



# BLOODWRAITH

SETTING

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*Bloodwraith* is a fantasy game setting for any rules system. It was designed and written in roughly 60 hours, as a personal challenge to produce a usable fantasy world after reading some poorly written PDFs. This is for spite.

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# GENDER AND DIVERSITY

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The most hotly contested issue in gaming today is representation. Everything I make, I make for everyone. My catalog is filled with games where you can play anything you want, regardless of ethnicity, gender, or sexuality. Since this document has nothing but stock art, my options are based on the kind of stock art artists produce. If you don't see enough images representing the plethora of human existence, it is a resource issue. This does not preclude you from playing any gender or ethnicity in this setting.

She is the generic third-person pronoun throughout.

# HUMAN WHEELS

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*This land today, shall draw its last breath  
And take into its ancient depths  
This frail reminder of its giant, dreaming self  
While I, with human-hindered eyes  
Unequal to the sweeping curve of life  
Stand on this single print of time*

— John Mellencamp, *Human Wheels*

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# BLOODWRAITH

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*Bloodwraith* is a stand-alone, self-contained fantasy setting for any roleplaying game system, specifically ones that focus on gritty or low-tech fantasy. This book is about the setting and style of bloodwraith, with extensive time spent on plot, setting, and tone. Mechanics and die rolls are informed by the systems used to play.

The adventure challenges of this game world focus on survival and dealing with the world in front of the characters, moreso than dungeon-delving and super-heroics. That won't stop people from doing those things in this world, but that is not the intent of this game world.

Any OSR system like *ACK™*, *Dungeon Crawl Classics™*, *Osruc™*, or *Swords and Wizardry™* are ideal for use with Bloodwraith, if players do not want to use the *Bloodwraith* rules system. Gamemaster advice begins on page 72.

## THE MYTH

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Sixty years ago, the sky erupted with blood. Not rain. Blood. Sacramental blood, born of the heavens and all the dead gods. This blood rain was known as the purge. And from this purge, faith died. Humankind knew the gods were dead. They sensed it. Felt it. The world was coated in the viscera and blood of the supreme beings who once created them.

And from this blood was born all manner of horrors. Dwarves, elves, goblins, orcs. Just to name a few. Humankind went from being a tranquil species to living at the edge of a knife overnight. Entire nations were wiped out and replaced with the despotic dwarves, powerful elves, chittering goblins, and warlike orcs. Humankind scattered to the world's edges, leaving the bloodmarshes to the mongrel species that fell from the sky.

Humans who once stood together, became divided, forming into small, disparate enclaves. Each disconnected from the other. Each afraid to unite together again. For who could be trusted?

Which is exactly what the bloodwraiths wanted.

*I've done this story before, to some degree. I wrote a game named King of Storms with a similar myth. But the use here is different because of how it affects humankind and not the other god-things. I think it's okay to copy myself once in a while.*

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## TODAY

No one alive today was alive then. Sixty years is the longest marker of time, after all. Today's generation has known nothing save the never-ending war and the fight for survival. If there's a light at the end of the tunnel, the people are too busy working to see it. It's not safe in the tunnel after all.

# THE WORLD

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All fantasy worlds need a name. Even if the people don't call it anything other than 'Earth' or 'World,' the writer needs a name to convey to the reader when she is talking about the game and when she is talking about the game world. For ease of use, the world is named Gyrr and its people are known as Gyrrians, though this latter term is rare. Gamemasters are welcome to change these.

Gyrr is a flat, disc-like world with the bloodmarshes at the center. No one remembers the city that lay there before. Now. It is the place from whence all horrors grow. The blood of dozens of gods now fuels a near endless parade of evil creatures, led by thirteen bloodwraiths, each horrible and vile.

A tall sheet of ice surrounds the world, keeping humans on the disc. While the ice itself is cold, the regions next to it are not. The people generally live in temperate regions, though some warmer climates do exist. This should make it easier to describe the various regions of the world to players. Just pick a climate (like your hometown) and have the PCs live there.

Humans have been unable to rebuild since the purge. Hamlets, thorps, and villages dot the landscape, but towns are destroyed as quickly as they are planned. In order to stay alive, humans keep to the fringes, in small numbers. This means hastily made hovels, huts, and tents. Nomadic squads are common.

The bloodmarshes are hot, humid, and smell of death. No one can prove it, but it is believed the bloodmarshes are spreading. From the bloodmarshes all of the captured lands radiate. Non-human species and monsters serve the bloodwraiths, who in turn serve their own selfish desires, fueled by the cryptic power of the gods' blood.

## THE BLOODMARSHES AND THE BLEEDING REALM

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Two forsaken names echo throughout Gyrr: the Bloodmarshes and the Bleeding Realm. The Bloodmarshes are a real place people can see for themselves (if they survive the journey). The Bleeding Realm is a whispered place where the dead come and go. It is said the Bloodmarshes are the gateway to the Bleeding Realm, but no one knows for sure. A bloodwraith named Riswan guards the pathway, making the journey nigh-impossible.

## RELIGION AND THE AFTERLIFE

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Faith is a tough mistress. It is easier to believe in the gods when one doesn't know the truth. But once the heavens bleed and unholy forces rise against humanity, spirituality flits away. As such, faith-based magic does not exist, though an argument can be made for a cleric or paladin still holding onto hope, imparting enough faith to power her strengths.

*But that's for a gamemaster to decide.*

## MAGIC

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In the past, the people worshipped the gods, earth magic existed, and a few wizards dotted the landscape of Gyrr. But since the death of the gods, churches have fallen, earth magic has been replaced by blood magic, and there are no more places of learning for magic-users to pass on their art. Only a handful of druids, warlocks, and witches exist today. Some can brew potions, some speak to the dead, and some turn the blood of living things into unstable magic.

A short list of magic systems exists on page 30, as well as an explanation to gamemasters on how to build a thematic magic system for this setting. The *Bloodwraith* rulebook has more information.

## SPECIES

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The traditional fantasy species exist in this game world for familiarity purposes. Gamemasters who want to administer a gameworld devoid of traditional species should remove them. Dwarves, elves, goblins, and orcs are well-known by players and aren't particularly silly, unlike new species flurber or krebber (or whatever). In this setting, the traditional species are mostly evil, and bent on killing humanity. Their motivations are simple (i.e. power and survival) and their recruitment by the bloodwraiths predictable.

Humans are the only playable species, though an explanation could be made for why dwarves or elves might leave their communities to help the humans survive. Such occurrences are rare, however. There would never be more than one non-human in an adventuring party.

## MONSTERS

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The most terrifying things to come out of the bloodmarshes are more than a few different unidentifiable monsters defying logic. Humans have grown accustomed to the *idea* of monsters, but they still aren't ready for all the things they encounter. While specific monsters are detailed on page 56, traditional fantasy monsters (dragons, manticores, etc.) also exist, through with a world-tailored spin. Regardless of the monster, most people are shocked the first time they see something new.

## UNDEATH AND SHADOWS

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Undead creatures are rare, though present in the world. The bloodwraiths are undead, but they do not employ undead servants, choosing instead to enthrall traditional fantasy monsters. Each bloodwraith is explained on page 41, with specific cohorts.

Book two details more undead creatures and special rules for fighting them, including information on critical failures in combat against them.

# THE SLEEPING DEAD GODS

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The old world believed in many gods. Gods of morning and wind. Gods of rivers and fire. Gods of mercy and whispers. Every aspect of the world had a god, demigod, or shrine spirit watching over it. The sun rose and fell because the gods willed it. Nothing was without their touch.

But the gods are gone now. Dead. Or sleeping. Somewhere without aspect or faith. The gods have been bled dry and the people suffer for it. In their place, the bloodwraiths have claimed Gyrr. They've come to sate their hunger, left behind by the unnatural blood they are born from.

Winter and its wraiths have arrived to cull mankind. Spring and its gods will never return.

Or will they?

Humankind may yet have an obligation to find the gods. Or wake them. Or restore humanity's faith in their deities. What if a few remain, hidden somewhere for fear of the unstoppable bloodwraiths? Perhaps they slumber in secret grottoes, or the darkest corners of the world, hiding from the watchful eyes of the bloodwraiths. Perhaps the servants of the old gods must stoke the fires of faith to bring the dead back to life.

*If such a thing is possible.*

## FAITH ALONE

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One cannot decide for the other how faithful they should be. Most people have turned their backs on the gods ever returning. The sheer will to live is all that keeps some people going. Without faith and knowledge — and the great institutions of the past — most people have little to live for.

Yet, they carry on.

Faith is a personal thing for most people. Most people in Gyrr keep their faith close to their chest, only speaking about the sleeping dead gods when it is safe to do so. But without faith, there is little adventuring to do in Gyrr. Survival is an option, but not the most exciting way to pass the time in a roleplaying game. If the gamemaster sets a course for a campaign beyond survival, someone must choose to believe in something bigger than herself. There's few ways to lead a campaign otherwise.

*If no one believes the gods will come back, who will bring the fight directly to the enemy? Humanity needs hope. Without faith, they must find it another way. There's nothing wrong with a non-spiritual campaign, but it needs substance.*

Page 86 provides more information on how to structure a campaign.

# HUMAN LIFE: THE NINE ENCLAVES

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Sixty years ago, before the purge happened, humans were a single people, cleft only by culture, food, language, and mannerisms. There were no wars. They shared the great city at the center of Gyrr and they used the five roads to reach their respective lands.

Now, those lands are gone, taken over by the bloodwraiths and their armies. People live in disparate hovels and broken-down villages on Gyrr's edge, eking out their existences and fighting for survival. Nine divided enclaves litter the world, separated by lands controlled by the bloodwraiths. Time has passed and each enclave has its own culture and way of life — as detailed on page 32.

## INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

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Gyrr rests in the early part of the iron age. For centuries, its people lived without conflict or war, so toolmaking was the main focus of forging and creation. Thus, weapon technology is a few steps behind the innovation curve for a society as advanced as theirs was. In fact, swords are almost unheard of.

But that was the past. Now, Gyrr is a fragmented world. The people work tirelessly and desperately to make whatever weapons they can muster to fight against the elves and dwarves; durable weapons that can be made quickly, with very little metal.

*Characters are not equipment lists. As such, they must find innovative ways to use what they find. Creative use of a leftover hammerhead befits the setting more than paying someone to make an extra-nice knife. When faced with struggle, humans are extremely resourceful.*

## SUBSISTENCE AND SURVIVAL

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The people of Gyrr were once philosophical and peaceful. Their culture was monolithic and years ahead of any equivalent iron age society. But those days are gone. Survival has replaced progression. War has replaced scholastics. Misery has replaced faith. Slash and burn farming has replaced the arts.

Gyrr was a place of advanced agriculture and craftsmanship. All of that has been lost. The Bloodwraiths' minions hunt the people who now live in nine enclaves — nine enclaves that have not been in contact with one another in decades.

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Who knows if they still live?

Being hunted has forced the people to become mobile and semi-nomadic. They raise livestock that can move quickly when they have to move. Scouts patrol nearby lands to give the people time to pack up and move should the enemy armies be close.

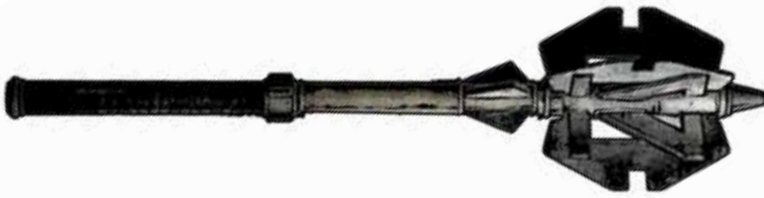
## ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

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Each enclave behaves differently, but most have no real inherent economic model. People work to survive: farming, foraging, hunting, sewing. There is no place for bankers and merchants. Such roles are luxuries to communities barely surviving contact with the Bloodwraiths.

None of the enclaves mine for anything except what is on or near the surface. There is no time for the elaborate mining of before, with pulleys, water wheels and carts. When a hillside or mountain is tapped of its coal, the people move on.

Metal is used and reused from whatever can be scrounged. Timber is cut quickly before the community has to move again. It is baked hard so it can be turned into building materials or weapons. Animals are sheered or tanned. There is little else of value, or no time to use it. Stones are not shaped for defenses — no time to wait for masons to mix sand and gravel. The community may have to pack things up quickly.



## POLITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

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The de facto governmental system of fantasy games is feudalism. This concept did not exist in Gyrr before the *rain of blood*. And it did not develop after. Without a centralized government, each enclave regulates its own affairs differently. Some systems involve a single leader. Others involve councils. One enclave has no hierarchy to speak of at all.

In all cases, enclave laws are primitive. There are no complex codes of laws, because the population is not there to justify it. Property rights are limited because the enclaves are always on the move. Common sense applications of what must be done and who has the right to do are more in line with the legal systems of Gyrr, than any formalized system of grievances. Most often, elders gather for discussion to decide someone's fate for violating the community's rules. Or a single leader declares what must be done.

Of course, this doesn't mean everyone agrees about everything, nor are the guidelines for behavior within an enclave so rote they are inflexible. Arguments over what is actually a law and what isn't happen all the time. Meetings regarding what is best for any given enclave are commonplace.



## COMMUNITY, FAMILY, AND KINSHIP

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The family unit isn't what it once was. Parents and children still exist in communities, but no one worries about specific parentage. Anyone and everyone from the enclave is responsible for rearing children. Everyone has a hand in teaching the children the key elements of survival — cooking, farming, hunting, etc. None of these jobs is gender-specific either. Survival is too damned important to worry about which gender is good with a bow and which isn't.

*If you can skin a deer, you skin a deer.*

This reset of cultural roles means each society is still trying to find its own footing again. An enclave that relies on brute force alone won't last long when winter comes. And an enclave that keeps women off the battlefield loses half its soldiers to antiquated, misplaced ideals.

## ENCLAVE LIFE

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The average enclave is made up of semi-permanent structures. They are designed to be put up and taken down quickly. Think a modern day bivouac, only with lots and lots of tents and half-shelters. They are easily defensible and hidden. Scouts and leaders spend days looking for the perfect place for an enclave before setting up tent stakes.

A place for livestock and minimal slash and burn farming is essential.

Patrols and guardposts are essential to the enclaves survival. With so many people dedicated to defense, the workers of the community must double-down on their efforts. Cooking, feeding the livestock, foraging, hunting, sheering sheep, tanning animal hides, weaving, and all the essential acts of survival are left to about one-third the community, while the others safeguard and train.

There are no kilns, so baking pottery is a lost art. Most everything is cooked over open fires and dry grains are stored in treated bags and dried stomachs. Timber is more common than coal, so wood is used for almost everything, saving coal for smithing whenever necessary. If the civilized eyes of Gyrr could see their people now, these enclaves would appear on the verge of collapse. The quality of life is so raw, as to be on the verge of dying.

Yet the people muster on.

## MILITARY

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Gyrr has never had a formalized military. There was never a need to. Those who fight now, learn through experience and practice. There is very little actual training. People either do not have the time to devote to it, or there is no one alive to teach the others. An enclave may require everyone practice with a spear for two hours a day. Or perhaps only a select few are dedicated to the community's defense.

## FAITH AND RELIGION

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*“In my own ashes, I am standing without a soul.”*

Faith is complicated. Religion is not. Religion is control. It is hard to control people who know the gods are dead. Therefore, only faith remains. Faith is the belief in the unseen. The unknowable. In Gyrr, faith is luxury the people can no longer afford. Even if the gods are still alive, they have forsaken the people. Only the old and desperate still believe in the creators: the god of the morning star and the goddess of perdition; the goddess of knowledge and the god of the blessed earth. Such irrationality almost makes others believe too. Until they see what has become of the world around them.

Faith is not so uncommon that one of two PCs might still believe in the old gods, but it is uncommon enough that not all of the PCs would be spiritual.

### THE SLEEPING DEAD GODS

Most people do not know the fate of the gods. Only those with some faith or magical acumen may have some understanding of the gods' fate.

## STATUS AND FREEDOM

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While nothing is formalized, people generally rank in importance based on their value to the enclave. Regardless of station, everyone has a right to be in the community. Humanity is losing the war with the Bloodwraiths, so every body is needed to keep the species alive. Unless someone is completely irredeemable, the enclave needs them.

