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HELLFROST

• MATTERS OF FAITH •





MATTERS OF FAITH

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FAITH MATTERS



Faith is an important part of the *Hellfrost* setting. While priests worship one deity, being granted miraculous powers in return for their service, the common citizens honor the gods in their own way. Although most have a patron deity, they pray to gods as required by specific circumstances. Thus, a farmer who takes Eostre as his patron may make offerings to Freo when he heads to a distant market, Var to ensure a good price for his crops, Thunor to hold back storms that may ruin the harvest, and Eira when his children fall sick in winter.

While the gods of *Hellfrost* do not often interfere in the affairs of mortals, their power is felt through their paladins and priests, divine heralds, and natural events. While modern man can explain away natural phenomena through science, the citizens of Rassilon are superstitious. A thunderstorm is not a natural event, but the anger of Thunor, god of storms and wind. An earthquake has nothing to do with seismic forces or tectonic activity—it is an indication Ertha, goddess of the earth, is restless or moving around her subterranean home.

To that end, the inhabitants of Rassilon have strong beliefs in the powers of the gods. Whether they pay lip service to many gods, attend infrequent ceremonies when it suits their needs, have chosen a patron deity, have devoted their life without holy vows, or have taken office as a member of the clergy, all citizens honor the gods in some way. To deny the gods is to deny reality.

● CULTS & SOCIETY ●

This section takes a look at how temples are organized, both internally and with regard the wider faith, and also the matter of clerics and the laws of the land.

TEMPLE HIERARCHY

Cults in *Hellfrost* operate around a hierarchical structure. At the bottom are the laity, men and women who honor the

god but who are not ordained clergy. Above them are the devotees, laity who swear oaths of allegiance to worship the god above all others but who do not take holy office or receive miracles. The first true members of any cult are the priests and paladins. Finally there are the disciples, clergy who have taken their faith to a higher level of dedication.

Every temple has a high priest. Though the bearer is the senior cleric in the temple, the position is honorary and cannot be used to judge the cleric's status as a common cleric or a disciple. The term "senior" is also open to interpretation. Depending on the temple, the post may be filled by the oldest cleric, a disciple, or one with the most access to miraculous powers. Those of Tiw, as an example, often hold ritual combats when the position becomes available to determine who has the right to lead. As always, nothing is quite that clear cut in Rassilon. Some temples of Tiw treat the number of battles a warrior has survived as a mark of his right to lead.

While these titles represent level of faith and hierarchical order, cults also have a varying number of actual jobs within any given temple. For instance, temples to Tiw may boast a Training Master or Master of the Armory; those of Eira might have a Senior Physician or Almsgiver; and those of Thunor titles such as Master of Crows and Wind of the East Gate. No defined, rigid list of titles exists, giving the GM ample room to create unique positions as required.

HIERARCHY OF THE FAITH

Temples in cities and towns operate as independent political and spiritual entities, answerable to no higher authority save the deity. Those in villages, being smaller and often lacking in resources, tend to ally themselves to the nearest large temple, accepting orders from and granting tithes to their superiors in return for aid when required.

This arrangement is by no means universal, and plenty of small temples remain fiercely independent of outside interference. As a result, many temples hold unique rites and festivals, even within the same realm. Often these reflect local customs and traditions. In some cases, even

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THE SELARI PANTHEON

The Selari, a now extinct culture whose ancient lands once centered on Shattered Moor, recognized just two deities, Sigel and Niht. However, each was accorded many aspects which coincided with one of the other major deities. For instance, Sigel the Healer had similarities with Eira while Sigel Rainmaker was synonymous with many aspects of Thunor.

In game terms, a character wishing to adopt the Selari faith as a cleric must take Arcane Background (Miracles) and pick either Sigel or Niht as his patron. He must then pick an aspect which relates to one of the other major deities, adding both the spells and sins of that second deity to his patron's list. For example, Sigel the Healer has the combined spells and sins of Sigel and Eira. Niht, an evil goddess, is linked with Dargar, Hela, Thrym, and Vali. Sigel may be worshipped in an aspect of any of the remaining greater gods.

The cleric starts with the two signature spells of his chosen gods. In this he has no choice.

common stories have details changed to reflect local sensibilities or to praise the current ruler. In the Freelands, for example, stories which revolve around kings and the gods are replaced with tales of common citizens receiving divine blessings. This means that there is no one overall religious leader for any faith, nor any one temple (regardless of boasts), that speaks for all members of the faith.

In terms of the wider social order, all clerics rank just below the nobility. Those who also possess noble titles, something of a rarity but not unknown, are weighted by their social rank, not their clerical status.

THE LAW

In matters of law, all clerics are subject to the laws of the land in which they reside or travel. Temples have the right to punish those who transgress religious laws, whether the perpetrators are clergy, laity, or non-worshippers. The local temple of the offended god judges any acts of desecration, blasphemy, or sacrilege.

Rights set down long ago also allow the clergy to judge other crimes committed within the temple's land. For instance, if someone commits murder in a temple of Var, then the temple clergy has the legal right to hold the trial. Normally this is only done if the victim is a member of the clergy or an important lay member.

In neither instance may the accused submit for his feudal overlord, the local moot, or a civil court (an Anari concept) to hear the case (see *Hellfrost Expansion 2*).

PANTHEONS

This section takes a brief peek behind the scenes of the pantheon of greater gods.

RACIAL PANTHEONS

Though different races tend to favor certain gods, there are no true racial pantheons. An engro warrior is just as likely to follow Tiw as a Saxa warrior, and an elf druid probably pays homage to Eostre, as does an Anari farmer. The following list typifies favored gods by race, but should never be used to restrict a player's choice.

Elf, Hearth: Eira, Eostre, Hoenir, Maera, Sigel, Ullr.

Elf, Taiga: Eostre, Maera, Sigel, Tiw, Ullr.

Anari: Hoenir, Maera (the Magocracy), Tiw, Var.

Dwarf: Ertha, Kenaz, Tiw.

Engro: Freo, Nauthiz, the Norns, Unknowable One.

Finnar: Freo, Kenaz, Rigr, Sigel, Ullr.

Frostborn: By main race, but add Thrym.

Giant: Kenaz (fire), Eostre & Ullr (forest), Thrym (frost), Ertha (cliff), Vali (marsh), Neorthe (sea), Thunor (storm).

Orc/Goblin: Dargar, Niht, Thrym, Vali.

Saxa: Eostre, Hothar, Kenaz, Neorthe (coastal only), the Norns, Thunor, Tiw, Ullr.

Tuomi: Eostre, Kenaz, Neorthe (coastal), Thunor, Tiw.

DIVINE FAMILY TREES

Despite there being no true racial pantheons, the various races and cultures do tend to view the relationship between deities differently. The notes in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* are those of the majority of Saxa, and represent a belief system commonly shared by most of the other cultures and races.

However, there are many areas of contention and confusion. Hoenir, for example, is widely regarded as the brother of Nauthiz. Nauthiz, on the other hand, is stated to be the twin brother of Var, yet Var is not listed as having any relationship to Hoenir. Many have tried to argue that Maera and Sigel, the moon and sun, were once wed though are currently separated. Clerics of Eira deny Dargar is the offspring of a union between their goddess and Tiw, though others believe this is fact.

Many elementalists insist the four "elemental gods" (Ertha, Kenaz, Neorthe, and Thunor) are all children of Maera, whose threads of magic bind them together. Yet this flies in the face of Kenaz being most often listed as Sigel's son and thus Scaetha's brother.

Racial beliefs also muddy the celestial waters. The hearth elves hold that Eostre is the wife of Sigel, though Scaetha is not their daughter. Instead, she is the daughter of Tiw and sister to Dargar. To the dwarves, Ertha and Tiw are married. Their daughter is Scaetha, despite the goddess of death receiving little mainstream worship among the subterranean race. To the engro, the Unknowable One and the Norns are husband and wife, regardless of there being three distinct Norns, and all the other gods are their children.

No one of these beliefs is totally correct, nor can it said to be a total fabrication. They are merely the mortal races attempts to place some sort of order on beings far beyond their true comprehension using their own cultures as a guideline. Even clerics of the same faith are at loggerheads much of the time over the true relationship between the gods.

PRIESTS & PALADINS



The Religion chapter in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* details the core aspects of the greater gods and provides a little information on the duties of their clergy. This section is an expansion of those notes, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

The information is broken down into four separate sections, each of which is explained below.

Training: Clerics, and to some degree the laity, receive religious training. This section briefly describes how a typical worshipper is trained. Many cults use a mentoring system. This gives the player and GM opportunity to introduce a cleric's former mentor. Most times he is there to help the hero, or at least provide roleplaying opportunities.

The mentor may also have turned from the faith, or become corrupted in some manner (like a cleric of Eostre Plantmother who has taken to human sacrifice to empower the crop fields). Such villains needn't exist purely to be slain—questing to turn a former mentor and friend back onto the right path can make for some very intense roleplaying.

Prayers: All clerics and worshippers pray regularly and use colorful speech. Players should be encouraged to flower their character's speech both when praying, cursing, and swearing oaths. The GM can use the same for his NPCs, thus helping to turn them for a set of stats into more realistic inhabitants of the *Hellfrost* setting. It isn't just clerics who can use this section. Any character uttering an exclamation might hiss, "Tiw's beard!" or "Eira's mercy!"

Adventures: Every cleric of a greater god has the Orders Hindrance and every cult has its focuses. The most common types of mission a cleric is asked, and likely desires, to undertake are detailed here.

Character Guidelines: Hints and tips for players and GMs with regard choice of skills and Edges. Nothing is written in stone, though some choices should be obvious necessities. For instance, a cleric of Rigr the Watchman should have Notice as his highest skill in order to fulfill his duties.

DARGAR

Training: Worshippers are expected to be remorseless killers, devoid of pity and compassion. Novices are forced to witness scenes of grisly torture or take part in raids on defenseless citizens until they become desensitized. Those who show signs of weakness are used as sacrifices. Potential clergy are then formed into small bands under the leadership of a full cleric. They are encouraged to form strong bonds of friendship. As training nears its end, the students are ordered to fight each other to the death. The sole student who survives the massacre is accepted into the clergy.

Prayers: Most prayers are intended to stir up violent feelings. "Dealer of death, eater of flesh, slayer of the weak, slayer of the meek, hear my prayer."

Adventures: Anything involving senseless violence or massacres is well-suited to Dargar's crazed worshippers. They support (or even lead) orc and goblin raids, attack defenseless settlements and innocent travelers, create war between two nations, and stalk battlefields to dine on the flesh of the dying before finishing sending them to their gods.

Character Generation: Dealing death and destruction requires good Strength and Fighting. Any Combat Edges are suitable, though Frenzy and Sweep, which allow death to be meted out more quickly, are favored. Given many are berserkers, a low Smarts is actually favorable, so as to be able to go berserk more easily. The downside is the berserker finds it hard to calm his emotions. Mean is a suitable Hindrance, for Dargar's cannibals and psychopaths are rarely charitable souls.

EIRA

Training: Clerics begin training with classroom instruction in the anatomy of the races and the art of herbalism, learning the medicinal properties of plants before brewing their own herbal remedies. Once the basics are learned they assist senior clerics around the temple as orderlies,

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learning how to recognize and treat a variety of injuries and sicknesses. Later, clerics are taken to battlefields to witness the carnage or listen to veterans' stories. These are not tales of heroic battle like the skalds recite, but of senseless death and bloodshed—only by seeing and hearing the true cost of war can they fully dedicate themselves to the art of preventing violence. It also serves to cull those of weak heart, for healing is more than mopping fevered brows and tending minor cuts and grazes, and many injuries are enough to empty one's stomach.

Prayers: Depending on the situation, prayers begin with, "Merciful/Peaceful/Gentle Mother, pure of heart, take pity on this unfortunate soul and..." Curses, exclamations, and oaths always begin with the name of the goddess. Examples include, "Eira's serenity (save me from fools)!" "Eira's mercy (will you please shut up)!" and "Eira's tranquility (that scared the hell out of me)!"

Adventures: Wherever there is war or sickness, Eira's clerics are never far away. They may be called upon to accompany an army to war, attend critical peace treaty negotiations as mediators, hunt down worshippers of Vali, or transport and protect vital medical supplies. Ancient tombs and lost cities could hold healing relics or lost tomes of healing lore, both valuable to the cult.

Character Guidelines: Healing is the essential skill for clerics. As peacemakers, Intimidation and Persuasion are useful skills, both for resolving arguments and settling disputes. Many clerics are herbalists, and thus have the Hedge Magic Edge. Similarly, Alchemy is a useful

Edge for creating healing potions. Those who want to be truly excellent healers should become a Disciple.

Although clerics are pacifistic, this doesn't mean Fighting should be ignored. Even if the cleric doesn't actually attack anyone, it governs Parry and is a requirement for defensive Edges like Block.

Adventuring clerics shouldn't forsake Spirit, for they may be called upon to enter battle or help those facing fearsome beasts—a cleric who continually runs away or faints is no use in the heat of battle.

EOSTRE

Training: Novitiates train in the fields and forests, learning the different types of plant and beast and their many properties. They are expected to know how to sow, plow, and reap; understand the cycle of life in all creatures, and be able to tell the changing seasons.

Training is very much hands-on, and students are pushed hard, for life is a constant struggle. Practical examinations are favored over academic ones, and often the student is given no forewarning as a test looms. As clerics are wont to say, "The lamb won't stay in the sheep because you aren't ready."

Prayers: Eostre is the great provider, and this is always recognized at the start of prayers. Reaping, picking fruit and berries, and killing animals harms Eostre, thus apologies are offered. For example, a prayer might begin, "Bountiful Mother, forgive my sin as I gather your fruit."

Adventures: Clerics are called upon to hunt down marauding bands of goblins and orcs, fight forest fires (a rare occurrence), curb excess logging and hunting, and aid druids in the defense of nature. Occasionally, they may be sent to help the elves in their struggles. In their role as worshippers of the provider, they might transport and protect grain wagons heading to a region hit by famine.

Character Guidelines: Eostre's clergy lead outdoors lives. Vigor represents general stamina, while Survival is good for identifying edible herbs, fishing, and for catching prey.

Followers of Eostre Plantmother should seriously consider Hedge Magic and Alchemy. Woodsman (and later Ranger) perfectly displays the cleric's knowledge of the natural world.

ERTHA

Training: Clerics receive classroom and field instruction in how to identify minerals, ores, and gems, how to spot weaknesses and impurities, and how to purify, forge, and form them into useful goods. Practical tests of spe-



lunking are required, for clerics must be as comfortable walking the Underearth as they are the surface world. Paladins are taken on raids against subterranean foes in order to learn the nuances of fighting in enclosed spaces and on uneven ground.

A novitiate's final test involves a solo subterranean journey between two interconnecting caves. During this time they are expected to use all their skills to survive the rigors, and sleep at night without the comfort of light. Upon reaching the far end, they are questioned about what they have seen. Alone in the dark, novitiates often have strange dreams. Senior clerics perform divinations to determine the novitiate's suitability to join the cult.

Prayers: Ertha prefers prayers to be spoken rhythmically, with every odd-numbered word stressed and every even word spoken more softly, like the fall of a smith's hammer on metal. "Earth mother, dark mother, hear my prayer..." Exclamations are short, with "Ertha's hammer!" being a popular one.

Adventures: Clerics are called upon to fight goblins, orcs, and trolls in their shadowy lairs, and to explore new cave systems. They may be asked to safeguard wagon loads of precious ore or gems, or uncover new mineral veins. Within a decade of joining the cult, every cleric must spend at least one season aiding the dwarves of Karad Marn without payment.

Character Guidelines: Operating a smithy or jeweler isn't a very heroic endeavor, so adventuring clerics are advised to focus on subterranean exploration and combat (though a few dice in a suitable Craft skill can be used to make money).

Climbing, Stealth, Survival, and Swimming are all useful for exploring the cavernous depths. Fighting and Combat Edges are always required to some degree, for there are many subterranean horrors.

FREO

Training: Each cleric mentors one novitiate as an apprentice, taking her with him on his journeys. Instruction is always given while walking, sailing, or riding. During rest stops, the young hopeful reflects on what he has learned and formulates questions ready for the next leg of the journey. Instruction on languages and customs is important, for clerics will meet many different people on their future travels.

Tests involve solo journeys, where the candidate is expected to report back to his mentor all he has seen and heard. These journeys are always through unmapped and unfamiliar terrain, for a cleric of Freo never knows where his feet might lead him in the future.

Prayers: Given their constant movement, it is not surprising prayers mention travel. "Celestial wanderer, hear my footfalls, and..." is a common start. A favored exclamation is, "Freo's sandals!" Phrases, like "Best foot forward," "You won't wear out sandals standing still," and "Never walk the same path twice" (which means "Let bygones be bygones" or "Drop it, we've had this conversation before"), pepper their speech.

Adventures: Freo's clergy are given few formal quests, and those that do occur always involve travel. Delivering messages is a common activity, though they may be called upon to escort someone through the wilderness, determine the path for a new trade road, or map out an area in preparation for an attack or expansion.

Creatures such as orcs often trouble trade roads, and when progress is halted, clerics of Freo are usually keen to lend a hand dealing with the problem.

Character Guidelines: Outdoors in all weathers, clerics should invest in Vigor to help stave off cold penalties and survive the rigors of travel. Widely traveled clerics might wish to take a few dice in Knowledge (Area) and Knowledge (Folklore) to present their understanding of different places and cultures. Survival, arguably the most useful outdoors skill, can keep a cleric alive in the wilds longer than the more popular adventuring skills of Fighting and Shooting, though the wilderness is fraught with danger and these skills should not be entirely neglected.

As worshippers of the god of travel, Fleet-Footed is a perfect Edge, and a few dice in both Boating (assuming it is applicable to the campaign) and Riding will make journeys far easier.

HELA

Training: Initiation begins by facing death. Students may be buried alive, poisoned, or grievously injured. Whether a candidate survives or dies, he is accepted into Hela's embrace in one form or another. Like Eira, Hela requires her clerics to be of stout-heart. They must witness ritual sacrifices and the reanimation of the corpses, become accustomed to the stench of death and presence of mindless walking corpses, and, most importantly, they must be willing to snuff out life so unlfe may exist in its place. Obedience is drilled into them, for they must learn to accept orders from powerful undead without question.

Prayers: To honor Hela, who ritually died as keeper of the dead and rose again as the goddess of undeath, prayers begin by denying any former existence, often by stating the worshipper was dead to the world before honoring Hela. For instance, one might say, "I was dead but am now reborn in darkness."

Adventures: Assisting in the machinations of the greater undead and gathering recruits form core duties. Quests may be undertaken to collect ancient corpses, loot tombs for ancient relics, or raise armies of skeletons and zombies. During their mortal life, clerics must pilgrimage to the Withered Lands and serve the liches who rule the twisted realm for one year.

Character Guidelines: Any hero who is going to traffic with undead needs Spirit, and plenty of it. The art of combat is core to Hela's worship, both in gathering recruits and aiding the undead.

