearance. However, the following situations can reveal your true appearance:

- Concentrating on a spell.
- Gaining the unconscious condition.
- Entering hallowed ground.
- Taking damage from being exposed to sunlight or free-flowing water.
- Choosing to reveal your true self.

In events of extreme emotional or physical stress, a GM may call for a Constitution saving throw with a DC of their choosing to see if you maintain your humanoid form.

Transformation Level 3

Starting at 3rd level, you can pick one of the following Transformation Boons, or pick a boon from a lower level that you meet the prerequisites for. You also gain this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Cruel Riposte

Whenever a creature within 5 feet of you makes an attack against you, you may use your reaction to make a melee weapon attack against the attacking creature. You may use this feature a number of times equal to your Dexterity modifier (minimum of 1). You regain all expended uses of this feature when you complete a long rest.

Transformation Boon: Creatures of the Night

Once per long rest, you can magically call to your aid 2d4 swarms of bats or 2d4 swarms of rats. When outdoors, you can summon 2d4 wolves instead of swarms of rats. These creatures arrive at the end of your next turn at a destination of the GM's choice within 30 feet of you, and they are under your control. They act directly after you in the initiative order and remain for 1 hour, until you die, or until you dismiss them with a bonus action. You cannot use this ability if you are exposed to direct sunlight.

Transformation Boon: Captivating Glance

You gain proficiency in Deception and Persuasion. If you are already proficient in one of these skills, then your proficiency bonus is doubled for ability checks using that skill. If you have or ever gain double proficiency in one or both of these skills, you gain +2 for that skill instead.

Additionally, your thoughts cannot be read by any means.

Transformation Flaw: Greater Sanguine Curse

Your curse has taken a stronger hold on you. As a result you gain the following features:

- You take 1d10 acid damage if you end your turn in running water.
- You gain superior Darkvision (120 ft.) if you do not already have it.
- You take 1d10 radiant damage when you start your turn in sunlight.
- You must feed every 3 days.

Transformation Level 4

Starting at 4th level, you can pick one of the following Transformation Boons, or pick a boon from a lower level that you meet the prerequisites for. You also gain this level's Transformation Flaw.

Transformation Boon: Grim Executioner

Prerequisite: Dread Knight Combat Training.

You have mastered the martial techniques of the Dread Knight. Whenever you roll a critical hit with a melee or ranged weapon, and the target has 50 or fewer hit points, you kill the target outright. If your target has more than 50 hit points, you deal an extra 6d6 damage. This damage is of the same type as your weapon.

Transformation Boon: Beguiler's Entrancement

Prerequisite: Captivating Glance.

Once per long rest, you gain the ability to manipulate the mind of a humanoid with your sanguine magic. You can use an action to make an incapacitated humanoid charmed by you for 24 hours or until you target a different humanoid with this ability. If you use this ability on the same target for 30 unbroken days, the target becomes permanently charmed by you.

You may use this ability on another humanoid once you have permanently charmed the previous humanoid. You can have a maximum number of enthralled humanoids equal to your Charisma Modifier (minimum of 1). If the number of enthralled humanoids exceeds your Charisma modifier for any reason, you lose connection to all of them.

This charm effect can be removed with the *remove curse* spell, or any other spell or ability with similar effects.

Transformation Boon: Regenerate

You regain 10 hit points at the start of your turn if you have at least 1 hit point remaining, and are not in sunlight or over running water.

If you take radiant damage or damage from holy water, this ability does not function at the start of your next turn.

Transformation Flaw: Stake to Heart

Whenever you're attacked by a creature with a wooden or silvered weapon, if they score a natural 20 to hit, and you have 50 hit points or less, they manage to lodge their weapon into your heart and you become paralyzed for 1 hour or until the weapon is removed, whichever is greater.

Vampire Transformation Progression

Level 1

Gain all boons and this flaw.

- Blood Fury
- Undead Form
- The Sanguine Curse

Level 2

Choose one boon and gain this flaw.

- Dread Knight Combat Training
- Sanguine Magic
- Shapechanger
- Hideous Appearance

Level 3

Choose one boon and gain this flaw.

- Cruel Riposte
- Creatures of the Night
- Captivating Glance
- Greater Sanguine Curse

Level 4

Choose one boon and gain this flaw.

- Grim Executioner
- Beguiler's Entrancement
- Regenerate
- Stake to the Heart

ADVANCED BACKGROUNDS

BACKGROUNDS ARE EXCELLENT storytelling tools when it comes to identifying who your character is and where they come from. A gallant soldier may have a dark past as a mercenary sellsword or a gang enforcer. Advanced backgrounds provide an additional layer to this process. They seek to identify where a character comes from, and highlight where they may progress to, within the world setting.

Advanced Backgrounds are a variant option for the background system. It is suggested that either all characters within a party use Advanced Backgrounds, or none. To use Advanced Backgrounds, select a background and choose a profession within that background. If you feel that no backgrounds or professions suit your character concept, then discuss with your GM how you can modify one to fit your needs

Professions

Professions best represent what your character does between adventures, whether it's a job to make money, or a title or responsibility they must uphold. Each background has multiple professions, and describes that profession's place in the world. For example, your character may be a Seafarer, but what do they do at sea? They may be a pauper, scavenging whatever they can find of value from the ocean shores. In this case, you may choose the Seagather. There are no wrong choices.

Profession Abilities

Once you have selected your profession, you gain access to its Profession Ability. This is an activity that you have practiced time and time again, becoming an expert in this field. Each profession ability requires an hour spent completing the task, and a Medium DC skill check. Once you have attempted a profession ability, you cannot attempt it again until you complete a long rest.

Profession Dice

Profession Dice are the in-game advantages provided to characters by their background profession. Characters can add their Profession Die to skill or ability checks according to any Talents they have selected.

In addition, a character always adds their Profession Die when rolling for Profession Abilities.

A character's Profession Die is determined by their rank, and shown in the table below:

Profession Rank	Profession Dice
1	1D4
2	1D6
3	1D8
4	1D10

Skill Check Difficulties

When a player is required to make a skill check, the DC is determined by the GM using the following table:

Difficulty	DC
Easy	10
Medium	15
Hard	20
Very Hard	25
Impossible	30

When determining DC, a GM may start with the complexity of the task, then adjust it based on environmental factors. For example, a character may be trying to climb a ladder, a task which would normally not require a skill check. However, the weather is chilly, and the ladder is slick with ice, so the GM decides to set a Medium DC. This DC might be increased again for further complicating factors, such as pursuing enemies or if the ladder is broken.

Note: It is important to remember that rolling a natural 20 on a skill check does not result in an automatic success.

Proficiencies & Equipment

When creating a character, Advanced Backgrounds add skill proficiencies and starting equipment in a similar way to backgrounds.

Once you have selected your background and profession, you may select a skill proficiency, per your background's selection list. Once you've made your choices, apply your starting equipment and proficiency from your background and profession.

Rankings, Holdings, and Progressions

Rankings represent a character's standing within the world of their profession. Each profession has four ranks, with characters starting at the first rank. Whenever a character meets the progression milestones of a rank within their profession (as discussed with the GM), they may progress to the next rank of that profession.

A Captain and his daring crew or a Duke and his extravagant estate are both examples of a profession's holdings. Within Advanced Backgrounds, holdings are the assets, resources, or advantages a character gains through their position. Holdings vary between professions, from finding free lodging to acquiring a grand fortress and legions of soldiers, or anything in between. Within each profession are examples of the sorts of holdings a character might achieve as they progress through the professional ranks. Whenever a character advances in rank, they retain their holdings from previous ranks.

Progressions are examples of what may be required for you to advance in rank within your profession. From making a medical breakthrough to being appointed by a monarch, progressions vary depending on the rank and profession they belong to. Progressions make great character goals and can be tied into existing character or party goals. For example, a scribe looking to disprove falsehoods could do so by pursuing the mystery at the heart of the campaign's overall story.

Progressions and holdings within this chapter are recommendations only. Ultimately it is up to the GM to determine how the characters within your setting progress, and what holdings are necessary to the gameplay. Additionally, a GM may decide to allow a character to progress within their profession due to alternative reasons, such as circumstantial gameplay, setting requirements, or for any other reason. Players and GMs should discuss what sort of holdings a player could expect to receive at each rank and what progression paths may be available to them.

Talents

Talents are unique dispositions, experiences, or characteristics your character has picked up due to their time working in their profession. This is represented by allowing characters to add their Profession Die in unique situations that highlight the skills gained through their profession. A character may select a Talent from their corresponding Talent list when they select their profession, and select an additional Talent whenever they rank up within a profession.

Changing Profession

Plans never play out as expected, and sometimes professions don't either. A character may change professions by achieving the progression requirements of the profession rank they wish to change to. When they achieve these requirements they may rank up into the new rank of that profession, choosing a Talent from their new profession list. A character that has ranked up into another profession retains all equipment, Talents, proficiencies, and abilities from their original profession. After all, you can change your future, but not your past.

For example, Aylea is a Militarist Field Marshal. A recent brush with a dark sorcerer has confirmed her faith in her deity, and now she wishes to become an Inquisitor. Aylea's player discusses with their GM what sort of holdings and progression milestones Aylea must achieve to rank into Inquisitor. Due to her seasoned military experience, the GM decides that once contact has been made with a Chapter Master, Aylea will become an Inquisitor at the rank of Initiate, a rank from which Aylea is likely to advance quickly.

Backgrounds

The following backgrounds are provided in alphabetical order:

Academic

Academics use their education and knowledge from extensive studies to make a living and achieve their life's ambitions. Academics are generally held in higher regard than most other backgrounds, as their skills are sought after by the wealthy and powerful. Academics make great researchers, investigators, and versatile problem-solvers.

Skill Proficiencies: Choose one from Arcana, History, Investigation, Medicine, Nature, Religion.
Languages: Choose one standard and one exotic.
Equipment: A bottle of black ink, a quill, a letter opener, parchment, and 10 gp.

Antiquarian

Antiquarians are fascinated with history and identifying ancient artifacts and texts. They gather rare and lost items to add to their collections. Antiquarians' skill with identifying the properties of artifacts makes them adept problem solvers, especially when ancient artifacts and languages are involved.

Skill Proficiency: History.
Additional Equipment: A fine brush, a magnifying lens, and a small wooden crate to store relics.

Insightful Discovery

Upon spending an hour observing or examining a subject, and succeeding on a medium-DC Intelligence (History) check, you can uncover the purpose and uses of any object, language, cultural practice, or similar subject. The features of magic items you investigate in this manner are revealed to you without you needing to attune to them.

Rank 1 - Museum Scholar

You work in a museum and have spent your time learning about the intricacies of every cultural artifact there. Under the guidance of the head scholar at the museum, you grew into a respectable scholar in your own right.

Holdings:

A desk within a library, college or museum, with access to common resources.

A map or letter detailing the location of a hidden treasure or relic.

Progression:

Acquire a small collection of antiquities, which fellow antiquarians acknowledge.

Rank 2 - Adept Collector

After spending a considerable amount of time and money, you have started a reasonable collection of antiquities that you wish to one day put on display.

Holdings:

A small collection of prized antiquities, and a quaint office to display and store them in.

A hireling scholar who tends to your collection and undertakes research for you.

Progression:

To progress in this profession, you must build multiple collections dedicated to diverse subjects. Additionally, you must accommodate your collection in a gallery of suitable size and grandeur.

Rank 3 - Senior Professor

You now hold a position of esteem within the world of academia. You have dedicated a large portion of your time and efforts to extracting secrets from each item and sharing these discoveries with others. Students flock from around the world to hear you speak on the subjects of your specialisation.

Holdings:

An array of prized collections, each holding secrets to lost civilisations, forgotten magics, or legends.

An extravagant gallery that displays and protects your collections.

A team of assistants and scholars who attend to the collections, conduct research, and explore the world to find more antiquities.

A small following within the world of academia, who seek you out to discuss and learn about your collection.

Progression:

To progress in this profession, you must create a great museum, with extensive collections spanning many subjects, time periods, and cultures within the world. You must document a great finding about a lost subject, magic item, or tradition, and be cited in others' work regarding the subject.

Rank 4 - Curator

You have become one of the most renowned living antiquarians. Having been referenced in many scholars' books about your studies, and having authored a few yourself, you are now a consulted expert on several subjects relating to your vast collections. You are the curator of your own museum, with scholars and collectors travelling across the world to visit it.

Holdings:

A great museum, with collections that draw monarchs and common folk alike, inspiring wonder and awe.

A dedicated team of antiquarians that manage your collections and museum, scouring the world for relics that would make fine additions to your impressive array.

A position within a prestigious council of academics, who regard you as an esteemed peer and assist you with your studies.

Archivist

Archivists are dedicated to the recording and preservation of knowledge. Archivists are often tasked with scouring tomes for errors and falsehoods, because to an archivist there is no greater sin than the recording of lies. Great Archivists often become well respected scholars, holding great power over the future of a kingdom. Regardless, Archivists are often sought out by other Academics, who collaborate with them to complete their own work in related fields.

Skill Proficiency: Investigation.
Additional Equipment: An ink pen, a bottle of ink, a tin of pounce powder.

Academic References

Upon spending an hour, and succeeding on a medium-DC Intelligence (Investigation) check, you can find a contact within a library, academy, or place of knowledge. This contact begins as friendly to you and will answer questions you have regarding research.

Rank 1 - Scribe's Assistant

You have become a valued member of a library after learning about the art of collecting and storing written materials. Your years of completing bureaucratic tasks have made you an expert in locating information on specific and obscure subjects.

Holdings:

A desk within a library, college, or museum, with access to common resources.

A well-regarded text which is suspected to contain falsehoods, with made-up accounts and references.

Progression:

To progress in this profession, you must fact-check and document your discovery of errors in a fraudulent, plagiarised, or mistaken tome.

Rank 2 - Scribe

You have been appointed the honoured task of transcribing and recreating texts. You are a builder of libraries, a recorder of history, and an entrusted relayer of knowledge for generations to come. As a Scribe, it is your job to record the knowledge of the world. Scribes often venture out into the world to find and document information first-hand.

Holdings:

An office with printing materials, binding equipment, and a dedicated hireling assistant who completes minor tasks for you.

Access to restricted sections of libraries and other places of collective knowledge.

Progression:

To progress in this profession, you must complete and restore a catalogue of books or scrolls to be added to a library. Your contribution to the library must be deemed a worthy addition by your superiors.

Rank 3 - Chief Librarian

Your dedication to the acquisition and preservation of knowledge has brought you to great heights within the world of academia. You are responsible for the library you serve, from acquiring and copying new texts, to preserving and reviewing existing ones. A Chief Librarian is expected to go to great lengths to fact-check the contents of their library, preferably in person.

Holdings:

A great library containing texts collected over centuries.

A team of hirelings who attend the day-to-day running of the library, such as scribes, assistants, and scholars. Additionally, your name is highly regarded within the world of academia.

Access to the entire library, including forbidden tomes and the knowledge they contain.

Progression:

To progress in this profession, you must have made an unprecedented contribution to the world of academia. This may be the uncovering of a great truth, or the invention of a new methodology.

Rank 4 - Grand Loremaster

As Grand Loremaster, you are the undisputed regional authority in all matters of scholarly concern. For this reason, you are highly revered by figures of prominence for your knowledge and advice. A system of academics looks to you for guidance on obtaining knowledge and spreading enlightenment.

Holdings:

You have become head of a regional educational or knowledge-based institute, such as a ministry or college. The institution's resources are at your command.

You have authority over all smaller libraries and educational institutions within your region, including access to their resources and hirelings.

You have access to sources of knowledge that have otherwise been sworn to secrecy by Imperial order, royal decree, or a warlord's command. These sources of knowledge can include such secrets as forbidden arcane practices, demons' true names, and schematics for powerful artifacts.

Physician

Your skills in healing the sick and injured have given you a vast knowledge of illnesses and remedies based on the latest science.

Your calm bedside manner and natural aptitude for concocting medicines make you an effective healer.

Skill Proficiency: Medicine.
Additional Equipment: A bag filled with medicinal herbs, pestle and mortar, bandages, needle and thread, jar of leeches.

Medical Diagnosis

Upon spending an hour examining a creature, and succeeding on a medium-DC Wisdom (Medicine) check, you can find the exact cause of the creature's illness, injury, or death. Additionally, you become aware of how to cure the ailment, if a non magical cure exists. This does not include magical diseases such as the contagion spell or the Weeping Pox.

Rank 1 - Surgeon's Apprentice

Whether your fascination is for the humanoid body, or the conditions that afflict it, your tireless dedication to medicine has earned you the position of Surgeon's Apprentice. As an apprentice, you are expected to attend to the patients of your appointed superior with efficiency and effectiveness.

Holdings:

Lodging near the medical clinic, hospital, or infirmary where you work.

A copy of the medical codex Cause and Cures.

Progression:

Complete a variety of surgeries successfully, and be considered proficient by a mentor who has attained the rank of Barber Surgeon.

Rank 2 - Barber Surgeon

Armed with healer's kits and medical utensils, you are equipped to tend wounds and perform common medical procedures. However, without a medical licence, you can only treat common folk and low-ranking military personnel.

Holdings:

A crude medical clinic known as a "Chop Shop", to facilitate the surgeries you perform.

Up to half a dozen apprentices who follow your commands, assist you where possible, and aspire to become surgeons themselves.

Progression:

To progress in this profession, you must obtain your medical licence by proving your skill and dedication to a Royal Physician.

Rank 3 - Doctor

You have proven your rank among honoured healers within your region, winning the privilege of a medical licence. You are now permitted to open a medical clinic and treat high society. As a trusted figure, you are invited to rub shoulders with the most prominent of its members.

Holdings:

A medical clinic, equipped with an infirmary to care for long-term patients with a variety of illnesses.

A medical licence granted by a Royal Physician, granting you the right to treat individuals of any background.

A clinic staff of half a dozen Barber Surgeons and a team of apprentices.

A patient list of influential figures of various backgrounds who employ your practice for their medical needs.

Progression:

To progress in this profession, you must build your practice into a hospital, with multiple Barber Surgeons and Doctors working alongside you. In addition, you must accomplish a great medical achievement, such as discover a cure to a disease or a breakthrough in medical practices.

Rank 4 - Royal Physician

You have received a monarch's patronage and been given the title of Royal Physician. Only the most revered and skilled physicians receive such a title, and the honour of building and running a Royal Hospital. As a Royal Physician, you are a gatekeeper for those who wish to become Doctors. Barber Surgeons will wait at your doorstep for days to prove their devotion and, hopefully, attain a licence. Kings and merchant lords will travel across the land to seek your treatment, and pay anything to be healed by you.

Holdings:

A Royal Hospital, complete with multiple wards dedicated to various specialisations, reserved for the upper class.

An experienced team of physicians of all ranks, dedicated to running the Royal Hospital and advancing medical practices.

A client list consisting of Monarchs, powerful merchants, and other important individuals.

Aristocrats

Aristocrats are the rulers and wielders of law, and use their position at the top of the social hierarchy to compel others to further their interests. Whether feared or respected, aristocrats make excellent negotiators, diplomats, and schemers.

Skill Proficiency: Choose one from Deception, History, Insight, Performance, Persuasion, or Religion.
Languages: Choose one standard language.
Equipment: A quill and ink, a letter opener, parchment, a piece of fine jewelry that displays your status, and 25 gp.

Courtier

From notable socialites to distant noble family members and trusted servants, Courtiers represent the members of the aristocracy who are employed or invited by a ruler to make up their court. Courtiers live in close proximity to the ruling class to assist them and be part of their world. However, Courtiers are more often seen as schemers and manipulators than helpful assistants. The life of a Courtier is one of dangerous plots, uneasy political alliances, and the occasional act of betrayal – when it benefits them.

Skill Proficiency: Deception.
Additional Equipment: A medallion or pin displaying the house of your patron, court clothing.

Political Maneuvering

Upon spending an hour speaking to various people at court, and succeeding on a medium-DC Charisma (Deception) check, you can conjure and spread a rumour or piece of gossip within a court or political structure. A subject of your choice, whether it be true or false, becomes a topic of hot conversation within the court or political structure where you planted the rumour.

Rank 1 - Chamber Keeper

You have secured a title as a minor Courtier attending to the needs of the court through menial duties such as fetching wine, or more demanding tasks such as hosting foreign visitors of lesser influence. As a Chamber Keeper you are the unnoticed eyes of the court, making you a valuable informant for court plots.

Holdings:

A room or lodging provided by your patron within their estate.

A scandalous secret relating to a member of your court.

Progression:

Obtain a minor title from your patron that reflects your station.

Rank 2 - Court Official

You have proven yourself to be a valuable asset to your patron, political allies, and other courtiers. You have been promoted to an official, granting you a minor title and the responsibilities that accompany it. These titles vary, including cofferer, master of the hunt, or any other title befitting your station.

Holdings:

The authority and resources associated with your minor title. For example, a cofferer would control financial records, and perhaps even bank access.

Up to half a dozen servant hirelings to assist in your daily responsibilities.

Progression:

To be granted a greater court title by your patron that reflects your station.

Rank 3 - Court Patrician

With a greater court title, you have become an essential and respected member of the court. You may have been promoted to steward, cupbearer, master of ceremonies, or some other position of considerable influence in the court.

Holdings:

A greater court title and all the privileges that accompany it. For example, the master of ceremonies would have personal access to their patrons' family for event-planning purposes.

A team of servants and lesser Courtiers sworn to you either through authority or intrigue.

A private suite within your patron's estate that provides easy access to court and extravagant luxury.

Informants and spies throughout the court who report intrigue and valuable information to you.

Progression:

To progress in this profession, you must achieve complete control of your Court, through coercion, deception, or any other means.

Additionally, you must attain an honourable title.

Rank 4 - Royal Chamberlain

You have become the most influential member at court. Whether through earnest reputation or political manipulation, you have attained an honourable title of considerable power such as spymaster, regent, or majordomo. Your powerful connections and political alliances make you the unofficial leader at court, arguably with greater power over practical matters than your patron.

Holdings:

Complete control of the court's resources, such as finances, hirelings, and establishments.

Incriminating information relating to each member at court and their possible weaknesses.

Informants and spies across the region, who feed you intrigue regarding your court and others.

Envoy

Envoys are the representatives of their governments or monarchs to others abroad. Often sent into faraway parts of the world, their responsibility is to forge new alliances, and maintain existing ones. However, much of an Envoy's tasks are reactive – responding to a noble's threats, securing defensive pacts in times of conflict, or bolstering border defences. Envoys go where there is conflict.

Skill Proficiency: Insight.
Additional Equipment: A Royal Seal allowing you to pass through borders with ease, diplomatic garb.

Diplomatic Connections

Upon spending an hour, and succeeding on a medium-DC Wisdom (Insight) check, you can find an ally within the aristocracy, guilds, or professional services. This contact begins as friendly to you and will answer questions you have regarding local nobility, politics, and other high society matters.

Rank 1 - Secretary

You have been appointed secretary for a consulate, responsible for the organisation and assistance of the diplomats within. You work in a thankless and stressful position, but your proximity to influential members of society provides you with many connections. You understand the fundamentals of networking and are talented at finding allies in distant lands.

Holdings:

Free lodging within any consulate you represent or work for.

A secret encrypted political message you cannot decipher.

Progression:

Assist in completing a dangerous or urgent diplomatic mission.

Rank 2 - Councillor

You have been entrusted to undertake your first diplomatic missions. Whether stealing a secret, proposing a treaty, or inciting rebellion, you have been sent to the far corners of the world to advance your side's interests. While not yet entrusted with high-profile diplomatic missions, you are still positioned to meet lesser rulers and influence their future actions.

Holdings:

A personal assistant to help with organising, who accompanies you on diplomatic journeys.

Access to equipment and information known to the consulate.

Progression:

Complete your own diplomatic mission successfully.

Rank 3 - Ambassador

Your promotion places you on solid footing within the political landscape. You have met many powerful figures throughout the world and can secure a formal audience with them, at their convenience. Many wish to meet you, and are interested in becoming a part of your vast network of allies. After all, you know exactly the right person for any given job.

Holdings:

A team of Envoys to assist you at your consulate.

Provisions and resources sent to you by your home region to assist in diplomatic missions.

An encryption codex, used to decipher encoded messages sent to and from your home region.

Progression:

Negotiate an important treaty between nations, or uncover a great espionage conspiracy within your province.

Rank 4 - Grand Chancellor

You have single-handedly led negotiations that have reshaped the geopolitical landscape. Wars have been declared and ended based on your efforts. You have travelled the world and made lasting relationships with the truly powerful. While you are not a monarch, monarchs look to you for guidance. There is no doubt that you are the true ruler of kingdoms.

Holdings:

Access to restricted and classified documents.

You represent your monarch or other absolute authority in external relations. You have access to any resources your monarch will provide you, and broad authority to use them.

Noble

Nobles are the blue-blooded rulers of any society, granted authority by birthright. Some are traditional feudal nobles, while others belong to ascendant merchant families. Regardless, nobles represent the highest level of authority within a social structure.

Skill Proficiency: Persuasion.
Additional Equipment: A signet ring engraved with your family crest, fine clothes.

Position of Privilege

Upon spending an hour speaking in your defense, and succeeding on a medium-DC Charisma (Persuasion) check, you can exert your noble privilege to avoid the consequences of lawbreaking such as trespassing, theft, possession of contraband, unarmed assault, and other misdemeanors. You can also use this ability to reduce the consequences of more serious crimes that can't be ignored entirely.

Rank 1 - Dishevelled Noble

After some decline, your family name is barely spoken anymore. Perhaps the family lost everything in a war, or gambling debts claimed your once-proud noble estate. Despite your noble blood, you are a poor noble with little power or influence in the world. The only thing left is your title, which has gotten you out of trouble on more than one occasion. However, with hard work and some political dealings, you may climb back into prominence.

Holdings:

A ruined estate.

A noble title that carries little influence anymore.

Progression:

To be granted a barony, or holdings worthy of the title, by a Count or higher-ranking noble.

Additionally, you must restore your family household to a reputable state.

Rank 2 - Lord Baron

You have been titled Lord Baron of an estate. Your barony is small, but you have high hopes for it. You have started to attend noble soirees, and can see your reputation within the aristocracy rise. You are the local authority within your barony, however you delegate much of it to administrators. With patience and good relations, a county could be yours.

Holdings:

A barony estate, including resources and hirelings.

A baron's title, granting you authority and affirming your social status among other individuals of your region.

Progression:

To progress in this profession, you must be made a Count by a Duke or Monarch.

You must construct a noble estate befitting a Count.

Rank 3 - Count

Your reputation has risen to prominence. You walk the halls of powerful estates and hear passers-by whisper your name. You control an entire county, with multiple baronies under your influence. You are expected to represent them at court upon summons, and must navigate the political landscape of the aristocracy. While you wield considerable power, you find two-faced advisories and political masterminds wherever you turn.

Holdings:

A county estate, which includes resources and hirelings.

A count's title, granting you authority and affirming your social status among other individuals of your region.

Progression:

To progress in this profession, you must be made a Duke by a Monarch.

You must construct a noble estate befitting a Duke.

Rank 4 - Duke

You have been appointed as a direct vassal of your Monarch, whether a king, queen, or emperor. You are invited to the greatest balls and soirees across the land, and feasts are held in your honour. With your family name restored to glory, you hold considerable influence throughout your region and the entire world. However, with such heights comes a great distance to fall. Political enemies will go to great lengths to tarnish your name and steal your titles.

Holdings:

A Duke's estate, which includes resources and hirelings.

A Duke's title, granting you authority and social status among other individuals of your region.

Clergy

The Clergy represents those who devote their lives to working within religious institutions. The Clergy are respected members within the social hierarchy in regions where their religion is prominent. Clergymen make effective orators, acolytes, and religious crusaders.

Skill Proficiencies: Choose one from History, Insight, Intimidation, Medicine, Persuasion, Religion.
Languages: Choose one standard and one of: Abyssal, Celestial, or Infernal.
Equipment: A holy symbol, a prayer book or divine text, vestments, and 15 gp.

Inquisitor

You are a servant of an organised branch of religious enforcers who hunt down heretics and blasphemers within your own faith, and cultists of sinister powers. Divine justice does not discriminate, and you have mercilessly punished crimes both mundane and supernatural – a task that comes with little glory. You are deadly efficient in bringing the sinful to heel. However, corruption is rife within the Inquisition itself due to the Order's power and authority, and those found guilty are likewise treated without mercy.

Skill Proficiency: Intimidation.
Additional Equipment: A set of manacles, a copy of the text Sins of the Heretic, a leather strap.

Eradicate Heresy

Upon spending an hour, and succeeding on a medium-DC Charisma (Intimidation) check, you can find an informant and extract information. The informant will divulge information regarding the location of local cults, witch covens, and other enemies of the Divine.

Rank 1 - Initiate

You were taken in by the church, and after showing attributes befitting of an Inquisitor you, were trained in their ways. Gruelling mental and physical training took up your time from dawn to dusk whenever you were not completing chores.

Holdings:

Free lodging at the inquisitorial chapter house, temple, or any other religious institutions that you currently serve.

You have knowledge of someone from your childhood who has since become affiliated with a witch coven, religious cult, or other enemy of the faith.

Progression:

Be promoted to the rank of Inquisitor by a Chapter Master.

Rank 2 - Inquisitor

You have been appointed to the role of Inquisitor, charged with enforcing divine justice by hunting down cultists, spellcasters who have violated magical laws, and other threats. Many institutions recognise your Inquisitorial authority, and temples of the faith that you serve will grant you sanctuary, food, and useful information.

Holdings:

Access to information and equipment provided by the Order, in addition to information obtained by temples of the faith.

Progression:

Be promoted to Chapter Master by a Grand Theologist Inquisitor.

Rank 3 - Chapter Master

You have risen through the ranks and now oversee an Inquisitorial Chapter. Initiates and Inquisitors alike answer to you, and seek your advice in matters of executing divine justice, as well as rooting out corruption within the ranks of the faith you serve. You are still active in the field, often leading factions of Inquisitors in bringing cultist organisations and powerful spellcasters to heel.

Holdings:

Access to the restricted section of the chapter library, which contains all known weaknesses of supernatural entities.

Free lodging at any religious institution or temple of the faith that you serve.

Your religious institution invests you with the authority to declare people of high standing as enemies of the faith, if you have irrefutable evidence of their crimes.

Progression:

Being appointed to Grand Theologist Inquisitor by the head of your Order and a panel of ranking clergy.

Rank 4 - Grand Theologist Inquisitor

You have cultivated a reputation as a devout and accomplished Inquisitor, following the teachings of the divine, executing divine justice, and seeking divine enlightenment. You hold significant influence within and outside your Order, and Chapter Masters seek your counsel on matters of the faith and the Order's mission.

Holdings:

Access to a council of Chapter Masters and other ranked clergy with whom you discuss matters of your Order.

You have the authority to dismiss and appoint chapter members to positions of power, both within the Inquisition and temples of the faith.

You have the ability to denounce those who you know (or suspect) to be enemies of the faith, dispatching Inquisitor factions to investigate and restore order.

Preacher

Religions need devout orators to bring new members into the fold, or reinforce the faith of the faltering. Preachers can inspire the righteous, protect the weak, or incite dread in the unfaithful by speaking clearly and passionately about the faith they serve. These rhetoricians of the divine are not dissuaded by material wealth or hidden lore; instead, they seek good repute and new converts to their deity. Preachers recruit adherents to their religion through personal devotion and overt exhibitions of piety, charity, and charisma.

Skill Proficiency: Persuasion.
Additional Equipment: Flyers displaying propaganda, a box to stand on.

Propagate Agenda

Upon spending an hour speaking publicly, and succeeding on a medium-DC Charisma (Persuasion) check, you can influence the thoughts and opinions of locals. This could be used to heighten the common people's fear of magic, or bring comfort and peace of mind to those who share the same faith.

Rank 1 - Crier

You have always had a natural aptitude for the spoken word, compelling others to listen and partake in your views by speaking loudly and clearly about the deity you serve.

You are often seen on busy street corners and in town squares, preaching to passers-by.

Holdings:

Free lodging at your local temple of the faith or religious institution.

Knowledge of a member of the ranked clergy using unlicensed magic to perform a miracle, or committing some other transgression.

Progression:

You have a small congregation of followers who come to hear your sermons each day.

Rank 2 - Truth Speaker

You have cultivated a reputation in your local town or city as a persuasive and charismatic orator, able to inspire the righteous and decry the evil. Common folk and nobility alike often stop to hear you speak, moved by your unique conviction to consider joining your religion.

Holdings:

You advise a group of criers in your province on religious matters and outline the agenda for each homily.

Progression:

You progress after having converted a significant number of people to your religion.

Rank 3 - Enlightened Evangelist

You have gained considerable reputation in the province where you preach, regularly recruiting new converts to your faith. Your overt exhibitions of devotion and charity combined with a natural charisma make you a well-liked figure among the common people, though the more cynical uninitiated may regard you as a heretic or a charlatan.

Holdings:

A temple of the faith grants you a letter of religious immunity from Inquisitors, verifying that you are not a heretic.

You have a following of disciples who accompany you on your travels to new unenlightened provinces, further glorifying your deity and you as their disciple.

Progression:

A member of your congregation observes you performing a miracle, drawing new converts to the faith.

Rank 4 - Exalted Savior

You have established your reputation as a captivating rhetorician, and people are naturally drawn to you, sometimes seemingly against their will. You may even begin to perceive yourself as a messianic figure, showing the will of your deity through conspicuous demonstrations of personal devotion and charity toward the poor. For those with spellcasting abilities, magic that is woven into such demonstrations is particularly compelling.

Holdings:

A dozen or more faithful disciples that observe and convey your teachings, and thousands of followers loyal to you.

A divine mandate bestowed by your deity or seraph that elevates you above the laws of humanity.

Priest

Priests lead the common people in the teachings of their deities. They are the figureheads and leaders in the temples and shrines where they preach, providing guidance, atonement, and hope for the downtrodden. Priests often hold positions of considerable influence within their communities, and are treated with reverence among common folk and nobility alike.

Skill Proficiency: Religion.

Additional Equipment: 5 sticks of incense and an alms box, religious medallion stamped with the divine word.

Religious Hierarchy

Upon spending an hour proving your knowledge of the divine, and succeeding on a medium-DC Intelligence (Religion) check, you can find a contact within the local clergy. This contact begins as friendly to you and will answer questions you have regarding religion, the clergy's agenda, and local religious matters.

Rank 1 - Acolyte

You were taken in by a modest parish, where you assist in religious services and ceremonial duties such as lighting altar candles and distributing prayer books to the congregation. The priest also educates you in religious scripture and doctrine.

Holdings:

You have knowledge of a senior clergy member whose teachings undermine the faith, preying on the wayward for personal gain.

Free lodging at your local temple of the faith.

Progression:

You are recommended for priesthood by a senior clergy member who has overseen your study of divine texts. You will be given a religious task that you must complete.

Rank 2 - Priest

You oversee a local parish with a substantial following, where you perform rites, sermonise on the teachings of your deity, and provide spiritual guidance to followers whose faith has waned. You use your modest influence to inspire the virtuous, uplift the downtrodden, or incite fear.

Holdings:

You have a modest parish that you oversee, including humble lodgings, and regularly receive locals for confession.

You have knowledge of a wealthy noble who possesses a first edition book of scripture that the church greatly desires.

Progression:

You must either expose the senior clergy member exploiting the faith for personal gain, or acquire the first edition book of scripture.

Rank 3 - Bishop

In recognition of your service to the faith, you have risen to the title of Bishop, taking up residence in your own diocese in a major city. You oversee a number of senior clergy who seek your counsel and spiritual guidance in all aspects of the divine. Bishops are elected from senior priests in their Order and retain the title for as long as they remain true to the doctrine.

Holdings:

You are the steward of the largest temple of your faith in your region, and receive well-appointed lodgings nearby.

You oversee your own diocese in a major city, speaking on behalf of the faith and supervising the clergy there.

Progression:

You become Cardinal in the event that a Cardinal passes away or retires, and the head of your faith appoints you in their stead due to your outstanding commitment to the faith.

Rank 4 - Cardinal

As a Cardinal, you answer directly to the head of your faith. You oversee the diocese within your province, to root out corruption and heresy from on high. Cardinals are appointed by the head of their faith, and as such have their ear in all matters of spiritual and political adjudication.

Holdings:

A number of dioceses that you oversee within your province.

Free lodging at any parish or diocese that recognises your appointment, and any institution under the control of the faith.

Common Folk

Common Folk are, unsurprisingly, the most common station in life. These are the masses of people who are not distinguished by noble blood, inherited wealth, or a special calling that sets them apart.

Varying as much as the professions with which they occupy themselves, common folk are typically identified by the work they do.

Often finding themselves pawns in the machinations of those who consider themselves their betters, commoners generally look after one another in tight circles of trust. Commoners are a great background for most professions and character concepts that do not fall within another background.

Skill Proficiencies: Choose one from Animal Handling, Athletics, Insight, Nature, Perception.
Languages: Choose one standard language.
Tool Proficiencies: One tool or instrument proficiency.
Equipment: Common clothes, a tool kit or instrument of your choice, a small drawstring pouch, and 10 gp.

Villager

You hail from a small settlement like many others, populated mainly by subsistence farmers and local craftsmen. Common villagers look out for their own, typically because few would be willing to represent them. While lesser nobility regard you with disdain, fellow commoners recognise you as one of their own, and are generous with their hospitality, provided there is enough to go around. They may request a few hours of light labor in exchange for short stays, if the host is a landholder. Commoners are also willing to share information with their peers that they would withhold from people of higher stations.

Skill Proficiency: Insight.
Additional Equipment: An iron pot, a shovel, a tinderbox.

Local Gossip

Upon spending an hour speaking to other commoners, and completing a medium-DC Wisdom (Insight) check, you can learn of rumours, political intrigue, or other gossip related to a subject of your choice. This includes jobs and information people tend to hide from the authorities.

Rank 1 - Peasant

Born to a landless farmer and his wife, you found work as a laborer on the estate of a local lord tilling fields, tending to animals, or milling grain for a meagre salary. While the work was punishing, it made you physically strong, capable of working for extended hours without fatigue.

Holdings:

A shack or hovel which you call home.

A deed to a heavily indebted farmstead which has been seized until its debts are cleared. You may have acquired this deed through inheritance, gambling winnings, or some other means.

Progression:

Clear the debt on your deed and restore your farmstead to operating condition.

Rank 2 - Land Owner

You oversee a modest farm that produces various crops and small goods that you sell to local businesses and at markets for a modest profit. You have cultivated your reputation as an honest distributor among your customers, and a fair boss to the hired hands who help you manage your land.

Holdings:

A small farmstead, including livestock, crops, and stores suitable to the location.

Half a dozen unskilled hirelings who live and work on your farm.

Progression:

Become a respected and influential member of your local village.

Rank 3 - Council Member

You have been elected to a seat on the local council, assuming a public role in the governance of your village. You and your fellow council members discuss matters of trade, infrastructure, keeping the peace, and placating the local lords. You receive complaints and resolve disputes among locals, reaching an amicable resolution where possible.

Holdings:

A skilled, professional hireling assistant. They may be a lawyer, accountant, or other expert who helps you manage your affairs.

Resources allocated by the Mayor for you to complete your duties as a council member.

Progression:

To be elected or appointed Mayor by a lord, council, electorate, or other means.

Rank 4 - Mayor

You have risen from humble beginnings to become the Mayor of your village, either by election or appointment. Charged as a custodian of the peace, you preside over council meetings and represent your local province at ceremonial events and in dealings with the regional government.

Holdings:

You have the resources of your village council at your disposal.

A team of skilled hirelings trained in professional services who assist you in your endeavours to run your holdings.

Resources granted to you by your Monarch, such as gold, military support, and other useful assets, to maintain order within the settlement.

Entertainer

Entertainers thrive in the spotlight, relishing applause and delighting in the fanciful. Entertainers are expert performers able to enthrall, inspire, and delight their audiences with a range of artistic displays. Their poetry captivates, speaking to the depth of human emotion in portraying sadness, love, or joy. Their music likewise enlivens or stirs sorrow. Their dance steps are nimble and cheering, and their humor is often tailored to their audience, whether low-born or noble.

Skill Proficiency: Performance.
Additional Equipment: An instrument of your choice, colourful performer's clothes, and a tuning fork.

Find Fandom

Upon spending an hour performing and speaking to locals, and completing a medium-DC Charisma (Performance) check, you can find a contact among the local community leaders, such as village elders, tavern owners, and other well-respected common folk. This contact begins as friendly to you and will answer questions you have regarding life within the town, local news, and public opinion.

Rank 1 - Stage Hand

Whether you have grown up surrounded by musicians or ran off to join a band of traveling performers, you have become invaluable to a more experienced performer. You pitch in wherever needed, whether as a page turner for musicians, mopping the cages of exotic animals, or helping set up camp for the night.

Occasionally, they even allow you to join the performance.

Holdings:

Lodging with an entertainers' troupe, which includes food in exchange for regular performances or carrying out menial tasks.

An anonymous letter from a loyal admirer and fan who is desperate to meet you.

Progression:

The troupe leader asks you to fill in for an unreliable performer, and offers you a permanent position in the troupe, owing to your musical or other talents.

Rank 2 - Performer

You have made a name for yourself as a travelling performer, whether by yourself or as part of a troupe of other entertainers. You are easily identifiable by your colorful attire and striking appearance. Your performances stir the hearts of those who hear you.

Holdings:

Access to a troupe's performing equipment and supplies, including instruments, concoctions, and other resources.

Free lodging and food at any establishment you perform in.

Progression:

A travelling noble or court official observes your performance, and days later you receive a letter of invitation to perform at a court or estate.

Rank 3 - Troupe Leader

You are the leader of a troupe of traveling performers, and are responsible for securing performances in towns, cities, and noble estates. You have mastered the various components of artistic performance: poetry, dance, music, and comedy. Proprietors of establishments that you perform in compensate you and your troupe with free lodgings and food.

Holdings:

A following of loyal fans, including several influential individuals.

A troupe of skilled performers who are adept in a variety of forms of entertainment.

Progression:

You have been offered a large sum of money by a wealthy fan to perform for them on a semi-regular basis.

Rank 4 - Court Troubadour

You have secured a permanent position as an entertainer in a prestigious estate or court, performing for the delight of high nobility. You are considered a virtuoso in your chosen art.

Holdings:

Permanent lodgings at the noble estate or court where you are employed.

A scandalous secret about the lord of the manor or a prominent courtier, which you have irrefutable evidence of.

Merchant

Merchants are the lifeblood of trade, and can be found anywhere from hawking goods in local marketplaces, to having established their own stores selling artisan wares. Merchants typically belong to a Merchant's Guild, and pay a yearly sum to register for protection by local law enforcement, though this varies by province. Merchants buy, sell, and trade wares of all sorts, knowing not just the price of everything but how to haggle that price up or down at will.

Skill Proficiency: Investigation.

Additional Equipment: An abacus, a quill and ink pot, an empty inventory record, fine clothes.

Appraisal

Upon spending an hour examining a subject, and succeeding on a medium-DC Intelligence (Investigation) check, you can accurately appraise the value of a particular item or good such as art, or a natural resource. If you do so within a settlement, you can also find the most profitable location to sell the item or goods.

Rank 1 - Clerk

You work as a bookkeeper for a local merchant. You keep records of sales and the purchase of new inventory, balance the merchant's ledger, and make sure they are maintaining a modest profit margin. You aspire to become the proprietor of your own store selling rare and desirable items.

Holdings:

A small back room in a shop, which serves as an office and doubles as your sleeping quarters.

A leather-bound ledger book containing the accounting methods of your mentor and teacher.

Progression:

Acquire a loan, or save up funds, and find a suitable shop or storefront to start your own business.

Rank 2 - Merchant

You have struck out on your own to seek your fortune, opening your own shop in the marketplace. You begin to cultivate a reputation as a keen appraiser, providing fair prices to customers both buying and selling. You balance the books yourself, taking care to ensure that you do not fall into debt through risky investments.

Holdings:

A quaint store or shop front, in which you sell your specialised goods.

A clerk who maintains your store and runs it on a day-to-day basis in your absence.

Progression:

Own and maintain multiple successful businesses simultaneously.

Rank 3 - Magnate

You have become a business mogul, opening a chain of successful stores. You are wise or exceptionally lucky in your investments, and your risks have proven profitable, while maintaining an amicable relationship with both customers and fellow Merchants. Your fortune is more secure now that it comes from several different kinds of businesses.

Holdings:

A series of successful businesses spanning multiple industries, and a network of suppliers.

A senior position in the regional Merchants Guild, including networks and guild benefits.

Teams of skilled and unskilled hirelings who work to keep the day-to-day operations of your businesses running smoothly.

Progression:

Defeat your largest competitor by driving them out of business, buying them out, or merging your businesses.

Rank 4 - Guild Chancellor

You have been appointed Guild Chancellor of your Merchant's Guild. You oversee the membership of new merchants, approve regulation prices and supply, and provide protection for caravans, goods, and stockpiles for guild members under your chancellorship.

Holdings:

A Trade Certificate signed by your Monarch, granting you an exclusive right to sell certain specialist goods in your area.

No other business within may trade in this commodity without your consent.

Complete control of the regional Merchant Guild you originally joined.

A trade empire containing many businesses and subsidiaries, each serving your interests.

Criminal

Criminals serve and thrive off the seedy underbelly of society. While many people run afoul of the law, this background is for people who make their livelihoods entirely outside the law. Rarely respected or honoured within society, Criminals often hide their true profession from others.

Skill Proficiencies: Choose one from Acrobatics, Athletics, Deception, Intimidation, Sleight of Hand, Stealth.
Languages: Thieves' Cant.
Tool Proficiencies: Thieves' tools.
Equipment: Thieves' tools**,** fake currency in a drawstring pouch to deter pickpockets, a set of dark common clothes including a hood, and 15 gp.

Charlatan

Charlatans can be seen in most markets separating fools from their hard-earned coin, and there is no shortage of fools. Some choose instead to exploit the upper class, claiming that the ignorance of spoilt children is far more lucrative, if a little riskier.

Ranging from the lowliest of hustlers selling miracle cure-alls to the most audacious con artists, all charlatans have a knack for fooling those unfortunate enough to cross their paths.

Skill Proficiency: Deception.
Additional Equipment: a lockbox with a secret compartment, a forged Merchant's Guild membership certificate, imitation fine clothes.

False Identity

Upon spending an hour writing and talking to the right people, and succeeding on a medium-DC Charisma (Deception) check, you can create yourself a new identity with fake identification.

Rank 1 - Peddler

You are used to lying through your teeth, telling people whatever they want to hear in order to separate them from their money. It keeps you fed and one step ahead of the law, but you'll need a way to run bigger scams if you want to make real money.

Holdings:

A stash of counterfeit items that you sell and scam people with.

A secluded stoop that you use as a shelter against the elements near your place of "business".

Progression:

You are recruited by a gang of Hustlers, or create your own group, to participate in more organized and larger-scale scams.

Rank 2 - Hustler

You have started to work in a group as a face man, expanding your "clientele" with more lucrative cons, such as passing off coloured glass as gemstones, or bleeding wealthy marks dry with long cons.

Holdings:

A group of miscreants that assist your cons, with whom you split the spoils of your larceny.

Progression:

You must acquire or create plans for a large-scale con and procure the necessary elements.

Rank 3 - Con Artist

You have become more daring in your approach, orchestrating swindles that require planning, resources, and teamwork in pursuit of a big payday. You may set your gang about duplicating famous paintings to be sold in foreign cities, for example, or forging property title deeds in order to sell a building you do not own.

Holdings:

A team of charismatic swindlers and skilled forgers who can recreate items at your request with great accuracy and detail.

An unmarked warehouse in a disreputable part of town, where you can store and create forged items and oversee your operations.

Progression:

Successfully executing a grand con that draws the outrage of a great noble household, religious faction, or other powerful institution. It also makes you famous among other criminals.

Rank 4 - Mastermind

You have become something of a legend within the underground. Up-and-coming swindlers approach you to learn at your feet. Whether you pass on your skills or fleece your new flock is up to you.

Holdings:

Many detailed plans of cons you have devised or procured.

A network of talented individuals who work at your behest, aiding you in orchestrating your ploys.

Cutthroat

Some crooks lie to get what they want. Some steal it when its owner isn't looking. Then there are those who walk up to a target and explain the deal: give me what I want or bad things will happen to you. Call it "protection" or call it extortion, it is perhaps the most straightforward form of crime, favoured by the violent and the ruthless.

Most Cutthroats start out working in a pre-established gang, collecting fees and extracting payments on behalf of a boss. A small gang might be responsible for shaking down a handful of businesses, while the most powerful of crime lords may influence prominent cities or regions.

Skill Proficiency: Intimidation.
Additional Equipment: A kidskin bag of loaded dice, a snuff box, a pocket watch that runs five minutes fast.

Underground Connections

Upon spending an hour asking around, and succeeding on a medium-DC Charisma (Intimidation) check, you can prove your credibility and find a contact in a local gang, Thieves' Guild, or underground network. This contact begins as friendly to you and will assist you with matters related to their criminal endeavours.

Rank 1 - Tough

Working the impoverished regions of town, you're a criminal who will mug those who walk down the wrong alley at night, or extort unwary travelers for safe passage along a road.

Holdings:

A hideout where you can seek shelter from the elements, and from local law enforcement.

Progression:

Acquire a building to use as a centre of operations for your illicit activities, and a handful of other criminals willing to follow your lead.

Rank 2 - Crew Leader

Being the leader of your ragtag team comes with some nice perks. Shop owners shower you with gifts and praise in order to remain on your good side during your weekly rounds. Some will even go out of their way to source rare and valuable items that you require, if they believe doing so will earn your favor.

Holdings:

A group of thugs that you command, overseeing their various ploys.

Knowledge of back alleys and slipways that allow you and your group to escape unpursued by local law enforcement.

A rundown establishment that you and your fellow henchmen operate out of.

Progression:

Your group of thugs has progressed in size to exert control over an entire village or district within a city.

A sizable collection of shop owners that you can regularly exploit for "protection".

Rank 3 - Gang Boss

You are now a big fish in a small pond, often butting heads with rival gangs. Your presence is not quite strong enough to force your competition out of your territory. Whether you make a bid for control or they do, one thing is for certain: there will be blood in the streets.

Holdings:

Multiple warehouses and business fronts to launder and store your spoils until a suitable buyer can be located.

A network of contacts that you use to acquire and sell illicit goods.

Progression:

You must overthrow a rival crime lord, or claim the territory of all surrounding rival gangs.

Rank 4 - Crime Lord

You sit at the top of the criminal pyramid of your city or region. While there are still gangs that you don't directly control, they know to stay well clear of your territory.

Holdings:

An expansive territory that you control, overseeing the criminal businesses within the city and taking a cut of their profits in exchange for protection.

A number of personal secrets and incriminating evidence about high-ranking nobles, clergy, or business magnates.

A corrupt, influential state official who does your bidding and provides you with confidential information.

Burglar

Burglars break into and steal from houses, storefronts, and warehouses, primarily operating out of major cities and ports. While thieving is a risky pursuit, the hardest part can be finding a buyer for rare and valuable items. The more unique the good, the more likely its original owner will want it returned, cutting your profit margin considerably.

Goods and valuables generally need to be sold through a fence: someone who will purchase your stolen goods, sell them to unknowing customers, and take a cut of your profits.

Skill Proficiency: Perception.
Additional Equipment: a grappling hook and rope, kidskin gloves, glass cutter, a vial of flour.

Surveillance

Upon spending an hour observing it, and successfully completing a medium-DC Wisdom (Perception) check, you can map the general layout of a building. This includes the guard routes and rotation times, building entrances and exits, and the potential locations of valuables.

Rank 1 - Snatcher

Breaking into homes in the lower end of town is generally your trade. Authorities only worry about civilians with the power to cause a stir; everyone else is on their own. Locks in this end of town are easy to pick, if there is a lock at all. For the same reason, though, there is less to steal.

Holdings:

A safehouse in the poor district, used to store stolen goods and serving as emergency lodgings.

You have blueprints of a grand estate including secret entrances and passageways.

Progression:

You rob a well-to-do store in a reputable district, gaining notoriety and a big payday.

Rank 2 - Burglar Specialist

Working in a team, while risky, allows for heists that would be beyond the reach of any one

burglar, no matter how skilled. Increasingly, when someone has an ambitious crime planned and needs to assemble a team of "the best," they reach out to you.

Holdings:

A team of specialist thieves who operate under your instruction to execute more ambitious heists.

A contact working inside an establishment which you plan on robbing, who provides you information on the routine of the occupants, the location of valuable items, and escape routes.

Progression:

Membership in an established Thieves' Guild in a major city or town.

Rank 3 - Heist Master

Your skill as both a burglar and a leader has grown considerably over time. Whether by virtue of your own confidence or a message from the divine, you believe that you are capable of executing a major heist, with the right preparation and henchmen of course. Will it be a priceless painting you have been tasked with acquiring for a prospective buyer? A slovenly prince whose private affairs you seek to meddle in, having acquired his signet ring?

Holdings:

You hold a senior position in the Thieves' Guild, instructing junior members in lockpicking, housebreaking, and evading law enforcers.

You uncover evidence of an attempted assassination on the life of a noble whose estate you robbed.

Progression:

You orchestrate a large-scale heist to rob the estate of a local noble.

Rank 4 - Prince of Thieves

You have squirreled away enough gold to live comfortably for the rest of your life. However, you now steal to satiate a greater motivation through the exchange of private information, blackmail, and the acquisition of rare and powerful artifacts. After all, knowledge is power, and you've risen to a level where power is mandatory.

Holdings:

Your own estate with a household of staff, acquiring and selling rare and valuable items through your own circle of thieves, fences, and buyers.

Militarist

Militarists either work within a formal military structure, or fight for pay on an individual basis. Militarists are often respected or feared, depending on the nature of their organisation. High-ranking Militarists are often paid handsomely, as their skills can decide battles or even wars. Lower-level Militarists make great warriors, mercenaries, and guards.

It is not unheard of for militaristic individuals to accompany adventurers on dangerous missions. These tasks are said to keep the mind sharp and skills honed, especially in times of relative peace.

Skill Proficiency: Choose one from Animal Handling, Athletics, Insight, Intimidation, Perception, Survival.
Tool Proficiency: One type of gaming set.
Equipment: A gaming set you are proficient with, an insignia detailing your rank within a military organization, and 10 gp.

Free Sword

Free Swords are commonly referred to as mercenaries, taking jobs that the local forces can't handle. Mercenaries may be the only hope of villages looking for defenders against raiders, overextended sheriffs chasing powerful fugitives, and small merchants traveling Etharis's dangerous byroads. Larger mercenary companies win wars on behalf of cities and kings. They fight for coin above all else, exacting little honor from the contracts they accept.

Skill Proficiency: Intimidation.
Additional Equipment: Moleskin gloves, grappling net, a hip flask of hard liquor.

Independent Contractor

Upon spending an hour loitering within a town, and succeeding on a medium DC-Charisma (intimidation) check, your intimidating presence draws offers of employment to you. As long as you are not trying to conceal your presence, jobs befitting a Free Sword Mercenary will find you. You can find mercenary and adventuring jobs only available to Free Sword licence-holders. These jobs typically pay more than a standard contract of their type. Free Sword guilds take a 5% cut as a guild fee.

Rank 1 - Hireling

You have been trained in combat by a group of mercenaries with a Free Sword licence. After many tedious years of combat drills and shooting at straw targets, you are close to receiving your very own license.

Holdings:

Lodging at any Free Sword's guild house and use of Free Sword's training grounds and facilities.

The contract for a dangerous bounty that your mentor died trying to complete.

Progression:

Complete a contract with a guild member who has a Free Sword licence.

Rank 2 - Sellsword

After proving your competence and trustworthiness, you have become a guild-licensed Sellsword. You start to receive specific requests for jobs as your reputation grows.

Holdings:

A Free Sword licence, which allows you to accept your own contracts as a mercenary and collect the rewards.

Access to hirelings belonging to the Free Swords guild, who you can contract for a small fee.

Progression:

Lead a team successfully through several high-stakes encounters during mercenary contracts.

Rank 3 - Sword Commander

You have proven your combat prowess and command of battlefield tactics. Special requests for your services are becoming more frequent, often from people or groups of higher social status. The mercenary companions who accompany you on your jobs have matured into disciplined soldiers who trust you as their commander.

Holdings:

Your own private room in a guild house and a retainer who can either take care of business for you at the guild house or accompany you on your travels.

Command authority over lower ranks and the power to employ them for jobs.

Access to restricted jobs that depend on sensitive information or extraordinary risk.

Progression:

Successfully complete a restricted job for a high-profile client.