Belonging to the enclave has its advantage — safety in numbers comes to mind — but also its drawbacks. But one cannot simply do as she wishes. Everyone has a role in the community. Everyone has work. And with each enclave handling responsibilities differently, freeloading off the community's generosity is frowned upon in any community.

## ARTS AND CULTURE

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Whenever possible, people write songs, record the events of day, and share their personal art with one another. When people feel safe, they dance and express themselves through art and performance. But whatever pieces of the past that might have survived initial contact with the enemy, have slowly eroded with time. Work and survival have become mainstays.

The old culture isn't gone completely. People still cook the same kinds of foods, speak the same languages, and try to uphold the same customs and holidays. Nothing remains unaltered. People generally try to maintain traditions. But people also know the importance of pragmatism. They can no longer idly devote three days of the year in celebration of the return of the sun in the spring. Half a day will suffice.

## HOLIDAYS

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Whatever festivals and holidays the people of Gyrr once celebrated have been lost to time. Spring and autumn festivals are now a hodgepodge of traditions. People still carry them out, but with little understanding of why. Nevertheless, communities bond over such events, which may be why each enclave indulges.

### RAIN OF BLOOD

One day, every year, is taken to honor the purge. People gather to say personal prayers and speak of the dead. Anyone who was ever lost to the bloodwraiths is mentioned on this day. Each enclave has a small cadre of people responsible for recording the names of the dead, so they are not forgotten.

### NEW YEAR

Every enclave celebrates the new year on a different day and with different traditions. It typically occurs around winter solstice.

## IMPORTANT NUMBERS

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### FIVE

Five is the best number. It reflects the five roads from the center of the world, emanating in all directions. Compasses in Gyrr are divided into five segments instead of the normal four — though this may feel alien and gamemasters should ignore it if it confuses players. Five is also a reflection of how all huts are built, with four walls and a single door to let the gods back in when they return. Most villages are laid out in such a way that there are five 'segments' to it.

### SIX

Six is an unlucky number and it is always to be avoided. People are buried six feet down in order to punish their spirits.

### THIRTEEN

Thirteen is a sacred number belonging to the dwarves, and elves. Orcs revere the number fourteen, the highest number they know.

### THIRTY

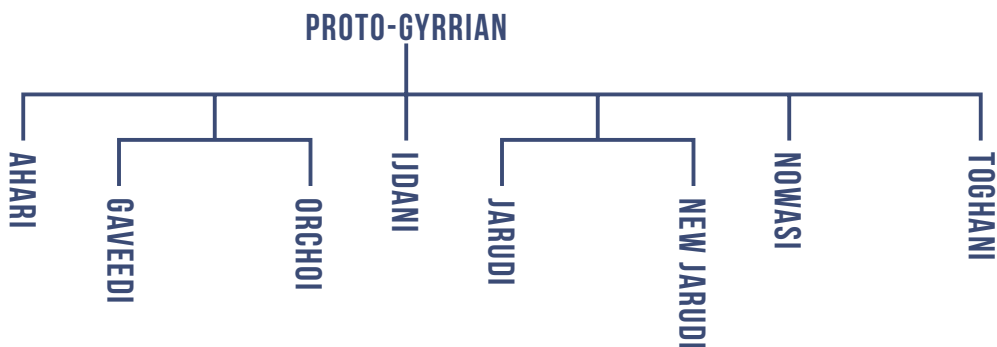
There is never actually thirty of anything. Whenever someone uses the number thirty, they are indicating that this is the limit of something they have. It could be arrows, coins, food, livestock, or whatever. Most often, the number thirty is said during negotiations to indicate someone cannot bid higher on a thing. It is considered good manners to take one on her word and not negotiate further. Lying about the number thirty is considered a grave faux pas.

### SIXTY

Sixty is the highest number that humans count to. Whenever someone says sixty, they are saying 'a lot.' Sixty is almost never exactly sixty.

# LANGUAGES

There are eight human languages in Gyrr. Some enclaves share similarities, while others are vaguely the same at all. Below is a language chart, showing options and similarities.



# MORALITY

Players who enjoy the alignment system from a particular game, may want to read Gyrr's interpretation of Law/Chaos, Good/Evil.

## CHAOTIC EVIL

Believe it or not, there are few chaotic evil elements in the world. Chaotic evil doesn't last long in the face of... well... anything.

## CHAOTIC GOOD

Chaos focuses on change, while good focuses on things that benefit others. Such a combination in Gyrr is not helpful to communities. Chaotic people do not remain in enclaves longer than necessary and no chaotic good forces serve the bloodwraiths.

## CHAOTIC NEUTRAL

Selfish people and creatures do not have a place in Gyrr. It is rare to find a living chaotic neutral human, though not so uncommon among the dwarves, elves, goblins, and orcs. However, the bloodwraiths do not tolerate anyone serving a need other than theirs.

## LAWFUL EVIL

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Someone who is lawful evil, believes in order to such a degree they are willing to kill those who do not follow the rules. Justice, in the eye of someone lawful evil, is harsh and firm. Those who do not serve the enclave are punished severely.

On the surface, the bloodwraiths and their minions appear as forces of chaos. But they are not. They are in fact extremely lawful, in this principle. In fact, their evil is a small portion of their morality. The bloodwraiths are explained in greater detail on page 41.

## LAWFUL GOOD

Being lawful and good is an unrealistic and naive combination of values. Enclaves must remain pragmatic and flexible. And nothing is more inflexible than the tenets of lawful good.

## LAWFUL NEUTRAL

After neutral good, lawful neutral is the most common human moral trait. Those who believe in law and neutrality can read the writing on the proverbial wall and know that 'good' is a luxury. Everyone must be dedicated to the community's safety and survival, which sometimes must be forced.

## NEUTRAL

People who are truly neutral fall into one of two categories. Either they are too focused on the work to make time for ethical debates or they just don't care all that much about anything else. True neutrality is rare in Gyrr. It is left to the



animals and some subservient beasts who only care about making it through the day.

## NEUTRAL EVIL

Neutral evil is rare among humans. It exists, certainly, among the truly selfish and narcissistic. People with conspiratorial mind sets are neutral evil. They don't trust the enclaves to truly look after the welfare of others. They wish to gain some respite or creature comforts before the inevitable calamity befalls.

Truly neutral evil people do not let their intentions be known. They behave in a lawful neutral fashion — as best as they can — until it's time to strike. This requires them to be in a position of power to do so. Truly neutral evil humans are irrelevant without power.

Neutral evil bloodwraiths exist as well. They are concerned more with the destruction of mankind and less with a new world order. Most goblins are neutral evil, with some leaning toward law or chaos.

## NEUTRAL GOOD

Where true neutrality is rare, neutral good is common. The average person who does not believe in the laws, but in the welfare of the people is most certainly neutral good. She might also put human life before the common good. Neutral good Gyrrians are among the most common people living in enclaves. Among nomadic enclaves, neutral good is unheard of.

# GETTING STARTED

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The players need to make characters. And those characters need to know who they are and what they are doing. The gamemaster needs to decide what kind of campaign she is running. The world is designed for one of three ideas: glory, growth, and survival. Adventurers looking to fight and take back the land can do so in any of these campaign formats.

The gamemaster section at the end of this document further details how the gamemaster can pull all these elements together.

## GLORY

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Glory is the bog-standard fantasy campaign of adventure and dungeon-delving. You don't need this game world to do that, but you're welcome to it. The flavor here should be enough to fuel any hack-and-slash campaign. There is nothing to preclude the gamemaster from using *Bloodwraith* in this manner. In fact, there's plenty of opportunity inside any of the established locations, beyond the ice wall, or even in the Bleeding Realms themselves for characters to explore.

## GROWTH

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Trying to build a new community isn't easy when the dwarves and elves keep showing up and burning down the forest. It's hard to build a wall without wood. It's even harder to build a community when more than half the people are assigned to defending its resources. A new town has to be built remotely and in secret. Such a campaign focuses on project planning, problem solving, and cooperation amongst the community members — PCs and NPCs alike.

## SURVIVAL

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Perhaps the most common, yet least satisfying of the three campaigns, a campaign based on survival requires constant pruning by the gamemaster and players. If the party is based in one location, they have work to do — cutting trees, farming, hunting, and so on. Monotony sets in, broken up by semi-dramatic moments inside the community and violent moments outside. Such a campaign is destined to eventually lose.

If the party travels from place to place, a nomadic survival campaign is better — problem solving, traditional adventuring, trading goods, and so on. This is the sort of campaign gamemasters and players are used to, though in Gyrr, survival is an ongoing enterprise and not just something you do at the dungeon doors. Gamemasters need to pepper a nomadic campaign with mediocre as well as dramatic moments.

## THE WARBAND

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The PCs are nonhuman, hunting humans into extinction.

# ROLES

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Because it is impossible to write character classes for every game system imaginable, the following list is merely a guideline.

## ARCHER

Archery is simple enough to teach anyone. Mastering it takes years, however. Those who aren't strong enough to stand toe-to-toe with dwarves and orcs, fight from the back ranks with a longbow and some hand-made arrows.

## BARBARIAN

Humans live in hovels, so everyone is some kind of barbarian, but those who fight with savagery generally earn the moniker barbarian or berserker. Barbarians always have a higher constitution score than others.

## DRUID

Naturalist is a more correct term, since druids' knowledge of magic is limited. Gamemasters should provide a short list of roughly a dozen spells druids can cast from (for each level), but these spells can come from any field of magic, especially ice. Since there are no clerics, healing spells would be a druid's purview. The closer druids get to the bloodmarsh, the more powerful they become. Druids also act as historians and record-keepers.

## FIGHTER

Fighter is the most common-place term for untrained humans who grab a spear and fight one-on-one with the denizens of the Gyrr. Some are conscripted to fight, while others fight as there is no one else to defend the enclave.

## IRREGULAR

Irregular fighters have developed their own way of dealing with the bloodwraith armies. They employ hit-and-run tactics against an increasingly hostile enemy. Irregulars also create diversionary tactics so the rank and file soldiers can finish the job.

## SCOUTS

Agile fighters with good eyesight and fast feet have the most important job. Patrols must be able to spot a small army coming their way a good day or two before it would reach an enclave. Their survival depends on it. Moving a few hundred people quickly means being aware of one's surroundings. Here, scouts are essential.

## WARLOCK

There are no longer places to study magic. Some people are born with the gift of second sight or the ability to move objects. But such gifts are rare, and certainly scare the already fearful. Blood magic, sorcery, and witchcraft are powerful tools against the bloodwraiths, despite the corruptive nature of magic.

# NAMES

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The following is a list of names to help players get started. These names also provide context and flavor for the world, so characters sound like they all come from the same place. Categories include character names, locations, and titles. Titles are normally reserved for the most deserved.

## CHARACTERS

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Abbas	Abazion
Amaya	Ardeshir
Ashkan	Ashti
Banu	Bijan
Benyamin	Cyruus
Darius	Ehsan
Farangis	Farrokh
Ghazi	Godigas
Golzar	Goshen
Haig	Hurik
Idris	Irfan
Isra	Jaleh
Kamran	Kasra
Kiana	Kejal
Ladia	Laleh
Lang	Mada
Mahtab	Maisara
Maral	Musa
Nazar	Niloufar
Parisa	Pedram
Potiphar	Ramtin
Reza	Roya
Safi	Saruk
Soraya	Storan
Tanisha	Taraneh
Vosg	Zenwar

## LOCATIONS

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<b>Akmola</b>	<b>Aktau</b>
<b>Aram</b>	<b>Arevik</b>
<b>Badamsha</b>	<b>Belogor</b>
<b>Bjni</b>	<b>Dilijan</b>
<b>Eskene</b>	<b>Guryev</b>
<b>Havron</b>	<b>Janozen</b>
<b>Kyzan</b>	<b>Makat</b>
<b>Masis</b>	<b>Mehgri</b>
<b>Nurnus</b>	<b>Odzunai</b>
<b>Orall</b>	<b>Oskomen</b>
<b>Sagiz</b>	<b>Semey</b>
<b>Shor</b>	<b>Tateva</b>
<b>Veyk</b>	<b>Yelphaan</b>

## TITLES

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<b>of Aghavni</b>	<b>of Almast</b>
<b>Avag (chief)</b>	<b>the Brave</b>
<b>of the Circlet</b>	<b>the Corrupted</b>
<b>the Councilor</b>	<b>the Crippled</b>
<b>the Defender</b>	<b>the Fair</b>
<b>the Grey</b>	<b>the Guardian</b>
<b>the Hermit</b>	<b>Himnakhan (second in command)</b>
<b>Ishkhan (lower chief)</b>	<b>of Jevan</b>
<b>the Jaded</b>	<b>of Kirant</b>
<b>the Knife</b>	<b>the Last</b>
<b>Master of the Fens</b>	<b>Namak (guardian)</b>
<b>of Nimur</b>	<b>the Noble</b>
<b>the Old</b>	<b>the Pious</b>
<b>the Repetent</b>	<b>the Righteous</b>
<b>the Savior</b>	<b>the Scion</b>
<b>the Strong</b>	<b>Taughuin (lady)</b>
<b>Thane of Taraz</b>	<b>of Thorn</b>
<b>of Ugha</b>	<b>the Wise</b>

# BACKGROUNDS

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Character backgrounds are not mandatory, but they do provide flavor and texture. Pick or roll randomly, if you are so inclined.

## 1d20 Background

- 1 Born on a year of unspeakable calamities/horrors
- 2 Born with a significant birthmark or odd-colored hair
- 3 Born with an extra toe – a mark of evil
- 4 Faced-down an evil and powerful elf at a young age... and lived to tell about it
- 5 Fifth-born child and therefore blessed and adored
- 6 Hated by the community because of who parents are/were
- 7 Incurred a debt of honor from a dead parent who never paid it
- 8 Indebted to someone of power, who may or may not be alive any longer
- 9 Inexplicably feared by domesticated animals
- 10 Noticeably flat-footed, yet faster than average
- 11 Only child of the community born that year
- 12 Passed rite of passage at an early age
- 13 Picked up a weapon at a young age, preserving the community during a particularly violent raid
- 14 Raised in a tough, violent environment, perhaps on the road
- 15 Self-taught in a critical skill
- 16 Sixth-born child and a family outcast
- 17 Sprouted early, but with deformed bones
- 18 Taught a trade, while still working as a shepherd; never any time for yourself
- 19 Trained for another role, but failed
- 20 Wounded at a young age, and expected to die



# RELATIONSHIPS

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Traditional roleplaying games assume relationships of adventurous intent, but good stories are built when players develop relationships beyond glory and greed. Characters are not born alone on islands. Most, in fact, know each other and/or come from the same locale. Strangers do not just meet in a tavern and hope to get along inside the dungeon. It's a good idea to establish how the characters know each other before the game starts.

Relationships are determined by choosing two characters (one is usually your own) and drawing one random poker card from a deck, comparing the result against the chart on the next page. The characters in question share this relationship.

## EXPRESSING RELATIONSHIP VALUES

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The descriptions are purposely vague, as specificity is the job of the players. For instance, the ♣10 reflects a relationship of family and trust. Alone, these words mean nothing. However, the characters sharing this relationship may define it as an ongoing issue of trust between two brothers who have lied to each other since childhood.

Relationships are dynamic. They can be positive or negative, but they are never easy. In most cases, two players can easily work out relationship details. However, there are instances when two players do not want their characters romantically involved or related by the bond of family. The suits and values are prompts, not absolutes. Family could be in-laws. Romantic could be two characters who were once involved with (or chasing after) the same person.

## COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

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Characters may have relationships with the community as a whole, or individual people living in that community. The gamemaster should produce a small list of important NPCs living in the enclave with the main characters. If everyone agrees, the characters can define another round of relationships, this time with the NPCs.

**Note:** There are no mechanical benefits to relationships. Relationships build context for the game world and weave realistic backgrounds into the characters' lives. They clearly have extended families and people who worry about them. Even if the PCs are adventurers out for a good time, they still have people back at home who care about what happens to them.

# RELATIONSHIP CHART

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The following chart is for characters in *Bloodwraith*. Using a poker deck, one playing card is drawn for each pair of characters who share a relationship. Otherwise a 1d4 and 1d12 could work (ignoring the K and Joker).