One might not think of Leadership Edges when one plays a cleric of Hela, but out of the various archetypes one could play, it is precisely these clerics who can ben-

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efit most—they all have *zombie*. With a little time they can have a small force of skeletons and zombies ready to obey their every whim.

HOENIR

Training: Hoenir's clerics are bookish scholars, and this is reflected in their training. Those who wish to join the cult must endure endless hours of lectures and tests. Oral and written examinations are frequent, with novitiates being awarded grades. At the end of each year, a final test is taken. Those who fail to meet the minimum requirement are either expelled (if they totally flunk) or held back a year (if they fail by a few points and show promise).

Prayers: Knowledge plays an important role in prayers. Rather than beseeching Hoenir to provide direct help to the cleric, he invokes images of the past. "Deliver me the wisdom of Emperor Persiliax X," or "Let my words travel fast, as did Coelric Windrunner, who delivered news of the Anari invasion," for example.

Exclamations typically involve admission of ignorance—"Blindness and folly! I should have deduced by the juxtaposition of the glyphs there would be a trap there!"

Adventures: Anything involving new or lost knowledge draws the attention of Hoenir's clerics. Instances of the Siphoning, the chance to explore a lost city or tomb, and the discovery or creation of a new book are all irresistible lures. Other times they must counsel nobles and help solve problems facing a realm or city.

Character Generation: Scholars and sages, these clerics need a good Smarts die, Investigation, and a wide selection of Knowledge skills. Being a Lorekeeper and cleric of Hoenir is not forbidden. Just remember that while the Lorekeeper Edge allows the cleric to roll a d4 in all Smarts skills, he still has to buy the skill at d4 if he wants to increase it later. For this reason, taking a smattering of Knowledge skills at d4 is better than nothing and provides plentiful options for specialization, especially if the hero intends to get the Disciple Edge. While starting with a high Smarts die provides a few bonus languages, adding Linguist doubles the number. Rather than picking the common languages others will take, consider the more obscure ones.

HOTHAR

Training: Knowledge of the law forms the core training for young clerics. Mock trials are held, with the novitiates acting as prosecution and defense. Some sort of moral ambiguity is always thrown in, a test as to whether the worshipper can separate the quest for justice and truth from his personal feelings and prejudices. Students must obey every order given them unless it convenes a law in order to learn obedience and conformity. Every aspect of their life is strictly ordered, from the way they must fold their clothes each night to the way they eat meals. Transgressions of the myriad rules are swiftly but justly punished.

Prayers: Given their devout obedience to the law and strict adherence to conformity, conversations often begin, "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not." Prayers invoke the fact the cleric believes he is doing the right thing, or that Hothar's divine aid is sought for a righteous cause—"I am beset by enemies of order and..." or "In the name of justice, I..." for example.

Phrases like, "Strength through conformity" and "I hear and obey," are commonplace. Criminals know full well the lexicon of the clergy, and hearing "Halt in the name of the Law" and "I am the Law" is enough to start a panicked run.

Adventures: Hunting down criminals, investigating crimes, and crushing rebellions are all quests typical of Hothar's clergy. City-based quests may involve rooting out a thieves' guild, or bringing corrupt officials to justice. Hired as defense spokesmen, they may have to uncover the truth behind a crime, perhaps facing opposition from those whose idea of justice is far from Hothar's decrees.

Character Generation: Knowledge (Law) is a must have skill for adventuring clerics, as it gives insight into the laws of all the lands. Smarts, Spirit, and Strong-Willed are all handy for resisting the lies and bluffs of those caught in the act of committing a crime. If you're thinking of being a criminal investigator, invest in Investigation, Notice, and Streetwise.

KENAZ

Training: A cleric's training begins by undergoing the rite of coals. This has similarities to the trial of the burning stone, sometimes invoked in legal cases. The cleric must clutch a hot ember in both hands while reciting sacred vows. If the resulting burn heals quickly and cleanly, the recruit may begin training. As worshippers of heat and enemies of winter, they are expected to scorn the cold—ice cold baths and naked runs in snow build up stamina, mock Thrym, and prepare the cleric for the battles ahead. Training is given in identifying and combating Hellfrost beasts.

Prayers: Prayers make reference to heat and forges—"I am tempered by heat, resistant to cold," "I am the anvil against which winter cannot hammer," and "The fire of my heart burns true," for example.

Adventures: Worshippers of Kenaz are constantly busy holding back and warring against Thrym's minions. They defend settlements from frost giants and orcs, escort supplies to the Winterlands, hunt down Hellfrost dragons, and guard fire loci. Ancient ruins may be plundered for fire-related relics to help in the war against Thrym, or searched for knowledge which may help rekindle Kenaz's dying flame.

Character Guidelines: Any adventuring cleric is going to be focused on destroying Hellfrost beasts. While high Vigor and Survival are important for enduring colder realms, combat skills and Edges are really where a cleric should be investing. Given their duties are similar, being a Hearth Knight adds extra abilities in combating Hell-

frost beasts without causing much conflict of interest. Of course, as warriors, a cleric will always find Strength and Spirit vital.

MAERA

Training: Academic training in the occult arts begins from the day the novice enters a temple. Those displaying an aptitude for magic are counseled as to the options open to them, protected and sheltered until their decision is made. Once a student reaches a satisfactory level, he is apprenticed to a mage of each type for a year so he may fully understand their sacred art. After this, the novitiate begins his final training. Over the course of a year he will undergo a rigorous set of practical examinations involving the dispelling of magic.

Prayers: Prayers are never straightforward, for they are not for the ears of mortals, and Maera, goddess of mysteries, knows the hidden meaning behind the words. For example, a cleric might say, "As the heavens hang over the earth and the leaves catch the rain" to mean "Protect me from harm."

Adventures: Anything involving magic or mystery can involve a cleric of Maera. A worshipper might quest to recover a lost relic, lead a rescue party to free a mage from captivity at the hands of orcs and goblins, recover ancient books of magical lore, investigate the Siphoning, destroy Null's cult, or delve into the great mystery of relic creation. They may be called upon to visit a distant realm to deliver a prophecy or investigate a mystery with a magical or mundane focus.

Character Guidelines: If there's one skill that best suits Maera's followers it is Knowledge (Arcana). With a Disciple's ability to cast any spell, albeit at a small penalty, Alchemy allows the cleric to produce a wide-range of devices. Of the attributes, Smarts is most important, though Faith is tied to Spirit and thus, the latter cannot be ignored. Vigor should never be ignored, but Agility and Strength needn't be very high—clerics are ideally suited not to be frontline fighters but ranged combatants and support troops. The basic spell list is quite small, but the spells are tactically very powerful.

NAUTHIZ

Training: Waifs, strays, and orphans are favored recruits, many of whom already know how to survive by their wits and petty larceny.

The first thing a novitiate must do is donate all his worldly possessions to the cult. Naked and devoid of riches, the novice's first test is to win back his goods in games of chance. Different games are played, to give the would-be cultist a good grounding. Once suitably attired, the real training begins.

Students are taught how to pick pockets and cut purses, crack locks and disarm traps, how to move without being sensed. During his apprenticeship, the cleric must donate all his ill-gotten gains to his mentor. Unscrupulous clerics might fail to let a recruit take his

vows for years, thus lining their own pockets through the young thief and gambler's activities. Any thief worth his salt quickly steals back and hides what is rightfully his.

Prayers: Luck is always called upon when praying. Sometimes Nauthiz is called upon as Lord Luck, and other times odds of success may be quoted. Odds are also used when discussing the difficulty of a task. Thus, one never says, "That's going to be tough," but instead might say, "Your chances are 3- to-1 against that working."

Adventures: If you need something found, call on Nauthiz. Tomb-raiding is the bread-and-butter quest for any aspiring worshipper. High-profile activities are lures few can resist. Stealing a king's crown just for the glory, breaking a renowned thief out of prison, adding a new law to the sacred tomes in Hothar's well-guarded temples, and gambling against nobles when you have just two silver scields to rub together, all make for great stories.

Character Guidelines: Nauthiz's clergy need to invest wisely in quite a few skills to cover all their bases. Climbing, Lockpicking, and Stealth are required to take the Thief Edge, which is pretty much a must-have.

Given they are likely to be the ones leading a party, Agility, Vigor, and Notice are all useful for avoiding, surviving, and detecting traps respectively. Gambling, of course, is another skill which the character should take during character generation.

Unfortunately, several Knowledge skills are also useful to Nauthiz's clergy, as is Persuasion and Streetwise. No character can take everything, or be expected to handle every possible situation which might apply to a thief god. To that end, work with the other players so they take some of the burden off your shoulders—otherwise you're going to end up as a very poor generalist.

NEORTHE

Training: All novitiates begin by ritual submersion in water. They are held underwater until their lungs burn, for in all likelihood this is how Neorthe will welcome them to the Afterlife. By facing death by drowning now, the novices learn to respect the ocean and not to fear its watery embrace.

Novices are then apprenticed to ships before beginning any religious training. Until they know how a ship works, until their muscles bulge and ache from rowing day after day, until they can tell when a storm is brewing or the tide turning, or where fish are waiting beneath the surface, they are unworthy to serve. Once deemed worthy, training continues at sea. Clerics are taught the secret songs of the water from a mentor until such time as they are deemed ready to face their final test—single-handedly sailing a small boat a distance of 100 miles and back to port safely.

Prayers: Clerics are fond of making frequent references to the many ports they have visited. "This reminds of when I was in..." is a common way to start a sentence. Prayers always begin with a reference to a similar occurrence that took place in the cleric's life—"As you

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did in Shapryr, protect me now from drunken oafs,” for example.

Adventures: Any water-based adventure suits the clergy well, as this is where their spells are most useful. Diving for sunken treasure, battling pirates, exploring lands across the ocean, defending aquatic fey, and thwarting the evil plans of the kreana all appeal to Neorthe’s worshippers. With ice riggers being popular transportation further north, the clergy can even be of use in land-based tales.

Character Guidelines: Clerics of the sea god need Strength and Vigor (most ships use oars) as well as Boating. Swimming is optional, but recommended. A hero with the Styrimathr Edge begins with a ship, which is a major boon when traveling. Just remember, there is no waterway linking the east and western oceans—if you want to move your boat between the two bodies of water, fit an ice rigger and wait until winter. Steady Hands is a must-have if you’re going to be doing a lot of water travel, as are some Leadership Edges—you’re going to be near a lot of Extras while aboard ship.

Knowledge (Area) is useful, as it can represent the places a hero has visited before his adventuring. Whether you focus on one area or decide a wider number of locations are better is going to depend on the campaign. Alternately, consider Connections Edges as a way of representing old friends or organizations you have helped in your travels. To a lesser extent, Streetwise can cover these bases.

NIHT

Training: Before anyone can join the cult they must have committed murder and not been punished for their wicked act. Placed in a darkened room, they must reveal all their darkest and deepest secrets, not knowing if any one is listening. This is the last time the recruit will be allowed to speak secrets—from now on he is expected to keep all he has learned private except from his goddess.

Since knowledge is abhorred, there is no formal training—novices are expected to be ruthless killers from day one and learn by example. Each year, two trainee clerics are paired. By the end of the year, one of them must be dead at the other’s hands. An aspiring cleric must survive five years before taking his final vows and taking his place beneath Niht’s dark cloak.

Prayers: Worshippers know that Niht has many secrets. Prayers do not call upon Niht to perform deeds or grant wisdom, but ask ignorance to be removed so the cleric can find his own solution to a problem. For example, “Remove the veil of ignorance from my eyes so I might find the true path.”

Adventures: Destroying knowledge is a favored endeavor for Niht’s clergy. They may be called upon to kill enemy scouts or military commanders, steal vital plans or valuable tomes, assassinate scholars and fortunetellers, torch libraries, conceal access to ancient tombs, uncover a noble’s darkest secrets, or aid the Reliquary in recovering and concealing a powerful relic.

Character Guidelines: If Stealth isn’t at least as high, if not higher, than your Faith something is wrong. Clerics have access to spells which can boost Stealth, but you can never count on them being active when you need them. Similarly, a good Notice is vital for moving round in the dark when miracles aren’t available. Other than these two, you need to think about what sort of cleric you want to play. Assassins, for instance, need to focus on combat, whereas those who raid tombs to destroy the knowledge they contain should be more thievish.

THE NORNS

Training: Although the Norns accept clerics of both sexes, all training is carried out by female clerics on a one-to-one basis. Novitiates must first accept that there is both free will and no free will simultaneously. The Norns do not shape every second of a man’s life, but only the most important events. The hard part is telling what is destiny and what is not, for what seems important may be inconsequential and a turning point in history may pass as an



insignificant deed or word. Clerics then learn the art of divination and how to glimpse into the near future.

Prayers: Nothing except death is certain to the Norns' followers. Hence, prayers never make demands of the Norns, but are always phrased that if something is meant to happen it will. Many prayers begin, "If it be woven that..."

When something goes well for a cleric, he thanks the Norns for weaving it thus. When something goes wrong, he can shrug it off with, "The skein of my life was woven long ago" or "What will be will be," rather than brooding on it. Dwelling on past events is considered pointless, for the matter is done and gone, and cannot be changed no matter how hard one tries.

Adventures: Undead, golems, and demons are anathema to the cult, and are hunted down and destroyed at every opportunity. Adventuring clerics are often woven into the destiny of others. For example, if the cleric helps a party slay an orc chieftain, then the character is there because that is what the Norns' had fated. As such, any type of adventure can involve one of the Norns' clergy.

Character Guidelines: The Norns allow great freedom when it comes to skills and Edges. A cleric might be a scholar, healer, or warrior, as fits his view on how he helps others fulfill their destiny—some guide gently, some manipulate from the shadows, and others actively push heroes along their preordained path.

RIGR

Training: Rigr expects his clergy to be vigilant and observant. Candidates hoping to join the cult are kept waiting for long hours, sometimes days or even weeks. At some point, a small signal will be given that the hopeful has been selected. Failure to spot the sign results in dismissal.

Once accepted, students are subjected to long periods of sleep and sensory deprivation followed by tests of the five senses, thus teaching stamina as well as vigilance. For instance, a student may spend a week in a blacked out room, kept awake by banging drums and fed at random intervals to fool his body clock. He is then led outside into brilliant sunshine and within seconds will pass or fail a test—perhaps an archer hits him with a blunt arrow or he steps onto a trap.

Only when his senses are ready is he taught how to detect intruders by the way animals respond, how to spot movement in fog by the way the mist swirls, how to tell the snap of a twig caused by a bear to one caused by an orc, and so on. Knowledge of how to construct and maintain defenses is drilled into the recruit until it becomes second nature.

Prayers: Worshippers begin prayers by informing Rigr they are ready for whatever comes their way— "Devoted to my duty I stand, alert and ready, never wavering in my oath" is a common way to start.

Adventures: While not hunters in the same way as Ullr's followers are, Rigr's clerics possess all the necessary skills to help hunt down monsters, find that which

is lost, and act as scouts and guides. Through the god's aspects of warnings, clerics may serve as messengers, bringing word of invasion to nobles and city leaders. In towns and cities, they may be called upon to use their observational skills to aid in criminal investigations.

Character Guidelines: Unless you want to be a constant sinner, Notice should be your favored skill and Alertness the second Edge you write down (after your Arcane Background). Equipped with these, the cleric is ideally placed to honor his god. Expanding the repertoire, one should look at Tracking. Although it isn't a vital part of the cleric's duties, it ties in nicely to his mastery of the senses. Seeing as how the cleric is likely to be the one pulling late night guards shifts after a day's adventuring, Vigor is handy for staying off sleep. As defenders of settlements, Leadership Edges are useful, though not required.

SCAETHA

Training: Young orphans, children who have survived raids in which their kith and kin were slain, and those who have lost a close loved ones, are preferred candidates, for they have seen death first hand and mourned. To ensure they can cope with death, all young recruits are taken to battlefields and tombs to witness death.

Before they learn how to fight undead, all novitiates learn the funeral rites of the civilized races, for attending funerals will form part of their core duties. During this time they are stripped of their humor, for that plays no part in their faith. After undergoing weapon training, each novice is assigned a mentor. The novice follows the mentor wherever he goes. Those who die as novices, assuming they do so without sin, are assured a place in Scaetha's celestial army.

Before he takes his final vows, the novice must have visited the tomb of the Liche-Priest with his mentor. Here he is told the stories of old and shown the decaying seal. He is warned of the tide of darkness which will flow across Rassilon if the ward is broken, and informed that only the clerics of Scaetha stand between salvation and damnation. As his final test, he must battle against and personally slay a number of undead.

Prayers: Scaetha's prayers are present tense affirmations of their willingness to tread where others fear, such as "I stand in the darkness, unafraid of death, for She is my companion."

Adventures: Battling undead is where clerics of Scaetha find employment, though stopping a necromantic cabal or protecting a graveyard from robbers is also part of their mission. While they may explore tombs for relics useful to their cause, they must refrain from desecration and looting—activities many adventuring parties find acceptable.

Character Guidelines: Adventuring clerics are going to face many threats. The first to overcome is fear, so take Spirit. Given their focus, Favored Foe (Undead) is going to be useful, as is Necromantic Severing when you reach the right Rank. No cleric can afford to scrimp on

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his combat abilities, though Leadership Edges are not as important as general Combat Edges. A few dice in Healing never hurts, though can be avoided if you have the healing spell or there is a more dedicated party healer. Smarts is the weakest attribute, though that is not to say it should be completely ignored—Spirit, Strength, and Vigor are just more useful to a warrior.

SIGEL

Training: Most citizens like to think they're basically good people. Sigel's clergy know better. Candidates are required to admit all their sins, for until the soul is cleansed of this weight, one cannot worship Sigel with honesty. Throughout training, the novitiate must constantly purge his soul of sins through confession and ritual cleansing. Transgressions known to the clergy that are not recanted are beaten out before they can tarnish the cleric's soul for eternity.

Prayers: Sigel's prayers always begin by asking for purification for sins committed. For example, "Bathe me radiant light and cleanse me of my sins." Clerics are fond of quoting righteous scripture and begin such statements with, "Sigel teaches us that..." Worshipers try to refrain from cursing.

Adventures: Darkness lurks everywhere and must be cleansed. Wherever there is evil, the clergy of Sigel are expected to battle it. Because of this, any adventure that promises a clash between good and evil is acceptable to Sigel's clergy. Adventures needn't involve orcs or giants, though—closing down a brothel, thwarting a slavery ring, and slaying followers of Niht and Vali is perfectly good work. Any investigation into why the sun is fading is likely to be of interest to a cleric.

Character Guidelines: Aside from pretty much having to take Spirit (for being able to face the forces of darkness without panicking) and Notice (so you can hunt down foes in the dark), worshippers of Sigel have a great deal of free choice. Sigel demands his clergy defeat darkness, but he doesn't force them down any one path. Yes, paladins are warriors of the faith and should build accordingly, but priests might be scholars or healers first and warriors second.

THRYM

Training: In order to be accepted into the cult one must kill a cleric of Kenaz or Sigel or a fire elemental in single combat. Ambushes and assassination are fine, but no ranged weapons may be used—the victim must be slain in melee. As the victim dies, the candidate must repeat the oath, "By your death the sun weakens/by your death the warmth fades/by your death the winter grows." The novice must then journey into the Winterlands (in winter) and survive a blizzard lasting at least four hours. If he does, Thrym grants him his miraculous powers.