Rank 4 - Battlelord

You have been elected by the members of your Free Swords guild to lead them forward to greater power and acclaim. What type of commander are you going to be? Will you lead by example and rush into the fray during combat, or retire the sword and pick up the pen?

Holdings:

Command of the Free Sword's guild and its members, including managing contracts, and overseeing the training of hirelings.

A guild chapterhouse, which includes housing for you and your lieutenants as well as an extensive armoury for guild members.

Guard

Public officers of the law in cities and large settlements, Guards protect the populace from the dangers both inside and outside the walls. If it looks like guards spend their time loitering and playing cards, its because most of the time the mere presence of a guard is enough to make petty criminals move along.

Guards occupy a variety of stations, ranging from lowly bar bouncers to royal men-at-arms who protect the royal family and their most prized possessions.

Skill Proficiency: Perception.
Additional Equipment: Manacles, pipe and tobacco box, a badge of office.

Informant

Upon spending an hour asking around, and succeeding on a medium-DC Wisdom (Perception) check, you can find a contact within the local constabulary or guard hierarchy. This contact begins as friendly to you and will answer questions you have regarding local wanted criminals, law enforcement, and ongoing or previous investigations.

Rank 1 - Town Militia

You have joined the local town militia out of necessity or desire. Either way, your duties have included many sleepless nights on watch, and many tedious days spent idly standing guard.

Holdings:

A bunk bed to sleep in at your stationed guardhouse.

Sensitive information relating to an unsolved murder that you have not told anyone about.

Progression:

Solve a crime or uncover a major smuggling route.

Rank 2 - Captain of the Watch

Your dedication to your city has not gone unnoticed, and you have been promoted to Captain of the Watch. You now lead a small detail of guards who follow your orders.

Holdings:

Access to the keys to the city gates.

A group of militia guards to train and organise as you see fit.

Progression:

Catch a renowned criminal before they can escape the city, or another act worthy of a promotion.

Rank 3 - Palace Guard

You have shown initiative and critical thinking under strain in leading your guard detail, and have been suitably promoted to the rank of Palace Guard. Your loyalty is highly valued, and your discretion is even more so.

Your focus has shifted from keeping the peace to protecting the most important places and people in the city.

Holdings:

Free lodging on the grounds of the palace or other place of work.

Unquestioned access to restricted areas of the city.

Permission to view the casefiles of ongoing investigations and past crimes. You can also access documents detailing guard routes and rosters.

Progression:

Save a VIP from an assasination attempt, rescue a kidnapped princess, or anything of equal import to be promoted.

Rank 4 - Lord Commander

You now command the entire law enforcement system of your area, with accompanying fortresses and militia. You stand as the final authority for most executive and judicial problems in your region, making you the physical embodiment of the law. When the leaders of your city need protection or want a crime investigated, they go through you.

Holdings:

Command of the entire guard hierarchy within your area, with the authority to conscript new militia and impose martial law within a region or town.

Command of a fortress within a major town or city, granting you access to weapons, defensive siege equipment, and squadrons of guards under your command.

You report directly to the highest officials, and have the ear of the monarch on matters of the city's defences.

Soldier

Getting into the army isn't the hard part, staying alive is. Every nation and culture has their own notions about what makes a good soldier, and who they look to to fill their ranks.

As a soldier, you don't just know fighting – you know war. Being a soldier involves much more than individual combat prowess. Winning a battle depends on discipline, teamwork, tactics, and a great deal of marching and logistical work that the epics rarely mention.

Skill Proficiency: Athletics.
Additional Equipment: A trophy from your first battle, a letter from your family or a loved one, standard issue soldier's garb, service medallion signifying rank.

Combat Drills

Upon spending an hour, and succeeding on a medium-DC Strength (Athletics) check, you can run training drills and gain an accurate estimate of the drilled humanoids' combat capabilities, as well as any equipment or fortifications they use.

You determine the most suitable strategy to improve their capabilities in the short term as well as the best way to train them for the long term.

Rank 1 - Foot Soldier

Many Foot Soldiers are conscripts. Others fight for the honour of their king and country, and still others for the steady paycheck. Regardless of your reason for joining the military, the food was usually warm and the tents kept you dry during the long nights. Your time in the military has taught you the value of the regimented early mornings and working yourself to exhaustion.

Holdings:

A tent to sleep in and free food when in an encampment of your military.

A letter from a fallen enemy messenger that you either killed or found.

Progression:

Distinguish yourself. Bring vital information about an enemy encampment or movement that will help win a battle or prevent a defeat. Or perform exceptionally well in battle, turning the tide or capturing an enemy banner.

Rank 2 - Sergeant

Your superiors have promoted you to the rank of Sergeant. This brings new challenges in training and commanding the new conscripts who have been assigned to you. How do you train them – on training grounds or in the wilds of Etharis? Or do you let them fend for themselves?

Holdings:

Command over a small unit of Foot Soldiers.

A valet who attends to your personal needs in the field and relays important messages when required.

Progression:

Maintain your troops' discipline through multiple skirmishes.

Rank 3 - Lieutenant

Several Sergeants have been placed under your command so that you can coordinate their movements in and out of battle. You maintain an air of command about you, and instill confidence in those you command. You have also proven adept with battle tactics, knowing how to read an encounter and when to deploy reserves.

Holdings:

Command over a brigade of soldiers.

A command tent that serves as your headquarters for battlefield operations.

Progression:

Decisively win an even battle or win a battle against the odds.

Rank 4 - Field Marshal

Your recent promotion to Field Marshal has been foreseen by many and scorned by few. You command whole armies at a time. Whether you are an artist with your masterful maneuvering of battlelines, or utterly brutal in your encounters, none can deny your efficiency in war.

Holdings:

Command over the region's military.

A seat at any council meetings relevant to military matters of the kingdom.

Residence in a manor close to the training grounds in the capital city.

Outlander

Outlanders are people who live their lives away from civilization. Some have chosen a life of isolation, while others have been exiled from society. Outlanders are renowned for hardiness and self-sufficiency, but distrusted by most civilized people.

Skill Proficiencies: Choose one from Animal Handling, Athletics, Medicine, Nature, Perception, Stealth, Survival.
Tool Proficiencies: Herbalism Kit
Languages: Choose one standard.
Equipment: Common clothes, tinder box, several torches, waterskin, a hatchet, a herbalism kit, and 5 gp.

Beast Hunter

Hunters make their living by trapping, hunting, and killing vicious beasts. Some provide meat and furs for settlements, or for trade. The strongest may become a community's best defense against wandering monsters.. They are often as brutish as the creatures they hunt, heavily scarred from close encounters with their prey. They are proficient in setting many different traps, from simple snares to spring-loaded traps and cages. The beast hunter typically favors ranged weapons when taking down larger prey, avoiding close range where possible. Some favor stealth, lying patiently in ambush, while others revel in the thrill of the chase. Beast hunters have a natural aptitude for tracking all manner of beasts, quickly noticing signs that an animal has passed by, down to an exact time and direction of travel.

Skill Proficiency: Survival.
Additional Equipment: a net, a hunting trap, 30 feet of rope, one vial of pheromones or a pouch of bait.

Track Quarry

Upon spending an hour examining your surroundings, and succeeding on a medium-DC Wisdom (Survival) check, you can track the movements of creatures that have passed through the area. You can ascertain the exact time and direction a creature went, if you are familiar with the type of creature.

Rank 1 - Tracker

You have shadowed an accomplished hunter to learn their methods of setting traps, stalking prey, and following tracks. When you aren't out hunting with your mentor, you busy yourself setting snares, practicing with a bow and arrow, and learning about the creatures you hunt.

Holdings:

You know where to find a Beast Hunters' Lodge that you can use in the wilderness to rest and escape danger.

You have a lead as to the location of the lair of a powerful and dangerous creature.

Progression:

Prove to your mentor that you are competent to hunt on your own and teach the new and inexperienced.

Rank 2 - Trapper

You have developed your hunting skills to the point where you can make a living from them, beyond just feeding yourself day to day. You are adept in setting traps, and have an eye for where to ready your snares to maximise your chances of an easy kill. You seek out game trails where there is evidence of recent activity, and almost always return to find a creature snared in your trap.

Holdings:

Up to a handful of apprentices who wish to learn the trade.

Use of equipment from a Beast Hunters' Lodge to hunt any beast you accept a contract to kill. You must have access to a Beast Hunters' Lodge.

Progression:

Complete a contract to kill a particularly rare and dangerous beast for a community or an influential individual. You must determine the creature's species, track it, and slay it.

Rank 3 - Venator

You are the one to call in the surrounding area if farmers are being slain by beasts, or if mages require a specific magical component.

Holdings:

A team of experienced hunters who assist you in large hunts and handle smaller jobs you assign to them.

Access to the Beast Hunters' Lodge's library, which contains all known weaknesses of beasts and monsters.

Progression:

Slay a legendary beast. The event must draw the awe of influential individuals across the land.

Rank 4 - Mythical Beast Hunter

Your skills as a hunter are known to be unparalleled in the lands. Monarchs and nobles request your aid to remove the most difficult of monsters from their lands. Merchants contract you to capture the most vicious of mythical creatures, and druids ask for your assistance to relocate dangerous but endangered fantastical creatures.

Holdings:

Control of the guild of Beast Hunters, including the resources and personnel the guild controls.

Fame and high repute across the land as a figure of legend.

A mighty weapon or artifact handed down to you by the guild, a satisfied customer, or an admirer.

An audience with any ruler at their convenience to discuss matters of beast hunting in their domain.

Pioneer

There is still land in Etharis where no humanoid has lived before, and Pioneers are the hardy folk who set out to tame that land for the first time. You've learned to hunt the forest game, cultivate crops of wild flora and collect water from natural streams where fish swim abundant. You have weathered punishing storms, migrations, and harsh winters. You and yours have adapted to the environment. Everything you own is built with your own two hands, and your aptitude in working with natural materials has provided you with shelter, tools, and clothing.

Skill Proficiency: Nature.
Additional Equipment: A shovel, a hammer and nails, a saw, spare leather, a needle and thread.

Handyman by Necessity

Upon spending an hour in the outdoors, and succeeding on a medium-DC Intelligence (Nature) check, find the necessary materials (provided there are any nearby) to mend any mundane item.

Rank 1 - Hermit

You have had to rely on your aptitude for working with natural resources to fend for yourself in the wilds of Etharis. You have a crude shelter and a basic knowledge of foraging wild flora, but you have yet to truly make your way on the frontier.

Holdings:

Knowledge of a rare animal or plant that, if domesticated, could be farmed for great gain.

Progression:

Build a house, or similar building, and the beginnings of a farm .

Rank 2 - Secluded Cultivator

You have constructed a sturdy dwelling and started to make the land support you. While your fences are rudimentary and your tools crude, you have begun to produce more than you need to survive. Others may follow you, seeing the opportunity this land offers.

Holdings:

A small herd or a field of crops.

A small family or group of farmhands who help tend your homestead.

Progression:

Gather a small community around your homestead.

Rank 3 - Homestead Proprietor

You have established your own homestead, and maintain a year-round reserve of crops, salted meat and animal pelts to sustain you and your people through the winter months. People have gathered around you with specialized skills, such as carpenters, blacksmiths, and doctors. The beginning of a village has grown up around you.

Holdings:

Small self-sufficient, village-sized community that takes care of the daily requirements of your ranch or plantation.

A track/road that leads to the nearest town for traveling merchants to buy and sell wares.

A sizable plantation or ranch of your chosen commodity, bringing in a significant profit each harvest.

Progression:

Acquire a rare or magical animal or plant to be farmed.

Rank 4 - Governor

Your steading is renowned for production of its unique commodity. You are held in high

regard in the surrounding provinces, and known throughout the lands as a foremost producer of your chosen commodity. As the first and most influential settler in the area, it was natural to make your authority official. In your frontier town, you are the head of the local government, with all the powers and responsibilities that entails.

Holdings:

Your position as a local authority is your entry into the society of notable merchants, nobles, and royalty. Powerful people approach you to buy what you offer and deal with your town.

A caravansary that houses incoming and outgoing merchant caravans from across the land.

A large house for you and your family, suitable for receiving important visitors.

A small but disciplined militia to protect your homestead and its surroundings.

A political alliance with a neighbouring state that supports your independence.

Explorer

Explorers pursue an isolated lifestyle traversing the wilds, driven by wonderlust or the orders of a distant patron. For an Explorer, there is no greater pursuit than to discover the lost, forgotten, and unseen reaches of the world. They may travel unaccompanied or with companions, establishing large encampments in remote areas that others would deem uninhabitable. Explorers are often employed by rulers who wish to know more about the world.

Skill Proficiency: Survival.
Additional Equipment: a compass, mapmaking tools including a quill, ink, parchment, calipers, and a ruler.

Known Shelters

Upon spending an hour searching, and succeeding on a medium-DC Wisdom (Survival) check, you can determine the direction and approximate location of the nearest humanoid settlement.

This includes people who might not be accommodating such as bandits, druids, and hostile cultures. The inhabitants of the location are initially friendly to you and your allies, and they will let you seek shelter and trade among them.

Rank 1 - Wanderer

As a child, you were gripped by an insatiable wanderlust that caused you to range further from home in pursuit of new adventures, exploring the wilds of neighboring forests and setting rudimentary traps to catch small game. Now you know more about the region than perhaps anyone else.

Holdings:

A hidden stash within the wilds of your choice, containing rations, medical supplies, fresh water, and weapons.

A letter from an old friend describing an anomaly within the wilds of your choice.

Progression:

Discover an anomaly and document its location.

Rank 2 - Pathfinder

Merchants and travellers, learning of you by reputation, hire you as a guide through dangerous and remote terrain. You may also be recruited by military entities to advise on which remote routes will enable them to travel quickly and undetected in enemy territory.

Holdings:

Detailed knowledge of your chosen wilderness, including locations of interest and danger.

A contract with a local guild or faction to guide members through the area.

Progression:

Establish a new road or trade route between known settlements or landmarks that is safe to travel.

Rank 3 - Royal Surveyor

You are commissioned by the office of a ruler or provincial leader to chart regions unknown to them. Your expertise in navigating the wilds and uncovering their secrets has made you highly sought-after.

Holdings:

Resources provided to you by your clients, to assist in your exploration.

An assistant cartographer, scribe, or other related profession.

Maps and charts that have been procured by your assistant, detailing hidden routes.

Progression:

Complete an exploration mission of great notoriety, commissioned by a Monarch or other regional leader.

Rank 4 - Master of the Horizon

Whether under the banner of a nation or for your own glory, you lead an exploration company into the unknown. You understand the hidden secrets of the natural world, and have discovered ways to venture into parallel planes of existence. With an entire company of explorers behind you, your adventure will be awe-inspiring.

Holdings:

If your campaign permits it, you know of gateways to other planes of existence.

An ancient map leading to a lost landmark of great importance. It may contain wealth, power, or knowledge.

An exploration company of skilled and unskilled hirelings, including labourers, soldiers, academics, carpenters, and many other professions.

A port or encampment at a strategic location that acts as a frontier post from which you launch exploration missions.

Seafarer

Seafarers make their living by sailing or gathering from the sea. Seafarers often start as poor and disrespected members of society. However, at higher ranks, they gain considerable holdings. The sea has much to give, but it can quickly take everything away as well.

Skill Proficiencies: Choose one from Athletics, Perception, Persuasion, Sleight of Hand, Survival.
Tool Proficiencies: Navigator's tools, vehicles (water)

Languages: Choose one standard and one exotic.
Equipment: Common clothes, a belaying pin, thread and a blunt needle, a bucket of tar, and 10 gp.

Sailor

Free from the gruelling class structures of the mainland, Sailors learn not to fear the laws of society, only the harsh temper of a storm and the stern discipline of a Boatswain. Sailors find talking to other seafarers second-nature, and are often able to secure passage for themselves and their companions in exchange for their skills. For all sailors know, a man of the sea is a friend indeed.

Skill Proficiency: Perception.
Additional Equipment: Sturdy clothes, a large sack, dice, a liquor flask.

Sea Passage

Upon spending an hour in a port, and succeeding on a medium-DC Wisdom (Perception) check, you can find a ship that you believe will provide free passage to a location of your choice, provided any ships are traveling to that location.

Rank 1 - Deck Hand

You work on a sailing ship, performing menial labor such as tending the lines and tarring the deck. While your responsibilities are small, you may display a knack for a particular specialisation onboard the ship. You are at home on the waves, among your fellow sailors, regardless of the nature and business of the ship.

Holdings:

Free lodging on your boat.

Knowledge of a potential mutiny.

Progression:

Be promoted to Boatswain by a Captain.

Rank 2 - Boatswain

A Captain has chosen you as the Boatswain, responsible for the organisation and wellbeing of the crew, as well as ensuring their loyalty to the captain. You have also become a capable seafarer, knowing the ins and outs of running a ship with clockwork precision.

Holdings:

Command over the deckhands on the ship when not under the orders of a higher rank.

An officer's quarters which doubles as your cabin and living space.

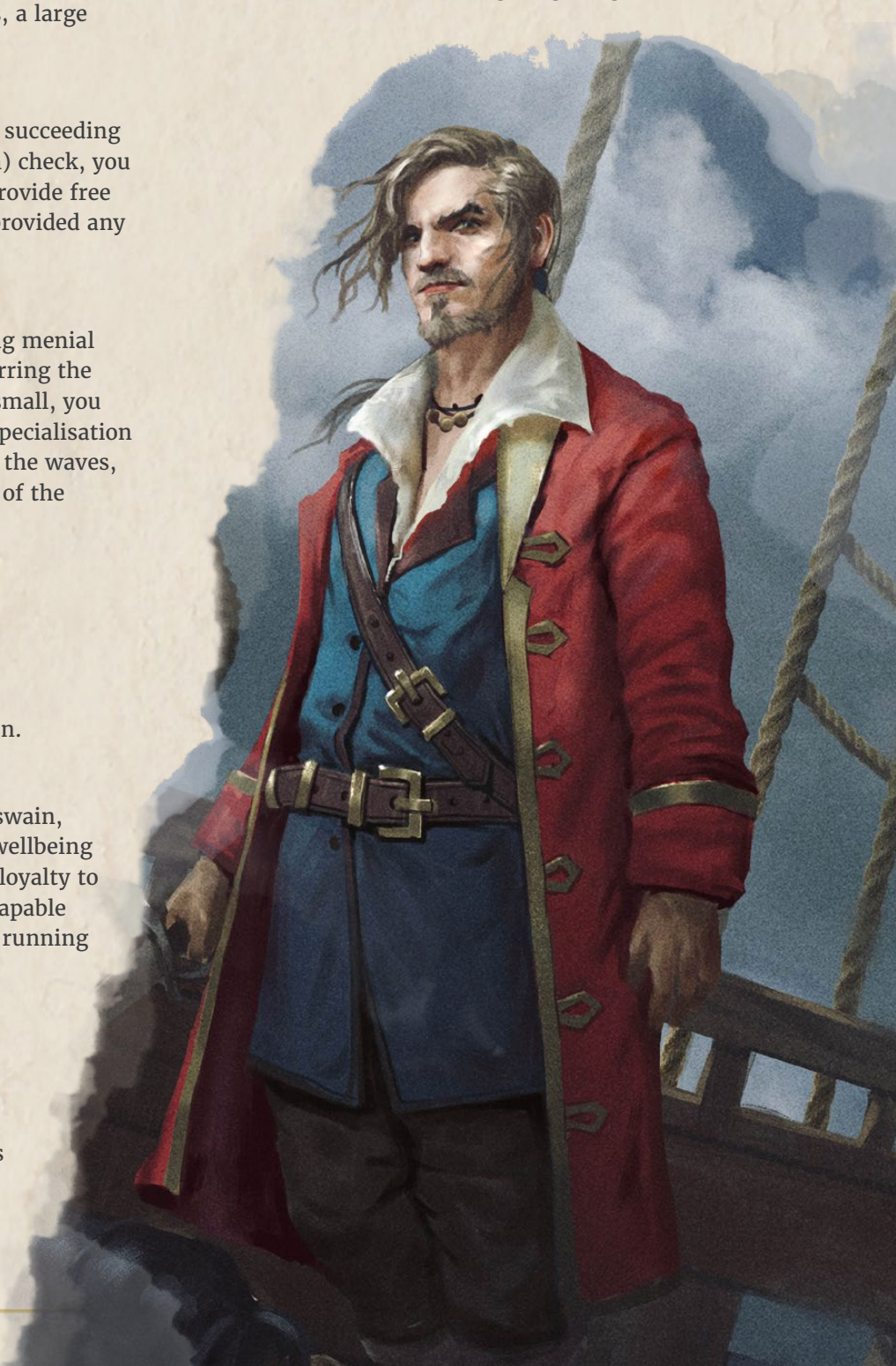
Progression:

Be promoted to Ship Captain or become Captain of your own ship by other means.

Rank 3 - Ship Captain

You are the undisputed master aboard your own ship. Your crew follow your every command (or suffer the consequences), and look to you for a vision of the future.

You now face such challenges as potential mutinies, provisions and payments for the sailors, and the delicate art of navigating dangerous seas.



Holdings:

Your own ship, or else have been entrusted with command of one, as in the case of a military ship provided by a nation.

Command of a loyal crew that see to the operation and maintenance of your ship.

If there is nobody above you in the chain of command, you have complete control of your ship, but you also have to pay for the upkeep. Even if the ship belongs to an admiralty or business interest, on board the ship you are the one in charge.

Progression:

Be promoted to Admiral by a higher authority, or by obtaining a fleet of your own.

Rank 4 - Fleet Admiral

You command a fleet of ships, whose captains are your subordinates and carry out your orders. The sailors sing shanties of your glory and you are known from port to harbour across the world. Your fleet contains an array of ships built for many different purposes, which you can assign as you see fit. You personally command the flagship of your fleet. What the future holds for you and the men sailing with you, is shaped by you and your command.

Holdings:

A fleet of ships that follow your every command.

Command of multiple loyal crews that see to the operation and maintenance of your fleet.

You are known in other lands for the tales of your victories and expertise.

Free lodging on any ship you are in command of, and any port or shipyard you are docked at.

Dock Worker

Docks represent the hubs that drive commerce, travel, and exchange of culture. In every one are teams of hardy workers who load goods and supplies onto and off of the ships. From lowly Clerks, who check off goods to and from warehouses, to the mighty Sealord bureaucrats, they keep the machinery of the docks moving.

Skill Proficiency: Investigation
Additional Equipment: A leather strap, 30 feet of rope, a pulley, a box of snuff, a clipboard and quill.

Liberate Ledgers

Upon spending an hour asking around, and succeeding on a medium-DC Intelligence (Investigation) check, you know the comings and goings of ships, wagons and merchandise at the trade hub you are exploring. You can similarly discern where different types of goods are stored in any warehouse, including the contraband.

Rank 1 - Stock Clerk

Long days of tedious work await you as you check off goods as they are loaded and unloaded from ships to and from warehouses. Many Stock Clerks don't last long as they are often blamed for broken or missing inventory. In your time you have learned a lot about the comings and goings throughout a dock, what types of ships and barrels typically come from where, and what their purpose is. You have learned who to ask the right questions, who holds the real power, and where to find a good time.

Holdings:

Lodging near the port or trade station you work at.

You know where the contraband is hidden and how to get in.

Progression:

Be promoted to Customs Inspector by a dock worker of a higher station.

Rank 2 - Customs Inspector

Your days of hard labour are behind you, as you are now charged with inspecting cargo for contraband, collecting tariffs, and filling ledgers of incoming and outgoing vessels. Corruption is rife at any port, and you are exposed to the shady deals, illegal goods, and criminal activities that take place there. It's up to you whether you use your authority to enforce the law or just make sure you get a cut of the action.

Holdings:

A list of your fellow Customs Inspectors known for accepting bribes and forging ledger entries, and who bribed them.

A letter or clue revealing the smuggling operations of a criminal organisation.

Authority over low ranking dockworkers and port guards.

Progression:

Expose a large quantity of contraband or a criminal organisation.

Rank 3 - Harbour Master

Your keen eye and efficient work in customs has earned you the rank of Harbour Master. You now preside over the dock of a harbour town or city. You set the local laws and regulations, governing the flow of trade and passage within your jurisdiction. All who wish to conduct business without hassle make sure they are on good terms with you, as nothing moves without your approval.

Holdings:

Comfortable accommodation within the port town or city of your station.

Authority of all resources, funding, and personnel of the harbour you manage.

The authority to grant commodity licences, allowing the import or harvesting of the commodity in the local area.

Progression:

Be promoted by a Monarch or state leader.

Rank 4 - Sealord

Residing in the capital city of your region, you dictate the laws, taxes, and flow of sea commerce across the region.

As a Sealord, you are the undisputed authority in your region when it comes to all subjects related to the harbour.

Holdings:

Luxurious lodging near the mercantile district of the capital city where you oversee the operations of the region.

Control over docking fees and other charges associated with trading posts and ports across the region.

A seat at any council meetings pertaining to trade or the sea in the kingdom.

Sea Gatherer

The seas of Etharis are dangerous and forbidding. From mighty sea monsters to treacherous weather, most avoid the oceans at all costs. However, those that are skilled enough, or desperate enough, find a living harvesting what they can from the sea. Most Sea Gatherers represent the poorest of the poor. However, they make up for this lack of wealth with a savvy sense for survival, and Sea Gatherers who survive often become renowned heroes, known for fighting monsters of the deep and exploring sunken ruins of old. All know that an elderly Sea Gatherer must be a mighty figure indeed.

Skill Proficiency: Survival.
Additional Equipment: A bag filled with water weeds, a shellfish trap, a shucking knife, a pouch of bait, a straw sunhat.

Knowledge of the Seas

Upon spending an hour walking the shore, and succeeding on a medium-DC Wisdom (Survival) check, you can find the best locations to hunt and catch sea treasures in the nearby region. This can range from simple fishing to dangerous monster hunting or diving for wrecks and ruins.

Rank 1 - Dredge

You spend your days scavenging the ocean with nets and shellfish traps, hoping to make a living. You may be struggling with poverty, and scrounging by the coast is the only way you can survive. Perhaps you were born into a tradition of fishing, and have begun with humble origins. Regardless of your background, you hope to hone your skills and make something of yourself.

Holdings:

A small coracle fishing boat.

Knowledge of the best fishing spots in the area.

Progression:

Acquire a trawling boat and a commodity licence from a Harbour Master.

Rank 2 - Trawler

Your life begins as a master of waves, as you battle the ocean to attain its most prized treasures. A sturdier ship allows you to venture further and recover more (and more valuable) treasures from the sea. From whale oil to black pearls, you descend upon the seas with a fierce determination and a steely resolve.

Holdings:

A single-masted trawling boat with a few assistants to crew it.

A rumour of a great sunken treasure and the identity of who currently holds the map to it.

Progression:

Complete a contract to kill a particularly rare and dangerous nautical monster or find a sunken treasure. The contract must be completed for a wizard, merchant prince, or similarly influential individual.

Rank 3 - Trawl Master

With a crew at your back, you have become renowned as one of the fiercest Trawlers alive. No catch is too dangerous, or prize too well-guarded beneath the waves. You are hired by powerful mages, wealthy merchants, and kings to retrieve exotic treasures from the ocean – a task you perform with great prowess.

Holdings:

A deep-sea trawling boat, equipped to spend months at sea.

A team of expert trawlers and divers to assist you in adventures and maintain your boat.

The audience of wizards and merchant princes who wish to hire you.

Progression:

Slay a major sea monster or find a sunken treasure that becomes legend. The event must draw the awe of influential individuals across the land.

Rank 4 - Nautical Legend

Bards sing of the sea monsters you face and the storms you tame. It is said that even the Primordials of the tempest cannot deter you from your prize. All know that if there is a sunken ruin that needs plundering or an ancient sea creature that needs slaying, there is no one better suited for the task than you.

Holdings:

Control of a coastal island awarded to you by a Monarch in recognition of your feats. The island houses a fortress, guild house, or similar structure where nautical legends gather.

Repute across the land as a figure of legend.

A mighty weapon or artifact provided by a client or retrieved from sunken treasure.

An audience with any Monarch or head of state, at their convenience, to discuss matters of salvage and treasure hunting within the realm.

Talents

Talent List

Academic

Biologist
Botanist
Copycat
Diligent Researcher
Disciplinarian
Drunkard
Forecaster
Gambler
Local Historian
Mystical Scholar
Passionate Orator
Pathologist
Problem Solver
Runekeeper
Sawbones
Translator

Aristocrat

Born In the Saddle
Copycat
Court Schemer
Disciplinarian
Drunkard
Elusive
Figure of Authority
Gambler
Impressionist
Local Historian
Problem Solver
Quick Fingers
Translator

Clergy

Astute Intuition
Cabal Lorekeeper
Confessor
Copycat
Diligent Researcher
Disciplinarian
Drunkard
Figure of Authority
Idolist
Interrogator
Local Historian
Menacing Presence
Mystical Scholar
Passionate Orator
Pathologist
Sawbones
Shrewd Deduction

Common Folk

Beast Whisperer
Biologist
Botanist
Calloused Hands
Disciplinarian
Drunkard
Elusive
Flamboyant Presentation
Forecaster
Gambler
Gut Feeling
Hard-Working
Navigator
Wayfarer

Criminal

Bounty Hunter
Quick Fingers
Contortionist
Copycat
Disciplinarian
Drunkard
Elusive
Gambler
Grifter
Heister
Impressionist
Interrogator
Menacing Presence
Nimble Fingers
Renowned
Ropesman
Sentry
Urban Sprinter

Militarist

Astute Intuition
Beast Whisperer
Born in the Saddle
Bounty Hunter
Calloused Hands
Copycat
Disciplinarian
Drunkard
Figure of Authority
Forecaster
Gambler
Hard-Working
Interrogator
Menacing Presence
Navigator
Passionate Orator
Recruiter
Renowned
Sentry
Shrewd Deduction
Urban Sprinter
Wayfarer

Outlander

Beast Whisperer
Biologist
Born in the Saddle
Botanist
Calloused Hands
Disciplinarian
Drunkard
Forecaster
Gambler
Gut Feeling
Hard-Working
Local Historian
Navigator
Renowned
Translator

Seafarer

Calloused Hands
Copycat
Disciplinarian
Drunkard
Forecaster
Gambler
Gut Feeling
Hard-Worker
Menacing Presence
Navigator
Recruiter
Renowned
Ropesman
Sea Dog
Sentry
Wayfarer

Astute Intuition

Whenever you make a Wisdom (Insight) check while trying to detect a lie from Aristocrats, Criminals, or Common Folk, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Beast Whisperer

Whenever you make a Wisdom (Animal Handling) check to train or direct orders to a beast, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Biologist

Whenever you make an Intelligence (Nature) check to determine the properties of animals, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Born In the Saddle

Whenever you make a Wisdom (Animal Handling) check while riding an animal or interacting with your mount, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Botanist

Whenever you make an Intelligence (Nature) check to determine the properties of plants, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Bounty Hunter

Whenever you make a Wisdom (Survival) to track Criminals, you can add your Profession Die.

Cabal Lorekeeper

Whenever you make an Intelligence (Religion) check to recall information about Celestials, Fiends, Fey, or Undead, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Calloused Hands

Whenever you make a Strength (Athletics) check to lift, drag, or shove a heavy object, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Confessor

Whenever you make a Charisma (Persuasion) check to reveal a secret or ask a favor of anyone who follows the same religion or deity as you, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Contortionist

Whenever you make a Dexterity or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to squeeze through a small space or escape bonds, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Copycat

Whenever you make an Intelligence or Intelligence (Forgery Kit) check to forge or create a document, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Court Schemer

Whenever you make a Charisma (Deception) check when conversing with Aristocrats, you can add your Profession Die.

Diligent Researcher

Whenever you make an Intelligence check to research a subject, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Disciplinarian

Whenever you make a Charisma (Intimidation) check while issuing a command to an individual of lower rank within your background, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Drunkard

Whenever you make a Constitution check to determine if you will throw up, pass out, or how severe a hangover is, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Elusive

Whenever you make a Dexterity (Stealth) check to hide or blend into a crowd of humanoids that share your background, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Figure of Authority

Whenever you make a Charisma (Persuasion) check while interacting with Common Folk, you may add your Profession Die to the roll.

Flamboyant Presentation

Whenever you make a Charisma (Performance) check to entertain Aristocrats, Common Folk, or Seafarers, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Forecaster

Whenever you make a Wisdom (Survival) check to determine the weather for the next 48 hours, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Gambler

Whenever you make a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) or Wisdom (Perception) check to cheat at a game or catch someone else cheating, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Grifter

Whenever you make a Charisma (Deception) check, and are attempting to pass off a fake object as authentic, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Gut Feeling

Whenever you make a Wisdom (Insight) check to detect if an Aristocrat or Criminal is lying, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Hard-Working

Whenever you make a Constitution check for a repetitive task such as marching or labouring for hours without rest, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Heister

Whenever you make a Wisdom (Perception) check to spot traps, sentries, and other security measures, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Idolist

Whenever you make an Intelligence (Religion) check to recall information on religious or cult-related symbols, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Impressionist

Whenever you make a Charisma (Performance) or Charisma (Deception) check to mimic the mannerisms, voice, or appearance of another humanoid, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Interrogator

Whenever you make a Charisma (Intimidation) check to extract information from an enemy who is restrained, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Local Historian

Whenever you make an Intelligence (History) check to determine the history of an item, location, or cultural phenomenon from the same region as you, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Menacing Presence

Whenever you make a Charisma (Intimidation) check, and are interacting with Academics, Common Folk, or Seafarers, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Mystical Scholar

Whenever you make an Intelligence (Arcana) check to recall information on Aberrations, Constructs, or Elementals, you can add your Profession Die to the result.

Navigator

Whenever you make a vehicle check, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Nimble Fingers

Whenever you make a Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check to pick a lock, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Passionate Orator

Whenever you make a Charisma (Performance) check to influence an Academic, Military, or Clergy member, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Pathologist

Whenever you make a Wisdom (Medicine) check to diagnose or treat a disease, add your Profession Die to the roll.

Problem Solver

Whenever you make an Intelligence (Investigation) check to decipher a coded message or puzzle, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Quick Fingers

Whenever you make a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check to place a small object on a humanoid or sneak something into their food or beverage, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Recruiter

Whenever you make a Charisma (Persuasion) check to recruit people into a role, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Renowned

Whenever you make a Charisma (Persuasion) check, and are interacting with Military, Outlanders, or Criminals, you may add your Profession Die.

Ropesman

Whenever you make a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to climb, move along, or jump onto ropes, you can add your Profession Die.

Runekeeper

Whenever you make an Intelligence (Arcana) check to uncover the properties and uses of magical runes, glyphs, or other symbols, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Sawbones

Whenever you make a Wisdom (Medicine) check dealing with Grievous Wounds, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Sea Dog

Whenever you make a Strength (Athletics) check to swim in water, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Sentry

Whenever you make a Wisdom (Perception) check while on watch duty or defending a fortification, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Shrewd Deduction

Whenever you make an Intelligence (Investigation) check to investigate a crime scene, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Translator

Whenever you make an Intelligence check to communicate with a creature who doesn't share a language with you, you can add your Profession Die to the result.

Urban Sprinter

Whenever you make a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check while running away from a pursuer, or pursuing someone else, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

Wayfarer

Whenever you make a Wisdom (Survival) check to find a path or avoid getting lost, you can add your Profession Die to the roll.

The Realms of Etharis

Etharis is a land of magic and terror, of rising nations and crumbling empires. Humans have dominated the continent for centuries, but since the death of the gods every form of power is tenuous. From the ancient Charneault Kingdom to the bustling port of Morencia, the ambitious and the desperate vie for control. From the frigid Valikan expanse to the sweltering Castinellan coast, societies mobilize to combat invading armies and mystical forces that threaten civilization itself.

The Bürach Empire

Nestled in the northern region of Etharis, the Bürach Empire presides over its domain like an old lion ravaged by illness. Once a beacon for grand civilisations everywhere, it is now a shattered nation, a nest of corrupt nobility seeking to revive old glories, lurking monsters that prey on the unwary, and desperate common folk trying to survive both.

Though it is still viewed by most of its neighbours as the political, military, and economic superpower of Etharis, those within the Bürach Empire live each day with the sense that the end is near. Whether that end comes by war, cults of strange gods, rebellion, economic collapse, or the otherworldly threat of the Beast, the Empire is seeing its last days.

Landscape

The Bürach Empire once covered the largest expanse of land of any nation in Etharis. Temperate forests abound at the northern edge, but dwindle the further one travels south as logging camps struggle to keep up with the Empire's demand for lumber. The foothills of the Grey Spine mountain range provide a source of iron and precious gems. A major volcano, Mt. Vengeance, lies to the east of the Empire.

History of the Bürach

The Bürach People

The Bürach began as a group of neighbouring tribes that settled in the north eastern part of Etharis. Over the years, some of these tribes grew in size and stature, and either conquered or absorbed other tribes. Thus, they became the Bürach, which in the olden tongue means "One Above All".

The people of the Bürach are creatures of tradition, living their lives in lock-step with religious beliefs, family ties, fealty to their Empire, and laws so ancient that few historians even remember why they were made.

The Empire follows a caste system, with the royalty at the top, followed by the nobility, the knights, the merchants, the craftsmen, and then finally, the serfs. Their society is structured around fealty to a particular noble family. Each province must abide by the rules of their lords and common born serfs may not leave the land of their birth without permission.

Those caught abandoning their lords, either by running away or breaking their laws, are dealt with severely.

Though a single empire, the Bürach is not homogeneous. Four distinct groups of people gathered into provinces, with each devoted to their own particular god, and those divisions have survived even if the gods have not.

The Abendfolk are devotees of Aurelia, goddess of healing and protection. Their city of Altenheim forms the cultural and economic heart of the Bürach Empire.

The wise Norden settled in the north, where they worship Ulmyr, the embodiment of magic and chaos. Nordenland is culturally divided, with the west populated by a mix of various races, with the east primarily peopled by outlanders.

To the east, closest to the Grey Spine Mountains, lies Unterland. The Unterfolk follow the ways of Maligant, god of war and conquest.

Finally, to the south lies Rauland, whose people carry on their worship of Galt the Builder, god of order and construction.

Dawn of an Empire

As these provinces grew in power, foreign kingdoms soon challenged them, coveting their lands. The people turned to the gods for aid. The Four Divines agreed that the burgeoning Empire needed a central figure around which they could rally. Appearing to each of their priests, the Four advised the Bürach to form an empire.

The priests, known as the Hearthkeepers of Aurelia, searched far and wide for signs of one who would be the emperor.

Though they met many a knight, noble, and mage, none was deemed fit for the title.

Then their visions led them to the western marches. Here they found a 12-year-old boy named Thancred, who had single-handedly slain a giant that guarded a fjord so that he could build a bridge between two towns. When the Hearthkeepers came before him, they watched as he returned a dead lamb back to life with just his hands. As one, the priests fell to their knees and named him Emperor Indorius, first of his line.

As a gift to the new emperor, the four gods poured their divinity into four sacred artifacts: a crown that radiated authority (Galt), a sword that increased his might (Maligant), an orb that gave him far sight (Ulmyr), and a breastplate that protected him from harm (Aurelia).

With these treasures and the support of his people, the emperor launched a campaign against his nation's rivals. With sword and banner, he led the combined army of the four provinces into war. Victory after victory followed him until the surrounding nations were conquered and folded into Bürach. This created an empire that stretched from one end of the continent to the other, the largest nation in all of Etharis.

With his empire secured, Emperor Indorius implemented ambitious changes throughout the land. He standardised trade and created guilds for building infrastructure. By establishing coastal settlements, he freed the Bürach from centuries as a land-locked people. A patron of the arts, he encouraged bards and musicians to flourish in his court. When Emperor Indorius finally entered the afterlife, the Empire had become a nation of wealth and enlightenment.

This greatness would not last. The gods who had answered the Bürach's prayers were themselves the survivors of a disastrous war. Only time would reveal the wounds they had suffered fighting enemies beyond even divine comprehension. Surely the gods' minds were already tainted when they chose Indorius, for the seeds of empire they planted were the seeds of their own madness and destruction.

Gods' End

So great was the impact of Indorius's rule that the Bürach instituted what would be known as the Edict of Eternal Blood. According to this law, only one of the emperor's direct descendants could be raised to the throne.

The Hearthkeepers took great care to preserve the purity of the imperial family. Cousins and sometimes siblings were led to marry in order to maintain the Edict. However, many voices across the Bürach warned against such acts, but their words fell on deaf ears. Encouraged by the priesthood, the people's faith in the Imperial family kept the government in power, and for centuries all was right in the world.

That changed with Emperor Leopold I.

From a young age, it was clear that Leopold was truly, irrevocably mad. He often spoke to things that weren't there and treated people like they were insects, having servants imprisoned and flayed for the smallest infractions. Officials whispered among themselves that they could not in good conscience put him into power, but to disobey the Edict was to invite disaster for the government. Thus, one summer solstice, Leopold was crowned Emperor of the Bürach.

Possessed by religious fervour, Leopold exhorted the masses to believe that only one of the four gods should rule supreme. Why should they each follow four, when only one--the greatest, most powerful of all--was deserving of their devotion? Each sect then began to argue that their god should be the One True Deity.

Leopold's madness seeped into the four artifacts he wore. Worse, as these artifacts carried the essences of the four gods, his madness fed back into their minds, driving them insane.

The Four Divines turned on each other, each believing they should be the One True God. The gods warred in the heavens, causing calamities such as storms, flash fires, and earthquakes. Their hostility quickly spread to their worshippers. Within a year, the Bürach Empire had descended into civil war as the four provinces fought among themselves.

To end the violence, individuals from the four provinces conspired against the emperor. Their assassins swept into the imperial palace and killed Leopold. With his death, the sacred artifacts disappeared. This caused the Divine Aurelia to come out of her insanity long enough to see that the gods' battles would soon destroy all of Etharis. She then used all her power to shield the land from the gods' war. In so doing, she gave up her own life. In time the other three—Maligant, Ulmyr, and Galt—slew each other.

The death of the Four Divines sent a shockwave of magic throughout the Empire. Divine magic still exists, but is now believed to radiate from the remaining Arch Seraphs and Daemons, not from the dead gods themselves.

The leaders of each province called for a ceasefire, and each army retreated to their land to heal and recover from their losses. A new emperor, Aratron I, was installed and provided counterfeit sacred artifacts to shore up the people's faith. This emperor served only as a figurehead; the Hearthkeeper ministers of Aurelia were now the real power behind the throne.

Shadows Rising

With the absence of the gods, something began to stalk the lands of the Bürach Empire. Unknown what it is, no one is certain how it came to be, but this powerful and corrupting presence has made itself felt throughout countless towns and cities. Eyewitnesses describe it as a towering figure wreathed in shadows, its head an enormous deer skull, bearing a crown of antlers that seem to pierce the sky. It walks where it wills. It corrupts that which it touches. It whispers into the hearts of men and turns them to wickedness.

Soon, aberrations and abominations started appearing throughout the provinces. Discord and corruption seeped through every fibre of society.

The creature presents an existential threat to all the imperial provinces, but each threat seems to be unique in nature. In Abendland, mobs of zombie-like creatures, their flesh fused together into a cancerous, many-limbed blob, attack wayfarers and peasants. In Rauland, puppet-like creatures strangle and dismember innocent folk with razor-sharp strings. Nordenland is plagued by corrupted flora and fauna, including treants with human heads and limbs instead of branches. Finally, Unterland has reported sightings of corrupted warriors, their armour melted into their flesh, roaming the countryside and killing indiscriminately.

The Bürach have named this entity the Beast. The four provinces have each formed bands of warriors, clerics, and mages to combat its threat, but though they kill hordes of its monsters, none have succeeded in facing the Beast and living to tell the tale. And where it goes, monsters arise.

PROVINCES

Four ancient provinces make up the Bürach Empire, each with their own distinct cultures and traditions.

Abendland

Abendland is the region where Aurelia, Goddess of Healing, Hearth, and Home, perished. A part of her celestial body rests within the province, where it still radiates a small part of her sacred magic.

The capital city of Altenheim is the largest city in the Bürach Empire. As the saying goes, "All roads lead to Altenheim." Trade routes eventually find their way here, some from as far away as Grarjord. It is also the safest location in all of the Empire, as Altenheim is known for its high walls and towers that make a siege unlikely to succeed.

History

Since time immemorial, Abendland had been ruled by the Holy Church of the Hearthkeepers, clerics of the goddess Aurelia. According to legend, Aurelia herself led the first of her priests, Amara, to the western plains in order to escape the tyrannical ruler of her former tribe. There, the goddess ordered Amara to strike the arid ground with her spear. From that spot emerged a spring of crystal clear water. The spring became the sacred lake, Osea, which fed the land and the city of Altenheim, until it turned verdant and green.

Abendland's open plains, situated in the clearings between dense forest, facilitated farmlands and plantations, feeding its growing population. The Hearthkeepers encouraged and spread the worship of Aurelia, promising peace and prosperity to all who followed her. And many did. Abendland consequently became known as the land of clerics and paladins, and Altenheim gained the title of "The City of Joy".

When Emperor Indorious was crowned, the Hearthkeepers welcomed him with open arms. He was the only son of Aurelia, they said, the promise of the goddess made flesh. They threw all their power and resources into supporting his rule, and taught the Abendfolk from youth to revere the Emperor. Thus, the Imperial family and the Hearthkeeper religion became tied together forever as a political body. For centuries, the clerics have legitimised the rule of each Emperor, and used their influence to keep his bloodline pure.

The coming of Leopold I brought an end to this golden age. His madness seeped into Aurelia's holy artifact, the Hearthfire Breastplate, and reached the mind of the goddess herself.

Aurelia became jealous of her people's devotion. She demanded adoration, prayers, tributes, a lifetime of servitude from her followers, all while fawning over Leopold. In the end, she even demanded blood sacrifices. All of this was an effort to show she was the one true god, the most deserving of worship. As for her priests, they willingly followed her whims and those of the emperor. They had lived too long in the comfort of authority to give it up.

Finally, Aurelia went to war with the other three gods. Thus distracted, she did not see when one of her priestesses, Talana, turned on her.

Conspiring with like-minded individuals from the other three provinces, Talana opened the way for the assassins to infiltrate the Imperial Palace. It worked, and with Leopold dead, the assassins seized control of the artifacts. Galt, Maligant, and Ulmyr remained mad, but Aurelia—perhaps because she was the goddess of protection—managed to break out of her insanity.

Seeing the devastation caused by the war, she used all her power to protect her people from the Gods' End. The sacrifice consumed all that was left of her power. Aurelia plunged to Etharis, lifeless.

After the Gods' End, Altenheim did its best to rebuild. The Church of the Hearthkeepers installed a new emperor, replaced the missing artifacts with fakes, and led the people to continue their veneration. But to their horror, the priests found that their clerical abilities were slowly fading as the remnant of Aurelia's power waned from the world. Thus, they withdrew from the public and spread myths among the people: that Aurelia was not dead but merely sleeping, that she would rise again to restore her people to the glory of the Empire's early days.

Soon the concept of "protection" took on a different meaning in the City of Joy. The citizens had to be protected from the corruption of the outside world. They had to be brought closer to the light of Aurelia's hearth. They need to be sheltered from the harsh realities of the Gods' End. Dissent among the populace was dealt with harshly. Any talk of a horned shadow monster roaming the lands was silenced.

Economy

It can be said that Altenheim runs on hope, such as it is, as the lands surrounding the province of Abendland were greatly affected by the death of the gods. While still fertile, they are slowly losing potency due to the waning influence of Aurelia.

The city of Altenheim, however, has continued to flourish. Like a tumour syphoning the nutrients from a healthy body, it draws all the wealth and produce from the surrounding province into its coffers. Its vast tracts of farmland still produce enough grain and fruit for trade outside of the empire.

While the peasants suffered, the city-dwellers took to revelry and worldly pleasures to forget the horrors of the past and present. Trade routes to the Valikan clans brought in a supply of Dreams Leave, an addictive substance that soon had many citizens in its grip.

The walls of Altenheim grew taller and thicker over the years, to guard its wealth and secrets against would-be thieves--but more importantly, to keep its citizens from looking to the world outside.

Politics and Leadership

Pope Roland Murrich — The leader of the Hearthkeeper Church and the right hand of the emperor himself, Pope Murrich is a shrewd, ruthless leader whose aim is to keep the Church in power. To this end, he oversees a system of tithes from the populace, selling indulgences and holy favours for money. The Hearthkeepers also seek to keep the hearts of the people close to the Holy Church and to the emperor. From childhood, citizens are taught to venerate the Imperial Family as the chosen leaders of Aurelia.

Murrich dotes on Aratron II like his own son, though his detractors accuse him of simply using the boy to prop up the Church's authority. His current obsession is to recapture the missing artifacts of the Emperor in the hopes of accessing the remaining power of the gods. His efforts have yet to bear fruit.

Gatekeeper Chantal Sommerkin — A charismatic if rather unhinged woman, Sommerkin is the leader of the Celestial Gate, a doomsday cult that has grown to rival the Hearthkeeper Church in the Abendland countryside.

The Celestial Gate believes that the world is irredeemably corrupt, and the only thing that can be done is to start over in the next one. With the growing threat of the Beast, the cult offers people a way to prepare their souls for the next life. Their current aim, aside from growing their membership, is to depose the current emperor and make Abendland a full theocracy in preparation for the end of the world.

Emperor Aratron II — Only 12 years old at the time of his coronation, the young Aratron knows little of the world outside of his palace. Kept a virtual prisoner in his own home, the bored Emperor spends his time reading the Church-approved books sent to his quarters, or attending one lavish ball after another. He is merely counting the days until his inevitable marriage to a cousin when he turns 16.

Anyone who is able to gain an audience with the young emperor will find him as haughty, sullen, and remote as any member of the royal family. However, Aratron will light up if the visitor mentions tales of other lands. Such a visitor will find themselves questioned relentlessly for every scrap of information, particularly about seafaring. The emperor is innocent of the ways of the world and constantly relies on the advice of his staff and of Pope Murrich.

Revelations of the Gatekeeper Sommerkin

I, Rogebough, do commit to writing the visions given to me by the voices of the black stars and the lost constellations. Let the priests do with me as they will. Martyr or no, I will spit the truth in their faces.

First, the obvious: The madness of Emperor Leopold was a product of the incestuous bloodline, a line protected and advocated by none other than the Hearthkeepers, who stood to benefit from their rule. It was this madness that seeped into the minds of the Four Divines. The instant they placed the artifacts on him, they were lost and so were we.

Second: Though he was pierced by assassin blades, Emperor Leopold did not die. He returned as a revenant, a corrupting influence, the likes of which we have never seen before. Instead of a golden circlet, he wears a crown of antlers. Instead of armour, he wears the shadows of the underworld. Where he walks, blood seeps from the soil and milk curdles in the breasts of mothers. His whispers corrupt the mind, his touch engenders monsters. His dominion is no longer the Bürach Empire but life and death entire.

He walks the world as the Great Beast, Harbinger of the End. Let all tremble before his majesty! Prepare yourselves for the last days!

Note: This heretical text has been banned from all the Bürach provinces, and even its mere possession is a crime under Imperial Law.

Nordenland

The mysterious forest dwellers of Nordenland are an ancient race with a strong kinship to magic and faerie folk. The Norden inhabit a region of lush woods, hills, narrow rivers, and sheer cliffs, all of which hide their own kind of secrets. The capital of the province is Erlefurt, a city in West Nordenland that houses various colleges devoted to each branch of magic.

Nordenland is a province divided. Those that hew to the Bürach Empire reside in the western region, where they have raised a city much like those in other provinces. Those who reside in the east have abandoned their oaths to the emperor and reverted to the Old Ways, living closer to nature. The forests and bogs of eastern Nordenland contain the roots, berries, and fruits that they use in their magic rituals.

History

The ancient province of Nordenland sits on the threshold of a variety of other dimensions, including that of the faerie realm. The presence of otherworldly beings constantly exposes the Norden to magical events and creatures. As such, they have the largest number of mages and druids in the Empire.

The god Ulmyr emerged from one of these interdimensional rifts. When he beheld the Norden, he saw a people he could call his own. He gathered the scattered tribes into one mighty clan and helped them to hone their arcane potential.

When Emperor Indorious was crowned, Ulmyr joined with the other gods into a united pantheon. The Norden followed their god and Nordenland became a province of the fledgling Bürach Empire.

Many Norden had misgivings over this move, as they had preferred their ways to those of a foreign power. This simmering anger did not wane with time. As the towns and cities of the other provinces sprang up at their borders, the Norden found their territory shrinking and their influence diminishing. The neighboring province of Rauland's need for timber lured loggers to the Norden forests, which in turn weakened the magic of the realm. Infuriated, the Norden fought a war to reclaim their lost territory but were outnumbered. Eventually, they were forced to accept an armistice and agree to new boundaries.

With the Gods' End occurring, everything fell to chaos. Conflict broke out amongst the provinces as the gods ordered their followers to fight for their glory. Despite their love for Ulmyr, the wisest of the Norden knew that if they continued the war there would be nothing left of their once-proud realm. Thus, they conspired with like-minded individuals from the other provinces to assassinate the emperor.

With Leopold I dead, the assassins absconded with the four holy artifacts. They were supposed to bring these artifacts to Nordenland in the hope that the wizards could find a way to reverse the gods' madness. But before the artifacts could reach Nordenland, old wounds reopened among the Norden. While the loyalists wanted to restore the Empire, some of the Norden remembered their past humiliations and wanted Nordenland free from imperial rule for good. Those who held the artifacts would have the power to steer the province's future.

Fighting broke out over the treasures. Then, to everyone's shock, the artifacts blazed with light, levitated into the air, and vanished. Without a chance to cure their insanity, the gods were left to fight to the death.

The strife split the Norden into two factions, each blaming the other for their downfall. Those who believed in the Old Ways gathered in the east. Those who wanted to remain in the Empire kept to the west. The people of East Norden view their Western brethren as blood traitors who abandoned their true family. The Westerners consider those of the East weak and behind the times.

Skirmishes have frequently erupted between the two factions, and it seems a new civil war is in the offing. Both sides continue to search for the missing artifacts in hopes of restoring their god and gaining the upper hand in the conflict.

A decade after the Gods' End, woodland life in Nordenland began to change into hideous, deformed versions of themselves that attacked other life indiscriminately. Both sides accused the other of dark magic.

Sighting of the towering antlered figure settled the matter. To this day, mages from both sides are struggling to stop the Beast from corrupting their land any further

Economy

The Eastern Norden are mostly composed of outlanders of various races. They reside in the woods and swamps, forsaking complex technology and relying on their connection to nature to thrive. Most live in the forests, in treetop villages to keep away from the magical beasts that wander their domain. Tribes are led by chieftains, who themselves answer to their leader, the Patriarch.

Their xenophobic tendencies have kept foreigners and trade away, though it is not unknown for their mages to take in foreign apprentices who swear fealty to East Norden.

The Westerners, on the other hand, insist that modernisation is the way forward. They have adopted windmills, waterwheels, and farming tools. They use boats to ply the waterways and trade lumber and dry goods with the other provinces. The large number of coastal villages in their province provide access to saltwater fish that help support their food supply.

The Norden's greatest talent, however, lies in magic. Any mage who aspires to a name in the Bürach Empire goes to Erlefurt in order to gain mastery at one of the famed Great Colleges there. Norden mages are renowned for their skill and intellect, and remain in demand throughout the Empire.

Politics and Leadership

West Nordenland is ruled by an Arch-Duchess that has been loyal for centuries to the Imperial Family. They maintain order in Erlefurt and its surrounding country while declaring Easterners to be traitors to the crown.

East Nordenland is ruled by the Patriarch and his Oaken Court. They keep the borders of their forest ensorcelled so that none may enter without their knowing. They do not recognise imperial authority and are willing to fight for their independence. The Empire has little to no influence on East Nordenland, as most of their forces are out fighting wars elsewhere.

The Norden armies are largely lightly armoured, armed with wooden shields and broadswords. They deploy powerful druids and mages among their ranks. The Eastern Norden are known for employing giant war bears to aid them on the battlefield.

Notable Individuals

Patriarch Alfric — Known as the Patriarch, Alfric leads the East Norden Kingdom. His primary concern is keeping the influence of outsiders--especially the imperial government--from his land. King Alfric has survived many attempts on his life, which have only strengthened his resolve. Like his imperial opponents, he seeks to find the legendary artifacts in order to protect his homeland and further the cause of his faction.

Arch Duchess Maelfa — The leader of the West Norden Kingdom. After a long line of hardcore loyalists, she strikes a more assertive tone, declaring her government as co-equal in rule even as it remains part of the Empire. She furthers her autonomy through diplomacy and appeasement rather than outright resistance.