## SUIT

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- ♣ **Family/Long-Term**
- ♦ **Friends/Rivals**
- ♥ **Romantic\***
- ♠ **Community**

## VALUE

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- A **Unrequited**
- 2 **Codependent or Sycophantic**
- 3 **Confusing or Complex**
- 4 **Divided or Estranged**
- 5 **Inspirational**
- 6 **Burdensome**
- 7 **Indebted**
- 8 **Betrothed**
- 9 **Reliable or Supportive**
- 10 **Trust**
- J **Buried Secrets**
- Q **Compassionate**
- K **Comrades-in-Arms**
- Joker **Took Oaths Together**

\* There is little room for traditional romance in Gyrr. Romantic relationships are defined as anything in the sexual-love-marriage spectrum. Players should work within the level of detail they are comfortable with and not force a situation outside their boundaries.



# ARMOR, EQUIPMENT, AND WEAPONS

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Characters carry only the basics. No one is wealthy and everything is hand-made. Characters piece together whatever they can from leftovers and their own skills at crafting, smithing, and weaving. Currency is a remnant of old times. Most people barter for what they need. The gamemaster must decide how much equipment the characters actually start with.

*If you're using the Bloodwraith rulebook, this is already decided for you.*

## ARMOR

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Armor better than chainmail is non-existent, while chainmail itself is uncommon. Leather armor is most common for adventurers, though an elf or dwarf might wear something nicer — if you can get it off them and make it fit.

## EQUIPMENT

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Any gear that requires advanced forging techniques is hard to come by. Most everything is made from animal hides, animal stomachs, burlap, canvas, cloth, fur, intestine, leather, rope, or wool. The rougher and more rugged the material, the better. Making something once — and having it last — is better for most communities than cheaply made goods.

## WEAPONS

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Forging weapons is not easy. Finding a place to set up an anvil, heat coals, and then hammer iron into shape is a luxury in Gyrr. Weapons with wooden handles are preferred over anything made from four pounds of metal.

## SWORDS

Swords are extremely rare. Few bladesmiths know how to make them, so most people carry axes, hammers, and spears. If someone finds a sword, it is generally ten times the price one expects in other settings, but deals roughly 2–3 more points of damage than normal.

## MAGIC ITEMS

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Page 83 details some less than obvious magic items for the setting. Characters cannot just make magic items from whole cloth. It is work, even to make something as simple as a +1 *dagger*.

# TWENTY QUESTIONS

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Before, during, or after character creation, each player should answer two or three of the following questions about their characters and/or environment before the adventure/campaign can begin. Some questions allow the players to implicate another PC or NPC. Know the boundaries of others before imposing untenable answers onto them.

1. Why have you lost your faith? What will it take to restore it?
2. How did your parents die? Did you witness it or hear about it later?
3. What about the enclave do you value the most?
4. Who among you is being eyed for a position among the elders?
5. What law was recently enacted that affects you personally? How?
6. Who among the enclave has become your confidant?
7. Who has wronged you and you in turn them? How? What are its lasting consequences?
8. Who refuses to be alone with you? Why? How does this affect your work in the enclave?
9. What function do you have inside the enclave beyond defenses?
10. How did you lose your eye? Who finds your scars abhorrent?
11. Where do you go to be alone? How precious is privacy to you?
12. Why do you have more free time than most?
13. Why do your parents continue to track the family lineage?
14. Why do you keep your “sacred” medallion a secret from others?
15. Why do you bear a limp? What happened? Why won't it heal?
16. Who among you refuses to stand guard at night? Why?
17. Who among you goes days without rest, only to crash and sleep for hours on end? What haunts her?
18. Name and describe a nearby glade the others considered foul and tainted (but you still visit)?
19. Name and describe an outsider from another enclave, who has joined your community. Define your relationship to her.
20. Name and describe a member of the inner circle of your enclave. What makes her so reliable or quick to snap decisions. Define your relationship to her.

# VISIONS

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Ever since the fall of the gods, people have been haunted by messages they cannot decipher. All characters suffer visions. For most, it is always the same vision. Nonetheless, they are cryptic and inconvenient. Each PC determines her own ominous vision, either randomly or by selecting from the list below.

1. Assaulted by demon spirits; flesh torn from arms and face.
2. A burning wheel in the sky, spinning ever clockwise and upward.
3. A circle of cultists chant the names of dead gods, in unison.
4. A cloudy and colorless sky rolls backwards as the moon rises and the sun shrinks.
5. The repetitive and wet sound of coughing emanates from an unmarked grave.
6. A crumbling temple teeters on its edge, never falling, but never righting itself either. A deformed and swollen cat speaks backwards and in rhyme.
7. Dwarven drummers pound out a human dirge.
8. Eight spears hold aloft the dead body of a vaguely elven figure.
9. Four glowing eyes spin around the body of a dead calf.
10. A father and mother wear bloody aprons and stand before a hearth, hands barely touching at the fingertips.
11. Flies buzz around the rotting remains of a half-dead cow.
12. The ghostly image of a lost friend watches someone sleeping.
13. A goblin, in chains, claws at her own skin in an attempt to remove her shackles.
14. Haunting, indescribable images from the bleeding realm, repeat like a broken kaleidoscope.
15. An ivory-handled dagger drips with blood over a melting wax pool.
16. Lovers hung upside down like slabs of meat.
17. Magical lines intersect against a vague, cosmic shape and texture.
18. Six dead people, locked arm in arm, stand before the gates of an unknown and unseen place.
19. Someone is stabbed repeatedly by a blood elf, while a dog howls in the distance.
20. Two (bloodless) soldiers stab one another for eternity.





# MAGIC

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Magic is rare and subtle in *Bloodwraith*. It is most-likely players and gamemasters use *Dungeons and Dragons*™ or something equally popular to play out their *Bloodwraith* stories. Short of producing all new spells lists, it is difficult to reflect the *Bloodwraith* magic system onto gamemasters. And while I am not against doing such work, it is only valuable to people using that specific ruleset.

*Which is the antithesis of a generic game world.*

Instead, this section details the types of magic and spells one can expect spellcasters to have access to.

## BLOOD MAGIC

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Blood magic is the only source of magic that directly inflicts damage on targets. It requires the spellcaster to offer (fresh) blood to the sleeping dead gods. This blood sacrifice is made in good faith, summoning forth whatever glimmer of magic the gods might still possess. Wherever they are.

But blood magic is not without its dangers. There's always a chance a spell could fail. Or worse, turn on its user. The more blood a magic-user expends while casting a spell, the more powerful it becomes.

Blood magic is akin to evocation, and some necromancy, but not much else.

## DRUIDIC MAGIC

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Most of what druids know and do is not magic at all, but common earth logic. Which herbs to avoid, how to combat a snakebite, and what to do during childbirth are all part of a druid's purview. Druidic magical spells take that logic one step further. Spells that produce and purify food and water are essential, along with anything that hides the community and its tracks. Druidic magic also includes healing spells.

## DWARVEN EARTH MAGIC

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Dwarven culture is detailed on page 50. Much of this will make more sense after reviewing the role of dwarves in *Bloodwraith*.

Dwarven earth magic is very different from druidic magic. Dwarves use magic to move large portions of rock, burrow into the earth for camouflage, and strengthen armor and weapons. Their spells also include anything that harms the mind or inanimate objects. Spells that shatter or pass through walls. Magic that causes mental fatigue and deterioration. The dwarves of Gyrr are mean, warlike, almost despotic creatures bent on ending human's place in the world. Their magic reflects the desire to break humanity — both physically and mentally — and replace them altogether.

## ELVEN TRUTH MAGIC

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Elven culture is detailed on page 51. Much of this will make more sense after reviewing the role of elves in *Bloodwraith*.

Elves are inherently immoral reprobates and liars. They come from a culture of backstabbing and status-hopping, if such a thing could be called a culture. Those few with the power to discern fact from lies are generally hated by other elves. But an age-old pact stops them from killing their brethren born with the ability to expose falsehoods.

Elven truth magic includes all spells of detection and revealed truths. Some elves can also cast abjuration spells that ward against evil or falsehoods.

## SORCERY

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Sorcery is a catch all of unearthly powers. Most humans with access to sorcery are born with it... and feared. It is a contemptible source of power that others consider a curse. It slowly poisons the body and reduces the lifespan of the user, but those who can harness it bring aid to the enclave others can only dream of.

The followers of the bloodwraiths do not have access to sorcery. It is a power from beyond the Withered Wall, as the old guard used to name it. It is neither a place for the living or the dead, but of malevolent demon spirits unable to reach Gyrr. Their only connection is through certain humans born with the mark, or the willpower to study it.

One in a thousand people is born with the curse of sorcery, granting them access to conjurations, enchantments, illusions, and necromantic powers.

## THE TESTAMENT

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The testament is a covenant of faith — a vow made between a human and unseen forces. Each oath is different. The testament is explored in depth in the gamemaster section, on page 78. Player characters making a testament, do so without knowing the full effects and benefits.

## WITCHCRAFT

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Witchcraft is simple magic for simple people: small rituals over fires, invoking the names of baleful spirits and chanting the names of people one hates. Witchcraft is generally known by old men and women, who have spent years in secret learning sacred words. These words implore the spirits of darkness to do their bidding, often will ill-effect on the ‘target.’

Witchcraft allows a spell caster access to any low level (1st–2nd) spells across any spectrum, so long as the spell is cast in a slow ritual manner. The benefit of witchcraft is that no harm ever comes to the caster.

# THE HUMAN ENCLAVES

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## AHAR

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Ahar is the largest enclave in Gyrr. With a population nearing 2000, the community is difficult to move. Ahar's defenses are more permanent than most and the people routinely set up long-term farming with the hopes of never moving again. This doesn't stop the bloodwraiths from sending out a small army from time to time to test the readiness of Ahar, but it does bring into question why Ahar is left standing if they know exactly where it is.

Because of its size, Ahar has five leaders — Davia, Isabella, Kerran, Nejad, and Soukias — each in charge of a different piece of the enclave. This cadre communicates well and respects one another's value to the community, which is probably why Ahar is still standing. Little time is spent bickering. Each of them knows what to do and how to do it. They only meet when something pressing cannot be solved alone.

The people of Ahar speak Ahari.

## BENNIC AND IJDAN

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Bennic and Ijdan were once a single enclave. But tensions mounted over authority that could not be reconciled. Brother turned on brother and a bloodless fracturing of the enclave resulted in people going their separate ways. The division took place less than 30 years ago, so the cultures of Bennic and Ijdan are quite similar.

The differences arise when leadership is examined. To the Bennic, authority is a thing to be shared, by all of the people. And while de facto leaders have emerged, the people of Bennic still have a voice in the fate of their community. Public meetings allow people to voice concerns for the enclaves future, though a group of officials — called a gerros — is still responsible for making the final decision.

To the Ijdan, the political landscape is more despotic, ruled over by a single warrior — Raffi Sinan — who considers himself the ideal chieftain and capable of killing a bloodwraith single-handedly. His ambition and arrogance intersect without humility or irony. Worse yet, no one feels compelled to question him. Ever. Raffi's actions and beliefs always unify, regardless of the results. For some, this is a fearful prospect. If Raffi makes decisions that affect the community's longevity, what is the point of all this?

The two communities never intersect. Their semi-nomadic patterns ensure they never 'rest' in the same place at the same time of year.

The people of Bennic and Ijdan speak Ijdani.

## GAVEED

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Gaveed is less an enclave and more a confederation of loosely arranged 'cells.' Roughly the smallest enclave, Gaveed's actual population is unknown. Weeks can go by without contact from one group or another and sometimes a community is forced to move quickly without report. It can take a long time to establish a new home and then send word back to the others their new whereabouts.

In general, however, the Gaveed stay close to the edges of the known world, and spread out from there. They use the forests for cover and natural resources, relying on druids to provide food and water. This makes Gaveed the most flexible and mobile enclave in Gyrr.

While there is no formal 'center' to the Gaveed enclave, the people generally consider Tasparhir the headquarters. The leader, Melek, is fair and just. His lax attitude about most everything has resulted in less fear and tension. But with this attitude comes more crime and less personal responsibility. Gaveedi do not share the same community cohesion of the other enclaves, which has led to unrest and finger pointing. Without some change in leadership, Gaveed could fracture into several more tiny enclaves, or self-destruct entirely.

Reports of a small elven band burning one of the cells to the ground has everyone worried.

The people of Gaveed speak Gaveedi.





## JARUDA AND NARDUA

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Jaruda and New Jaruda — formally Nardua — were divided people long-before the death of the gods. Their culture and languages had started to split centuries earlier. Minor debates over customs, language structure, law, philosophy, and the like caused the people to divide into Jaruda and Nardua. Though it is unclear if any one acknowledge a formal division, intrinsically the change was felt.

After the purge, the division was made permanent.

While there is no animosity between the two enclaves, the differences ensure they keep their distance from each other. A simple way of pronouncing a word is enough to irk a Jarudi. A conversation about marriage and property rights could turn a Narduan violent. Or worse. To avoid minor quibbles, and focus on survival, the people keep to themselves. And all for the better.

As it so happens, neither enclave seems to suffer the same level of wrath as the others. Perhaps the location of their enclave keeps them safe from patrols. Or maybe they just aren't strong enough for the bloodwraiths to worry about. Whatever the reasoning, the two Jaruda's recipe for success can't be duplicated.

Jaruda has three rulers — Ovsanna, Pagor, and Puzant — who convene as a tribunal to deal with the laws and project planning. They generally get along, although the people of Jaruda have grown tired of their inability to make lasting decisions. Each week it feels as though two steps are taken backwards with every rethink of a problem. A young upstart named Ohan seems to be eyeing a seat on the council, if not all the seats.

Nardua is governed by Gacia and Hasmig, self-proclaimed King and Queen. While they assume a regal bearing in public, they are both hard-working and devoted people. They lead through example, trying to bring back some of the old world's culture and philosophy. And while there isn't time for most people to sit around and theorize about the law and indulge in great works of art, many people are coming around to realizing there is more to life than just survival.

The people of Jaruda speak Jarudi. The people of Nardua speak New Jarudi. While the languages share similarities, New Jarudi is more complicated and its pronunciations more poetic. Understanding between the two languages has dropped to roughly half.

## NOWASA

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Living in a difficult-to-navigate forest on the Northwest end of Gyrr, live the Nowasa. Nowasa is a problematic enclave. The people do not consider themselves Gyrrians and barely part of the comings and goings of normal society. They do not send envoys to communicate with the other enclaves, they do not respect established boundaries, and rarely if ever respond to requests for aid. Nowasa is nearly alone in their war against the bloodwraiths.

They refer to themselves as Razavian, a race of humans pre-dating the rain of blood. And while there are no records to verify this, their skin-tone and body shapes are remarkably different than the rest of humanity. Enough so that it is conceivable they are different, even if it's unlikely.

Paradoxically, it is the Nowasa who segregate themselves from the rest of the enclaves and not the other way around. While their attitudes do not ruffle the feathers of their neighbors — Gaveed and Toghan are closest — the Nowasa feel compelled to remove themselves from the rest of Gyrr's affairs. "The bloodwraiths were brought about by your gods. And your problems. We have no desire to fight your wars."

Nowasa's inner council is made up of seven elders, men and women, who can spend hours mulling over a single issue. Every voice in the council is heard before action is taken. All the while, the people of the enclave work hard to maintain their way of life, using wood to construct nearly everything.

The people of Nowasa speak Nowasi.

## ORCHON

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There is a saying. "Worth less than a life to a Orchon." Truth is the Orchon have always had population problems. Constantly growing too fast, resources are choked out quickly and the community must send soldiers out to fight in order to keep the population in check. Such behavior is distasteful to some, indicating the Orchon do not respect human life.

The Orchon are familiar with shantytowns and nomadic lifestyles. Itinerant Orchon are the most common humans to encounter travelling Gyrr. Most stragglers (see page 38) are from Orchon, as well.

Fertility and motherhood are valued more than any other profession. One's value in society is measured by how many children you have and how extensive is your family tree. Families of six or more are popular, as the Orchon don't have the same problem with the number six as the rest of Gyrr.

Orchon is a matriarchal society, led by a trio of grandmothers and mothers. Thusly, the Orchon take their cues from people with a different stake in the community. Every year, one leader is rotated out and replaced by a deserving woman from the enclave, often someone with the most children.