Prayers: Entreaties are always performed naked and when the temperature is below freezing. Praying at any other time is an insult to Thrym. Prayers are always made

in the plural—the blizzard is made of many snowflakes working together—and must include an admission of weakness. For instance, "We stand in the blizzard, weak and powerless before your might."

Adventures: The promotion of the Fimbulvindr takes many forms. Heroes may be asked to fight cultists of Kenaz and Sigel, locate and destroy or recover relics, spread chaos and fear in the Hearthlands, escort tribute to a Hellfrost dragon or frost giant jarl, serve either of the afore-mentioned, or lead orcs and ice goblins in battle.

Character Guidelines: Thrym expects his worshippers to promote the Fimbulvindr by whatever means they can. To that end, they have no favored archetypes. That said, unless you're playing a frostborn, a high Vigor is absolutely vital for coping with the cold—Thrym forbids clerics to warm themselves, remember. Given that at some point you'll end up taking orders from a Hellfrost dragon, a good Spirit die is vital to helping one avoid showing too much fear.

THUNOR

Training: Thunor's clergy are educated outside. They study the different types of winds and clouds, and learn Thunor's mythology. Philosophy and conundrums with no set answers are debated, so encouraging the novitiate to set aside preconceived ideas and adapt as a situation unfolds. His clerics can be eloquent orators, speaking out against oppression and tyranny, encouraging the acceptance of new ideas over tradition, and promoting the idea of free will over ordained destiny.

Prayers: Rumbling drums or clashing cymbals always accompanies worship. As mentioned in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide*, prayers are generally written on kites and sent skyward. When spoken words are required, there is no set standard—reliance on defined methods of worship promotes stagnation.

Adventures: Thunor's clerics liberate the oppressed. A village beset by rapacious orcs, a prisoner wrongly incarcerated, prisoners of orcs and goblins—all require Thunor's help. At the same time they are explorers and seekers of new ideas, so exploring an old tomb or delivering someone or something to a distant land is likely to appeal. The more varied the quests the better, for stagnation and repetition is abhorred.

Character Guidelines: As travelers, Survival is an important skill, for there will be long periods when the cleric is away from civilization. Curiosity is a valued trait, but stubbornness is not, for clerics should always be open to new ideas. Beyond these simple guidelines, clerics are given total freedom to pick and choose skills and Edges, for Thunor's clergy have no single defining goal.

TIW

Training: Tiw's militaristic cult is run like an army. Instructors put recruits through punishing boot camps to test their physical fitness. Recruits must be able to handle a barrage of threats, taunts, and beatings, for the

life of warrior is a harsh one, and those who cannot cope will soon feed the ravens. Once basic training is complete, cadets are trained in how to wear armor and carry shields, undergoing long marches to boost their stamina. Only then are they allowed to handle weapons, and at first only blunt or wooden ones. Frequent formation drills, such as forming the shieldwall, are held, as are mock battles. Recruits who show the right qualities are trained in command roles and given tactical and strategic training by Knights Hrafn loyal to the cult.

Prayers: Prayers before battle begin with the cleric boasting his prowess—"I shall feed the ravens this day," and "My arm is strong and battle is in my blood." Worshipers also state their lineage to honor Tiw and intimidate enemies—"I am <list family heritage>, and today I shall honor my ancestors." Those after battle celebrate the worshipper's survival—"I am victorious, my arm still strong and ready to serve."

Tiw's followers have many exclamations, oaths, battle cries, and taunts. "Tiw's shield!" and "Tiw's sword!" are common exclamations. Although often little more than brutish thugs, a few have shown great talent at making inspiring speeches. Such orations are always short and to the point, designed to inspire, not bore.

Adventures: Where there is battle there are worshipers of Tiw. Whether serving as huscarls or mercenaries, followers or commanders, fighting is the lifeblood of the clergy. Clerics may find they face old comrades in battle. Tiw is not a god of comradeship but of courage and victory, and what better test can one face to prove one's loyalty to the creed?

Character Guidelines: Priest or paladin, you are going to be in the thick of the action. While Smarts has its uses, especially if you want to be a commander-type, Agility, Spirit, Strength, and Vigor are all far more useful for a dedicated fighter.

Naturally, Combat Edges should be taken frequently, though which ones will vary with your character type—an archer needs different skills to a cavalryman, who requires different ones to a frontline tank, who differs from a bodyguard. The same applies to skills—any combat skill is going to be essential. When it comes to social skills most clerics stop at Intimidation.

ULLR

Training: Most candidates wanting to join Ullr's cult are from rural communities, though a few city-dwellers feel the call of the wild in their hearts. All education is practical, taking the form of identifying animal tracks and spoor, stalking, and archery. Novitiates are also taught how animals' behavior changes during the year, when beasts may be hunted, and how to make best use of every ounce of an animal. Tests involve the novitiate living off the land for extended periods in isolation.

Once a candidate feels ready for his final test, he must venture into the wilds for no less than one month, living off the land. He may make contact with settlements, but accepting any form of hospitality or charity, whether

healing, assistance in a hunt, food, or shelter, is forbidden.

Prayers: Worshipers make frequent mention of animals in their prayers. Very rarely do they employ flowery speech, for Ullr is a god of deeds, not words, and leads a simple, uneducated life. For example, a cleric looking for shelter from a storm might say, "Like the bear, I seek a cave." Insults often compare people to animals. Someone who whines a lot may be accused of bleating like a sheep, whereas someone who talks tough but shuns battle may be compared to a wolf.

Adventures: Any threat to wild animals a community relies on for food is going to be investigated by the cult. (Threats to livestock are typically handled by a cleric of Eostre Animalmother, though the two cults do cooperate.) Thus, goblin and orc raiding parties must be stopped, as must the activities of large predators, like dragons, and more common ones like rogue wolves. Clerics might be hired to act as a guide or tracker, thus opening them up to a variety of adventures—whoever kidnapped the noble's daughter likely left some tracks.

Character Guidelines: As trackers and hunters, Woodsman is the most appropriate Edge for Ullr's clergy. Survival and Tracking are core skills, with Notice, Shooting (or Throwing), and Stealth very close behind. Rarely serving as frontline fighters, clerics should also consider Edges like Dodge, Fleet-Footed, and Marksman ahead of ones like Frenzy and Sweep.

Attribute-wise, Smarts is highly useful since many of the required skills are linked to it, as is Vigor for being able to withstand the elements. Strength need only be high if the cleric intends to use thrown weapons; otherwise, Agility is more useful.

THE UNKNOWABLE ONE

Training: No one chooses to be a cleric of the Unknowable One—the god chooses them. The Unknowable One favors three types of individuals. First, there are the most arrogant, vain, self-centered, and cocky individuals his heralds can locate. Second, those already renowned for performing tricks are singled out. Third, those who have been the butt of jokes all their lives, perhaps because of a stutter, mental illness, or physical deformity, are singled-out. No formal training is given—suitable candidates simply awaken to find they are clerics of the Unknowable One.

Prayers: As is the Unknowable One's way, he makes no set demands on how prayers must be made. Jokes, songs, stories, and limericks are all acceptable. Most often, the worshipers add a caveat, such as "...and I pray that never happens to me" or "... and let me enjoy the same." Exclamations should always be colorful, and preferably at the expense of the other gods. For example, "Thunor's ass!" or "Scaetha's humor!"

Adventures: Arrogance and ignorance are everywhere. Any quest is an opportunity to teach somebody something. Bards and skalds might adventure so as to have new material, and thus might accompany a band

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of would-be heroes wherever they go, recording their deeds for posterity.

Character Guidelines: As masters of trickery, no cleric can afford to ignore his Agility and Smarts. Using Intimidation is a sin, which presents for an interesting quandary—it is a requirement for Strong Willed, which boosts Taunt (a vital skill) and helps resist Tests of Will. While paladins teach through combat tricks, and this requires good combat skills and Edges, priests have less focus. To that end, the priest has more freedom when it comes to picking a focus.

VALI

Training: Clerics are not recruited into service so much as corrupted. Those already sick of flesh are greatly favored by one faction, while individuals with a reputation for treachery and depraved ways by the other. Those who favor Vali's pestilence aspect are locked in filthy, rat-infested holes and forced to consume food until they reach obese levels. Every month, as a reward for progress, they are allowed to indulge in whatever depravity they desire—there are no limits within Vali's cult.

Those who wish to become servants of Vali's corruption aspect must first experience vice and depravity before they lead others unto it. After being thoroughly corrupted, they are taught how to find the weakness within men's hearts and manipulate it. At some point during his training a student will betray the cleric to the authorities. Evidence is left pointing to another student. Assuming he survives incarceration, the betrayed novice is expected to get revenge.

Prayers: All prayers begin, "Bless me, Vali, for I am a sinner." This isn't an admission of guilt or request for forgiveness, but a reassurance the cleric has stained his soul. Typically, the worshipper lists a few of his choice sins before asking anything of Vali.

The general populace often invokes Vali in exclamations and curses. "A pox on you!" is by far the most common curse, and while it doesn't name the god of pestilence, it is obviously a reference to him.

Adventures: Any opportunity to cause famine, spread disease, or corrupt a virtuous soul (the more important the better) is going to attract Vali's clergy. Doing someone a favor without immediate reward is favorable, as that now leaves the other party indebted to you. While a cleric's return favor may seem innocuous, it almost always leads to some form of corruption or sin.

Character Guidelines: Corruptors and Unseen Hands are a better choice for player characters over Plaguebearers and Verminlords (who make great NPC villains). Given that Persuasion and Streetwise are important skills, Charisma should be boosted to take best advantage. Connections is a useful Edge, especially if linked to a more insidious group—this way you get to help the party by providing them with allies, though they may be forced to taint their souls by dealing with unsavory characters they'd normally avoid.

By far the best weapon a cleric of Vali wields is the

player's roleplaying abilities. You can't use Persuasion on another player character to get him to perform a corrupt act, so you need to be a master manipulator, making suggestions toward certain courses of action without saying, "Do this!" The path to damnation is all the more enjoyable, for the cleric, if the victim walks it of his own free will.

VAR

Training: Both paladins and priests begin apprenticed to a priest of the faith. The first year is spent as a menial assistant, packing and unpacking the store, and carrying boxes and crates around the warehouses.

Second year novitiates are apprenticed to a paladin, where they are trained in ways to detect thieves and pick-pockets, as well as physical exercise.

In the third year, instruction is given in identifying and valuing trade goods, how to haggle effectively, how to write accounts (and hide profits from tax inspectors), as well as the social skills necessary to negotiate a successful contract. While never given control of a market stall or allowed to conduct trade deals, they are expected to be present, so as to learn the basics.

In their final year, students are given a small quantity of trade goods and an end-of-year profit figure, and then let loose on the unsuspecting market-goers of Rassilon. Naturally, the profit required is far higher than the value of the initial goods—clerics must buy and sell repeatedly to reach their target. If the cleric fails to make enough profit, he must redo his third year studies again.

Prayers: Var gives nothing for free, for there is no profit in charity. As such, prayers are intoned as contracts in which the god gives the worshipper something in return for a future favor. Such favors are usually extra offerings, thus rewarding Var financially. Hence, all prayers begin, "Master Merchant, I propose a contract between our two parties that is beneficial to us both."

Adventures: Money and obscure, historical, or just plain valuable items are important to clerics. Any expedition could be a chance to turn a profit (and one that is tax free) and travel not only broadens the mind, but also the pockets, as it brings the cleric to new markets.

Character Guidelines: Clerics who favor the mercantile side of Var should consider Persuasion and Streetwise as their most useful skills, with Connections Edges representing their many contacts. Common languages are more useful than obscure ones, since you need to be able to talk to your customers and read contracts (not everyone speaks Trader, and most people prefer to use their native tongue).

Paladins are going to need Notice to spot thieves before they strike (and to notice if goods have been taken), and maybe Alertness if they can spare the Edge slot, to perform their duties. For catching those pesky thieves, Fleet-Footed is a powerful tool. Intimidation can help thieves return goods without the need for messy bloodshed. Remember, your job is only to stop thieves—not arrest them.

CEREMONIES, FESTIVALS & RITUALS



Whether they worship a major or a minor deity, clerics perform rituals and officiate at ceremonies and festivals throughout the year. For the most part these rituals are minor affairs and non-intrusive into the cleric's life. In many cases they are performed as part of the cleric's daily routine or encompassed into his work.

They can usually be ignored or handled with a brief description. Sometimes, though, rituals can be useful tools. GM's can work them into adventures, either as a backdrop or the main focus, or insert mention of them to make the world seem more vibrant and realistic. Rituals are not just for clergy, though they officiate at them—citizens who have a god as their patron must participate in these ceremonies, and many celebrations are open to members of all faiths.

In this chapter are detailed many important ceremonies for each of the greater gods. The list is not exclusive—although communities may share the same deity, their rituals are often personalized. Some communities hold unique festivals as well. If the GM gets a cool idea, he should use it without worrying about whether it is canonical or not.

IMPORTANCE OF RITUALS

The sentient denizens of Rassilon are in no doubt the gods exist—the use of miracles and appearance of heralds precludes atheism. Even people who chose to follow no deity do not argue against their existence.

In *Hellfrost*, there is no scientific explanation for natural phenomena, nor is one required. The sun rises because it is Sigel. Crops grow thanks to Eostre Plant-mother. Earthquakes are the movement of Ertha in her subterranean hall. Undead stalk the night because of Hela. Winter comes each year because Thrym is active. The wind, whether gentle breezing or raging storms, is Thunor's breath. If things go wrong, it is because the mortal worshippers failed in some way, such as performing rituals incorrectly or without sufficient devotion, or due to the direct interference of another deity.

So too are ceremonies a part of everyday life. From

the day they were old enough to walk and talk, every inhabitant has taken part in them. Some players might see participation as a distraction from killing monsters and looting treasure, but their characters would see it as the right thing to do, something expected of them as members of their culture. To neglect a ritual might, after all, carry with it unfortunate consequences.

GMs using the *Resource Management* and/or *Resource Miracles* rules are encouraged to tie the miracles into a specific custom, ceremony, or ritual. While this changes nothing in the rules, it makes the process more than just a die roll. Such times are always handy backdrops for Resource events, as well a source of potential adventure.

HOLY DAYS

Clerics don't suffer the Siphoning, but they are subject to sins and having to observe rituals, ceremonies, and festivals honoring their deity. Most faiths have holy days and/or high holy days—days important to the god when the clergy are expected to pay due homage at the expense of other activities.

A holy day, despite its name, is rarely an entire day. Typically the cleric must devote at least 1d4 hours to prayers, meditation, singing, or whatever other activity his deity finds pleasing. Failure to observe a holy day for any reason is considered a minor sin.

A high holy day involves a special ritual, such as those described below, and often lasts all day or night, as appropriate. Failure to observe the ceremony for any reason is a major sin.

● DARGAR ●

COUNTING THE HEADS DAY

First night of the Deorcmonan in Wulfmonan

Dargar's bloodthirsty ways began when he was but a

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youth. Each year on his birthday, he would present the heads of those he had slain to his father in an attempt to win Tiw's approval. Tiw never once praised the boy, but Dargar remains confident he will one day succeed.

Throughout the year, worshippers of Dargar take the heads of foes they have slain as trophies. On the day of the ceremony, they bring their collections to their temple to be counted. The cultist with the lowest tally is ritually slain and his corpse hacked apart and burned—to eat the flesh of a weakling is to inherit his flaws. Failure to attend carries with it an automatic death sentence. Afterward, the flesh is boiled off the gathered heads and eaten. The skulls are then placed in the temple.

CULLING THE WEAK DAY

Any Deorcmonan (local high priest decides)

Once a year all the half-starved, half-crazed captives of a temple are armed and forced to fight each other to the death. Those who refuse are brutally tortured and then mutilated in front of the other prisoners. In some instances, the winner is ritually sacrificed and his flesh devoured so as to strengthen Dargar. In other instances, he may be insane and violent enough to be offered membership in the cult. The carcasses of all those slain are eaten by the worshippers throughout the year.

DRINKING THE BLOOD DAY

When required

Although the cult is a bloodthirsty collection of psychopathic killers, there are folk who actively want to join. Some wish membership because they are insane, while others enjoy carnage and bloodshed. The most dangerous members are those who wish to join because they believe the weak are holding back the rest of society and must be culled. In order to be accepted, a candidate must kill all those closest to him, drink their blood, and bring their severed heads to the temple. Anyone sick enough to do this is granted membership.

NIGHT OF RED SNOW

Any night between Fogmonan and Frostmonan when the moon is dark or shrouded by heavy cloud

On this dark night cultists of Dargar gather in secret to prepare for an act of savage butchery. With faces smeared in congealed blood they descend on a remote farmstead or village like a pack of rabid wolves, slaughtering the entire population without mercy. The raiders do not take captives or treasure this night—they kill to sate Dargar's thirst and bless his eyes with a cacophony of terrified screaming. Once the cultists have finished their work, victims are dismembered, gutted, decapitated, partially eaten, or nailed to the sides of their houses.

As the dawn nears, the cultists retreat back into the wilderness. Often the attacks are timed to coincide with heavy snowfall. Non-cultists who know of the ritual claim this snow is not sent by Thrym directly, but by Eira. Ap-

palled by the senseless massacre, her tears fall to earth, freezing in the winter air to conceal the bloody crime.

Perhaps the mutilated bodies of the victims will lay undiscovered until the spring thaw. Maybe a passing merchant or hunter braving winter will seek shelter, only to discover a grisly sight. All that is guaranteed is that when the corpses are discovered the screaming will begin again, and the Lord of Terror will laugh.



BANISHING DAY

First Milcdaeg of Sowanmonan

It is widely believed that fell spirits of Vali cause diseases. In one story, Vali tried to kill Tiw by slipping a disease spirit into his mead. Eira and the powerful spirit fought for days, but eventually the goddess of mercy was victorious. Healers celebrate this day by banging drums and shouting loudly to drive away spirits harmful to the body, mind, and soul. It is an auspicious day to brew antibiotic herbal remedies and a bad day to fall ill.

BED BLESSING DAY

Third Marketdaeg of Falmonan

With the crops stored, the citizens of Rassilon prepare for the long winter nights. Married couples have their beds blessed by a cleric of Eira to increase the chances of producing a healthy baby in the late spring. Before the Anari occupation, it was traditional for clerics to bless the bed by engaging in lovemaking with the husband or wife (as appropriate) to ensure fertility. This version of the ceremony occurs only among cultists of Gersemi (p. 78) these days.

GREAT HEALING DAY

Sangdaeg of Werremonan

Once the killing season has ended, the clergy of Eira gather at their temples to conduct a powerful ritual in order to wipe the blood from Rassilon's soil. This ritual emulates one Eira performed at the end of the God War. The sick and infirmed from the local community gather here as well, for on this day all healing is free (though each patient receives only one spell or Healing roll). Between dawn and dusk, clerics sing songs of peace and healing while tending to the sick.