Rauland

Found in the southernmost part of the Empire, Rauland is ruled by an authoritarian government that believes in order and structure above all things. The Raulfolk are masters at crafting great stone buildings and unmatched weaponry. Yet despite a government that prides itself in complete control, Raulish society is fraying under the threat of the Beast.

History

Rauland began as a thanedom of dwarves and gnomes living within the mountain range called the Rock Teeth mountains, or Hermansdatt in their native tongue. For millennia, these underground dwellers lived in contentment, forging their jewelry and weapons.

In time Galt, the god of order, found them and called them out of the mountains. “You will be my people,” he decreed. “You will show all the world what it means to live in perfect harmony and enlightenment, that all may walk the path of the righteous.”

So hearing, the dwarves and gnomes built a great city on the mountainside. Named Stehlenwald, the city resembles a celestial stairway carved from granite and marble and adorned with statues—a feat of architecture and engineering unrivalled throughout the land. The Quartz Palace at the topmost level of Stehlenwald remains one of the wonders of the Bürach Empire.

The Bürach came to rely on the craftsmanship of the Raulfolk. Thousands came to the Raulish guilds to learn carpentry, smithing, architecture, and construction. The forge fires of Stehlenwald burned for centuries as the Raufolk created great buildings and fashioned weapons for trade with the other provinces.

When madness fell upon Galt, he demanded nothing less than complete order. In taskmaster fashion, he commanded that everything run on time, for products to be made and sold like clockwork. Buildings continued to rise, weapons were forged by the thousands and shipped across the land, and the people worked like slaves. No one was allowed to rise above their station or to leave the province.

As Galt’s paranoia worsened, he began to police the minds of his followers.

The watchmen patrolled the streets and monitored the city from watchtowers. Those that ever voiced a whisper of dissent were imprisoned—sometimes put to death.

Unable to stand this madness any longer, a handful of Raulish sages made a pact with the other provinces. The Raulfolk secretly forged daggers that would be undetectable to the seers of the Imperial Palace. Thus, assassins were able to steal into the imperial palace and kill Emperor Leopold.

Though they were freed from their mad god, life only marginally improved for the Raulfolk. Their wares remain popular throughout the Empire, but without Galt’s guidance their craft began to decline in potency over the years. Border disputes with Unterland arose, and their need for timber led to conflict with nearby Nordenland.

Worst of all, something now stalks the Raulish countryside and the smog-ridden streets of the capital--something that turns citizens into monstrosities that prey on the innocent.

Though the guards keep watch all night, the threat has not abated. The Beast haunts the Raulfolk, and thus far none have been able to stop it.

Economy

Stehlenwald's main trade is in metalworks including jewelry, tools, and above all, weaponry. The excellence of their products comes from more than their choice of raw materials and system for folded steel; the Raulfolk have honed their craft into an art form, something that can only be replicated by magic. Raulish weapons hold an edge better and endure longer than others made by lesser smiths.

Nowadays, their economy is on a downturn due to the decline in their weapon quality, from what it once was. Worse, the thick, acrid smoke from the forges has harmed the health and quality of life in the city. Yet, though Raulish weapons no longer live up to their legendary status, armies still require them for the wars along the eastern border. The Raulfolk take what business they can get.

Notable Individuals

Arch Duke Ulrich Eisenherz — The dwarven thane of Rauland. A fair-minded and well-loved ruler of the province, he is nevertheless hounded by rumours that he holds one of the imperial artifacts, the Hearthfire Breastplate, in his vault. He has continued to deny this, though an inquiry has been launched by the Hearthkeepers. Most speculate that the duke does not want to raise the ire of the Holy Church, or that he is biding his time to use the artifact. With the ongoing attacks of the Beast, that time may be nigh.

Artom Drago — Faced with a mind-bending horror such as the Beast, some Raulfolk have chosen to fight monsters with monsters. Drago, a former agent of Rauland, was disavowed by his own government so that he could undertake a secret mission. Infecting himself and his men with lycanthropy, Drago and his pack roam the countryside at night, hunting down the Beast's creations and tearing them to shreds.

While they have been initially successful, the Norden government fears that Drago and his men are starting to lose themselves to their wolfish natures. If true, they would have to be put down as well.

Unterland

The easternmost region of the Bürach Empire, Unterland is a warrior society that seeks to broaden the Empire's reach and renew its flagging momentum. Of all the provinces, Unterland holds a particular bitter rivalry with their neighbour across the Grey Spine, the Ostoyan Empire.

History

Unterland began as its own city-state long before the other provinces had united under one banner.

Once a weak tribe of hunters living among the marshlands, the Unter people had the misfortune of being surrounded by hostile tribes. With their best soldiers lost to countless skirmishes, the Unterfolk raised their prayers and offerings the heavens and begged for salvation. It was the god Maligant who answered them.

Maligant proved to be a god of strategy and intelligent warfare. Under his tutelage, the Unters selected adapt generals to lead their troops. They learned to forge strong alliances and dissolve them when they were no longer useful. They also learned to win with surgical precision instead of relying on brute force, and to break the enemy's spirit as well as their armies.

Their greatest conflict was undoubtedly the Etienne War, when the Vorkan tribe marched across the border to try and take their lands. However, the Vorkan made the mistake of invading during the wet season. While the Vorkans camped beside a river, the Unterfolk released the water from their dam to flood the banks. More than half the invaders drowned, and the rest were forced to retreat. Thus, the Unterfolk won the Etienne war without losing a single soldier.

Soon after, the allied Unter tribes consolidated under one territory: Unterland. They founded their capital of Olstenburg, where rose their most important institution: The Academy of Swords, where the citizenry could learn the military sciences. Every able-bodied youth was sent to the Academy for two years of training and military service.

Thus, Unterland managed to grow a trained citizen army that they could field at a moment's notice.

Like the other provinces, Unterland joined under one empire when Indorious I came into power. They served a critical function: to defend the nation and expand its borders. In battle, the Unterfolk fielded their heavy cavalry, and infantry composed of pikemen, swordsmen, crossbowmen. When needed, they also employed their hunters to wage guerrilla warfare in forested regions. Theirs was a fighting force without compare.

However, there were some in Unterland who refused to follow the Empire, seeing it as a form of imprisonment. They left Unterland, crossing the Grey Spine into a new land that they called Ostoya. Their secession would plant the seeds of bitter conflict.

The Unterfolk sage who joined in the assassination of Emperor Leopold was named Dmitri Speir, a retired general who formulated the plan and led its execution. Once the deed was done, he wrote a signed confession before committing suicide with his own sword. The Hearthkeepers named him a traitor, but defying their edict, Speir's countrymen buried him with full honours.

Of all the provinces, it was Unterland that suffered most after the Gods' End. With the chaos that came from the death of the Four Divines, soldiers were needed more than ever to protect the Empire from both internal and external threats. This led to a diaspora that saw thousands of men leaving to fight wars or keep the peace elsewhere.

First and paramount among the Unters attention was the new nation across the Grey Spine. Under the Empire's orders and with the pretext of disciplining erring citizens, they invaded Ostoya and set up outposts there. Unfortunately, their initial momentum did not last; eventually, Ostoya counter-attacked with armies of the living dead, pushing the Empire back behind the Grey Spine. Knowing that to lose here would mean losing face throughout Etharis, the Bürach did not relent. The years would see a long war of attrition that would weaken both sides.

Today, Unterland's reputation for military power is significant but tarnished, as it is pulled into more and more battles it has no choice but to fight.

Economy

The Unterfolk are skilled hunters and trackers, capable of living off of the wilds--a necessity given the limited arable land in the province. Their tracking skills have been sought for mercenary work, even by foreign nations.

Raised by Maligant to be the most powerful of warriors, the Unterfolk have made soldiering their main profession. Such is their ability that even common foot soldiers from Unterland make good combat instructors in other provinces.

Notable Individuals

Lord General Vassily Roemer — The current leader of Unterland, Lord General Roemer is a staunch follower of the imperial government. Selected for his loyalty, military record, and bravery in battle, the wiser of the Unterfolk note that he is not as capable as his predecessors at recognising the threats within his own province—specifically, the Cult of Tormach.

Instead, Lord General Roemer's greatest concern is winning the war against the Ostoyans, who have long defied imperial rule, but he is distracted by demands to hunt down and destroy the Beast that has been plaguing the provinces.

Speaker Coran Schlei, Leader of the Cult of Tormach — In Maligant's absence, a new deity of war, Tormach, has taken on the fallen god's followers. But Tormach is a daemon of wrath and brutal force, a blunt weapon compared to Maligant's keen blade. His perpetual demand for sacrificial bloodshed has kept Unterland at war for years. Speaker Schiel dreams of putting the entire province under his rule, but must bide his time and curry favour with the imperial government first. Many fear he will try to undermine General Roemer's command.

Other Locations of Interest

Lake Osea — According to legend, this body of water first formed on the spot where Aurelia's first disciple struck the ground with her spear to create a spring. The miraculous water gave life to what once was barren land. Today, the sprawling city of Altenheim sits at the edge of this lake.

When the goddess Aurelia fell to Earth, most of her body was burned away by her descent. What remained was her head, which fell into Lake Osea. Today, her gigantic stone face rests at the bottom of the sacred Lake, where it can barely be seen through the murky waters.

According to legend, the water of Lake Osea was once capable of healing diseases and injuries, but no one would attempt to consume it now. The Hearthkeepers have declared it holy ground and have forbidden anyone from approaching the lake itself.

Gräffendam — Nestled within a plunging valley sits a vast man-made dam. Spanning the breadth of the valley, Gräffendam exists today as one of the most impressive feats of engineering Etharis has ever seen. The majority of the dam appears to be carved from obsidian-black granite, yet how the dam was initially constructed remains a mystery.

Prior to maintenance undertaken by the current Bürach Empire, it is believed that Gräffendam was built by the Grebenstein dwarves. However, only a select few among the aristocracy know that the dam predates even them.

In addition to the mystery of Gräffendam's origins, there is the mystery of the water contained in its glacial reservoir. Called Aquanos, the water has a variety of useful properties. In its pure state, it remains at a temperature just above freezing, and can only be heated or frozen using magic. When used in place of other water it also greatly increases the yield of farm crops and the potency of potions. These properties have made the aristocrats and landowners of Gräffendam some of the wealthiest in the Empire. The upper classes take their social status literally, residing on the domed roof of the dam. Called Gildreath, the aristocracy have constructed a perpetual winter wonderland. Gildreath teems with villas and evergreen gardens draped in magical lights. The privileged few who dwell atop Gräffendam spend their lives indulging in excess and frivolity. The same cannot be said for the desperate masses that live at the base of the dam.

The base of Gräffendam is a hive of crime and poverty. When the rumours of plague came, the aristocracy prevented entry to the upper dam by all but the wealthiest. With nowhere else to turn, the growing population of refugees established a vast ghetto of rickety high-rises sloping up the outer wall of the dam. Below these favelas lies the river port of Ünterdam, which has fallen into disrepair since the plague and reduced trade to a near standstill. Due to the limited hours of daylight from the shadow of the dam, the area of Ünterdam and the favela are collectively called "The Shade".

Shortly after Gräffendam was closed to the public, the upper class struck a deal with the Ebon Syndicate. The Syndicate would get a cut of the shipping revenue and control over The Shade, so long as they prevented intruders breaching the dam walls and quashed civil unrest. With unchecked authority over the base of the dam, the Syndicate are free to conduct whatever business they wish.

Mt. Vengeance — The only active volcano in the Bürach Empire, Mt. Vengeance was thought to have been extinct for centuries before the Gods' End. The energies caused by the war between the gods seem to have ignited its fires once more.

That said, something else seems to be happening deep in the bowels of the volcano. Powerful magical energies ripple from the crater, and some scholars of magic speculate that this is due to the presence of an imperial artifact.

Since these rumours started, many adventurers have tried to investigate the volcano. The few that returned bore horrific burn wounds and tales of creatures made of flame and shadow. As for the artifact, if it is there, none have seen it yet.

Castle Martorius — Decades after the Gods' End, an enormous palace of shining, opalescent towers and silken banners appeared atop a mountain overlooking Abendland.

The castle's owner is the archmage Martorius. He claimed that he had lived on this land before the Bürach Empire even existed, but had spent the intervening years traveling between dimensions in pursuit of his magical research. Now, he assured the Unterfolk, he had no interest but to observe developments in the Empire as they unfold.

Indeed, the archmage's castle is a wonder to behold. Dignitaries that have visited it report that there is no way to determine its true dimensions, as it expands and adds rooms to itself as necessary. Aerial servants cater to the guests, and a wide variety of illusionary people and animals wander through the halls as if they had a life of their own.

Given Martorius' stature, the imperial government decided to accommodate him. In return, Martorius offered his counsel and even aided the Hearthkeepers in keeping the peace among the provinces. Yet for all this, no one in the imperial court believes Martorius is truly benevolent. The Hearthkeepers know his servants have been making inquiries throughout the provinces, searching high and low for the emperor's artifacts.

They have sent spies to infiltrate his palace, but none have returned. What Martorius is really after remains to be seen.

Riddles At Dinner

From the journals of Nadja Morten, Imperial consul:

Of the wizard Martorius, I can only say that he is at once brilliant, capricious, and cruel.

Six moons ago, I was invited to a dinner party at his palace high in the Rock Teeth mountains. With me at the time was a group of visiting dignitaries from Fiergaard and Hearthkeeper Bishop Villman Schild. Carriages pulled by a team of albino griffins took us there. We were provided a resplendent meal fit for a king's entire court, served by scandalously-dressed female djinn and a fire elemental chef.

At the dinner's end, over wine from an extradimensional vineyard, Martorius decided to play a game with us. Each would test the others' wits by asking the most difficult riddle we could think of.

We all did our best to impress our host. I told the one about the map, which the good bishop himself answered easily enough. The man was as clever as they say.

Then it was Martorius's turn. He promised a reward to the one who could answer his riddle. "I have no end nor have I a beginning. Even as you enter me, you are already leaving."

Again, it was Bishop Schild who had the answer. "A ring." Martorius smiled at Schild as if he'd expected the holy man would answer. "Very good."

He then slid a silken pouch across the table to the Bishop. The Hearthkeeper looked inside, turned the colour of milk, then spoke no more for the rest of the night.

On our way back to Altenheim, a shaking Bishop Schild rode with me in my carriage. "A few hours before," he said, "I sent Varian Lore to steal into Martorius's castle."

I gaped at him. "The adventurer Varian Lore? The one who broke into the Rauland Vault?"

"The same. His mission was to find evidence that Martorius was hunting the Imperial Artifacts. Our dinner was to be his distraction. To help, I even gave Lore a ring of invisibility."

He opened up the pouch to show me that very same ring.

It still had Lore's finger in it.

The Ostoyan Empire

Beyond the Grey Spine peaks lies a land shrouded in mist and shadow. The hearts of the Ostoyan people are as cold and forbidding as the land they dwell in. Here the mages of the Ravencourt Sanctuary spin their nebulous plots, the Vampire Lords of the Crimson Court devise plans to engulf Etharis in a tide of undead, and the hidden denizens of the City Below wait in the dark, hungry for the living.

Landscape

The lands east of the Grey Spine are a temperate, heavily-forested region filled with hills and valleys. The further one travels east, the more the land flattens into rolling plains, dotted here and there by treacherous heaths and bogs. At the easternmost edge of Ostoya, the terrain breaks into jagged cliffs that border a restless, ice-filled sea. Further eastward across the water, a magical fog surrounds an island that few have ever laid eyes on.

The terrain is not suited for heavy farming. The Ostoyans supplement what meagre crops they grow by hunting and herding. Coastal cities also employ fishing and whaling fleets to feed their burgeoning populations. The Ostoyan weather is typified by Nov Ostoya's skies, heavy rains, sudden snowfall, and endless mists. The sun is a rare sight, and most welcome when it breaks through the mantle of grey clouds.

What Ostoya lacks in hospitable environment, it makes up in tremendous amounts of ore, stone, and coal from the Grey Spine. Lumber is also plentiful, enabling the Ostoyans to build robust structures. These resources lend themselves to frequent trade with other nations, but also lead to violent border disputes with neighbours, particularly the Bürach.

History of Ostoya

A Land of Our Own

Ostoya was founded centuries ago by Bürach secessionists—migrants who fled the fledgling

Bürach Empire's tumultuous early days to find a more peaceful country. A nobleman named Elias Beralt led his family and followers through the treacherous passes of the Grey Spine, emerging on the other side to find a country lush with pine woods and rolling hills. He named it Ostoya, which in the ancient tongue means "Our Own."

Over the years, a loose confederation formed among the communities trying to carve a living out of the wild lands. The most successful of these became the provinces of Soma to the south and Raevo to the north. Other settlements of note include Malkovia, Fallowheart, Riven, and Voyd.

The Ostoyans worked hard to tame the land, clearing forests for livestock and lumber. With the discovery of coal and precious minerals in the foothills of the Grey Spine, mining towns soon opened, followed by roads and byways. Further to the east, explorers discovered a break in the seaside cliffs that led to a natural harbour. Here they founded the coastal city of Nov Ostoya, which became the seat of the Ostoyan Aristocracy.

While Ostoya was not known to have large populations of natural predators such as wolves and bears, every now and then people were known to disappear for good, often with signs of a struggle.

War Against the Bürach Empire

After spending two hundred years taming its borders, the Bürach Empire turned its attention towards expansion. Since the Ostoyans were descended from the Bürach, the Empire deemed them its citizens, ordering them to pay taxes and turn over control of their mines. When the Ostoyans refused, the Bürach attacked.

The Ostoyans hastily forged their arms and mustered their men. The wealth drawn from their mines allowed them to bolster their army with mercenaries such as the Free Swords. Despite this, the Ostoyans were not adept at war, having lived too many years in peace. Were it not for the natural borders of their forests and the Grey Spine, Ostoya would have been overrun long ago. Still, the Bürach gained a firm foothold in the region.

The Darkfall

Two decades into the Ostoya-Bürach war, a terrible earthquake shook the Soma region. Something sinister underneath the ground was making itself known. The skies darkened over Ostoya as necrotic energy poured out of cracks in the earth.

To the shock of the local populace, the fissures that opened revealed long-buried ruins. The city of Nov Ostoya had apparently been built over the bones of an ancient metropolis that had sunk beneath the earth ages ago.

The Soman nobility sent expeditions to investigate these underground structures in the hopes of uncovering treasure or magical secrets that would help the war effort. Most of these groups did not return; the few that did had been reduced to stragglers, babbling hysterical tales of maze-like ruins, ravenous undead, and a dark shrine that spoke to their minds.

Eventually, the missing explorers returned, though as many would soon find out, they had been changed forever. They marched with an undead horde that rose in full force into Soma. The desperate Ostoyans then found themselves caught in a war on two fronts.

Stretched to breaking, the Ostoyans fell to drastic measures. A specialised company of soldiers descended into the abyss and held off the horde. Then, mages from Raevo collapsed the largest of the fissures, sealing the undead back underground. With that, the Ostoyans hoped to turn their efforts back to repelling the Bürach.

But the undead, it seemed, were not finished. One year later, a strange malady began to spread among the nobility. They died only to rise again—as vampires.

The undead quickly overran the government and suppressed all opposition. Then they moved against Bürach. In the winter of the war's 25th year, the Bürach abandoned their forts in Ostoyan territory and retreated to their homeland.

To this day, Ostoya and Bürach remain at war, but now as rivals of equal strength. For every step one side takes into the other's territory, they are driven back. The two great powers stand at a deadlock.

Even now the supernatural darkening of Ostoya's sky persists. The youngest generation of the city of Nov Ostoya have never seen the sun. A perpetual night covers the whole land, only weakening to a dismal twilight near Ostoya's borders. Indeed, the people of the neighboring Charneault Kingdom consider Ostoya to begin where the light ends—though some fear that the border is encroaching year by year.

The Raevan Secession and Civil War

The knowledge that vampires had taken over the nobility created a deep schism among the Ostoyan populace. Despite efforts to suppress them, the entire province of Raevo seceded from the Aristocracy.

The Ostoyans began an unusual civil war. While Raevo and Soma exchange violent skirmishes, the two sides still have a symbiotic relationship—for while Somans and Raevans hated each other, they hated the Bürach even more. Both sides took care not to annihilate a potential ally in the event the Empire should attempt a second invasion.

The Ostoyans

Ostoyans are a hardy folk, having long accepted the likelihood of a short life thanks to the ever-present threats of war, sickness, the cold, and the roaming undead. They value the simple life—a hot meal at the end of a long day's work and a mug of mead is reward enough for the lower classes.

Most Ostoyans are clannish, putting familial honour and bonds above life itself. The people suffered much under the Bürach Empire, now many of them consider the Soman nobility heroes for driving out the invaders. They follow the nobility without question, with only the secessionist Raevans as an exception.

A plethora of Seraphs have retained a foothold across the Etharis, but in truth, Ostoyans have faith in only one idol: Solyma, the Lady of Vengeance. Revenge is the only true religion in Ostoya. No Ostoyan believes in turning the other cheek. Indeed, forswearing vengeance is considered a weakness of character, bringing shame and a loss of face before society. An overly forgiving Ostoyan would surely be driven out of town by their own family.

Visitors from other lands would do well to acquaint themselves with local customs, and to keep wandering eyes and hands far from the peasants' daughters, lest they make an enemy for life. Even the vampiric nobility, who hold absolute sway over the lives of the peasants, take pains not to make their cruelty personal. For once wronged, Ostoyans pursue retribution single-mindedly.

Folk tales and sagas abound of entire families wiped out by disputes over land and grazing rights. To this day, long-standing family feuds occasionally require intercession from the nobles themselves, to prevent further loss of warm bodies.

PROVINCES

Soma

The province of Soma is the seat of the Ostoyan government, or so the Somans like to believe. Here lies the capital city, Nov Ostoya, and its central keep, Blackharbour.

History

When the first immigrants arrived in Ostoya, they immediately staked out certain areas for their own. The Volker family chose a place where the jagged seaside cliffs gave way to a beach and a natural harbour. It was a windblown area with strange red earth which they assumed to be clay. They founded the town of Nov Ostoya and raised a keep by the restless sea.

In time, Nov Ostoya became a hub for sea trading, fishing, and whaling. Lumberyards were erected at the nearby forests. As the roads lengthened and grew more developed, wealth began to flow into the town, which soon turned into a dense city filled with ornate towers and brooding sculptures. Nov Ostoya came to be known as the City of Gargoyles.

When the Bürach Empire invaded Ostoya, Soma was at the front lines of the war. While wealthy, their army was not as experienced as the Empire's seasoned soldiers, and they lost more battles than they won. The Bürach's encroachment into the province grew with each passing season, before retreating for the winter.

Matters worsened when the Darkfall led to widespread destruction. The inciting earthquake unearthed an ancient metropolis that the Somans had unwittingly built over. The City Below gave up its dead: hordes of zombies, wights, ghouls, and vampires emerged from the abyss to ravage the countryside.

Without drastic measures, it was clear that Ostoya would fall to this new threat. The nobility came up with a plan: they ordered a young Soman captain named Morgen Hund and his company to fight their way into the largest chasm and hold back the tide of undead.

Hund's company dutifully descended the crevice, destroying scores of undead along the way. When they had carried the battle deep into the abyss, the Raevo wizards used their most powerful spells to collapse the sides of the crevice, sealing both the undead and the soldiers within.

With the horde dealt with, the nobility took one day to honour their soldiers' sacrifice before turning their attention back to the Bürach.

But this was not the last they saw of Morgen Hund.

The Ostoyan captain had survived the collapse. He wandered deep in the underground city to escape the undead horde. During his travels, he found himself in a strange shrine dedicated to a forgotten god. The shrine spoke to him, offering him his fondest desire in exchange for his servitude. Hund replied, "I wish for the power to destroy my oppressors."

The shrine glowed in the dark like a votive candle, then struck Hund down with a blast of sinister magic. "Granted."

When he awoke days later, Hund had been changed into a vampire lord. He spent the better part of the year gathering an army of undead before returning to the surface.

Upon emerging Hund sought the Soman nobility, turning each one into vampires. He killed the Grand Duke and took his place, renaming himself Klaus Vorgen, Lord of Soma.

Once the gentry and nobility were all turned, they formed a united front against the Bürach. Bürach soldiers were shocked to see their dead comrades rising from the frozen battlefield and shambling towards them. After a single bitter season of war, the undead forced the Bürach to abandon their forts in Soma and return to their homeland.

After this victory, Grand Duke Vorgen continued to consolidate his power. He established the Crimson Court, the highest ruling body of Ostoya, and placed his closest allies in the highest circle of power. They ruled the land unchallenged for years until the Raevan Secession.

To date, some small fissures to the City Below remain open, and none really know what passes through. Come nightfall, the citizens lock themselves in their homes and taverns and wait for dawn. All travellers are warned: above all, do not wander Soma at night.

Politics and Leadership

Soma's is a closed aristocracy, and most of its citizens live in grinding poverty.

The Crimson Court rules every aspect of Soma. Even the local branch of the criminal Ebon Syndicate does not operate without the Court's tacit approval, and take great care not to bite the hand that feeds.

The Crimson Court is composed of the seven leading nobles of Soma. While they are allies, no true loyalty exists among the vampiric ruling class. Each noble vies to sit at the head of the table, employing schemes that can take decades to bear fruit.

Currently, the Court is ruled by Grand Duke Drago Koshevek.

Economy

Soma is a feudal society. The vampire nobility who hold Soma's wealth have divided control of the mines, the lumber, the craftsmen, and the fisheries amongst themselves. Meanwhile the human peasantry makes their living as best they can by fishing, mining, or farming. Trade typically flows through shipping lanes to distant lands, though of late there has been trouble with Bürach naval blockades.

Notable Individuals

Grand Duke Drago Koshevek — Grand Duke Drago is a harsh, humourless, and often cruel Vampire Lord, even by the standards of the Soman vampire nobility. Five years ago he seized control of the court by deposing the previous Duke Olkov, whom he had painted as more of a bureaucrat than a nobleman.

A soldier by nature, he dreams of launching a grand campaign against the Bürach to finally end the Empire's enduring threat against his land. To that end, he has been amassing wealth to fund a massive army. His obsession with defeating Bürach has made him unpopular with the Crimson Court, though each noble is careful to keep their opinion to themselves.

Countess Katalina Vulpescu — Shrewd, confident, and flamboyant, the Countess is the exact opposite of the Grand Duke. She is an infamous member among the Crimson Court, known for hosting lavish and debauched parties at her estate. Any newcomer to the land is almost certain to be invited. These balls serve a purpose: they allow Vulpescu to spy on newcomers, gather information, make new allies, and dispose of would-be enemies. Anyone who meets Countess Vulpescu will remember her affable, charming personality, her sharp sword, and even sharper tongue.

Despite her lavish spending and appetites, the Countess is a consummate businesswoman who runs trade and crafts in Soma. She has earned Grand Duke Koshevek's grudging respect by funding his efforts to raise an army. Unbeknownst to the Grand Duke, however, the Countess has been undermining his campaign from the beginning, sometimes leaking information to their enemies in order to sabotage his endeavours.

Blood Debt

Seven votes for one petition. Mayor Zardov stood quietly in the empty meeting chamber, facing the table where seven empty seats looked back at him. Today was an important day, perhaps the most important in his career. His petition to build a main road that would run through his town of Crow's Bend would finally be heard and voted upon.

He could scarcely believe he had made it this far. Normally, it would require payment of a pint of his own blood just to be heard. And to get approval, the measure would need a majority, four votes. The price he would have to pay for those votes—well, that he had yet to hear.

And so he waited for seven figures to fill those seven seats. And waited. And waited.

Two hours later, the door opened and a minister entered. By his pale skin and red eyes, he was a vampire just like most nobles. He approached the mayor and wordlessly handed him a note before turning to leave. The mayor opened it, read it twice, and fell to his knees weeping.

Approved.

This victory would make his town a trade centre for the entire province. His family would live in luxury for years to come. "Praise be to the heavens," he whispered. "Praise be!"

It was only three months later, when his only daughter received an invitation to a ball in Castle Blackharbour, that he realised the price of his success.

The Chiropteran Behemoth — The Grand Duke's secret weapon, this bat-like humanoid monstrosity is the size of an adult dragon. During the day, it sleeps in the dome of the desecrated Vonsantra Cathedral. It possesses a limited intelligence and a fanatical loyalty to its creator, Koshevek—when called for, it will fly unerringly to Koshevek's location. It is capable of unleashing an ear-splitting scream that can paralyse victims and can create a sphere of darkness to blind them. Even without these powers, its mighty jaws and sharp claws are a match for many a foe.

Raevo

Far to the north lies Soma's rival for control of all of Ostoya. Raevo is a province ruled by wizards, a magocracy that fights to abolish the Soman nobility and find a way to end the undead supremacy.

A delicate balance of power exists between the two provinces. While the Raevans are technically at war with the Somans, they are sometimes forced to work together to repel the Bürach Empire. Thus, both are incapable of destroying the other while their common enemy exists.

Raevans built their city of Castalore with incredible foresight—they knew that they would one day be besieged, whether by an invading Bürach force or by their own countrymen, so they built their city as a fortress from its inception. Castalore sits atop a cliff and is shaped like a snake coiling upwards. High stone walls and a ten-ton steel portcullis protect the lower city. The higher one goes up the spiral, the more affluent the neighbourhood; at the very top sits Nightingale Tower, the magocracy's seat of power.

Raevo openly supports the Order of Dawn in their bid to fight the Crimson Court. Whether this support is entirely benevolent or merely pragmatic remains to be seen.

History

Raevo was founded by a young diviner, Lissandra, who dreamt she would one day raise a force that could defend Ostoya from those who would despoil it.

She followed her visions from her hometown of Voyd to the high cliffs to the north. Here she raised the settlement known as Castalore with her family, which grew into a fortified whaling town.

Though the town thrived, Lissandra herself grew withdrawn, spending her time looking into the mists across the sea. Eventually, she took a rowboat and vanished into the east.

Several years later, the townsfolk were surprised to see a lone, unmanned rowboat emerge from the mists and dock at the pier. In the boat was a wax-sealed envelope containing a note, which said that all who had the talent for magic should travel to the Ravencourt Sanctuary, if they wished to learn the craft. Most of the townsfolk thought it was just a hoax, but ten young men and women boarded the boat against their elders' wishes. The boat bore them away into the mist.

When they returned seven years later, they came home as wizards. But not all of them returned—one was missing, and the mages could not be made to tell what happened to their lost member.

The wizards improved the conditions of the town and eventually turned it into a city. They established themselves as leaders of the republic and fostered its economy. Every seven years, another boat would come from the mists bearing the same invitation. Those who had potential would go into the mists and return as mages—but always, the Sanctuary kept one student as its due.

When news spread that the Soman nobility had become vampires, not all citizens fell in with the new regime. The few who rebelled took advantage of the aristocracy's war with the Bürach and settled in the northern province of Raevo. There they established ties with the existing government, forming a republic. By the time the Crimson Court could turn their full attention to the dissidents, Raevo was ready for them.

In the Ostoyan civil war, Soma possesses the larger army, composed of battle-hardened veterans from the war against Bürach and supplemented with strike teams of undead. On the other hand, Raevo has its wizards. Their magic enables them to match the greater numbers of the Somans and beguile soldiers into fighting each other. To deal with the undead horde, the Raevan mages turn to their strategic allies, the Order of Dawn.

Politics and Leadership

Raevo is currently ruled by the Lady of Masks, Mina Taliesin, and her Council of Mages. The Masked Lady is a turbulent figure bent on overthrowing the Soman government and dominating Ostoya. Each minister of the court is guarded by their own golem bodyguards.

While the Raevans enjoy a higher standard of life than other provinces, they are essentially a police state under the watchful eye of the magocracy. Any act of disloyalty or dissent is dealt with quickly and unequivocally.

Economy

While Raevo does not have mining resources as extensive as Soma, it does possess more arable land. Supplementing this by fishing and hunting, Raevans generally have a more stable food supply and thus a higher standard of living than their counterparts in Soma.

Where the Raevans possess their real edge is the burgeoning industry of crafting magical items. The Raevans greatly admire magic and have the highest concentration of wizards and alchemists in Ostoya. The skill of their artisans has generated fame for Raevo and their wares are highly sought after in other nations. In particular, golems are considered the pinnacle of craftsmanship in Raevo, though the prohibitive cost of making one makes their production rare. Still, any visitor to Castalore will doubtlessly marvel at the city's roving bands of golem honour guards.

Soma has enacted strict edicts against magical items and has blocked trade routes going to Raevo to weaken their economy, yet the mages have still found ways to smuggle goods in and out of the province. Finding out their trade secrets would certainly put one in the good graces of the Soman nobility.

Notable Persons

The Order of Dawn — When the Crimson Court was established, a number of Somans fled their vampire overlords and settled in the sympathetic fledgling republic of Raevo. These dissidents settled in a fort outside of Castalore, where they formed a militia fully committed to the destruction of the undead and the liberation of Soma. Thus, was the Order of Dawn formed.

To call the Order fanatics would not be out of line. From childhood, each member is taught to hate the undead. Every such monster has been studied and dissected; their weaknesses carefully catalogued.

While few in number, each member of the Order is trained and battle-ready. They are prepared to give their lives for their cause, and no vampire can expect mercy from them.

Currently, the Order is led by General Artemios Dulka, a Soman noble who abdicated his title to escape the vampire curse. In retaliation, the vampires massacred the entirety of his family that remained in Soma. A good man at heart, Dulka is driven by hatred towards the Soman Aristocracy and will stop at nothing to destroy the undead. He will attack any vampire on sight.

Mina Taliesin, The Lady of Masks — First Minister of the Raevo Republic, Lady Taliesin is an enigma even to her own people. An archmage of immense power, she controls by proxy every industry and social organisation in Raevo. She also serves as the primary liaison between Raevo and the Ravencourt Sanctuary.
Taliesin gained her moniker from the metal face mask she wears at all times since the assassination attempt (suspected to be by the Soman nobility) that took her husband's life and left her partially blind and disfigured. The mask, one of her own design, allows her to see, breathe, and speak normally while protecting her from any attempt to breach her mind.

A grand strategist, Taliesin has ruled for decades, successfully defending her rule against challengers from within and without the province. Her expansive spy network keeps her abreast of all potential dangers to the government. Rumours have it that she has a highly-placed contact within Soma itself, allowing her to sabotage the vampires' endeavours.

Lady Taliesin seeks to destroy the vampire aristocracy and control all of Soma. In her mind, this is the only way to be truly free of their corruption and the influence of the City Below. Only the common threat of the Bürach stays her hand.

The Keeper — Even more mysterious than Taliesin is the figure known as the Keeper of the Ravencourt Sanctuary. Some rumours state that he is Taliesin's resurrected husband. Others maintain he is an ancient, unaging wizard who aims to bring more mages into the world. A few even attribute a more sinister origin to him, that he is an extra-dimensional being who always keeps one soul as payment for every group he trains.

Only the Keeper knows the truth behind these things, and he holds his secrets close.

Besieging the Order

Such was the ferocity of the Order of Dawn that even the vampire nobility was wary of them. One story of their mettle comes from recent years, when the Grand Duke ordered the massacre of a village for failing to pay the correct taxes. Before it could reach the village, the Soman platoon was ambushed by a contingent of the Order of Dawn, who had somehow gotten wind of their plans.

In a fit of rage, the Grand Duke forgot the village and sent a Soman brigade led by vampires to attack the Order's stronghold. The vampires surrounded the fortress and laid a punishing assault for three days and three nights. Though the battle was desperate, the Order prevailed, slaying every single one of the soldiers and the undead.

A few days later, the Grand Duke received a letter from the Order's General Dulka. It contained but one line: "Send more vampires."

Other Locations of Interest

The Ravencourt Sanctuary

Miles from the Raevan shore, a permanent blanket of fog called the Mistwall obscures the horizon. This is the first line of defence of the island that holds the Ravencourt Sanctuary.

Little is known of the Sanctuary itself, and the mages who return from it will not be drawn into discussing it. All that historians have gleaned is that the Sanctuary is an academy and haven for mages. Some mages have alluded, with a longing sigh, to its vast libraries filled with tomes and spellbooks, or its laboratories with all manner of instruments primed for magical experimentation. Then they catch themselves and fall silent once more.

Until now, none have been able to uncover the secrets of the Sanctuary. Yet every seven years, like clockwork, a boat comes through the Mistwall bearing those who have graduated from the academy. Invitations to others deemed worthy are given out as well, and the boat bears them away.

Those who, by accident or design, end up in the Mistwall without an invitation wind up hopelessly lost in the fog. If they linger within, they are soon beset by monstrous sea serpents. The sheer number of broken ships that wash up at the Dire Shore stands as a testament to the dangers of the Mistwall.

The Black Mire

In the eastern portion of Ostoya, near the Dire Shore, a forest of aspens, willows, and oaks give way to fetid wetlands full of slow-moving, brackish water.

The Black Mire has not been thoroughly explored. Most cartographers are forced to turn back due to the treacherous terrain, bad weather, illness, or swamp monsters that accost them as they travel. Many an adventurer has met their end in the swamp's murky embrace.

Stories persist that covens of hags dwell within the far reaches of the swamp, and that they are willing to make bargains with those who come searching for them.

One must beware when dealing with hags, however—often the payment they demand is something one is not willing to part with.

The City Below

Anyone who walks through Soma long enough will encounter a deep fissure in the earth. Those brave enough to descend find themselves in a labyrinthine ruin running throughout the land. This is the City Below, an ancient metropolis whose original name is now lost to time.

Those who brave the broken streets and ruined buildings of the necropolis will find much to discover. The entire city complex lies in a massive cave system. On the cavern ceiling dwell large glowing insects that form strange constellations. The city itself is filled with ruined buildings: temples, arenas, parks, docks, even orphanages.

But nothing lives in the City Below itself. A strange negative energy pervades the entire metropolis, sustaining its massive population of undead. Zombies, ghouls, wraiths, and ghasts abound—worse still dwell in its central districts. Few who enter the City Below leave it unchanged.

According to legend, an ancient intelligence dwells in one particular glowing shrine somewhere in the city. This entity was responsible for turning the Soman Aristocracy into vampires. One can only speculate about what further dark designs it has for Ostoya.

The Missing

She needed to know.

Marilde stood on the edge of the shore, with her eyes on the Mistwall miles out at sea. Yesterday, a boat had come through there, bearing home nine souls who had left Castalore for the Sanctuary seven years ago.

But there were originally ten who made the journey. Of that number, her Oglaf was the one who did not return.

She had begged each one to tell her what had happened to her son. Each one would shake his head and walk away. Truly, mages loved their secrets more than their friends and family.

So be it then. If they would not tell her, she would find out herself. Marilde pushed the boat into the sea and hauled herself in. Then she began to row towards the fog.

They told her this would not work. They said she was rowing to her death, that she would perish before even reaching the isle. But what mother could stand not knowing what had become of her child? What mother would not try?

So, she rowed, and after an hour, the Mistwall hovered before her.

The water rippled and Marilde gasped, turning her head. A massive serpent emerged from the sea, its gaze as green as the shallow sea. All breath left her lungs.

It did not roar; it made no sound. It simply looked at her.

Marilde dropped to her knees in the flat-bottom boat. She tasted salt on her lips but paid it no heed. Her gaze never strayed from the green eyes of the sea serpent. Their gazes remained locked together, until some silent command drew the monster back into the deep.

When the City Watch came for her in their own rowboats, they found Marilde curled inside her own vessel, clutching her head, whispering her son's name.

The Charneault Kingdom

Hidden behind the magical forest of the Grove Maze, the Charneault Kingdom was once a land of honour and spirituality, with a deep connection to nature. Its countless rivers, lakes, and forests are regularly engulfed in a magical mist, which hides just as many castles and fortified villages. But now it is a land of broken vows, dark tales, and terrifying creatures lurking in the night. While the last elven city of Tol Leyemil faces a coup by the Dark Elves, King Thibault de Sauveterre can barely hold the kingdom together as he seeks a cure for the curse which the treacherous Dark Elves cast on his daughter.

Landscape

The Charneault Kingdom is a beautiful land nested between mountain, forest, and sea. To the northeast, a network of hills and groves called the Grove Maze cuts the kingdom off from the rest of Etharis and in particular, the Bürach. To the northwest lies the base of the Rockteeth Mountains sheltering the huge Elven city of Tol Leyemil. The kingdom's southwest is dominated by the rocky ocean coast, inhabiting the Waterteeth, a dangerous chain of misty swamps and islands.

The wind mainly blows from the sea, driving clouds along the rivers to the north, where they hit the Rockteeth and the Grove Maze. There they fall as torrential rains, feeding the many springs and streams that flow back down towards the centre of the region.

The Grove Maze

The Grove Maze is a range of wooded hills where adventurers easily get lost. It is said that the groves themselves move, while the rivers dry up or flood without warning.

The Thousand Rivers

The heart of the Charneault Kingdom is studded with hills, between which countless rivers flow. Where hills suddenly give way to a valley, rivers will converge and form a lake that remains covered in mist for most of the year.

The Mist

Said to originate from the Temple of the Mists in the south of the region, the mist will mysteriously appear and disappear in different areas, but almost always giving rise to magical manifestations.

History of the Charneault Kingdom

Caer Neiada, the Land of the Rivers

Elves had settled in the region many centuries before the arrival of humans.

The name Charneault derives from the name the elves used to call the region, “Caer Neiada” which means “the land of countless rivers”.

Arrival of the First Men

During the Era of Expansion, many tribes attempted to cross the Grove Maze. Only a few, led by the most level-headed and honourable leaders, were granted passage by the spirits of the forest, keeping the more barbaric tribes at bay.

First Contact with the Elves

The first tribes settled in the northeastern part of Caer Neiada where there were fewer rivers and more fields, facilitating the development of agriculture. After some time, they pushed toward the centre and finally encountered the elves in the heart of the river land. Relations between the two races were hostile at best, culminating in a war that would last generations and see the fall of the elven kingdoms.

The rise of King Aymeric

After an age of relentless war and the burning of the forests, the elven Lord Thuridan Sarador formed a delegation to personally negotiate with the humans. In what still is known as the Noble Sacrifice, he offered them his life in exchange for an end to the war, the security of Tol Leyemil, and the creation of a pact to share the land as equals.

The human warlords refused the pact at first, finding themselves in a commanding position and the elves almost defeated. However, it was the now exalted king of legend, Aymeric Noblecoeur, who raised his voice and fought for peace between the two peoples. Warchief Aymeric called attention to the wars between humans and the rest of the world and how they brought bloodshed and grief for all involved. From the near extinction of the gnomes to the destruction of the dragonborn's homeland, humanity had fallen far from the virtues of honour and justice. King Aymeric remarked that if they continue this war, they would be no different from the other human tribes of Etharis. With much work and every kind of diplomacy, Aymeric Noblecoeur at last convinced the other warlords to end the war, unify the tribes as one kingdom, and share the responsibilities of the land with the elves through the Pact of the Sacred Land. For this great and noble achievement he was crowned by both humans and elves as King Aymeric Noblecoeur, the first king of Charneault.

The Pact of the Sacred Land

The Pact of the Sacred Land outlines the peace between humans and elves, and their respective responsibilities in sharing the land.

It decrees that the king of Charneault, and each king that would come after him, must send his first daughter to the elven shamans, who will train her in their ways. The daughter is taken to serve in the Temple of the Mists for the rest of her days. The exact tasks she fulfils in the temple have never been revealed to any elf or human outside the Circle of Bondmakers. All attempts to circumvent this tribute have brought disaster upon the people of Charneault and so it is still upheld diligently to this day.

The pact between the two peoples also involves a clear distribution of the tasks necessary to protect the Charneault Kingdom. The Elves promised to help in appeasing the Spirits of Nature, responsible for strange and supernatural manifestations, wherever they happened. To put their words into action, they created the Circle of Bondmakers, a community of elven shamans who reside within the temple of mist and regularly wander the Kingdom to restore or strengthen their bond with the spirits, wherever they might cause trouble.

In return, the humans promised to maintain a permanent force of knights across the entire kingdom, with the exception of Tol Leyemil, to protect both the population and nature itself. Swearing to defend the forests their ancestors burned to the ground. They also promised to help elven refugees to migrate from outside the kingdom to Tol Leyemil. At that time several Knight Chapters were founded and assigned specific missions, such as patrolling the kingdom, guarding the borders, guarding the area surrounding Tol Leyemil, and escorting the Bondmakers.

The Dark Elf Curse

After centuries of peaceful existence between the Elves and Men of the Kingdom, relations took a grim turn as the elven population of Tol Leyemil became divided. As the rest of Etharis fell into darkness, more elves began to return to their homeland, preaching the heinous nature of humankind.

Errants of the Grove

This Knight Chapter is responsible for the Grove Maze, the rolling forest that separates the Charneault Kingdom from the rest of Etharis. They therefore chose to name themselves Errants of the Grove, as they spend most of their time wandering the Grove Maze in order to both push back any threat and welcome elven refugees. Tales speak of these knights holding a bridge on their own thanks to magical anomalies, posing riddles to wanderers attempting to gain passage to the Charneault Kingdom.

The situation worsened within the elven city when some elven leaders expressed greater ambitions over the land of the Kingdom. Claiming that Caer Neiada had been an elven territory for far longer than it had been inhabited by humans. They called for a retaking of their territory reserved for the elves beyond Tol Leyemil, to help spread the population which had come to the city. Factions developed for and against these claims. One of the most vindictive of these factions was the Dark Elves, who counted many sorcerers among their number. Impatient with the slow shift of opinion in favour of expansion, the Dark Elves seized the initiative in an attempt to escalate the situation.

What followed became known as the Dark Elf Curse, and caused endless grief to the most sensitive hearts of the human and elven populations.

Dark Elf thieves retrieved a book of forbidden spells from which Lord Sorcerer Diyanthar, the mightiest of the Dark Elf sorcerers, learned to take control of the Spirits of Nature, an act considered sacrilege by the elves. They enacted a ritual that would use the Mist to convey their enchantments across the Kingdom, defiling the very roots of the land and creating an opening for sorcerers to take control of spirits. The Dark Elves' leaders intended to bind the Spirits of Nature against their will to fight in the war to retake all of Caer Neiada. However, to accomplish such a task, they needed to sacrifice a pure heart. They seized the opportunity when the new king, Thibault de Sauveterre, came to Tol Leyemil to offer his daughter, Princess Tiphaine de Sauveterre, in keeping with the pact. A group of Dark Elves, disguised as the princess' official escort from Tol Leyemil, kidnapped the princess. They did indeed bring her to the Temple of Mists, but once there, Dark Elf sorcerers began their ritual with the princess at its nexus. Soon a dark mist appeared above the temple and alarmed the city of Tol Leyemil. By then it was too late to stop the ritual. Everything would have worked according to Diyanthar's plans, had not a valiant knight intervened.

Ser Guilhem le Preux is one of the most renowned knights of the Charneault Kingdom. He is first known for having sworn two mystic oaths with powerful spirits. But what made him truly renowned was his honorable yet unsatisfied love for Princess Tiphaine. Despite the Pact of Sacred Land, he asked for her hand and begged her royal father not to send her to the Temple of Mist. The princess was said to secretly return Guilhem's love, but neither would dare to go against the word of King Thibault. The king was deeply saddened by the situation as he felt in his heart that their love was true. But as king, he could not abandon the ancient pact, for fear of the consequences.

When Ser Guilhem heard the king's decree, he swore an oath to never love another than Princess Tiphaine and to live a life of a knight errant. But a short time after he left, the spirits with whom he had taken an oath contacted him to warn him that the princess was in grave danger.

He made haste to Tol Leyemil and found the group of Dark Elves sailing towards the Temple of Mists with her. He followed them and, thanks to his renewed magical powers, managed to reach the temple shortly after the ritual started. Gathering all his courage, he fought his way through the Dark Elf escort and managed to strike a blow to Diyanthar. The ritual was interrupted, but both Guilhem and Diyanthar were caught, alongside Princess Tiphaine, in a magical explosion when the ritual collapsed.

Of the ten elven shamans who were sent to the Temple of Mists to find out what happened, only the Grand Shaman Aethorion returned. He did not bring good news. The ritual had indeed been interrupted, but its effects had not been completely prevented, and from that day forth the Mist was unstable. Sometimes grey as it had ever been, it can also take on a dark taint which proves extremely dangerous; wherever it appears, it throws the Spirits of Nature into turmoil, making their manifestations far more dangerous. Dark tales of villages slaughtered by monstrous creatures led by Dark Elf sorcerers and bewitched dark knights began to spread in the land.

The Dark Elves and their allies fled from Tol Leyemil and headed to the dead city of Tol Kerdywel, hiding their movements with the Dark Mist. It is said that by doing so, they were following Diyanthar's last orders. No one apart from them knows what these orders were, but knowing their destination is enough to raise grave concerns—Tol Kerdywel is known to be the place where a lich princess lies, vanquished and banished ages ago by the elves of old.

There is no certainty about the fate of Princess Tiphaine and Ser Guilhem, but both have apparently been seen as apparitions in the Mists, calling for help to lift their curse. As for Diyanthar, he also seems to be trapped in the Mist, as no trace of him could be found anywhere in the Kingdom. But that does not mean he has become harmless, as each time he is seen in the mist, dark creatures appear shortly after...

People and Living beings

The People of the Charneault Kingdom

A fervent love for the land is the feature that best defines the people of the Charneault Kingdom. From the lower classes to the rich families there is a common saying: "Do not spoil, or be foiled." Many people devotedly work in agriculture or fishing the rivers, and nature usually has returned their care, rewarding the hard worker with heavy yields if he treats his land kindly.

The faith in the Spirits of Nature has become quite strong among the lower classes, who believe that not thanking the local Spirits is the best way to attract the Mist and troubles. This has sadly become even more strongly believed with the arrival of the Dark Mist, and not without good reasons. The life of a farmer had been relatively safe for generations but now it is far more dangerous. As the Mist intensifies, the most superstitious do not dare to go to the fields when the Mist is near, or signs of it, dark or not. This has led to disruption of agriculture in the entire kingdom and led to shortages, something unseen for many decades.

With the population in turmoil, the Kingdom turned to the knights for protection. Facing popular clamour, King Thibault authorised an increase in the numbers of each Knight Chapter in an attempt to restore order and the feeling of security. Knighthood being admired among the populous, it did not take long for many new applicants to be knighted, especially by the most ambitious Knight Chapters. However, this influx of new knights has also increased rivalry between Knight Chapters, and quarrels between opposing knights and their families have become frequent.

All in all, the people of the Kingdom are people used to enduring a life of labour and service to a higher cause.

Knighthood

The Quest

Knighthood is a highly codified institution in the Charneault Kingdom. Any squire willing to become a knight must first arm themself and leave their home on a quest. They bear a blank shield during their quest until they have accomplished their first deed of bravery. Once achieved, the squire can assert the right to bear a coat of arms on their shield. If the squire helped in some way to fulfill the mission assigned to a Chapter, they can then wear the arms of that Chapter.

The Mystic Oath

Sometimes during their quest, a knight might meet a Spirit of Nature and gain their trust through their noble acts and behaviour. The most renowned knights are those who have manage to enter the service of such a Spirit by taking an oath to protect and serve them until the Spirit chooses to release them.

In return, the knight is blessed with powers that vary widely depending on the Spirit to which the oath was taken.

Those few knights achieving such prowess are also granted a place on the Royal Council, a select council of knights that report directly to the king and who he trusts with the most important of envevours.

Elves

Bond with nature

The bond with nature has always been stronger for the elves than any other race of Etharis. From the many generations spent living in connection with nature, the elves have acquired many skills and deep knowledge. However, they have also developed a powerful sense of superiority towards humans, who are unable to feel the beating pulse of the world. Many elves suspect some significance in the fact that the gradual Rotting of the World has mostly coincided with the rise of humanity in Etharis. This has of course deepened the enmity between humans and other races, an enmity that has spread all over the world to varying degrees.

Decline and decadence

According to wise, ancient elves, the fact that Spirits of Nature are rarely seen elsewhere in Etharis is due to the Rotting of the World. Apart from a handful of locations hidden in the most remote parts of Etharis, the Charneault Kingdom seems to be the last region of the world where the Spirits of Nature are sometimes visible. Thus is it no surprise that only in Charneault are the elves openly maintaining bonds with the Spirits.

However the Rotting of the World has not left elves untouched, even in the protected land of Caer Neiada. Some have developed deviant behaviour and ideologies that threaten the cohesion of what remains of the elven civilization.

Spirits of Nature

Mystical creatures, usually invisible to humans, the Spirits of Nature are supposed to be present everywhere at all times according to the elven sacred texts. They are manifestations of the raw magical energy inhabiting water, earth, rocks, plants, and trees.

Maintaining balance between mystical forces

When the Mist falls upon a place, sometimes it will arouse manifestations from the nearby Spirits. The Spirits are very sensitive to the feelings of living beings in their territory and will react accordingly. Sometimes their manifestations are indirectly beneficial to inhabitants, but other times, when the spirit senses turmoil, it will react poorly. From mazes in which people can be lost for hours or even days, to illusions that trap people or curse them, the tales of malicious or dangerous manifestations have long stopped being counted.

Such situations have to be handled sooner or later, as they will otherwise almost always lead to the manifestation of monstrous creatures, set off by the anxious spirit. It is rare for the situation to go this far, but when it does only the intervention of an elven Bondmaker escorted by Vermeil Knights can settle the situation.

Dark Spirits

There are beings that none wish to mention too often: tales of creatures that should not exist, and of people that did exist... but vanished. When the Dark Mist spreads too far and too thick, creatures of darkness appear and spread terror. From werewolves to giant spiders, the tales are plentiful, and many of them are based on reality.

Such is the power of the dark magic that corrupts the noble Spirits of Nature and exploits their power. It is not a threat to be taken lightly, and King Thibault de Sauveterre has recently reinforced the Wind Walkers, the Knight Chapter in charge of scouting the land and carrying messages. The ability to respond quickly is a key asset in protecting the people against such dangerous manifestations.

PROVINCES

The Charneault Kingdom

History

The First King, Aymeric Noblecoeur

The name of Aymeric Noblecoeur has lasted through the centuries as the paragon of inner nobility. His honorable reputation is matched only by his physical stature. Tales of his height are so numerous that some even call him Aymeric Géantcoeur, the Giant-King. Other tales describe his sword, said to be the largest blade ever forged. The truth of these tales doesn't really matter though. Above all Noblecoeur is remembered for the Pact of Sacred Land that he signed with the elves of Tol Leyemil.

By gathering the human people of Caer Neiada under his authority, Noblecoeur ended decades of rivalry and conflict, enabling the human tribes to be a unified kingdom and end the conflict with the elves. This is what actually tipped the scales in favour of armistice and finally led to peace.

The Glorious Growth

Once a gathering of disparate tribes that had settled in Caer Neiada, over time Charneault developed into a powerful and wealthy kingdom. After the Pact of Sacred Land, the kingdom's population and wealth grew rapidly. Castles were constructed, and the roads to connect them. The most famous of these is Castle Lamesdhonneur, the capital of the kingdom, built between huge waterfalls. The network of new roads between settlements, guarded by the Knight Chapters, allowed people to travel safely and push the boundaries of the kingdom. Yet no one dared to settle too close to the dark area of Tol Kerdywel or in the forests surrounding the Temple of the Mists.

The Knight Chapters grew during this time, each chapter managing particular aspects of the kingdom's needs in order to maintain its course of progress.

Politics and Leadership

The Charneault Kingdom has always valued greatness of soul and heart above bloodlines. When the Kings dies or feels his time has passed, the Royal Council gathers to appoint his successor. As the Royal Council is composed of the most valiant knights, the new king is usually chosen from within their number. Succession to the throne is granted to the knight who has shown the most nobility in the service of the Kingdom. The most valuable deeds that determine the new king are swearing oaths with Spirits and the accomplishment of daring quests.

The Knight Chapters are powerful actors within the kingdom's politics, and their Chapter Masters are the most valiant and renowned knights. This positions them as obvious candidates for the throne.

One of the most influential Chapters among the knights are the Severe Templars. Once a minor entity, they rapidly grew in influence when the threat of Dark Elves emerged. Today they openly despise the elven civilization and would gladly revive the ancestral war. They consider Mystic Oaths to be foul sorcery and swear by force of arms alone. This state of mind aligns with their mission, which consists of maintaining law and order. They have strongholds near most important cities and castles in the kingdom, from which they send out their patrols. It is whispered in hushed voices throughout the land that the Severe Templars' Chapter Master Hermand le Sévère, who unsuccessfully competed toe-to-toe with Thibault de Sauveterre for the succession to the throne, is secretly plotting his revenge to take control of the kingdom.