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The complexities of this system are two-fold. First, the women of Orchon are often valued for their family size. This maternal attitude means they are less likely to throw away the lives of their children in costly battles. Second, this leads to the overpopulation issues discussed above. If every child is sacred to the Orchon, then no one can be sent off to war. Survival through numbers replaces survival through fighting.

The people of Orchon speak Orchoi.

## TOGHAN

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Toghan were once among the most common sights throughout the old kingdom. Even today, while communication is strained, a Toghan is not far from the leaders of the other enclaves. Toghan politics was a democratic republic with legislators in a constant state of oration. Everyone spoke about everything. To be Toghan meant to engage. About everything. All the time.

Nearly none of that matters now. Humanity has little use for mendicants when people fight over scraps to fill their bellies. Statesmen are an affront to those who must take up arms to survive.

That didn't stop the Toghan spirit. Among the other enclaves, the Toghan are valued for their resourcefulness, and their ability keep the enclaves in contact with one another. They act as couriers, messengers, and translators. But Toghan is often treated as the enemy — lazy foreigners, unable to carry their own weight, who may even conspire with the enemy. It does not take much to spark a debate over Toghan value.

The Toghan disprove these rumors with enclave efficiency. They work harder with less resources. They are more efficient against dwarven and elven cells. When enemies come to their gates, the encampments are either empty or misplaced. Their scouts are swift and they have adapted their communications across great distances.

They are not brave, but they are excellent at avoiding danger.

Some Toghan have taken to striking back. They ambush and trap the enemy, beleaguering enemy sorties from hidden positions to whittle their numbers. 'Toghan resourcefulness' it is called. It's not just a motto, but a cultural thread that keeps the community together.

Toghan's present leader, Jirayr, is an aging soldier. He is unable to fight any longer, only working on battle plans and strategy before the fight. His second in command, Hagint, takes on the tactical role whenever the Toghan encounter enemy patrols. She's quickly earned the nickname 'the Butcher,' due to the callous and heinous manner in which she deals with those the Toghan capture.

The Toghan dress in drab colors to blend into their surroundings. But it's common for Toghan to wear a personal and sentimental item made from a vibrant fabric. These mementos are often collected by survivors of an attack and hung from the branches of certain trees to commemorate their dead.

The people of Toghan speak Toghani.

## STRAGGLER ENCLAVES

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There are many straggler “tribes” in Gyrr, made up of those disparate souls who have been ejected from their community, either on reasonable grounds (too violent or despicable), or on trumped up charges where they spoke out against a cruel leader, or challenged the status quo. These folk roam Gyrr in loose nomadic communities, foraging, hunting, scavenging, or preying on others for what they need to survive.

Some tribes steal from the dead, while try to ease the lives of others who wander Gyrr’s many places. All of these tribes have one thing in common, they don’t settle down in one place for long and they move, often with migratory wildlife patterns, food sources, resources and in the case of predatory clans, when they have a new target to focus on.

There have been clashes in the past between the stragglers, over resources and territory. These conflicts either result in death, or a truce. There is no in-between with stragglers who are always inches from death. The less militant stragglers learn to leave each other alone. But tensions mount, like anywhere, when boundaries are not respected. Attacks breed paranoia, which keep straggler enclaves even further apart.

Some stragglers form makeshift alliances, or in rare cases, permanent bonds. This is cemented by some token from one tribe to another. Perhaps the elder offers her son for marriage, or perhaps a significant portion of livestock is proffered. Each enclaves has its own ways of doing things.

But the strength of these alliances can wane, over time. Together, a pair of straggler enclaves can be quite powerful. But when trust fades, so does the power to work together. Straggler dynamics are too complicated to sum up with simple platitudes. And there are too many to keep track of.

## BONE PICKERS

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Death: the Bone Pickers thrive on it, live on it, profit by it. Also known as the Dirt Diggers, they are nomadic stragglers who spend their lives digging up the dead. They claim bodies, regardless of depth, in search of anything they can use — trinkets, weapons, body parts, and everything in-between — while ignoring the potential consequences of digging up bodies six-feet down.

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Currently, a charismatic woman known as Rinka ensures the Bone Pickers are successful in all that they do. She gathers the enclave together in small caravans, which function as mobile dissection and flensing stations. As well as homes. Rinka has moved the enclave’s focus from the old dead, to the newly dead. They scavenge battle sites and razed enclaves, without regard for who or what has died. Or who killed it. She’s brave enough to send her people into the depths of monster infested territory for that juicy carcass or bit of loot.

## REDDTHORN

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Reddthorn is a militaristic enclave without equal. Almost entirely men, they have turned to savagery, taking cues from dwarves and elves as to how to hurt the enemy. While they aren't above attacking human enclaves, their focus is on bringing the fight to the nonhuman species. Killing a few dwarves, taking their armor and weapons, and carving up the bodies has served them well these last few years. Their survival depends on maintaining this pattern all over Gyrr.

Because of the expanse of their nomadic path, the Reddthorn encounter nearly everyone in Gyrr, at one time or another during the year. They have rudimentary, yet thorough maps of some regions, giving them a glimpse into the entirety of the world, something all other enclaves do not possess. And because of their route across Gyrr, they are able to trade scavenged goods, including weapons with enclaves more predisposed to farming and smithing.

The Reddthorn are led by Ruisom, a brutal leader who has personally killed over fifty dwarves and elves. No one disputes his claims, as he has the scars and trinkets to prove it. Each time the Reddthorns kill the enemy, they make sure to do two things: take everything they can find and leave desecrated corpses behind for the enemy to find. The nonhuman species do not fear humans, but the Reddthorn get their attention.

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## THE SAVIORS

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Over time, enclave life becomes a burden, especially when they must live within the myriad labyrinth of their current leader's laws. These laws are especially troublesome and restrictive for those with their own minds. The Saviors are an enclave made up entirely of humans who broke the covenant — have stepped over the line, helped when they should have remained static, and spoke up when they should have kept silent.

They are driven by a singular purpose: to aid those in need. Their values are simple. Humanity is at its nadir. The only way to survive the bloodwraiths is to keep as many people alive as possible. Everyone is worth saving.

Such thinking is dangerous, but ultimately worth it.

The Saviors are led by Lissa, Ruk, and Vrak, three of the strongest warriors and thinkers of the group. They have been leading for sometime and over the years have developed a list of laws everyone must obey. There are no exceptions and violators are punished in non-lethal ways for acting against the Savior's best interest. Curiously for people who were exiled for having their own minds, Lissa, Ruk, and Vrak work well with others. They always find a way to provide aid, regardless of the enclave's resource levels.



# BLOODWRAITHS

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The bloodwraiths are spectral forms beyond imagining. Humans do not see them and live. They are beyond measure for any campaign, and thus should only be encountered by high-level PCs. If they fight and defeat just one during the campaign, they should consider themselves lucky.

## THE THIRTEEN

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There are thirteen bloodwraiths. Each is a manifestation of some kind of evil, hell-bent on turning humanity to cinder. But the bloodwraiths think in terms of centuries. They are in no hurry to end human life. The crusade to wipe humans from Gyrr is a slow, plodding campaign. Instead, they employ agents who already despise humans and want them to suffer.

The thirteen bloodwraiths are divided into two categories: the lower nine and the upper four. Each is detailed below.

## THE LOWER NINE

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To call them “lower,” is to be without any other term. The weakest of the 13 bloodwraiths lack pomp and titles, but they are no less deadly to humans. Any one of them could wipe out a squad of humans with a thought, let alone a single adventurer who staggered too far from camp.

### ABYZOU

Abyzou is a loathsome wraith responsible for any form of infant mortality. She causes miscarriages and still-births. Anyone unable to conceive blames it on the presence of Abyzou, stating “She is close. It is time to move.” She also induces headaches and vomiting in everyone who can see her. Violently so. It is said that she watches humanity all the time, and there is no place in to hide from her.

### EDYNISE

The queen of riddles carries a scythe and visits humans in the form of a lost traveller, changing her name each time she finds a new enclave. She is always looking for farm work and once ingratiated into an enclave uses her power to turn people’s minds inside out. She makes simple small talk — at first. Working alongside the men and women, Edynise behaves politely and does her work. After all, she never tires. Her simple work ethic always seems to disarm the others, allowing her to fit in quickly. Once she has ingratiated herself into the community, her questions grow more confusing and rapid. Edynise asks riddles of simple people and turns them into games where they punish themselves for not answering right. Her greatest trick is to ask questions with circular logic or no answers, so to keep someone’s mind fixated on the question and nothing else. Once enough people are enthralled, she takes their heads. Once she has collected the heads, she disappears into the forest, never to be seen again.

## **GASAGA**

The bloodwraith of sickness is not unique among his kin. All of them can induce some degree of nausea. Gasaga's true power is turning a single illness into a plague, with a wave of his hand. He commands only dwarves in battle, can boil away rivers with enough time, and may cause an earthquake once per week.

## **GHARES**

Despotic and unfeeling, Ghares commands a cadre of 31 servants, from hand-picked from all walks of life. They serve without question. Because of the chaotic makeup of Ghares' army, its fighting tactics are unpredictable and deadly.

## **HAMAAK**

Hamaak controls others, filling their minds with temptation so they cannot complete tasks or fulfill oaths. Not all of his temptations are sexual in nature, but most are. Despite his horrifying appearance, humans are drawn to Hamaak — men and women alike — with lust and ill-intent.

## **LEAH**

In addition to her terrifying visage, Leah is known to control the weather, destroying the land through lightning and firestorms. She can travel fast than all other bloodwraiths, turning herself into lightning as a desperate final move if necessary.

## **MATUU**

Matuu is the smallest of all wraiths. Standing a mere 8-feet tall, the wraith travels without escort, almost invisibly. She looks for dead humans and sucks the blood and marrow from their bodies. Matuu's intent is not feed, but to be spotted feeding to drive those who witness her act insane. If necessary, she can transform into a cloudy, hideous winged beast.

## **NIN**

Nin is arguably the worst of all wraiths, turning humans into cannibals at will. There is nothing remarkable about Nin physically, other than his 30-foot tall stature and blue-black cloak that appears to be made of human faces. In combat, he can project the stench of death and plant dishonest (and hungry) thoughts into people's minds.

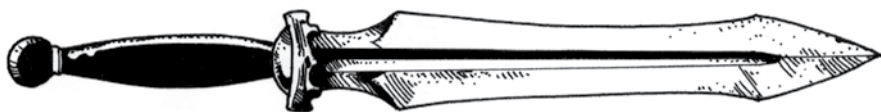
## **PHEOgyrr**

Sometimes called, the baleful one, the bloodwraith of mistrust and paranoia spreads his power by amplifying the bad thoughts already in people's minds. In fact, he does it so discreetly and subtly, it can done from miles away. He need not even see the creature he is inflicting mental distress upon. Pheogyrr need only sense the emotion on the horizon and amplify it a few degrees before people turn on one another. In combat, he can make humans turn on one another directly, and with a thought.

## THE UPPER FOUR

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Physically, there is nothing remarkable about the 'Great Four.' They appear in shrouds, their faceless cowls projecting darkness. Blackened hands extend from their tattered robes, as ethereal smoke trails behind their damned and unholy forms. But that is where the simple measures of these bloodwraiths end. Beyond their deathly pallor lie four of the most dangerous and destructive minds in all of Gyrr. What they cannot do is easier to list than what they can.



### BAALETH

Known as the King of Misery, Baaeth commands an army of bats, locust, rats, snakes, and a pair of incestuous blood elves. Those who can see him, know exactly who he is. Whatever myths they've heard of Baaeth crystallize in that moment. All their worst thoughts are made real. Baaeth's vanity projects the rest, filling in the gaps with hateful thoughts and blackened fears.

Once someone's brain has adapted to what they are seeing — which only takes a few moments — she instantly starts to harm herself. Thoughts of self-mutilation and ugly self-depreciation fill the human's thoughts. All of which feed Baaeth's taste for misery. Those who suffer only make him stronger.

While Baaeth shares his kins' desire to wipe humanity from the earth, he is the proverbial cat with a nearly dead mouse. He enjoys playing with his food before eating it. Metaphorically. He intends to take his time before killing everyone. And everything.

In combat, Baaeth is a destructive force. While most of his energy is spent on breaking down people's mental fortitude, his magic is just as deadly. Capable of turning blood — any blood — into fire, Baaeth boils animals and people from the inside out. He can even ignite blood on the ground or inside a carcass. Fire tornados are not impossible for Baaeth to conjure, should the battlefield contain enough bodies.

Baaeth's retinue of beasts are beyond measure. Whenever the enemy thinks they've faced the last barrage, another legions of bats arrives. Or snakes. Or whatever the enemy fears most. His army is not an illusion and Baaeth has no qualms making every living beast extinct in his quest to grind humanity under his fist.

## ENEPH

Eneph. Swordbearer. Queen of discord. Lady of twilight. The harvester. The mourning veil. The living eclipse. The shade. Sorrow's mask. Eneph bears so many titles, she is without equal in any pantheon. Her reign of destruction is unending. Her power to undo the mercy of creation is so great, with a thought she could end everything.

But Eneph wants more than to simply undo creation. She wants to understand the human experiment through her own artistry of torment. Her power to inflict pain and drive a nail of chaos into the coffin of humanity is unmeasurable. Humans see no end to her power, because there is none. Eneph can gaze into infinity and all she would see is the sorrow of worlds unmade by her hand. Gyrr is just another toy in her ancient lineage of destruction.

Discord is literally part of her DNA.

Thematically, Eneph's counterparts are any of a host of primordial gods. Creatures lacking — and devoid of any interest in — human understanding. Eneph is best understood as an elusive, vile, paradoxical machine. Her brain does not work on an axis of right and wrong, but rather on a spiraling ring made up of thoughts beyond the realms of man. At that matters in the end, is that humanity is just another thing for her to destroy. There's a comforting thought.

Without question, Eneph is the most powerful bloodwraith. The others willingly honor and respect her, secure in the knowledge they all want the same thing — fighting with one another solves nothing.

Eneph is an end-of-the-campaign encounter. She cannot be defeated, but the PCs should try their best to make a go at saving the world. A combat with Eneph, regardless of game system, should take hours. Every last character resource should be depleted. Every last spell and magic item used up in the fight against the Queen of Discord.

Eneph brings something new to the fight at every turn. One second she is bringing down a hail of fire and locusts. The next she is running her claws through the armor of a cocky warrior. One moment she is ending the life of a warlock, too stupid to protect himself. The next moment she is fading into the darkness to plan her next move.

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Nothing the PCs do should prepare them for this fight. Each round should be a painful order and tax their willpower to keep going.

Eneph's list of powers is extensive. If it causes agony, confusion, madness, or suffering, it belongs in her retinue. Since this setting is systemless, gamemasters are encouraged to list out (roughly) a dozen different, high-level magical powers, along with a few physical attacks to vex the characters.





## MANNON

Mannon is a thug. She is the bloodwraith you hope to never face. She rides a black, winged-steed: Syllahean. It's scintillating golden hide has turned black, stained in blood and ichor; its eyes pale and dead from the innocents it has slaughtered at the bloodwraith's command. Mannon commands the beast with a lash, made from the skin of every living thing she's ever murdered.

Behind Mammon trails burnt viscera. Anyone who wanted to find her could simply follow this scarred ribbon to wherever she rests. Mammon lives for the kill, one victim at a time. Drove of refugees find their way into other communities to tell tales of how they escaped. She is easy to escape as long as you leave someone behind for her to torture. To do so creates a specter bent on haunting those that left her behind.

All manner of things crawl from Mannon's *death wake* and anyone attempting to sleep within one mile of it suffers amplified and maddening visions. It can take up to a week for the death wake to burn itself out. Those who get too close, surely suffer madness without measure, while the wake itself crawls toward them.

Mammon's role among the bloodwraiths is questionable, if not outright puzzling. She seems to ignore any sense of function or order, instead using her power to punish almost randomly. Mannon is not only a force of discord, but an outright element of entropy, stripping away the very reason for existence. This is different from Eneph, who intends to unmake creation, slowly, and methodically. Mannon doesn't seem to care what she destroys. Even the elves are not safe from her.