NO HEALING DAY

Raestdaeg of Hegmonan

During the God War, Eira's skills were in much demand. Exhausted by her efforts at healing the injured and trying to broker a peace deal, Eira fell asleep for a short while. During her brief nap, dozens of minor gods and celestial beings were slain. On waking, Eira was mor-

tified by the loss of life and wept for an entire year in an attempt to wash away the bloodstains of the fallen. This event led to Eira's vow that she would never rest while others needed her help.

Clerics are forbidden from performing any healing, magical or mundane, on this day, and from creating or selling curative herbal brews or alchemical devices. To do otherwise is a major sin. The minor sin of not refusing to heal a good person in need is not negated on this day—virtually all clergy will sin this day. Not being able to help those in need causes great heartache to the clergy, as it did Eira, but only through being unable to aid the suffering can the clergy truly understand the sacred vow they have sworn.

Many clerics weep all day, recalling the names and faces of those their magic and healing arts failed to help, and mourning the countless masses of citizens who died during the last year.

● EOSTRE ●

Eostre has two aspects. Those marked (P) refer to her Plantmother aspect and (A) to her Animalmother aspect. No markings indicate a joint ritual.

APPLE DAY (P)

Sangdaeg of Wulfmonan and Sangdaeg of Frostmonan

Apple Day is the original name for this ceremony, but different settlements honor it depending on what fruit is cultivated or that grow wild in the local area. For instance, in the vineyards of Aspiria it is honored as Grape Day.

Citizens carrying flaming torches gather near the orchards, fields, or bushes once the sun sets. Clerics carry drums, horns, and symbols. Trays of specially made bread soaked in mead or honey are laid out on long tables. Each citizen takes a slice of bread and places it on a tree, plant, or bush. In the early winter this sustains the tree during the cold winter months, while in late winter it provides the waking tree with breakfast.

Once this is done, the gathered crowd shouts wildly and loudly while the clerics play their instruments—no tune is created, just a cacophony of noise. Again, the two festivals have differing reasons. In late winter this din drives away mischievous fey and foul spirits, thus ensuring next season's crop will be bountiful. Come the new year, the noise awakens the tree in preparation for spring.

BIRTHING DAY

Varies

Birthing Day marks the official start of spring. Spring has no fixed beginning in the calendar, starting instead whenever the local priestess of Eostre declares winter to have ended.

Traditionally this is when the first lamb is born to the temple's flock. Thus it is held in different seasons and on different days the length and breadth of Rassilon. The ceremony can last as long as a week, and always begins on the first Heafoddaeg after spring is declared.

Three maidens from the local community are picked by lot or rune divination. The first assumes the role of the Eostre Queen, representing the beauty of spring. The second is the Eostre Princess, and is the incarnation of the fertility of all living beings. The third maiden is the Eostre Maiden is the embodiment of the earth's fertility. During the festival the maidens are showered with gifts, for they are the living embodiment of Eostre.

While all communities have their own ritual, it is commonplace for the local nobility to hold extravagant festivals for their citizens. Some settlements hold contests where the winners are married off to the maidens (hence they have to be maidens). Others reward victors with gold, jewels, cattle, or land. Feasts are put together from the remaining winter supplies, fields and animals blessed by the many clerics in attendance, and songs of welcoming sung to the plants and animals of the world awakening from their winter slumber.

The final day is the grand ceremony to Eostre, at which animals and crops are sacrificed and their blood sprinkled on the soil, alcohol is drunk by the barrel load, couples get frisky, and prayers are offered to all the benevolent gods. Marriages between the maidens and contest winners are always held at this time.

Giving birth on this day is a good omen for the child's future, though because the festival date changes, planning ahead is difficult.

Note: The adventure *The Eostre Festival* in *Adventure Compendium 1* is set around at a Birthing Day festival.

COURTSHIP DAY

Second Waesdaeg of Eostremonan

Trapped in their communities over winter, young men and women have little to do but eye each other up as potential mates and try to sneak the occasional dance at one of the many festivals held to stave off winter depression. Courtship Day is the traditional day to officially begin wooing a maiden. It is also the day many fathers begin sharpening their weapons.

Young men are under no obligation to ask a father's permission to court his daughter, but it rarely hurts to at least introduce oneself formally. If the wooer approaches a father, the father is obligated to provide the young man with a feast. During the meal the father politely but firmly interrogates the youth as to his social status, family history, and romantic intentions toward his daughter.

The laws of hospitality prevent the host from beating his guests if he is less than honest, but once outside the door he is fair game. The Saxa have an old saying, "If the father follows you to the door, pray to Freo and run."

Many marriages are held on this day, as it is an auspicious time. Couples who have exchanged life bond oaths renew them on this day as a sign of continuing

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commitment and a reaffirmation of love. Courtship Day is also considered an auspicious time to get pregnant, something protective fathers are all too aware of.

HERBALISM DAY (P)

Second Monandaeg of Haerfestmonan

Eostre thought she knew everything about plants. She could name every species of tree, bush, plant, and root, and could tell at a glance what purpose it served. Maera was passing Eostre's garden when she saw Hoenir departing, his face glum. Maera enquired as to why Hoenir looked so upset, whereupon the god of knowledge said Eostre had a problem he could not solve. Curious, Maera walked through the gate to find Eostre.

On seeing Maera, Eostre handed her a leaf and asked if she knew what the thin lines were, for she had not seen them before. Maera studied the leaf closely, and then smiled. "Yes sister," she said, "I know what these are. As you know, I have discovered that a thread of energy, which I call magic, touches every object. It seems your plants have sucked up extra threads from the soil and have bound them into their very being." Maera then worked with Eostre to find a way to unleash the energy, and so herbalism was created.

Worshippers spend the day crafting herbal brews or helping an herbalist in her work. All creations worked this day must be donated to the next temple of Eostre the herbalist visits or she will suffer bad luck (GM's discretion on how this works). These are then sold to provide the temple with funds for other projects.

HERDING DAY (A)

First Heafoddaeg of spring, summer, fall, and winter

On each of the four Herding Days, every settlement which makes use of the temple presents a fine animal at the temple doors. The beast is thoroughly inspected by the clergy and either accepted or rejected. Acceptance means Eostre Animalmother will protect the settlement's livestock for the season, whereas rejection bodes ill for the stingy community. Failure to deliver a beast bodes very poorly indeed.

In the Hearthlands and Low Winterlands, a sow is traditionally offered in spring, a ewe in summer, a female ox in the fall, and in winter a milk cow. Further north, reindeer are offered every season—females in winter, spring, and summer, and a male in fall. When in dire need of divine succor, a community will even offer a pygmy mammoth.

The animals are not sacrificed immediately, but rather added to the temple's private herds, thus increasing its wealth. By mating the beast with the temple's resident livestock, it ensures a steady supply of sacrificial beasts is always available for holy days.

PURIFICATION DAY (A)

First Sunnandaeg of Sowanmonan

Although primarily a festival to Sigel, it is also an important day for Eostre Animalmother. See p. 31 for details.

REAPING DAY (P)

First Heafoddaeg of Hegmonan

The festival marks the start of the main harvest season, when the first cereals are cut. The men of the community begin the ceremony by lining up with their scythes and sickles outside the temple or shrine at dawn. When they are assembled, the clerics work down the line. Each man is required to run his thumb down the blade of his tool, drawing blood as he does so. A cleric catches the trickle of blood in a chalice. Any tools found to be blunt are honed by paladins to a fine edge. The owner must make a cut on each thumb as penance.

This act of self-harm serves three important purposes. First, it proves the tools are sharp and ready to be used. Second, Eostre is believed to be present in all plants, and cutting them causes the goddess pain. The drawing of blood is a symbolic gesture to show the harvesters share Eostre's pain and value her sacrifice. Third, the collected blood is sprinkled on the fields to replenish the life energy Eostre loses during harvest.

When each tool has been checked, the clerics bless both the men and tools, absolving them of the sin of harming the goddess. With the ceremony complete, the highest-ranking cleric leads the men into the fields. Under her direct supervision, one of the men is chosen to make the first cut while singing the Reaping Song, a tune whose rhythm keeps the men working in unison and staves off fatigue during the long hours in the fields.

STONE PICKING DAY (P)

Last Heafoddaeg of Eostremonan

Before plowing can begin the fields must be cleared of stones. Clerics lead the women and children into the fields at dawn for the backbreaking task. Clerics sing to keep spirits high and to bless the soil. Some of the songs are to Ertha, a warding that any deep stones sink lower into the soil so as not to damage the plows that will rake the soil later. The collected stones are divided into four equal piles and stacked at the corners of the field from where they were collected as boundary markers.

The ritual marks a rivalry between Ertha and Eostre. Eostre demanded she be allowed to seed the soil, but Ertha claimed all the earth was hers. In the end Ertha set Eostre a task—if she could clear the area of all stones by nightfall, Ertha would grant her the topsoil for her seeds for a year. Despite Ertha throwing stones in Eostre's path, the nature goddess won the bet. The two compete each year in the same bargain.

SUMMER AND WINTER COURT DAY

First Milcdaeg of spring and fall

Two courts govern the enigmatic fey—the Seelie,

who are active in spring and summer, and the Unseelie, who prefer autumn and fall. Each year, the two courts exchange seniority as the seasons switch. The Unseelie have taken the wording literally rather than symbolically as was intended, and thus hold power for longer in the Winterlands than they do in the Hearthlands.

Rural communities welcome the new court by leaving gifts of milk, bread, and cheese outside their houses on the night before these holy days. In spring, the offerings must be the freshest available to avoid offense, while in fall curdled milk, stale bread, and moldy or hard cheese are considered an appropriate gift.

Doors are barred, shutters secured, and folk off the street by dusk on these nights, for it is said the fey dance through the countryside with wild abandon, dragging any mortals they spy with them. Such folk are never seen again. Many folk block their ears, for other stories say that those who hear the faeries' music are compelled to join the dance.

During the evening, the community holds an all-night feast in the largest building available to bid farewell to the old court and welcome the new one. Loud music and raucous dancing follows. Skalds often attend these ceremonies, singing songs of the fey, while clerics of the Unknowable One attend because the fey are associated with tricks and taunts. Clerics also sell wards to protect against the fey, though as is typical with the Trickster and his gifts, none who purchase these charms are willing to test if they actually work by stepping outdoors. Those who last the night will swear come the dawn the charm worked, of course.

During the night many strange sounds will be heard, like footsteps on roofs, scratching at door and windows, distant voices calling, and faint music drifting on the wind. That these could have an earthly cause (like cats on the roof or scratching to get in to the warm homes, voices from passing travelers, or music from a neighboring village) is unthinkable—anything even remotely odd is attributed to the fey.

If the offerings are gone in the morning the faeries have accepted the offer. While their court remains in power, the faeries won't bother the community (unless any mortals provoke the faeries, of course). If the offerings are left behind it means the court is unhappy—the settlement will be subjected to the faeries' mischievous or malevolent tricks until the courts change.



FEEDING DAY

Second Marketdaeg of Huntianmonan

All followers of Eostre are expected to return metal and gems to the earth on this day, with clerics donating a larger amount. Whereas Eostre's crops are fruit, vegetables, and cereals, in Ertha's fields grow metal and mineral ores and gemstones. In order to ensure the

crops grow next year, a portion must be returned to the earth.

Throughout the day, worshippers make their way to temples or deep holes in the earth to toss in their offerings. Any hole is acceptable so long as no one knows the location of the bottom. Placing an offering in a well or other body of water is a grave offense, for these offerings go to Neorthe, not Ertha. Just to make sure no one can use the hoard, coins are cut in half or bent, swords and weapons snapped in twain, mineral ore tainted with other ores that while not harmful or offensive to Ertha make refining them more effort than it is worth, and gems smashed or cut so as to be useless in jewelry.

FOUNDING DAY

Varies, but only honored by frost dwarves

Frost dwarves mark the day their city was founded with celebration and feasting. The ruling noble renews his vows of loyalty to the currently vacant throne of the dwarven king and to his people. Accompanied by his huscarls, he then travels the city to the many market halls. Here, he gives every dwarf a token coin according to his social status—gold for nobles, iron for warriors, copper for workers, silver for merchants, and so on. These coins are then sacrificed to Ertha. The ruler must also sacrifice one percent of the city's wealth in coins, jewelry, weapons, armor, or metal ore to Ertha.

On the Founding Day of Karad Dahn, Karad Khan, and Karad Noshrek, dwarves across Rassilon wail and lament for the loss of these great cities and the countless dwarves who inhabited them. In Karad Marn, the warriors swear oaths to Ertha and Tiw that they will liberate their city or die trying. Some dwarves shave their beards on this day as a mark of shame their city remains in orc hands, vowing to suffer the ignominy of being beardless until the city is full reclaimed.

GROUND SHAKER DAY

Third Milcdaeg of Haerfestmonan

When Ertha assumed control of the earth she discovered her cave was rather small for her tastes. Armed with a pick, she began to expand her home. Each time the pick struck, the world trembled. Worshippers of Ertha believe earthquakes are signs the goddess is once more increasing her living space. Cultists of Foldardróttann believe earthquakes are their goddess clearing underground obstructions so she can continue her exploration.

During the ceremony, worshippers bang drums to simulate the noise of earth tremors and sway from side to side as if the earth was moving. Cultists take up shovels and picks and start digging, helping their goddess move the rock and earth. The numerous pits are left to fill in naturally, making them something of a hazard until everyone learns their locations. In cities and towns, municipal workers needing to dig foundations or trenches prefer to start work on this day, for they believe Ertha will make their task easier by doing some of the work for them.

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HARD CLAY DAY

Any day a new forge construction is finished.

It is a rare smith who does not pay the clergy of Ertha to bless a newly constructed forge. Note that weapon-smiths invite clerics of Hagvirkr (a minor god) to participate in the ritual as well. Once the structure is sound and the forge installed, a cleric of Ertha oversees the final step—laying the floor.

Traditionally, the floor is a mixture of heavy clay, gravel, lime, and bull's blood. The bull, which the smith must purchase, is blessed and then ritually slaughtered in a cave, its blood collected in a receptacle. The materials are then mixed in a large trough by trampling them together. Once the material reaches the right consistency, it is laid on the forge floor.

The final step involves packing the clay mixture. Rather than using tools, this is achieved by dancing. The attending cleric, the smith, and any others who wish to honor Ertha don heavy boots or clogs and dance to the beat of a lone drum. Given the clay must be packed hard, the dance can last for many hours. Once the cleric is happy the surface is finished, he performs a final blessing by engraving Ertha's holy symbol on to the forge. If Hagvirkr is also to be honored, his symbol is added beneath or to the right of Ertha's glyph.

HOUSE BUILDING DAY

Raestdaeg of Werremonan

When they first wandered the earth, humans had no homes and slept under the stars. Ertha showed them caves, in which they lived happily for countless generations. Eventually tiring of their cold and drafty homes, they beseeched Ertha to provide new accommodation. In her infinite wisdom, Ertha taught men how to build homes.

The elves, though a religious people, are more pragmatic, for they hold Ertha in little regard. In their ancient tales, the ritual is a remembrance of when they stopped being nomadic hunter-gatherers and began to build villages.

This is the traditional time to make repairs on one's home (except the roof) and start construction of a new house. Clerics and worshippers travel to the nearest settlement to help out as laborers, accepting no payment except a meal and plenty to drink when the work is done.

In some areas the clergy work together to build a new house, which they then gift to a member of the community. Common belief is that any home built by the clergy on this day will always be a happy home.



FIRST FOOTING DAY

First Heafoddaeg of Snaermonan

First Footing Day began as the cult's celebration of the new year but has evolved into a festival for all citizens,

regardless of their faith. As dawn breaks, folk across Rasilon don their winter furs and visit the homes of friends, family, and strangers. After being greeted on the doorstep they hand over small gifts. By tradition, you can't cross the threshold without bringing the householder a gift. Clerics of Freo always give items of footwear, but others gift small cakes, candles, or bottles of alcohol. Being the first person to visit someone else's home on First Footing Day is seen as a good omen for any travel during the coming year.

HORSE FIGHTING DAY

First Marketdaeg of Haerfestmonan

This festival, considered barbaric by many druids and clerics of Eostre Animalmother, is held only in Hrosmark and always takes place at the summer gathering in Veergarth. Each clan selects a fine stallion from its herds. Lots are drawn at random to determine fighting pairs. The animals are then led into a circle, in the center of which is tethered a thoroughbred mare from the king's stables. The mare is always "in season."

The two stallions are worked into a frenzy by slaps with sticks from their owners and the pheromones of the mare. The animals may be subjected to this for many hours before they are considered ready to fight, by which time they are half-mad. The horses are then released. In their frenzy to mate, they kick and bite each other, inflicting serious injuries on their rival. When one horse cannot carry on, the fight ends. Seriously wounded horses are ritually slain. The winning horse is allowed to mate with the mare. This is not a knockout competition, and the king must supply a mare for each fight. Should a foal be born, it is presented to the clan of the fathering horse at the next summer gathering. Its sire is then ritually sacrificed to Freo, so as to ensure the god's stable is stocked with only the finest horses.

Regardless of whether or not a foal is born, winning curries favor both with Freo and the king. In the latter instance, the king may award better inter grazing lands, something every clan seeks.

SADDLE DAY

Sangdaeg of Sceranmonan

During summer the town of Veergarth turns from a near-deserted plain into a bustling metropolis of felt tents. With grass plentiful, the horse-lords gather in one place to arrange marriages, interbreed horses, sell their livestock, and purchase supplies brought in by hundreds of visiting merchant caravans. As summer ends and the chill of winter begins to bite so the grass becomes less nutritious and unable to support such a large population with their many horses.

A week before the ceremony, the king, mounted on his black stallion, summons the nobles and clan elders who owe him allegiance. Also mounted, they fan out before him in a wide semi-circle. The king then assigns each their winter lands based on how well their followers performed in the annual competitions.

On the day of the ceremony the tent city is rapidly pulled down for another year. The king and the paladins of Freo sit mounted at the main exit from the city while the priests are arranged in a line before them. As each clan departs the clerics bless them in the name of Freo Horsemaster and the king, wishing them a speedy and safe journey. When a cleric's clan leaves, he breaks ranks and joins his kin. Since the number of blessings diminishes as the day draws on, those clans most in favor with the king depart first.

By nightfall, when the king and his entourage depart, the city has shrunk from 25,000 people to a few hundred permanent guards.

SITES SEEN DAY

Sangdaeg of Haerfestmonan

Freo came to realize that many of the people he met on his journeys had never left their homelands and knew nothing of the greater world. Although driven by endless wanderlust, Freo rested his feet a while at the next village he came to and told stories of the wondrous sites he had seen strange beasts he had encountered, and different cultures he had met. Enjoying the chance to soak his aching feet, Freo vowed to take time out from his journeys each year to spread word of the world to those unable or unwilling to travel.

Each year the clergy are expected to spend the day in a settlement they have never visited before. In return for food and drink, they recount their tales of exploration and travel to their hosts. Clerics may embellish stories to make them more interesting, but may not invent fictional creatures, people, or places, nor may they rename them. In the morning, the host traditionally gifts the visiting cleric a new pair of boots for the next leg of his journey.