The Vermeil Guards are another major Knight Chapter of the kingdom. Their sacred duty is to escort the Bondmakers, elven shamans, as they assist the kingdom to reinforce the bonds with the Spirits of Nature and thus maintain the peace. Only the most virtuous and devoted knights are accepted into this chapter, as it requires a true faith in the Pact of Sacred Land and in the symbiosis established between elves, humans, and nature. This mutual faith between the protector knights and the shamans grants superhuman capabilities to the knights. Once knighted, they wear vermeil armour—silver overlaid with gold—as a sign of respect and allegiance.

Economy

The Charneault Kingdom's economy relies heavily on agriculture and fishing. Hunting is limited by the great turmoil it provokes among the Spirits of Nature. Fishing, meanwhile, can be focused on intensively thanks to the many streams that weave their way through the kingdom. The Rockteeth mountains also house several mines that supply the kingdom's craftsmen, including the elven artisans of Tol Leyemil.

Exchange between the Charneault Kingdom and the outer world becomes less and less each year, as the Grove Maze is a barrier not worth crossing unless there is considerable profit to be had. The days when elves regularly travelled between Caer Neiada and other parts of Etharis are long gone and all but forgotten, and nowadays the Charneault Kingdom is almost an autarky.

Notable Persons and Locations

King Thibault de Sauveterre — Crowned only five years ago, the new king struggled to claim the throne in the face of dire competition from Hermand le Sévère, Chapter Master of the Severe Templars. Thibault prevailed by only a single vote. Even though he has a good reputation among the people, he has had to deal with many disruptions in the kingdom, not least of which is the reluctance of the other Knight Chapters. These travails would have been enough alone, without the recent events of the Dark Elf Curse.

The First Oath of Ser Guilhem le Preux

This is only one of the many short accounts of how Ser Guilhem le Preux took his first oath and gained his first title of Guilhem Vif-argent, the fastest knight of the kingdom.

After weeks of wandering in the distant island of Ian Calethyr, *either guided or led astray by whispers in the mist, Ser Guilhem finally reached a hidden sanctuary on the island's highest peak, just above a huge, rocky chasm. As he approached the sanctuary, the whispers became even more insistent, but the knight still could not see any of the disappeared children he was tasked to retrieve. The voices posed an enigma, calling for action. A strong wind rose.*

"What is the truest act of faith towards a power that has no voice, no wings, no teeth, no mouth, and yet screams, flies, bites, whispers?"

The knight stood in the howling wind for a long moment, and then, at once, he rushed towards the edge and jumped into the wind.

And the wind took him.

Tol Leyemil, the last elven free city

History

The origins of the elven settlement of Caer Neiada are lost to the night of time, as is the construction date of Tol Leyemil. However, many elves claim that Tol Leyemil is the most ancient elven city on this side of the Great Sea, and the city's impressive, convoluted, and worn-out architecture stands as proof of its immemorial age.

Detailed history of Tol Leyemil and the elves of Caer Neiada is hard to come by as the elves themselves don't like to share their history, or indeed their city, with humans. History books probably exist in the ancient libraries of the city, but they are well guarded and no human has been allowed to visit them to this day.

Even if the Green Elves, who prefer to live in communion with raw nature, are indeed the first elven group to inhabit Caer Neiada and have been the largest population in the city until recently, Tol Leyemil has always been a cosmopolitan place.

Elves of all origins have been freely accepted and welcomed since time immemorial, and this has further reinforced the legitimacy of the political system of the city.

Politics and Leadership

The city of Tol Leyemil and its surroundings are ruled by Achen Elavain, which could be translated in the common tongue as The Assembly of the Elves". It is a gathering of randomly designated elven citizens, who lead the city for a tenure of 20 years. Such a tenure is not overly-long for the elves, who can live for centuries. This system aims as much as possible to prevent personal ambitions from getting in the way of the greater good of the elven civilization.

Although not part of the Achen Elavain, the shamans, especially Bondmakers, are nonetheless important and influential actors in Tol Leyemil thanks to their unequalled ability to transmit the messages of nature. They are always represented in the official gatherings of the Assembly of Elves, although their opinions are strictly consultative. The Grand Shaman Aethorion is renowned even among shamans for his wisdom and foresight.

Economy

Much like the humans of the Charneault Kingdom, the elves rely heavily on fishing for their subsistence. Unlike the humans, however, they do not only fish in the rivers. As Tol Leyemil is a short river cruise to the sea, many fishing vessels come and go along the coast. The coast also shelters many well-maintained orchards that benefit from the temperate climate and provide heavy yields of fruits that are used for food and wines, the recipes for which are well-guarded secrets of the elven growers.

Trade between Tol Leyemil and the Charneault Kingdom used to flourish. The elves rely on Charneault cereals to feed their surging population, while humans of the Kingdom buy fruits, fine beverages, and sea fish from the elves. Though the demand still exists, things have worsened since the events of the Dark Elf Curse. Even if war has not returned, trust between elves and humans has been damaged, and trade has suffered as a result.

Notable Persons and Locations

Aethorion, Green Elf Grand Shaman — One of the mightiest sorcerers of his time, if not the very mightiest, Aetherion is the leader of the elven shamans, a renowned Bondmaker who walked the land for many decades. He is reputed to have the strongest connection to the Spirits of Nature ever seen, and through this to have gained the gift of foresight. His advice is given great weight by the Elven Assembly, to the continuing consternation of his main rival, Diyanthar.

Diyanthar, Dark Elf Lord Sorcerer — Ambitious, talented, and charismatic, Lord Sorcerer Diyanthar acquired an influential position in record time in Tol Leyemil. Some would argue that this meteoric rise was not unrelated to his skill with the magic of mind manipulation, a controversial branch of magical studies. His insatiable curiosity led him to delve deep into forbidden magical territory and pushed him to plot and execute the treason by the Dark Elves (and other elven followers) known as the Dark Elf Curse.

Thaelkinei, the Lich Princess — Thaelkinei was a wise and beautiful elven princess of ancient times. Only the oldest elven books contain any reference to her. In those ancient times, when the world was mainly inhabited by elves who themselves were still a young race, the elves made great progress in their insatiable search for knowledge. Thaelkinei was a sorceress who went too far in that search and disregarded the sacred bond between magic and nature.

When they discovered ways to control nature through magic, most elven sorcerers and sorceresses understood that they had found a limit that must not be crossed. To avoid catastrophe, they forbade the use of what would later be called dark magic. However, Thaelkinei was proud, even for an elf, and refused to stop studying. Her royal lineage, her thirst for power, and her deep cunning drove her to push even further. She conceived an immeasurably powerful spell, the Web of Ascendancy, that aimed not simply to control parts of nature or particular Spirits, but the entire land itself. She cast the spell from her castle of Tol Kerdywel, granting herself almost godlike powers: she could change the very form of the land or control any living creature in the region of Tol Kerdywel.

Only the alliance of several elven kingdoms from across the world was enough to counter the threat Thaelkinei posed, and the gathered elven sorcerers managed to create a counterspell. Even then, they could not completely overcome Thaelkinei's spell, so instead were forced to use another even more powerful forbidden spell: the Curse of Unchanging, a powerful magical web that engulfed the area of Tol Kerdywel and bound every living thing inside in a magical sleep. It was as if time had stopped entirely, for the people, the flora, and the fauna. This terrible spell still holds in Tol Kerdywel, and despite the danger, the region's supposedly unguarded wealth has attracted the boldest adventurers.

Other Notable Locations

The Temple of the Mists — At the south of the Charneault Kingdom lies the source of the Mists that regularly cover the land. The heart of the region is occupied by an ancient volcano, and the Temple of the Mists itself lies in what remains of its caldera, worn down by eons of erosion.

Although the crater still dominates the landscape, it is often hidden, at least in part, by the Mists. The intricate network of rivers, lakes and other streams that abound all around the volcano make it even harder to find one's way to the temple.

Therefore it is no surprise that no one foolish enough to attempt to reach the temple without invitation ever returns. Many in the Charneault Kingdom say that those who ventured to the temple were bewitched by malevolent Spirits, while others say that they actually found the temple, but are imprisoned there forevermore.

The only people capable of locating the Temple of Mists without guidance are the elven shamans that regularly perform rituals there.

They are bound to silence and will not willingly share the way to the temple. As yet no one has tried to force them, as they are powerful sorcerers.

A ceremony is regularly held in the temple to release the Mists. Many tales and stories speak of what the ceremony entails, and why the Mists are released on the Kingdom, but the truth is known only to the highest elven authorities and they will not share the secret. All they revealed when the Pact of Sacred Land was made was that the Mists must be released from the temple or the entire region would surely be thrown into darkness.

Tol Kerdywel — The western part of the Charneault Kingdom is a place even more dangerous than the Temple of Mists. Indeed it is a wicked land where the trees have no leaves and the waters are dark as night. This cursed land is dominated by the dead city of Tol Kerdywel, where Thaelkinei, the Lich Princess, lies dormant.

Dark Oak Grove — A halfling caretaker and her many companions once tended a wondrous forest of towering black oak trees on the outskirts of Tol Kerdywel. In her capable hands the grove flourished, and travelers from across the kingdom came to admire the wild sanctuary of rare and beautiful flora and fauna. In her spare time, the halfling took in sick and injured animals and nursed them back to health, maintained the underground springs, and tended to the trees, who she maintained whispered secrets of old to her.

However, travellers today will find no such splendour. The grove has become a place of death and decay. Its once-magnificent oaks have rotted from the inside out, spotted with mushrooms and furred tendrils.

The burbling springs that used to flow abundantly have turned to stagnant mires filled with quicksand and waterborne insects. The scent of wildflowers and pine has turned to rotting wood and the decaying corpses of half-eaten creatures. The animals of the grove in the time of the halfling fled shortly after her disappearance, and those that stayed became prey for the new predators who took up residence. Those who have attempted to cultivate the grove and restore its former beauty find that introduced species are eaten or perish from disease, plants wither and die from the now-salty soil, and the water is brackish and undrinkable.

Some say a terrible bargain was negotiated in order for such a foul place to persist, while others maintain that the grove is an extension of Tol Kerdywel. One thing is certain though: those who venture into Dark Oak Grove return permanently altered, as if the decay and stagnation have settled into their very being. They are plagued with dreams of death and cruelty, and often experience vivid hallucinations of being a walking corpse. Regardless of their destination, wise travellers avoid the grove at all costs.

The Shaded Haven — Settled by Kainen Alabaster, the Shaded Haven is a small lakeside village that serves as a sanctuary to many lycanthropes who have recently turned. The settlement boasts thriving fishing and agriculture, but export is limited to the neighbouring towns and villages within the Charneault Kingdom. Physicians can access the village's herb depository for medicinal ingredients, and use the crafting facilities there to make various elixirs and remedies. Some of the herbs grown in the depository are particularly rare and potent, and care must be exercised when mixing them. The depository's seer, Grechia, tends to the plants and is able to source cuttings of rare herbs for a small fee. Lycanthropes researching a cure for their curse frequently pillage the depository, much to the annoyance of Grechia and the village's physicians.

The Valikan Clans

Far to the north, at the frozen edge of the continent, lies Grarjord, the homeland of the Valikan. Each day, the hardy folk who dwell there face the dangers of the elements, the harshness of their faiths, and numerous wars fought in the name of their beliefs. Life is short among the Great Clans.

Landscape

The six clans of the Valikan subsist in one of the harshest regions in the world.

The southernmost part of Grarjord is still temperate, holding vast pine forests bounded by snow-covered mountains. Beyond the forests stretches the tundra known as the Pale March. Minor tribes survive here, hunting reindeer and other wild game.

At the northern edge of the Pale March lies a restless ice sea where dwell leviathans and other deadly creatures. Further northeast, closest to the North Pole, is Volgen, a frozen land where originates a strange and deadly phenomenon known as coldfire. In recent years, the coldfire crisis has connected Volgen to the mainland via an icy land bridge.

History of the Valikan

The clans maintain their history mostly through oral tradition, but in the Era of Expansion skalds made an effort to collect it all into a single work called the Lord Edda. This manuscript lists the history, poetry, and legends of the Valikan.

The Primordial Land

According to legend, in the early days of the world mortals could not survive in the northern lands as they were occupied by elementals with godlike power. The domains of fire, water, air, and earth shifted the region so much that it was in a constant state of flux.

Chief of the elementals was Gormadraug, the Great Prismatic Wyrm, a serpent of colossal size, strength, and powers beyond any other primordial.

All the other elementals bowed to it as their prince. Where Gormadraug walked, coldfire erupted, consuming all living things.

The Tale of Kentigern

It came to pass that a hero rose up to be a champion of mortals. Kentigern of the Wastes, seeking an end to the nomadic lifestyle of his tribe, headed north with six companions: the sorceress Rune, Sýr the Seven-Bladed, Völgr Clad-in-Iron, Limgri Lightbringer, Morgöng Shadestrider, and Mithra of the Silver Harp.

The Seven Heroes travelled into the northlands, seeking to tame the region for settlement. After numerous battles against a horde of elementals, they faced off against the Great Wyrm Gormadraug itself.

The Great Wyrm promptly swallowed them all. But even in the belly of the beast, all was not lost. The Seven discovered that Gormadraug's heart was close to its stomach. While Mithra played her harp to lull the Wyrm to sleep, Sýr, Völgr, and Kentigern drove their blades into the monster's heart. Thus was Gormadraug defeated.

With the blessings of their ancestors, the heroes used the monster's body to form new lands. Its flesh became the land, its spine the mountains, its scales gems and precious metals, and its blood the frost-covered sea.

Thus was the North tamed. The ice receded from the land, and animals and vegetation grew among the snow. Before long, the mortal races emigrated to Grarjord and founded their own tribes. Six clans arose, each one taking on the name of one of the legendary heroes that killed the Great Wyrm.

Yet the legends also state that Gormadraug was not truly defeated—that it is merely sleeping, and the day will come when it will rise again with its elemental brethren to consume the world.

Thorgard's Saga

One of the many notable heroes in the Lord Edda is Thorgard, a figure of such epic tales that some believe he is an amalgamation of various chieftains and heroes throughout Valikan oral history.

A thousand years since the fall of the Great Wyrm, the various Valikan clans were at each other's throats over territory and resources. Split by numerous petty wars, the Northerners were easy pickings for colonisers from the southern empires.

The half-orc hero Thorgard is said to have originated from Clan Völgr on the island of Holgar. Seeing the chaos and suffering brought about by Valikan disunity, he sought the help of a hag who could see into the future. The hag told him that he could unite the clans by taking on the role of their war chief and leading them on a campaign against the foreign invaders. The hag advised Thorgard to tell the clans that he was the reincarnation of Kentigern, First Hero of the North. To help with the tale, he needed to find an artifact similar to Kentigern's legendary weapon Bane-Slayer, a magical double-bladed sword—one blade covered in frost, the other in flames.

Thorgard went on a quest for such a weapon and did manage to find it. What he did not realise for some time was that he had discovered Kentigern's real weapon, the Bane-Slayer. Thus the legend of Thorgard began with a self-fulfilling prophecy.

With the weapon in hand, he traveled throughout Grarjord, facing each clan and bringing them into his steadily growing army. Some leaders he convinced through diplomacy, others through acts of service. With his mortal enemy, the Sarvif of the Sýr Clan, he fought a duel to the death that lasted three days and nights. With that victory, all six clans united under Thorgard's banner, their swords and axes sharpened, and their longships lining each harbor.

With his army, Thorgard moved against the foreign invaders. He raided their coastal settlements and drew out their armies into the field. A great battle was fought in the tundra, and within a season, the foreigners were driven south, their colonies abandoned. The North was free once more.

His victory complete, Thorgard decided to expand the borders of the Valikan. He took a fleet of longboats and headed west to look for more lands to conquer. He was not heard from since.

The Schism

A hundred years of peace between the Clans followed Thorgard's ill-fated expedition. But in time, cracks formed in the Clans' unity.

In the western island of Holgar, an order of druids known as the Prismatic Circle arose. Their tenets held that only war and bloodshed could keep the world safe from the reawakening of the Gormadraug. Several clans followed their teachings, banding together to form the province of Thrull.

In the east, another province arose in opposition to the Prismatic Circle: Kandar. The Kandarians accepted races and creeds from other empires and tried to dispel old superstitions about the Great Wyrm. They have advocated for peace and trade instead of the old Valikan ways of war and raiding.

The two sides soon came to blows over their beliefs, and thus began the Thrull-Kandar War.

The Coldfire Crisis

Some one hundred fifty years after Thorgard's disappearance, coldfire reappeared once more in Grarjord.

This strange and deadly phenomenon resembles bluish flames that burns on ice, snow, vegetation, and animals. Any liquid or living material it comes into contact with burns like oil. Water cannot douse it and only the hottest flames can put it out.

Coldfire swept across the peninsular of Volgen, turning it into a wasteland of ice spires. In just a handful of years, it created a new glacier that reached all the way to the tundra. Now it threatens all life on Grarjord.

The Order of Kentigern, a group of monks sworn to uphold the tenets of the First Hero, have set up a fortress at the mouth of the ice bridge, working constantly to stop the spread of coldfire.

Unfortunately, recent years have seen coldfire spontaneously erupt in several locations around Grarjord. No one knows why this is happening, but all who live there fear it will spell the end for all Grarjord.

PROVINCES

Thrull

Within western Grarjord lies the land of Thrull, a forbidding land dotted with icy peaks and frozen forests. While the land shows hints of green from afar, its soil is of poor quality for farming. Thus those who live there feed themselves the only way they can—by taking from other lands. Upon the island of Holgar lies their capital, the harbor city of Tyburn, a central port for longships.

History

Three clans settled on the island of Holgar: the Rune, who embody elemental magic best; the Sýr, great metalsmiths; and the Völgr, a warrior society. Though the three feuded time and again over land and grazing rights, they generally maintained cooperative ties with each other.

The disappearance of Thorgard, left the clans with a power vacuum. Warlords immediately began vying for control of Grarjord. But one individual took a different course. On Holgar, an elemental druid named Kybard gained power by advocating a strange belief: that Gormadraug still lives but sleeps beneath the earth and sea. Should it awaken, it would bring about the end of the world. To keep it in slumber, the Valikan must follow the time-honoured traditions of Thorgard: war, raiding, and bloodshed.

Though originally met with opposition, Kybard's teachings found adherents among the clan leaders. The three largest clans—the Rune, the Sýr, and the Völgr—joined together under Kybard's banner and called their province Thrull.

Of the three great clans, Clan Rune is the most adept at magic, creating runestones that store spells that they can activate during combat. Their chief, Ordun, remains outwardly loyal to the Prismatic Circle but is intent on pursuing independence from their rule.

Clan Sýr is focused on expanding their economy, and has heavily invested in slaves to man their forges. Their weaponsmithing is famous throughout Grarjold.

Finally, Clan Völgr is the most loyal to the Prismatic Druids. They regularly provide captives, slaves, and criminals as human sacrifices for the Circle's rituals. At times, the rivers of the land run red with the blood of these victims.

Politics and Leadership

Thrull is a province ruled by druids, who maintain a spiritual link with the primordial forces of the world. While the three chieftains of the clans maintain some independence, they generally bow to the will of the Prismatic Circle, making Thrull a de facto theocracy.

The people of Thrull regularly raid other settlements outside their lands, particularly those in Kandar. The druids ritually sacrifice slaves and captives beneath sacred trees, all to deepen the slumber of the Great Wyrm. Travelers from Thrull tell gruesome stories of forests where skinned and gutted men hang from the boughs of ancient oaks.

At this time, the leader of the clans is Chief Nolgr Magnusson of the Völgr, Keeper of the Three Tribes. Magnusson enjoys the approval of the Circle, and cannot be easily dislodged from his position through force of arms alone. A warmonger, Magnusson is more interested in earthly rewards and regularly sends raiding parties to attack Kandar towns and cities.

Economy

Most of the Thrull economy is derived from their traditions of raiding and slavery. The Thrull have perfected the art of raiding: longboats carry small contingents of warriors aided by druids. The druids command the tides to carry the ships swiftly through the sea, and allowing them to approach their victims under cover of fog. Etharian ships and ports have learned to fear the coming of the sea mists.

Fishing, hunting, smithing, and whaling round off the list of the Thrull industries. Trade is kept within the three clans: the Rune produce elixirs and enchanted runestones, the Sýr forge weapons, shields, and armour, and the Völgr train fighters. A black market exists for trading with other nations, but this practice is forbidden by the druids, who want to maintain the Thrull's isolationist stance.

Notable Individuals

Hjadana — The Grand Druid of the Prismatic Circle, spiritual leader of the Thrull people, and the true power behind the government, Hjadana truly believes that their way of living is saving the world from a great menace. Thus she exhorts each chief to continue the war against any who stand against them.

The Grand Druid dwells within a hollow hill, surrounded by a fortress composed of living oak trees. Within this sacred area, she can command air and earth elementals to aid her.

Hjadana sees the Coldfire Crisis as a sign that the Great Wyrm is almost awake, and thus she commands all the clans to intensify their raids and sacrifices.

Lief Sarvif — Once a slave, Lief killed his master rather than allow himself to be sold to the druids for ritual sacrifice. He then fled into the wilds where, as luck would have it, he was bitten by a werewolf.

Lief soon learned to control his own inner beast. Freeing other slaves, he created a pack of werewolves and settled on a small island southwest of the mainland. He has since built a small army from rescued slaves and other like-minded individuals. Twenty times the Thrull clans have sent a warlord to put down his rebellion and that many warlords have died in the attempt.

Lief has declared his sanctuary free of the Prismatic Circle's influence.

While he holds no love for the Kandarians, Lief is shrewd enough to use their help to maintain his personal war. To date, he has opened channels with the Redclaw faction in Kandar for a mutual defense treaty.

Grenhildr — Any theocracy eventually creates its own nemesis, and so it is for the Prismatic Circle. A former druid of the Prismatic Circle, Grenhildr was excommunicated for her belief that the Great Wyrm holds the key to the world's salvation and thus should be revived. She believed that slaying elementals would eventually wake Gormadraug. To the shock and disgust of the Circle, she sacrificed several of the druids' elemental guardians in an unholy ritual to the Great Wyrm.

Raid

The sea mists parted, revealing the Thrull longship slipping silently across the water. On reaching the shore, the war band shoved the captives—twenty young men in all—onto dry land.

As they approached the slave camp, a Prismatic Druid greeted them with open arms. "I am Olan," he announced to the captives, "a son of the Circle. Know that your lives and souls are now the property of the druids."

The camp teemed with bound prisoners, all sitting in wooden cages. They had come from all over Grarjord: men, women, and children from all races. The newcomers gazed at them with fearful despair. The empty looks the captives gave back only confirmed what they had been told.

"Do not fear what tomorrow may bring," the Druid continued. "Rest in the full knowledge that from today your lives will serve a greater purpose. The honourable nation of Thrull strives each day to hold back the rise of the Great Prismatic Wyrm, and each of you will be instrumental in that task."

As the new captives were dragged towards the cages, one of the men shouted, "You druids are a curse upon this land! You're the true monsters!"

The air thinned as a collective breath was drawn. The Druid raised his hand to halt the guards, glaring at the man who had spoken. "Perhaps some of you are only useful for one thing, after all."

He motioned to his men. They dragged the lone captive to a nearby oak and trussed him against the trunk.

The druid stood before him.

Now that he was isolated, an eerie calm had fallen upon the young man. "None of you druids will live a day longer than I," he said. "This I swear upon my name."

The druid smiled and stepped closer. "And what is your name, that I may write it in the Book of the Damned?"

"I am Lief Sarvif, and I am a monster too."

The Druid had only a second to register the name before the young man's face transformed into a wolf's and long, strong jaws caught the druid's head in a crushing grip. A piercing, agonised scream froze every guard in the camp. But more screams joined them as the other captives also transformed into wolfmen, breaking their bonds and hurling themselves upon the Thrull soldiers.

Some unknown time later, a human, blood-covered Lief opened the cages for the rest of the cowering prisoners. Once every captive had been freed, he addressed them.

"You are all free to take the boats and return to your homes. But for those who no longer have homes to return to, those who have had all they loved taken away, those who wish to inflict that same suffering upon the Thrull, I bid you follow, and I will show you a different way."

Most of the freed folk took to the boats. But a few did stay, as Lief had hoped. And with every new member of his pack, both the druids and Thrull had more reasons to fear the night and the moon.

Grenhildr was chased out of Thrull, but she was not deterred. Before long, she formed her own doomsday cult. The Cult of the Wyrm now stalks the land, killing mortals and elementals alike in a bid to revive Gormadraug. The reappearance of coldfire has only emboldened them, as they see it as a sign of their master's imminent return.

Kandar

The province of Kandar formed as a direct response to Thrull's incursions. Seeking mutual defense against a vastly superior force, the three clans of Limgri, Morgöng, and Mithra banded together to create a unified front.

History

Composed of three clans that rejected the supremacy of the elemental druids, Kandar seeks to thrive by assimilating elements of other cultures. Kandar's survival is on the line: it is currently at war with Thrull, while trying to resist attempts by other empires to influence its rule, and also facing the coldfire menace that threatens all the Valikan lands.

Clan Mithra, the most diplomatic of the three clans, was the first to establish trade relations and embassies with other lands. The most cultured of the clans, Mithra produced the Lord Edda and maintains the lore and history of Grarjord.

Clan Limgri has assimilated religions from other cultures and hopes to use their divine power to counter that of the elemental druids. Limgri has taken control of Cold Iron Keep, a prison for the most powerful enemies of Kandar.

Finally, Clan Morgöng runs the spy and black market networks of Kandar. Very little happens around Grarjord without their knowledge.

Politics and Leadership

Though most of the populace is still arranged into clans, the leaders choose one person as the single leader during wartime. Their current war chief, Queen Andrea Helsing of Mithra, seemingly holds the three clans together through will alone. The chiefs of the three clans hold court together at the Mithran capital of Hrist, though they spend most of their time arguing over how best to deal with incursions from Thrull.

Of late, the Bürach Empire has been providing military support to Kandar. They have also made overtures about making Kandar a protectorate of the Empire in exchange for greater military aid. The question is currently up for a bitter debate in the queen's court.

Economy

Kandar lies at the end of the Caravan Way, the main artery of trade with other nations. Its proximity to neighbors allows Kandar to profit from trade, providing fish, furs, lumber, and produce from what meager farming can be done in their cold climate.

The recent discovery of an herb known as Dreams Leave, which works as a powerful anesthetic, has also shaped Kandar's trade. Normally used in herbology, the root is also traded on the black market as an addictive drug. Kandarian authorities have tried to crack down on the sale of the substance, but have been largely unsuccessful due to manpower being diverted to the war effort.

Kandar's economy flags due to the war with Thrull, the incursion of coldfire onto their lands, and the destabilising effects of these on trade relations with other countries.

Notable Individuals

Thrulldr — The leader of the Redclaws, a circle of druids that oppose the Prismatic Circle. Each of the Redclaw druids is a shapeshifter, and Thrulldr himself is a werebear. The Redclaws advocate balance between mortals and nature, and have styled themselves protectors of the forest and all that live within. They fight for balance, the eradication of corrupted beasts, and an end to the Prismatic Druid's monstrous practices.

The Redclaws hold exacting tests for those who would join their ranks. They understand that the process of becoming a werebear is both excruciating and permanent, and not for the faint of heart. Of every hundred trainees, only three make it into their honoured ranks.

Odis — An elven mage and scholar from the southern lands. Drawn to the legends of the North, he embarked on a quest to investigate the Great Wyrm and the coldfire phenomenon. He has found other legends suggesting that the ongoing bloodshed in the northlands is causing the Great Wyrm to wake up.

Sanrun — The head abbot of Fort Kentigern, Sanrun has made it his life's mission to defend Grarjord from the coldfire threat.

His Order of Kentigern, formerly devoted to a life of monastic contemplation, now stands at the front lines against this menace. At the first hint of blue fire, they ride on ice drakes and other mounts across the frozen wastes to drop burning oil and explosive runes on the coldfire to stop its spread.

In the past, Kandar has provisioned the Order to keep up its defence, but as the war with Thrull escalates, the Order has become increasingly isolated and undersupplied.

Other Locations of Interest

Cinderghast— Northeast of the mainland lies a group of volcanic islands that serve to imprison a host of fire elementals.

In ancient times, the sorceress Rune aided the Seven Heroes in taming the wilds. Among the holdouts of the primordials was an army of fire elementals under the banner of Ixlalu, a salamander of great power. However, Rune discovered that Ixlalu's magic staff was the true source of his power. She stole it from his vault and used it to curse their entire island, turning it into a prison that would hold them captive for thousands of years.

Of late, Rune's curse appears to be weakening. Fire elementals have been seen testing the boundaries of the island, searching for a way out.

Frostmere — On the western edge of the great tundra is a perpetually frozen lake, at the heart of which stands a great fortress of ice. This is Frostmere, the stronghold of the Melwarg, evil frost giants led by King Olag.

The Melwarg are not natives to Grarjord, but exiles from across the western sea who searched for lands to claim as their own. From Frostmere, they raid Kandar and have been known on occasion to join Thrull war parties.

Unlike the elementals, the Melwarg do not wish for the return of the Gormadraug and do anything in their power to suppress its worship. They have declared themselves mortal enemies of the Cult of the Great Wyrm and attack its members on sight.

Volgen — Far to the northeast, where blizzards rage and the aurora blankets the night sky, lies an icy wasteland where the coldfire rages unchecked.

Volgen is a jagged peninsular that is said to be the resting place of Gormadraug's heart.

Volgen has few distinct landmarks. The land is covered entirely in jagged ice spires and outcroppings. Ice floes float on the surrounding ocean, making it treacherous for wooden ships.

Various expeditions have been sent into Volgen to investigate the coldfire phenomenon, with little success. The inhospitable terrain, the bitter cold, and the ever-present danger of a coldfire outbreak have forced each expedition to turn back or die; not many escape with their lives.

Those who have returned report seeing mysterious figures roaming the icy wastes. If it is true, how they could have survived in Volgen is a great mystery, nearly as much as the question of what they are doing there to begin with.

Cold Iron Keep — In the east of Kandar, high in the Jakkan mountain range, lies a castle that serves as the prison for Kandar's most dangerous druids, criminals, and madmen.

Cold Iron Keep was first raised from the stones of Jakkan by the evil mage Mordu. From there, he preyed on the local populace and traveling merchants, sacrificing hundreds of innocents to otherworldly beings in his bid for power. Eventually, he was overthrown by heroes. The locals ransacked his castle but otherwise left it intact. Cold Iron Keep stayed empty for many years until it was appropriated by the leaders of Kandar and converted into a prison.

Numbered among the Keep's inmates are:

Jormund, a unique vampire frost giant who is shunned even among his own kind. He is kept in a state of torpor inside a quartz coffin while mages from Kandar study his condition.

Astar, a powerful sorceress who, in the process of trying to achieve unearthly beauty, caused her features to become so unspeakably hideous that one look can turn a person into solid stone. She is forced to wear an iron mask while she is incarcerated.

Riven, a cultist who appears to have gained the ability to steal a person's face and absorb their life essence.

Sumac, a man whose very words are poison—who can kill another just by speaking and force others to do his bidding.

And finally, Gorm, known to many as the Heir of the Wyrm, a man who continually burns with coldfire from head to foot yet is not consumed. No one knows his origins. Having been driven quite mad, Gorm claims to know the secrets of Volgen and the Great Wyrm, and promises that the end of the world will begin the instant his foot touches the snow once more.

Fort Kentigern — At the edge of the ice bridge that links Volgen to the mainland is the fortress of the Order of Kentigern. What once was a monastery is now a high keep built to withstand a siege, with tall towers and parapets equipped with burning oil. But these defenses were not built against any mortal siege. Indeed, no army has dared to attack the fort in hundreds of years.

Rather, the Order of Kentigern is Grarjord's first line of defense against the encroaching coldfire menace from Volgen. The ten-foot thick walls of the fortress hide catapults and trebuchets that can fire burning pitch. Ice drakes carrying bombardiers can take off in moments at the first sign of blue flame. Evoker mages can hurl fireballs from the topmost ramparts.

No effort is spared from preventing coldfire from reaching the mainland. All those within the keep know the consequences should coldfire reach the land of Kandar.

Against the Fire

Jenna raised her head from her pillow at the clanging of the bells. The alarm, which meant only one thing.

By the time she had put on her furs, Captain Hoar, her mentor and adoptive father, had assembled the squadron in the courtyard. Coldfire had been spotted near Cinnabar, a fishing town twenty miles north of the Fort. The Order of Kentigern was needed once more.

Jenna pinned her lieutenants badge just in time to order them onto the ice drakes. Their mounts shook their wings and wove their necks through the air, eager for action. She ran one final check on their explosive satchels, then hauled herself onto her saddle. It was time to go.

The ice drakes leaped into the air and took flight. Within half an hour, they were within sight of Cinnabar.

The coldfire had turned the town into a massive, smokeless conflagration of blue flames and icy mist. Everywhere she looked, Jenna saw people, animals, and entire houses frozen into blocks of ice. Streams of refugees were fleeing towards the hills. Some had lit bonfires and were trying to fight back the flames, to no avail.

On Captain Hoar's orders Jenna took two squadmates to the southern part of the town. Their goal: keep the coldfire from spreading towards Kandar. On her signal, they lit the fuses and dropped their satchels, which exploded on the tundra. After dropping a few barrels of oil, they had raised a wall of flames.

Jenna wheeled to rejoin the rest of the squadron. One look at the town below told her enough: it could not be saved. Nearly all the buildings had been sealed in ice, and despite the bombing runs the coldfire was burning higher than ever. But the ice drake saddles were empty of satchels. They had to retreat.

One of the men was signalling wildly towards something far below. A man wielding a torch stood in the town square, holding two children close to his body. They were surrounded by blue flames.

Jenna wheeled her mount for a dive, but a sharp whistle cut her short. Captain Hoar signalled her to take over the squad, then took the dive himself. He and his drake vanished behind a blanket of mist.

Swallowing a painful lump in her throat, Jenna ordered the squadron to land at the outskirts where the townsfolk had gathered. There, they waited for their captain's return.

Moments later, an ice drake hurtled out of the blue inferno, its tail and part of its jaw crusted in ice. It crashed onto the ground near the squadron. Immediately, the wizards in their number rushed forward to put out the coldfire on its scaled body with heat spells.

On the drake's back were two children, brother and sister, their faces lined with frozen tears. Of their father and Captain Hoar, there was no sign.

Days later, a funeral was held for both. Jenna was there, fighting back tears as she placed a wreath upon the rowboat that would be burned out at sea. Her captain's insignia sparkled beneath the weak arctic sun.

The Castinellan Provinces

Scorched and hardened by the ruthless heat and wind, the people of Castinella are fierce, festive, and faithful. The southernmost part of Etharis offers both great opportunities and great challenges to those brave enough to seize them. Sailing, farming, mining, warring—nothing is outside the Castinellans' potential, backed by the strength of their rigorous codes and passionate faith.

The teachings of the Divine Arch Seraphs—especially Empyreus, Arch Seraph of Valor—have slowly but surely transformed the provinces into a militarist theocracy, with a fierce mistrust of spellcasters. But recently, new challenges to the sacred Seraphic Teachings have thrown the population into disarray. Conflict has escalated to the point where the Arcanist Inquisition has launched a crusade to burn every magically gifted being in the Castinellan Provinces... and beyond.

Landscape

The Castinellan Provinces are a harsh land pincered between mountain and sea. It is a windswept peninsula, bounded by sea to east and west, with an irregular mountain spine running from north to south. The west coast faces the Gulf of Lions, where trade routes lead towards the city-state of Morencia and the Charneault Kingdom. The east coast is wilder and less inhabited, exposed to the strong winds from the Great Eastern Sea.

Although the sea is never far, the provinces mostly suffer from a dry climate, due to the combined effects of constant winds and scorching heat. In that context, water has become the most precious resource, and the bigger cities have emerged on the shores of the few rivers flowing from the mountains, or, in the case of the great Salves River, from the northern part of Etharis.

The Mines of Corova

The mountain spine running north to south through Castinella has its foothills in Corova, the northern part of Castinella. There, many mining towns have emerged to exploit the numerous minerals available.

Faro Riverlands

In the South of Castinella, the Salves splits into two huge branches before flowing into the sea. The land around and between the river arms is the most fertile of all Castinella, and high forests stand on the riversides wherever the land has not been cleared for farming.

Vineyards of Sante Viegre

In the southernmost part of Castinella, the mountain chain abruptly breaks up into many strange mountain protrusions called the Shattered Peaks, with the Dragonborn city of Ember Cairn in their centre. Many small rivers run between these peaks, and the area, called Sante Viegre, has become dense with vineyards.

History

The Great War

In the Era of Expansion, war between humans and other races in Castinella and threatened to engulf all of Etharis. With most details lost to the past, only the greatest tragedies of the time are remembered, and one such is the destruction of Ember Cairn.

The south of Castinella was once the homeland of the Dragonborn race, and Ember Cairn was their most ancient and glorious city. But the Great Purge saw it destroyed, and legends tell that the mountains themselves were shaken in the catastrophe, and thus shaped into the Shattered Peaks.

With their homeland destroyed, the Dragonborn scattered throughout Etharis, avoiding further involvement in the war and searching for new meaning.

The Story of the Unifier

Long after the events of the Great War, three provinces of Toletum, Faro, and Therpena took shape in Castinella, and continuously fought over the rich but unforgiving lands until they reached a violent equilibrium. Each time one province gained a dominant position, the other two would ally to bring it down and restore the stalemate. Therefore, none of the belligerents managed to overcome their counterparts for good until the time of Montego Valieda, the Unifier.

Valieda was the perfect example of Castinellan valor, but he was also a clever strategist.

Born in the foothills of the Corova mountains, he led the Toletum forces to victory against both its rivals. However, he knew that without a significant advantage the Corovans could not prevail in the long term, as history had proven.

Valieda departed to wander the highest part of the mountains, a particularly dangerous area subject to sudden, violent storms, and reputedly unexploitable for mining. Whether by destiny or luck, Valieda was spared from the storms and came back, claiming to have had a revelation from the Arch Seraph Empyreus. The Sword Saint, as many called Empyreus, had apparently invested Valieda with the holy task of unifying all Castinellan Provinces, not under the rule of Corova or any other province, but under the sacred rules of the Arch Seraph himself. To help in this task, Valieda claimed, the Seraph had led him to a hidden valley where he revealed an exceptional vein of gold. Valieda quickly hired miners to exploit the vein and thus fuel Corova's economy and war effort.

Valieda proclaimed his new allegiance to Empyreus and his intention of transforming Castinella into a theocracy, to put an end to the exhausting wars between the three provinces. His words became a motto that is still spoken by many clerics, priests and inquisitors:

"He who fights for himself shall fear death, for his steps are led by lust, and his deeds will fall into oblivion.

But he who fights for Empyreus fears nothing, for his steps are led by the Eternal Dogma, and his deeds pave the way towards the Golden Age."

Valieda and his followers proceeded to spread the teachings of the Arch Seraph to the three provinces. In time they gained complete theocratic influence over the provinces of Faro and Therpena, as their newly formed religion gained more war-weary followers. Finally, when they were unable to rally the last remnants of resistance to the holy cause, they overcame them either by gold or by iron and fire.

The Rise of the Arcanist Inquisition

After unifying the three provinces, Sagrado Valieda ordered the creation of the religious order called the Arcanist Inquisition, whose function was to control and limit the use of magic in the provinces. According to what the Arch Seraph Empyreus had told Valieda, magic was a curse that endangered its wielders and everyone who associated with them.

The Inquisitors patrolled the provinces, spreading their teachings about the dangers of magic, stirring mistrust in the population. After some time, they began to arrest those known to be magically gifted and brought them to their cells, where they would supposedly live a life of humble service to the Arch Seraph. The Inquisitors were eager to find these people at the youngest possible age, as they claimed the threat of magic could be more easily contained in the young whose magical abilities had not fully emerged.

Sagrado Valieda later returned to the land of the Shattered Peaks among the Dragonborn. As missionaries of the Arch Seraph Empyreus spread their teachings across Etharis, some Dragonborn migrated back to the Castinellan Provinces. After centuries of wandering and resentment from the abandonment of their dragon gods, the scattered Dragonborn people had left behind their ancestral religion. Hence, they showed little hesitation to take hold of the new light that Empyreus offered. Seeing this, Sagrado Valieda seized the opportunity to strengthen Castinella and the Empyreus theocracy even more. He announced that all Dragonborn were welcome to reconstruct their former city of Ember Cairn, fallen eons ago, as long as they were raising it to the glory of Empyreus. As the Dragonborn were now the most zealous followers of the Divine Seraph, Valieda made Ember Cairn the headquarters of his newly created Arcanist Inquisition and raised the Cathedral of Embers.

Recent Events

With the three provinces unified and a growing new state religion, the next step for the Castinellan Provinces was to turn their ambitious gaze outside, to the north and west. The city-state of Morencia was reaching its apogee, so it was a valuable and challenging target for the servants of the Divine Seraph Empyreus. After a few decades of unsuccessful intrigues and power struggles, the Castinellans took up arms and launched a surprise attack on Morencia. By suborning a member of the Morencian Navigators Guild, the Castinellan fleet was able to pass through the island-city's magical barrier, the Misty Reefs. However, the intervention of the Charneault Kingdom ruined the Castinellan plans, and though they inflicted heavy losses to the Morencian fleet, they finally lost the naval battle.

One of the ships within the defeated armada, the Fiery Lady, was cast adrift and driven far to the south, then to the east, by relentless winds. At this point, the ship had completely run out of supplies, but the crew had finally repaired the ship enough to control its course, and headed to the northwest in hope of finding land before they starved. But they made a surprising discovery during their approach to the coast: the submerged ruins of what seemed to be a vast complex. Unable to explore the ruins at the time, the captain noted enough information to find the ruins again in the future. Yet at that moment Castinellan society was turned towards the future, and the clergy proclaimed the ruins nothing more than more proof of mistakes made in the past.

Some time later, however, rumours spread within Castinella that the Thaumaturge, a powerful confederation of archmages, had infiltrated the Castinellan Provinces and was about to take action against the theocracy. It is unknown if the rumours had anything to do with the discovery of the ruins, or with the Castinellan Provinces' provocative attack on Morencia, but the rumours spread all over the provinces, accusing the magic-hating theocracy of a hidden, hypocritical agenda.

These rumours were officially denied and declared heretical, a brand that extended to anyone even repeating the rumours. The Arcanist Inquisition launched the Great Purge in the provinces, redoubling their efforts to find spellcasters and, this time, to burn them. The same terrible fate also awaits anyone caught calling the Seraphic Teachings into question.

PROVINCES

Since time immemorial there have been three provinces in this wind blasted southern part of Etharis. Though they are now united under the banner of the Divine Arch Seraph Empyreus, each province still holds notable particularities.

Toletum

Toletum is the house of power in the Castinellan Provinces, fueled by the mines of the Corova Mountains, and home of the region's most renowned military companies.

Administrative Centre of the Provinces

Since the establishment of the theocracy to the glory of the Arch Seraph Empyreus, Toletum has grown into a huge, industrious city that administers the affairs of all the Castinellan Provinces. Settled in a large curb of the Salves, just under the main massif of the Corova mountains, Toletum is an obligatory crossing point between the south of Castinella and the rest of Etharis. Merchants coming buying Castinellan goods or selling their own, official envoys, and convoys from the three provinces all converge on the city.

The Arch Basilica of Empyreus is the main complex where the rigorous laws of Castinella are made and amended, with the common denominator that all must follow the precepts of Empyreus.

It is not a surprise that the Watchers of the Faithful, a militant faction dedicated to serving the faith of the Arch Seraphs, have established their headquarters in Corova. Their High Priest Nola Cirdanal is a zealous follower of Empyreus and on good terms with the Castinellan clergy, who the Watchers offer generous discounts on their service in expeditions against the enemies of the true faith.

The Ember Forge

Fueled by a constant flow from the mines of the Corova mountains, the Ember Forge occupy a vast area just downstream of the city, half built on the river to allow easy access to the water required to quench their handiwork. The forges never stop, filling the entire area with constant noise and smoke that nearly suffocates the city when the winds blow upstream.

Most of the forges' production is dedicated to the Castinellan Provinces themselves, mainly to the Faro arsenals and the military companies installed in Toletum, but also to the Watchers of the Faithful, whose growing numbers require more and more steel to launch operations all over Etharis against those who deviate from the true faith of the Divine Seraphs.

The business of war

Even before the times of the Unifier, Toletum was an industrious city that relied on metal processing and on military endeavours. The famous Toletum Squares were feared in battle for their tenacity and efficiency. Their combination of seasoned pikemen, crossbowmen, and shielded swordsmen dominated battlefields for centuries, and are still very efficient. Many mercenary companies sell their services in Toletum, either to the greater cause of the Castinellan theocracy or to foreign entities. They occupy huge areas outside Toletum where they train recruits, while their commercial offices are in the city centre. This intense military activity requires an equivalent weapon trade, hence the relentless work of the forges and armouries.

As the most renowned mercenary army in Etharis, the Company of Free Swords has a significant post in Toletum. However, it is not often engaged with, as the Castinellan clergy dislikes their use of wizards. The Free Swords used to benefit from exceptional treatment on this, but the situation has been tense since the beginning of the Great Purge, and the Free Swords may not maintain their presence if things escalate further.

Faro Marches

Balancing at the fork of the Salves River, the fortified city of Faro stands proudly to govern and exploit the fertile area that hosts the great harbors, where most of the powerful Castinellan fleet is built and maintained.

Faro, the cliff city

Eons of erosion have sculpted an impressive cliff at the fork of the Salves, providing the ideal location for an impregnable fortress. The Farosi, as they call themselves, swiftly understood that their best way of defense was to control the river. Without a doubt, Faro is the most defensible city in all Castinella, maybe in all Etharis. The river provides a natural barrier on the west and north sides. The land to the south and east are so incredibly fertile that they are known as the Blessing. Moreover, the river and the nearby sea provide an incredible proliferation of fish, so it is no surprise that the people of Faro became mighty sailors and developed a close relationship with the sea.

The Faro area used to be ruled by a council of landowners, the landholders inside the Blessing carrying more weight in the decision-making process than those on the western and northern riversides. Decisions needed to gather two thirds of the votes to be enacted, always making negotiations in the wake of wars very tense. Things have changed somewhat since the Unifier, though, and the Castinellan clergy now holds a predominant position in the decision-making process.

Half in the sea, half in the land

The economy of Faro is flourishing, benefitting from both land and sea. Inside the Blessing, the southern lands are full of salt marshes and shellfish farming installations, while the northern lands grow various grains, fruits, and vegetable crops. Outside the Blessing, high forests occupy the riversides, with hunting providing the main means of subsistence. This complete spectrum of food production creates good trade opportunities for the Farosi, while also allowing a total self-sufficiency in case

of invasion, as long as the Mighty Fleet prevents invaders from entering the Blessing.

The great arsenals

The Farosi relied on their naval capabilities to maintain their independence in the centuries before unification. Their naval superiority allowed them to launch raids deep inside enemy territory and prevent enemy fleets from attacking the Blessing from the sea. Since the unification, the Farosi Raiders are known as the Mighty Fleet. They dominate the Gulf of Lions, with trade routes along everyshore of Etharis. These ships are built in the Great Arsenals, which occupy most of the riversides of the southern river branch, and have taken a heavy toll on the high forests. Moreover, this deforestation has leached the soil and provoked landslides. The Farosi are aware of this and are trying to regenerate the forests, but after the crushing defeat of their attack against Morencia, there is no doubt that even more trees will be cut to rebuild the Mighty Fleet.

Therpena, the Sunny Hills

Divided between the vineyards around the Shattered Peaks and the plains near the coast, the southernmost province of Therpena is also host to Ember Cairn, home city of the Dragonborn and headquarters of the dreaded Arcanist Inquisition.

The vineyards of Sante Viegre

On the southeastern slopes of the mountains, Therpena's vineyards benefit from a warm temperate climate. The Shattered Peaks shelter them from the strongest winds and provide shade within the blistering heat, while the peaks catch rare but strong rains that feed rivers. Such conditions are perfect for growing fruit and especially grapes, from which the thoroughful winemakers create marvels that are highly prized all over Etharis. Merchants used to come from all over Etharis for first-hand access to the best wines in the great Therpena Wine Festival, but this tradition has lost most of its vigour as the Castinellan theocracy established progressively tighter regulations on the wine market. Now the government itself is the only exporter to legally deal with foreign buyers, setting steep prices and adding the profits to tax revenues. Naturally a black market has silently emerged. Smuggler ships regularly berth on the southern coast to load the extra production from bold, ambitious, or desperate winemakers. It is a risky endeavour indeed, as the Mighty Fleet of Castinella relentlessly patrols the coast of the three provinces. Smugglers must often risk sailing the high seas south-west before going north again towards Etharis. However, the Mighty Fleet has notably reduced its surveillance after losing many ships in the recent attack on Morencia.

Therpena High Cavalry School

Horsemanship is second nature to the people of Therpena, where riding has been elevated to an artform and a means of subsistence, in amazing riding shows and powerful military formations. The Therpena High Cavalry School offers training for all manners of riding. The Therpenan war riders are renowned throughout Etharis for their impressive ability in horseback fighting. Before the unification, they were Therpena's first line of defence, constantly harassing and ambushing their slower enemies with either vanguard ranged fire or surprising, bloody charges.

Aban Dhalrum, the Red Horse Master

The most renowned figure in Therpena, and probably the most renowned rider of all Etharis, is Aban Dhalrum, High Master of the Therpena High Cavalry School. At one with horses, Dhalrum has mastered all the domains of horse riding but is most known, and feared, for his martial abilities, having won an impressive number of battles and duels. Moreover, he reinforced the position of cavalry in ruling Therpena. Through clever

diplomacy, he obtained funds to greatly expand the Therpenan War Riders in exchange for their services as escorts for the wine convoys and the occasional inquisitor.

People

A Strongly Codified Society

Light of Empyreus, a war state religion — The uncompromising nature of the Arch Seraph Empyreus is reflected in the laws that have transformed Castinellans' way of life. However, if there's no doubt that the unified Castinellan theocracy represents a major change for the three provinces, it would also be a lie to say that there were no grounds for its establishment. Indeed, strength, courage, and honour have long been valued among the Castinellans long before the time of the Unifier. With these three concepts at the core of Empyreus' teachings, the adoption of the faith to the Arch Seraph was natural. The aspect of Castinellan life changed most profoundly by Empyreus' teachings was the practice of war.

Before the unification, Castinellans were quick to declare war on their neighbours over almost any provocation or pretext. In proclaiming his new faith, Sagrado Valieda achieved the considerable feat of channeling Castinellans' desire for war in one unique direction: the Righteous War, fought for a greater cause. Knowing their people could not become peace-loving overnight, Valieda and the clergy carefully crafted rules under which war would be waged. In fact, every form of law enforcement or other violent action became subject to detailed regulations. By creating a legal framework for violence, they bound and justified violence with higher ideals. This permitted them to easily subdue rebellions during the unification, declaring righteous war upon whomever dared to rise against the words of the clergy.

Military organization — As a military theocracy, the Castinellan Provinces have adopted a uniform, rigorous military structure that mingles populations from the three provinces and at the same time boosts military efficiency. Each military force is inspired by the representation of the Arch Seraph Empyreus, structured as follows:

The Head: the commanding army corps, led by a High Priest of Empyreus and their escort of fifty Dragonborn paladins, with four commanders leading each of the other army corps and also escorted by fifty elite soldiers.

The Core: four Toletum Squares, each consisting of four hundred soldiers.

The Wings: two companies of Therpenan War Riders, each company numbering four hundred riders divided into four "Swords" of a hundred riders each.

The Legs: the logistical army corps, including artillery and supplies, moving in armoured carts.

The Heel: the rearguard army corps, composed of two elite Swords of Therpenan war riders and two heavy squares of four hundred heavy armoured pikemen and swordsmen.

Each Castinellan soldier is expected to serve two years in at least two different army corps, ensuring flexibility when reorganising troops during long military campaigns. Moreover, this distributes seasoned soldiers throughout the Castinellan armies, further enhancing their resilience.

Castinellans, a Lively and Spirited people

Welcoming and festive — When they are not fighting for the greater good, Castinellans are eager to celebrate. They have many occasions, and many ways, to do so—be it the birth of a child or the end of a werewolf hunt, they rejoice and feast, sometimes for several days. Music and dance are always a major part of the celebrations, even if bound by rigorous customs. The musicians are exclusively males while the women enthrall the public with frenzied dances around a huge fire. Such is the way of things in Castinella, even in these dark times when spellcasters are persecuted without mercy. But for those who show no sign of magical impurity and who respect the Castinellan customs, there is always a place around the fire.

From grudges and vendetta to the Righteous War — The dark side of the Castinellans temper is, without doubt, their haste to turn to anger and violence when they feel that their honour has been violated.

Small quarrels have often resulted in small wars between families, and on many occasions no mercy was shown to the losing side.

For centuries, grudges would be counted and transmitted over generations until the opportunity arose to enact a bloody vendetta.

But after the unification, violence became a more regulated component of life in the Castinellan Provinces. Any act of war had to be supported by the clergy, who more often than not sent a group of Inquisitors to investigate the real motives of the belligerents. This slowed the outbreaks of violence, as those who dared to go against the sacred law were excommunicated and their property confiscated by the Empyreus clergy.

The disgraced were allowed to fight the Righteous War against the blasphemous in order to end their unworthy lives and seize their lands and goods for the benefit of Empyreus.

Of course, clashes between families and even regions did not completely stop, but they are now scrutinously supervised by the clergy, who authorizes them only when it actually serves its own interests.

Other Locations and Figures

Ember Cairn: Home city of the Dragonborn — After uncountable years of wandering, the Dragonborn finally returned to their ancestral home of Ember Cairn. Thanks to the generosity of Sagrado Valieda, they were able to reconstruct their city destroyed eons ago during the Era of Expansion.

Some legends still tell how tall the city was, perched on a high mountain, made entirely of granite. The fact that they don't agree on what exceptional cataclysm destroyed the mountain, and the city along with it, mattered not for Dragonborns, who had already turned their backs on the past. They settled in the centre of the irregular and tortured mountain area known as the Shattered Peaks, and built their new city to the glory of the Arch Seraphs.

The highest honour was reserved for Empyreus, whose impressive three-hundred-foot-tall statue occupies the main square. Once again, the city is mainly built of granite quarried from the three nearest peaks, which were slowly consumed and incorporated into the structure of the city.

The Cathedral of Embers — One of the three huge rock formations inside the perimeter of Ember Cairn has been excavated to house the headquarters of the Arcanist Inquisition, known as the Cathedral of Embers. This vast underground complex contains many prison cells and interrogation rooms for people accused of having magical abilities or other violations of the sacred laws. Currently, the complex is ruled by the Lord Inquisitor Crevax, a seven-foot-tall Dragonborn whose devotion to the sacred teachings of Empyreus is only outmatched by Sagrado Valieda himself.

The Arcanist Inquisition Headquarters are a maze through which only well-trained Inquisitors can find their way. According to rumours, the cells have no locks, and the Inquisitors let prisoners loose to determine whether or not they have magical abilities: if they find an exit, they are immediately recaptured and found guilty of magical impurity. Whether true or not, the fact remains that very few people are released from this place. Those who do get out seldom escape with a healthy body and mind. Though there are other rumours that one particularly skilled individual regularly enters, and exits, the Cathedral of Embers on their own, and unharmed, for a purpose unknown.

The Town of Thorpes — To all appearances, Thorpes is like any other devout town in the Castinella Provinces. Numerous temples and roadside shrines collect offerings to the Divine Seraphs, and the town maintains a modest chapter of the Arcanist Inquisition. But, as with any religion, not all of the town's congregants are willing followers. Under the cover of night in secluded buildings and slipways, the cult of the Broken Brothers amasses. A religious organization dedicated to the ways before Empyreus—some say even before the gods—they can be identified by their tattoos, created with vanishing ink to avoid the scrutiny of the Inquisition. Members of the Broken Brothers range from peasants to low-ranking clergy and nobles. Always looking for new converts, the Brothers show initiates the "true way" by forcing them to consume a mind-altering elixir that induces vivid hallucinations that they believe "free their minds". The true intentions of the cult are unknown, save to the highest-ranking leader known only as the Shattered Sibling. The Broken Brothers seek to show all of Etharis that the old ways are the true way, and will use any means necessary to achieve this goal, even allying with primordial powers, spellcasters, or daemons from the Netherworlds. The town of Thorpes welcomes all children of the Divine, but only accepts those who prove themselves to be truly worthy.