Almost on cue, Mammon becomes uncontrollable. Among her brethren Mammon is easiest to drive to fits of rage and once ignited, she can't be diverted from her inexorable path of anguish and gore. But once in a fit of rage, she lacks the awareness to notice who is dead and who is not. She is a metaphorical line of fire, cutting through the world, from edge to edge.

In combat, Mammon is a juggernaut. Her tactics are straight-forward and destructive. She has never encountered anything she cannot destroy. This has made her arrogant. Mammon doesn't rely on tricks to defeat her opponents, just sheer strength. She will break the strongest warrior first, sending a message to the rest of the army. Those who flee die all the same, but Mammon understands the value of breaking humanity's will.





## RISWAN

Also known as the gatekeeper, Riswan is the weakest of the four ‘generals.’ Acting as guardian of the bloodmarshes, Riswan’s role is to ensure the sleeping dead gods never return. In fact, this one concept may be the main reason the bloodwraiths haven’t extinguished life on Gyrr — overextending their power and opening the gate for the return of the gods.

Riswan is a nightmare. He has many minions, monstrosities fighting over a illusory pecking order. They all seek to bring the monster of monsters “gifts” of foolish interlopers who wander too close to the bloodmarshes.

Riswan’s power is in fear and deception. The bloodwraith picks off parties one by one. He leads the explorers off beaten paths with false hope into twisted briers with thorns the length of swords. He poses as missing party members and lures each away with secrets and rumors. When they least expect it, he envelopes his victims. Most never recover mentally or physically from being partially digested within his nightmarish nether-realm. His quarry wake up crippled and fused together, writhing within the walls of his *wrath pits*. These swirling sinkholes of smoke and toothy guts are living conduits between Gyrr and the Bleeding Realm, feeding the creatures which crawl from its depths.

Riswan not only protects the bloodmarshes physically, seemingly everywhere within the alien landscape, but instills hopelessness in any who are foolhardy enough to brave his domain. Because of his nature, he can project himself into the minds of thousands of Gyrrians at once, albeit without knowing exactly where (or who) they are.

Riswan is intimately aware of demons and spirits. Anything that would seek passage through the bleeding realms does so with Riswan’s approval or guidance. As such, he is the master of abjuration, divination, and astral travel. He can cast spells of this nature at will.

Riswan’s horde is like no other. In combat, he brings with him an army of insufferable, impossible beasts. No two creatures are alike. He also commands a small retinue of dwarves, orcs, and goblins.

*Riswan detests the elves and seeks to rid the world of them as soon as the humans are gone.*

Fighting Riswan is like fighting inside of a sack. His cohorts always confound the enemy with heavy numbers and blitzkrieg tactics, while Riswan himself torments the minds of the heroes with images of the bleeding realms and maze-like spells.



# NON-HUMAN SPECIES

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This section details sentient species, some of which existed before the purge, but all of which share some association with humans. They are all bipedal for example and have their own languages. Like anything else, they appear in alphabetical order. Monstrous adversaries start on page 56.

## BLOOD ELF

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Elves are the bloodwraiths' favorites. They are callous, violent, and have a penchant for knowing exactly how to hurt humans. It comes as no surprise, then, some elves are elevated above the others for truly sadistic tasks. Elves who prove themselves are offered a blood oath to the wraiths in exchange for a taste of even greater power.

Blood elves are the elves who have successfully survived the blood ritual of drinking directly from the bloodmarsh. They are partially spectral, resistant to magic, and a lot tougher than the average elf. They can also see in the dark about a quarter of a mile. Blood elves have access to one or two spells, as fueled by the bloodwraiths, beyond any truth magic they already know.

Blood elf encounters are at least one level above the group, but never one-on-one. They often lead a death squad of normal elves, attacking at night. Such an encounter should be tough, resulting in the loss of resources. Should the PCs ever encounter a blood elf alone, she is an assassin or witch of great power. Such an encounter should be terrifying.

## DWARF

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The dwarves have always hated humanity. Living underground, they blamed humans for their lot, but lacked the power or will to change anything about their circumstance — until the bloodwraiths offered them power and conscripted the hateful dwarves into their service. Now, the dwarves lead the charge against the humans. Their general tactic is to disarm and maim first, routing or killing the humans if there is time.

A single dwarf is roughly 25% better in combat than the average human — other than the PCs of course. Dwarf encounters are always in large groups, often lacking a coherent leader (unless a magic-user is present). Dwarves, goblins, and orcs should be the most common encounters in *Bloodwraith*.

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Some dwarves know earth magic. It is unclear to humans if dwarves are born knowing it, or must study it. In any case, dwarven magic-users are rare and always lead a squad when present. They do not fight from the front, but focus instead of harming and slowing the strongest human enemies.

A common saying among dwarven mages is “For now, we can keep them down. There is always time to kill them later.”

## ELF

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Elves are assholes. There's no nice way to put it. Self-involved, indulgent, and devoid of conscience. Elves know nothing of how to deal with other species. They lack the social grace to deal with anyone else, even their own kind, and have no need to understand someone else's point of view. Their one goal in life is to see everyone else dead... sometimes even their own kin.

Most elves are hunters, but they lack group cohesion. Their tactics involve harming humans as much as they can, while claiming the most 'trophies.' Some elves have access to truth magic, making them a little more powerful than the others, but not really respected all that much.

Elf encounters are always equal to the adventuring group. Such an encounter should be tough, resulting in the loss of resources.



## GOBLIN

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Goblins are the bottom rung of all non-human species. This is generally true in any fantasy setting. In *Bloodwraith*, goblins are the after-thought of the enemy armies. They are disposable skirmishers, thrown into the fray to distract and cajole human forces, while dwarves and orcs pound at the defenses.

Goblins are weaker, but faster than humans. They wear little to no armor, carry jagged blades, and fight with swarm-like tactics. Goblins are fearless and stupid, unaware of their own mortality, which makes them useful for certain applications.

Goblin encounters are always a part of a dwarf and/or elf assault, though a diversionary raid is not unheard of. By themselves, goblins are easy enough for humans to dispatch.



## LIZARDFOLK

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Lizardfolk are a strange breed. They are — and are not — a relatively new race to the world of Gyrr. While always living in the bogs and swamps of Gyrr, they lived alone and in peace, far from humankind. No one knew they were there. But after the purge, the lizardfolk were forced from the metaphorical darkness and into a post-god world.

Lizardfolk live alone and value solitude. Sometimes lizardfolk find a mate, and while such conditions are rare, the union lasts a lifetime. And a lizardfolk lifetime is twice that of humans.

The lizardfolk of Gyrr walk upright. They lack a tail and their faces are somewhat bird-like. The similarities to humans is not lost, though they aren't communal and for the most part are the most self-sufficient beings in Gyrr.

They are non-violent and avoid humanity whenever possible.

Despite their height — roughly six feet on average — lizardfolk are especially good at finding places to hide, fitting into the tightest of places. When forced into combat, they take defensive postures one-on-one and flee when outnumbered. This does not stop some human enclaves from hunting them.

## LIZARDFOLK SHEPHERDS

Some lizardfolk have learned to herd animals. Though still nomadic in nature, lizardfolk can herd roughly a dozen sheep over rough terrain without much exertion. More if they need to. A pair of lizardfolk shepherds, working together, can herd five times as many.

Even working in tandem, lizardfolk shepherds avoid humans as best as they can.

## ORC

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Orcs are the meat and potatoes of most bloodwraith armies. They are straightforward, simple to command, and serve as ground troops against enclave assaults. Where dwarves are driven by hate, orcs are simply driven by war. They are born and bred for it. Humans had never encountered orcs before the rain of blood, so adapting to their tactics has been a painful lesson.

Orc warriors are shorter than humans, but stockier. They are nearly 50% heavier than the average human and much stronger. Orc encounters are always in groups of four, eight, or fourteen. These are simple numbers for orcs to count to and maintain these group numbers helps them know when someone has gone missing.

Orcs do not know magic, despite attempts to teach them. This keeps their fighting tactics simple. The largest orc fights from the front while the weakest use ranged weapons from the rear. Large stones are a common orc weapon when arrows and spears run out.

## PUS GOBLIN

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'Pus goblin' is a ugly moniker used to describe a race of sub-goblin creatures living under hills and inside caves. The term pus describes their filthy deportment. It is unclear if they are even goblins, but the bloodwraiths have started to employ them as general workers and scouts. They are the most expendable, after all.

## SUNDER DWARF

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Rumors persist of a race of dwarves who live underground.

Permanently.

Sometimes referred to as iron dwarves, sunder dwarves have never encountered humans. The belief is sunder dwarves are without equal. Even regular dwarves fear them. In a fight, a sunder dwarf is equal to ten regular dwarves. Who knows how many humans a sunder dwarf can kill? Imagine an army of them. Hopefully, these stories are myth.

## TROLL

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Trolls are rare. They are solitary figures who do not serve anyone but themselves. Stories conclude they are corrupted goblins or orcs, grown stronger and bigger through twisted blood magic or sorcery. It is not clear which tale is true, if any. What is known is that trolls are nearly immortal and a threat to humans and bloodwraiths alike.

Fortunately, trolls do not work together, making them easier to deal with.

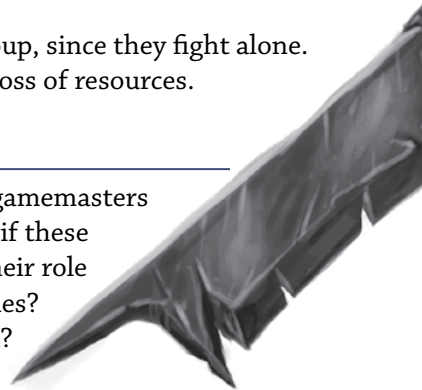
*Bloodwraith* trolls regenerate, have a tough hide, are highly-resistant to several types of magic, and lack internal organs. Flanking a troll does nothing. Their mental acuity is unknown. They do not communicate with others (much) and are immune to most enchantments. This could be an indication of an extremely high or low intelligence.

Troll encounters are always a few levels above the group, since they fight alone. Such an encounter should be tough, resulting in the loss of resources.

## OTHER NONHUMAN SPECIES

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Certainly other humanoid species exist in Gyrr, and gamemasters are welcome to add whatever creatures they like. But if these additional species lack the tools to survive, what is their role in *Bloodwraith*? How are they effective allies or enemies? Will PCs recognize them as part of the fantasy milieu? Or are they just a weird addition for weirdness sake? For this reason, numerous species were glossed over and excluded from this document.





# MONSTERS

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Before the purge, monsters did not exist in Gyrr. Humanity lived in peace and whatever existed outside the great city was nothing to be concerned with. The following section includes some, but not all of the horrors the bloodmarshes have produced since the purge. Since this document is system neutral, game information for these creatures is included in book 2.

## ARCHON BEASTMAN

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Archons or archon beastmen are horribly disfigured humans, turned evil by the forces of the bloodmarshes. They are gruesome and twisted beasts now, devoid of their former humanity and wracked with incredible, perpetual pain. They are violent monstrosities that make orcs appear calm.

They fight ferociously and without pause, often distracted only by their own unbearable pain. Their life expectancy is short, however, so the bloodwraiths often use them as a 'wrecking ball' to break down human defenses, allowing dwarves, elves, and orcs to commit their heinous acts of butchery.

Archon beastmen have little to no memories of their former lives, yet are somehow drawn to places they once knew.

## BEGGAR SHADOW

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Beggar shadows appear in one of two forms: a dark shadow in the corner of a room, or a sickly human in need of aid. In the form of a shadow, the beast is capable of infesting a house, spreading like a cancer into every shadowed portion of the house. As a frail human, the beggar shadow seeks shelter and food. In either form, once a beggar shadow latches onto an enclave, it is almost impossible to be rid of.

The beggar shadow starts slowly enough. It asks for a meal, some crumbs a bread perhaps, something to satiate its appetite. If it doesn't get what it wants it makes those around it sick. If it does get what it wants, it asks for more than next day. The process can continue for days and days, as it grows stronger with each meal. It has no bottom. It will always hunger. It will always ask for more.

There is no known method of dealing with a beggar shadow other than to move away. Or burn down the house it infests.

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The nature of Gyrr and the bloodmarshes have produced a number of spirits from the shadow that didn't exist before. Cutting open the world into the bleeding realms means the shadowy undead exist in two places now. Geists. Specters. And of course the bloodwraiths. All of them breaking into the world.

But beggar shadows are something else entirely. They are a new kind of plague humanity has yet to rid itself of.





## CHIMERIC BEAST

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The bloodmarshes have spawned more than its fair share of unnameable things. All manner of chaotic creatures grow from the belly of the bloodmarsh. Each one hungry for humanity's suffering. Each one, a blight on the gods' creation. Each one, a painful reminder the gods are dead and gone and humanity is alone in an unending war.

No two *things* crawling from the ichor look or act alike. A host of creatures that appear to be made of three or more other things routinely crawl or slither from the tainted earth. Regardless of their shape, chimeric beasts possess a host of nightmarish powers to drive enemies closer to their breaking point. The average human is wise to flee from them, rather than test their own life expectancy.

Fantasy games are riddled with these kinds of monsters and the bloodmarshes are a perfect place to *grow* hideous monsters from. Gamemasters may decide there is only so many things the bloodmarshes can produce, indicating there is a light at the end of the proverbial tunnel. Chimeric beasts offer a metric for this thought process.

## THE CLOVEN

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The cloven are solitary, nocturnal creatures. Reminiscent of goat-like satyrs, the cloven are more bogeyman than siren. They do not charm, but rather haunt. When encountered in the wild, there are few things which can stand against its powers. Fear and powerful nightmare visions are the first of its weapons. And if that does not work, it employs its horns and cloven hooves in melee.

But the cloven lack ambition and an objective. They harangue, but do not necessarily kill humans; which makes them a strange respite from the chaos of everyday life. This does not mean humans do not view the cloven with trepidation. Most enclaves consider them an ill-omen. And even when nothing bad follows, it is easy enough for superstition to overcome a community and evil spirits to follow.

Stories persist that the cloven are born human and become possessed by something demonic in order to assume their form. Someone offended a god or a woodland spirit was harmed by a human and the cloven is their punishment. But these rumors do not match the stories where the cloven existed before the appearance of the bloodwraiths... before humanity was beset by demonic forces.

In either case, the cloven are a rare sight, often indicating an enclave has been chosen or marked. Something else is coming...

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## CORPSE EATER

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Another of Gyrr's ominous creatures is the corpse eater. Corpse eaters are albino rooks with blood stained wing tips, talons, and long, sharp beaks. They travel in *murders* of 8–30 depending on how close to the bloodmarshes or a bloodwraith they are found. They exclusively eat carrion, seeking places of disease, famine, and war for their suppers. When near goblin, humans, and orcs, they generate fear in the form of a terrifying screech that lingers beyond human hearing. Dwarves seem unaffected by this sound, while blood elves seem to enjoy it. Orcs on the other hand...

The mere sight of a white crow is enough to send warning to superstitious humans that death is coming, despite the fact that corpse eaters arrive where death already is.

These pests are more dangerous dead than alive. A dead corpse eater immediately exudes a stench, which grows and spreads. This foul-smelling blood can stain clothing, clinging to anything for hours afterwards. In turn, this attracts all sorts of foul and hungry beasts, including enemy warbands, predators, and other corpse eaters.

Individuals marked with the rook's stench must find a way to remove the stain, which is lengthy and difficult. It is easier to burn the clothes. Not so easy to burn skin marked with the rook's blood.

## DEGENERATION HAG

Slowly eroding from the stain of the bleeding realms as it weeps into Gyrr, the once mighty hags, now exist in a perpetual state of decay. Less than a dozen still exist, and those that do roam the earth in search of an end to their suffering. They seek out human enclaves and attack without reason in the hopes of being put down.

But this is not so easy.

A degeneration hag's wounds close up as soon as they are attacked. They have a slight resistance to magic, which makes curses and magic fires less than effective. And their mere sight is so hideous most people cannot get near them without becoming nauseated.

A few hags still possess some of their old powers, but lack the wherewithal to use them effectively. Magical spells employed by the degeneration hag have unpredictable results, often harming themselves and others, while signalling their position or setting unintentional fires (to name a few).

Encounters with degeneration hags are chaotic and deadly. The average human does not stand a chance against one, and it can take as many as five or six seasoned warriors to take one down.