DARK HARVEST NIGHT

Varies

Each temple holds its own Dark Harvest Night, and rarely does it fall on the same night across multiple years. The only stipulation is that all activities must occur between dusk and dawn. Hence, it mostly often falls around the end of the year.

As is widely known through religious preaching and mythology, Hela commands a host of fell spirits. In order to come to the mortal realm, they must inhabit a corpse or skeleton. These grisly remains are known within

the cult as a vessel. Dark Harvest Night is the clergy of Hela's way of ensuring they have plenty of hosts to offer the malevolent spirits.

The ritual stems from the earliest days of the goddess' existence. Now possessed of a host of spirits, Hela sent her immortal agents into the world to find suitable vessels for the host inhabit. After a lengthy search her agents reported returned. Amid much bowing and scraping they reported that all the creatures they encountered already had spirits dwelling in them. All they could find devoid of spiritual energy were corpses and bones.

During the night of the ceremony, worshippers must gather as many corpses as possible. Although they have a week to return them to the temple (the clergy forbids worshippers from performing the ceremony within 50 miles of the temple), all corpses and bones must be gathered in the one night to count as an offering to Hela.

How the cultists gather corpses and skeletons is left to them. Many resort to grave robbing, though burials are far scarcer than in the days the ceremony was first performed. The current trend is to provide fresh corpses by murdering people. Busy trade roads are stalked for small merchant caravans or lone travelers, small steads and villages attacked en masse, and late night revelers, thieves, watchmen, and ladies of the night plucked from city streets.

Whoever returns the most corpses to the temple is promised greater power after death, coming back as a more potent and intelligent undead. Whether this is true or not has yet to be determined.



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DARK RISING NIGHT

Second Deorcmonan after Dark Harvest Night

Dark Night Rising, according to myth, marks the night when Hela unleashed her infernal spirits into the world to seek vessels to possess. It was on this night that the art of necromancy was born, for it was then that Hela created the first undead.

Between Dark Harvest Night and the next Deorcmonan the corpses are ritually prepared by washing them in blood, carving eldritch runes into flesh and bones, and intoning dark prayers. As the sun departs the heavens the clergy begin casting *zombie* and *greater zombie* spells over the corpses while lesser worshippers cut their limbs and drip blood onto the corpses to attract the spirits howling loose from Hela's stygian realm.

Originally the ritual was performed to honor Hela's invention of necromancy. Since the fall of the Liche-Priest the ritual has taken on new meaning. Though many of the newly created undead will not last the night, their spirits departing within the day, some will be permanently infected with a spirit. These undead are pledged to the Liche-Priest, who will find an army ready and waiting to serve him on his eventual return.

HOENIR

GRADUATION DAY

Raestdaeg of Sowannmonan

Schooling is expensive, and educational establishments are few and far between. Most citizens are taught at home, and thus have only a limited knowledge of the wider world. Graduation Day marks the end of the school year. All students, including novitiates of Hoenir, must take end of year exams to prove they have studied. Those who pass are invited to attend Graduation Day, a formal recognition of their accomplishments. Certificates on learning are handed out amid long and boring speeches on the power and importance of knowledge, after which students and tutors attend a feast. Those who fail must serve the diners as punishment.

NO KNOWLEDGE DAY

First Milcdaeg of Wulfmonan

Hoenir's wisdom meant that he was constantly pestered by the other gods, who demanded he teach them new things. Frustrated at the interruptions, which interfered with his studies, Hoenir asked Niht to help him. She concealed him beneath her cloak where the gods could not find him. Niht's act was not entirely benevolent, for while Hoenir was concealed he could not share his wisdom. After many days, Hoenir realized events of which he has no knowledge were taking place.

Fearful he might be missing something of importance, Hoenir tried to leave Niht's cape, but she tightened the

weave, imprisoning him. Niht kept Hoenir captive for so long that the other gods could learn nothing new.

The universe stagnated, and then slipped back into barbarity as the gods began to forget everything they knew. Only Niht, who knew all of Hoenir's secrets, retained her knowledge. Rigr and Nauthiz eventually found and freed Hoenir, bringing knowledge back to the universe.

Worshippers remember their god's folly, and remind themselves of the dangers of allowing knowledge to be forgotten, by blocking their ears with wax stoppers, covering their eyes bound with dark cloth, and gagging themselves. This prevents them from learning anything new or imparting knowledge.

In urban areas, actors perform a play retelling the story of Hoenir's imprisonment. Under religious law the character of Hoenir cannot be played by a cleric of the faith, as the play imparts knowledge. Hoenir is played as a bumbling scholar. Niht is portrayed as a pantomime villainess, heavy with child called Ignorance and wrapped in a vast cloak, beneath which the figure of Hoenir is concealed once the play reaches the appropriate stage.

Actors dressed to represent Rigr and Nauthiz wander around the audience asking the crowd if they have seen Hoenir. Excited children and adults who remember their first witnessing of the play call out and gesture toward the figure of Niht, who shakes her head, shrugs her shoulders, and tries to misdirect the hunters. Eventually, of course, Hoenir is found and rescued to wild cheering from the crowd. While the three heroic gods bow to the audience, Niht sneaks off the stage to boos and hisses.

This play is heavy on audience participation, an unusual occurrence for Hoenir's ceremonies. Most critics agree this is because the clergy of Hoenir don't actually take part in the festivities.

SPOKEN WORD DAY

First Sunnandaeg of Huntianmonan

Philosophers have long debated which came first, the word or the thought behind the word, for one cannot exist without the other. Hoenir was the first god to speak, thus enabling the exchange of ideas, for before this the gods were silent and the knowledge they had gained could not be transmitted.

Clerics stand up in public and talk from dawn to dusk on whatever subject appeals to them. Like most of Hoenir's rituals, it is extremely dull. Followers of Niht often try to disrupt the ceremony by gagging Hoenir's clergy. Unfortunately, most citizens are equally inclined to do the same in order to stop droning voices ruining their day, thus resulting in cases of mistaken identity and false accusation having been made.

WRITING DAY

Third Monandaeg of Falmonan

Hoenir had gathered a lot of knowledge from personal experiences and the wisdom of the other gods, but

he was constantly under attack by the capricious goddess Forgetfulness. The goddess plucked snippets of knowledge from Hoenir's mind and consumed them, causing the god to forget what he had learned.

Hoenir went to Maera and told her his problem. The goddess of divination worked her magic and revealed that somewhere in the universe there was an unknown form of magic which would protect against Forgetfulness' dark magic. Maera, as cryptic as any of the Norns, added that the new magic could not stop Forgetfulness from stealing knowledge from Hoenir's mind. Not being much of a traveler, Hoenir asked Freo to accompany him. After a quest full of wondrous encounters, Hoenir discovered the new magic—writing.

Worshippers spend the day copying out sacred texts in the library or reading from them in public. Because Hoenir gave away the new magic, booksellers lower their prices on this day to encourage folk to purchase their wares. Seeing a great business opportunity, clerics of Hoenir's brother, Var, purchase great piles of books, which they resell later at inflated margins.

● HOTHAR ●

CONFESSION DAY

First Sunnandaeg of Snaermonan

One day Hothar was visiting a minor god's hall when he heard lamentations. On enquiring as to the nature of the disturbance, the minor god said that he had done a bad act, which while not against Hothar's laws, did leave him sorely vexed. Hothar offered to help the god remove the dark stain of his sin, though the younger god would have to accept whatever punishment Hothar handed out. Others heard of Hothar's blessing and soon there were crowds outside his brilliantly lit hall. Seeing that his work would be disturbed every day unless he acted, Hothar told his companions he would hear their stories, but only on one day a year.

A new year, a new start, as the old Anari saying goes. Whether or not their activities constitute a crime or a sin, everyone makes mistakes. Confession Day is a chance for people to remove any stain upon their soul by confessing to a cleric of Hothar. Anything said in confession is held in strictest confidence.

After listening to the list of sins, the cleric passes judgment, offering the guilty a chance to redeem themselves by performing an act (which in the case of serious crimes is to turn themselves in). Typical judgments involve performing good deeds, lengthy prayer sessions, and vigorous scrubbing of the flesh. An oath must be sworn to accept and act on the ruling.

In game terms, clerics suffering the effects of minor and major sins may be absolved through the ritual, so long as they follow the cleric's orders on how to remove the taint. Mortal sins can still only be resolved with a lengthy and suitable quest.

GOOD DEED DAY

First Sunnandaeg of Werremonan

Hothar, as the god of order, is also honored as the god of communities. After the chaos of the God War, the survivors had become embittered and insular, or had formed tightly knit warbands. Hothar helped form the first true communities by gathering together the gods who shared common ideals and persuading them to cooperate and live together by common laws. Order and conformance resulted in peace, but the communities lacked spirit. Citizens obeyed the laws, but they remained largely selfish and insular. In order to create a community spirit, Hothar asked the gods to perform one selfless act for another deity each year.

Citizens and clergy alike perform good deeds on this day. What constitutes a good deed is left to the individual's conscience to decide. Good deeds needn't involve extravagant gifts or concerted effort—acts like chopping wood for an elderly neighbor, helping someone with chores, or giving a beggar a few silver pennies are all good deeds. Many women work together to prepare a feast for the whole settlement. In large towns and cities, where a single feast would be a logistical nightmare, smaller feasts may be held on individual streets or in small neighborhoods.

Clergy are expected to perform good deeds from dawn till dusk, whereupon they join the feasting.

LAW DAY

Second Marketdaeg of Werremonan

In the beginning all was chaos and disorder. The gods did as they pleased, having no fixed aspects, arguments were common as deities dabbled in each other's favored areas, and the stars and planets wandered the heavens as they saw fit. Hothar, frustrated by the bickering and turmoil, codified a set of laws. When Hothar read out his laws, order was enforced on the entire universe and the gods were tied to a fixed set of aspects.

From dawn until dusk clerics of Hothar stand in markets across Rassilon and recite the local laws from memory. New laws are introduced on this day, coming into force as soon as a cleric proclaims them.

OATH RENEWAL DAY

Starts of the last week of Eostremonan and lasts a month

Virtually everyone in Rassilon is tied to someone else by an oath of fealty. Every year these oaths must be renewed. It is only mandatory for senior nobles, for under the most ancient laws every nobleman who swears allegiance to his feudal superior does so in the name of those he rules over. Over the course of the month, the nobility gathers at the court of the most powerful noble in the land. Typically dukes, jarls, their social equivalents, and nobles of lesser rank who hold fealty only to the head of state attend.

HELLFROST: MATTERS OF FAITH

The head of state stands before his immediate subordinates, holding out a plain gold ring, a symbol of unity, before him. One by one the subordinates approach, touch the ring, and renew their oath of allegiance to liege and land. The process is then repeated across the land, with jarls taking oaths from counts, tribal leaders from clan heads, clan heads from family heads, and so on. Failure to renew one's oath without good reason within 40 days is viewed as a clear sign of treachery. Since the participants have a whole month, bad weather is not considered an excuse.

Some leaders demand their subordinates complete an older ritual—the blood oath. Small cuts are made on the participants' forearms and the limbs loosely bound together. If a cut festers, it is believed the oath was dishonest.

As well as the nobility, mercenary captains, the Hearth Knights, the Iron Guild, and the Knights Hrafn hold this ceremony sacred as a way of reinforcing the bonds between leader and followers. Because members may be dispersed across Rassilon, they are not expected to attend their leader in person—they need merely speak their oaths aloud so Hothar hears.

TRUTH DAY

First Heafoddaeg of Plobmonan

When Hothar became god of law, he agreed to be blinded so his judgment would not be affected by physical appearance or bribes. Without his sight to mislead him, Hothar relied only on his ability to sense truth when deciding verdicts. Each year, his clerics must wear heavy blindfolds and maintain *detect lie* spells for 24 hours in honor of his sacrifice. Accompanying them are non-blindfolded laity armed with clubs. When the cleric detects a lie being spoken in his presence, he directs the laity to punish the sinner with a swift beating.



BURNING GIANT DAY

Night after first snowfall of the year

Before the God War Thrym and Kenaz were minor deities representing winter cold and summer warmth respectively. Though neither could gain total dominance over the other, the seasons varied in length as first one god gained superiority and then the other. After much squabbling they made a truce, agreeing to share the year between them. Neither honored the full spirit or letter of the compact, and so summer and winter varied in length. When the races of giants were created, they pitted them against each other. After the God War, the rivalry intensified immensely and the petty squabbles turned into bitter war when Kenaz persuaded his father to join his cause.

During the Blizzard War worshippers of Kenaz were

always in the frontline, battling fiercely against frost giants and Hellfrost dragons. Their struggle, and Kenaz's eternal battle, is honored each year.

After the harvest is gathered worshippers set to work building huge wicker figures packed with hay and grass. These figures vary in size from 18' feet (the height of a typical frost giant) to over 50' (and are representative of Thrym). The day after the first snowfall worshippers gather around the wicker men, reciting epic tales of the heroic struggles of the Blizzard War, reenacting battles against frost giants (men on stilts wrapped in furs), and praising their god.

Toward dusk each worshipper takes up a burning torch. They cluster in small groups, which from the heavens resemble hot coals, Kenaz's holy symbol. After singing the Song of Warmth, the torches are thrown in a pile at the wicker man's feet. As the flames begin to lick the effigy, the worshippers sing hymns to encourage the flames to spread. If the vegetation catches quickly, the omens promising that are winter will not be overly harsh. Should the figure fail to burn properly, winter will be cold and long.

COLD NIGHT

Heab Wyntr Daeg

The Cold Night began as a celebration to mark the end of winter and the return of warmth. During the God War, a godling loyal to Thrym slipped past Kenaz's bodyguards and plunged a dagger into his heart. Though not slain, Kenaz was mortally wounded and withdrew from the combat. As his life force ebbed away, so the warmth of the universe faded.

Sigel and Tiw hunted the universe for Eira, who was away tending to the many wounded on both sides. Their quest was long and arduous, and each day the universe grew colder as Kenaz grew weaker. At last Eira came to Kenaz's aid, healing his wound through her powerful charms, restoring the light of the universe and banishing the winter.

As Sigel's Hearth sets on the longest night, worshippers of Kenaz gather outside in the cold night air. Candles, torches, and bonfires are extinguished, lanterns dimmed to mere flickers, and even the sacred flames in Kenaz's temples are reduced to glowing coals in memory of Kenaz's injury. Clerics wail and lament while retelling the myth. An hour before dawn, clerics of Eira move among the congregation, rekindling bonfires, lighting the torches and candles, and turning up lanterns to full. As the dawn breaks, the worshippers rejoice at Sigel's healing and return to strength.

Since the Blizzard War and the waning of Kenaz's power, the worshippers have grown more fervent in their singing. Kenaz it seems has once again been wounded and his warmth once more fading from the universe.

Note: Clerics of Sigel have a similar celebration known as Long Night. In their mythology, when Sigel went looking for Eira the universe grew darker as well as colder. Sigel's ritual is one of restoring light and banish-

ing darkness. Clerics of Eira are welcomed at the festival, but play no part other than to be lead around by Sigel's clergy until dawn.

HEARTH DAY

Raestdaeg of Wulfmonan

At the beginning of time, before Hothar brought order to the universe, there were no seasons. Thrym, who had been rooting in the furthest recesses of the universe far from the light of the stars, found a new god called Frost. Being something of a bully, Thrym cajoled Frost into using his powers, and so the first winter came to the universe.

The other gods did not know how to cope with this new phenomenon. Frost's son, Shivering, soon came to pay the gods a visit and teach them his new trick. Kenaz asked his father, Sigel, to heat up the universe, but Sigel refused. Back then there was no summer, and Sigel refused to banish the new god just because he was different.

Kenaz went to see Nauthiz, who taught him secrets of stealth in return for knowledge of Sigel's daily agenda. While Sigel slept, Kenaz stole into his hall and cut locks of his father's fiery red hair. He carried these to the gods' halls and laid them inside a ring of stones. When the hair touched the ground it became fire, which banished the cold. Although Kenaz had not defeated Winter, he had found a way to banish him from houses.

Throughout the year, fagot-gatherers, often older widows and the physically and mentally infirm, scrape a meager living selling bundles of firewood (known as fagots). Most are worshippers of Kenaz. Each year on this day, all worshippers of Kenaz work with the fagot-collectors to gather firewood during the daylight hours. As night begins to fall, they deliver fagots to houses, asking nothing in return, for Kenaz freely gave the gift of fire to his fellow gods.

Once the deliveries are complete, the regular fagot-gatherers are invited to a grand feast. Where a temple to Kenaz exists it hosts the gathering. Otherwise the honor falls to the local priest of Kenaz or blacksmith, or, if the community lacks both, the head of the settlement. Clerics of Kenaz are expected to visit the nearest feasting hall and gift the fagot-gatherers with small tokens, such as a purse of silver coins, a basket of bread, or a set of new clothes.

Allowing a hearth to go out on this day brings exceptionally bad luck for the next year.

SWORD DAY

First Heafoddaeg of Werremonan

This holy day marks the time when Kenaz crafted the first weapon, which he gifted to Tiw, thus transforming him into the god of war. While all temples teach melee combat, each has a preferred melee weapon. Sword Day is the most common name for this ceremony, but its names changes from temple to temple. Thus one may find Axe

Day, Hammer Day, Mace Day, and Spear Day all being celebrated simultaneously across Rassilon. Every cleric of Kenaz must gift a weapon he has forged in the last year to a cleric of Tiw before sunset or commit a major sin.

New weapons are blessed on this day over the sacred temple flame. Starting or finishing the creation of a weapon on this day is said to imbue it with a divine spirit. After meditating in front of the sacred flame the creator names each weapon he starts or finishes during the ceremony in honor of the spirit it contains.

Note: Clerics of Hagvirkr, the minor god who Kenaz later installed as weaponsmith to the gods, hold a similar ritual on the first Sunnandaeg of Werremonan. They also celebrate this festival.

MAERA

ALCHEMY DAY

Third Monandaeg of Werremonan

As goddess of magic, Maera is also goddess of alchemy. It was she who discovered that magical threads could be tied into knots and unraveled at a later date to release their energy. Maera also taught Eostre the secret of herbalism, but that is another story (see page 18).

Worshippers spend the day crafting alchemical devices or helping an alchemist in her work. All creations worked this day must be donated to the next temple of Maera the alchemist visits or she will suffer bad luck (GM's discretion on how this works). These are then sold to provide the temple with funds for other projects.

DIVINATION NIGHT

First Monandaeg of Snaermonan

Originally there were four Norns. They were the goddesses of past (Urd), present (Verdandi), future (Skuld), and what if (Maera), the latter being the goddesses of alternate possibilities. While her sisters worked hard to intertwine the threads of existence, Maera was something of a daydreamer—not surprising given that her job was to gather and burn all the excess thread after the Norns ended a being's life. Contained in these threads were the different directions a life could have taken had the Norns chosen another path for the creature.