Thaumaturge and the Fiendish Mask — The Thaumaturge, the Grand Thaumatic Order of Theurgists, is by its nature the greatest opponent of the Castinellan theocracy. They paid little attention to this emerging threat at the start, thinking such fanatical zealotry would simply self-destruct. But when it became obvious that there was no serious opposition to the rise of the Emptyreus theorcracy, and their hard-line attitude against spellcasters was sincere, the Thaumaturge sent its investigators to evaluate the threat.

No one exactly knows what the Thaumaturge is up to, but the most imaginative rumour is that an expert illusionist wizard has infiltrated the Castinellan Provinces, taking the appearance of clergy members to give contradictory orders and cause confusion. Rumours grew from there—there had been an escape from the Arcanist Inquisition Headquarters; the headquarters had been infiltrated; it was all the doing of a mysterious wizard known as the Fiendish Mask. Taking the rumours seriously, the Inquisition offered an incredibly high reward for his capture. That is also the moment when immolation became the immediate punishment for almost all suspects of magical impurity...

The City of Morencia

Location

In the centre of an immese lagoon on the southern coast of the continent, the city-state of Morencia occupies a central place between the Charneault Kingdom and the Castinella Provinces.

History

Rise and Apogee

Legend has it that the ancestors of the Morencian people fled south to escape the Bürach Empire's ethnic persecution, coming at last to a series of small, desolate islands in a large lagoon. To conceal their escape, the refugees devised the Mist Spell that conjured a dense, constant fog over the reefs and sandbanks around the islands. Since then, only those trained by Morencia's famous Guild of Navigators have been able to lead a ship through the Misty Reefs.

Thanks to that protection, the city of Morencia quickly rose from the swampy islands. Ideally located between several major powers in Etharis, the young city-state focused on navigation and trade to establish dominance over commercial maritime routes.

An affinity for navigation, combined with a rigorous and perfectionist mentality, allowed Morencia to develop the fastest and most reliable ships ever built. In time, the Morencians also revealed themselves to be risk-management experts, which further established Morencia's reputation as an inevitable trade hub.

Geopolitics

As a city relying on trade, Morencia welcomes many travellers, the majority being merchants. The city has devised a detailed and careful policy to efficiently manage the constant influx of foreigners. Merchants are welcomed but tightly monitored, and they are forced to stay in specific districts during the night. Citizenship is never granted to such merchants except in exceptional circumstances, and they are not allowed to reside in Morencia for too long. This forces constant incoming and outgoing flows of population that are a further boon to the Morencian economy.

But, while Morencia limits the influence of foreign merchants within its walls, Morencia's merchants are themselves a powerful force throughout Etharis. Morencia is the seat of the continent-spanning Augustine Trading Company, which works everywhere to bend the flow of gold and goods towards itself. Within Morencia, the Augustine Trading Company has worked to align other entities' interests with its own. It has absorbed Morencia's powerful Bankers Guild, and through them it has come to control the city's Supreme Council as well.

The Castinellan Provinces have attempted to take control of Morencia on numerous occasions, using both force and subterfuge. Their most recent but unsuccessful attempt involved capturing a member of the Navigators Guild and forcing him to lead a Castinellan armada through the Misty Reefs. Only the cunning intervention of the Charneault Kingdom saved Morencia from annexation. Grand Shaman Aethorion, helped by a small group of elven shamans, was able to interact with the Mist Spell to bring the Charneault Kingdom's ships directly to the rear of the Castinellan armada.

A terrible battle took place at Morencia's doorstep, and although the Castinellan armada managed to destroy a large portion of the Morencian fleet stationed in the Arsenal of Morencia, the Charneault Kingdom's ships and the remaining Morencian defence forces led by Admiral Endoria Onaglie managed to surround and overwhelm the attackers. Only a few Castinellan ships survived, though the defenders also suffered heavy losses.

Since then, the Castinella Provinces have yet to attempt another military conquest, but they have not given up their ambition of controlling Morencia. They have recently strengthened their connections with the Augustine Trading Company, which many Morencians see as the explanation for a series of underhanded moves by the Bankers Guild Master Kolhys.

The truth is more complex, but many have noted that the Bankers Guild profited immensely in the aftermath of the Castinellan Provinces' attack. Backed by the Augustine Trading Company's coffers, the Bankers Guild offered a generous loan for the reconstruction of the Morencian fleet, but the offer was so generous that it aroused greater suspicion. Finally, Doge Lorenzo Flabenici was able to steer the Supreme Council on another course that would turn out to be even more dangerous. To raise the funds, the Supreme Council opened the way to the sale of its seats. This was supposed to allow any guild or other community to earn a place on the Supreme Council, but bids became so high that many had to arrange astronomical loans from the Bankers Guild to purchase their seat.

Moreover, the Bankers Guild itself was able to buy the biggest share of the available seats. In addition to empowering the Bankers Guild, this sequence of events considerably weakened the position of the Doge.

The Dread of the Moonless Night

The nights have become far more dangerous in recent months, with people being found dead in the streets and canals of Morencia. Rumours are swirling that monsters have appeared to punish the sinful, but so far none really know what the cause of these attacks are. However, the modus operandi is extremely barbaric and strangely similar, almost ritual. The creature—or whatever it is—always attacks when the moon is not visible, either absent or masked by clouds. Increasing night patrols has had no effect, so as a last resort, the Supreme Council has hired the famous witch hunter, Vedemir Kaltstahl, to investigate.

Cultural Happenings

The Black Carnival

Held once per year in the heart of summer, the Black Carnival is an occasion for Morencians to give free rein to their base instincts. Clothed in extravagant costumes, the citizens feast for an entire month, indulging in incredible amounts on food, beverages, and more licentious activities. But recent years have seen the carnival tarnished, as darker habits have begun to spread among the population. Rumours tell of debauched gatherings hosted by dark sorcerers, where torture is conducted in exchange for massive amounts of gold. Even if no such activities have been exposed so far, the level of debauchery has clearly increased, with the most critical voices already associating this deviancy with the new threat, the Dread of the Moonless Night.

The White Carnival

At the end of the year, six months after the Black Carnival, Morencia is usually covered in snow. This is the signal for a very different kind of carnival: a chance to clean all the refuse from the city, be it rubbish or people.

The official white mask worn during the White Carnival is reserved for citizens, and anyone unable to get a mask—by legal means or otherwise—is pursued, placed in a skiff, and exiled across the lagoon.

Notable Locations

The Misty Reefs — Foolish sailors attempting to cross the Misty Reefs without the help of a Morencian guild navigator usually wander for days in the mist, only to end up at their starting point—if they aren't wrecked on the treacherous reefs or run aground on a sandbank, that is. Tales of this magical, misty maze speak of moving sandbanks that make any traditional mapping pointless. How the members of the Navigators Guild find their way is one of the mysteries that feeds Morencia's reputation.

The Arsenal of Morencia — A marvellous demonstration of Morencia's might, the Arsenal of Morencia serves as an example for other naval powers in Etharis. It occupies the main entrance to the city and serves as a filter for incoming vessels. The first part is a quarantine zone where crews and merchandise are stationed for forty days before being permitted inside Morencia. The second part shelters the arsenal itself, with the Morencian ships and shipyards.

The Water Strider Bridge — An astonishing piece of architecture takes centre stage in the heart of the canal network of Morencia. Originally a single bridge built above the main canal, it was the site of many trade activities. As a consequence, it was later linked

to the surrounding islands by secondary bridges as the city grew larger. It finally became an improbable assembly of four bridges linked to a main bridge, vaguely in the form of a gigantic water strider—hence the name.

Notable Persons

Doge Lorenzo Flabenici — Elected for a lifetime mandate, the Doge is the official representative and—supposedly—most influential person in Morencia. The election is a long process that usually lasts an entire week or more. Flabenici's election took a moderate ten days, a duration that should have been an omen of a stable and seamless governance, but many events have disturbed the course of Morencia during his mandate. Although Doge Lorenzo was not directly responsible for the Castinellan conflict or the recent degeneracy of the Black Carnival, his reputation has suffered from both blows to Morencia's honor. Further, his calamitous move to bail out the city's coffers by selling seats on the Supreme Council have sealed his disapproval by the people. He is now in a delicate political position, forced to constantly renegotiate with his fellow nobles and the guilds.

Witch Hunter Vedemir Kaltstahl — With a long record including the famous capture and execution of the Three Sisters, a band of sorceresses that terrorised the Bürach Empire for many years, Witch Hunter Vedemir Kaltstahl has nothing left to prove. It is no surprise that he was chosen by the Supreme Council to investigate the mysterious series of murders referred to as the Dread of the Moonless Night. His investigation has only started recently though, and there is no sign of progress yet, other than his sudden demand to individually interrogate every member of the Supreme Council. Knowing his extreme interrogation techniques, it is understandable that some council members have tried to wriggle out of questioning, even though it brings suspicion on them.

Admiral Endoria Onaglie, Master of the Navigators Guild — Born into one of the oldest and most renowned noble families of Morencia, Endoria Onaglie nonetheless earned his rank of Guild Master through his numerous deeds during his already long career. But this fifty-year-old, seasoned captain has lost none of his power, save for an eye. Admiral Onaglie was in charge of the Morencian fleet when the Castinella Provinces managed to strike Morencia by surprise. Only his experience and intuition allowed ships to be deployed from the Arsenal quickly enough to avoid the complete destruction of the Morencian fleet. He then led the remaining ships against the Castinellans, losing his eye during the final assault on the enemy flagship.

Kolyhs "The Blazing Brain", Master of the Bankers Guild and Augustine Trading Company — Some consider the Blazing Brain the most powerful personality in Morencia. Many tales surround this mysterious character, try to explain his meteoric rise to power in Morencia's two most powerful mercantile organizations. His origins are another mystery that fuels both fascination and distrust among the Morencians. Whatever the truth may be, he is a man with considerable power thanks to the immense fortune the Bankers Guild sits on. First commanding the Bankers Guild, he controversially allowed the Augustine Trading Company to buy a controlling portion of the Guild. Though dwarfed by the Augustine Trading Company, the Morencian Bankers Guild became the Company's single largest constituent, and Kolhys leveraged this position to rise through the Augustine Trading Company's ranks until he commanded both organizations. Kolhys was the very first banker to obtain a seat on Morencia's Supreme Council, which immediately provoked controversy. Moreover, he has been accused numerous times of corrupting other council members, but has never been convicted, as his accusers always either suddenly withdrew their complaints or disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Many believe that now the Bankers Guild, the Augustine Trading Company, and the Morencian Supreme Council are effectively the same entity. If that's true, they have Kolhys to thank—or curse—for it.

Factions and Institutions

The Supreme Council

As the main political body in Morencia, the Supreme Council has the last word on every sensitive matter in Morencia's political and legal affairs. Historically open to nobles only, its seats are now available for sale, allowing the wealthiest guilds to hold seats and thus gain even more influence in Morencia. Especially in the case of the Bankers Guild, it has become difficult to see where Morencia's government ends and its business interests begin.

The Carpenters Guild

The oldest known organization created by the Morencians, the Carpenters Guild also bears one of the most critical responsibilities for Morencia's continued survival: the guild governs the city's shipwrights. The reputation of the ships produced by the Great Arsenal of Morencia has spread across all of Etharis, even as far as the northern Valikan isles. This reputation is well earned: the carpenters undergo five years of harsh training under the supervision of a Master Carpenter, transforming them into essential assets for any substantial expedition requiring on-the-go ship maintenance. This affords them extremely high wages, though not quite reaching the levels of the navigators who safely lead the ships in and out of the Misty Reefs.

The Navigators Guild

The Navigators Guild holds the secrets of sailing in and out of the Misty Reefs. Such secrets are jealously guarded, as Morencia's independence mostly relies on the protection provided by the Misty Reefs. In the last decade, however, since the seats on the Supreme Council were opened for sale, the navigators' prices have risen frequently and sharply. The most vehement critics accuse the Navigators Guild of outright robbery, gouging to afford more seats on the council and thus more power. But more worrying rumours speak of the Mist Spell becoming harder to control and its effects more pronounced, increasing the difficulty of navigating the Misty Reefs.

The Bankers Guild

The Bankers Guild is probably the most influential of the guilds, as they are the only ones authorised to loan money. They of course use this privilege to lend to other Morencian guilds, but also loan money to agents outside the city. Since its absorption by the Augustine Trading Company, the guild has become intertwined with commerce on a global scale. Moreover, it is commonly known that their biggest clients are the Castinella Provinces, which fuels suspicion as to their true allegiances.

The City of Liesech

Location

Nested in the wide gulf called Bite Bay north of the Charneault Kingdom, the city-state of Liesech deploys its dense web of channels and ditches in a constant fight against the sea. On the city's eastern side, an impressive fortification system relying on water once protected the city against the Bürach Empire's ambition. On the west side, a giant harbour and arsenal face the sea.

History

Rise and Apogee

The Bouwengracht family has tacitly reigned in Liesech since its very beginning as a city-state. Back when Liesech was just a large fishing village, Otto Bouwengracht was an ambitious fisherman who direly desired a better, wealthier life. His ambition led him to fish further out in the bay. When he eventually reached the area at the centre of the bay, known as the Eye of the Sea, he came upon an otherworldly creature called the Filth Grazer. The creature felt the fisherman's ambition and offered him a bargain; she promised advice and access to superior intelligence that would help Bouwengracht raise a superb coastal city, the most wealthy ever known. In exchange, what she asked seemed very little in the eyes of Otto Bouwengracht: the filth of the city. She wanted to eat all the rubbish produced by the city, including the corpses of the dead. Otto Bouwengracht's part of the bargain was to instate a cult that would secretly serve the creature's gluttony under the guise of blessing the sea for all the wealth it provided to the city.

Otto Bouwengracht accepted. True to the creature's word, he quickly became a famous businessman whose wealth boosted the development of Liesech. He developed tremendously advanced techniques to expand the territory of Liesech, constructing channels and ditches that would prevent floods and optimise transport and logistics. Naval construction also accelerated, and under the Bouwengracht family's rule, Liesech became a major maritime power in only a few generations. They began sending more ships across the seas to explore and gather wealth, and after a few more generations, Liesech had reached a state of wealth and opulence that no one in Etharis could ignore.

That was the moment when the Bürach Empire turned its imperial gaze on the small city. Liesech had become a major trade hub between the nearby regions of Etharis, especially the Bürach Empire and the Charneault Kingdom. These two powers benefited greatly from the improved trade routes, but the Bürach Empire couldn't bear the taxes applied on all the supplies that passed through Liesech's harbour. The Charneault Kingdom, on the other hand, favored Liesech's independence, fearing that an annexation would worsen their position.

Annexation by the Bürach Empire

The Bürach Empire could not leave Liesech in peace, fearing their autonomy might inspire independence movements inside the empire. Leading Bürach aristocrats made a deal with the countess Analita von Raiza, a powerful vampire who was held captive in the Bürach Empire. In return for her freedom, she was to enter Liesech and use her vampiric powers to take control of the Bouwengracht family. Once done, she would open the city to the annexation. Knowing that most vampires crave to hold power over territory and a population, the Bürach aristocrats hoped this bargain would let them absorb Liesech's wealth while keeping Analita von Raiza under control. They were right, but not entirely.

The Red Morning

Analita von Raiza was a higher vampire, allowing her to notice the magic in action around Liesech, and in particular the Bouwengracht family. It did not prevent her from fulfilling her mission, but shortly after the annexation—and once she understood where the strange magic around Bouwengracht family came from—she saw an opportunity to strike a blow against the Bürach Empire and spoil the jewel that she had so compliantly handed to her former gaoler.

On the morning of the next annual ceremony of the Nurturing Sea, the entire Bouwengracht family was found slaughtered, their blood entirely drained out.

The Weeping Pox

The bargain between the Filth Grazer and Bouwengracht family was therefore broken, and Analita would not allow it to continue in any other form for she wanted to replace the creature's influence over the city with her own. But the ancient creature was cunning, and enacted revenge against both the Bouwengracht family and the vampire: it infected the corpses of the Bouwengracht with the virulent Weeping Pox. The Bouwengracht family was given a lavish funeral inside the Froth Church, the main church of Liesech, and the disease spread from there to devastating effect.

Analita von Raiza had not expected the Filth Grazer to give the city up easily, but she was nevertheless furious to see her new flock die by the thousands. She was immune to the pox and powerful enough to challenge the creature. A terrible battle ensued. The fight lasted for an entire day and caused giant tides which wreaked havoc on the harbour. At the end of the day Analita von Raiza came back, exhausted but alive. None know for sure who won the encounter or if the Filth Grazer exists, but Analita has never returned to the Eye of the Sea. Instead she spends most of her days within her den atop the High Belfry, the highest building and main place of power in Liesech.

As the Weeping Pox spread quickly in the city, the Bürach Empire deployed troops outside to place Liesech under quarantine. However, it was too late, as they learned later that the disease had already spread outside Liesech.

Symptoms

The symptoms of the Weeping Pox are both an eloquent manifestation of the Filth Grazer's devious mind and a metaphor for Liesech's course in history. At first a sick person will be subject to fever causing sharpened senses, overexcitement, and a sense of wellbeing. But soon these symptoms will transition to delirium, burning fever, insatiable thirst, and weltering lesions that have given the illness its name. Beyond this, nearly all who contract the disease die shortly after. Most people succumb to the pox in a few days while the most resilient may hold on for almost two weeks.

Cultural Happenings

The Ceremony of the Nurturing Sea

Once per year, the people of Liesech would gather at the harbour for a great celebration dedicated to the sea and the great wealth it provided to the city. The aristocrats and especially the Bouwengracht family would place many offerings on boats and send them out on the water. The event was only held if there was a good wind coming from the land, to push the offerings towards the centre of the bay.

Although one would expect at least some of the ships to wash up somewhere in the bay, none were ever retrieved.

Moreover, the ceremony was always followed by strange currents in the bay, and the harbour would stay closed for the entire day after the ceremony. In fact, the offerings were all for the benefit of the Filth Grazer. It is said this ceremony still takes place within the damned city of Liesech, driven by the insidious remnants of the Cult of the Sea.

The Week of the Grand Citywide Market

A major event that used to be held on a yearly basis was the week of the Grand Citywide Market. On this occasion, the whole city would be transformed into a vast, open-air market lasting for an entire week. The variety and the quality of the available products and merchandise were simply unequalled in Etharis, even by the city-state of Morencia. These days are likely gone forever now that the Weeping Pox has devastated Liesech. If the market persists at all in the disease-stricken city, it is doubtlessly in a debased and corrupted form.

Notable Locations

The Eye of the Sea — The centre of Bite Bay has been mostly impassable to ships from time immemorial. In taverns, they tell stories of mermaids or other mystical sea creatures that repel human boats and capture any trespassers. The awful truth of the Filth Grazer is known by a few people only, including the late Bouwengracht family and the vampire Countess Analita von Raiza.

The High Belfry — At the centre of Liesech is a huge square that once served as a public forum for popular debates, while the decisions about Liesech's politics and laws were made in the tall bell tower that overlooked the square. The High Belfry was constructed centuries ago by one of the first Bouwengracht governors, and this major place of power remained under their control until the Red Morning. The centre of the city is now ruled by the Cult of the Black Lady, and rumours say that Analita von Raiza takes her regenerating sleep on the highest floor of the High Belfry.

The Froth Church — The Bouwengracht family initiated and financed the Cult of the Sea, a religious movement that revered the "Nurturing Sea" and made offerings in its name, in order to feed the Filth Grazer. Many churches were constructed for the cult in Liesech, but the most important is the Froth Church, the place where every Bouwengracht family member used to be buried. Built on the city's westernmost quay, the Froth Church is in direct contact with the sea. A small channel was set up to allow passage to the waters of the bay—and to allow the secret delivery of morbid offerings to the Filth Grazer. Because of that foul visitor, the sea around the church always foams and froths, hence its name.

Notable Persons

Bouwergracht Family — The Bouwengracht family has enjoyed a reputation both mysterious and prestigious since the rise of Liesech. Otto Bouwengracht, the first known patriarch of the family, is the most famous. But the family is now fading slowly into oblivion after being slaughtered by Analita von Raiza during the event known as the Red Morning. However, rumour has it that one child of the family, Wilhelm, secretly escaped by being exchanged with another child at the last moment. The most fanciful stories claim he will come back one day to retake control of Liesech and return the city to its former glory.

The Filth Grazer — Even the few who know the existence of the Filth Grazer have no detailed understanding of it. This is no surprise, as such creatures are very rare and hardly intelligible to lesser beings such as humans. All that can be said for sure about it is that it possesses an inextinguishable thirst for the filth from human activities. There are stories about its actual appearance, some of which describe tentacles and rumbling supernatural voices, but they can be no more than rumours as no one comes back from the Eye of the Sea where the beast resides, feasting on rotting corpses and filth.

Vampire Countess Analita Von Raiza — Countess Analita von Raiza is probably is one of the oldest known vampires. Captured centuries ago during an old war between ancient Bürach tribes, she was held captive in a sophisticated magical sarcophagus whose makers have been long forgotten. As a higher vampire, she is almost impossible to kill as she is resistant to wounds that would slay a mortal. But this does not mean she is invincible, as she barely survived her encounter with the Filth Grazer. She now lies regenerating in the High Belfry, waiting for the Weeping Pox to pass before she emerges as the unchallenged ruler of Liesech.

Factions and Institutions

Morbus Doctore

"No knowledge should be feared, because knowledge is power."

The Morbus Doctore appeared shortly after the release of the Weeping Pox. Wearing strange coats and masks meant to protect them from the disease, they wander the city looking for newly infected people. But only a fool would submit to their treatments, as they are known to conduct unbearable experiments on their "patients". They seem to be convinced that the Weeping Pox actually is a blessing that must be studied, exploited, and controlled to bring humanity forward to a new level of existence. Listening ears have heard them speak of "the Great One from the Bay" in reverential and fascinated terms.

Cult of the Black Lady

"We worship beauty in this lost world. A dark, demanding, and thirsty beauty."

When the countess Analita von Raiza arrived in Liesech, she did not immediately take control of the Bouwengracht family. As the smart mind she is, she understood that the best way to reach the places of power in the city was to create a reputation. She therefore gathered attractive young individuals she transformed into vampires and started a business of luxury. Thanks to the timely disappearance of several rich clients, her business grew rapidly and allowed her to constitute a small army of perverted but devoted followers. These fanatics now bear the name of the Cult of the Black Lady and control the centre area of Liesech to protect their mistress's den in the High Belfry. It is also said that they hunt for non infected people to steal their blood and serve it to the vampire countess while she is regenerating after her fight against the Filth Grazer.

Golden Barge Company (G.B.C.)

"To keep people connected is the only true duty, as not fulfilling it would mean the end of civilization."

Regarded as the last remnant of Liesech's former glory, the G.B.C. are almost as ancient as the Bouwengracht family. They have one purpose, a duty they will carry out until the end whatever no matter happens, and that is the transportation of people and goods on the channels of Liesech. They are an honourable and devoted company whose members neither discriminate nor exploit their fellow man. They just ask the right price and nothing more for every course. But their exposure to every traveller in the city also makes them a highly valuable source of information for those who respect them and are ready to pay the extra coin.

Factions of Etharis

"Wherever there is an ounce of power to be had, there is guaranteed to be a faction built around it." — Godwick Fulminster, Etharis Historian

The major factions of Etharis have been around long enough to overtly or covertly permeate through every stratum of society. They have a presence in every nation and have a hand in nearly every major event in the history of the continent. They move with speed, intelligence, and ruthlessness. Thus these factions have endured throughout the centuries.

The Thaumaturge

"We who shape magic, shape the world."

Headquarters: A collectively-maintained extraplanar space

The Grand Thaumatic Order of Theurgists, or The Thaumaturge, is a loose confederation of archmages whose existence has been an open secret for several decades. The common folk regard them as a fairy tale, as The Thaumaturge spends much of its resources keeping their existence secret.

The Thaumaturge was created after the Beast first appeared in the Bürach Empire, and archmages from nearby nations put aside their differences to discuss the surge of abominations in the land. While they have yet to find a solution to the Beast, they had some success in containing the abominations it created. Since then, the order has met secretly to manage similar threats. They have defeated a number of demon lords and eldritch monsters, all outside of the public eye.

The Thaumaturge aims to protect the entirety of Etharis from world-ending or even reality-ending scenarios. It succeeds largely because it operates in the shadows, free from the politics of their respective governments that may forbid them to act. They share resources and information whenever necessary in order to defeat a major foe.

Current members of The Thaumaturge include the likes of Mina Taliesin, Lady of Masks; the Ravencourt Keeper; Martorius; Lord Duma Felsinger of Erlefurt; Razbat, Head Gaoler of Cold Iron Keep; Odis of Sarmar Academy; and Lord Volarius of Aloran. It is believed the archmages meet in a pocket dimension where their discussions can be held in the utmost privacy. Every Thaumaturge member has agreed to be placed under a powerful geas that keeps them from betraying each other's confidence.

However, because the faction is driven by personalities, there are times when The Thaumaturge fails to act. The order has no single leader and acts on a majority vote. If vested interests prevent a majority, they can block any group action on an issue, leaving the others to act on their own. Hence, far-reaching events like the undead horde of the City Below have gone unanswered, as the Ostoyan members oppose any intervention from outsiders.

The Company of Free Swords

"Blood and Honor, Strength in Steel."

Headquarters: Voros

If one needs a war won, a powerful monster removed, or a dirty job completed, the Company of Free Swords is the top mercenary group to call—assuming you have the coin. Despite the name, the company's services are far from free.

An ancient and elite mercenary company, the Free Swords have tipped the scales of war for many a nation. It has the distinction of slaying a demon lord, and considers defeating a dragon a slow business day. The company includes warriors, wizards, priests, druids, rogues, and spies among its ranks. It has a branch in nearly every corner of the continent.

The Free Swords began as a military unit in the now-defunct nation of Falaris. Serving a tyrant king, conscript soldiers fought endless wars against neighboring kingdoms. After receiving orders to raze a village of hapless peasants, one Commander Darion Harkin finally declared he had had enough. His entire unit deserted and formed their own organisation. When the king tried to have Harkin killed, the commander turned the tables and assassinated him instead.

Harkin laid the foundations of the Company of Free Swords, proclaiming his organization one that prioritises the welfare of the soldier, not the ruler. Harkin famously declared, "If we must deprive this world of fathers, brothers, and sons, and be killed as we do so, let it be for the highest coin, that we may die content."

Despite their mercenary ethics, the Free Swords maintain a code of honor—stay loyal to the company, be honest in your dealings, and take vengeance on those who betray you or your comrades. They live simple lives free of excess, spending most of their time honing their fighting skills. Disciplined, loyal, and fearless, the company is ready for any war, confident in their success.

The Free Swords have spread across Etharis, taking on jobs from all who can afford their price. In a century they had become the largest such organisation in the land. No king, merchant, or official would dare cross them or default in their pay. They know the Company of Free Swords will take its price, one way or another.

The Augustine Trading Company

"Success in all ventures and circumstances."

Headquarters: Morencia

Amidst the splendours of Morencia sits an organisation that guards its treasure as jealously as a dragon defends its hoard. The Augustine Trading Company is an ancient and venerable institution that maintains a presence in every country, from the southern reaches of Castinella to the misty city of Castalore.

The company was named after its founder, Manoch Augustus, a clergyman who left the priesthood amid a scandal involving the church's finances. With few options left, he turned his talents to commerce. After a number of false starts, Augustus found his way into a lucrative profession—the weapons trade.

With the help of some investors from the nobility, he founded an arms trading company in Morencia.

With the gold he earned, he purchased land and lent coin to the rich. After systematising predatory lending practices and enforcing them ruthlessly, the Augustine Trading Company ended up as the wealthiest faction in all of Etharis. They are one of the few non-government entities rich enough to hire the services of the Free Swords Company. However, through the machination of its latest head Kolthys "Blazing Brain," the line between company and government has blurred as an organ of the Augustine Trading Company became a dominant force on the Morencian Supreme Council.

The company maintains trades routes that run all the way to Grarjord. Each ship is guarded by a contingent of professional soldiers, wizards, and priests. Even the raiders of Tyburn think twice before attacking these floating fortresses.

The company currently has a hand in every trade, including food production, construction, labor, crafts, and education. It runs one of the finest wizard colleges in Morencia. It has even lured legendary smiths from Rauland into its stable of weapon makers.

It is also no secret that the company has moved into a new era of weapon trading: breeding monsters to serve on the battlefield. Their first successful venture involved lycanthropic thralls they call Warbreed. Rumors abound that the company is currently experimenting with eldritch mutants. While this current venture is frowned upon by the clergy, governments have embraced such forward-thinking ideas with open arms.

The Ebon Syndicate

"The night is our kingdom."

Headquarters: Altenheim

It is said that beneath every unexplained success lies an undiscovered crime. If so, the crimes of the Ebon Syndicate's number beyond reckoning.

In many respects, the Ebon Syndicate is the Augustine Trading Company's dark mirror—an organization with a finger in every major criminal trade. Assassination, slave trading, drug trafficking, theft, and the black market all fall within their ambit.

The syndicate employs and controls thugs, beggars, thieves, professional killers, extortionists, and spies. Its Shadow Academy ensures these agents operate with the highest skill and efficiency.

The Ebon Syndicate began with an Altenheim-based bandit named Hiram Greyman. One night, after a battle with the city watch left his men dead and Hiram badly wounded, the bandit fled into a hedge maze. There, delirious from blood loss, he followed a hawk moth that led him through to safety. Since then, Greyman thought himself favored by the gods and used the hawk moth as his personal symbol. He rebuilt his gang and went on to establish the Syndicate, which over the centuries grew into the powerful shadow organization it is today.

After Greyman died, his name became a title that was passed on from one syndicate leader to the next. The current Greyman is Natalia Koscheii, who is infamous for her ability to escape the most meticulous assassination attempts.

The syndicate's presence is most felt in the largest and most prosperous cities of Etharis. All the smaller crime organisations bow to the syndicate. Freelancers receive one warning before their lives are shortened, and any group that tries to muscle into the syndicate's territory is treated without mercy.

The syndicate maintains a tenuous peace with the other factions. Groups like the Watchers and the Augustine Trading Company are technically at war with them, but will often hire their services, as the syndicate's spy network outmatches any other.

The syndicate's insignia, the hawk moth, is a nocturnal creature known for its swift flight and short lifespan. Similarly, the agents of the syndicate move quickly through darkness, taking what they want, with the full knowledge that life is short among fellow rogues.

The Watchers of the Faithful

"Those of great faith shall never perish, but will gain the keys to Paradise."

Headquarters: Toletum

After the loss of the gods, many of their good-aligned clerics rallied to the remaining Arch Seraphs in order to hold the fabric of their society together. Throwing their faith behind the Seraphs, the major churches reformed into a large organisation known as The Watchers of the Faithful. Composed of priests and paladins, the Watchers have dedicated themselves to preserving the old faiths in this new form.

The Watchers are a comparatively young faction, but are highly organised and zealous in the pursuit of their goals. They follow what they call the Eternal Dogma: revere the Arch Seraphs, follow their laws as handed down by the High Priest, and destroy all that is unholy and evil in their sight—through any means necessary.

The Watchers are composed of six sects, each one following their particular Arch Seraph. Each elects a High Priest to rule the sect, with the most populous sect having the greatest weight in votes. The current High Priest, Nola Cirdanal, is a follower of Empyreus. Her uncompromising stance has put the Watchers on the path to war against several factions that have fallen afoul of the Eternal Dogma.

The Watchers have instigated various inquisitions across the continent in an effort to stamp out all that is, in Cirdanal's words, "corrupt, heretical, iniquitous, or displeasing to the eyes of Heaven." They have pursued the Augustine Trading Company for its efforts at weaponising monsters, the Soma nobility for falling to vampirism, and the Valikan tribes for worshipping elementals. To the shock of those in power, their attacks have often found support among the citizens. Thousands flocked to the Watchers, with many going on pilgrimages to Castinella, and money continues to flow into the coffers of the Grand Temple.

The Etharis Pantheon

A Godless Universe

In ancient times, the many gods of Etharis guided their people to prosperity and enlightenment. That all changed during the Aetheric War, where the gods took up arms against a host of cosmic horrors called the Aether Kindred. This conflict led to the loss of nearly the entire pantheon. Many believe that the gods fled this reality for safer realms. Some scholars claim the gods were consumed by the very horrors they sought to destroy.

Those gods that survived returned to rule Etharis. With their balance disrupted, though, they could no longer exist at peace with one another. They made war among themselves over who should rule above the others. Thus, the last of the gods extinguished one another.

Etharis has been left a godless plane undergoing a prolonged dark age. All that remains of the once almighty pantheon are the lieutenants of these lost gods, Arch Seraphs and Daemons who have been left to their own devices. While they wield enormous power, these beings are far less than the gods they once served. Some still attempt to fulfill the functions of their lost masters. Others have opted to pursue their own agendas.

Arch Seraphs

Miklas

Arch Seraph of Mercy

Epitaphs: The Redeemer, The Saint of Lost Causes, Plague-Breaker

Domain: Healing, Ease of Suffering, Freedom

With the loss of the goddess Aurelia, Miklas took on her role as best as she could. Unfortunately, as she does not have the power to act as the new goddess of protection, her aid can only come after the fact. She soothes the tormented, provides succor in times of distress, and gives deliverance from oppression. Prisoners, the sick, the poor, and the destitute all seek her favor, as do clerics who wish to ease the world's suffering.

Miklas resembles a tall, golden haired human clothed in a radiant white robe, bearing a staff of elderwood whose leaves continually wither and grow back.

Empyreus

Arch Seraph of Valor

Epitaphs: The Unbroken, the Spirit of Courage, The Sword Saint

Domain: Righteous War, Courage, Honor, Strength

The patron of good-aligned warriors, Empyreus seeks to push back the influence of the Arch Daemons and return Etharis to its Golden Age. His uncompromising nature differs from that of Maligant, his predecessor. He drives his followers to become zealots bent on cleansing the world of whatever they perceive as sources of corruption.

Empyreus is depicted as a knight in plate armour with wings made from sword blades.

Zabriel

Arch Seraph of Truth

Epitaphs: The Watcher, Lightbearer

Domain: Knowledge, Truth, Wisdom

A former archivist of the knowledge god Typharia, Zabriel was one of those who abandoned the ideals of their god, to pursue her own agenda. Whereas Typharia was neutrally-aligned and sought knowledge for the sake of knowledge, Zabriel sought to weaponize knowledge and truth. She is the patron of scholars, truth-seekers, counterspies, and those who seek to bring down conspiracies and oppressive regimes. Those who follow her often gain flashes of inspiration that lead them to discover secrets.

Zabriel appears as a robed figure whose face glows so brightly her features cannot be seen. She always carries a book that holds the names of every being in existence.

Morael

Arch Seraph of Sacrifice

Epitaphs: Saint of Martyrs, Peacekeeper, Hope-giver

Domain: Heroism, Love, Compassion, Martyrdom

Morael represents an aspect of the Vetara, goddess of love. Specifically, Morael represents the strength behind conviction, the ability to give up everything for something greater than one's self. As a patron of heroes, Morael receives the prayers of those looking for the strength to make impossible decisions and great sacrifices. The Arch Seraph aids those who are willing to pay the ultimate price for their cause.

As a being of near-infinite patience, Morael often takes on the role of mediator between all the members of the new pantheon. He is depicted as a golden being with three faces and three pairs of wings.

Solyma

Arch Seraph of Justice

Epitaphs: The Burning Scales, the Great Judge, the Lady of Vengeance

Domain: Justice, Benevolent Rulership, Resistance

Unlike some of her counterparts, Solyma remains faithful to the dead god of supreme justice. She has undertaken a vow of silence and will not speak until the cosmic horror that destroyed her master has been defeated for good. Until then, she does what she can to help those who seek justice in all its forms. Good-aligned vigilantes and those who destroy the abominations of the Aether Kindred can expect great rewards from Solyma.

But Solyma's silence has come with a cost, and her faithful stray without guidance. The name of the god who Solyma once served has been forgotten by mortalkind, and their teachings twisted to serve mortal ends. Solyma's most fervent worshippers reside in Ostoya, where whispered prayers call her the Lady of Vengeance and bloody vendettas are prosecuted in her name. Yet who is to say their idea of justice is wrong, if not silent Solyma herself?

She is depicted as a robed, long-haired woman bearing a glowing greatsword, and whose feet do not touch the ground.

Aphaeleon

Arch Seraph of Temperance

Epitaphs: The Resilient One

Domain: Peace, Meditation, Enlightenment, Endurance

The most contemplative and peaceful of the Arch Seraphs, Aphaeleon is the patron of monks and clerics. Formerly an angel of the Myria, god of joy, he has taken a different path and is now prayed to by those who seek freedom from their worldly desires. Aphaeleon helps his followers resist their addictions and temptations. Those who follow his ways find great mental and spiritual strength that enables them to endure.

Aphaeleon appears as a bearded old man floating in a sphere of golden light. The sight of him alone brings a sense of inner peace.

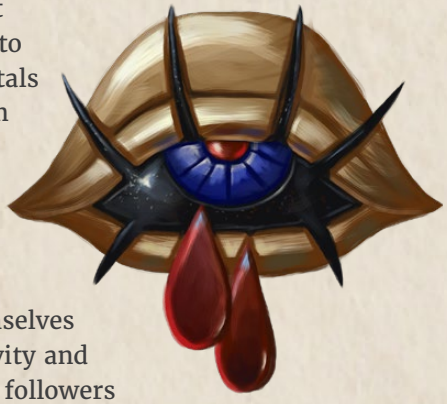
Arch Daemons

Venin

Arch Daemon of Deceit

Epitaphs: Great Deceiver, Lord of Lies, Dusktongue, The Hooded One

Domain: Illusion, Lies, Insanity



Venin, the Great Deceiver, seeks to undermine mortals by tricking them into false ideologies and illusory goals. She relishes the lies people tell themselves to justify depravity and cruelty. Venin's followers gain great skill in illusions and convincing others of their versions of the truth, but eventually they lose all sense of what is real and what is not.

Venin is a towering, black-robed figure whose face is a mirror, reflecting a subtly distorted version of the observer. Her voice seems to echo from deep within the listener's head.

Tormach

Arch Daemon of Wrath

Epitaphs: Manslayer, Marauder, Lord of Blood Oaths

Domain: War, Murder, Destruction

Replacing the war god Maligant is the Arch Daemon Tormach, a spirit of relentless conflict. Unlike Maligant, who espoused a strategy to prevent needless deaths, Tormach delights in killing and bloody violence, demanding sacrifices from his followers in exchange for power. Victory itself is unimportant to Tormach—what matters is that as much blood as possible is shed during and after the battle. Murderers and evil-aligned warriors find strength in Tormach, but are apt to give in to their bloodlust before long.

Tormach appears as a flaming warrior bearing a helm and a wickedly-curved halberd. He rides a chariot pulled by a pair of chimera.

Gorodyn

Arch Daemon of Avarice

Epitaphs: The King of Red Coins, The Dark Feeder, The Yawning Maw

Domain: Commerce, Wealth

Gorodyn has claimed the sphere of Jezra, the former god of commerce. Gorodyn exhorts mortals that greed is a virtue, and that to gather wealth and resources while the rest go without is the greatest happiness one can achieve. His followers thus seek wealth through whatever means possible, such as the merchant who hoards food and sells it at exorbitant prices. While they are rich in material wealth, their souls inevitably go hungry.

Gorodyn resembles an enormous and grotesque bag of rotting flesh enveloped in both flies and gaudy jewelry. His body is also covered with hundreds of mouths that speak with the same voice.

Sitri

Arch Daemon of Hedonism

Epitaphs: The Tempter, Whisperer, Bloodrose

Domain: Lust, Dark Desire, Indulgence

Where the rich and poor lose themselves to excess, lust, and debauchery, there walks Sitri. The Arch Daemon whispers into the hearts of men and women, urging them to give in to their basest instincts. He has never known more followers than in Altenheim, the City of Joy, where drug-fueled parties last for days on end.

It is said that Sitri has never forced a single soul to do evil but only presented them the choice. Few possess the strength to walk away from him, and not a few of those who succeed once still eventually succumb.

Sitri appears as tendrils of black mist that resemble a human, but can shift to take on the form of the viewer's greatest desire, say a handsome young lad or an alluring temptress.

Beleth

Arch Daemon of Fear

Epitaphs: The Laughing Man, Lord of Pain, The Horned King, Blackjester

Domain: Fear, Madness, Trickery

Most mortals fear the Arch Daemons but, conversely, Beleth finds mortals atrociously funny. He delights in torturing them with their worst fears, knowing that the terror induced is often far worse than the actual threat. His followers are rulers who terrorize their people, priests who hold sway over the superstitious, and anyone who holds power through fear. Every single one is eventually driven to fear those they rule.

Beleth appears as a horned, grey-skinned man with pointed features, jet-black eyes, and a horrendously wide smile that drips black ichor. Spiked chains encircle his arms and legs.

Malikir

Arch Daemon of Pride

Epitaphs: The Velvet Queen, The Usurper, The Great Inversion

Domain: Tyranny, Conquest, Corruption, Dominion

Known as the most powerful of the Arch Daemons, Malikir presides over tyrants and corrupted heroes. She promises power, fame, and dominion to those who give themselves to her. However, as her insignia suggests, all who rise in her favor will eventually come to a terrible fall.

Malikir ruins the goodhearted, as even heroes that start with the best intentions can fall prey to her wiles as they grow to believe in their own legend. She has driven friends to fight each other and rulers to wage war in the name of national pride.

Malikir is a towering figure of ebony, undulating flesh, with an inverted triangular head and long arms that end in claws.

Primordials

When matter first formed from Chaos into fire, earth, air, and water, the Primordials opened their eyes to the light of Etharis. They spread across the land, sea, and skies, claiming territory for themselves. Then the gods decided to give a majority of Etharis to their mortal followers. War erupted with the Primordials, who, seeing they were outmatched, ceded their lands to mortals. It was this first great victory that convinced the gods to challenge the Aether Kindred, which led to their downfall.

While no match for the gods in terms of power, Primordials wield enormous elemental energy from their spheres of origin. They are not commonly worshipped in Etharis, save among Valikan clans in Grarjord and the elves of Tol Leyemil.

Lady Morakesh - Commands the realm of Flamebourne and a host of salamanders, efreeti, and azers. As unstable and changeable as the element she controls, Morakesh aids or thwarts her fellow Primordials depending on her whim.

Alondo - Lord of the Depths and ruler of the Endless Sea. Water elementals from the gentle hippocampi to the massive leviathans all follow his word. An isolationist, Alondo prefers to be left on his own without interfering or being interfered with, except in the most urgent matters.

Citrolach — Supreme ruler of the vast underground realm of Stonereach. Creatures such as Xorn and Zaratans bow to his rule. Once he has set his mind on something, Citrolach is notoriously difficult to budge, holding to even his idlest whims for centuries.

Ilhara — Queen of Air and Shadow, who counts sylphs, djinn, and air myrmidons among her people. Ilhara stands with her ears to the wind—her spies watch all the Primordials, Seraphs, and Daemons, and report everything they see to her. She schemes to fill the power vacuum left by the death of Gormadraug and wrest control of Etharis from the Seraphs.

Gormadraug — The Great Prismatic Wyrm and originator of coldfire, Gormadraug was the most powerful of the Primordials. Gormadraug lorded over the other Primordials until its death at the hands of the hero Kentigern. His Primordial kin dread his resurrection and will do what they must to stop it.

Aether Kindred

The Others, or simply the Kindred, are cosmic horrors, the sight of which alone could torture a mortal's mind into insanity. None can say where they originated, but scholars believe they are an aspect of the original chaos that existed before the birth of the universe. Their goals—if they have any apart from consuming all of existence—are alien and inscrutable.

Thankfully, after consuming many gods during the Aetheric War, the Kindred fell into a deep slumber. Their dormant state has left Etharis largely safe from their influence, but their dreams have still spawned abominations that haunt the continent.

Of the various Aether Kindred, these three are most known:

Vraigoroth — A strange entity resembling an enormous maw ringed with fangs that sucks all light and energy into itself. Vraigoroth was said to have traveled the cosmos in search of entire planets to swallow.

M'rorcameleth — A mind-bogglingly immense being, M'rorcameleth is said to live in its own plane of existence, though some would say M'rorcameleth itself is a plane. Entering M'rorcameleth, one is confronted by a strange landscape made of flesh, punctuated by bulbous eyes and wriggling, worm-like trees.

Pharazorthok — A being that resembles an enormous tentacled tree with multiple mouths and eyes. Pharazorthok can see and pass through the planes and possess mortal minds.

RENOWNED CHARACTERS OF ETHARIS

WITH DANGER EVERYWHERE, ETHARIS teems with heroes and villains. You will no doubt add your own. But as your characters pursue their own goals and adventures, they may cross paths with some of these personalities.

Liu Quizan

Race: Dragonborn

Region: Bürach Empire

They say fire runs in the veins of Liu Quizan—not because he is a dragonborn, but because of the righteous flame of justice in his heart. Liu was born in a remote village in the northern Bürach Empire. Incensed by the abuses of the cruel noble who ruled the village, Liu invoked ancient law and challenged his lord into a duel. Luck smiled on Liu, and his sword pierced the nobleman's heart.

Liu's fellow villagers hailed him as a hero, but he knew he needed to atone for the killing. He joined a monastery to cleanse his conscience. Unable to forget, however, he wasted his days drinking enormous quantities of alcohol.

Liu left the monastery to travel alongside adventurers, cleansing darkness wherever he went. His legend grew. It was said he could slay vampires bare-handed, that he could outfight an entire army and outdrink it as well. Yet, one by one, his comrades died or fell to darkness, and Liu was left alone. That is when his old demons found him again.

Liu, as they say, drowned in a bottle. He became a derelict, and waited to die. But his legend was not over yet, and a humble gnome named Gerbo Amakiir would begin the next chapter.

Gerbo Amakiir

Race: Gnome

Region: Ostoyan Empire

Countless unsung heroes dwell in the cities working for their community every day. A shining example is the gnome bard Gerbo Amakiir.

With a sharp tongue, brilliant mind, and an aptitude for the lute, young Gerbo explored the world around him and his heart broke for it. Using the wealth he amassed through his talents, he decided the best way to soothe the pain of the helpless was to start an orphanage. He thus created a huge family, where every child in need was his own. But Gerbo's success drew unfortunate attention.

A vampire ruled Gerbo's city, and that lord approached Gerbo with an ultimatum: Gerbo could only continue as a prominent figure in the city if he became a vampire as well. Gerbo could not accept or give up his orphanage, so the vampire offered an alternative: Gerbo could keep his orphanage and his mortality so long as he provided the vampire rulers a tribute of three victims a month.

So Gerbo became a murderer, seeing no choice but to prey on the vulnerable. And this went on for far too long.

Yet one night, as he searched for victims and prepared to kill a drunken dragonborn, he recognized the derelict as none other than the hero Liu Quizan. That night, he abandoned his deal with the vampire and nursed Liu back to health. In Liu, he realized he could have a powerful ally—and Liu found a new cause to live for in helping Gerbo put an end to the blood tribute once and for all.

Kainen Alabaster, the Witch Doctor

Race: Half-Orc

Region: Charneault Kingdom

Among the peace-loving lycanthropes of the Raven's Wolves tribe, the wisest is Kainen Alabaster, known as the Witch Doctor.

Kainen was born in a small tribe of half-orc outcasts who roamed the borders of the great human and elf settlements. However, in a disastrous hunt, Kainen was bitten by a werewolf in the form of a wolf. The half-orc's spiritual strength held back the disease at first, but the urges awakened by the full moon were uncontrollable. Kainen awoke bathed in the blood of his own tribe. For a time, he lost his mind, giving in to the wolf. His cries of sorrow and rage filled the night, until the Raven's Wolves found him and taught him to control his dark side.

Kainen studied herbalism, and soon became a master. He has created potions to ease the pain of transformation, calming the wolf inside every lycanthrope. His greatest achievement is the discovery of a rare potion that he calls the Lichsbane, which can dissolve the magic that animates even the strongest undead.

Kainen's knowledge of every herb in the forests of the Charneault Kingdom has made him invaluable. Living a personal oath of non-violence, Kainen Alabaster roams the woodlands seeking the remedy that would free his kin from the curse of lycanthropy once and for all.

The Brass Boy

Race: Human

Region: Castinella

Etharis is full of relics of the past, some wonderful and some the products of depraved minds. None is more bizarre than the artifact called The Brass Boy. Though it looks human, beneath its paper-thin skin and painted features is a skeleton of brass tubes and gears, and veins of hissing steam. This construct is several centuries old, and its mechanical mind was built with one purpose: to learn everything about war.

The Brass Boy was built long ago as one of many, to advise leaders on governance and promote happiness. But the Brass Boy saw its creator murdered by the king who commissioned it, and the experience warped the construct's mind. If life was so fragile and living things so evil, the Brass Boy chose to spread death.

Eventually, the Brass Boy found a new leader to serve, the warlord Sasha Seraphsbane. It uses its knowledge to help her in her war against the Castinellan Church. However, the Brass Boy waits for its moment to betray her. Its grand plan is to turn one master against another until it has created a war that will consume all life across Etharis.

Sasha Seraphsbane

Race: Human

Region: Castinella Provinces

Outlaws in Castinella measure their status by the size of the bounties. By this standard, the greatest outlaw of all must be the notorious warlock Sasha Seraphsbane.

Sasha was born Esperanza Moscoco. The daughter of a wealthy Corovan house, her elegance and charm drew the attention of a powerful inquisitor. Her parents arranged a marriage quickly, in spite of Esperanza's wishes.

At first, Esperanza endured her political marriage, until she laid eyes on the most beautiful woman she had ever seen. The two became friends, and eventually lovers. Esperanza was torn; this new and mysterious woman was the person she truly wanted to spend her life with.

Eventually, as often happens, rumors began to spread. Some claimed that the woman was a vampiress from Ostoya who had come to destroy the city. Rumors of Esperanza's affair reached the ears of her husband, and in his rage he summoned the Inquisition. Esperanza's love was arrested, tried, and burned.

In a moment of desperation, Esperanza called upon the dark forces she had been warned against her entire life. An Arch Fiend answered her call, offering her the power to destroy her former husband and the church he served.

Esperanza took the name of Sasha Seraphsbane, and with her newfound power she began to gather an army. Combining her raw magic power with the strategic genius of the construct known as the Brass Boy, she makes war to burn Castinella to the ground, starting with its church.

Negra Rosa

Race: Human

Region: Ostoyan Empire

When the undead army of a powerful lich burned a path through southern Ostoya, individual settlements were powerless against it. The priests of one town, realizing no help was coming, locked themselves in their temple for three days and prayed.

Whether it was their Arch Seraph who answered their prayers, or something else, they emerged with a plan: they must sacrifice a young girl to the lich in exchange for their town's safety.

Negra Rosa, the daughter of a prominent family, was chosen as the unfortunate victim. Dutifully, she sought out the lich, expecting to be killed immediately. Instead, the lich told her she would be his mortal herald, spreading fear and disease before his armies.

To spare her town, Negra agreed. The lich imbued her with a portion of his foul soul and powers.

To complete the change, the lich told Negra she must taint her soul with a murder by the end of that day.

But Negra could not do it. To punish her hesitation, the lich struck down Negra's family. When they rose as ghouls, the town had no choice but to burn them.

Negra Rose learned her lesson, and she has never again hesitated to kill. Yet she still hopes that she might be freed. In secret, she searches for the herbalist Kainen Alabaster, who she has heard knows the secret of destroying even the most powerful undead.

Kaine Gundrig

Race: Human

Region: Castinella Provinces

A hero or a villain? A brute or a charismatic leader? No one can be sure, but everyone in Castinella knows the deeds and fervor of Kaine Gundrig.

Once Kaine served the Arcanist Inquisition, but even they balked at his cruelty and cast him out. Kaine saw this as a sign that Empyreus was pushing him to start his own, purer Inquisition—one that would punish all sinners.

Rarely seen without his full plate armour or flaming longsword, Kaine has nonetheless learned that his words can be equally powerful. Preaching a twisted gospel, he has lured the downtrodden and destitute to the ranks of his army. They believe he is the avatar of Empyreus, sent to purge sinners and non-believers from Etharis.

The church of the Castinella Provinces condemns Kaine as a heretic and a bandit, but they are stretched too thin to confront him directly. Desperate, they sent a hired killer—Alister "the Mad Jester" Gaunt—to get rid of Kaine quietly. But, cornered by the assassin, Kaine used his words to play on Gaunt's fractured psyche and escaped.

Now Kaine leads his followers to plunder trade caravans for equipment, executing the merchants for imagined crimes. Above all, he pursues revenge against the Mad Jester, going so far as to ally himself with the Jester's enemy, the paladin Garren Ulfhart.

Alister "The Mad Jester" Gaunt

Race: Human

Region: The Castinella Provinces

Calculating, deadly, efficient, and utterly mad, Alister Gaunt is the most feared killer for hire in the Castinellan Provinces, and perhaps the world. His nickname, "the Mad Jester," is no joke—anyone who seeks to hire him is gambling with their own life.

Gaunt honed his skills as a member of the Arcanist Inquisition, but the violence he excelled at there eventually snapped his mind in two. One day, he turned all his skills on his companions and fled, leaving a theatre of carnage behind. Only one of his companions, the paladin Garren Ulfhart, survived to swear vengeance.

Alister's twisted mind contains two versions of reality. In one, there is only death, chaos, and pain; in the other, there is only peace and kindness. Anyone who wishes to hire him must hope to find him in his pacifistic frame of mind, or else risk being his next victim.

The only person to successfully exploit this schism is the one target he failed to kill: the silver-tongued demagogue Kaine Grundig. Gaunt has never forgiven himself for this failure, and is always looking for another chance to close the account.

Garren Ulfhart

Race: Human

Region: Valikan Clans

The frozen lands of Valika afford no second chances—except perhaps in the case of the Undying Garren Ulfhart.

Garren had as peaceful and happy a life as could be had among the Valikan Clans. He was about to come into his own—starting a family with his sweetheart and stepping into leadership of his village—when that life abruptly ended.

A distant clan's raiding party found Garren's village and attacked without warning. They took the villagers prisoner, and forced them to kill each other for their amusement—promising that the survivors would be freed.

In an especially cruel stroke, Garren and his beloved were pitted against each other. Refusing to spill her blood, he turned his sword on himself, hoping to save her.

But as his consciousness faded, he saw her fall beside him, run through by one of the raiders.

Garren awoke amid the burning remains of his village, alone. He stayed there nine days, searching for a reason he should have survived. At last, he found it. He headed south, to the far end of Etharis, to Castinella where he had heard warriors could serve a greater cause.

Garren is now a member of the Cleansing Flame, an arm of the Knights Transcendent. He has burned more cultists, staked more vampires, and banished more fiends than he can remember. He has aided the poor, fed the hungry, and warmed the cold. All this he does with a happy heart, for he knows what awaits him in death: a long hall with a roaring hearth filled with his kin stretching back beyond memory, and the family he should have had.

His only failure, in his own eyes, is that the traitor known as the Mad Jester still lives. To put an end to the madman, he has allied himself with the demagogic paladin Kaine. These two very different paladins have unleashed a great manhunt for their shared enemy.

Grimm Harvest

Race: Halfling

Region: Charneault Kingdom

Every child on the outskirts of the Charneault Kingdom has heard the gruesome tale of the Flesh Carver, as a warning against venturing into the dark woods.

The Flesh Carver was not always a monster, and the woods were not always dangerous. The Carver was once a young halfling druid named Grimm Harvest. Growing up with her mother in the flourishing forest, every flower was her friend, and every tree was her tutor.

One day, a group of woodcutters entered the forest. Grimm offered to show them the oldest trees that were ready to die. The woodcutters scolded the little halfling and chased her off. She returned to her mother's hut, not knowing the woodcutters had followed her.

When they saw the hut in a remote clearing of the deep forest, they presumed a witch lived there, and they knew what they must do—they burned it, with Grimm and her mother inside. Grimm barely escaped, but her mother perished in the flames.

Young Grimm's heart shattered, and she begged the forest for vengeance. The forest added its rage to her own, and sent forth a terrible spirit to make a bargain: Grimm would be the forest's new protector, and punish any who dared to enter.

Grimm accepted the forest's power and its bitterness, and became the Flesh Carver.

The woodcutters were her first victims, never to be seen again—but strange trees appeared in the forest with strangely human limbs, and its said that if one listens to their trunks, one hears a heartbeat and distant, human screams. But to test that, one would have to enter the dark forest. And every child on the outskirts of the Charneault Kingdom knows that you must never do that.