## FRACTURE WYRM

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Not dragons, per se, fracture wyrms (sometimes furnace wyrms) are remnants of a world before the old world. They are part flesh, part fire, part earth. They are gigantic-sized creatures, standing as tall as two giants and over one hundred feet long. Fracture wyrms live under the earth, in the hottest places, resting until it is time to feed. They do not think about the effects of their actions, they merely react to base needs — hunger and thirst. They are apex predators who eat anything and are capable of destruction on a massive scale. If the bloodwraiths did not exist, they be the most fearsome thing in all of Gyrr.

Fracture wyrms burrow mostly. They lack the ability to fly, but can crawl on their bellies and are especially fast underground. They have no magical powers, but are nearly invulnerable to everything. They are so rare as to be almost unique. PCs should never encounter more than one fracture wurm during a campaign — if at all.

Encounters with fracture wyrms are deadly. They are high-indestructible, threatening entire communities with their presence. A single fracture wurm could easily kill over 100 poorly-trained soldiers without a break. Humans dead set on fighting one are likely to lose a few comrades in the process, regardless of level. Once killed, however, the husk of a fracture wurm is suitable for all manner of building supplies... once it cools down.

## MURMUR LIZARD

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Murmur lizards existed before the rain of blood, but in limited numbers. As the human population dwindled, people no longer possessed the resources to hunt the lizards. As such, their population grew in inverse proportion to humanity. Given their size of nearly 20 feet, they are especially solitary, except during mating season when a bull leader protects a clutch of eggs for months on end.

Named murmur lizards because of the soft noises they make, these creatures are otherwise dangerously silent, especially in open ground. Their silence is dwarfed only by their speed. They are excellent climbers and can cling to many surfaces, even when encumbered or wounded.

In combat, murmur lizards rarely face their quarry head on and run if faced with overwhelming odds. They use stealth and ambush their prey, like any cunning predator. If cornered, a murmur lizard uses its powerful legs to lunge at the nearly enemy and its powerful jaws to rend and maim, before escaping.

What makes the murmur lizard unique is its carcass. Their hide makes excellent flexible armor, their larger teeth make strong knives, and their dried tail ridges make for excellent tools. The smallest fourteen teeth are used in a special divination practice akin to throwing bones.

## RAVENWING OWLBEAR

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Ravenwing owlbears are a corruption of the Gyrrian predator. While the original owlbears are most dangerous during drought and famine, when protecting their young, or when old and infirm, ravenwings have an unrivaled hunger that makes them dangerous all the time. Luckily, ravenwing matings are rare, since they are semi-cannibalistic and territorial. Over the past 60 years, a common sentiment has arisen in communities unlucky enough to be in one's hunting grounds: "If you see a baby Ravenwing, kill it!"

The average ravenwing has a prominent raptor beak, foot long talons, and an impressive wingspan that can actually keep it aloft. Barely. It stands two to four heads taller than it's counterpart. It drifts through the night sky and plucks victims from a field or road. Ravenwings are not graceful on the ground, however. They drag their massive wings behind them and make enough noise they can only capture one prey at a time.

Ravenwings see very well in the dark and their flight is nearly silent. If facing its prey on the ground, it uses its wings to corner someone and to propel its massive bulk in impressive bounds. It tries to gore its opponent or pin their prey to the ground under its talons.

## RAZORBACK TROLL

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Razorback trolls are nothing like their gray-skinned namesake. While they possess the same general powers of a troll, razorback trolls look like giant rats with large, bipedal bodies. Their hands can hold rocks or weapons, and their feet are a mass of hair, toes, and webbing. Their appearance, in short, is unsettling.

They can see near-perfectly in darkness, making them excellent solitary hunters. Despite their massive size and strength, they lack cognition of their potential. They generally avoid big groups and only attack a small cadre of humans from an ambush point, which is difficult given their size.

When pressed to fight, they act like any cornered animal, with one exception. Their unsightly appearance is difficult for most people, causing fear and panic in those unused to such a beast. Given how strange the landscape of Gyrr is, it is rare for a creature's appearance to affect people so.

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Since they regenerate, razorbacks are hard to kill. Nevertheless, razorbacks flee quickly whenever it perceives a fight is going poorly. It knows it can always hunt something smaller, later... or stalk its human prey for a few hours before trying again.

Razorback trolls are extremely rare, and rumor has it their internal organs can be used by witches to brew healing potions and the like.





Eric LeFay

## SOUL BORER

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Not all who die come to rest. Sometimes the damned remain. If the Gyrrians had time to consider these things, their perspective on the world would change. As such, the constant war for survival has blinded them to realities of unholy beings who still remain on this earth.

Soul borers are gluttonous souls damned to the bleeding realms, and trapped with 'one foot' on Gyrr. Their drive is to consume. Shadowy creatures, they are most akin to ochre, ruddy segmented, caterpillars, with black stubby points for feet. They use rings of saw-like teeth to drill their way through organic material. It takes half a day for a soul borer to consume a goat.

The process is hardly quiet. Consuming living things is loud and messy... and painful for the victim. This requires the soul borer to find a victim who is alone and far from others, as the noise is sure to attract attention. And scare off smaller animals.

Once the soul borer has had its fill, it can 'birth' a second soul borer. And once that soul borer is grown, they start the process of feeding all over again. They are considered unholy, undead, and permanently tormented by their own hunger. They are especially susceptible to cold.

## TABARD SNAKE

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Tabard snakes look like traditional pythons but for one noticeable difference. On its head is a white cowl-like mark, cascading on both sides to the top of its neck. This small difference separates a dangerous encounter with a python from a deadly encounter with a tabard snake.

Naturally occurring in Gyrr, the tabard snake can constrict and bite. The venom it produces is a power paralytic agent that also fills the mind with hallucinations to make escape almost impossible. Once a tabard snake wraps around its prey's throat, death is a few short moments away. The toxic makes sure the victim cannot get away, while triggering all manner of powerful, nonsensical imagery.

## TOXIC THOLE

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Devoid of any real name, the toxic thole is often referred to as a dread pin or gas needle, or any of a dozen different names by different groups. Unnatural and horrifying, the toxic thole feeds on hope. Though rare, when it hunts, it sucks the will to live from fertile minds. The process of feeding is lengthy, however, so this requires them to hunt at night, or places where people are alone.

Toxic tholes do not fight in combat. Their sole purpose is to hunt at night and seek out defenseless victims. If cornered, they attempt to flee, turning partially invisible and floating away (a few feet off the ground). They have a hard outer shell and pincers, but they lack tactics or the will to fight.

## VAPOR GHOUL

Neither vaporous or ghoulish, the origin of the term is unknown. What is known is that vapor ghouls are ethereal spirits who wear the skin of dead things and make them look real. The smaller the carcass, the easier it is to control. Often the vapor ghouls take control of something like a goblin, and infiltrates a group, posing as one of them. This does not work as often as one would think, since the carcass sometimes has signs of wear or the people of the community recognize the body as someone they already watched die.

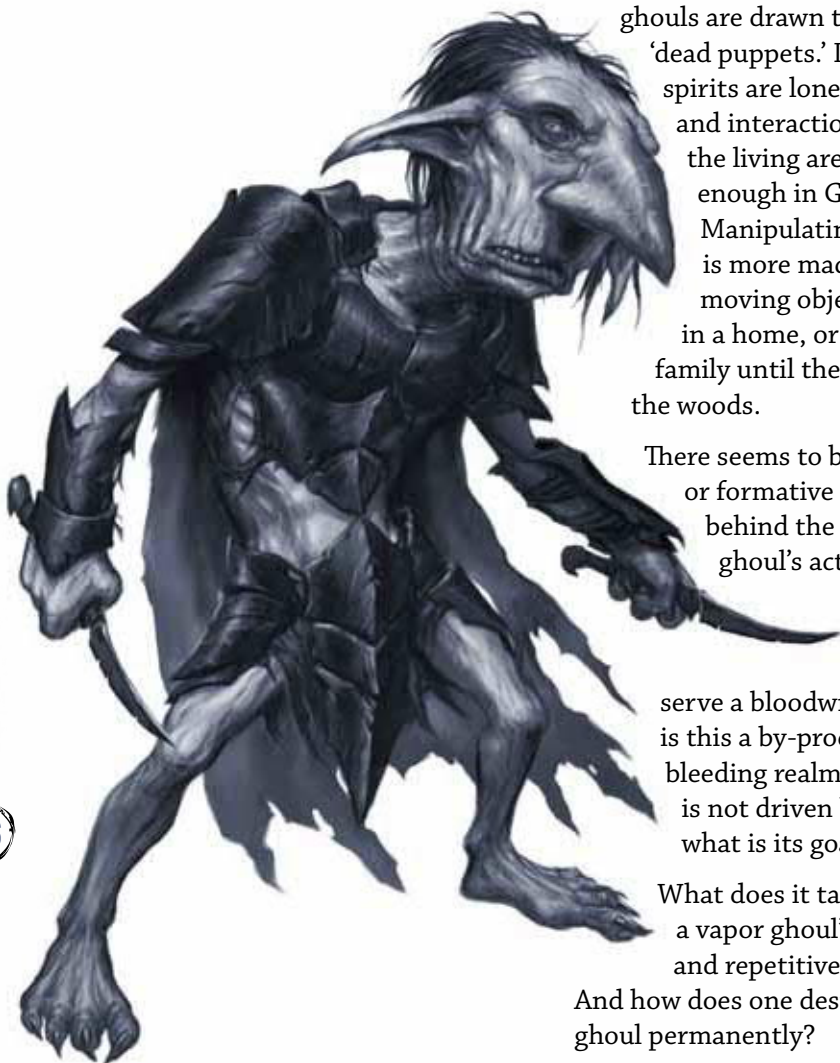
This doesn't stop the vapor ghouls from trying. It is undead after all, and difficult to kill. Once this body is finished, it can find another one. There are always other bodies to control and drag along for a few days before the ruse is discovered.

But, it is unclear why vapor ghouls are drawn to these 'dead puppets.' Lonely spirits are lonely spirits and interactions with the living are common enough in Gyrr. Manipulating the dead is more macabre than moving objects around in a home, or haunting a family until they flee into the woods.

There seems to be no logic or formative thought behind the vapor ghouls' actions. If it is just an act of chaos, does it serve a bloodwraith? Or is this a by-product of the bleeding realms? And if it is not driven by chaos, what is its goal?

What does it take to stop a vapor ghouls' mindless and repetitive games?

And how does one destroy a vapor ghouls permanently?



## WEATHER HAG

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Weather hags are eternal. They are not human, but appear as lanky old women, with distended jaws and matted hair. They dress in butcher's aprons or smocks with a variety of sharp knives for flensing. Those found in colder climates have mottled grey/blue skin with slight hints of frost. They can control the elemental forces of nature. They are more akin to a primordial force than actual monsters. Nevertheless, they exist. And they are as powerful as one can imagine.

Weather hags live near marshland centers, or deep inside a bog. They live solitary 'lives,' and only interact with humans when they need something. And what they need is always something highly personal to the individual. Hags seek out items treasured by others. It's not the item itself, it's the item's connection that is valued. But because of an ancient curse, the weather hag cannot take anything that does not belong to her.

It must be gifted.

Hags do not make their wants immediately known. Instead, a hag offers a deal in exchange for aid or another gift. She has the power to do that. But as time passes, the weather hag turns the deal in her favor, somehow, rewording things or striking a new deal before the bargain is complete.

Conversely, hags respond to flattery. A charming, clever, or cunning individual can talk her way through an exchange before the hag realizes what has happened. But weather hags are different. Tougher. Their feelings changes like the weather, calm one moment and stormy the next. This makes their moods harder to pinpoint.

Weather hags powers include any spells involving clouds, fogs, lightnings, rains, and thunders. Elemental forces of nature are their purview and they can change the weather on a whim. An indication of a weather hag's presence in any given area is a sudden change in temperature, or climate. Inexplicable rains may be a blessing for farmers (and infantry), but they may indicate something worse.

## WIGHT ELF

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One in one thousand elves is born with white hair and skin. These physical affectations are ominous and terrifying to other elves. They spell doom and dread. In fact, to most, wight elves are a curse. They bring hardship to others and are either killed outright or driven from the community.

But some consider wight elves a great gift.

Wight elves possess magical powers outside the range of elven truth magic. They cast powerful blood, fire, and lightning spells, outside the normal ranges of sorcery. Wight elves are also extremely resistant to control and manipulation. Bloodwraiths are wise to include them in their armies.

# COWLS

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The souls of the damned — the remnants of the living — are bound to the world of Gyrr beyond death. Cowls are, just like their living counterparts, varied and driven by different desires and wants. Their machinations involve the living, and just how to hurt them. Many cowls are outright jealous of the lives of those left behind in the waking world. Here are just examples.

## THE KEEPER OF LIGHTS

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The Keeper of Lights — Old Marshlight, or Witch Light as folk call him — is a cowl, grown fat upon the souls he lures to their doom. This ghost is tricky and dangerous. It delights in leading foolish travellers to their deaths. He once lit street lamps. But no longer.

One night, the old man stopped lighting the lamps and people fell into the bog in the dark of night. This happened on six consecutive night. And when the people found out, they reacted violently. In anger, and without much thought, the people hung the old man in an iron cage, where he starved — his body rotting for sixty days. Slowly, animals ate away at the decaying flesh and the people went back to their lives, unaware Old Marshlight would live on again...

Soon after his death, stories of the Keeper of Lights emerged. People spoke of a floating lamp in the woods or along the old roads. Following Old Marshlight led to certain doom. But some disagreed. “There was treasure at the end of Witch Light’s trail,” they contended. Those who believed the rumors learned the truth, as they came face to face with the twelve-foot tall ghost of the hanged lamplighter.

His form much changed from the lanky man he used to be, now wrapped in the clothes of death, and armed with a wicked pitchfork and giant bone-shrouded lantern. In combat, the Keeper of Lights uses his pitchfork to stab at his enemies, harming both body and soul as he does so. The fork’s chilling connection to the bleeding realms plucks at the spirit as easily as the spines harm the body.

He also draws the souls of the dead and dying into his lantern. He can project a beam of paranormal energy as a weapon, or create a blinding flash that echoes with the howls of thousands of doomed souls caught within. He can manifest wisp-like lights, which appear friendly at first, but when he has the upper hand they turn out to be deadly agents of the Keeper.

The Keeper of Lights is not meant to be a regular ghost; he is a high-level adversary for competent characters. He uses gruesome tactics, luring PCs into a variety of dangerous situations before he wades in to finish the job. He might cause them to fall down a ravine, or stumble into a boggy marshland, a sudden puddle of choking and slopping mud dragging them down into the depths.

## SISTER OF BLOOD

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Rage is a powerful weapon, a deadly force that can turn the most mild-mannered souls into spitting, snarling, curse-hurling hellfire servants who would murder their own family in a heart-beat. Unfortunately for the Sister of Blood, that's just what happened. She killed her own family in a fit of pique and overcome with remorse, took her own life. It's sad. It happens. But life goes on. The village mourned her. Sort of.

After her death, the villagers threw her body in the ground, buried her six feet under, and punished her spirit for her vile misdeeds. That was the end, or so they thought. But Gyrr has a way of ensuring tormented souls remain tormented in death.

She rose again as a ghost, drenched in the blood of her family; clad in the very clothes she died in, tattered and torn. Her spirit split in two, calm for a while and a raging tormented terror the next. Now the Sister of Blood lurks the forgotten places of the world, sneaking from ruin to ruin. She favors places that remind her of home — though her home is long gone and faded from history.

She first approaches travellers as a lost soul. She appears fine and nothing untoward about her stands out. If they spend any time with her, the paranoia shows, the little rage ticks happen, and eventually she explodes into a full on psychotic paranormal entity. This can happen over a few hours or a few days. Sometimes it can take a whole week for her true soul to manifest, depending on how she is treated and which memories are triggered.

The Sister of Blood is a dervish in combat; she relies on speed and fluidity of movement. She employs swift slashes with her long claws, and her writhing, spectral, blood-drenched hair distracts and harries foes.

She is adept at hit and run tactics, moving from one foe to the next before snaking back into the shadows, concealed. She does not kill outright. She prefers to torment her victims, watching them bleed out. She deliver slashes and cuts with her supernatural sharp claws, attempt to open wounds which never heal properly.