While out in the garden one day, Maera fell asleep. In her dream she discovered new threads, ones the Norns had not woven. By tugging, twisting, and shaping these threads she produced wondrous effects, which she named magic. On waking she discovered clutched in her hand a myriad of threads. She rushed to tell her sisters of her discovery, but they were too busy to pay any attention, and ordered her to get back to work and quit her daydreaming. Frustrated, Maera threw the threads out the window, where they drifted down into the mortal realm. Thus did mortals discover the threads of magic.

When the Norns discovered what Maera had done, the

weird sisters flew into a rage, for mortals had been given a new gift and the strands of their lives would have to be interwoven with these new threads, meaning more work for the Norns. Maera was disowned by the Norns and banished from their presence for all eternity. Despondent at no longer being able to view the Norns' loom or study the threads of what might have been, Maera began to look into the universe for patterns that might reveal what the Norns were weaving.

Once the moon sits alone in the sky, clerics of Maera spend the night divining the future, trying to steal a peek at the Norns' loom. Folk visit the temples in the hope of learning the future's secrets, for everyone has a curiosity about some future event. Until dawn breaks and the Norns awaken, the clergy strive to answer the age old questions—who will I marry, will I have children, are the omens good for war, will the harvest be good, will I die well?

STAFF DAY

Third Monandaeg after of Eostremonan

Staff Day is celebrated only in the Magocracy. The children of nobles are trained in the principals of magic from an early age, learning the theory from the age of five. When a child who displays an aptitude for heahwisardry reaches 14, the age of adulthood in the Magocracy, she undergoes the Staff Day rite the next day it is held. A heahwisard to be born on Staff Day is said to be destined for greatness.

The ritual is always held in the Grand Temple of Maera in Kingshall. Among the crowd are the powerful nobles of the land, here not so much to watch the ritual but to size up the next generation of nobility and begin arranging marriages.

When the moon first breaks the horizon, the adult-to-be is handed his heahwisard staff by the Mage-King. The high priest of Maera binds each child's hand to her staff with long lengths of multicolored thread while reciting prayers to the goddess of magic. By tradition the binding is done in descending social order. It is believed the longer the threads are bound the more powerful the mage will be in later life.

The children then swear an oath to protect the secrets and uphold the traditions of heahwisardry, to serve the Mage-King loyally, and to serve their families with honor, bravery, and decorum befitting her noble status. With the oath sworn, the threads are unraveled and handed to the now adult mage. Traditionally these are kept, to be used when her children undergo the rite.

Each family then holds a private feast in its townhouse (or those of a feudal superior for lesser families) to welcome the new adult into the family and any noble titles due the young adult are bestowed.

Characters who chose the Black Sheep Hindrance or Magocratic nobles who did not take the Arcane Background (Magic: Heahwisardry) Edge have never undergone this rite, and thus are viewed as children under Magocratic law—another reason why they cannot inherit their parents' estate or titles.

● NAUTHIZ ●

CHANCE NIGHT

First Heafoddaeg of Hegmonan

Reckless and carefree with money, Nauthiz once challenged his stingy brother Var to a game of chance. Nauthiz staked a vast fortune against an equal amount of goods from Var. Although Var counted every coin and abhorred gambling, the chance to make a huge profit for doing nothing but throwing a pair of dice was too good an opportunity to resist. Stories vary as to who won, but every year on the same night the brothers meet up to repeat the game.

Worshippers are expected to enter a high-stakes gambling game on this night, pitting a fortune of at 500 gs on games of pure chance. Cheating is permitted. This isn't a formal ceremony—no worshipper is required to pray or perform any acts of devotion beyond having a good time and the chance to win or lose a small fortune.

NIGHT OF LONG FINGERS

Variable, but always in Werremonan

One long summer's day, Nauthiz found himself outside Tiw's battle hall. Feeling bored, he entered and began speaking with the god of battle. After much small talk Nauthiz asked Tiw what he valued most in the world. After thinking hard, Tiw pointed to a clay jar on his mantelpiece. In that jug, he said, he kept the ring Eira had given him on their wedding day (they were divorced by this time). It wasn't particularly valuable as a piece of jewelry, but it was of special sentimental value. Nauthiz smiled to himself, thanked Tiw for his hospitality, and departed with a skip in his step. That night, Nauthiz returned to Tiw's hall and broke in. Brimming with overconfidence, he thrust his hand into the jar. Unfortunately, Tiw had seen through Nauthiz's question and had hidden the ring elsewhere in his house. The magical jar closed around Nauthiz's hand and began to whistle loudly. Moments later, Tiw's two war hounds, Goðjaðarr ("God Protector") and Hildolfr ("Battle Wolf") bounded into the room, their snarling jaws dripping thick rivers of bloody drool. Nauthiz fled, chased by the two dogs and with this hand still stuck in the heavy jar, to the booming laugh of Tiw. Once a year, Nauthiz breaks into Tiw's hall to find the ring he so prizes. Tiw changes its hiding place each year, and the god of thieves has yet to locate it. And so the game continues.

Clerics must steal a very valuable item at least once a year or offend their god. Originally clerics participated on the anniversary of their joining the cult, thus giving themselves but one night to fulfill their oath. As organized thieves' guilds sprang up, the ceremony was seen as a gambling opportunity. Each cultist openly states his mark and the value of goods he will steal that night. Odds are offered based on the target and the worshipper's skill, and fellow cultists place stakes on the outcome.

Since holding the ceremony on the same night each year would alert the local authorities and allow them to prepare for the rash of burglaries, the local high priest or thieves' guildmaster sets the exact day of the ceremony. The only stipulation is that it is held in Werremonan, when the nights are shortest. Stolen goods must be returned to the temple or guild house by the time Sigel's Hearth breaks the horizon, or the thief is listed as failing the ceremony.

RECLAMATION DAY

Raestdaeg of Hegmonan

Folk in Rassilon are generally community minded, especially in villages and steads. As such, people tend to borrow things from each other for long periods, and often without asking. On this day, folk visit their neighbors and reclaim borrowed property. Typically the day is marked by much apologizing for not returning the object sooner, arguments over damage, and quaffing too much ale as way of reparation. The next day, the borrowing begins again.

NEORTHE

BOAT BLESSING DAY

First Waescdaeg on Sowanmonan

Also known as Shoal Day, this festival marks the official start of the sea fishing season. Each fishing community spends the winter months constructing a full-size fishing vessel, which is decorated with shells and coins. The night before the ceremony, known as New Boat Night, the boat is set on fire and shoved out to sea as a gift to Neorthe so he always has a new ship each year. Clerics spend the remainder of the night praying while worshippers sing the Gathering Song, summoning the fish shoals to their annual feeding grounds.

Come morning, the clerics row out to sea and salvage burnt timbers floating on the surface. Divinations are performed over the scorched wood to determine if Neorthe has accepted the sacrifice. A good omen means the fishing will be good, while a bad one spells warnings of famine and reduced income.

DEEP DIVING DAY

Third Waescdaeg of Haerfestmonan

Temples to Neorthe are often constructed from driftwood and decorated with shells and items lost to the ocean. Once a year, worshippers are expected to help maintain the temple. Women and children scour the beaches for more driftwood and items washed up on shore, while the men take to their boats in search of flotsam and jetsam or dive to the seafloor to recover objects. Temples do a good trade in environmental protection potions on this day, for the deeper the water from which an item is brought the more it pleases Neorthe.

At dusk all the gathered items are blessed by clerics of

I SEE NAUTHIZ

I See Nauthiz is a popular children's game. One player assumes the role of Rigr, watchman of the gods, while the others are all Nauthiz.

Rigr places an object on the floor, typically a piece of fruit or small cake, and then stands so the object is behind him and he is facing away from the other players. The aim of the game is for the many Nauthiz players to sneak up and snatch the prize. Whoever achieves this wins and gets to eat the prize. If none succeed, Rigr wins the game and claims the prize.

At random intervals, Rigr whips round to face the other players, who must remain motionless. If he spies any moving, Rigr shouts, "I see Nauthiz!" and points to the offender, who is then out of the game. It is widely regarded as cheating if Rigr faces the players for more than a slow count of ten.

A common trick is for Rigr to point to a player who has remained still and accuse him of moving. If the child is clever, he does nothing. Rebuking Rigr involves moving one's lips, which means Rigr is then proven right. Arguments that this is a form of cheating are quashed with the logical— if erroneous— argument that Rigr sees all, even the future.

Neorthe, who claim the salvage in the name of their god. Legally, anything found abandoned in the sea or on a beach on this day and taken to one of Neorthe's temples becomes the property of the temple. Worshippers who recover particularly beautiful or valuable objects are given special blessings as a reward.

QUENCHING DAY

First Waescdaeg of Werremonan

After Kenaz invented fire, he took some to Neorthe, fearing even the sea god must be feeling the cold. Haughty and arrogant, Kenaz threw down the fire, which quickly flared out of control and threatened to burn down Neorthe's hall. Angrily, Neorthe extinguished the flame and kicked Kenaz out, threatening him with violence if he ever returned. Another version of the story tells that Kenaz kept coming back to give Neorthe fire, and that several times the sea god burned his hands trying to dampen the flames. In order to avoid frequent house calls, Eira taught Neorthe the secret of healing magic.

Worshippers light numerous bonfires on this day, which they then extinguish. Sea water is considered the best liquid, but over the years Quenching Day has become something of an excuse to drink heavily, and any liquid is considered acceptable. While dousing the flames, worshippers sing rousing sea shanties and offer prayers to Neorthe. Clerics are on hand to treat the many burn victims.

As well as being a religious ceremony, Quenching Day ensures the locals know the fire drill in case of fire in the settlement.

HELLFROST: MATTERS OF FAITH

WHALE SONG DAY

First Waescdaeg after spring starts

While Neorthe was out rowing one day the Unknowable One summoned a dense fog. Lost at sea, Neorthe rowed in circles for many days. Hungry and tired, Neorthe began to wonder if he would ever find land again. Suddenly something bumped his boat. Looking down, Neorthe saw a whale alongside his small craft. "Follow me," said the whale, for all animals could speak at that time, "and I shall lead you to safety." The whale was good to his word, and Neorthe returned safely to his watery hall.

On this holy day, worshippers row out onto the oceans and rivers to sing to the whales, beseeching them to come to their aid if in need, as they did with Neorthe. Those on the sea need only sing loudly, while those on rivers must stick their head into the water and sing, whereupon the river carries their words to the sea. Small coins and other votive offerings are thrown into the water as gifts to the whales. Many of these end up being reclaimed on Deep Diving Day.



NIGHT OF GUILTY CONSCIENCES

Raestdaeg of Wulfmonan

Many may regard Niht as an evil deity, but she has never betrayed a confidence and never judges those who tell her personal secrets. During the God War both sides committed many atrocities. Once the chaos ended, the surviving gods felt the need to talk about their experiences but were too shamed to do so in public. Niht promised she would never reveal what others told her and has been good to her word.

On this day, people of all faiths say prayers to Niht. Guilty secrets or acts gnawing on the conscience are whispered into dark crevices and dark shadows, where Niht will hear them but no others will. Priests contact nobles and authority figures in advance, offering them confessional services in return for gold. Knowing that a cleric who reveals a secret is committing a mortal sin and that the loudmouth is destined to suffer horrendous torture (see Night of Silent Screams below), the offer is often accepted—confessions made to a priest are more potent than those merely whispered.

Niht does not, indeed she cannot, absolve sinners of their sin, but the confession often reduces guilty feelings.

NIGHT OF LOST KNOWLEDGE

Last Healfdaeg of Frostmonan

Niht was born a princess among the gods, but was a spoiled and selfish child. She loved unique gifts, for they made her feel special. Those not given to her she stole and stored in hidden areas of the heavens, where only she could enjoy them. When Hoenir began to hand out

knowledge, Niht was duly honored. At first the goddess was pleased, but she quickly learned Hoenir had given the exact same wisdom to every other god.irate, Niht waited until Hoenir had gained new knowledge. Before he could disseminate it she snuck into his library and stole it. After learning the new knowledge she destroyed it, thus ensuring no one else could ever learn it.

Throughout Frostmonan worshippers gather books of learning and store them in secret places. Libraries double their guards, for the repositories are prime targets. A few days before the holy day, the books and scrolls are placed in huge piles and doused with oil. Once Sigel's Hearth hides its face, the pyres are ignited. As the smoke drifts upward, worshippers sing to Niht, who opens the windows of her dingy hall so the knowledge can enter.

Clerics of Hoenir are well aware of this ritual. Throughout Frostmonan they diligently investigate thefts from libraries and bookstores, hoping to learn where the ceremony will be held. Should they discover the local site, they swoop down in a desperate bid to recover the sacrificial tomes before they are consumed by fire and lost forever.

NIGHT OF THE RED SPOT

Any Deorcmonan

When Niht became patron of assassins she needed a way of ensuring all her minions had served her at least once a year. After all, she mused, what is the point of paying servants who don't do anything? In order to keep a record, she marked each with a red spot. When he had performed a kill, the spot was removed until the next year.

Assassins who worship Niht must undergo this ritual once a year. Given that wearing a red spot would cause assassins to stand out, the rite has changed slightly from its original form. Instead of having a red spot removed after a kill, the assassin is marked with a red spot at dawn on the day he elects to undergo the ceremony. He is then given a contract by his superiors, which must be carried out by the following dawn. Failure results in the assassin being held captive until he can endure the Night of Silent Screams. Those who fail and elect to run away rather than undergo ritual torture (the clever if less than faithful ones) become instant targets for their comrades. The assassin who eliminates the traitor is exempt from this rite for a year, having proven his worth to his goddess.

Those who know how to contact the cult may demand an assassination is carried out by a killer undergoing this rite. Not only is the assassin more eager to succeed, the cult also has a policy that if the assassin fails the fee is returned. Should the killer succeed, though, the fee is doubled.

NIGHT OF SILENT SCREAMS

Last Healfdaeg of Wulfmonan

When one of Niht's servants gossiped about her activities to another god, Niht had his tongue torn out and hands

CEREMONIES, FESTIVALS & RITUALS

severed so he could never speak or write of her plans again. She grew to enjoy the punishment, and used it on her assassins who failed to accomplish their missions.

Worshippers known to have betrayed their oath never to reveal a secret entrusted them or who fail to complete the Night of the Red Spot, are punished on this night. Like Niht's servant, they must endure ritual disfigurement for their sins. Given that few sinners volunteer for this torture, worshippers kidnap clerics of Hoenir and Bragi (see page 62) in the days beforehand. Once mutilated, the victims are released to continue their lives—Niht appreciates the irony of a cleric of knowledge never being able to pass on what he has learned.

The tongue is always removed first, for whatever oaths and curses the victim may try to utter are then known only to Niht, who adds them to her collection. When depressed or in need of entertainment, Niht opens the jars containing these silent screams and listens to them.

● THE NORNS ●

FATE DAY

Whenever a child is born

When a new child enters the world kicking and screaming the Norns weave the skein of his life. Sometimes a cleric of the Norns makes an appearance soon after the birth. A certain irony exists here—the Norns make no ritual demands on their clergy, so it's up to individual clerics whether they wish to attend the birth. Of course, since the Norns have already woven the skein of their clerics' lives, the decision has been preordained.

An attending cleric of the Norns, not the midwife or a cleric of Eira, cuts the umbilical cord, signifying the child now has its own fate. If no cleric appears within an hour or so, the cord is cut by the attending midwife and prayers offered to the Norns. The visiting cleric watches for omens. The Norns do not always send signs, for most people are destined for a life of relative obscurity. If one appears, the meaning is quietly whispered into the child's ear so no others can hear. Sometimes the news is good (such as growing up to sire many children, be a strong warrior, or achieve a position of power) and other times it bodes ill (an early death, crippling sickness, or a life of evil).

Fate Day is the Rassilon equivalent of a birthday, for even if the Norns do not reveal the future, they have woven the child's fate. Family and friends usually hold a small celebration each year to mark the occasion.

● RIGR ●

FINDER'S DAY

Raestdaeg of Werremonan

Since clerics are expected to be observant and alert

at all times, Rigr does not distract them by demanding ceremonies. Finder's Day is not so much a religious ceremony as a way of ensuring children learn to use all their senses from an early age. In the early hours of the morning worshippers hide silver coins and small cakes around the settlement. Most are placed in relatively easy to find positions, while others are hidden in more difficult locations. Among the treasures is always a silver amulet shaped like Rigr's holy symbol. Sometimes this is hidden in plain sight, for folk often miss the obvious, and other times it is placed where only those blessed with keen senses can find it.

Come dawn, the children tear through the village, ransacking it in the hope of finding a prize. The child who finds the special amulet is watched carefully over the coming years—if he shows further promise he is invited to join the cult as a novice.

WALL DAY

Raestdaeg of Plobmonan

The fortifications of a settlement are the responsibility of Rigr's clergy. When the winter storms have finally subsided, the clergy spend the morning inspecting the fortifications and defensive artillery weapons of their settlement and those nearby for damage. A junior, often a functionary from the settlement, makes note of ditches that need clearing, timber posts that need replacing, protective runes that need to be cleaned or re-cut, and cracked walls that need to be sealed with fresh mortar. In the afternoon, they summon the local defenders and test their shieldwall formation by hurling themselves at the shield to ensure the men have not forgotten their drills over winter.

At dusk, the clerics stand on the walls, staring out into the land beyond. They watch and wait silently for hours, hoping to get some divination as to how bad any coming raids might be and from which direction they will come.

● SCAETHA ●

CREMATION DAY

Varies

In order to prevent their earthly remains being misused by clerics of Hela, many citizens are cremated after death. The corpse is laid out with torches placed at the head and feet so Scaetha's herald finds her way to the body quickly. The body remains in state for three days, during which time the cleric watches for signs indicating Scaetha's herald has collected the soul. During this time, family and friends busy themselves building the funeral pyre.

When the cleric pronounces the corpse devoid of spirit, burning torches are waved over to purify the flesh. Grave goods are placed on the corpse or in the pyre. The body is then placed atop the funeral bier and dry

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tinder lit. As the flames rise, the mourners tell tales about the deceased's life, adding their testimony to that of his patron god's heralds. It is considered very poor behavior to speak ill of the dead at this stage.

The next morning, the mourners gather the ashes and place them in a large pot. This is buried in the earth and the site marked in some manner. Engraved stones and swords thrust into the ground are the most common memorial markers. Noble burials sometimes involve ships. The process is identical, except the ship is burned as the funeral pyre. Some ship cremations occur at sea or on rivers, but the majority is held on land.

Scaetha does not condone more traditional burials, though her clergy insist on certain precautions being taken to prevent the corpse becoming undead. Most often it is bound hand and foot and placed facing down. If it does awaken and slips free of its bonds, the undead creature will instinctively begin to burrow toward freedom. In this case, it will forever dig downward, thus never troubling the surface of the world. More fanatical clerics insist the corpse have its hands, feet, and head severed, making it useless to Hela's necromancers.

DIRGE DAY

First Sunnandaeg of Snaermonan

Scaetha's first dirge poured out into the universe after she had defeated Hela and sealed the gates of the Abyss. The dirge was not for the minor gods and champions of Sigel who fell beating back the Abyssal hoard that day, but for Hela, who was declared by all the other gods to be dead to them from that day forth. She was the first deity to be declared dead since the God War ended.