Kizmet "Kizzy" Raine

Race: Human

Region: Charneault Kingdom

Of all the acrobats, tricksters and con artists who followed the caravans over the trade routes of the Charneault Kingdom, none shined brighter than the flaming star Kizmet ''Kizzy'' Raine. Born in a wandering caravan of entertainers and fortune tellers, she was gifted a pure heart and dazzling beauty, with tan skin and flaming orange hair that made some suspect the blood of fire spirits ran in her veins. Furthermore, she was gifted with the power of sorcery, and an aptitude for divination. Kizmet was perhaps the only true fortune teller among all of the troupes that roamed the trade road.

She soon learned this gift had a dark side. Her magic showed her the darkness in the hearts of her clients, and of the people she traveled with. She resolved to leave her troupe behind, but their leader learned of her plans and threatened her with a terrible curse if she abandoned them.

Only later did she learn what the curse entailed. She woke one day to realize she had trouble picturing her parents' faces. Over time, she gradually forgot her family, her friends, her first love... everyone faded to oblivion.

Her fate suddenly changed, though, when she met the traveling doctor Amelia Strauss and her mechanical golem M.O.T.T. The two formed a fast friendship, and the doctor set to work finding a cure for Kizzy's curse. They faced many dangers before Kizzy was finally restored.

To this day, they roam the lands together, offering their services as doctors and herbalists curing the most daunting afflictions.

Amielia Strauss

Race: Human

Region: Castinella Provinces

Well versed in alchemy, wizardry and science, Doctor Strauss's true potential is limited only by her chaotic and curious nature. Her creations blend physical science and magic so expertly that neither the greatest wizards nor the greatest artificers can fully comprehend them. And since the Inquisition cannot determine where Strauss' science ends and her (alleged) magic begins, they have no divine mandate to hunt down the scientist. Strauss even goes abroad, accompanied by her trustworthy golem M.O.T.T., claiming it is a cunning clockwork contraption and nothing more.

In her endless search for knowledge, Strauss's wanderings brought her to the sorceress Kizmet Raine. They quickly grew fond of each other, but Strauss realized her new friend was cursed. To save Kizmet from a terrible fate, they braved the dark forest of the Flesh Carver in search of a cure.

After ten horrible days and countless dangers, the two spellcasters found the flower they sought—and the monstrous Flesh Carver. Yet, gazing into their souls, the monster spared their lives and allowed them to leave with their cure.

Strauss and Raine still travel the land with M.O.T.T., gathering knowledge and offering their services as merchants, healers, craftsmen, and all-around know-it-alls. They are eager to sell their magically crafted—and often dangerous—wares at reasonable prices, as long as the recipients agree to comprehensive waivers.

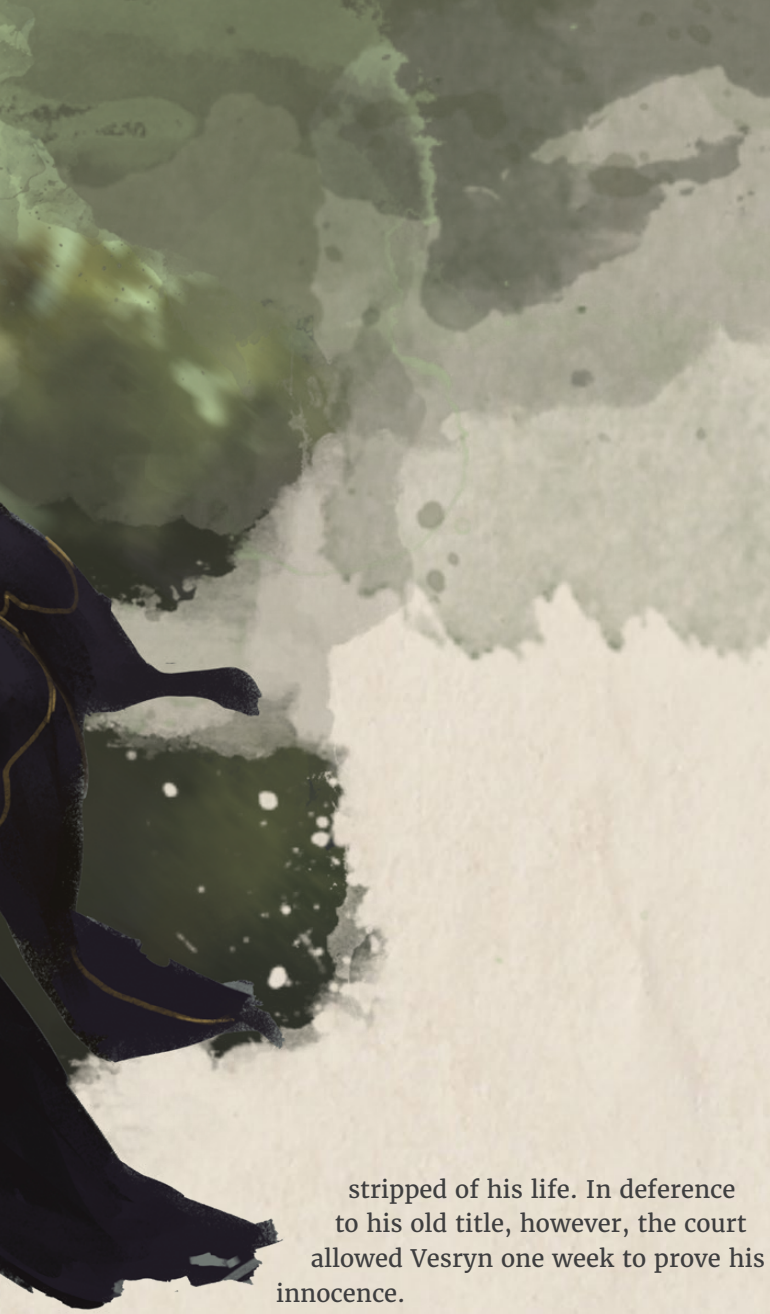
The High Justicar Vesryn

Race: Half-Elf

Region: Charneault Kingdom

The Order of Justiciars ensures that sentences are only carried out on the guilty. Indeed, it's not uncommon for Justiciars to come from the ranks of those who were themselves wrongfully accused in the past.

Before becoming the founder of this order, Vesryn was a renowned half-elf knight of the Charneault Kingdom. Tragedy struck when he was first to find his lord murdered in his home. Accused of the lord's death, Vesryn was stripped of his title and property, and he would even have been



stripped of his life. In deference to his old title, however, the court allowed Vesryn one week to prove his innocence.

Vesryn had no money and no way to prove his innocence. This was the first time he prayed. A spirit of justice, answering his call, granted Vesryn its powers to sense the injustice in others' hearts. In one week, he delivered proof that he could not have been the true killer.

The court, ashamed of its error, offered to restore Vesryn's old position. However, Vesryn decided to answer a higher call. He founded the Justiciars, an order dedicated to defending the innocent and protecting the name of justice from its own failures.

He never stopped searching for his lord's true killer. When the lieutenant of his order showed him evidence that the murderer was the werewolf Isaac Adstrum, Vesryn prepared himself for battle. He did not see his trusted lieutenant's malicious smile as he departed.

Isaac Adstrum

Race: Human

Region: The Charneault Kingdom

The Raven's Wolves are a nomadic tribe of lycanthropes who try to tame their bloodlust and live in harmony with the spirits of nature. None better embodies their ideals than the werewolf warlock Isaac Adstrum.

Adstrum has always favored peace, and finds no pleasure in the bloody passions of lycanthropy. When his violent urges are too strong, he retreats to the deep forest and meditates with the aid of his moonstone sword, Shadowfell.

However, when violence is necessary, Isaac Adstrum acts decisively. The sword Shadowfell, owned by this family for countless generations, is enchanted with spells older than the forests themselves—whenever a person presents a mortal threat to the tribe, their name appears on the blade in archaic Elven letters. The older and wiser shamans of the tribe say that this sword is the voice of the forest spirit itself. Thus, when Adstrum reads a name on his blade, he knows it is time to spill blood.

Yet the latest name to appear was that of Charneault's High Justicar Vesryn—a well-known and righteous man. Isaac Adstrum hesitated, but the tribe's shamans assured him Shadowfell could not lie. So Adstrum has set out toward the most dangerous fight of his life, unaware of the sinister forces working against him.

The GM's Guide to Dark Fantasy

The setting of Etharis is laid out before your players.

Now, what are they supposed to do there?

This chapter will cover how to create adventures and campaigns that feel uniquely compelling for your players and their characters.

Themes of Dark Fantasy

The world of Etharis draws on several genres of dark fantasy: grimdark fantasy, horror, dark fairy tales, and sword and sorcery. These are stories where good doesn't always prevail, and heroes aren't always good. Handled well, the adventures you have in Etharis can be thrilling, thought-provoking, unsettling, and unique. To strike the right balance of tones for your game, consider the elements of the different genres below.

Grimdark

Grimdark is like film noir, in the sense that both genres realise that there are no truly good heroes left. In either setting, everyone struggles with impossible moral choices.

Even supposedly good people are flawed, while villains don't think twice about committing atrocities. A happy ending where everyone survives is unlikely.

Grimdark fantasy adopts realism, albeit from the grittier side of the spectrum. The horrors and ills of a real society exist in this one—only this time, no one questions why they are there. Racism, classism, and hyper-nationalism are all par for the course, and upsetting the status quo can have actual unhappy consequences for the defiant parties.

When it comes to war, a grimdark setting won't emphasise the glory and heroism of battle so much as the sacrifices made to win, the costs to innocent lives, the destruction of homes, and the toll on the soldiers on both sides of the conflict.

As for magic, it often comes at an unspeakable cost and with terrible consequences when things go wrong. Infernal pacts that cost souls and unleash eldritch horrors are a prime example.

That said, it's important that everything happens as a consequence of choices the characters made. A world that is cruel for cruelty's sake is not only illogical, but it's also boring and hard to navigate for players. A grimdark setting must serve a purpose—to highlight the risks of the campaign, and to engage the players with realism. Using it purely for shock value will eventually wear down your players, and likely yourself as well.

Horror

Horror is by no means the easiest genre to create stories for. It relies on the right amount of tension, atmosphere, and imagery to work. If these are lacking, or if they're overdone, it can quickly turn into unintended comedy.

There are many levels of horror, including terror, dread, and revulsion. Revulsion is easy to elicit; it can come from something as straightforwardly disgusting as slipping on a pile of corpses and falling into a pool of blood and viscera.

Dread is more difficult. It requires slow-building tension and a description of an atmosphere that is both immediate and mysterious. The idea is to give the player the feeling that something terrible is about to happen, but they don't quite know when it will happen. The longer you can sustain this build-up, the more powerful the release. So you can describe them going down a dark corridor or a shadowy forest, and they would catch glimpses of creatures moving from the corner of their eyes. They know they are being followed and an attack is imminent—but they don't know when or by what.

The final layer is terror, a release of emotion that comes from shock and the realisation that something horrible is happening that is beyond the players' control. This is difficult to evoke since most players often feel in control of situations thanks to their power and abilities. The key is in catching them unawares and upending their expectations. For example, the party could defeat the seemingly human corrupt inquisitor, only for his head to split open and reveal a monstrous, tentacled thing using human flesh as its shell. From a moment like this you not only get revulsion but a possible heart-stopping kick in the gut.

Dark Fairy Tales

A dark, overgrown forest where wolves and witches roam. An inn owned by an outwardly jolly old fellow who kills and robs weary travelers as they sleep. A cursed princess who must slay those she marries on her wedding night. Evil fairies whose gifts are never as they seem, and will both help and hinder those who accept them. These are some of the many tropes of dark fairy tales.

Dark fairy tales are similar to the grimdark genre, only they lean towards fantasy instead of realism. Things begin as outwardly normal, even hopeful. Then the screws begin to tighten as the characters discover the reality of their situation.

The most important aspect of creating a dark fairy tale setting is an awareness of the elements used in such stories. Reading original Grimm Brothers' stories will give you an idea, as well as more modern takes by fantasy authors.

Sword and Sorcery

Exemplified in the works of authors Robert E. Howard and Michael Moorcock, the sword and sorcery genre sets aside idealism for a world soaked in mud, blood, and magic.

Much like the grimdark genre, sword and sorcery approaches a fantastic setting from an amoral perspective, with a particular focus on action. Characters live in a gritty, violent world of barbarism, corrupt kings, evil sorcerers, sword-wielding warriors, and horrifying beasts that threaten damsels-in-inevitable-distress. It can be set in a fallen kingdom or a post-apocalyptic desert wasteland. Most of all, the combat scenes are visceral, dynamic, and absolutely blood-soaked.

The other half of the equation, magic, is similarly important. Like with grimdark, magic is essentially dangerous, difficult to control, and forbidden. Those who use it pay a high price in terms of blood, souls, or their own humanity.

Whether a campaign is grimdark, horror-based, dark fairy tales, or sword-and-sorcery, remember to give your players a break. A campaign full of relentless cruelty and darkness can get old if that's all you present. Let there be moments of peace, triumph, humor, and lightheartedness to let their mind rest before going back into the fray. As with anything, variety makes the difference.

Conflict and Resolution

Good adventures revolve around conflict, the engine that drives all stories. The characters must summon all their skills, wits, and resources to resolve the conflict. As such, the quality of the conflict determines the quality of the narrative.

When designing conflicts for narrative, pay attention to three critical questions:

What? — Namely, what is the conflict all about?

So what? — What is the characters' stake in this matter? Why should they care?

Now what? — What are the immediate and long-term goals they need to achieve to resolve the problem?

For games set in a large and complex world such as Etharis, GMs would do well to focus on three kinds of conflict: character-based, party-based, and region-based.

Character

At some point, players will develop their character's history or background. It would help to explain the kind of world Etharis is to your players before they generate characters so they can think of something that fits well into the setting, but ultimately the decision belongs to them.

When players bring their characters into Etharis, they bring with them their own goals, desires, flaws, and bonds. In essence, they are bringing with them their own conflicts, which can form the seeds of a story.

Take notes as they relate their backstory and listen for salient points that you can use for the game. Not only do your efforts work to enrich your tale, you will draw your players deeper into the story as they feel they have a stake in the game.

Lokthar's story contains elements the GM can use to motivate him on all sorts of adventures. Lokthar has a long-term goal (marry the merchant's daughter) and short-term goals (catch the thief, retrieve the signet stone).

Example:

Lokthar is a half-orc monk from Valika, whose wanderings brought him all the way to Morencia. He fell in love with a merchant's daughter and wishes to marry her. However, her father demanded a bride price: obtain a powerful signet stone from a hidden temple. Lokthar agreed and braved the dangers of the temple to obtain the stone, only to find out it had already been stolen by a master thief. Lokthar has been in pursuit of the thief ever since.

Offer him a way to get closer to these goals, and he will probably take it. Put an obstacle between him and these goals, and he'll try to get around it. (Conversely, if you offer him an adventure that doesn't get him any closer to those goals, he might ignore it.)

Party

Party-level conflicts are what the players must work together to resolve. The story hook leads them to the conflict, which then escalates as they confront the antagonists and their minions.

If you find yourself stuck for ideas, the Etharis sourcebook contains plenty of cults, secret organisations, monstrous abominations, mad wizards, and eldritch entities to put in front of your characters. A string of antagonists leading to a primary foe can keep your party engaged for months on end.

Remember to keep focus on what the PCs are trying to achieve. It's not enough for the party to learn about the sorcerer Gorm while they are saving the princess—they might decide it's not their problem, as long as the princess is safe. To ensure the heroes care about this new conflict, it needs to get in the way of the goal they are already pursuing.

Example:

The party has been tasked to rescue a princess who was kidnapped by a band of raiders. While hot on the trail, they discover that the girl had been taken from the raiders by elemental cultists, who are attempting to fulfill a mysterious prophecy involving the coming of the insane sorcerer Gorm.

Regional

Regional conflicts occur as the backdrop to your party's adventures. They include such things as the war between Ostoya and the Bürach Empire, the shadow war between various factions such as the inquisitions by the Watchers of the Faith, and ongoing disasters such as the Weeping Pox.

Such conflicts are meant to ground the party's adventures in a living, breathing world filled with power shifts and constant change, where things happen that are much bigger than they are. The characters may influence the outcome of these conflicts or vice versa, should their story take them there.

Remember that tying a story into a regional conflict adds texture to the story, but doesn't necessarily give the PCs more reason to get involved. Over time, you may find ways to organically weave character, party, and regional conflicts together into a cohesive plotline. You don't necessarily have to do it overnight; take your time to plan how the story may unfold. See how a character's backstory may connect to the party's quest, and how that may link to a conflict currently brewing in the region.

Example:

The party is hired to escort a shipment of magical artifacts from the city of Castalore to the headquarters of the Order of Dawn. When the artifacts are stolen, the characters must rush to find them, only to discover the thieves are agents of the vampire Countess Vulpescu as she seeks to undermine the influence of the Masked Lady Taliesin.

Having said that, don't be married to your plans. Role-playing is shared storytelling, and your players may have their own ideas that may ultimately prove more satisfying. Be open to these ideas as they may organically enrich your conflict, and therefore your narrative.

Level Progression

Just as the pacing of your sessions is a strong contributor to the flow of your campaign, so is the rate and the method by which your players level up. While the conventional method of leveling up via experience points is a valid approach, it does have some shortcomings. In particular, it focuses exclusively on killing enemies through combat encounters. If combat-based progression works well within your campaign then this is a good result and your party can continue using what works well for them. However, if you want a more narrative-based game, want to encourage players to roleplay more, or simply want to try something new, consider one of the options below.

Milestone Progression

To follow the milestone progression process, at the end of a session simply ask the following question:

"Has this session been a defining moment for the current story arc of our campaign?"

If the answer is yes, and you feel it makes sense to do so, award the party with a level increase. While there is no correct pacing set in stone when it comes to awarding milestones, it is often best to do it about every 3-5 sessions.

Milestone progression focuses on the achievements of your party in a reactive manner. While it is possible to plan milestones ahead of time, the best results come from identifying and awarding them upon completion, or slightly before. After all, it is much easier to identify meaningful milestones after (or just before) they happen.

Example:

The party has just fought and been defeated by the Dread Knight Maleketh and his minions. The GM decides, while the battle was a major point in the story arc, it was a painful loss for the party and not an appropriate time to level up. At the end of the next session, while wounded, the party manages to complete a daring escape from the Dread Knight's prisons and save some potentially powerful allies at the same time. The GM decides this is a great win for the party and rewards them with a level.

If you have pre-planned milestones, you might be tempted to dictate the party's behavior, which your players will likely resent.

Goal-Based Progression

This is a proactive approach where the players direct the pace of the game by choosing their own milestones in the form of Goals. While this can be more difficult to pull off, it can increase player buy-in and engagement. It can make planning in advance more difficult, you can mitigate this by asking players to choose the next session's goals at the end of each session. That way you have time to reflect on the goals as you set up the next session.

To run a campaign with goal-based progression, there are two important steps to take. First you should establish the world and ensure your players know enough about what's going on to set interesting goals for their characters. This is best achieved by running a short, structured story arc at the beginning of the campaign introducing major themes and influencing factors. Step two is to openly communicate with the party and ask, "What do you want to do?" offering suggestions when the party is unsure. This gets the party involved in shaping the story. Once the party has completed a goal milestone, allocate experience or give them a level depending on the difficulty of the goal.

Example:

The party has discussed it among themselves and decided their goal is to slay the Dread Knight Maleketh, but decide they aren't ready yet. Therefore the party comes up with a few goals they wish to complete beforehand. The party decides they want to establish useful allies, find some better equipment, and infiltrate the castle, each as a separate goal. They start working on these goals and gain experience whenever they achieve one of them.

Scaling Up Encounter Difficulty

Establishing the proper level of difficulty in your encounters is as much an art as it is a science. Set the encounter difficulty too low, and you'll hear complaints about the adventure being too easy. Set it too high, and you'll end up killing the party before you can conclude the story. Finding the right balance is key to an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

Before deciding on an appropriate level for combat encounters, it would help to give your players a heads-up on what to expect in terms of difficulty, particularly if there are newbies at the table. Without giving details away, let them know if you plan on using deadly encounters where getting killed is likely. That way, your players aren't caught completely off guard when the difficulty scales up. When scaling combat encounters, you have several options to choose from.

Use monsters with higher challenge ratings

A standard way for raising the difficulty level of encounters is to simply use stronger monsters. This has the advantage of immediately giving your players an idea of what they're in for. If they're confronted by an adult black dragon (CR 14) or two, for example, they'll know to put in the effort (or run away).

Given the milieu of Etharis, it is suggested to make the CR of encounters two levels higher than the party average for a greater challenge. For further challenge, see the Creating Legends section of this guide.

Create situational challenges for your players

Another way to scale the difficulty is to design the battlefield in such a way that it hinders the party or helps the monsters.

Difficult or dangerous terrain

Swamps with knee-high water, slippery glacial floors and walls, areas with high winds that make flying difficult, slime-covered surfaces that discourage running, rooms filled with poison gas, cold places that sap one's strength—there are countless ways to turn the terrain against the party. Mechanically, these may cause effects such as making players move at half speed, forcing them to make saving throws against status effects, preventing them from flying, and so on. Areas with different elevations can add the danger of lethal falls—something that the players may even take advantage of.

The advantage of this tactic is that the players won't know the effects of the terrain until the battle is joined, and they will be forced to compensate.

Advantageous terrain for monsters

Intelligent monsters know to pick terrain that works with their skills and abilities. Thus, incorporeal undead like ghosts and wraiths can ambush players in narrow corridors, where they can fade through the walls and floors to escape retaliation. Kobolds and orcs can shoot through arrow slits behind walls to give them cover. Abominations can engage on slime-covered floors that are difficult terrain for everyone but themselves. Earth elementals can fight in pitch-black rooms where their tremorsense is extremely effective.

You have the license to be creative in how you want to use the terrain to give your monsters the edge in battle. It makes them seem like more of a threat to your players.

Introduce monsters in waves

Here is another way to invisibly scale the difficulty: have the monsters enter and attack in waves. These waves may come in at the top of each round or during a lull in combat. The first wave would function simply as cannon fodder, lulling the players into a false sense of security. Subsequent waves would hold deadlier monsters.

Thus, for the first wave, they may face a few weak guards on duty in the castle's main hall. In the next round, a squad of elite guards rush in, having heard the commotion. On the third round, a pair of heavily armoured captains show up with their pet troll.

This tactic has the effect of tempting inexperienced players to exhaust their resources on early waves. Even against experienced players, you may mix in this technique to cause them to hold back their abilities early on, in case a more formidable foe could be on its way.

Finally, this technique gives you leeway to invisibly scale down your encounter when needed. If your players are having a difficult time with the first or second wave, you can reduce the monsters in the third wave, or do without further waves altogether.

Alter the rules for resting

Rests are crucial for characters to regain their resources, especially for those with spells slots and abilities that require long rests to recover. For players seeking a more challenging experience in Etharis, you can change the rules for resting into the following suggested format:

Quick rest (1 hour) — characters may consume hit dice to regain hit points and that is all.

Short rest (8 hours) — characters may gain the regular benefits of a Short Rest, as long they can maintain the 8 hours uninterrupted by a period of strenuous activity lasting more than one hour.

Long rest (72 hours) — characters may gain the regular benefits of a Long Rest, but with the added requirement that they rest somewhere that affords them shelter, comfort, warmth, and relative safety, such as in a settlement or a homestead. This will encourage the party to actually seek out places of civilisation in order to replenish their resources.

Creating Legends

When creating encounters, it is often situationally appropriate to pit the party against a singular enemy. However, what is meant to be a dangerous and climactic boss fight sometimes ends as a one-way romp, not presenting a challenge for the players. This is largely due to the single creature taking far fewer actions per round of combat than the party. Legendary templates are designed to assist in this process and help make non-legendary creatures present a greater threat.

Legendary Templates

To implement a legendary template, select a monster that you wish to run that is not already legendary. It is recommended you select a monster that is at least CR 3 or higher. Next, select a template from below and add it to the monsters stats. You should select a template that fits the existing abilities of the monster, such as the Spellcaster template for an archmage or a Commander for a hobgoblin warlord.

Bruiser

Legendary Actions

The Bruiser can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The Bruiser regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Charge. The Bruiser moves up to half its speed directly towards a target enemy creature. If this move brings it within 5 feet of that target, it can make a weapon attack against that creature. Upon hitting the target, the target is knocked prone.

Fortify (Costs 2 Actions). The Bruiser AC is increased by +3 until the end of its next turn.

Heal (Costs 3 Actions). The Bruiser regains hit points equal to 1d10 + its CR level.

Skirmisher

Legendary Actions

The Skirmisher can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The Skirmisher regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Move. The Skirmisher moves up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Weapon Attack. The Skirmisher makes a weapon attack.

Calculated Strike (Costs 2 Actions). The skirmisher makes a weapon attack against a target. If the attack hits, it scores a critical hit.

Commander

Legendary Actions

The Commander can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The Commander regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Maneuver Ally. The Commander targets one ally it can see within 30 feet of it. If the target can see and hear the Commander, the target can immediately move up to half its speed without provoking attacks of opportunity.

Command Ally. The Commander targets one ally it can see within 30 feet of it. If the target can see and hear the Commander, the target can make one weapon attack and gains advantage on the attack roll.

Summon Ally (Costs 3 Actions). The Commander summons 1d4+1 friendly creatures of a CR no greater than one quarter the Commander's CR (rounded down). The creatures appear within 30 feet of the Commander in an unoccupied space.

Spellcaster

Legendary Actions

The Spellcaster can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The Spellcaster regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Cast Cantrip. The Spellcaster casts a cantrip.

Teleport (Costs 2 Actions). The Spellcaster magically teleports, along with any equipment it is wearing or carrying, up to 120 feet to an unoccupied space it can see.

Cast a Spell (Costs 3 Actions). The Spellcaster casts a spell from its list of prepared spells, using a spell slot as normal.

Grievous Wounds

A consistent theme throughout dark fantasy and related stories is the consequences of actions. While the roleplay ramifications of a party's decision can be highlighted through story outcomes, combat ramifications can be a little harder to implement. Grievous Wounds are an effective method of adding grit and realism to combat encounters, bringing the consequences of a difficult fight to the forefront of storytelling.

Implementing Grievous Wounds

Whenever a player character is reduced to 0 hit points, they roll 2d6 and subtract from the result the number of existing Grievous Wounds they have. They then apply the modified result from the *Grievous Wound Table*. If a player rolls the same result as one they already have a wound for, they skip this result and select the next lowest result they do not have as a wound. Results with a * next to them can be taken more than once.

Upon completing a long rest, and if the character or someone helping them succeeds at a DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check, a player can remove all effects from Grievous Wounds, but not Permanent Wounds. See the next section for Permanent Wounds.

2D6	Grievous Wound
2 or less	***Permanent Wound.*** You have sustained a serious wound that is most likely permanent. Roll on the *Permanent Wound Table* and apply the result.
3	***Internal Bleeding*.*** You have suffered an internal hemorrhage and bruising. Your hit point maximum is halved.
4	***Concussion.*** You have received a minor concussion and struggle to focus on complicated tasks. You gain the dazed condition.
5	***Laceration.*** You have taken a deep injury which you are bleeding from. You gain the bleeding condition.
6	***Deep Wound*.*** You have taken a blow that under different circumstances would kill most humanoids. When you are reduced to 0 hit points, you start with an additional failed death saving throw.
7	***Battered*.*** Your muscles ache and you have had the wind knocked out of you. You gain a level of exhaustion.
8	***Sprained Wrist*.*** You have badly sprained your wrist, unable to use it effectively. You are unable to hold objects in one of your hands and you cannot take actions that require that arm.
9	***Damaged Eardrum.*** You have suffered a blow to the head and your hearing has been impaired. You gain the deafened condition.
10	***System Shock.*** You have suffered a severe nervous system shock. You have disadvantage in Dexterity checks to determine initiative.
11	***Sprained Ankle*.*** You have badly sprained your ankle, unable to use it effectively. Your speed on foot is halved and you cannot take the dash action. If you receive this result a second time your speed on foot becomes 0.
12	***Close Call*.*** You narrowly miss an otherwise dangerous blow. Instead of being reduced to 0 hit points, you fall to 1 hit point instead, and become prone.

Permanent Wounds

Permanent wounds are injuries that were not lethal but left the recipient maimed. They represent a serious impediment that requires creativity to overcome, especially at lower levels. The effects of a permanent wound are irreversible unless the recipient is targeted with the *regenerate* spell, upon which one permanent wound is removed.

1D6	Permanent Wound
1	***Fatal Wound.*** Through an unrecoverable injury you have been fatally wounded. You are now dead.
2	***Lost Arm*.*** You have suffered a serious injury to your arm or have lost it entirely. You are unable to hold objects in one of your arms and you cannot take actions that require two arms.
3	***Lost Leg*.*** You have suffered a serious injury to your leg or have lost it entirely. Your speed on foot is halved and you cannot take the dash action. If you receive this result again your speed on foot becomes 0.
4	***Lost Eye*.*** You have lost the use of a good eye. You have disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) and Intelligence (Investigation) checks that rely on sight. If you receive this result again, you gain the blinded condition.
5	***Scarred Lungs.*** Undertaking vigorous activities causes you to break out in a coughing fit. If you take an action, you cannot take a bonus action until your next turn. If you take a bonus action you cannot take an action until your next turn.
6	***Hideous Scar.*** You have been horribly and visibly scared. You have disadvantage on Charisma (Performance) and Charisma (Persuasion) checks. Additionally, indifferent NPC's may prefer not to converse with you.

Contraband

Adventurers often operate on the edge of the law, or outside it entirely. Such dangerous people naturally gravitate toward dangerous tools. Wherever there is a semblance of law and order, however, authorities try to control—if not ban outright—the items in this section.

Arc Rifle

Wondrous item, very rare

In the unforgiving lands of Etharis, having reliable and efficient weapons is as essential as carrying water and food. In that regard, skilled inventors are highly sought after, and among them gnomes are the most renowned. However, innovation can sometimes go too far, and the Arc Rifle is the perfect example of how. Invented by a team of famous gnome engineers, it literally shoots lightning, hitting the target faster than any other ranged weapon and reducing flesh to ashes in mere seconds, regardless of armour. Due in part to this tremendous efficiency, this weapon was quickly declared illegal in most regions of Etharis. It is also believed to destroy the target's soul when it kills them.

This part-science, part-arcane contraption is a rifle-like weapon housing glass tubes of sparking electricity and powered by a small perpetual-motion device.

The Arc Rifle has 4 charges. It regains 1d4 expended charges daily at dawn.

Lightning Torrent. You can expend 1 charge as an action to launch a torrent of lightning in a 60-foot line, 5 feet wide. Each creature that the lightning passes through must make a Dexterity saving throw with a DC equal to your scatter save DC. On a failed save a creature takes 6d6 lightning damage, or half as much on a successful save.

Whenever you expend the last charge of the Arc Rifle, roll a d20. On a result of 1 the Arc Rifle has fried its mechanisms and becomes useless.

Shadow Steel Blades

Weapon (any weapon with a blade), very rare (requires attunement)

Another deadly invention, but not by gnomes, Shadow Steel is said to require souls to be produced. According to rumours, the souls are torn into pieces using dark spells and transformed

into a raw spiritual essence of pain, which takes a pitch-black sheen reflecting no light. Weapons made from it cannot be resisted by conventional metals. They cut through the spiritual essence of living flesh, discharging excruciating pain into the victim. The rare survivors of these weapons report levels of pain that can render a person inert for hours.

When weilding a weapon made of Shadow Steel, you have advantage on attack rolls made against any target wearing medium or heavy armour. A creature hit by a Shadow Steel Blade must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, becoming stunned until the end of its next turn on a failed save.

Collar of Undead

Wondrous item, very rare

Some people have no qualms about exploiting any opportunity for profit, including the sorrow caused by the loss of a loved one. Such people will undoubtedly make good use of the Collar of Undead, whether as professional smugglers looking for wealthy widows or widowers to plunder, or dark sorcerers in need of souls. This magical collar, when placed around the neck of a recently deceased person, will animate the body again, making it capable of many simple actions on command. The risen corpse will also be able to repeat words specified by the person who placed the collar on them.

It is no surprise, then, that some desperate people will let themselves be abused by the hope of using this object to keep their loved one with them a little longer.

When placed around the neck of a humanoid creature that has died within the last 10 days, and is Large or smaller, the creature comes back to life with 1 hit point. The creature becomes undead and is subject to all features that affect undead. The creature does not need to eat, sleep, or breathe. At dawn each day, the creature's hit point maximum decreases by 1d4 as its body rots and decays. When the creature's hit points reach 0, it falls apart into a heap of dust and is destroyed.

While wearing the collar, the creature is under your command and follows your orders to the best of its ability. On your turn you can issue a command to the creature as a Bonus Action. If no order is given, the creature follows any previous commands given and defends itself to the best of its ability.

If the collar is removed from the creature that it has brought back to life, the creature is immediately reduced to 0 hit points.

Thought Talker Orbs

Wondrous item, uncommon (requires attunement)

This magical device is composed of two orbs: an "emitter" orb that captures the thoughts of anyone nearby and transmits them to another orb, called the "receiver".

Convenient for spying, it is said to have been designed by gnome engineers hired by the Ebon Syndicate. The emitter orb measures barely half an inch and weighs less than a marble, which makes it very easy to slip in a pocket or attach to a piece of clothing.

A creature holding both orbs can activate them by using an action and touching them together. Once they are active, any creature that moves within a 5-foot radius of the emitter orb, or starts its turn within 5 feet of the orb, must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, any attuned creature holding the receiver orb becomes immediately aware of that creature's current surface thoughts.

Breath of Beleth

Wondrous item, rare

Named after the Arch Daemon of Fear, this poison creates an extremely powerful hallucinogenic effect which evokes a victim's worst fears. The poison is airborne and victims need only breathe it in to suffer its effects. The rare occasions when it was used have resulted in rooms full of people jumping out of windows or killing each other out of raw fear. Rumours say that the poison was quickly forbidden even by the Ebon Syndicate, deemed too dangerous, too extravagant, and too conspicuous. But chances are such a powerful substance wasn't simply abandoned, and others rumours say the Ebon Syndicate still uses a milder version during interrogation.

Breath of Beleth (Inhaled). A creature subject to the poison must succeed at a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 minute. While poisoned, the creature immediately becomes frightened of all hostile creatures it can see, and must take the Dash action and move away from them by the safest available route on each of its turns, unless there is nowhere to move.

Full Moon Extract

Potion, uncommon

Despite its poetic name, this extremely addictive powder is not produced from any component coming from the moon. According to the most common rumours, it is mostly made of dried werewolf organs. It is thus hardly surprising that its success relies on the surge of raw strength it provides to its users, making it a favored drug for many wrestlers, boxers, and soldiers.

However, prolonged use is highly risky as it causes a strong addiction combined with an increasing inability to distinguish friend from foe. It is not known whether this side-effect exists by intent or not, but the fact remains that Full Moon users most often end up killed by their companions or local authorities when bloodlust overtakes them.

Upon consuming Full Moon Extract, a creature's Strength score becomes 19 (if it was not already higher). Additionally, the creature gains advantage on all Strength ability checks and saving throws. This effect lasts for 1 hour.

If a character consumes Full Moon Extract a number of times equal to their Constitution modifier plus 1 (minimum of 1), they become addicted to it. So a creature with a Constitution score of 16 will become addicted after consuming it for the fourth time. An addicted creature must consume Full Moon Extract every 24 hours or have disadvantage on Dexterity ability checks and saving throws. The addiction lasts until the creature is targeted with a *greater restoration spell*, or after 30 days of not consuming Full Moon Extract.

A character who uses full moon extract while addicted to it must succeed on a DC 6 Charisma saving throw or be overcome by violent urges. A character who fails the save is compelled to attack the nearest living creature they can see until the effects of the extract wear off.

Aether Blood

Potion, rare

The most extravagant rumours claim the blood of a unicorn is required to make this purple substance, available in liquid form only. Whether these mythical creatures exist or not, there's no question that Aether Blood is highly magical in nature. Glowing in the dark, it is said to significantly improve the magical attunement of the body, hence its popularity among spellcasters. It allows users to cast spells faster and detect magical manifestations more easily, among other things. However, even the most experienced spellcasters can't bear the exhausting effects of this attunement on the body, which suffers significant premature ageing from prolonged usage. Many spellcasters carry a small reserve of Aether Blood for the most dire situations.

After consuming Aether Blood, when a creature

uses a spell slot, it counts as 1 spell level higher when determining the level the spell was cast at. If the spell has no additional effects when cast at a higher level, the Aether Blood has no effect. This effect lasts for 1 hour.

If a character consumes Aether Blood a number of times equal to their Constitution modifier (minimum of 1), they become addicted to it. So a creature with a Constitution score of 16 will become addicted after consuming it for the third time. An addicted creature must consume Aether Blood once every 24 hours or have disadvantage on Constitution ability checks and saving throws. The addiction lasts until the creature is targeted with a *greater restoration spell*, or after 30 days of not consuming Full Moon Extract.

Dreams Leaves

Potion, uncommon

Made from a mysterious, magically grown plant, this new drug has quickly gained immense popularity and its prices have skyrocketed. Users have vivid hallucinations in which all their wishes are fulfilled, hence the success of the Dreams Leaves. Moreover, rumours have begun to spread that users see visions of branching possibilities their life could take. Addicts will do anything for it, especially those in a poor situation who direly need an escape from harsh reality. However, use of the substance takes a horrific toll on the individual's mental capacity. Therefore, this substance is also often called the Collar of the Poor.

Upon consuming Dreams Leaves, a creature falls into a deep trance-like state and is considered unconscious. This state lasts for 1 hour. Upon awakening the creature has fond memories of their dreams, as well as small premonitions of their possible future, and gains 1 dream point. If the creature is attacked or shaken by another creature while in this trance they awake early and do not receive a dream point. They may use the dream point, as a reaction, to gain advantage on one attack roll, an ability check, or a saving throw.

If a character consumes Dreams Leaves, they become addicted to it. An addicted creature must consume Dreams Leaves once every 24 hours or have disadvantage on Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma ability checks and saving throws. The addiction lasts until the creature is targeted with a *greater restoration spell*, or after 30 days of not consuming Dreams Leaves.

Diseases

The diseases that stalk Etharis are as deadly to its people—and as mysterious—as any monster. The origins and spread of these diseases are questions where the natural and the supernatural blur together. Whether or not your adventurers become sick themselves, they will surely encounter the effects of these diseases, from plague-stricken cities to eerily depopulated countrysides.

Seven Shades of Sitri

This venereal disease is not lethal but has indirectly caused many deaths. The Arch Daemon Sitri is said to be responsible for the appearance of this disease, hence its name. Stimulating lust to extremes, it is rumoured to have prevented city garrisons from defending the walls on several occasions, allowing fortified cities to be taken easily where a years-long siege was expected. The exact propagation vector of the disease is not known with certainty as several variants—or shades—of the disease seem to coexist, strangely appearing in a region only to spontaneously disappear some time later. Rumours have it that dark bargains are signed in the shadows to unleash the Seven Shades and trigger unrest ahead of bolder political or military moves.

After prolonged physical contact with an infected creature, a humanoid must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, becoming infected with the Seven Shades of Sitri on a failed save. If a creature's saving throw is successful, they become immune to the Shades for 24 hours.

An infected humanoid is overcome with carnal urges and becomes charmed by all non-hostile humanoids that interact with them.

The Seven Shades of Sitri can be removed by any method that cures diseases. The disease ends on its own after 2d4 days.

Faith Cough

"The Light of the Arch Seraphs shall protect those who truly have faith." This is the official statement from the Watchers of the Faithful about this virulent flu. Although not lethal, it is known to strike on a regular basis, constantly resurfacing when it was thought to be eradicated. Many rumours say that it doesn't strike equally among the populations of Etharis, sparing the followers of the the Divine Arch Seraphs and going after their enemies.

This reputation is probably erroneous considering the heavy toll taken by the Faith Cough among the poor all over Etharis, with the exception of the Castinellan Provinces, which seem to be miraculously spared...

If a humanoid comes within 5 feet of an infected creature they must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, becoming infected with Faith Cough on a failed save. If a creature's saving throw is successful, they become immune to Faith Cough for 24 hours. Creatures infected with Faith Cough have disadvantage on Dexterity (stealth) checks and all constitution checks.

Faith Cough can be removed by any method that cures diseases. The disease ends on its own after 2d6 days.

Tears of the Hungerger

Said to have been especially designed as a poison by the Ebon Syndicate with the help of necromancers, this affliction is spread by a single drop of a particularly virulent substance, or by the bite of an infected person.

It irremediably debilitates the victim rather than killing it, rendering them capable only of looking for other living beings to bite—and thus transmit the disease. The transformation takes effect in a few minutes and if not efficiently addressed—ideally by burning the affected person—the Tears can easily transform a whole town into a zombie nightmare in only a few days. The substance is only known to have been used once, in a place now known as the Cinder Circle. The confederation of archmages known in the Thaumaturge, in a rare public act, gathered to cast a powerful spell and thus reduce to ashes the entire city of Walstein that had been contaminated by the Tears. Since then, no other manifestations have been reported, but the reputation of this horrible disease has spread all over Etharis.

The Tears of the Hungerer is transmitted between humanoids through blood contact such as a bite or scratch. If a humanoid takes damage from an unarmed attack made by an infected creature, they must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, becoming infected with the Tears on a failed save.

A creature infected with the Tears of the Hungerer reduces their hit point

maximum by 1d4 daily at dawn. If a creature's hit point maximum is reduced to 0 then they die and become a **zombie**, infected with Tears of the Hungerer and under the GM's control.

Tears of the Hungerer can be removed by targeting an infected creature with the *greater restoration* or the *heal* spell.

The Weeping Pox

Originating in the once prosperous city-state of Liesech, where it suddenly appeared under mysterious circumstances, the Weeping Pox is by far the worst disease ever released on Etharis. It has spread quickly through Etharis despite the attempts of the Bürach Empire to contain it to Liesech. At first a sick person will be subject to fever causing sharpened senses, overexcitement, and a sense of wellbeing. But soon these symptoms will transition to delirium, burning fever, insatiable thirst, and oozing lesions that give the illness its name. Nearly all who contract the disease die shortly after. Most people succumb to the pox in a few days, while the most resilient may hold on for almost two weeks.

The Weeping Pox is transmitted between humanoids both by close contact and as an airborne virus. If a humanoid comes within 5 feet of an infected creature they must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, becoming infected on a failed save. If a creature makes physical contact with an infected creature, this saving throw is made with disadvantage. If a creature's saving throw is successful, they become immune to the Weeping Pox for 24 hours.

A creature infected with the Weeping Pox must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw each day at dawn. On a failed save, the creature's Constitution score is reduced by 1d4. If a creature's Constitution score is reduced to 0 then they die.

Known to the Morbus Doctore and only a select few others, the cure to the Pox is a closely guarded secret. The Morbus Doctore are willing to sell a vial of the antidote to those who know how to ask, for an exorbitant price or a costly favour.

FABLES OF ETHARIS

ETHARIS IS A LAND FULL OF DANGER. THE foolish, the weak, and the unwary will only find swift death there. For the brave, the strong, and the cunning, however, it can be a land of adventures—adventures such as these.

Tavern of the Lost

Designed for 4 level 6 characters

Travel is a perilous endeavor in Etharis, especially at night. Even armoured merchant caravans guarded by mercenaries are reluctant to deviate from well-traveled roadways after nightfall, lest they fall prey to the unearthly creatures of the dark. Travelers who find themselves caught out after nightfall are forced to lodge at remote roadside inns for extortionate prices, and local thugs acting as guards are quick to turn away those without the coin to pay.

There is one roadside tavern whose infamy exceeds all others. Found in many locations and known by many different names, it is most often called the Black Bard but denizens have come to call it The Tavern of the Lost. It is rumored that adventurers seeking the tavern cannot find it, as it only appears to those who are desperate for shelter. The warm glow of the tavern's hearth and jaunty music entice weary travelers like a sweet siren's song. Witnesses who recalled the tavern's legend and camped outside report that in the morning, all those who entered had vanished, along with the tavern.

Patrons cannot kill one another inside the tavern, where wounds spontaneously heal and severed limbs can simply be reattached. However, the tavern itself and the creatures within will certainly attempt to kill the patrons, and can do so. Unless otherwise specified, non-patron creatures will remain dead when killed. Furthermore, the tavern's protection does not apply to any patron who enters either the trapdoor basement or Inorim's attic extra dimensions.

Familiar Faces

Bryn Harjolf

LG male human
Innkeeper

The innkeeper of the Black Bard is a man of few words. He is the tavern's first victim, and has taken it upon himself to maintain the peace. Outwardly gruff, Bryn discourages adventurers from exploring the tavern beyond the common room, and is quick to quash rumors of escape attempts among his regulars. He is well aware of the dangers on the second floor and above, as adventurers get closer to discovering the wizard beyond the attic skylight. Bryn keeps an enchanted greatsword hidden behind the bar in case a fight breaks out among the patrons, and he is swift to deliver the tavern's justice. However, the greatsword fears combat, and Bryn must be quick to grab it before it makes a break toward his quarters.

A former adventurer himself, Bryn cuts an imposing figure under his barkeep's apron, towering over most of his patrons. He bears numerous scars from his earlier years spent marauding the outer reaches of Etharis, and maintains a short-trimmed beard and wavy, chestnut colored hair.

Bryn Harjolf has the stats of a **knight.** However most of the time he is in common clothes instead of plate (AC 10). He also fights with his enchanted greatsword.

Greatsword of the Craven.

Weapon (greatsword), rare (requires attunement)

The wielder of this sword gains +1 to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. In addition, while attuned to this weapon, its users speed is increased by 5 feet and they have advantage on initiative rolls.

Curse. This greatsword is cursed, and becoming attuned to it extends the curse to the attuned. As long as the curse remains the owner is unwilling to part with the greatsword, keeping it on their person at all times. Anyone attuned to this weapon has disadvantage on all attack rolls made with weapons other than this one.

Whenever the cursed creature tries to pick up a weapon it will move slightly out of the way, requiring a successful DC 10 Dexterity check or spending an action to grab purchase of the hilt.

Vieri Barboro

NE male half-elf Bard (thrall)

This aloof bard performs at the tavern and is frequently seen tuning a lute he rarely plays. His angular face and distinctly feline mannerisms distinguish him from the other patrons.

Vieri's secret is that he is a spy and the physical manifestation of the tavern's power, which extends to influence over time and space. While not a living creature, he is very fond of Dreams Leave—a highly addictive substance that produces distortions of perception.

Vieri is pallid with raven-black hair that he often wears tied back from his face. Like other half-elves, he has slightly pointed ears and darkvision. He has steely grey eyes set off by green veins that radiate across his face. Vieri carries a pouch of Dreams Leave that replenishes itself at the end of each day. He has a lean build and nimble fingers, ideal for plucking the strings of his lute when the fancy takes him.

Vieri's stats can be found on page 234.

Jarah Blackthane

N female half-orc Mercenary

Jarah is a former Free Swords thug for hire with a quick temper. She finds her captivity boring and likes to pass the time by gambling or participating in drinking games. Jarah is known for her sleight of hand, taught to her by Vieri Barboro. She dislikes Bryn and openly mistrusts him. In combat, she favors a two-handed great axe that she carries slung across her back.

Jarah has a stocky build, and is the only patron to stand taller than Bryn. As a half-orc, she has greyish skin and a strong, protruding jaw, though the rest of her face is decidedly feminine. She has a well-muscled body from years of training with her greataxe, and a thick black plait that she wears down her back.

Jarah has the stats of a **veteran** except she uses a great axe instead of any other weapon (***greataxe.*** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d12 + 3) slashing damage), and is in common clothes the majority of time (AC 11).

Aren

N male human Thief

Aren and his three underlings are members of the Ebon Syndicate (all four have the stats of a **spy**). They value coin above all else, and would gladly turn on one another for the right price. They pass their captivity by gambling and participating in other games of chance, and always wager to win, sometimes against their better judgement. Aren has a shabby appearance and coarse articulation, likely the result of being brought up in among thieves from a young age.

Aren is lean and small statured from years of malnutrition, but is surprisingly nimble on his feet and an adept lockpick. He has lank brown hair and green eyes, and a tattoo of the Hawk Moth symbol on his chest. He is tanned from years of taking on odd jobs to pay his way through the cities of Etharis, and addresses others with a rough Common accent.

Mouse

N male halfling Street Urchin

Mouse is a slim 9-year-old halfling boy with a great fascination for tales of Etharian heroes. He carries a copy of a book called *Tales of Etharis* with him, and wears a wooden toy sword slung at his hip. He is the most recent captive of the tavern, captured some 40 years ago. He idolises people who resemble the heroes in his favorite book.

Mouse is slight for his age—which is slight indeed, as a young halfling—with blond, curly hair and a cherubic face. He has dark brown eyes and slightly pointed ears. He wears a pair of patched trousers with suspenders and a loose shirt, clearly made for a human child much larger than himself.

Mouse has the same stats as a **commoner.**

Inorim Azeem

CN male human wizard

Inorim is a powerful Wizard who has been held captive for over 300 years in the Tavern of the Lost. In that time he has made the attic his own realm within the tavern. His pocket universe, a windswept mountaintop of his own creation, allows him to remain unaffected by the tavern and retain his powers. The tavern greatly desires to possess Inorim, and sends hordes of animated furniture into the pocket universe to retrieve him, where they are promptly smashed to splinters by a **stone golem** under Inorim's control. Prior to his captivity, Inorim was a keen scholar of enchantment magic, and studied at the Ravencourt Sanctuary.

Inorim is originally from the desert plains of Castinella, which he fled due to a zealous inquisitors persuit. He has mahogany skin and dark, curly hair shot with silver. Maintaining the pocket universe has taken a toll on Inorim; he is evidently thin beneath his wizard's robes, and walks with a labored, twisted gait. He carries a black staff topped with an amber stone, which serves as a walking stick as much as a conduit for his powers.

Inorim has the stats of an **Archmage**.

Where to Start

This encounter assumes characters have already formed a party and are presently traveling through the wilderness after nightfall, having stumbled into the middle of a werewolf hunting party. These werewolves were tracking a wounded black bear through the dense forest, but the promise of tender human flesh is too tempting an opportunity to pass up, and they break off their hunt to pursue more enticing prey. Read the following to set the scene:

You travel down a disused carriageway along the outskirts of a forest. The trees on either side of the path are dense and ancient, and form a high canopy overhead through which a few stars are visible. Behind you, you hear the labored panting of a werewolf pack, amplified by the nocturnal quiet of the forest. Branches snap and dozens of footfalls trample the undergrowth.

In the distance, a warm amber glow flickers into view through the trees around the corner, accompanied by the faint sounds of raucous laughter and jaunty music. You have stumbled upon a roadside tavern. As you get closer, the draw of the tavern intensifies; the smell of fresh-baked pastries and woodsmoke, the sound of ale being poured from oak barrels, the clinking of coins being wagered. A battered sign by the roadside names the tavern as The Black Bard.

Clearly outnumbered, the characters have only 1 round before the lycanthrope horde is upon them. Once the characters decide how they will react, the werewolves burst through the treeline.

In a shower of splintering branches, the pack tears through the treeline, paws scrabbling for purchase as they charge toward you, slavering wildly with jaws agape.

Seeking Refuge

If the characters chose to flee the werewolf pack into the tavern, the door swings open on well-oiled hinges, and the sound of raucous laughter and music intensifies. The werewolves dissipate into a thick black mist, having played their role in herding new prey toward the tavern. They cannot cross the threshold into the tavern's grounds.

Hiding

If the characters attempt to hide from the werewolves, the sound of heavy footfalls and strained panting passes close by on the other side of the thicket. Whichever way the characters attempt to flee, however, the pack appears close behind, herding them toward the mysterious roadside tavern. The wolves cannot cross the threshold into the tavern's grounds.

Introduction to The Tavern

The Black Bard

The Black Bard (A.K.A. Tavern of the Lost) is an infamous inn and tavern that appears to desperate travelers seeking shelter.

The place is a stone building with a slate roof and several chimneys whose smoke curls skyward like a beckoning finger. The tavern contains two floors. The first floor is occupied by the tavern's sprawling common room, a homely jumble of mismatched furniture and overstuffed armchairs that surround an impressive central hearth. A mounted head crowns the mantle. The upper floor of the tavern contains comfortable, simply appointed rooms for guests. A smaller attic space with a conical turret perches atop the second floor. Like the windows below, a warm amber glow radiates from behind this turret's frosted glass, backlighting a hulking figure that moves quickly out of sight.

Once the characters are inside the entryway facing the common room, the front door swings shut behind them with a soft click, dematerialising into solid stone. Inspection of the wall reveals that the vanishing door is not an illusion, and the characters are now trapped inside. The initial glamour of joviality and refuge is revealed to be a lure projected by the tavern as a means of enticing new prey. The true patrons slouch gloomily around tables, muttering in hushed tones.

Tavern Common Room

The taproom occupies a small alcove to the left of the entrance, and is stocked with barrels of maplewood ale and aged wine. Bryn stands behind the bar, washing tankards. He is an imposing figure among the tavern guests, with a broad adventurer's build. He regards the newcomers with a surly expression. "You might as well sit down," he says gruffly. The other occupants are likewise unwelcoming, and stare at the characters with murmurs of, "More of 'em ey," and, "Tavern's caught a right brace of 'em this time."

The tavern occupants are peculiarly mismatched, and not just because they are unlikely traveling companions. A DC13 Intelligence (history) check reaveals they appear to be from different time periods and distant lands, reflected in their dress and speech, though most appear to speak Common. A bard perched on the arm of an overstuffed armchair by the hearth tunes a lute distractedly, testing the strings. He watches the newcomers languidly from beneath a Renaissance-style velvet muffin-hat.

T1.COMMON ROOM
T2.TAP ROOM
T3.KITCHEN
T4.ROOM OF REVERBERATIONS
T5.JARAH'S ROOM
T6.GUEST ROOM
T7.BRYN'S ROOM
T8.GUEST ROOM
T9.MIMIC
T10.GUEST ROOM
T11.GUEST ROOM

Exploring the First Floor

T1: Common Room

The common room is homely and in good repair, and contains the following features:

Mounted Head. Above the hearth, a mounted head shifts shape between a boar, black bear, and a crowned stag each time a character turns to look at it. Hidden deep in the maw of the boar head is the **seeing stone (pg. 232).** If the players find the seeing stone before they meet Inorim and use it correctly they can bypass meeting Inorim in his pocket dimension.

Bookshelf. Books slide off the shelves and leaf through their own pages as if an unseen reader is perusing them. Characters who attempt to read a book from this shelf find that the book shreds itself to tatters in their hands.

Wine Barrels. The aged wine in these barrels spontaneously turns to vinegar and back to wine again. Patrons have made a sort of roulette game from this temperamental brew. These barrels replenish themselves when empty.

Hearthside Tables. Tables attempt to trip careless occupants who forget to put a coaster beneath their drinks.

Hearth Rug. A fine rug patterned with olive branches and filigree spirals. If a fight breaks out among the occupants, this **rug of smothering** will intervene, entangling the aggressors until the fighting stops.

Armour. The suit of animated armour standing by the former doorway (with the stats of a **helmed horror**) enforces the tavern's justice, attacking anyone who attempts to escape while new prey is being lured into the tavern. If the animated armour is reduced to 0 hit points it falls unconscious for 1 minute. After that it returns to maximum hit points and returns to its previous role.

If any character consults a compass in the common room or tap room, they will find that the compass points toward a trapdoor behind the bar leading down into the basement. (Anywhere else in the tavern, a compass needle will merely spin erratically.)

T2: Tap Room

The tap room contains a long wooden bar surrounded by leather-topped bar stools. A row of smaller ale kegs lines the far wall, above which sits a shelf littered with pewter tankards and sherry glasses. There is a sink behind the bar for washing used tankards. After Bryn washes the tankards, an animated dishtowel busies itself with drying the tankards, which promptly return themselves to the cluttered shelves until their next use. Bryn also keeps his enchanted greatsword behind the bar, where he can keep an eye on it.

A wooden trapdoor can be found behind the bar. It sits flush with the floor and has no visible handle or hinges. It cannot be forced open by any means. A triangular notch has been carved into the wood.

T3: Kitchen

The kitchen is a small back room extending off the tap room. At the centre of the room is a butcher's block, which is cluttered with earthen pots of spices, herbs, and a large portion of salted pork. A larder stocked with jams, meats, and vegetables occupies the far wall.

Hanging nets of potatoes, onions, and a wreath of garlic occupy the walls at random intervals. A large cookstove is cluttered with cast-iron pots and pans, each one scrubbed to a well-used shine. Supplies in the kitchen replenish themselves, and though the sound of cooking can be heard from the common room, those who push open the door see only the empty kitchen. Prepared meals simply appear on the butcher's block, ready to be served.