Once per battle, the Sister of Blood can release the blood tide, based on the amount of victims that have met their end at her claws. The area washes with clotted and stagnant blood and it oozes from every imaginable surface.

The Sister of Blood is slasher-horror. She is not meant for psychological encounters, though she can twist people's minds with her nice-girl act until she tires of it, or grows angry enough with the little things that piss her off. It doesn't take much to set her into a murderous rampage: a condescending person who, grinding teeth, a leering glance, or even a fake smile. Her list of ticks and triggers are left to the gamemaster to decide.

# SHROUDS

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Where crows are specific damned, living in perpetual torment, shrouds are vague, apparitional forces, tied to places (like ghosts), but living under the weight of the bloodwraith's punishment and not some personal quest to avenge a wrong. Shrouds take on many forms, based on how they died and/or were tormented before death. The following is just a short list. Gamemasters are encouraged to create more.

Like any shadowy spirit in *Bloodwraith*, shrouds trigger visions, but they also attack a character's primary ability scores. Through sight, touch, or whispers shrouds slowly erode a person's health, sanity, and willpower.

## THE BLIND

Having lost their sight (through some horrible act or attack), the blind in the afterlife now see things beyond imagining. They are cursed with perfect perception of the realities around them and wish to share their madness with the rest of Gyrr.

## THE DROWNED

Merely drowning is not enough to return as a drowned shroud. Painful, terrifying drowning at the hands of something malevolent ensures a human comes back as a ghastly shroud, drenched and withered by the weight of the undertow. Their icy touch drains a person's health and strength.

## THE HUNGRY

It is not beyond the powers of the bloodwraiths to deny humans food, all the while tormenting their captives until death takes them. The hungry appear as sallow shrouds, emaciated and dreadful. They bring pain of hunger with them, using it as a weapon to destroy others.

## THE LEPERS

While not all leper shrouds died from leprosy, they were all consumed by some form of malignancy. Their deathly pallor reflects the conditions under which they died, often spreading disease through touch.

## THE SEVERED

Having been torn apart by some ungodly force, severed shrouds are not whole. What pieces remain, float through the air, tormenting humanity in horrible and impossible ways. The sheer sight of them can actually cause people of low constitution to simply die.

## THE SORROWFUL

The sorrow of loneliness attacks a person on many levels, eroding a person to nothing. Appearing as sad, nebbish spirits, sorrowful shrouds cannot stand to be alone, spreading their misery to those they come in contact with.



# GAMEMASTER ADVICE AND SECRETS

Game books are littered with advice for gamemasters, but rarely for players. And universally, most advice is ignored. Most people “know what they are doing” and don’t need some elitist egg-head writer telling them how to run a campaign for their friends. And they are probably right.

*I don't game with you. I don't know your group. If you're having fun, most gaming advice is worthless.*

One can assume people picking up a new setting, with a new vibe and conflict probably have never run this sort of thing before. I’ve never designed this kind of world before, so the conclusions are easy to justify. “How exactly do I use this?” was a common question for me in the 1990s when someone put out a new game without an consideration over how gamemasters would implement the ideas.

*Hence a few pages of advice.*

Grimdark fantasy tends to focus on the grim, but not the depth. Without a solid foundation of ingredients, grimdark stories can flounder in their veneer. Deeper worlds are needed to make sense of the dark, not darker stories to make sense of the deep. This can sound a bit highfalutin and picayune, but the differences are valuable.

*Bear in mind, Bloodwraith is not meant to be grimdark, but the similarities are obvious. So, I'm starting there so we have a shared language.*

Bloodwraith takes a lot of preconceived notions of fantasy and turns them 91 degrees... just enough to be recognizable, yet just enough to make it uncomfortable. It’s the gamemaster’s role to make sure nothing remains comfortable.

- Adventures are not about gold and experience points, they are about survival.
- Adventures are not about magic items and spellbooks, they are about the community.
- Adventures are not about personal goals, but collective ones.

The characters are invaluable to their enclave. They must have roots. Characters without an investment in their community and world are just psycho criminals running around collecting gold coins for some imaginary and meaningless objective. *Bloodwraith* was built in a short amount of time, but the heart of this world is built around my decades of examination into what works.

And what doesn’t.

## RUNNING ADVENTURES

Running *Bloodwraith* adventures is not the same as typical fantasy games. Based on the campaign type (see page 16), gamemasters are likely to focus on anything but dungeon-crawling. Relationships with one another and the community are invaluable to providing campaigning context. The gamemaster should create a handful of NPCs from the enclave and allow the PCs to develop relationships with them. Their fates should matter to one another.

Let the first session be about the community. Deal with the ever-present fear of the Bloodwraiths. A simple encounter with some elven hunters should be enough in the first session to remind the PCs of the threats around them. Give the PCs something to care about by letting them breathe in their world. The setting comes alive because the PCs care about it, not the other way around. Give them a stake in the world and the rest of the gamemaster's job is easy.

Bloodwraith adventures do not start in taverns. They are not quests for magic items or gold. Things *need* to get done. Even if the PCs never leave the enclave, someone needs to be in charge of the work. If the PCs are left to do whatever they want, there's not much story there. Gamemasters can treat it like a sandbox, but without some conflict to resolve, the PCs are just walking around the enclave fixing fence posts and hunting deer.

*That will be fun for about 15 minutes.*

Published adventures are coming, at least a few of them. The ideas presented in them are loose, providing gamemasters a framework to start from, with advice on where to go from there. These are not "on the rails" or "pull by the nose" adventures. Something happens to the enclave to trigger an event and the PCs react however they wish.

*Something gamemasters should consider for their home games.*



## TONE

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The hardest advice to give to gamemasters and players is to explain how to maintain a consistent tone. People come from such varied backgrounds of what they love about comics, literature, movies, television and video games, that matching expectations of tone is the hardest thing to do. Especially when people don't even know the definition of the word.

There are lots of ways tone is defined in writing circles. It's an elusive term, because it's more intuitive and less concrete. Essentially tone is the author's voice and her attitude about the story. Tone can be described as the level of darkness or light on a story. Silly jokes may or may not fit the tone, based on how the gamemaster approaches the subject.

*Dark fantasy games are popular because the tone is easier manage.*

Whether players realize it or not, tone is the most important ingredient in a campaign or game session. Tone determines how and when people are pulled out of the story, shattering the immersion. A session where the PCs must rescue someone from the jaws of an evil god is made silly when the tone is interrupted by the summoning of a giant toad. Or *Monty Python* jokes.

Tone requires an investment from everyone. A silly mood disrupts the tone and continuity of a campaign in noticeable ways. People interjecting quotes from movies, introducing guns into a setting, and having conversations outside the game not only distract play, but unsettle the tone the setting is establishing. And this is true for any setting.

Keeping the tone consistent (and alive) means everyone signs off on how the game feels. This doesn't mean you can't laugh when something funny happens. We absolutely should be having fun at the game table. But the tone is only maintained when everyone is involved, even if this means a conversation before the campaign even starts.

Once the tone is disrupted, it's work to re-center the campaign. Any disruption turns the players away from the established immersion. It therefore cannot be the responsibility of the gamemaster, solely, to maintain the tone. Everyone is playing the same game. Everyone has a stake in making it work.

## THEMES

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Theme is defined as the culmination of all subtext. This is a fancy way of saying, "the things that come up over and over again in a story." Hundreds of games have tried hundreds of ways to explain theme to neophyte gamemasters in order to create coherent stories. The regular themes of *Bloodwraith* have been well-established so far, with community and survival at the center of it all. Gamemasters familiar with theme can create their own for any *Bloodwraith* campaign. Those who are not, would be wise to stick with what's established.

## MOTIFS

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Visually, *Bloodwraith* borrows from numerous stock art sources. If the budget allows for it, additional art can add its own spin on the game world. However, there was no specific look in my mind while writing. Certainly the image of forests and jungles, devoid of cities cropped up in my mind, as well as ragged-looking warrior, tired from war, and wearing well-worn armor. Mixed with the ragged-clothing look of specters and wraiths, Gyrr looks battered.

I also imagine Incan-style temples here and there, for gamemasters who want dungeons to explore. At the very least, they become places to defend once the PCs turn the tide of the war. The PCs can win, right?

## PHILOSOPHY

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*Warning. Some soapboxing.*

A lot of gamers bleed their political and social values into the games they play nowadays. Game designers have no control over the values of the people who play their games. Nor should they. There is no tablet of stone indicating I am right and you are wrong. Unless you advocate cult-like political views, you are who you are and you think what you think. I'm not here to change that.

My games reflect their own internal philosophies, and often times the messages from game to game aren't always the same. A game like *The Carcass: Exodus* (check it out) may feel a little more selfish than a game like this one, which advocates cooperation and stewardship.

My views have nothing to do with how you approach these games. But I am a firm believer that people's personal values bleeding over into in-character debates aren't fun for anyone. Choosing a character alignment to purposely get under the skin of other players and play the 'selfish prick' card won't make *Bloodwraith* any better. Play chaotic neutral if you want to, but don't turn every session into your own personal diatribe about how you know what's best for society. **Everyone at the table is playing a character working to do what's best for society.**

## METAPHORS

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I do not design without a metaphor in mind. The game worlds I create are always based on something, or an homage to something real world. It's unavoidable. I am sorry. I have no intention of prattling on about the deeper elements I've drawn from to create this world. Many elements are loosely defined for a reason and sometimes elements do not add up, purposely. Humanity has lost its history and identity. This is difficult to recover from.

Gamemasters are welcome to put their own spin on Gyrr and ignore whatever charming bullshit I've snuck into this setting. Sometimes a pipe is just a pipe.

## NOMENCLATURE

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In an attempt to make *Bloodwraith* sound unique, I've taken names from Armenia, Iran, Scythia, and parts of the Christian Bible. All the while, some of the flavor of the sleeping dead gods is from Greece. In any event, a game world like this one, transplanted into *Dungeons and Dragons* (and the like) requires some retooling of names, either from the world or in the core book. The name *N's magic aura* doesn't belong in *Bloodwraith*. But *M's faithful watchhound* does. Other fantasy roleplaying games probably have similar issues. Gamemasters may want to decide for themselves what works for their individual campaigns.

*I normally take a great deal of care in naming things and generating lists. But because of the nature of how this game world was written, I grabbed a lot of inspiration randomly. I don't want it to feel hodgepodge, but I think that happened anyway.*

## BLOODWRAITHS

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One interpretation of the game is that the gods are not dead, but transformed into the bloodwraiths. The thirteen bloodwraiths are the thirteen gods who survived the war for heaven and were cursed for their victory. Committing treason against their own kind, the heavens banished them to the earth and gave them new form. Sadly, the side effect of this curse was to punish humanity as well... perhaps for believing too much in such selfish and callow beings.

The bloodwraiths may or may not be aware of this. But they still think and act like gods. Time does not operate for them, the way it does for humanity. The bloodwraiths have no idea how much time has passed since their spawning and have no intentions of killing humanity quickly. Nevertheless, gamemasters should keep this a secret until such a time as it needs to be revealed.

Where the gods drew their power from faith, the bloodwraiths draw their power from fear and misery. Every atheist and faithless human makes the bloodwraiths stronger. Every act of blasphemy only emboldens the bloodwraiths and their war on humanity. Once humanity's heart is gone, the bloodwraiths will be unstoppable.

Each bloodwraith is an antithesis of the god it was born from, hence why the bloodwraiths have genders.

But wait? The sleeping dead gods...



## SLEEPING DEAD GODS

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Making sense of the sleeping dead gods is difficult once the facts of the bloodwraiths are known. But to the PCs, this shouldn't be known. Gamemasters may have many questions, but the setting is purposely vague on many details. The ultimate truths are up to the gamemaster to determine. Each campaign is different. Each group of players has different questions. Answers are elusive.

## THE BLEEDING REALMS

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The bleeding realms are purposely kept vague, giving the gamemaster room to devise stories the author didn't think of. They are certainly a place for astral- and planar-related monsters and spells. Gamemasters looking for something a little more twisted, can easily have the PCs fading into and out of the bleeding realms, once they are powerful enough.

The realms might also be the place for the final showdown. But this is up to the gamemaster to decide. There's no hard-and-fast storyline to follow. But the world is dense enough for one or two campaigns before the players want something more.

## THE ICE WALL

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Gyrr is a disc-like world completely surrounded by ice. There is no intention for anything to exist on the other side. The world has enough conflict to keep the characters contained within the roughly 150,000 "square" miles of Gyrr. But gamemasters wanting more can include Gyrr as part of some other fantasy setting. *Hollow World*<sup>™</sup> comes to mind. Maybe *Tékumel*.

Regardless, the ice wall is over one hundred feet high. Escaping over the wall shouldn't be easy.

*No one has dared try for many reasons.*

But. Should the bloodwraiths path of destruction be unstoppable and there is no other course of action, a small cadre of humans escaping to build a new world on the other side isn't the worst campaign idea ever.

## THE REST OF GYRR

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The look and locations of *Bloodwraith* are undefined. This document would be 600 pages long if it was. And it makes no sense to design locations for cultures always on the move. Forests look like forests until you find a cave or abandoned ruin. Then the adventures become your own.

Since *Bloodwraith* is not about five-foot squares and how far the well is located from the firepit. It's about the community member's dependence upon one another to thrive. That makes the people living in the community much more important than the hut they live in.

# THE TESTAMENT

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Magic-using characters may forgo spell-casting to take an oath. There are a number of pre-built oaths a character can take, but players and gamemasters are welcome to create more. Each oath leads to some unforeseen power. If you are using the *Bloodwraith* rules, *Bloodwraith: Magic* details a number of these. Otherwise, if the gamemaster is using any other rules system, work must be done to make these match the game system in place.

## COVENANT OF DEFIANCE

The covenant of defiance focuses on free will and independence; two traits lost when the gods were taken and the bloodwraiths took over. The defiant ones push on against insurmountable odds and the like. This can lead to complications with communities, costing people relationships. But those who are defiant see the final equation balancing when the war is won.

Characters taking a covenant of defiance gain a bonus to armor class and all saving throws, while being able to pray for defensive spells once per day, or have a permanent abjuration cast upon them.

## COVENANT OF THE EARTH

Nothing is more permanent than Gyrr. Yet even it erodes with time. These two laws butt against one another, making this testament a bit confusing to those who hear it. To those who believe it, there is no inconsistency. It is a righteous covenant of bone and flesh, unlike any other. The covenant is not just a spiritual vow, but a physical one as well. Those who take this covenant give a part of themselves and select a sacred place in Gyrr where they intend to die.

Characters taking a covenant of the earth increase their Constitution score, but begin play with fewer hit points than normal. They also gain access to earthly magics.

## COVENANT OF FAITH

All other covenants, by default, are about faith. But a true oath is a leap of faith, putting one's life into the hands of the sleeping dead gods. Somewhere there must be one who is still capable of returning to save mankind. "And until that days comes, I shall be the voice of god, calling humankind from the darkness and into the era of renewed prosperity."

Characters taking a covenant of faith gain a bonus to armor class and all saving throws, while being able to pray for guidance once per day.

## COVENANT OF KINGS

Authority and dominance are two sides of the same coin. Humankind once ruled over everything it surveyed, applying authority and/or dominance as it saw fit. One could argue the cause of the purge was an imbalance of mankind's authority over unwilling subjugates.

'Control for the sake of control,' as some put it.

But the era of authority and control are over. Humankind has little place for those who would rule over others for the sake of their own vanity. Or worse. Those who would take the covenant of kings, do so knowingly opposing the general communal-forward thinking of enclaves, or do so knowing the sleeping dead gods are returning and mankind will return to a place of dominance and honor once again.

Characters taking a covenant of kings gain a bonus to Charisma and more retainers than normal.

## COVENANT OF LAW

There is one interpretation to anything. Disagreements of opinion are a failure of principles. Any who would interpret the will of the sleeping dead gods do so as a failure of their character. Nothing more. The covenant of law establishes there are no gray areas or moral complexities. Sins are sins. Failures are failures. Death is death. There are no other ways to see than world and this unbending approach to life is difficult for the majority of Gyrrians to deal with.

Characters taking a covenant of law can detect incongruities and lies.