Clerics halt their crusade against the undead on this day to remember those comrades and helpers to have fallen in battle against the relentless hoard. Traditionally, this day marks the end of the Liche-Priest's reign, when the races finally mourned their many losses. Worshipers gather in temples and on battlefields where their foes were undead to sing dirges and death prayers, and to honor their comrades' memories. Vows of vengeance and oaths to continue the crusade, regardless of the losses endured, are made on this day as well.

DOOR SHUTTING NIGHT

First Sunnandaeg of Fogmonan

Only Scaetha's valiant actions in slamming shut the gates of the Abyss prevented more evil souls escaping. On this night her worshippers remember that feat. Throughout the day, the main doors to the temples are left wide open, regardless of season and any threats to the structure. All imagery sacred to Scaetha is covered in black drapes, for on this day the temple represents not Scaetha's home but the Abyss.

Worshippers of Scaetha spend the day outside the temple in prayer and meditation. Local citizens get to play the part of evil spirits. Although the spirits released from the Abyss were all sinners, the clergy does not con-

done criminal acts. Instead, it is a feast day (sponsored by the clergy of Scaetha), a time to get drunk, act the fool, and revel in temporary chaos as the social mores are abandoned.

Just before dusk, the citizens gather outside the temple of Scaetha, shouting loudly and taunting Scaetha's clergy. As the sun sets, the high priest and his retinue of priests and paladins shove their way through the inebriated crowd toward the main doors. Drink-fuelled violence often erupts, though only rarely is anyone killed or permanently maimed. Having reached the doors, the clergy slam them shut and lock them, signaling the end of the festival (which is why the citizens are keen to prevent this).

Anyone foolish enough to be inside the temple is now trapped inside until dawn, when the doors are reopened. Although a holy place, Scaetha's temples are dark and sorrowful halls, supposedly haunted by the ghosts of fallen priests and paladins. For most, it is a frightening experience (especially when drunken imaginations start working overtime).

FIRST DEATH DAY

First Sunnandaeg of Werremonan

At the beginning of time, there were many arguments between the gods and even violence, but none were slain, for Death was unknown. While searching the dark recesses of the heavens for a suitable opponent, Hela (before her madness) came across a pathetic figure huddled beneath a musty cloak and sleeping soundly. She took the god back with her (some say by force) and presented him to the other gods, demanding to know who this new creature was. Niht said she knew but could not say, Hoenir consulted his books to no avail, Maera sought a divination but no answer came, while the Norns appeared horrified, for they had not foretold this event and knew nothing of the new god's fate.

One of Tiw's champions, a bully by nature, began to physically abuse the new god, shoving and kicking him. With a gentle touch, the new god laid the warrior flat. He did not rise again and was renamed Valtýr ("Slain God").

The new god, his voice soft yet firm, said his name was Death, and that he was the end of all things. He possessed the greatest power in the universe, one so powerful he could not control it unless he slept—were he to remain awake for too long the universe would end.

The gods began debating who should guard Death while he slept, for here was a weapon too easily abused. Each argued his case, but in all their faces Death saw greed, treachery, vengeance, and the possibility of accidents. Knowing he could never rest in peace now he had been discovered, Death flew into the Norns' loom and vanished. From this point, all creatures would contain a part of a tiny Death, and when it awoke from its slumber that person's life would end without unraveling creation.

On First Death Day, citizens offer prayers to their ancestors and lay on ritual feasts. The seat at the head of the table is always left vacant for any ancestors who care to join their kin. Food and drink is laid on for them. Once the prayers

CEREMONIES, FESTIVALS & RITUALS

are over, the citizens tell stories of their ancestors, keeping their memories alive. Scaetha is honored with prayers and blessings, for she is the guardian of Death, who sings it to sleep each night, and allows the ancestral spirits to return for one night.

This is another day when speaking ill of the dead is foolish, for there is a good chance they may actually be listening.

● SIGEL ●

DELLING DAY

First Sunnandaeg of Snaermonan

Delling is the name Sigel first used when he shed his light across the mortal realm. In Auld Saxa it means “the start of something new.” In modern Saxa it is often shortened to mean “dawn.” Delling Day not only marks the start of the new year, but it is also the end of winter. In olden times, worshippers prayed on Delling Day Eve to ensure the sun returned. These days the festival is an empowering of the steadily weakening sun disc.

On Delling Day Eve worshippers gather outside in the cold and dark. Torches are lit and placed in the ground to form Sigel’s holy symbol. All night they pray and sing, offering strength to Sigel so that his fierce luminescence may once again light the heavens. As Delling Day dawn nears, clerics of Kenaz hand out bows, and stacks of fire arrows made ready. As the sky begins to lighten, volleys of these arrows are launched into the east, renewing not only the light of Sigel, but also imparting Kenaz’s fiery warmth into the pale sun.

If the dawn is masked by cloud or inland mist, insults are hurled at Thunor for interfering in the ritual. In heavily-populated areas priests of Thunor employ *becalm* and *zephyr* spells to drive away the clouds, thus ensuring their temple is not vandalized by angry mobs of irate sun worshippers. If a blizzard blows or snow falls, more arrows are loosed, this time toward the north, where lives the hated god of winter, Thrym.

Once the sun is completely clear of the horizon, the torches are extinguished as final prayers are invoked. The tired laity then returns home while clerics stare at the sun disc to divine the omens for the year ahead.

PURIFICATION DAY

First Sunnandaeg of Sowanmonan

Sowanmonan marks the time livestock are taken to the high pastures to gaze on the lush, fresh grass. In the



days beforehand, clerics of Sigel (god of purification), often accompanied by those of Kenaz, build two huge bonfires at the edge of the settlement, between which a large gap is left. In the hours before dawn the fires are lit in preparation for the ceremony.

Once the sun has risen and the bonfires are well ablaze, the livestock are herded through the gap and onto the high pastures. Passing between the bonfires is said to burn off evil spirits currently infesting the animals while the smoke keeps ones that may trouble the beasts later at bay. Eostre Animalmother’s clerics perform blessings over the beasts.

Kenaz’s clerics also make an appearance, drawn to the fire like moths. The more devout worshippers leap through the actual flames to purify their flesh and spirit (without the use of magic).

Toward dusk, as the fires are burning down, worshippers walk through the hot coals to achieve similar purification, while clerics of Eira make an appearance to tend the burns of those whose faith was found lacking.

The ashes from the pyres are gathered the next morning and given to the clergy of Eostre, to be sprinkled over the fields to purify the soil.

The lighting of the pyres has a second purpose. So large are the bonfires that their flames are visible for many miles. Nearby communities can thus ensure their neighbors are okay by watching out for their bonfires in the gloom before dawn. If no fires are seen, the militia is roused and armed while riders and runners are sent to investigate.

WHEN TO UNLEASH THE FURIES

Every god, even Eira, has furies at his disposal. These reprisal spirits are sent to punish wayward clerics and remind them they have sworn sacred vows to honor their god.

The gods realize that mortals are inherently flawed, so most times the furies are held back in favor of weakening or stripping the cleric of his miracle working for a time. Frequent transgressors are most likely to suffer the furies' wrath rather than clerics who make the odd mistake.

As a rough guideline, furies are generally unleashed if a cleric commits three or more minor sins in a single season, two or more major sins in a single year, and more than one mortal sin at any time in their life. Clerics who renounce their faith are also liable to be paid a visit.

The nature of the cult should be taken into consideration before making any decision. Eira, a goddess of mercy is more forgiving of her clerics and gives them the benefit of the doubt. So long as the cleric makes suitable penance with haste, she'll keep her furies chained up. Dargar and Tiw, by comparison, are more inclined to punish even trivial infractions swiftly and harshly. Such deities may punish more than one minor sin in a season and any major or mortal sin.

A visit from a single pack of furies is often enough to get clerics back on the straight and narrow, assuming they survive the encounter. Clerics slain by furies sent to punish them (as opposed to someone else slain by the furies in the course of their duties) are never claimed by their god in Scaetha's Hall—they have died in sin and will be punished for eternity.

SUN GAZE DAY

First Sunnandaeg of Sceranmonan

Heah Sumor Daeg is a high holy day for clerics of Sigel. The previous dawn, one member of the local community is chosen to represent Sigel and another to represent Thrym. While a cleric of Sigel assumes the role of the sun god whenever possible, it is not a strict requirement of the ritual. Thrym's champion is chosen based on the combat ability of Sigel, to ensure a fair fight.

Itinerant clerics of Sigel are expected to try and find a settlement in which to observe the ritual. Those who cannot reach a settlement in time may undertake a personal ritual by challenging an actual servant of Thrym to combat to the death. In the event neither is possible, the cleric is expected to spend the entire day in prayer. Failure to perform any of the above constitutes a major sin.

An hour before dawn, "Sigel" steps into the open,

bedecked in armor painted bright yellow especially for the occasion. As the sun breaks the horizon, prayers are recited and chants sung to empower the sun god. "Thrym," clad in white or blue armor and robed in furs, then makes his appearance, cursing the sun god loudly, trying to shout above the boos and jeers of the gathered laity.

For the rest of the day the two champions strut around the settlement, boasting of their strength and making promises to the locals. Sigel vows to drive back Thrym and bring a mild winter, while Thrym swears the sun god will be defeated and the coming winter harsh and merciless.

As the sun begins to set, the two champions meet in ritual combat within a large square formed by torch-bearing citizens. The fight, while symbolic, requires the use of real weapons, and both combatants are expected to fight to the best of their abilities.

In olden times, the Saxa would force a prisoner condemned to death to take the role of Thrym. If he won the ritual combat, his sentence was commuted to outlawing, amid much wailing and gnashing of teeth. These days a volunteer fills the role of Thrym.

Though less fatal, the contest is still hard fought. To give Sigel an easy victory gives him no strength and makes a mockery of his divine struggle. Healers are always on hand, for while death is rare, injuries are commonplace.

If Sigel wins, a great public feast is held in honor of the sun god's victory. Should Thrym win, the citizens slink back to their homes, bemoaning the fates and cursing the god of winter.



DEATH OF HEAT DAY

Heah Sumor Daeg

This ritual bares many similarities to Cold Night (see page 24), though it is told from the opposite view, marking the day Thrym wounded Kenaz and forced Sigel to retreat from the heavens in search of Eira. During the day worshippers build and ignite massive bonfires and light thousands of torches. No icewood is permitted—the flames must burn hot for the ritual to have meaning. To those accustomed to eternal cold, the heat from the flames is a veritable inferno. Prayers are offered to Thrym to rid them of the infernal heat and welcome them into his cold embrace.

As the sun falls into the west, the worshippers throw volleys of spears at it while shouting curses and insults. The bonfires are then dampened and the torches extinguished. As the last sliver of Sigel's Hearth leaves the sky, the final embers are doused and the final torches snuffed, signifying that summer is dead and the winter not far away.

If the worshippers have captive clerics of Eira, they sacrifice them to Thrym in the hope that Sigel will not

find Eira and thus not be able to heal Kenaz, plunging the universe into the Fimbulvint. Clerics of Kenaz and Sigel and fire elementalists are also sacrificed as part of the symbolic destruction of fire and the sun.

FIMBULVINT DAY

Heab Wyntr Daeg

Thrym's ultimate aim is to bring about the Fimbulvint, an age when the universe will freeze solid and Hothar's celestial order will be replaced with eternal stagnation. His mortal worshippers toil ceaselessly to bring this about, adding spiritual weight to their physical deeds.

On the longest night, when Sigel and Kenaz are at their weakest, worshippers gather outdoors, stripped naked to fully expose their flesh to Thrym's frigid touch. From dawn till dusk they repetitively cast *bolt*, *burst*, *fatigue*, *prolonged blast*, and *stun* spells at the sun to weaken Sigel, as well as *entangle* and *sluggish reflexes* to halt his celestial passage and extend the length of winter.

At night, as the temperature plummets, these spells are replaced by *aura*, *elemental form*, *storm*, and *summon elemental* spells, symbolically adding their might to the power and majesty of winter. Worshippers howl into the night while clerics invoke *fear* spells in the direction of the Hearthlands (or the nearest settlement if in the Hearthlands) to strengthen the Hellfrost wind. High-ranking clerics risk employing *summon demon* and *summon berald*, calling forth powerful otherworldly beings to join the celebrations.

Clerics who repeatedly suffer the displeasure of their deity while invoking spells are culled from the ranks as traitors to the great cause. As always, clerics of Kenaz and Sigel and fire elementalists are sacrificed to Thrym. Generally this is done at dusk, so Sigel can spend the long night helplessly mourning his dead followers.

● THUNOR ●

NORTH WIND DAY

First Heafoddaeg of winter

Thunor was once aided by four servants—Austri, Suðri, Vestri, and Norðri, whose bellows create the four winds. When Thrym ascended, Norðri abandoned Thunor, taking the secret of the north wind with him. It is for this reason Thunor does not control the north wind anymore. At some point during the day (there is no set time) the clergy of Thunor turn to face north and shout oaths of hatred, contempt, and vengeance. Many brave the elements to bare their backsides (a great insult) or to urinate northward in defiance of Thrym.

SKY BURIALS

Any day, but preferably during a strong wind

Since long before the imprisonment of the Liche-

Priest most human cultures in Rassilon switched from interring corpses in favor of cremations. Burial mounds are still erected by the rich, famous, and powerful, though these now commonly contain an earthenware pot filled with charred bones and ash instead of intact remains. For most citizens, the final resting place for their ashes is a shallow hollow excavated from the soil, atop which is placed a marker stone. A rare few are cremated at sea, placed in ships covered in pitch which are then ignited and sent out into the ocean.

The only people who regularly avoid cremation and inhumation are followers of Thunor, god of the air. For them, to be burned and then buried in the earth or at sea is anathema, for fire, earth, and water are the domains of other gods. The physical remains of Thunor's worshippers receive excarnation, known as a sky burial.

Corpses are placed upon wooden platforms supported by two huge posts and left to decay naturally. In order to prevent the possibility of a corpse becoming an undead, it is lashed or spiked to the platform. Placing the corpses high above the ground lessens the chances of wolves and other ground carnivores feasting on the remains, yet allows carrion birds free access.

Followers of Thunor hold that Scaetha's heralds take the form of crows when they visit their remains. These devour the soul and carry it to the heavens. The longer it takes for a crow to begin feasting, the more wicked the mortal is believed to have been in life. Once all the flesh and tissue are devoured, the bones are pounded into dust and left to blow away in the wind.

In order to assure ground carnivores do not despoil the body of their friends and loved ones, the living can pay a few silver scields to have a member of the faith, most often a junior paladin in training, watch over the corpse. Typically this is done only until the first crow feasts, at which time the soul is deemed to have left the body. Unscrupulous watchers have been known to deliberately lure crows to the area, or actually carry one to the site, so as to reduce the time they must spend exposed to the elements. This practice is widely frowned upon, but has proven impossible to stamp out.

STORM DANCE DAY

On the day of the first thunderstorm of the year

Warm summer winds blowing up from the desert realm of Al-Shirkuh clash with the cold north wind howling from the Hellfrost to produce terrific thunderstorms. The storm symbolizes Thunor's first battle with Thrym.

Storm Dance Day is celebrated when the first thunderstorm of the summer breaks. Being weather-wise, clerics usually have a few days' warning to prepare. Ignoring the lashing rain, howling winds, rumbling thunder, and crashing lightning, worshippers rush to the temple (or nearest open space if no temple is present). Under dark skies illuminated only briefly by brilliant flashes of lightning they dance wildly and freely, following no rhythm other than the one in their heart, for Thunor sets no patterns to men's lives. Many bang drums and clash cymbals,

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emulating the thunderstorm raging overhead. Most carry long spears, physical metaphors of Thunor's lightning, which they thrust northward to stab at Thrym.

Being struck by lightning is a sign of divine blessing, while death by electrocution is a sure sign Thunor has taken the worshipper to heaven to serve him eternally. On rare occasions, storm dragons congregate in the skies above Storm Dances, basking in the fury of the storm and gazing down on the frenzied mortals below. To see one on this day is an indication of good luck and a warm summer.

WIND CALLING DAY

First Milcdaeg of Eostremonan

Although primarily a ceremony honoring Thunor, many clerics and worshippers of Eostre participate. During winter, Thunor is busy recovering from a year of violence toward Thrym and planning his next campaign. While Thunor is distracted, Vestri, maker of the west wind, shirks his duties and catches up on his sleep. Eostre also hibernates during this time, rebuilding her energy for the coming spring.

Clerics of both faiths gather outside at dawn. For the rest of the day they blow horns, bang drums, and shout to the west to rouse Vestri from his sleep and get him back to work pumping his bellows. Meat is roasted and the smoke wafted toward Vestri's home, while beer is thrown into the air to tempt the god from his slumber.

If the west wind begins to blow within a few days, everyone knows Vestri has heard the call and spring will be early this year. A feast is held to mark the occasion and preparations are made for Birthing Day (see page 17). If the west wind does not rise, winter will last longer, delaying the plowing season.



BATTLE DANCE DAY

Varies (always held in Plohmonan)

On this day professional warriors and the militias show the populace they are ready for war, and steel their nerves for the fighting season ahead. The ceremony is always held in Plohmonan, but at a time of the local high priest or militia captain's choosing. At some point during the morning the captain blows his signal horn, raises the local battle standard, and sends runners to call the fighting men to arms. The warriors drop whatever they are doing and rush home to grab their weapons.

They then assemble in the largest public space, clashing weapons against shield backs and shouting war chants to alert the enemy they will find their foe ready and waiting, and to bolster their nerve. The official in charge then inspects the men, calling them out for tardiness or lacking vital pieces of equipment. When this is over, a mock battle is held to check the men remember their drills and respond to orders in timely fashion. In-

juries are common, but death is rare thanks to clerics of Eira who attend on behalf of their goddess.

At night, by the light of torches and bonfires, the professional soldiers perform the Battle Dance. More a run through of combat maneuvers than an actual dance, it is still a rhythmic display of man and weapon acting in harmony. Often warriors pair up, each performing a different routine while trying to avoid the swings and stabs of his foe as he goes through his movements. Worshippers mark time with chants and prayers, while the citizens clap and cheer the prowess of their fighting men.

BLOOD DAY

Sangdaeg of Plohmonan

The ritual dates back to the mythical age, when Tiw's barber accidentally cut him while trimming his beard. About to be slain, the barber stuttered out that he had done Tiw a favor, for now he had bled and no weapons would hunger to be the first to draw the god's blood that year. Eira quickly bandaged the nick, for Tiw had acted like all men and wailed as if mortally wounded. Since that day barbers have been bloodletters and healers.

Before the first muster of the year is called warriors give praise to Tiw in his role as defender. Scaetha, formerly her father's shield bearer before she took on her new mantle, is also honored. Fighting men cut themselves and let the blood flow freely, believing the wound will sate Tiw's appetite for destruction and spare them from further injury. Eira's worshippers are on hand to tend the injuries.