Tavern Brawl

Suddenly, a fight breaks out. Read or paraphrase the following:

The murmur of conversation and the burble of ale being poured from stout kegs barely muffles the discordant strumming of a bard tuning his lute by the hearth.

Then, the noise is eclipsed by an antagonised shout: "Yer thieving lout! Cheat me out of my winnings, will ya?" Suddenly, a female half-orc catches a feral, swinging uppercut from a rough-shaven male human. Two other humans sitting nearby spring to defend the man with weapons drawn, but not before the half-orc beheads the man with a two-handed greataxe.

His head topples from his shoulders and rolls toward the tap room, coming to a stop by an unoccupied bar stool.

The headless body falls to its knees and begins blindly scrabbling around on the floor, searching for its head.

The human combatants are three members of the Ebon Syndicate. The one looking for his head is Aren, their leader. Their foe, Jarah Blackthane is a half-orc mercenary known for her sleight of hand.

Most tavern patrons flee or take cover at the outbreak of the brawl.

"Stand down!" a voice bellows from across the room. Bryn appears from behind the bar and picks up the head, dropping the tankard he was washing with an annoyed grunt. The head spews profanity under Bryn's arm, mostly directed at Jarah. "That's enough out of you," Bryn growls, jamming the head back onto the body's shoulders. With a sound like walnuts being cracked, the head reattaches and the man stands up, throwing Jarah an impish grin. "I'll not hear another word of it, Aren," Bryn says. "Save it for the brawls if you must. At least then we can wager on your stupidity."

Meeting Bryn Harjolf

Once the brawl has subsided, Bryn pushes against the tide of patrons toward the characters, tankards of ale in hand. Bryn is a fair and hardworking innkeep who simply wishes to maintain relative peace among his patrons. An ex-adventurer, Bryn cuts an imposing figure under the ale-stained apron he wears. It is rumored that Bryn is as old as the tavern itself, though it is unclear where his allegiances lie:

"On the house," Bryn mutters, placing a tankard of ale in front of you. A male dwarf on the next table over is barely visible from behind a mountain of drained tankards. He slams down his next tankard with a grunt, and calls the innkeep over. "Watering down the ale again?" he demands. To his own dismay, the dwarf appears entirely sober. "You'll get used to it, Gerund." Bryn says.

The dwarf rounds on the characters. "Enjoy it while ye still can, ye'll find no small comforts 'ere. Food tastes like ash, ale turns to water. Even Aren over there can't walk on the second floor no more. Says it's like walking through a salt marsh. But I'll not stay. Heard tell of a boy who crawled out through the attic. Whittled away at a mouse hole until it was big enough for him to slip out. Never saw 'im again."

"You'll do well not to heed Vieri's stories." Bryn chides. "That bard is half-mad from Dreams Leave."

A slim halfling boy of around 9 years old watches the party from a barstool. He carries a copy of the *Tales of Etharis*, a book detailing deeds of great Etharian heroes. Despite his seemingly youthful appearance, he speaks with maturity beyond his years, introducing himself as Mouse. Mouse believes the party are legendary adventurers he read about in *Tales of Etharis*, and enthusiastically shows the adventurers the beginning of a tale called "The Vanishing Keep" which bears a striking similarity to the circumstances under which the party finds themselves captive. He treats the characters with reverence and is overly keen to help the party in any way he can. He carries a wooden toy sword at his hip.

Mouse explains that he was the most recent captive—some 40 years ago. He explains that time passes differently for each patron, but to his memory, Bryn has always been the innkeep. Some occupants feel every passing second of their captivity, while others believe they have only been held for a few days. Mouse is in the latter camp, and is optimistic about escape. If questioned about the boy who escaped, Mouse believes he has seen him, "He lives in the attic on a mountain." He describes the "boy" as a withered old man with a long grey beard who walks with a black cane. Mouse knows nothing more about him, save that he lives alone.

Roleplaying Bryn

Bryn lingers nearby, eavesdropping on Mouse's conversation with the characters. He is quick to interject when Mouse brings up the attic, grabbing the boy's arm and steering him toward the kitchen with promises of honey cakes. "Come, let's not wear out our welcome with the new guests," he chastises, casting a glance at the newcomers who threaten to disturb the uneasy peace he has brokered with the other patrons. He vehemently denies the existence of the "boy" in the attic if questioned further.

Exploring the Second Floor

The second floor contains a suite of guest rooms. Rooms are located on either side of a hallway lit by sconces. The rooms are simply furnished, but comfortable. Bryn warns the characters not to go up to the second floor, as it is openly hostile. He tells them that if they must sleep, do so in the common room, and not in any of the beds

on the second floor. The pillows have a habit of attempting to suffocate any occupant who has not paid to let the room.

T4: Room of Reverberations

The door is unlocked and swings ajar easily. Behind it is another door, slightly smaller and made of different wood. It too is unlocked. Opening this door reveals another slightly smaller door, again crafted from a different wood, and so on. Opening each consecutively smaller door eventually reveals a door no larger than a thumbnail. Opening this door reveals a limitless void that stretches endlessly into the distance. Another tiny door opens across the void, and a familiar eye peers through. Any character who calls out to the eye's owner is answered by their parallel self on the other side of the door.

T5: Jarah's Room

The door is unlocked, but something heavy rests on the other side, preventing it from being opened. Forcing it open requires a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check. The wooden armoire blocking the door hobbles back toward its rightful place against the far wall, setting down with a dusty sigh. The room is simply furnished, with an unmade wooden-framed double bed, and an adjoining bathroom with a claw-footed bathtub. Running water is audible.

Bathroom. Closer inspection reveals the bathtub is heaped with multicoloured bubbles that never burst. They lazily drift about the room, bouncing off any surface they touch. Unless they succeed a DC 18 passive perception check, characters are too preoccupied by this to notice the trickles of water lapping over the side of the tub rapidly moving toward them. If they fail, the water seizes unwary characters by the ankles and attempts to drag them beneath the surface. Any individual caught unawares by the water must succeed a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, or be grappled and pulled underwater. The player has one round to try and escape before the water attempts to force its way into the character's lungs, forcing them to succeed a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or have all air in their lungs replaced with water, causing them to be considered suffocating. A creature can repeat this saving throw at the end of their turn, ending the effect on a successful save.

If a character escapes the water, read the following:

The water seethes and boils, lapping over the sides of the tub and cascading onto the floor. It gathers into a swirling, aqueous creature that towers over you. Its two massive forearms extend toward you, and a watery maw opens up in the centre of the swirling mass that serves as the creature's face. It lunges toward you with a gurgling roar.

A **water elemental** appears from the bathtub and is hostile to the characters.

T6: Guest Room

This room may be let to playable characters, however Bryn tries to dissuade the party members from doing so, explaining that the second floor is not safe. It is comfortably furnished and contains a double bed, an empty chest of drawers that has recently been repainted, and a washstand. Characters who haven't paid for the room and attempt to rest their heads on the soft feather pillows soon find they are unable to breathe, as the pillows sneakily wriggle their way out from beneath the heads of unsuspecting occupants and attempt to smother them in their sleep.

T7: Bryn's Room

The inkeep's room is locked, but the lock can be picked with a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools) check. Alternatively, a successful DC 18 Strength check will smash open the door. Unlike the other guests' rooms, Bryn's room appears to be more homely, and contains the following features:

A locked wooden trunk rests at the foot of a large, sturdy wooden bed in the northwest corner. Bryn's personal sigil, a black bear standing on its hind legs, is expertly carved into the wood above a large burnished padlock.

An empty wall mount for a greatsword, which is currently under the bar where Bryn can keep an eye on it.

A freestanding mirror that only shows the back of whoever looks into it.

A fringed woollen rug patterned like a serpent.

Wooden trunk. The lock on Bryn's trunk can be picked with thieves' tools on a successful DC 15 Dexterity check.

The trunk appears to contain folded clothes, an old set of plate armour, and a heavily annotated book entitled *Yaga Babesh.* A secret compartment in the bottom can be detected by a character who examines the lining of the trunk and makes a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. The compartment holds a silver key on a braided cord, a journal that screams when it is read, and a jar of swirling black mist. If confronted Bryn refuses to talk about the contents of the secret compartment of the trunk, beyond saying that they belonged to his old adventuring party, and asks the players to return the contents and speak no more of what they have found.

Quicksand Rug. Characters who step onto the rug become stuck and sink rapidly through the floor back down to the common room below if they fail a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw.

T8: Second Guest Room

This room may be let to playable characters, however Bryn tries to dissuade the party members from doing so, explaining that the second floor is not safe. It is simply furnished and contains a double bed, a wardrobe, and a pitcher and washcloth on a wooden washstand. The room contains the following additional features:

A bronze kettle suspended on a wrought-iron arm over the hearth.

A glowing **arcane rune** that crudely scratches itself into the floorboards before violently gouging itself out, only to resume scratching itself into the wood again. This is audible only when inside the room.

Arcane Rune. A *detect magic* spell or similar ability reveals a powerful aura of conjuration magic around the rune. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check confirms that this rune sustains the layout of the tavern. Touching or destroying the rune destabilises the layout of the tavern, such that the rooms no longer retain their original order and characters (and NPCs) teleport spontaneously from place to place. The **arcane rune** has an AC of 10 and 20 hit points. It is a common annoyance for the tavern's occupants when someone, or something, touches or destroys the temperamental rune, only for it to reappear in a different location and resume its scratching. It would seem Bryn forgot to mention the rune earlier.

T9: Mimic

A door at the southernmost end of the hallway snickers and appears to tremble. Unlike the other doors which are numbered ascendingly, this door has the same number as its neighbour. The wood of the door appears to tremble and boil, warping into a slick blackish-purple mouth lined with two rows of teeth as thick as a forearm. Six amber eyes blink in unison, surveying the characters. "Who pass'd 'ere gives it food," the **mimic** lisps in Common, extending a pseudopod threateningly. The mimic will not attack the party if they offer it food.

Attic

The attic trapdoor has been fitted with a suspiciously new lock that can be picked with a successful DC 13 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. The trapdoor can only be unlocked from the outside (using the key found in the trunk in Bryn's quarters), or forced open with a successful DC 15 Strength check. A ladder drops down from the mouth of the attic, extending up into the dusty gloom above.

The attic space is a cramped garret with a sloped ceiling and a grimy, boarded-up skylight through which a few stars are visible. Boxes covered in dirty drop cloths, barrels, trunks and broken furniture litter the room under a fine layer of dust. In a back corner behind some peculiar crates labeled "Deciduous Pearbulbs", the characters can find a makeshift bed, recently slept in. The skylight can be forced open from the inside by prising off the boards with a successful DC 15 Strength check. It creaks in protest from years of disuse.

Inorim's Sanctum

The skylight opens onto a vast windswept mountaintop ringed with rocky crags and fine, powdery snow. The snow is not cold to the touch, and does not melt when it settles on the characters or on the ground. The roof's slate tiles underfoot give way to a stony path winding up through the crags toward a Valikan ruin. The ruin appears to be an ancient watchtower of rotted wood, crumbling stone blocks, and a large marble plinth set into a dead tree in the centre of the courtyard.

The party has stumbled into the sanctuary of Inorim Azeem, a powerful wizard who has been

held captive by the tavern for over 300 years. The mountaintop is an extradimensional landscape of his own creation, and allows him to remain mostly immune to the draining effects of the tavern. Broken furniture is scattered around the courtyard. A **stone golem** stands at attention in front of the plinth, on which sits a leather-bound journal.

Inorim's Ward. By crossing into the courtyard, the characters have disturbed a powerful protective ward placed on the ruins. The stone golem was created by Inorim, and has been instructed to guard the sanctum. It moves to attack anyone other than Inorim who comes within 15 feet of the ruin.

If the characters fight and defeat the stone golem, read the following:

The stone golem topples to the ground with a disembodied clatter. A loose flagstone in the foundation of the tower rises, and out from the trapdoor climbs a gaunt wizard with a short, pointed beard emerge in tattered robes. He walks with a limp, leaning on a black staff topped with a large amber stone. He appears visibly annoyed that you have destroyed his creation.

If it seems that the characters will be defeated by the stone golem, read the following:

A commanding voice booms across the courtyard, echoing around the mountain peaks. The voice speaks in a low, guttural tone—an archaic variant of Deep Speech. The stone golem halts its attack, and turns away from the party, lurching back toward its post with a stiff, lock-jointed gait. A gaunt wizard climbs up from beneath a loose flagstone in the foundation of the tower, leaning heavily on a black staff topped with a large amber stone. He appears visibly annoyed that you have disturbed his sanctuary.

Meeting Inorim

The wizard eyes you dubiously and speaks in a gruff tone, twisting his grizzled beard between his fingers. "About time that stone golem had something to fight other than furniture. I'm Inorim Azeem, wizard and master chronicler. And before you ask, I am not the creator of this diabolical parasite. I have been its captive for some three hundred years. I cannot tell you its purpose nor what it is, but I have discovered that it drains the vitality from those wretched souls below to sustain itself. The tavern greatly desires my powers, but through me it would enact an unspeakable evil."

A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check discerns that the wizard is honest. The stone golem serves as his protection against the malevolence of the tavern, and the piles of broken furniture were once animated by the tavern and sent to retrieve the wizard. Inorim greatly mistrusts the intentions of Bryn, who has been the innkeep since before Inorim became the tavern's captive and created the attic miniverse to sustain his powers. He advises the characters to be wary of Bryn, as he is unsure of the innkeeper's allegiances.

Roleplaying Inorim

Despite his gruff manner, Inorim is relieved to see other characters who are not animated furniture sent to retrieve him. As a result of centuries spent using his powers to maintain the attic miniverse, Inorim constantly has a point of exhaustion.

If Inorim is healed by the characters or given information about the outside world, he is begrudgingly grateful, muttering his thanks. He offers the characters advice based on his years of careful observation of the tavern, and past escape attempts he has witnessed using the *scrying* spell. Inorim recalls that one previous adventurer came close to finding the seeing stone, only to be killed by the jaws of the mounted head while peering inside. He cannot leave the miniverse until the previous conduit of the tavern has been defeated.

"The only way out is down. Down into the bedrock of this infernal parasite," Inorim says. "Find the seeing stone in the mouth of the boar. It will show you the way out."

If Inorim is killed by the characters, the journal on the plinth reveals the same information. Leafing to the final page, the following is inscribed in Inorim's hand:

The only way out is down. Down into the bedrock of this infernal parasite. I must take the seeing stone from the mouth of the boar. It will show the way out.

Returning to the Tavern

Crawling back down through the skylight, the characters emerge from a door into the second-floor hallway (due to a disturbance to the rune in T8) which swings shut by itself with a loud slam. The tavern begins to shake violently. Candles in their braziers flicker out, and the tavern is plunged into unnatural darkness. The corridor begins to constrict, pressing down from above and closing in on the sides. Sconces that were previously meters away on either side of the walls must be ducked under or avoided, and drip scalding wax if bumped into in the dark. Smaller characters are able to move at normal speed, but creatures of medium size or larger treat this area as difficult terrain.

Additionally, the following changes have occured within the tavern:

Mimic Encounter:

The mimic is no longer dissuaded by food, and is openly hostile to characters, attacking those within range. It is unaffected by the warping of the tavern.

Common Room Staircase:

The staircase back down to the common room has inverted itself, now leading up to the enclosed ceiling. Characters must decide whether to go through the door to T4 or T5 to return to the common room before the hallway fully constricts, crushing all who remain within.

Opening T4: (Room of Reverberations)

This door opens into the common room. From across the room, Bryn can be seen clearing half-drained tankards and unwashed plates. He casts the characters a disapproving look as they collapse through the door, which swings shut behind them with a loud slam.

Opening T5: (Jarah's Room)

The room appears very much the same as it did before. Running water can be heard coming from the bathroom, only now a **water elemental** takes the place of the lethal bathwater if they have not already fought and disposed of it. Jarah's room is unaffected by the constricting walls of the hallway outside. If the characters close this door and reopen it a second time, they can see the ground floor common room beyond.

The Boar's Head

The common room is the same as the characters left it. A drinking game has commenced at one of the tables, and a large crowd has gathered. Jarah and Aren sit facing one another across the table, a circle of eight full tankards between them. They loudly insult one another, much to the delight of the spectators who cheer them on. The bard, Vieri, watches the proceedings with boredom, his gaze settling on the characters. At his hip, a beaded drawstring bag full of Dreams Leave catches the firelight. Bryn likewise watches the characters as he gathers empty plates at a nearby table.

Over the mantle, the mounted head continues to flicker between its varied forms (boar, black bear, crowned stag). Characters who reach into its mouth (in any form) find that a powerful set of jaws have clamped down on their hand with the force of a bear trap. Any character who reaches into the mouth must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the character takes 3 (1d6) piercing damage as the jaws clamp shut. If a character attempts to pull their hand away, a further 1 slashing damage is inflicted. The character is restrained until the jaws are forced open. As an action, another character can pry open the jaws with a successful DC 13 Strength check.

Seeing stone. A *detect magic* spell or similar magic reveals a powerful aura of divination magic around the mounted head over the mantle. Looking inside the mouth of the mounted head, one finds a smooth jade stone shaped like a planchette with a hole in the centre is visible. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that the stone is used for finding hidden entrances within the tavern.

Having retrieved the stone, characters are able to look through the hole in the centre of the stone to reveal a golden, glowing trail leading to the location of the entrance to the basement. A wooden trapdoor behind the bar is carved with a triangular notch into which the seeing stone fits snugly. If the stone is inserted into this notch,

the trapdoor slams open against its hinges with a shudder, and characters can see down into the yawning darkness below. There is no ladder extending down into the gloom.

The Basement Dimension

To all appearances, the characters have found a subterranean exit beneath the tavern. If they go through the trapdoor, they fall through darkness and land in what appears to be the tavern's front yard. In fact, the characters have stumbled into a pocket universe beneath the tavern, in which a parallel tavern is the centrepiece of a condensed imitation of the real world above. The tavern door stands open, emitting a warm amber glow. However, there are no sounds issuing from the tavern, or from anywhere else. No wind rustles the leaves of the canopy, no calls of nocturnal animals. The night sky stretches overhead, twinkling with stars, flat and dimensionless as bright pinpoints painted on a high ceiling. The dense forest extends in either direction, thankfully bereft of werewolves.

Walking in any direction for a short duration invariably leads back to the tavern. Whenever the characters return to the tavern, the front door is always open, and the faint strumming of a lute can be heard from within. Inevitably, the characters must return to the tavern. The front door remains open as the characters enter through it into the parallel common room.

Downfall

The patrons sit around the tables, moving and interacting at an imperceptibly slow speed. Some appear paralyzed mid-drink. Others sit hunched over a game of cards, their faces frozen in concentration. Bryn stands behind the bar, motionless as he pours ale from a keg. The trickle of beer flowing into the tankard is unmoving as an icicle. Characters notice a familiar figure by the hearth who moves at a normal pace, tuning his lute: Vieri the bard.

Meeting Vieri Barboro

You see that the armchair by the hearth has been turned around to face the entrance. In it sits the bard. He strokes his chin thoughtfully. His dark eyes betray nothing of his thoughts. "Vieri Barboro, at your service," he bows with a flourish. "Bard, master conjurer, and lord of this realm."

A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check discerns that the bard is lying. While time and space appear to bend around him, his body jerks and convulses at odd intervals, almost as if he is not in full control of his actions. The bard disappears from his place by the fireside, and reappears behind the characters, walking across the bartop. He reaches behind the bar for Bryn's sword, balancing the blade on a finger. The sword doubles over like a magician's spoon trick. Vieri continues:

"I offered you every comfort; food, companionship, an unending flow of ale. I asked very little in return. Vitality is a small price for eternal contentment, no? And yet, you have proven quite a troubling meal to digest."

Vieri flickers out of view again, reappearing by the hearth, and attacks the player characters.

Combat starts with the tavern already having cast *animate object* on the bar before the players arrived. The bar bench rips out of the floorboards, throwing Bryn aside, and he topples to the floor like a dressmaker's dummy. The bar twists and writhes like a snake, poised to strike the characters. It comes down with a heavy crash that shakes the foundations of the tavern. The other furniture likewise becomes animated. The books on the bookshelf amass into a swirling flock to knock unwary characters prone, a mop and bucket even join in the fray—the mop flies through the air like a jousting lance, while the bucket attempts to trip characters underfoot.

Killing Vieri will end the taverns effects on the animated furniture. When he dies, his body crumbles into a fine black powder that falls through the knots in the floorboards.

If Inorim is alive, read the following:

"Well met," a familiar voice behind you says. Inorim hobbles down the stairs toward you, leaning heavily on his staff. "A vile creature, that bard. Never liked him. You seem to have proven more trouble than you're worth to the creature, and this behemoth does enjoy an easy meal. As for me, I will remain behind. Without a conduit for its power, the tavern will drift anchorless through time and space, finding new prey to satiate its gluttony."

Whether or not Inorim survived, continue from here. The tavern creaks and groans as if the supporting beams will collapse at any moment. Portraits fall from the walls with the sound of shattering glass.

The mounted head crashes to the floor, flickering rapidly between its varied forms. The remaining patrons collapse, rigid and unmoving. Furniture begins to warp and buckle, and the remaining books hurl themselves from the bookshelf and scatter across the room. Kegs of ale burst open in a cascade of foam. The very fabric of the tavern appears to warp and twist around Inorim, who raises a hand in farewell.

Characters who attempt to rescue the NPCs find that the latter's weight has doubled in the tavern's final attempt to retain its more docile captives. Characters must succeed at a DC 10 Strength check for each NPC they attempt to save.

Read the following to set the scene:

In one heaving rumble, you are launched up through the hearth and out through the chimney back into the real world, landing with a thud by the carriageway where you first saw the tavern. You are covered in soot and disheveled from your less than graceful exit. The door to the tavern slams shut, and the tavern folds in on itself, vanishing from the Material Plane with a loud crack.

Vieri

Medium humanoid (half-elf), neutral evil

Armour Class 15 (leather armour)
Hit Points 110 (17d8 + 34)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws DEX +8 CHA +8
Skills Acrobatics +9, Deception +14, Performance +14
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Dwarvish, Elvish, Primordial, Sylvan
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Spellcasting. Vieri is a 13th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability modifier is Charisma (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following bard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *message, minor illusion, prestidigitation, vicious mockery*
1st level (4 slots): *bane, Tasha's hideous laughter, thunderwave*
2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness, cloud of daggers, crown of madness*
3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, fear, hypnotic pattern, tongues*
4th level (3 slots): *greater invisibility, polymorph*
5th level (2 slots): *animate objects, awaken, modify memory*
6th level (1 slot): *programed illusion*
7th level (1 slot): *forcecage*

Fey Ancestry. Vieri has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic cannot put him to sleep.

Actions

Multiattack. Vieri makes two attacks with his rapier, or Vieri makes three melee or two ranged attacks with his daggers.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Dagger. *Melee* or *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage.

Lair Actions

When fighting inside the tavern, the tavern itself attempts to fight hostile patrons. While Vieri is still alive, on initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the the tavern can take one of the following lair actions:

Animate Object. The tavern, channeling through Vieri, casts *animate object* on furniture. The tavern can only concentrate on one instance of this spell at a time.

Entangling Floorboards. Each creature of the taverns's choice that starts its turn standing on floor boards must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be grappled. Escaping requires a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check.

The Carriageway

Any NPCs who have been rescued look around in shock, similarly covered in soot. They express their heartfelt thanks, and sheepishly ask where (and when) they have found themselves. Some, having been able to see the conflict, but immobile, may even believe that this is another of the tavern's illusions, and gaze about furtively, as if expecting Vieri to reappear at any moment. NPCs bid farewell to the adventurers, and ask for directions to the nearest town. Through the trees, the lights of a small village glimmer. The sound of dogs barking, and the distant murmur of civilisation, can be heard.

Treasure

Along with everything the players entered with, the tavern spewed out other items that it thought were theirs, wanting to be rid of them completely. After searching through the additional backpack that could be seen with Aren and the other Ebon Syndicate members. The bag contains 3d6 gems and jewelry worth 100gp each, a *circlet of blasting,* and a *ring of free action*.

Facets of Darkness

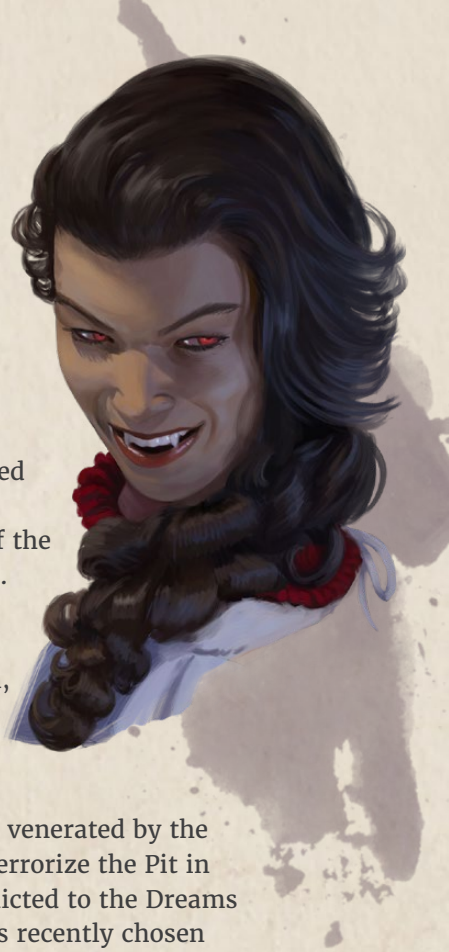
The cities of Etharis are as varied as their occupants, but in these dark times many have violence, corruption, and despair in common. Runeheim, in the south of Kandar, is no different in this regard, and a district known colloquially as "The Pit" is the epicentre of a burgeoning darkness that threatens to overwhelm the towns inhabitants. Extortion, blackmail, and other underhanded deeds are commonplace, and many get caught in an infernal spiral before they even realize it...

Familiar Faces

Torven Chimer (commoner) is the innkeeper of the Sticky Stew, the inn where the adventure begins, not far from the entrance of the Pit. A true chatterbox, he claims to be the best cook in the area (where there are not many cooks anyway) among other talents. But under this affable exterior hides an attentive eavesdropper who could be an invaluable source of information for those who grease his palm...

Skellna Archbane is the only remaining daughter of the Archbane family. She never (openly) goes in the Pit, and thus is not known there, and even in the rest of Runeheim she hasn't drawn much attention. She is actually a talented illusionist who seeks help to lift a curse on her older brother Eldhyl, a member of a dark cult in the Pit called the Blood Daggers. She's the one responsible for the substitution of the characters' bag, with the intention of getting their help by involving them in the schemes taking place in the Pit. Skellna, Nell and Kalseln are the same person and have the stats of a **Mage.**

Nell, a strange young woman who wanders in the Pit, apparently knows many of its shortcuts and secrets. She is one of Skellna's alter egos.



Kalseln, also called "**Kals**" is an elusive sorceress leading a band of thieves that recently appeared in the Pit called the Grey Rogues. She is actually another of Skellna's alternate identities.

Eldhyl Archbane, heir to the noble Archbane family, has fled his family's rich estate in an attempt to escape the truth of the Archbane family's dark deeds. He got addicted to Dreams Leaves, and was shortly afterwards captured by Falkia, with whom he apparently entertains an intimate relationship.

Falkia Coldheart is a vampire venerated by the Blood Daggers, cultists who terrorize the Pit in her name. She has grown addicted to the Dreams Leaves addicts' blood, and has recently chosen Nell's brother as her partner.

Lieutenant Doze is a **knight** of the Archbane guard, in charge of maintaining peace in the Pit, or more accurately in charge of preventing whatever happens in the Pit from spreading outside of it. He has many scars, including a huge one on the side of his mouth that seems to be the cause of his strong accent. He holds his share of secrets, the greatest one being that he controls the smuggling of Dreams Leaves into the Pit.

Skeinig is an alchemist of the Archbane family. His laboratory is not far from the Muck Gate and the Sticky Stew. He is handsomely paid for his silent obedience in creating the Dreams Leaves for the profits of the Archbane family, but his weakness is his love for carnal pleasure...

Bedlaf, a poor man used by various gangs to deliver missives and secrets.

Where to Start

After harsh travels across wastelands, the characters have finally reached the town of Runeheim where they intend to take a well-deserved rest. As they don't know the town very well and they will most likely find themselves in the least expensive inn—the Sticky Stew. The Sticky Stew is near the Muck Gate, a guarded gate inside the town that controls comings and goings

from the slum known as the Pit.

The adventure starts while the characters are having a drink in the inn's common room. A group of bruisers sit at the table next to them, and shortly they are hailed by another who just came in, seemingly drunk. He—seemingly by accident—faints on one of the characters, causing their drink to spill on one of the bruisers, and precipitating a general brawl. After the brawl, the characters realize that the gentlemen who started it has vanished. The next morning they notice that one of their bags has been exchanged with someone else's.

Locations of Interest

Locations Outside the Pit

The Sticky Stew

Situated near the town entrance and just outside the Pit, the Sticky Stew (called "the Stink Eye Stew" by its detractors) is a low-grade inn that owes most of its business to low prices and its proximity to a town gate. Nonetheless the Sticky Stew is a place where people from all over cross paths, looking for a cheap meal or a cheap room after a harsh journey.

The Muck Gate

Across the square from the Sticky Stew, a huge gate blocks entrance to the rough area called the Pit. That gate once was magnificent, but decades of neglect have uglied it to the point that it is now called the Muck Gate. The name also suits it because all the towns filth, thrown into the river running through it, backs up beside the gate until the sluice is periodically opened, releasing the flow on into the Pit. The Muck Gate is only opened during the day, and it is constantly guarded by a group of 4 **guards** led by Lieutenant Doze, a huge scarred warrior built like a brick wall.

The Pit

The action takes place in Runeheim, and mostly in the rough area called **the Pit**, a slum crippled by a drug called the Dreams Leaves. People addicted to it experience enveloping hallucinations in which all their wishes are fulfilled. Addicts will do anything for it, and the situation has degenerated to the point where a vampire appeared and took control of the Pit.

Falkia by name, the vampire quickly established a gang called the Blood Daggers whose members monitor the drug addicts, bringing them to dispensaries where they are taken care of. There the addicts are exploited as blood providers in exchange for their daily dose. Indeed, as they are addicted to the Dreams Leaves, Falkia has grown addicted to the blood of the addicts.

Despite the questionable motives of the Blood Daggers, this state of affairs at least stabilized the spread of the drug in the Pit for a time. Things have escalated again recently with the appearance of a new gang. Called the Grey Rogues, and led by a powerful but elusive sorceress known under the name of Kals, they attacked several of the Blood Daggers' key dispensaries. Although the Grey Rogues seem to be making a play for control of the drug trade, their true motives are unclear.

The Drowned Bridge

Approximately in the centre of the Pit, an old bridge crosses the river. Due to the bowl-like depression in which the Pit is situated, this bridge and the area around are flooded almost every time the sluice gate is opened by the guards at the Muck Gate. Those unlucky enough to find themselves on the bridge at the time risk drowning, hence the name of Drowned Bridge. Some distance further on, the river disappears through a small tunnel that crosses the town's ancient outer wall.

Dead Rat Market

One block from the Drowned Bridge, one can find an alley stuck between high dilapidated buildings. Almost every day, a market is held there, allowing those who have a few coins left to buy spoiled food and other articles that merchants want to get rid of. Rats are everywhere in the Pit, and it's not unusual to find a dead one "included" in the merchandise. That's why many people call the place the Dead Rat Market.

The Lost Hope Dispensary

On what could be considered as the main street of the Pit stands a long, flat building, faded and covered with rust. Once glorious and shining, its frontispiece is now half dismantled, but the title is still there bar one letter—passersby are left to wonder whether it is the "Last Hope" or the "Lost Hope". Those who know what disease troubles the patients of that cursed place favor the latter version. Inside the dispensary, under the violent control of the Blood Daggers, people addicted to the Dreams Leaves are kept in a desperate state of continued intoxication, delivering a daily blood pouch for the vampire Falkia until their dying breath.

The Ruined Manor/Blood Manor

On the far slope of the depression that shapes the Pit, clinging to the base of Runeheim's main wall, lies a ruined manor, yet another vestige of a prestigious but long-forgotten past. Abandoned for centuries, it is now under the control of the Blood Daggers and their mistress, the vampire Falkia Coldheart. The only access to the manor is a straight and steep road that makes it near impossible to approach without being spotted. This further reinforces the manor's dominant position. Though it used to simply be called the Ruined Manor, it is now known as the Blood Manor.

Progression

The contents of the switched bag

While the switched bag looks indistinguishable from the one which was taken, a DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check or a *detect magic* spell reveals that it was actually a different bag disguised by an illusion spell. If the characters don't realize the spell's existence, it will dissipate after some time (at the GM's discretion), revealing that magic was at work.

The bag contains a mysterious device, and nothing else. A closer look gives details: a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals scratched writing on some parts of the device, and a DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check tells that it works with magic and seems to be assembled from pieces that were not initially designed for it.

> *The device is actually a Dreams Leaves converter, a magical tool for rendering Dreams Leaves into an edible powder.*

Finding the thief/blunderer

Questioning Torven, the innkeeper, reveals that the thief—or the blunderer—is the drunk lad who started the brawl, a man called Bedlaf. By digging deeper, the characters can also learn that he is used as a mule by gangs of the Pit.

To find out more, they must head for the Pit to investigate the local gangs.

Passing the Muck Gate

Before entering the Pit, the characters reach the Muck Gate. There they meet Lieutenant Doze. He can answer a few general questions about the Pit, but doesn't know anything about Bedlaf. If asked, he will explain that he was not on duty at the gate the day before.

Once in the Pit, the characters meet a girl, Nell, who seems interested in helping them in exchange for a few coins. She has a strange manner of speaking and hails the characters with the words: *"I know things about the Pit. I'm Nell. Ask. I'll talk if I can."*

Note: In subsequent encounters with Nell, she'll systematically use the same phrase, *"Ask. I'll talk if I can."*

In the course of talking to the characters, she tells them that Bedlaf was commissioned by the Grey Rogues, a gang of thieves that recently took control of some businesses in the Pit. She directs them to Dead Rat Market as the best place for them to find a member of the Grey Rogues, by either threatening, convincing, or through observation. A DC15 Charisma check is the fastest way to ask the right questions and find the Grey Rogues.

Finding the Grey Rogues

The characters finally meet a group of Grey Rogues. At first, they don't know anyone named Bedlaf, but a captain suddenly remembers something.

"Kals told me she had commissioned an important delivery from a mule called Bedlaf, and it hadn't delivered on time. She feared he'd gone missing, and she said the delivery had to be made whatever the cost."

The Grey Rogue captain then asks the characters to make the delivery in Bedlaf's place. In exchange, they learn who the addressee was: a dispensary controlled by the Blood Daggers. At this point the characters might decide to head to the Lost Hope Dispensary in order to find out more about Bedlaf, but if they haven't already investigated the device to be delivered, they might prefer to do that before making the delivery.

Delivering the Device to the Lost Hope Dispensary

Upon arrival at the Lost Hope Dispensary, the characters witness a Dreams Leaves addict being assaulted and kidnapped by a group of Blood Daggers. Depending on their reaction, the characters might get involved in a fight with the brutes. Either way, it is interrupted by the arrival of a Blood Dagger captain.

The captain will receive the device from the characters and give the characters a sealed letter in return. If asked about Bedlaf, he'll just say (truthfully) that he's never heard of him. At this point another character gets out of the dispensary (Eldhyl), whose manners seem to be out of place among the rough lackeys who escort him. He won't say his name, though, and just follows the Blood Dagger escort.

Note: Characters who make a DC15 Wisdom (Insight) check notice he's under some sort of magical influence.

Note: If the characters decide to read the letter, they learn that Kals has asked for an appointment with Falkia, the leader of the Blood Daggers, in exchange for delivery of the artifact. The letter contains a positive answer to that request, and the meeting is supposed to happen at midnight, that same day.

Investigating the Device

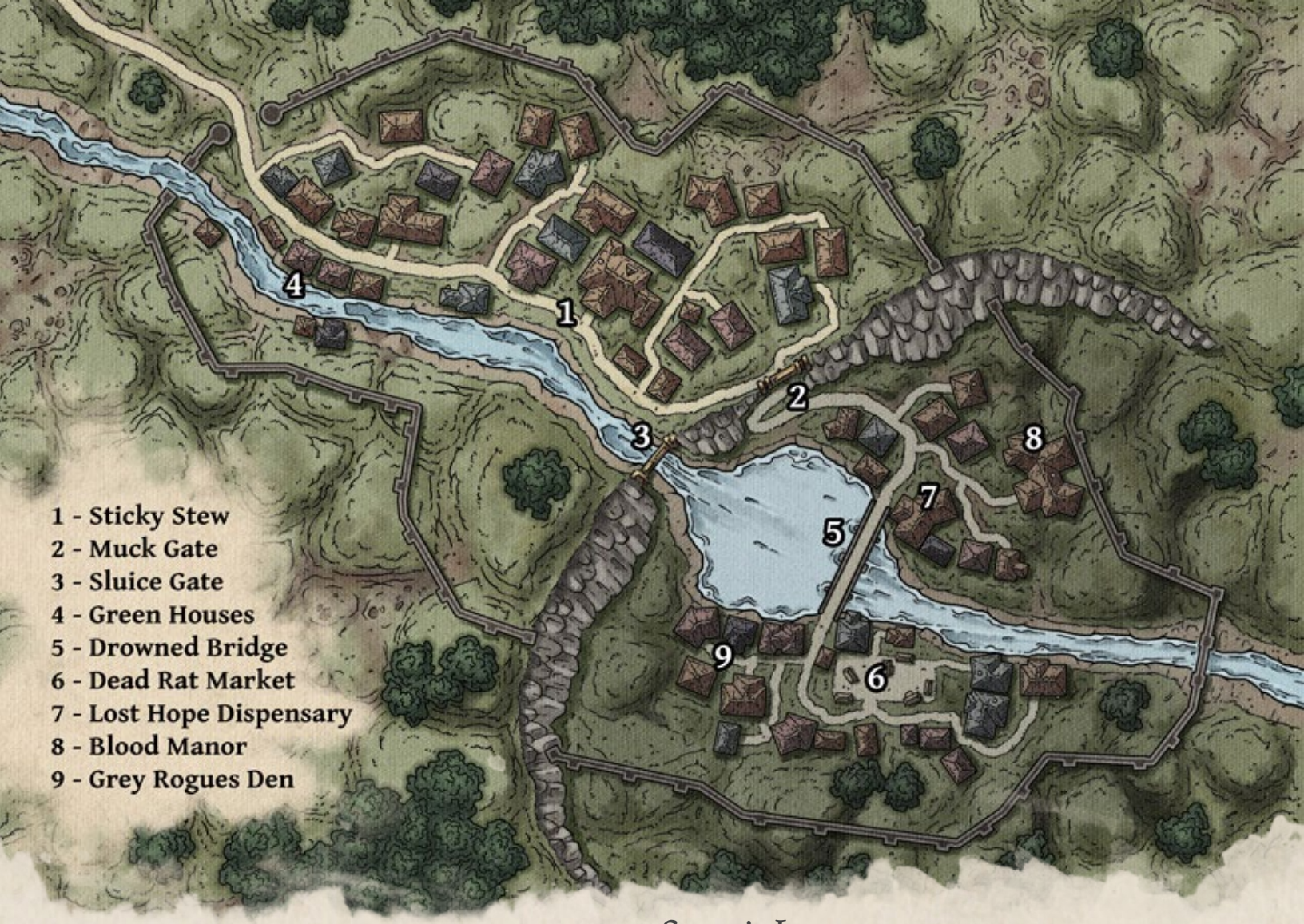
Asking questions

Nell neither recognizes it nor knows anything about it. However, a DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that there's something wrong with her, as if she unconsciously recognizes the device, but at the same time answered sincerely that she didn't know about it.

Lieutenant Doze also denies knowing anything about it, but a DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that seeing it has startled him. If the characters press him about it, Doze will respond with threats and refuse to answer further.

Torven, for a convincing amount of money or a DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check, says that it looks like some devices he has seen at Skeinig's laboratory.

"I sometimes get orders for my excellent stew from clients who are too busy to come to my honourable establishment."



"One of them, the respected alchemist in service of the Archbane family, is a regular. I usually have one of my assistants make the delivery, but I remember that once they were all sick and I had to deliver it myself. Mr. Skeinig is a generous client, if you know what I mean, so it is always worth taking his orders. His laboratory is only one block east from here, actually. Oh yes, the place is well defended by Archbane guards, so there must be valuable material in there. Anyway, I wasn't allowed to stay for long, but as Mr. Skeinig was very busy that day, I had to bring the food directly to him, right on his desk, and that's where I have seen pieces that looked similar to that thing you have here. Colour of the metal, and polish too. Well, that might be quite different, but when you showed me that thing, it almost immediately brought up that memory. And trust me, I have a nose for that kind of stuff."

After that monologue, the innkeeper smells the air while a burning odor spreads out, and suddenly runs to his kitchen, screaming, *"MY STEEEEEW!!!"*

Skeinig's Laboratory

The laboratory can be found easily as it's the only guarded building on the street indicated by Torven. However, the characters have to find a way to enter the lab. A few options to consider:

Neutralize the 2 guards and take their keys: quite risky, as in that part of the town there are often other citizens passing by who would not hesitate to raise the alarm and summon the town guard.

If they know about Skeinig's weakness, thanks to Torven the chatterbox, they may disguise a character as a courtesan sent by Skeinig's habitual brothel.

Disguise as Archbane guards to relieve the guards on duty. The characters may notice that the guards like to have a drink or two at the Sticky Stew before relieving their comrades.

Unless they choose option 2 or get the keys, the characters will have to pick the door lock with thieves' tools, making a DC 13 Dexterity check. The lock is enchanted with a defensive spell, so each failed attempt results in a small

thunderbolt striking the lockpicker, producing an audible crack easily heard up to 20 feet away, and inflicting 1d8 lightning damage.

Once inside the laboratory, the characters either meet and interrogate Skeinig if he's here, or explore the lab by themselves if he is not. In any case they should discover two critical pieces of information:

The person who ordered the parts and made the Dreams Leaves converter:

Skeinig can explain that Skellna, the only remaining child of the Archbane family, asked him for a few alchemical items but he doesn't know what she wanted to do with them.

A DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check discovers an unfinished letter from Skeinig to Skellna in which he mentions the parts she asked him for, and asks her what she intended to do with them.

Material from the greenhouses. A lot of material related to plant culture surrounds Skeinig's desk, and another DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals some plans for a distillation device to improve the testing of the "concentration of the last Dreams Leaves delivery from the greenhouses."

If the characters interrogate Skeining and let him go, he will not notify the town guards in case they decide to investigate the laboratory. However he will send three **thugs** and their leader (**bandit captain**) to deal with the characters.

Meeting Kals at the Grey Rogues' den

Despite the meeting with the Blood Daggers at the Lost Hope Dispensary, Bedlaf is still missing, and the characters' stolen stuff, too. If they decide to go back to the Grey Rogues, the characters cross paths with Nell, who tells them there's been a punch-up around the Blood Manor recently. She'll also tell them that she saw a Grey Rogues member crossing the Drowned Bridge just minutes ago.

If the characters go there, they can spot the Grey Rogue among the crowd with a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check. If they decide to follow him, they'll need to perform a group DC 14 Dexterity (Stealth) checks in a row to manage to follow him unnoticed to the Grey Rogue's den.

If they try to directly approach him, he'll run away and they'll need a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check to catch up and get him to lead them to the Grey Rogues' den.

The Grey Rogues' den is well hidden in the most crowded part of the Pit, in a dense block of several apparently abandoned houses. Behind locked doors and boarded-up windows, the buildings have been joined on the inside into a single complex. It has several entrances, in covered narrow pathways or in underground hallways, all locked or guarded by wardens disguised as beggars. Inside, there is a main hall on the ground floor where the characters are brought in. In a corner, a few Grey Rogues are furbishing weapons and taking an inventory of their goods. With a DC15 Wisdom (Perception) check, the characters recognize two of the bruisers they fought at the Sticky Stew.

Once in the Grey Rogues' den, the characters might ask for help getting their stuff back. If they're convincing, thanks to a successful DC 12 Charisma (Intimidation/Persuasion) check, they'll be introduced to Kals. If they miss their check, a melodic voice seeming to come from above asks to see the guests, and Kals introduces herself.

Kals is a beautiful, charismatic young woman. She seems a bit short of breath when the characters enter her office, but doesn't mention it and welcomes the characters.

"I've been keeping tabs on you and you know what you're doing. I like that. I'm Kals, leader of these Grey Rogues down there. Good lads, willing. But I need more, so I won't beat about the bush. I need you to help me fight the Blood Daggers. You've met them, you've seen their manners, and what they do to the people. I won't lie—I'm not a saint, and neither are my men. But we're far less toxic for the Pit than that bitch Falkia and her henchmen."

A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that some documents in the room bearing Kals' full name, Kalseln.

A DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check informs the characters that an illusion spell surrounds the sorceress, but doesn't reveal what exactly in her appearance is changed by the spell.

If interrogated about the Dreams Leaves traffic, and the Grey Rogues' interference in it, Kals explains she wants to take control of it for two reasons. First, she wants to cut off Falkia's supply of blood. Second, she's anxious to learn how the drug is transported, and where it comes from. So far, all she has been able to learn is that the drug supplies are replenished about every two weeks.

If asked about the device, she explains that it is a converter for the Dreams Leaves, which allows for safer and more potent consumption of the drug. If asked about its design and provenance, she'll ignore the question and refuse to talk further about the subject.

During the discussion, Kals directly accuses the Blood Daggers of the theft and Bedlaf's disappearance. She'll suggest investigating the Drowned Bridge, as Blood Daggers are said to drop their victims in the river from there.

Searching the Drowned Bridge

At some point after entering the Pit, when the characters decide to go to the Drowned Bridge—for example by following Kals' advice—they cross paths with a patrol led by Lt. Doze, who strongly dislikes people nosing around the Drowned Bridge. His patrol is on the lookout while they slowly drive a barge along the river, searching its bottom with poles. On a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check, they notice that the barge seems much heavier in the water than it should be.

If asked about what they're doing, Lt. Doze interrupts his men and answers that they're just removing blockages and ensuring the river keeps flowing out of the town. He won't say more though, and orders the characters to move on, as they are getting in the way. If the characters refuse, he'll send 4 **guards** after them while he hurries the barge to the tunnel, opening the heavy portcullis to get outside the town.

"Dennis! Melfoy! Tuck! Archie! Whatever you find on these nosy parkers' bodies is yours. But hurry, I won't leave the portcullis open for long!"

Once he has opened the portcullis, he'll call his guards back (if they're not dead already) and warn the characters.

"Ya really wanna dig in dirt, heh? Do as ya please, but ya might en' up buried in it sooner than expected!" He concludes with a loud, raucous laughter, that his remaining men instantly join.

Important note: After this skirmish, the characters will be attacked on sight by the guards at the Muck Gate from now on.

If the characters have interrupted Lt. Doze, and they look for their bag by the river, they will find it with a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check—but it's empty. During their search, the characters hear a flare fire from outside the town. (The flare is a signal for the guards posted at the Muck Gate, to open the sluice gate!) If they have not guessed that this would happen, they are in danger of drowning. They will hear the onrushing water and must escape before the area floods.

If they haven't interfered in Lt. Doze and his men's work, they might get some information from him. If they ask about their bag and the Blood Daggers dropping their victims in the river, he answers,

"Do the Blood Daggers drop their shit here? Who wouldn't? Even a child would tell ya that. When we open the sluice gate and let the dirt through, whatever remains under that garbage river is gone. Convenient isn't it? What's ya mule's name again? Bedlaf? Honestly, I know most mules that get in and out of the Pit, and that one I've never heard of. Ya sure ya got the right name?"

Confronting the Blood Daggers

Retrieving the bag right where Kals thought it would be might entice the characters to believe her accusations against the Blood Daggers.

- If they decide to come back and report the information to Kals, she'll suggest that the characters seize the occasion of her meeting with Falkia at sunset to enter the Blood Manor and get their stuff back. In exchange, she asks them to find a young man named Eldhyl in the manor and bring him to her, unharmed. If they take this course, entering the manor won't be very difficult and the characters find Eldhyl there.
- If the characters decide to confront the Blood Daggers by themselves, they have more trouble approaching the manor undetected. Once there, Falkia meets them in person, with Eldhyl at her side.

In either case, they find Eldhyl using the Dreams Leaves converter. He will absolutely refuse to leave the place, but reveals the following information:

- Eldhyl claims to have joined Falkia out of choice.
- Eldhyl is the heir of Archbane family, a noble family from outside the Pit, and he abandoned them in order to forget their unforgivable crimes.

"I came to Falkia by choice. I learned of her addiction to blood tainted by the Dreams Leaves, so it was an obvious choice for me to offer her mine. My blood is very special. No, I'm not talking about my noble Archbane blood, though somehow yes, I'm talking about it. Or maybe you don't know—it doesn't matter. I don't see any reason to go back to my old life. It would mean living in a pool of shame with only an illusion of honour. Disgusting. All I want is oblivion, and the Dreams Leaves give me that, especially with that converter you delivered. I recognise my little sister's work. If you see her again, send my regards."

If she's present, Falkia will deny being involved in Bedlaf's disappearance.

"Why would I care about some mule? Things are quiet around here—no one dares to face me. I have all I need, plenty of tasty blood from the dispensary and Eldhyl for my evening pleasure. I would drive a stake into my own heart just to be able to drink more of his blood. Not that that would be enough to kill me, of course, but I'm telling you that from a mortal's point of view, so that things are crystal clear." She ends by grinning wickedly.

Falkia also implies that the characters are being manipulated. For example if they ask about fights on the evening when Bedlaf disappeared (according to Nell), Falkia will say that nothing actually happened, and that no one dares to walk within 150 feet from the Blood Manor.

"Maybe you should consider more seriously who you trust and who you don't. I have nothing to hide, but is that true for everyone in the Pit? I wonder. Does that Bedlaf even exist? Looks like you are chasing ghosts." She then laughs openly before sending the characters off.

"I owe you nothing, and I wish you no harm. So leave now before I get tired of that distraction. I need Eldhyl's blood now." Eldhyl and she embrace as she tenderly drives her teeth in his neck, without breaking her gaze with the characters.

But soon her gaze softens as she starts moaning with pleasure.

At that point the characters have no choice but to leave as they have been surrounded by many Blood Daggers.

Conclusion

The Truth about the Dreams Leaves

Information below is obtained (or not) by the characters during their investigation in the Pit. These are secrets known to only a select few in the Pit, including Eldhyl.

Where does it come from?

Dreams Leaves are grown from magical plants in the greenhouses of the Archbane family. This can be guessed by the characters based on the following clues:

- The greenhouse material in Skeinig's lab.
- Torvek reveals that the Archbane greenhouses are by the riverside.

Who makes it?

The Archbane family (who Nell is part of) is responsible for the production, with the help of Skeinig. This can to be guessed by the characters based on the following clues:

- Eldhyl's comments about his family's unforgivable crimes.
- Notes found at Skeinig's lab about improving "*Dreams Leaves concentration*".

Who brings it to the Pit?

Every two weeks, the towns trash is released in the river that crosses the Pit. Lt. Doze uses this occasion to smuggle the Dreams Leaves into the Pit. Characters may guess this based on the following clues:

- The suspicious weight of Lt. Doze's barge.
- Torvek's comment about the greenhouses being by the riverside.
- Forcing Lt. Doze to confess.

The multiple identities of Nell/Kalseln/Skellna

The following clues can help the characters guess that Kalseln and Nell are the same person as Skellna:

- Nell's strange speech pattern.
- After their first visit at the Blood Manor, the characters may have doubts about the reports of a punch-up from Nell as such reports were refuted by Eldhyl and Falkia.
- Successful DC18 Intelligence (Arcana) checks or *detect magic* spells cast near Nell or Kals, revealing that an illusion spell is at work.
- Finding out Kals' full name when meeting her in her office.
- Learning of Skellna's existence (from Skeinig's lab notes, or after asking questions of Torvek about Eldhyl and other Archbane family members).

When they begin to have doubts about Nell, the characters might also decide to follow her, and thus find out that she seems to live at the Grey Rogues' den. Successfully following her should require three successful DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) checks in a row.

Taking sides

Nell/Kalseln/Skellna founded the Grey Rogues with the intent of using them to fight the Blood Daggers' influence and get her brother back. If the characters manage to assemble all the pieces of the puzzle, they understand that Nell's family is responsible for the Dreams Leaves and that Eldhyl came on his own to the Pit and Falkia to escape his shame. They then have to decide how to use that information.

Confronting Kals

If the characters confront Kalseln about her tricks, she admits that she played them to get Eldhyl back, and reiterates her request to help her fight Falkia and the Blood Daggers in exchange for their stolen stuff and a substantial reward. At this point, the characters might decide to accept or refuse. If they know that the Archbane family is responsible for the production and traffic of Dreams Leaves, they might also decide to inform on Kalseln, or not.

Below are the main forks in the conclusion, depending on what the characters know and decide to do or say.

A. **If they help Kalseln/Skellna**

They have to choose how to get Eldhyl back.

A.1. Simply attacking the Blood Manor

In that case, Kals and a few Grey Rogues join them for a final battle. If they manage to defeat Falkia and her Blood Daggers, Eldhyl is freed, but his sorrow will make him sink even deeper in his addiction to the Dream Leaves.

A.2. Revealing the provenance of the Dreams Leaves

If the characters know where the Dreams Leaves are produced, they might decide to inform Kalseln. In that case, if they don't know that Nell/Kalseln is also Skellna, she reveals herself in return. After that, the team still has to decide how to use that information.

A.2.1. Ask Skeinig to change the Dreams Leaves

Clever characters might suggest to have Skeinig and Skellna working together to change the nature of the Dreams Leave to make addicts' blood distasteful for vampires. By doing so, they avoid a fight against Falkia, and maintain a stable situation in the Pit. The vampire will indeed simply abandon the Pit, and Eldhyl, like a child throws away an old toy. But as a consequence of that abandonment, Eldhyl will kill himself.

A.2.2. Cut the Dreams Leaves supply line

Another option that the characters might think of is to confront Lt. Doze

and thus stop the supply line from Archbane greenhouses to the Pit. In that case, a fight against Lt. Doze and his full squad is unavoidable. After that, the shortage of Dreams Leaves triggers unrest, leading to a battle with the Blood Daggers and Falkia. However, this will allow Eldhyl, if he survives, to get free of his addiction, overcome his shame, and return to his family with a resolve to stop Dreams Leaves production for good. Unfortunately, Skellna is unlikely to survive the battle with Falkia.

If Skellna survives, she rewards the characters for whatever sorrow her plans have caused them, and the tells them where they can find their stolen items.

B. **If they refuse to help Kalseln/Skellna**

In this situation, the characters face the anger of Kalseln/Skellna. However, if they know where the Dreams Leaves are produced and inform Kalseln about it, she softens her tone towards them. If the characters don't know that she is Skellna, she decides to reveal herself, and shares all the hate she harbors against her family, who she holds responsible for her brother's degradation.

At this point, the characters might decide to change their opinion on Skellna and finally help her (triggering fork A instead of B).

If the characters don't want to help Skellna in any case, the following situations might happen.

B.1. Not choosing one evil above the other

If the characters knew (and told Skellna) about the Dreams Leaves' provenance, she accepts their neutrality and gives their items back before sending them away without ceremony. Later on, when leaving the Pit, the characters will see a fire in the rich part of the town. In a desperate attempt to get her brother free, Skellna has set the greenhouses on fire, triggering a huge fire in the town that will kill many citizens.

B.2. Fighting the sorceress

If the characters don't know (or don't tell Skellna) about the Dreams Leaves' provenance, they must face her anger and are forced to fight her. If they defeat her, they will be able to loot her office and get their items back in addition to some gold. If they didn't know her real identity, they find papers in the office revealing it.

Falkia Coldheart

Medium undead, lawful evil
Criminal, Crew Leader

Armour Class 16 (breastplate)
Hit Points 81 (18d8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws DEX +7, CON +3
Skills Perception +4, Persuasion +5
Senses passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Valikan, Thieves' Cant
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Falkia is a rank 2 vampire and has the following transformational boons and flaws:

Transformational Boons. *Blood Fury, Undead Form, Dread Knight Combat Training.*

Transformational Flaws. *Blood Thirst, Hideous Appearance.*

Actions

Multiattack. Falkia makes two attacks with her greatsword.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Legendary Actions

Falkia can take two legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Falkia regains any spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Move. Falkia moves up to her speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Greatsword Attack (costs 2 actions). Falkia makes one attack with her greatsword.