## COVENANT OF THE ONE

Before the purge, the people of Gyrr believed in a single dictum that defined who they were. All things are divine. Living within this state, the people enjoyed the prospect of knowing they would all one day become gods. Even if the gods were not eternal, they could live forever through memory. A handful of modern Gyrrians even believed themselves living examples of the gods. Or so the legends would have one believe.

Those who believe in the 'one-ness' of living beings does so fully understanding the arrogance of it, or blissfully unaware of the arrogance of it. There is no happy medium.

Characters taking a covenant of the one can heal a few hit points a day, while giving their hit points to others (in an emergency).

## COVENANT OF TRUTH

Lies damage the community. Every lie costs a piece of one's soul. While arguments can be made for the value of 'little white lies,' to those who take the covenant of truth, there are no lies. The truth cannot be

Among those who take the covenant of truth, they believe it takes only three lies to break a soul before it is irreparably destroyed. This unbendable thinking leaves many people afraid for their souls. If this principle is in fact true, what becomes of those who

Characters taking a covenant of truth gain bonuses in the face of those who are inferior; or judged so.

## COVENANT OF THE TWO

The covenant of the two is for those who believe in the duality of life. While some humans are divine, others are fragments of the divine, stumbling through the inherently sinful mistakes of life. Learning again what they failed to understand in a previous form — not always a human one. The covenant of the two implies that all life is connected, but not necessarily all valuable. It is a complicated, sometimes contradictory faith that seems to explain away injustice, while doing nothing to fix it. All the while, the covenant understands the unfair nature of suffering, though cares little about its reconciliation with life. For instance, killing others is a fact of life. Nothing can be done to save it, though everything must be done to perfect one's own identity.

Characters taking a covenant of the two live complex lives, devoid of prediction. The benefits of this covenant are never the same for any two people.

**Note to Gamemasters:** There is a lot going on here. If you accept or apply the logic that the bloodwraiths are a reincarnation of the sleeping dead gods, then reincarnation is a plausible concept in Gyrr, but one that is probably not wildly accepted or explored. Those who take the covenant of the two are rare and viewed with skepticism. How you reconcile this in your personal campaigns is up to you.

## COVENANT OF VENGEANCE

Justice is for civilized societies. Vengeance is a tool for repairing the broken lives of people dealing with loss. It is a primal force; one that only brings saddens and perpetual vengeance to those concerned. Even in redemption, vengeance is a poor man's reward. But some people, nevertheless, choose this path to walk, often taking the covenant for others, seeking to make something right in world overcome with wrongs.

Characters taking a covenant of justice personal bonuses in the face of those who are inferior.



## THE THIRTEEN GODS

---

Each of the gods has a corollary bloodwraith associated with it. Because the now sleeping dead gods were once peaceful and thoughtful gods, their counterparts are vile unmakers of creation. Whatever contemptuous and foul offense the gods committed against the laws of heaven have unleashed these things upon humanity.

Should the PCs be curious about the old gods, here is a list of the thirteen most important ones. There are more, but these formed the bulk of the pantheon.

1. **Aleria.** Two-faced goddess of wisdom. Often depicted as a pauper, Aleria represents the wisdom that comes from age, and not books.
2. **Ferrakus.** God of fire and labor. He often represents humankind's strength, in the abstract. Married to Gerana.
3. **Gerana.** Goddess of the forge. Married to Ferrakus. Together the pair are considered upstoppable when work must be done.
4. **Ithreia.** Goddess of glass. She brought the art of glassblowing to mankind, a skill that has since been lost.
5. **Kamus.** God of pennance. Those who have sinned and must be punished for it pray to Kamus for release from their "prison."
6. **Lyvalia.** Spider goddess and messenger. She visits mankind as a giant spider with the divine words wrapped in a web.
7. **Myketa.** Goddess of shadows. She represents the other half of all things. The feminine side of man. The dark side of humankind. The other side of a mirror. She is the most universal goddess.
8. **Neria.** The faceless one. Neria is neither a man, nor a woman and represents all things that have no identity or name.
9. **Paletius.** God of the sun. He has no human form, as he lives inside the sun all the time.
10. **Rolterra.** God of harvests. A manifestation of Rolterra once lived inside every person's barn, taking the shape of a moonbeam or owl.
11. **Saren.** The boar god. Master of the hunt. Physically, the second-strongest of the gods.
12. **Tulis the Martyr.** Every story about Tulis involves her sacrifices for mankind. It is unclear to scholars what domains she rules over.
13. **Yolana.** Goddess of knowledge and the written word. Not to be confused with Aleria. Yolana carries a book in one hand and a torch in the other.

## MAGIC ITEMS

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This document does not provide an encyclopedia of magic items, but it does provide a short list of ideas for turning regular magic items into *Bloodwraith*-flavored magic items.

### 1d20 Magic Item

- 1 +1 hammer also stores heat from the sun, to be used later
- 2 +1 ring of resistance, slowly running out of magic
- 3 Amulet of protection with a flimsy clasp
- 4 Arrow turns critical wounds into infections
- 5 Bottled centipede, when consumed, increases movement
- 6 Cloudy emerald grows cold the weather is about to change
- 7 Cold iron bracelet shocks others who touch it
- 8 Dagger never needs to be sharpened
- 9 Eagle-shaped amulet wakes user quickly
- 10 Fireflies in a jar, project 30' radius of light for one week
- 11 Librum of simple cantrips can be read by anyone
- 12 Magical stones used to send messages up to one mile away
- 13 Patterned blanket turns user invisible for one hour (while held)
- 14 Pot cooks and warms food in half the time
- 15 Ring of minor cold protection can be worn with other rings
- 16 Sheath magically conceals what it holds
- 17 Small, weatherproof sack holds twice what it should
- 18 Threaded needle always points toward the bloodmarshes
- 19 Unguent that hides the wearer's smell from elves and animals
- 20 Waterproof boots with a hidden vial compartment

## CAMPAIGN PLANS

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The conceit of many published games is the heroes and villains are after the same thing. Once the gamemaster has established the type of campaign she wants (from page 16), she should jot down some notes about what the PCs want and what the bloodwraiths want. Where do these wants intersect? How do they stop one another from getting what they want?

*Do not share this information with the players.*

It is the gamemaster's job to make the PCs' wants difficult to achieve, but not impossible.

## ADVENTURE IDEAS

---

*Bloodwraith* adventures are not your standard fantasy fare. There are not dungeon crawls and there is always something else going on under the surface. This is a short list of seeds to start adventures, but often with questions attached. The enclaves are used to the bloodwraiths tricks. Gamemasters must always ask, “what is next?”

Remember to start strong and then let the PCs explore the aftermath..

### 1d20 Plot

- 1 **A child – no one recognizes – stumbles into the camp, devoid of memories of who she is and what happen to her.**
- 2 **Children are beset by a beggar shadow. They tell the adults tales of a new friend they’ve met and no one takes notice until it is too late.**
- 3 **Dwarven soldiers camp in a clear line of site to the human enclave, making sure to be seen, either as a decoy or as a threat.**
- 4 **An elven emissary appears with a small retinue of bodyguards. She wishes to sit down and talk with the leadership, to negotiate a temporary truce. Nothing like this has ever happened before. Is this a sign of things to come or another elven trick?**
- 5 **An elven patrol finds a lone human and terrorizes her before killing her (just for spite). The PCs discovery the body hours later, or witness the end of the act, unable to save her life.**
- 6 **An enclave blacksmith quietly reminds leadership the iron supply is running low. Once again, they do nothing.**
- 7 **Enclave hunters head out for a few days to track game... and never return.**
- 8 **An enclave warlock dies in a fire-storm of magic. People are terrified of what could happen to them. Meetings are called to determine what will done about those who wield magic.**
- 9 **Farmers, working the fields, uncover the body of someone gone missing months ago. Is she still alive? What happened to her? And who did this?**
- 10 **Goblins skirmishers, led by an elven warlock, descend on the enclave, without warning. They are easily dispatched, but the question becomes, why the lack of planning or tactics?**

- 11 Goblins skirmishers and one orc commander attack the enclave. They are easily dispatched, but the commander is captured...
- 12 A murmur lizard is spotted by a patrol. They lack the strength to take it down, but one of the soldiers claims the lizard is wounded. If this is true, it could mean food for a few days, as well as a hide to make armor from. But what if the lizard is bait, set there by elven archers?
- 13 Orc hunters conduct hit and run tactics on the enclave's livestock. They are swift, killing a few oxen before returning back into the forest. Next, they poison the water supply with a dead body, before burning crops as a diversionary tactic, while a two-orc team smashes pottery and spoiled the grain inside. What is next?
- 14 Rumors surface of an ancient and ruined stronghold not too far from here. Some of the soldiers and a few of the leaders believe it is easily defensible, but others aren't so sure. Who created the stronghold and why wasn't it found earlier?
- 15 A straggler stumbles into the camp, battered and bleeding. But she bears the mark of someone who has been exiled...
- 16 A straggler stumbles into the camp, the sole survivor of an ambush. Where are the others? What followed her here?
- 17 A vapor ghoul stumbles into the camp, wearing the skin of a recently-murdered teenager. How long will the façade hold up?
- 18 The water supply becomes contaminated by the body of a dead dwarf. After the body is removed, the water still won't be drinkable for a couple of weeks. Who left the body there? What does this mean for the enclaves future?
- 19 While out scouting and hunting for a few days, the characters return to find the enclave has packed up and cleared out, leaving no indication of where everyone has gone.
- 20 A woman unexpectedly gives birth to twins, raising the number of children in her family from four to six. The community is split on how to handle this forboding omen.

# PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

---

Gamemasters may find all of this newfangled world design overwhelming, or they may just jump in with both feet and start writing adventures. My personal view on gamemastering is to pick three major factors to focus the campaign on and keep a fourth (secret) element in reserve to surprise the players with. Maintaining three elements streamlines the campaign, and stops people from tracking of too much extraneous information.

## BUILDING THE ENCLAVE

---

The gamemaster needs to define (at least a few) parts of the enclave before the campaign can start. PCs need to know which enclave they live in, where they are in the pecking order of the community, and who is in charge. It might also help to know where the enclave is, what its migration route is, and how often they pack up and move.

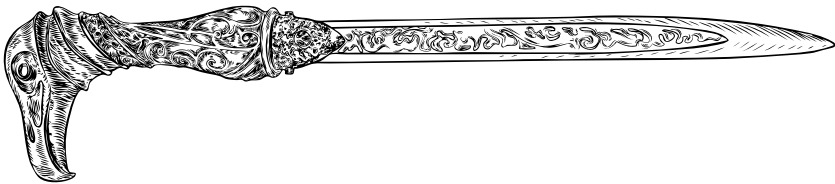
If the PCs are part of a straggler enclave, or some really small enclave that doesn't register on the map, the gamemaster's workload drops.

If the enclave is less than 20 people, it should be no work to define all of the NPCs and devise who knows whom. A relationship map of people is easy to create at that level. When enclaves reach about 100 people or so, it's a little more work to keep it straight. Gamemasters should design about a dozen important NPCs from all walks of life, including the three most important people in the community. This gives the PCs a sense of who is who in relation to themselves. Even a short two-sentence description is enough to get started.

All NPCs need three dimensions: who they are, what they want, and why they can't seem to get it.

*Ulvek is the enclaves's leading councilwoman. She wants to see her son elevated to a position of importance. But this is difficult to do since everyone knows her son is a horrible person.*

**Note:** Book two includes rules for enclave building, so gamemasters using that book have even more tools at their disposal.



## MAJOR CONFLICTS VS. MINOR CONFLICTS

---

The major conflict of the setting is obvious. In fact, if it wasn't clear, it would be a poor setting. Creating a miasma of world elements without a rhyme or reason is self-serving and doesn't help gamemasters. Every world element must include some conflict, or it doesn't belong in a fantasy roleplaying game. Gamemasters are encouraged to find one or two bloodwraiths who form the center of the story, and build the campaign from there.

Minor conflicts are a little more difficult to define. Usually fantasy adventurers await a mission from a kindly wizard in a tavern and then take a map to an abandoned tomb and kill the undead inside. In *Bloodwraith*, there are no taverns, no wizards with maps, and no nearby abandoned tomb everyone is afraid to enter.

Characters set on keeping the community alive need resources to do that. While food and water are obvious resources to keep people alive, ancient magic is perhaps their best tool. Finding weapons and killing enemy forces also strengthens the community. These goals can come from the gamemaster or the PC. Either way, it should be an organic extension of what has come before so that each minor conflict plays into the major conflict.

## ADVENTURING

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Regardless of the type of adventuring taking place in *Bloodwraith*, the world is dangerous. The PCs cannot survive without help. Retainers are essential for survival. As are alliances. Even going into a cave or tomb means bringing in extra hands, if for nothing else than to stand guard outside or help carry whatever is found within.

A small cadre of adventurers are mobile and flexible, making them a perfect tool for striking against the elves or digging through a lost temple. A larger community needs its citizens to perform numerous tasks and patrol in a dozen different directions to keep the enclave safe.

## PAST CIVILIZATIONS

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This gameworld exists in a vacuum. It is not connected to other worlds and what lies in any of its hidden corners is anyone's guess. Since exploring Gyrr is by no means an easy feat, there are numerous places where undiscovered remnants of the past emerge. The lost civilization of Gyrrian's history maybe be hundreds, if not thousands of years in the past. Any of these places can be used as a source of adventure, either for glory or to find some knowledge of the past, explaining what went wrong... and how it can be repaired.

This means any one of a thousand pre-published modules can be introduced into Gyrr with a little bit of creative editing.

## FOES

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There is a clear division in the presentation of this work between the small feeling of humanity and massive force of the bloodwraiths. This may feel jarring and that's okay. The idea here is that the weight of the world is too much for people to think about all the time. There is the constant work of living that must be done. Real people living in this world have other things to worry about, like raising families and finding food. The bloodwraiths are a faraway problem that may someday affect everyone. For now, the world keeps on spinning.

For gamemasters, this begs many questions. Are the bloodwraiths real? Will the PCs ever encounter one? When? Will killing one make a difference?

When building a campaign, the focus should start at a lower level and build to a crescendo where the PCs face something terrifying and meaningful. Maybe it's a bloodwraith. But maybe it's something else, like a blood-infected dragon.

Regardless of the final foe the gamemaster selects, the campaign flow from point A to B to Z should lead through a series of foes that challenge the PCs and make sense. Putting the focus on a single bloodwraith (in the beginning) who has targeted the enclave for destruction gives the gamemaster the proper framework to build the campaign around.

For instance, knowing from the beginning that Pheogyrr is the bloodwraith bent on destroying the PCs, the gamemaster can sew seeds of ill-intent early on in the enclave, before the first elf or orc shows up looking for a fight. From there, numerous plot threads can provide similar thematic problems for the PCs to overcome, until one day they finally face Pheogyrr one on one.

## HOPE

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Gamemasters must determine whether or not a glimmer of hope resides in the world. Can the PCs actually overcome the great evil bent on their destruction? Does it matter? Is it all just smoke and mirrors to keep the PCs from knowing the truth about Gyrr?

There are seekers. And faithful. People who still believe the gods are coming back. Are they wrong? Where does their power come from if the sleeping dead gods are truly dead? Are there clues in the wilderness and ruins of Gyrr?

Rumors must exist of something. People love to tell stories and superstition breeds the best (and worst) kinds of stories. Could any of them be true? Could a fairy tale told by grandmothers actually

# DESIGNER NOTES

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*Often I create games about authority, control, dominance, and the like. This game is the opposite. There are no lords or nobles telling the PCs what to do. Gamemasters are welcome to create an authority figure in the community giving PCs missions and tasks, but the PCs should already know their roles. Their goals should match the enclave's.*

Along the way, I detailed my thoughts on why I did certain things and how quickly this all came together. Ideally, I would have a team of people working on this setting and we could produce hundreds of pages of material. Even a boxed set. But I'm a one-man band and I think overloading people with data wouldn't improve the play experience.

Ideally, I would have ordered artwork specific to the setting and not pulled stock art from every corner of the internet.

But hopefully my design choices show gamemasters how to create a world that doesn't borrow from proto-European elements. Not everything needs to be a Tolkien-derivative creation.

I would love to hear some of the stories and campaigns people produce with this setting. I actually don't get personal feedback often.

Enjoy.

— jim pinto



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