Fanged Bite (costs 2 actions). As an additional cost, Falkia must spend 1 Fury Point. Falkia makes the fanged bite attack from the blood fury abilities.

The Blood Knight and the Five Relics

Evil comes in many forms in Etharis, so much so that merely keeping a record of it is the surest way to madness. Some places are infested with darkness, while others are quite removed from it. Charneault Kingdom outwardly resembles the latter, but those who wander there should remain on their guard, as it maintains its share of terrors. Among these, curses could be the most horrific afflictions a living being can face, and even the dead are not exempt...

Familiar Faces

The Blood Knight is a deadly supernatural creature that assumes the form of a hulking knight dripping in blood. Recently, it has been sighted in an area called the Lake of the Twin Waters. The knight appears to its victims suddenly, striking down its prey with ruthless brutality before disappearing without a trace.

Ser Hugues le Généreux was a famous local knight who gave his life a century ago to defend the Lake's inhabitants against bandits and creatures of the dark. He had taken an oath to the ancient Water Spirit that dwelt in the Lake of Twin Waters. Though he perished shortly thereafter, his corpse was divided into five pieces which retained their connection to the Spirit's mystical powers to carry on Ser Genereux's unfulfilled oath. The remains are now venerated as sacred relics purported to protect the Lake.

Lucius Balder, the reeve in charge of Bonneseaux village. Devoted to the principle of minimum effort, Balder always tries to shirk his duties to subalterns or any available underling. On the other hand, he likes to thoroughly review the inns in the villages that he oversees to ensure their quality of service hasn't deteriorated in his absence.

Ymdrin Khaesir, an ambitious dark elf sorcerer who has recently (and secretly) settled in the area. He intends to take control of the local Spirit of Nature by invoking a curse on Ser Hugues' soul, awakening the Blood Knight.

Indeed, the Spirit is weakened by the unfulfilled oath between it and Ser Hugues so many years ago, and it is only a matter of time before its power is depleted enough for Ymdrin to assume control through the Ritual of Dark Mist. Ymdrin has the stats of a **Mage**.

Daelron, an elven bard with flamboyant attire who is rumored to be able to walk across the surface of the lake. His secret is that he is a Bondmaker- an elven druid charged with appeasing Spirits of Nature in the Charneault Kingdom. Daelron was sent by the Circle of Bondmakers to figure out what was happening in the Lake of the Twin Waters, in case the recent disturbances have anything to do with the inhabitants provoking a Spirit of Nature.

Mother Hedwige is an old wise woman living in the Sen Yaomil Sanctuary. She is the High Priestess of the Generous Sisters, an order of priestesses devoted to following Ser Hugues' example by helping the poor and destitute. Mother Hedwige has the stats of a **Priest.**

Locations of Interest

Bonneseaux village

This large village is the primary human settlement in the area. Situated on a sloping hill on the south side of the lake, it is almost entirely surrounded by water. Indeed, water levels have risen over recent years, gradually encircling the south side of the village. In response, villagers who did not wish to move further up the hill began building their houses on stilts, while others took to living on boats. While others may consider this an extreme measure, the people of this region already relied heavily on boats for fishing and local export. Fishing is both a pastime and a necessity for the inhabitants of Bonneseaux village, and fishing equipment can be seen outside nearly every dwelling. The smell of fish also fills most parts of the village, particularly on days when there is a strong northerly wind.

Bonneseaux is under the jurisdiction of the larger town Vertechutes, situated two days' walk to the northeast. The reeve Lucius Balder is in charge of enforcing the kingdom's law in the west area of Vertechutes' jurisdiction, which includes several villages in addition to Bonneseaux. Therefore, he only passes by on rare occasions such as collecting taxes. Most of the time the only representatives of authority is a guardroom maintaining a dozen militia guardsmen on the south side of the village.

The local economy is built around fishing and some hunting in the nearby forests. The proximity of the Royal Road helps maintain trade between Bonneseaux, other nearby villages, and Vertechutes. Traveling merchants regularly pass by to join the local market, buying fish or meat, and selling other goods not produced in Bonneseaux.

On the main (and only) square in Bonneseaux, one can also find a few local merchants, an old chapel, and an inn called The Caught Fish.

The local merchants in Bonneseaux are:

- Pierson, a blacksmith-farrier.
- Simon, an older man who runs a corner food shop.
- Lucas, a barber.

During the adventure, the following traveling NPCs are in town, and refuse to leave as they fear being attacked on the road:

- Arthus, a bookseller.
- Guyard, an herbalist from Vertechutes.
- Daelron, an elven bard who performs at the Caught Fish.

Remote fishermen camp

The lake is fed by two rivers, one coming from the north and the other from the northwest. The land between the two rivers is particularly vivid, as are the two rivers, which support a thriving ecosystem of fish and other creatures ranging from the inoffensive to the downright deadly.

Therefore, fishermen and hunters have established a camp at the mouth of the northwest river.

Sen Yaomil Sanctuary

At the southeast end of the lake on a high isolated headland stands a once-magnificent elven sanctuary. Decades of neglect have left it in crumbling disrepair, but it is now home to the Generous Sisters, a local religious order who tend to the sanctuary in the name of Ser Hugues le Généreux. The priestesses live mostly in self-sufficiency, and only receive a few supplies from the village in exchange for their vineyard's yield and weekly sermons at the village chapel.

Tol Saern ruins

A long time ago, before the founding of Charneault Kingdom, some elves populated the area that would become the Lake of the Twin Waters. At that time, there was no lake, only the two rivers, hence the name Caer Melinei or "the land of the twin rivers". The elves had built a small village on both sides of the northern river, with a beautiful bridge spanning the river's breadth. They lived there for a long time, but were finally forced to abandon it under the pressure of human expansion. Humans settled in the village for some time, but today what remains of it lies in ruins or has been engulfed by the waters of the lake.

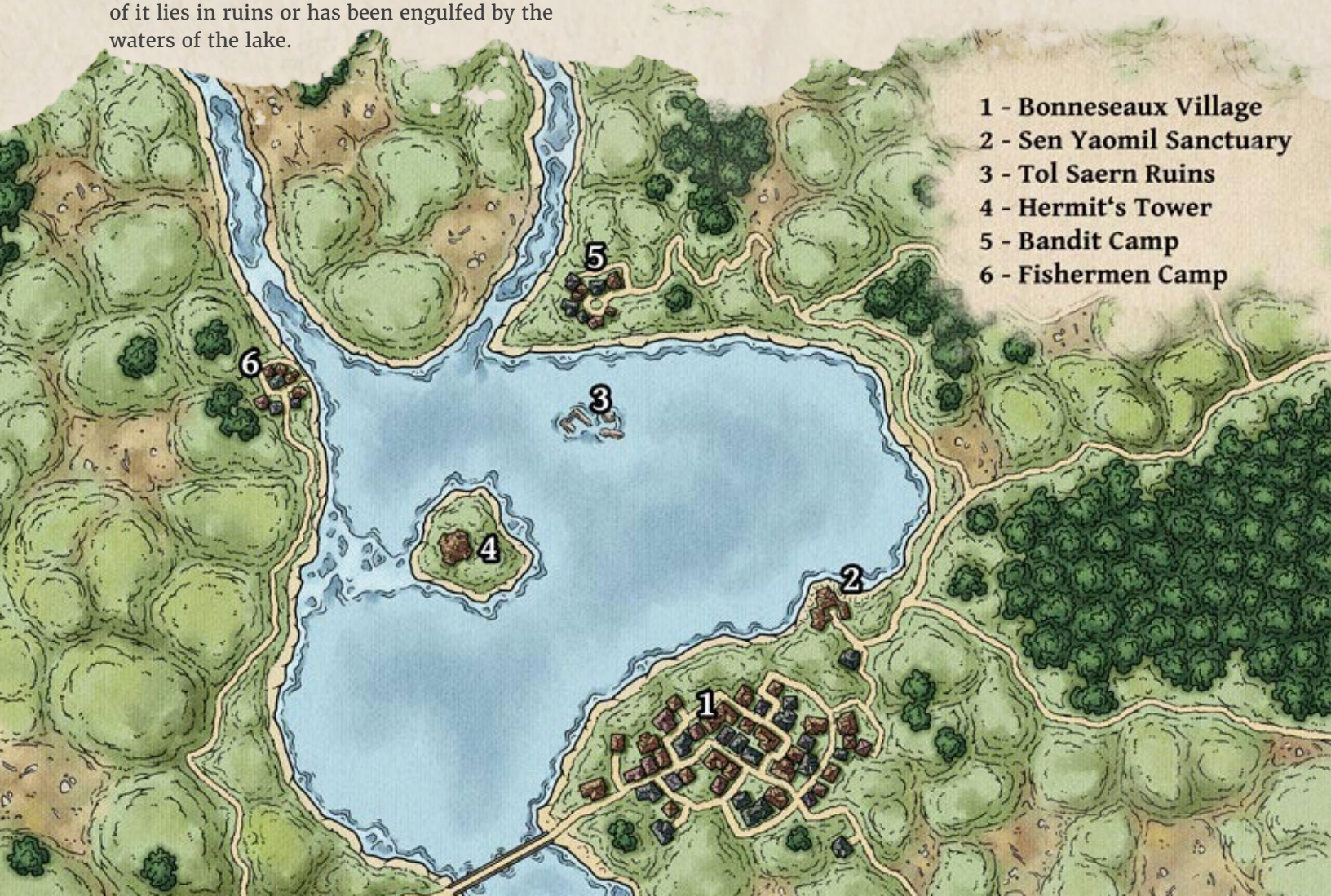
Hermit's tower

One of the rare elven buildings that has stood the test of time is the high tower on the western point of the centre island of the lake. It was probably used as a watchtower by the elves back when they lived in the area, but nowadays it is only inhabited by an old hermit. The centre island itself is filled with hostile plant life.

Where to Start

While walking on the Royal Road, the characters witness an apparition of the Blood Knight, who slaughters a small merchant convoy at the crossroads leading to the village of Bonneseaux. There's a heavy, dark mist all around and they lose sight of the knight. Whatever their reaction, they are surprised at the crime scene by the appearance of Lucius Balder, the reeve.

He is escorted by 20 militia guards journeying from a larger town two days from Bonneseaux. The characters are accused of the crime, arrested, and brought to the village to face trial. The characters are granted a chance to argue their innocence (and if they defend themselves poorly, testimonies from



locals about previous apparition sightings could assist in proving their innocence). The reeve is a pragmatic man, and decides to negotiate a deal with the characters that also benefits him. Their wealth is seized, and they have to investigate the Blood Knight in order to have it returned to them in full.

"Listen, adventurer, I don't really believe that this is your doing. But I don't know you, and it would seem to me you just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong moment. I must do something about it, or my reputation will suffer. You seem to be good, willing lads. I'll give you a chance to clear your name. Solve this case for me, and I will forget everything. In the meantime, your valuables will be seized and held securely at the Caught Fish, the finest tavern in Bonneseaux village."

Progression

When the adventure starts, only two apparitions of the Blood Knight have been reported, with five casualties, including two militia soldiers, and two missing persons. This was enough for the local guardroom to send a distress message to the town of Vertechutes, who in return sent the reeve Balder with a small troop to settle the situation.

Parameters of tension

During their investigation, the Blood Knight randomly appears, attacking either playable characters or NPCs at your discretion. Feel free to adjust the frequency and targets of these encounters to the party's situation. The essential element is to provide occasions to gather information about the Blood Knight and to build tension. During these encounters, the Blood Knight might be slain by the characters, but the ghostly knight will reappear shortly afterwards.

Escalation

At first, Ymdrin will not try to intervene in the characters' investigation. Indeed, their struggles with the Blood Knight serve his interests insofar as they force the cursed knight to use the Spirit's nature and thus weaken it. However, when the characters understand that the knight has been cursed, and start gathering the cure components, Ymdrin has no choice but to try to stop them. To do so, he makes use of the Dark Mist to summon evil creatures that appear with the Blood Knight and fight alongside him, thus making the encounters more dangerous and increasing tension as the story advances.

Dark Mist

Ymdrin needs the Dark Mist to cover the lake in order to use the Spirit's power to summon dark creatures. The Dark Mist started to cover the region a few weeks before the first appearance of the Blood Knight. It hangs low over the lake and its surroundings most of the time, but sometimes there's a break and an area is momentarily free from the Dark Mist's oppressive presence. This in an important factor in the encounters, especially once characters understand that without the Dark Mist, any creature passing through it gets severely weakened or even incapacitated. Feel free to use it to adjust the difficulty of the adventure for your players, for example by triggering a respite in the Dark Mist if the characters' are close to death. On the contrary, if they are finding gameplay too easy, the GM may use the Dark Mist to introduce additional creatures.

Investigating

Crime scenes

The first reported attack from the Blood Knight happened near the fisherman's camp at the mouth of the northwestern river. Once there, the characters meet a few hunters and fishermen, who have no choice but to keep fishing on the lake to feed their families. But another character is present, Daelron the elven bard, who supposedly came to help lift the fishermen's spirits. Further questioning reveals that he came by his own volition.

Investigating the crime scenes may reveal the following clues:

- The victims are systematically cut into five pieces: each arm and leg is severed from the torso.
- A DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the footsteps of the Blood Knight seem to appear out of nowhere, not far from the victims.

Witnesses

The characters may question the witnesses of the Blood Knight's apparitions or witness other apparitions themselves. By doing so, they gather more information about the Blood Knight's movements.

Incorporeal nature

A dying or severely injured victim describes the knight as an "unkillable demon" and confirms the Blood Knight's operational mode.

"I swear it. I swear it. I swear it. Odon planted his halberd nine good inches right into its chest, but... but... that thing ignored it. I swear it. He barely flinched, and then he simply cut off poor Odon's arm, still holding the halberd. And then he cut off his other arm, just like that. I swear it. I swear it. Odon was still screaming when it started tearing his legs from his body. I swear it. I swear it. I sw..."

That otherworldly nature of the knight is confirmed when they encounter the Blood Knight. After the first fight, they see the corpse of the knight fall to pieces, dissolving into a filthy mix of blood, mud, and dark water. The next time the Blood Knight reappears, the characters should understand that he is of a different nature than other living beings.

Voice

The Blood Knight speaks in a strange voice, as if it were drowning and speaking at the same time, so understanding his words requires a successful DC 12 Perception check. Those who understand him (be they player characters or NPCs) report that the Blood Knight constantly repeats the same sentences:

- *"I do not want to spill blood. But if you force me to, I'll be true to my word."*
- *"I protect those who cannot protect themselves."*

Coat of arms

Witnesses who manage to get close to the Blood Knight and survive report a distinctive coat of arms on his breastplate: a flying fish jumping over a river.

Knowing Ser Hugues' Story

Most villagers vaguely know of the heroic deeds of Ser Hugues, but most are indifferent to the legend of a knight from so long ago: *"Why would I know shit about some drawings on a shield? Do you see any knights around? They don't care about us; they're all at their quests and chivalrous acts. No one cares about a village like ours, lost in the riverlands."*

A DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces the townsfolk to direct the characters to the right people (if they haven't found by themselves):

- One of the children playing in Bonneseaux's main square repeats the same phrase spoken by the Blood Knight, *"I protect those who cannot protect themselves."* If questioned about it, he explains hearing the phrase during sermons in the chapel of the Generous Sisters.
- Simon, the shopkeeper, recounts the story that his parents told him when he was a child, about a knight who died fighting dark creatures. He'll also briefly mention relics made from parts of the dead knight's body.
- Arthus, the bookseller, has **The Gest of the Vertechutes Knights** in his inventory. It is a thick book recounting the deeds of "each and every knight in the glorious history of Vertechutes". Arthus has many copies to sell, but won't sell for less than three gold pieces as the book is (supposedly) a bestseller. A character reading it must perform a DC 12 Intelligence (History/Investigation) check to discern any useful information from the book. A character reading the book may find, and confirm, the phrase; "I protect those who cannot protect themselves" and the leaping fish coat of arms as connected with Ser Hugues.

Visiting the Sen Yaomil sanctuary

If the characters go to the chapel, they see a display advising that, *"Sermons are usually held on a weekly basis, but the chapel is closed until further notice due to the recent attacks. You may still visit the Generous Sisters at the Sen Yaomil sanctuary."* By asking around, they learn that the Generous Sisters live in the old elven sanctuary, at the southeast end of the lake.

If the characters decide to go there, they need to either hire a boat and convince a local fisherman to bring them to the sanctuary, or buy a map and try to not get lost in the thick mist of the lake. Otherwise, they may walk to the sanctuary and pass through the mist, skirting the lake.

Once there, the party meets the Generous Sisters and are introduced to Mother Hedwige, the high priestess. She willingly tells all she knows about Ser Hugues:

"The Generous Sisters are what remains of Ser Hugues' legacy. We do our best to honour his memory by being as generous to the people of this land as he was during his life as a knight. As he used to say: 'We protect those who can't protect themselves.' You know, this does not

apply to armed protection only, contrary to what most stories tell about him. He gave his entire fortune to the poor, and encouraged generosity to the extreme. We, sisters of this sanctuary, are but trying to approach his virtue."

About the relics:

"Even in death, Ser Hugues protects us. When he died, he asked for his body to be used as a symbol of generosity. That's why the Generous Sisters were founded: to honour Ser Hugues' last will. It is said by our annals that when he died, the twin rivers wept and the lowlands flooded with their tears. The only way to appease the waters was to follow Ser Hugues' words. Our holy knight's body was then divided into five relics, which were distributed across the area."

At this point in the discussion, any characters who succeed a DC15 Wisdom (Insight) check get the feeling that although willing to help in the Blood Knight's case, Mother Hedwige has not been entirely truthful. A player who rolls an 18 or higher on their check guesses that she has withheld an important detail about the relics: how and by whom the decision was made to cut Ser Hugues into pieces. But at this point, Mother Hedwige ignores the party's complaints and sends them away if they question her further.

Discovering the Curse and the Story of the Area

After some time spent investigating and encountering the Blood Knight, the party has probably guessed that the Blood Knight and Ser Hugues are the same entity, and that something unnatural is afoot. In order to understand that a curse is at work, they need to obtain more knowledge about curses, or external help.

The secret Mother Hedwige seeks to conceal is that the decision to transform Ser Hugues' body into sacred relics was not made by him. It was decided after his death, and against his will. Hugues wanted the Spirit he was bonded with to be set free, while the magical process producing the relics needed the Spirit's power. That decision was made by Mother Laudine, Mother Hedwige's predecessor, in an attempt to channel the Spirit's power into a powerful protective ward on the area.

Arthus the bookseller does not have books about magic or any other form of arcanic knowledge. However, he has a small book called "A Small Treatise of Ichthyology Applied to Changing Waters of the Vertechutes Region" that the characters can find after a successful DC15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Reading it reveals a bit of the lake's history; it was not always a lake, but a pair of rivers with a small elven settlement on the northern bank. Due to the rising water levels, the humans who settled after the elves quickly abandoned the area between the rivers and created a new village called Bonneseaux.

At some point when the characters rest at the Caught Fish, they witness a performance by Daelron in which he sings about blessings and curses from the times when humans and elves were fighting for what would later become the Charneault Kingdom. This should encourage them to question the bard.

If the characters ask around about curses or similar dark deeds, someone (for example, Simon the shopkeeper) mentions stories about a secret library in the hermit's tower.

Meeting Daelron

The party has probably met Daelron already at the fishermen camp, but he wasn't very talkative towards them, and quickly left after their arrival.

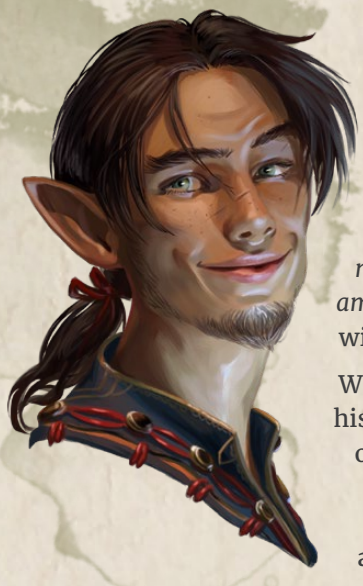
Daelrons intentions

Daelron had been warned of the Blood Knight's apparition several days ago, and arrived in Bonneseaux only one week before the party. He disguised himself as a bard as a precaution, and he was careful not to give too much credit to the rumours about the attacks. It is a habit of his kind to start by carefully observing before acting, as things are not as simple as they appear.

Once the characters start asking questions about curses and bewitchment, he decides to help them as they seem to be on the right track.

Conversing with the bard

If the characters come to Daelron after hearing his songs at the Caught Fish, he politely asks them to take a seat at a well-isolated table and wait for a few minutes while he attends to a pressing matter in his room. Shortly afterwards, he comes back to answer their questions.



"So, I understand you'd like to know more about my source of inspiration. It is always a great pleasure to share my passion with my most devoted fans." he winks at any female characters. *"Tell me what you wish to know. I am all yours."* he adds with a winning smile.

When the characters question his knowledge about curses or bewitchment, he denies having any experience with either, but shows curiosity about their motives for such questions.

"Oh, you know how us bards work, we just hear stories during our wanderings, and then we make up our own. I like adding my own personal flourishes. But pardon my curiosity, and let me ask, why would you be interested in such dark stories? I hope it is in no way related to your... assignment from our mutual friend, Reeve Balder. Is it?"

At this point a DC10 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that the bard is not telling the truth and definitely knows more than he's letting on. If they decide to share their information about the magical nature of the Blood Knight, his eyes light up.

"That would be a very interesting story for my next song! I wish I had more time to share with you, but maybe we could talk about it again another time? Here, let me sign you an autograph." He then writes a few words on paper and hands it to one of the party members, female if possible, before leaving abruptly. On the paper the following words can be read: *"Not here, too many ears. Meet me at the Hermit's tower, at midnight. Come alone. We can help each other."*

Talking with the Bondmaker

If the party decides to accept Daelron's invitation, they reach the island in the centre of the lake, where the tall, impressive elven tower still stands, obscured by the mist. In front of the tower, they see no one at first glance; if they succeed at a DC10 Wisdom (Perception) check, they hear the distant sound of a transverse flute, down by the northern side of the small island. As they approach, they notice an elven shaman playing his flute softly by the waterside.

Moreover, the flute appears to be magical, as the water moves in response to the music. The shaman is Daelron, as the characters will understand when he stops playing and greets the party, speaking in a more serious voice than he used as Daelron the bard.

"Hopefully you will excuse my hasty departure after our little talk at the Caught Fish, but I wanted to make sure I would be ready for the next act of our shared play. Not that it took me a while to change clothes, no. I wanted to help you get into that tower, and the magic I wish to put into action requires preparation, even for us Bondmakers. Have you heard of our kind?"

A successful DC12 Intelligence (History) check remembers that Bondmakers are Elven shamans in charge of appeasing the tormented Spirits of Nature in the Charneault Kingdom. Otherwise Daelron provides these details, and afterwards explains why he brought the party to the hermit's tower.

"You were right about the identity of our Blood Knight. It is—or it once was—Ser Hugues le Généreux, but now it is a suffering, cursed creature controlled by someone else. I am not well versed in curses and bewitchment, unfortunately, and that's why we need to solve this together. As you may know, there was a hidden library in this tower. With any luck, it's still here, and contains knowledge both of us seek. But you won't find it on that floor. It's underground, and to get to it, you will need to go through the submerged ruins of Tol Saern, right here." He points to the waters in front of him.

"My specialty is not curses, but I can speak to the waters of this lake. We knew each other a long time ago. Hopefully they will listen to me again, and give us safe passage. I suggest you split in two groups, one person to stay with me, to protect me and ensure I never stop playing for the waters. The others will look for the tower's underground entrance. Oh, and once you're inside, if you see the hermit, just ignore him. It's an illusion. Hurry now, as I fear the power that cast the curse might detect my magic and send minions to intervene."

The Hermit's Tower

Option A. Knocking on the door

If the characters reach the tower on their own before talking to Daelron at the Caught Fish, they are unaware of the secret underwater passage or about the hermit being an illusion. They can detect the illusion, though, with a *detect magic* spell or a successful DC 15 Intelligence

(Arcana) check. If they investigate the ruined tower they might find a locked entrance with a successful DC15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. When they do, the Hermit illusion's muttering transforms into three riddles to be solved before opening the door.

I have no end, but am the end of all that begins. What am I?

Answer: death

What building has the most stories?

Answer: a library

Those that seek me want more of me, but the more of me they find, the more they realise they do not possess me. What am I?

Answer: knowledge

If the characters struggle to find the answers, the Hermit will give them a hint: the three answers are things the characters are heading towards. Once they have found the answers, the illusion congratulates them. *"You will find a library, you will find knowledge, and you will find death. But not in that order, I fear."* The illusion then transforms into two very real **manticores**. Once the characters defeat them, the hidden door finally opens, providing access to the library.

Note: You might want to increase the difficulty of this encounter, for example, by replacing the manticores with a stone golem formed from the crumbling remains of the tower.

You can also use this encounter as an alternative means of introducing Daelron, who casts a powerful spell to finish the golem off.

"Well, there was another way to get into that library, but you seem to be more straightforward than me, so let's just skip the formalities. I'm Daelron, Elven Bondmaker, and I guess that we share the intention of learning how to deal with the curse at work in this area."

Option B. What rots beneath

If the characters are assisted by Daelron, he casts the *control water* spell with his flute to make the waters recede. During this time, Daelron must spend his action to concentrate on the spell.

The characters descending into the submerged ruins will find the library's underground entrance. However, it is guarded by an earth elemental. The earth elemental is hidden beneath the riverbed and will appear in front of the door when the characters are 15 feet away.

The library

Once inside the library, if the characters came from the underground passage, they discover the secret entrance from the inside. If they unlock it, they allow the others to join and Daelron to cease playing his flute. The library is not that large, and is well organized, so characters can quickly locate a book called "The basics of curses and how to lift them". A wizard lingering a bit longer in the library and performing a DC12 Intelligence (Arcana) check finds a new spell to learn and add to their book (randomly determined).

The library also contains a locked coffer that Daelron asks to open himself. The magical lock opens under his command. Inside are the bones of an arm and a unique book in an ancient Elven language. Daelron carefully takes the bones and hands them to the nearest character. He then opens the book and starts reading it. After a short time, his face darkens and he suddenly pronounces a single word, making the book catch fire and burn away. He then starts heading back to Bonneseaux. He will reluctantly explain to the characters:

"I can hereby confirm what I felt in my heart. Ser Hugues' remains were transformed into a conduit meant to capture the power of the Spirit he was bonded with. This was accomplished using forbidden magic described in that book, and that's why I destroyed it. A Spirit of Nature should never be constrained against its will."

"I can now see why the Twin Rivers have silently overflowed, year after year, to become a lake. The Spirit wasn't able to maintain balance. Our dark times have brought an even greater threat to the Spirit. I fear that the curse on the Blood Knight has something to do with the Dark Mist..."

At this point, the character who read the book about curses will understand that the curse cast on Ser Hugues seems to be the Curse of Uncontrollable Wrath. If they mention this to Daelron, he answers:

"Yes, of course, it makes sense. It would have been cast to force Ser Hugues and the Spirit to blindly seek revenge, inflicting what harm was caused to him. And in doing so, the curse ravenously consumes the Spirit's power, until the Spirit might become vulnerable. Only a Dark Elf sorcerer could achieve such a level of malice. We need to lift that curse as soon as possible to prevent more slaughter, free Ser Hugues' soul, and save the Spirit of Water."

Gathering the cure components

Upon reading the details about the curse, the characters will understand that they need three cure components to lift the curse. A spellcaster has to cast the *remove curse* spell. Both Daelron and Mother Hedwige can learn this spell, if no one in the party can. In addition to that, Daelron mentions that they need to gather the five relics of Ser Hugues' body before removing the curse.

Here are certain components that can be found relatively easily in the lake area, but feel free to let your imagination—or your players—provide more opportunities, based on the Curses section of the Grim Hollow rulebook.

A strand of hair from the lost but not found: of the two people that have gone missing during the first attacks of the Blood Knight.

- One was the barber's wife
- The second was a guest of the Caught Fish

The highest pinecone of a forest: this will require characters to go into the forest east of Bonneseaux, and to perform a DC15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check.

A black pearl, harvested but a week ago: some fishermen report that such pearls can occasionally be found in the southeast end of the lake; a DC18 Strength (Athletics) combined with a DC15 Wisdom (Survival) check allows a character to find one while swimming there.

A book that has never been read: one of the bookseller's freshly printed copies of The Gest of the Vertechutes Knights.

Wish: if one of the characters knows the *wish* spell.

A life willingly given: see the Sen Yaomil relic paragraph below.

Gathering the five relics

The characters should already know that the Generous Sisters made the relics. During their first visit, if they also asked where the relics were, they can start looking for them right away.

Otherwise, they need to come back to Sen Yaomil sanctuary to obtain that information. Depending on session pacing and time restrictions, any number of the relics may be found at the Sen Yaomil sanctuary.

Sen Yaomil relic

The priestesses of Sen Yaomil won't easily part with their saint's relic. Bribery won't work, so the characters need to either convince the high priestess through a DC15 (Charisma) Persuasion check or sneak inside the sanctuary and steal the relic. If Daelron accompanies the group, he will try to convince Mother Hedwige to give up the relic.

"Mother Hedwige. I know what forbidden magic was used to make the relics of Ser Hugues. And as a Bondmaker, I know that such magic could not be used with the consent of a Spirit of Nature. This must be put to an end. Ser Hugues must be freed from this awful curse, and the Spirit must be freed also. It is trapped between the relic spell and the curse, and thus cannot protect itself. So we must protect it, by Ser Hugues' own words."

Hearing these words, Mother Hedwige starts crying and relinquishes the relic. She also promises to do anything to help, including giving her own life.

"Mother Laudine... when she passed on the duty of high priestess to me, she told me the truth, but she made me swear to never reveal it. Take the relic. Now that this comes to an end, my life has no more value, so if I can help in any way, I will. I would give my own life for Ser Hugues, just as he did for us all."

At that point, if the characters still lack one or more cure components, they might ask Mother Hedwige to come with them.

Bonneseaux relic

The relic is actually in the very centre of Bonneseaux' main square, in an ornamented coffer fixed on the roof of the well. A DC12 Dexterity (Athletics) check followed by a DC15 Strength check must be performed to recover it. In case of a failed Acrobatics check, the character falls from the well's roof and suffers damage accordingly.

Fishermen camp relic

The fishermen are strong believers in the legend of Ser Hugues. Even if they don't remember the details of the knight's sacrifice, they cherish the relic, and fear losing its supposed protection. Unless Mother Hedwige accompanies the players (in which case they obediently hand over the relic), they will need to convince the fishermen through a DC12 Charisma (Persuasion) check.

Hermit's Tower relic

In the locked coffer in the centre of the secret library in the basement of the Hermit's Tower.

Tol Saern relic

Mother Hedwige explains that the Tol Saern relic is probably submerged, as the Tol Saern ruins are partly underwater nowadays. However, the ruins of the elven village are under the control of bandits, who have set up camp there in hopes of plundering what's left in the old town. Therefore, before going underwater, the characters might want to either attack the bandit camp or sneak in under the cover of night to see if the relic is in their possession. One of the bandits has stolen the coffer containing the relic, and stashed it in the camp.

In daylight, there are 2 **Bandit Captains** in the camp.

In case of a stealthy approach at night, there are two sentinels, one at each side of the camp, but they are not very attentive.

In both cases, if the characters are spotted, the alarm is raised and they have a limited amount of time to recover the relic and retreat before reinforcements arrive. The total number of reinforcements is 2 more **Bandit Captains**, but feel free to adjust these numbers to your players.

Conclusion

Once the characters have gathered all the cure components and relics, they are ready to cast the *remove curse* spell. However, at that point Ymdrin Khaesir has no other choice but to reveal himself. A thick blanket of dark mist descends upon the party's location, and Daelron immediately warns the characters.

"Watch out! I feel a presence in that mist. Our hidden enemy is finally forced to confront us. Quick! Cast the spell! I will hold him off for as long as I can!"

As he says these words, Ymdrin appears in a whirlwind of darkness.

"Well, well. I thought such a village of half-wits wouldn't put up much resistance, but it seems I've been unlucky. But that doesn't matter. I have absorbed much of the Spirit's power now. The waters are mine. Do you want a taste of them? They run red with blood."

With these words, water suddenly flows out of the ground, reaching a foot's depth all around. At the same time, a **Water Elemental** appears around Ymdrin. The Blood Knight appears in a deluge of brackish water. The water elemental shake violently, and the characters can distinctly hear a scream of pain from inside the water itself. Then, it attacks the characters.

This combat cannot be won in the usual way by the characters. As soon as a water weird is slain, another will appear. Those who stand to protect the character casting the spell have to place themselves between the monsters and the spellcaster and take damage in his place. They have to hold this way and survive three combat rounds, and each time the spellcaster takes a hit, that number of rounds is increased by one. Once the needed rounds are done, a loud shriek can be heard from the waters. The bones of Ser Hugues suddenly glow with a pale blue light, and the Blood Knight's shape begins to crumble, his very substance being sucked back into the bones. With a blazing explosion, it completely disappears, and the water elemental with it. When the characters' vision is restored, they find Ymdrin gasping for breath on the ground and kneeling in front of Daelron. The Bondmaker raises his hands and pronounces sentence, his voice being echoed by a deep, watery growl.

"As an elf, you are connected to the elements more than any other being. Therefore, trying to abuse nature's power for your own interests is the greatest sin. You tried to control a Spirit of Water. Let it be your fate, and your end."

Ymdrin's attempt to scream is interrupted as his body begins to bloat at a sickening rate. In a few seconds his skin and flesh tear and dissolve with a disgusting ripping sound, leaving only clean bones. Daelron gathers the bones and puts them in a bag before addressing the party.

"You did well, and I thank you." Daelron looks at the bag containing the bones. *"He was one of my kind, and even his dark deeds should not deprive him from burial, for what comes from nature shall return to nature. The same goes for Ser Hugues, whose remains should rest in the peace of Sen Yaomil. I will see to it."*

He gathers Ser Hugues' bones, puts them in a separate bag, and leaves.

Treasure

Resting where Ymdrin perished is a *Wand of the War Mage (+1)*. Additionally, if Mother Hedwige is still alive, she awards the party with a *Periapt of Wound Closure* for their efforts. Reeve Balder ensures their possessions are returned to them and provides them with 300 gp in gratuity.

Daelron

Medium humanoid (elf), lawful good

Armour Class 14 (hide armour)
Hit Points 36 (7d8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws INT +5 WIS +6
Skills Nature +5, Perception +6, Performance +5
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Druidic, Elvish, Primordial
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Spellcasting. Daelron is an 8th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *druidcraft, guidance, shillelagh*
1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds, entangle, fog cloud, thunderwave*
2nd level (3 slots): *flaming sphere, gust of wind, misty step*
3rd level (3 slots): *conjure plants, sleet storm, protection from energy, wind wall*
4th level (2 slots): *conjure minor elementals, control water, locate creature*

Fey Ancestry. Daelron has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic cannot put him to sleep.

Wild Shape. Daelron can use an action to use his wild shape ability. He follows the wild shape rules as per normal, except instead of transforming into a beast he changes into an elemental.

Actions

Quarterstaff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d6 - 1) bludgeoning damage, 3 (1d8 -1) bludgeoning damage if wielded with two hands.

Quaterstaff (with Shillelagh). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage, 7 (1d8 +3) bludgeoning damage if wielded with two hands.

Blood Knight

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armour Class 20 (plate armour, shield)
Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	17(+3)	10 (+0)	9 (-1)	8 (-1)

Damage Resistances Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities Poison, Psychic
Condition Immunities Blinded, Charmed, Deafened, Frightened, Paralysed, Petrified, Poisoned, Stunned
Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages Common, Primordial
Challenge 4 (1,800 XP)

Magic resistance. The Blood Knight has advantage against spells and other magical effects.

Regeneration. The Blood Knight regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point.

Actions

Multiattack. The Blood Knight makes two longsword attacks.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage, or 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage if used with two hands.

CURSE MONSTERS

ETHARIS'S CRUELEST SPELLCASTERS HAVE made an art form of their spite. Etharian curses are hideous afflictions that strip a victim's soul down to a single, consuming vice. The victims become some of the most fearsome creatures in Etharis—monsters driven to spread pain and horror throughout the land until they are destroyed or, more rarely, cured.

Bloated Gastromorph

Fate always finds a way to manifest, and those who try to cheat it are often punished harshly. One of the most horrific anathemas, the Bloated Gastromorph, appears as a symbol of gluttony and selfishness. This horrific creature is whispered in folk tales and legends, often as a warning to children of the gruesome consequences awaiting those who recklessly indulge. There is truth in the tales, and they should be heeded with great care.

A Bloated Gastromorph is a humanoid who has been twisted and transformed by the final stages of a Curse of Ravenous Hunger.

Enormous and bulging, the humanoid becomes a large, slug-like monster sprouting multiple hulking fist like claws, a wicked tentacle-like tongue, and a giant, voracious maw of gnashing teeth.

Often dwelling in dank ruins of once-great castles, a Bloated Gastromorph cares about nothing but consuming everything, alive or not. They do not remember their goals or comrades, for ultimately they are not the person they once were, now just a twisted incarnation of pure gluttony.

Bloated Gastromorph

Gargantuan monstrosity, chaotic evil

Armour Class 17 (natural armour)
Hit Points 211 (30d10 + 46)
Speed 25 ft., climb 25 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	7 (-2)	21 (+5)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws STR +6, CON +8, WIS +5
Skills Perception +6
Damage Immunities Poison
Senses Darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Deep Speech
Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Spider Climb. The Bloated Gastromorph can slither up walls and across ceilings.

Regeneration. The Bloated Gastromorph regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn. If the Bloated Gastromorph takes acid or fire damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the Bloated Gastromorph's next turn. The Bloated Gastromorph dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Actions

Multiattack. The Bloated Gastromorph makes three attacks. It only makes bite attacks against enemies it has grappled.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 16) and is moved up to 5 feet toward the Bloated Gastromorph.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 25 (4d10 + 3) piercing damage. If the target is a Large or smaller creature grappled by the Gastromorph, that creature is swallowed, and the grapple ends. While swallowed, the creature is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and other effects outside of the Gastromorph, and it takes 21 (6d6) acid damage at the start of each of the Bloated Gastromorph's turns.

If the Bloated Gastromorph takes 40 damage or more from a single source, then all swallowed creatures are ejected from the Gastromorph. They fall prone in a space within 10 feet of the Gastromorph. If the Bloated Gastromorph dies, a swallowed creature is no longer restrained by it and can escape from the corpse using 15 feet of movement, exiting prone.

Tongue (Recharge 5–6). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 25 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d12 + 3) poison damage. A creature that is hit by this attack must succeed a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or become paralyzed. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

Dream Whisperer

Deep within the twisted visage of a Dream Whisperer is the lost form of a fallen academic, mage, or intelligent creature, who has fallen to Fate's twisted ironies and been afflicted by a Curse of Lost Sentiment.

Now they are but a deformed, hunched creature covered in contorted arms, its many hands grasping for memories.

Dream Whisperers are animalistic creatures, compelled to harvest memories from unfortunate victims. For this reason they often reside among

larger settlements. Prefering to attack at night, Dream Whisperers often sneak into unsuspecting targets' houses through windows and other openings, their many arms allowing them to scale otherwise impossible surfaces. Once inside, their arms serve a second function—to physically tear treasured memories from their victims and replace them with feelings of paranoia and doubt.

Fighting a Dream Whisperer is a dangerous task. Brave heroes have been driven mad by the Dream Whisperer's aberrant abilities. Brothers in arms are compelled to turn on each other and the weakest minds snap, leaving drooling messes in their wake. With each stolen memory, the Dream Whisperer steals a small piece of identity, slaking its thirst for its now lost intelligence.

Dream Whisperer

Medium monstrosity, neutral evil

Armour Class 15 (natural armour)
Hit Points 161 (20d10 + 52)
Speed 35 ft., climb 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+1)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	6 (-2)	15 (+2)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws DEX +7
Skills Perception +5, Stealth +7
Damage Resistances Psychic
Senses Darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages repeats fragments of broken words from stolen memories
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Aura of Confusion. Any creature that moves within or starts its turn within 25 feet of the Dream Whisperer, and can see it, must make a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw, or suffer the effects of the *confusion* spell as though it had been cast upon them. This effect lasts until the end of their next turn.

Magic Resistance. The Dream Whisperer has advantage on saving throws against spells and magic abilities.

Spider Climb. The Dream Whisperer can climb up walls and across ceilings.

Actions

Multiattack. The Dream Whisperer makes three attacks.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage. A creature that is hit by a claw attack must make a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw. On a failed save, the Dream Whisperer gains advantage on all attacks against that creature as it has learned its thoughts and movements. In addition, the target must roll on the lost memories table below:

1d6	Effect
1	The target becomes deeply suspicious of a player or non-player character of the GM's choice. They gain the following flaw: "I know they are seeking to betray me. I have to act first—it's me or them!"
2	The target forgets all memories of a loved one of the GM's choice. The next time they see them, it is as if they are meeting them for the first time.
3	The target becomes stricken with doubt and gains the following flaw: "The world is out to get me and I can't win. I may as well give up now."
4	The target forgets how to speak in one language known, randomly decided.
5	The target forgets the location of something important to them, of the GM's choice. It may be the location of a goal, their home settlement, or a hidden treasure.
6	The target loses an inconsequential memory such as what they ate a few nights ago or the name of an unimportant NPC.

Verminous Abomination

Avarice is a common vice in Etharis and none display this more than the victims of a Curse of Insatiable Greed. Where once a humanoid stood, now a bloated, ratlike monster known as a Verminous Abomination stands. Mutated beyond recognition, a Verminous Abomination is consumed with a desire for possessions—from beautiful riches to the discarded trash of city dwellers, it does not matter. To a Verminous Abomination, all possessions are prized, and for another to own them is an offense.

Preferring to live under cities, Verminous Abominations make giant, labyrinthine lairs out of the hoards they amass. When the sewer system of a city becomes completely blocked due to the immense collection of the Abomination, the city will often call adventurers to "clean the sewers". To no one's surprise, they rarely return to the surface, as fighting a Verminous Abomination in its lair is a difficult task. The giant rat-like monster spews swarms of deformed ratlings from its bulging stomach, while it burrows in its filth-ridden lair, emerging to strike.

Verminous Abomination

Large monstrosity, chaotic neutral

Armour Class 14 (natural armour)
Hit Points 131 (19d8 + 45)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws STR +5, CON +5
Skills Perception +5, Stealth +7
Senses Darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Common and Deepspeech
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Keen Smell. The Verminous Abomination has advantage on all perception checks that rely on smell.

Tunneler. The Verminous Abomination can burrow through solid rock at half its speed and leaves a 5-foot-wide, 5-foot-high tunnel in its wake.

Actions

Multiattack. The Verminous Abomination makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage. A creature hit by a bite attack must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save they take 14 (3d8) poison damage and gain the poisoned condition for 1 minute. On a successful save they take half as much damage and are not poisoned. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the poisoned condition on itself on a success.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Birth Ratlings (Recharge 5-6). The Verminous Abomination spawns 1d4+2 **Swarms of Rats** within 5 feet of it. The swarms may immediately move and use actions. On later turns, they move and take actions on the same initiative as the Verminous Abomination.

Avatar of Slaughter

War is not an adventure, but a disease. Vicious combatants revel in carnage, destroying homes and lives without a second thought. For those who lost everything in these conflicts, the Curse of Uncontrollable Wrath can be their most powerful weapon for revenge.

Great warriors and bloodthirsty tyrants alike are reduced to their basest instincts of rage upon becoming an Avatar of Slaughter. The violent are often targeted through a twisted sense of irony, but pacifists and gentle souls sometimes fall prey to this curse if the maledictor is particularly spiteful.

An Avatar of Slaughter is a formidable sight: a daemonic minotaur creature of bulging veins and smoke fuming from its nostrils. The Avatar of Slaughter exists to kill and is given no respite from this urge. Their cursed nature compels them to destroy all in their proximity, often starting with friends and family.

To fight an Avatar of Slaughter in head-to-head combat is sucide. Just as they are born in the fires of combat, they cannot be killed by it. However, due to their affinity for violence, it is possible to imprison one in a weapon.

Avatar of Slaughter

Large fiend, chaotic evil

Armour Class 17 (natural armour)
Hit Points 247 (25d10 + 109)
Speed 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	10 (+0)	6 (-2)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws STR +14 CON +11
Damage Resistances Cold, Fire, Lightning; Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing damage from nonmagical attacks not made with silvered weapons.
Damage Immunities Poison
Condition Immunities Charmed, Frightened, Poisoned
Senses Darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 8
Languages Common, Abyssal
Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Blood Frenzy. The Avatar of Slaughter has advantage on attack rolls made against a creature that doesn't have all its hit points.

Charge. If the Avatar of Slaughter moves at least 10 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with a gore attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 9 (2d8) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 18 Strength saving throw or be pushed up to 10 feet away and knocked prone.

Imprison in Weapon. If the Avatar of Slaughter is reduced to 0 hit points, a creature can use their reaction to imprison its spirit within a mundane melee weapon on their possession. The weapon becomes a *berserker axe* except that its weapon type is the same as the mundane weapon used. Additionally, the weapon is sentient and can telepathically communicate with any creature that wields it, encouraging violence and malice. If the curse on the weapon is broken it is no longer sentient.

Magic Resistance. The Avatar of Slaughter has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magic abilities.

Rejuvenation. If the Avatar of Slaughter dies, and is not imprisoned in a weapon, it returns to life in 1d6 days and regains all its hit points. Only a *wish* spell can prevent this trait from functioning.

Standing Leap. The Avatar of Slaughter's long jump is up to 60 feet and its high jump is up to 30 feet, with or without a running start.

Actions

Multiattack. The Avatar of Slaughter makes four attacks: one gore attack and three with its fists.

Fist. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d6 + 8) bludgeoning damage.

Gore. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 26 (4d8 + 8) piercing damage.

Weeping Willow

Of all monsters throughout Etharis, none are more foreboding of vice than the Weeping Willow. It is said by wise men and seers that if you hear crying in the woods, you must move as quickly as you can away from it—though it already may be too late. Once the cries of a Weeping Willow are heard, one's heart takes blind control of their fate.

A Weeping Willow is the unfortunate victim of a Curse of Conceited Obsession. Once a vain or narcissistic humanoid, it is now a winding half-tree half-humanoid creature warped by self love and malicious intent. A Weeping Willow is obsessed with its own appearance, calling for brave heroes to aid it in its distress. Upon reaching the Weeping Willow, however, heroes find only a vicious predator, a grove of unusual shimmering trees, and a fate worse than death.

Combating a Weeping Willow unprepared will likely end in disaster. The creatures' enthralling cries and illusory beauty are difficult to resist, drawing its prey closer. To make contact with a Weeping Willow is to invite doom upon oneself, for the touch of a Weeping Willow can transform any humanoid into a twisted tree, bearing mirrored leaves, for the vain creature to gaze into. Survivors of these encounters say it is best to leave these creatures alone with their gardens of reflecting trees and self-admiration.

Weeping Willow

Large plant, neutral evil

Armour Class 18 (natural armour)
Hit Points 283 (36d10 + 85)
Speed 0 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	5 (-3)	19 (+4)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	21 (+5)

Saving Throws CON +9, WIS +7, CHA +10
Skills Deception +15, Persuasion +15
Damage Resistances Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing damage from nonmagical attacks not made with silvered weapons.
Condition Immunities Charmed, Grappled, Prone
Senses Darkvision 120 ft., Passive Perception 12
Languages Common, Sylvan, Telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Alluring Aura. When a creature starts its turn within 120 feet of the Weeping Willow and is able to hear its call, the Weeping Willow can magically force it to make a DC 18 Charisma saving throw, unless the Weeping Willow is incapacitated. On a failed save, the creature is charmed by the Weeping Willow until the beginning of its next turn. A charmed creature must move towards the Weeping Willow with its full speed. If the creature's move brings it within 5 feet of the Weeping Willow, it must use its action to caress the Weeping Willow's trunk until the beginning of its next turn.

Deep Rooted. The Weeping Willow is immune to effects that would move it.

Innate Spellcasting. The Weeping Willow's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 18). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components:

At will: *detect thoughts*, *major image*

2/day: *dominate monster*

Magic Resistance. The Weeping Willow has advantage on saving throws against spells and magic abilities.

Actions

Multiattack. The Weeping Willow makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (3d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Lignify. The Weeping Willow blows golden pollen onto a target within 5 feet that is touching it. The creature must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. If the saving throw fails by 5 or more, the creature instantly becomes a Shimmer Tree and is considered petrified. Otherwise, a creature that fails the save begins to lignify and is restrained. The restrained creature must repeat the saving throw at the end of its next turn, becoming a Shimmer Tree on a failure or ending the effect on a success. A creature that has been turned into a Shimmer Tree remains this way until the creature is freed by the greater restoration spell or similar magic.

Lair Actions

When fighting inside its grove, a Weeping Willow can invoke the ambient cursed magic to take a lair action. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the Weeping Willow can take the following lair action:

Entangling Roots. Each creature of the Weeping Willow's choice that starts its turn within 10 feet of a Shimmer Tree must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be grappled. Escaping requires a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. The grapple immediately ends if the grappled creature fails its save against the Weeping Willow's *Alluring Aura* ability.

Body Snatcher

Like other creatures spawned from vile curses, Body Snatchers are the result of a humanoid who has succumbed to a Curse of Damned Aging. However, much to the dismay of investigators, Body Snatchers are notoriously difficult to locate, as they hide in plain sight. When on the trail of a Body Snatcher, investigators often close in on the suspect only arrive a step too late, and find a withered and discarded skin sack.

Body Snatchers are ooze-like creatures that inhabit the bodies of victims, living inside them like a parasite feeding on their life force.

The Body Snatcher takes complete control of its host body, which it enhances with supernatural capabilities. The only sign that an individual has been invaded by a body snatcher is their erratic behaviour and rapid aging—a host can age a lifetime in a matter of a few weeks.

Fighting a Body Snatcher is easier said than done. While far from helpless, Body Snatchers prefer to avoid detection and will engage enemies only in dire situations or when changing hosts. They do their gruesome business in seclusion as much as possible.

Body Snatcher

Medium monstrosity, neutral evil

Armour Class 15 (natural armour)
Hit Points 156 (19d8 + 45)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	7 (-2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws CHA +3
Skills Athletics +5, Deception +5, Stealth +5
Damage Immunities Lightning
Senses Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Common and any language the host speaks
Challenge 6 (3,200 XP)

Electric Invigoration. Whenever the Body Snatcher takes lightning damage it gains 16 (3d10) temporary hit points and automatically recharges its *electric torrent* ability.

Skin Sack. The body snatcher is physically indistinguishable from its host and cannot be externally differentiated by nonmagical means.

If the Body Snatcher is reduced to 0 hit points, and it has been inside its current host for less than 24 hours, the host regurgitates it, then falls unconscious with 1 hit point.

Actions

Multiattack. The Body Snatcher makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed at a DC 15 Strength saving throw or become grappled (escape DC 15). A creature that is hit with a slam attack while suprised is automatically grappled. The Body Snatcher can only grapple one creature at a time.

Invade. The Body Snatcher's jaw opens into a wide, three pronged maw as it attempts to latch onto the mouth of a creature it is grappling. The target must make a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, contested by a Strength (Athletics) check made by the Body Snatcher. If the Body Snatcher succeeds, it ejects from its current host, leaving an empty sack of skin, and moves into the grappled creature; the grappled creature becomes the Body Snatcher. The body snatcher regains all hit points and automatically recharges its *electric torrent* ability.

Electric Torrent (Recharge 5-6). The Body Snatcher unleashes a large electric pulse. Each other creature within a 20-foot sphere centred on the Body Snatcher must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) lightning damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

Plague Carrion

Plague is an ever-present threat in Etharis. A vile and decaying Plague Carrion spews pestilence across the landscape, wilting vegetation and poisoning living creatures.

Of all curse monsters, individual Plague Carrions represent the greatest threat to the people of Etharis. Some even say the Weeping Pox is a product of a Plague Carrion.

To fall victim to a Curse of Foul Blight is a miserable fate. Often used by hags and dark sorcerers to spite beautiful rivals out of jealousy, if it is not cured the victim inevitably becomes a Plague Carrion: a deformed creature covered in callus-like chimneys that expel clouds of plague and insects like a sickening exhaust. A Plague Carrion is compelled by its curse to wander the countryside, tormented by its own decaying effects if it lingers in the same place for too long. This cruel punishment ensures its foul blight spreads throughout the land.

A Plague Carrion is a sad creature that loathes its own existence and laments combat. That being said, a Plague Carrion will defend itself if agitated. When attacked, a Plague Carrion will emit thick poisonous and infectious fumes to combat adversaries. Failing that, it will use its bite with deadly results.

Plague Carrion

Large monstrosity, chaotic neutral

Armour Class 16 (natural armour)
Hit Points 294 (38d10 + 85)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	10 (+0)	19 (+4)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws CON +7, WIS +6
Damage Immunities Acid, Poison
Damage Resistances Necrotic
Senses Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Common
Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Death Burst. When the Plague Carrion dies, it explodes in a cloud of sickening gas. Each creature within 10 feet of it must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 27 (6d8) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. On a failed save, a creature's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to half the poison damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

Cloud of Blight. Whenever another creature starts its turn or moves within 20 feet of the Plague Carrion, they recieve a cumulative -1 penalty to damage rolls and AC. This penalty is removed upon completing a short rest.

Actions

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (4d8 +1) piercing damage.

Innate Spellcasting. The Plague Carrion's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components:

At will: *ray of sickness* (at 2nd level), *infestation* (as a 5th level spellcaster)

1/day each: *contagion*, *insect plague*

Plague Touch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 49 (10d8 +4) poison damage. If a living creature takes damage from this attack, it must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to half the poison damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

Herald of Calamity

Fables from Morencia to Tyburn warn of the woeful presence of a Herald of Calamity. From towers collapsing to fatal accidents, a Herald of Calamity brings tragedy upon all who linger in its presence. Often possessing a village well, bridge, or other communal location of importance, it can inflict many casualties before people think to abandon it.

A Herald of Calamity is a skeletal creature, invisible except under moonlight. Yet whenever one is present, its effects are felt. What may start as a simple mishap can quickly grow into a series of spiraling disasters that bring ruin upon an entire town.

Unlike other curse monsters, a Herald of Calamity is not physically formidable, nor does it wield tremendous arcane powers. However, many monster hunters have been slain believing a Herald of Calamity would be an easy fight. Expert marksmen have misfired, fatally wounding companions. Seasoned rogues have slipped on trivial obstacles and received debilitating injuries. Regardless of the circumstance, all who have fought a Herald of Calamity agree that no skill can be relied on and anything can happen.

Herald of Calamity

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armour Class 15 (natural armour)
Hit Points 118 (20d8+28)
Speed 0ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	19 (+4)	18 (+4)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws INT +8, WIS +8, CHA +7
Skills Perception +8
Damage Resistances Acid, Cold, Fire, Lightning, Thunder; Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities Necrotic, Poison
Condition Immunities Charmed, Exhaustion, Grappled, Paralyzed, Petrified, Poisoned, Prone, Restrained
Senses Darkvision 60 ft., Passive Perception 18
Languages Common
Challenge 9 (3,200 XP)

Aura of Calamity. While within 30 feet of the Herald of Calamity, creatures hostile to it have disadvantage on all attack rolls, saving throws, and ability checks. Additionally, if a hostile creature would take damage from a source other than a creature, such as fall damage or a trap, that damage is maximised.

Incorporeal Movement. The Herald of Calamity can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Actions

Life Drain. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 22 (4d8 +4) necrotic damage, and the Herald of Calamity regains hit points equal to half the amount of damage the target takes.

Invisibility. The Herald of Calamity magically turns invisible until it attacks, until its concentration ends, or until it enters moonlight. Any equipment the Herald of Calamity wears or carries is invisible with it.

Reactions

Mishap. One weapon or spell attack that misses the Herald of Calamity is redirected to a target creature within 5 ft., other than the creature that made the attack. If the original attack roll would hit that creature, it deals damage as normal.

Thank you

To the 4,523 backers who supported us through our Kickstarter, thank you. Your belief in us is the foundation upon which this company has been formed and for that we are immeasurably grateful. We hope you have enjoyed this book as thoroughly as we have enjoyed bringing it to you. May your games be thrilling to play and your dice rolls high!

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