STANDARDS DAY

Sangdaeg of Werremonan

During the chaos of the God War, soldiers' morale failed as rumors circulated the battlefield their leaders were dead or had fled. Retreating units had no idea where to muster, and friend could not be distinguished from foe. Frustrated, Tiw ripped off his cloak, emblazoned on the back of which was his divine symbol, and handed it to his spear-bearer, who promptly lashed it to his spear and hoisted it above the melee for all to see.

Every military unit, from village militia to mercenary company, has a battle standard. In battle they serve to mark the position of the captain and serve as a rallying point. Each year, the standards are presented to the local temple of Tiw, where clerics bless them in preparation for the warring and raiding season. Those responsible for carrying the standard in battle swear an oath to protect it from harm, and to die before allowing it to be captured, broken, or defiled.

VICTORY DAY

Sangdaeg of Werremonan

If Tiw had one flaw above all others, it was arrogance. After every battle he would boast of his stunning victories and mighty prowess, while quietly ignoring his many

defeats. Though the Unknowable One eventually quelled Tiw's arrogant streak (a myth for another day), Tiw still remains boastful.

Victory Day is a time to remember battles and tell tales of glory, not of death and destruction. Individual soldiers give praise to Tiw by telling comrades personal war stories of triumph against overwhelming odds and daring antics that turned the tide of battle. Boasting and slight exaggeration is acceptable, as all stories grow with each retelling, but outright lies are considered the mark of a coward trying to cover his own inadequacies. Clerics reenact Tiw's ancient battles while worshippers sing sacred battle songs.

Communities that have survived raids, sieges, and battles mark their survival with feasts, while skalds weave the events into a story the whole community can share in future generations.



ARCHERY DAY

Raestdaeg of Eostremonan

Although settlements must be protected all year round, especially in these troubled times, this ritual was devised by the cult of Ullr, and originally applied only to hunters. It is now jointly undertaken by followers of Tiw who favor archery. Having (largely) rested over the long winter, archers and hunters begin preparing for the coming season. Archers compete against each other in a series of contests designed to test their range and accuracy. In some communities, the best archer is awarded some form of title for the year.

ARROW HUNT DAY

First Heafoddaeg of Plobmonan

Rested over winter, the hunters gather to prepare for the hunting season. In order to ensure their eyesight hasn't waned over winter, clerics and citizens gather at the edge of the nearest patch of forest, long grass, or marsh. Each hunter who honors Ullr gives an archer five arrows marked with his name. These are fired into the vegetation, whereupon the hunter must retrieve them. The more arrows he returns, the better his hunting will be this year. Although a ritual to honor Ullr, worshippers of Rigr often take part, since it was Rigr who taught Ullr how to spot animal tracks and spoor.

CUNNING HUNT DAY

First Milcdaeg of Werremonan

Ullr's followers are skilled with the bow, but the god expects them to be expert hunters under any conditions. Worshippers conduct a hunt this day armed only with their wits and bare hands. This ritual honors the time before the first weapons were forged, when Ullr used

nothing but his knowledge of his prey and what Eostre provided in the way of natural tools to trap them.

Capture of any animal is a clear sign Ullr is watching over the cleric. Rabbits may be simple fare for a hunter with a bow, but they are fast and agile when one must run to catch them. Bringing down a boar without weapons is an especially fortuitous sign, not just for the clerics but also the community he serves. All animals caught this day are blessed and the finest cut of meat offered to Ullr on bonfires. The hunters then divide the flesh among the local citizens.

ROD AND LINE DAY

Second Healfdaeg of Plobmonan

Fishing is not seen as a sport or pastime in Rassilon, but as another means of putting food on the plate. The ceremony honors the day Ullr first caught a fish and is the start of fishing season. Ullr's fish, a trout, proved to be the Unknowable One in disguise, but Ullr ate him all the same as he had vowed to eat all he caught and waste nothing. Though Ullr caught his trout by tickling it (which the Unknowable One found pleasant, hence why tickling someone makes them laugh), modern fishermen prefer nets or rods and line.

The day is spent angling from the riverbank or standing in the water. The largest fish's entrails are removed and used to conduct a divination. If the omens are good, the fishing will be good this year. A bad omen means the fishing season will yield little harvest. All the fish caught are then cooked and used to serve the local community.

Jym Ivens, an engro shopkeeper from Weem who just happens to specialize in selling fishing gear, offers a firkin (nine gallons) of his homebrew ale to whoever catches the largest fish from the River Ivens on Rod and Line Day. The competition draws folk from across southern Rassilon.

WOLF HUNT DAY

First Sunnandaeg of Wulfmonan

Wolves are a constant menace to livestock and travelers alike. Ullr hunted the first wolf at the asking of Eostre, whose livestock were being eaten by the predators.

In the depths of winter, when wolves are most desperate, the clergy and laity gather to turn the hunters into hunted. By hunting in winter, the wolves are easier to locate. The harsh conditions are also a test of the hunters' survival skills. Females and juveniles are the preferred prey, for slaughtering them diminishes the population for the next breeding season.



BREASTED WARRIOR DAY

Second Healfdaeg of Werremonan

Although there are no laws against women becoming

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warriors, the vast majority are male. On this day, wives, girlfriends, grandmothers, mothers, sisters, and aunts don their male relatives' armor and weapons and parade through the streets to much cheering and jeering. Afterward they engage in humorous mock battles, often letting weapons fly out of their hands, having bits of armor come lose, weeping in mock pain from imaginary wounds, and falling over for no good reason.

Under religious law, which overrides civil and criminal law, the female warriors may grab men, take them back to their homes, and have sex with them. Most grab their partners, but as the adultery laws are temporarily suspended for this day for female participants, it is an excuse to bed a man they fancy. Eira's clerics naturally frown on this.

While a source of much amuse and merrymaking, the ceremony is also a reminder to men that they should not be too proud and haughty in matters of battle, for the mightiest warriors can be laid low by the weakest foe. It is also a blunt way of reminding men that the forceful taking of a woman is a sin in the eyes of the gods and a crime under the laws of the civilized lands, more so if either partner is married.

FOOL'S DAY

Varies

Fool's Day can occur at anytime, but is only held once per year in any settlement. Local clerics of the Unknowable One inform the local authorities to the date at a time of their choosing. Sometimes the ruler is given months to prepare, and other times a matter of days. Fool's Day dates back to the God War. With many of the gods busy fighting, a handful of non-combatant deities were left to run the universe. Unable to decide who was best fit to govern, they agreed each god should rule in turn for a set time. Once each had taken a turn, they would make a collective decision. The Unknowable One's antics caused widespread confusion, hilarity, and panic simultaneously. Needless to say, he was not invited back to govern a second time.

At dawn on the chosen day, a cleric of the Unknowable One picks one member of the settlement to serve as Fool King until midnight. He is given an outrageously decorated crown and cloak, and carried around town on a litter by volunteer bearers. Crowds of citizens, often in garish and ludicrous costumes, line the streets to offer the new king their congratulations and toast his name with copious quantities of alcohol. Some invent noble titles, approaching the king in their disguise and asking for silly favors. Sometimes the titles mock the local nobility, while other times they are completely fictitious (like the King of the Potato Men).

From dawn until midnight the Fool King is the undisputed ruler of the settlement and can pass or repeal any laws he desires. Failure to obey a royal decree is punishable by spending the rest of the festival in jail. The results range from total anarchy to surprisingly good management. For many, being chosen is a chance to acquire a lit-

tle wealth through new taxation policies, get one over on enemies, mock those who normally govern, and ensure everyone has a good laugh. Others display a laudable gift for governance, changing the way the settlement works for the better for a few hours, repealing harsh laws, and letting those who rule know what it is like to be a peasant by reversing the social ladder.

At midnight the Fool King is deposed. The true ruler then resumes control. More often than not they have a mountain of work to complete repealing the new laws, rounding up criminals released by the Fool King, reclaiming property handed out as gifts by the temporary king (more than one noble has returned home to an empty house), and such like. A single day's work can often take many months to sort out completely.

HUMILITY DAY

Raestdaeg of Werremonan

The Unknowable One grew tired of Tiw strutting about in his armor challenging all to take up arms and prove their mettle against him. As the Unknowable One suspected, each challenger was easily beaten, for none were as skillful at arms as the god of battle. Stepping over the pile of unconscious gods that lay at Tiw's feet, the Unknowable One said he would like to accept the challenge. As Tiw drew his sword, the Trickster bade him wait. "I am no match for you, oh mighty one at arms," he grinned, "and it would be no challenge for you to defeat me. Allow me to appoint a champion in my place, one worthy of fighting you."

Tiw beamed a broad grin and accepted, for he knew the Unknowable One had many strange and mysterious allies—perhaps among their number was a god finally worthy of fighting him. The Unknowable One returned Tiw's grin and pulled from the voluminous cloak that masked his body a small insect. Bemused but honor-bound to accept the challenge, Tiw drew his sword. The Unknowable One whispered to the insect, which promptly flew in between the joints in the war god's armor and began biting him. Tiw dropped his sword and began swatting his body, but the insect burrowed deeper and bit harder. Tiw, to his credit, lasted an hour before he called enough.

The insect emerged and flew back to the Unknowable One's hands. Tiw, upset at being humiliated, roared threats of violence, but these quickly became roars of laughter as he finally understood the reason for the challenge. Since that day, Tiw has accepted that even the greatest warrior can be brought low, and vowed not to be so arrogant.

On this day mortals show their humility in a variety of ways. The rich and powerful dress in rags and beg for coins in the market, warriors allow children to push them over and peasants with sticks to best them in mock combat, wise men talk nonsense and invent fanciful solutions to problems to show they do not understand everything, and spellcasters refrain from using magic to remind themselves that without their gifts they are no different to other men.

JOKER'S DAY

Last Healfdaeg of Plohmonan

When Eostre first invented the plow, she gathered all the gods to have a go on the new device, hoping to find among them one worthy of guiding her celestial plow each year. Among the volunteers was the Unknowable One. He chose the final Healfdaeg of the month, hoping that with it being near the end of the month others would have done most of the hard work for him. He was disappointed to learn that plowing would continue all day, just like any other day of the month.

Instead of concentrating on his work, the Unknowable One messed around, telling jokes and playing japes instead of guiding the oxen. When Eostre came to inspect his work she found not straight, uniform lines but wiggly furrows of varying depths. She opened her mouth to chastise the god, but he cut her off before she could begin. "I am tired," he smiled, "and I have only been at it a few hours. Think how tired your oxen and plowman will be after an entire month doing this."

Eostre saw the wisdom in the Trickster's words and agreed that the last day of Plohmonan, as she has named the month, would be a festival and rest day. Joker's Day is held each year to honor this event, creating a three-day holiday at the end of the month. To thank the Unknowable One, people play practical jokes on each other and swap jokes and funny stories, all the while drinking copious quantities of ale to help them get into the mood.



FAMINE DAY

Raestdaeg of Snaermonan

While few civilized folk actively worship Vali, supplications are made to appease him. On this day, citizens across Rassilon destroy a portion of their winter stocks as an offering to the plague god in the hope he will not send vermin to infest their granaries or ruin food stocks with mold.

As Vali is god of famine as well, citizens refrain from eating and drinking throughout the day, in the hope Vali will be fooled by their suffering. Many settlements forbid the killing of vermin on this day, which frustrates clerics of Veth (see page 110).

GLUTTONY DAY

Raestdaeg of Frostmonan

Although some hardy crops can be cultivated and wild ones picked, food is always in short supply during winter. On this day, citizens scorn Vali by cooking and devouring a huge feast. Traditionally, no sharing between households is allowed during the day. The feast ends at dusk. During the night, leftovers are gathered up and taken to friends and neighbors. A second feast is held,

accompanied by much boasting and lying about the fine vittles the family dined on during the day.

While citizens are meant to use their best foodstuffs, the ceremony is really an excuse to use up food that would otherwise spoil before the first spring harvest can begin. As a result, the meals are poor but plentiful fare and the celebrations far less enthusiastic than is often claimed.

The ceremony dates back to the first winter. Vali scoffed that he had brought famine to the land through his wicked ways and that everyone would grow sick. Eostre, ever eager to get one over on Vali and prove him to be a liar, held a massive feast for the gods to show his dishonesty and her bounty.

INDULGENCE DAY

Raestdaeg of Sceranmonan

While the general populace holds certain celebration to appease Vali, this is not one of them. On this day, cultists gather to indulge in their most extravagant and perverted debaucheries in a no-holds barred duel-fuelled sadomasochistic orgy. It is also known as Recruitment Day, for this is the time to invite that curious neighbor who wonders about those special parties you hold for honored guests, and indoctrinate him into the faith that denies no pleasure. To encourage corruption, brothels, drug dens, and gambling halls offer very cheap services during the working week before and after the festival.

PLAGUE DAY

Raestdaeg of Werremonan

Summer can be a foul time in Rassilon, for it is the season of war and death. Festering corpses lie scattered across the land, while swarms of insects gather in the warm air to bite the living. Traditionally, it is the season of disease and sickness. To fool Vali into believing he has already sent plagues and need not send more, citizens paint black, red, and yellow blotches on their hands and faces, simulating many forms of disease. They refrain from visiting temples to Eira to have their "ailments" cured. Thus boosting Vali's ego and convincing him Eira is too weak to challenge him.

Once the night ends, the paint is washed away and the "plagues" cured. Clerics of Eira offer to wash away the sickness in herb-infused water for a small donation. It is widely held that having this service performed keeps away real diseases for the year.



AUCTION NIGHT

First Marketdaeg of Werremonan

One day at market, two gods approached Var. One sought to buy the last item of jewelry Var had to sell and

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offered a good price. Before the deal could be concluded, the second god offered a higher amount. Again, the deal could not be sealed before the first god raised the price again. Fascinated by this unexpected and previously unknown turn of events, Var sat back and let the two gods bid higher and higher, until at last one stomped away.

Rather than haggling or selling their goods at fixed prices, clerics must hold an auction on this day. All the clerics gather at dusk within the temple or shrine to Var (or erect a temporary shrine if none exists) and set up their stalls. Once the sun has set, the cleric with the highest profit for the year so far lights a candle stub. The length of the stub is variable, but it must burn for a minimum of one hour, and cannot burn beyond dawn. The candle is the only light allowed during the ceremony, and for this reason it is normally held indoors in the temple or inside a heavy tent.

While the candle burns, each cleric auctions their wares. All the auctions are handled simultaneously, the clerics seeking to out shout their rivals and secure bids. Once the candle burns out, the auction ends and the clerics tally their profits and losses in their ledgers.

CONTRACT DAY

Varies

Every cleric enters into a personal contract with Var when he is ordained. This contract lasts for exactly one year, after which the cleric must either renounce his faith by ending the contract (and so be stripped of his pow-

ers) or make a new one. Each cleric celebrates this ceremony on the anniversary of his ordination. The contract also requires the deal be between worshipper and god only, and thus it is a private affair.

The cleric begins by ritually washing, symbolically removing his sins (but not actually removing any game mechanics) so he can enter the negotiations with a clear conscience and unburdened soul. Once washed, the cleric sits down at a specially prepared table. Opposite he must place a holy symbol to represent Var. The cleric must then present all ledgers covering the last year since the contract was made. This is known as the religious year-end, and is different from the trading year-end.

If he made a loss over the religious year, he must explain what went wrong and what steps will be taken to ensure a healthy profit should he be granted a new contract. Even showing a profit the worshipper must convince Var he can not only repeat his performance but improve on it next year. This done, the petitioner signs and dates a blank piece of parchment. The contract signed, the cleric fills two glasses with alcohol. While drinking one he simultaneously pours the contents of the other over the signed parchment which, once dried out, is tucked into the cleric's current ledger.

PROFIT DAY

First Marketdaeg of Plobmonan

With winter in the Hearthlands now over and the snow rapidly melting, the trade roads come alive once again. This ritual marks the start of the new trading season and is one of the most holy days of Var.

To honor their god and ensure he has top quality wares to sell (and a healthy profit at year end), clerics must sacrifice their most expensive trade good or possession to their god. Pots and vases are smashed; weapons, armor, and jewelry melted down; herbs and wooden items burned; and art works vandalized. The cleric cannot have manufactured any of these items—they must have been purchased, thus starting the trade year off with a substantial financial loss. The quicker one reimburses oneself through trade deals, the better profits the cleric will have by year-end.

TALLY DAY

First Marketdaeg of Fogmonan

While some merchants trade over winter, the official end of the trading year falls on this day. It marks the day

Var finished his first year of trading and tallied up his profits and losses.

All clergy are required to keep two sets of ledgers. The first, and most important, is for their god's eyes. This ledger must contain every business transaction the cleric has undertaken, whether legal or illegal. Since this ledger can be very incriminating, all clerics invent their own shorthand accounting system to cover their tracks. Clerics must tally their profit and loss for the year on this day or face their god's displeasure. The year-end figures are then written on a piece of paper and burned.

The second ledger is of no concern to Var, but it is of interest to the local authorities, especially if the cleric only operates in a single place. This ledger is his mundane accounts for tax purposes. Var doesn't much care what his clergy write in this book (and most fail to record illegal transactions), though getting caught avoiding tax is a sin.

● LOCAL CUSTOMS ●

As well as the major religious festivals and ceremonies detailed above, many communities have a unique, or at least semi-unique, local festival. Some of these were always religious in origin, whereas others started in a mundane fashion and evolved into a form of worship over time. A selection of local customs is given below. None have been assigned any specific settlement and only a few are tied to specific dates, thus allowing the GM to use them wherever and whenever he wishes, although one makes reference to a specific geographic region.

AWAY WITH VALI DAY

Deity: Eostre Plantmother

In the Hearthlands, apple harvest occurs anytime between Werremonan and early to mid-Falmonan, depending on the variety of fruit, the harshness of the previous winter, local weather conditions, and even the presence of benevolent or malevolent fey. For one community, the day before the harvest begins, as determined by the high priest of Eostre Plantmother, is time for a painful ceremony.

Throughout the year, those charged with petty crimes (the sort that would normally result in a trivial fine, admonishment, or be laughed out of court) are brought before the Apple Court. The court comprises the high priest of Eostre Plantmother, the village ruler, and a farmer chosen by random lot each year. Evidence is not heard, witnesses are not called, and unless a "fine" (actually a donation to toward the local post-harvest feast) is paid, the accused is always found guilty. The criminal is ordered to report back the day before apple harvesting begins, known locally as Away with Vali Day.

As the sun rises, all persons found guilty of "heinous" crimes by the Apple Court are wrapped in rags that have been smeared with dung and urine. For the rest of the day, they represent Vali. Apples that fall early do not keep,

and are no use for winter storage. Instead of pressing them into cider or leaving them to rot, the locals gather them up and hurl them at the various Valis, who try their best to dodge the barrage of overripe missiles. Bruises are assured (and broken noses and concussions are not uncommon). Once Vali has been suitably battered, it is believed he will not trouble the apple store over winter, ensuring the villagers will have something to eat.

BARLEY QUEEN DANCE

Deity: Eostre Plantmother

Ale and beer are the lifeblood of commoners and nobles alike (with notable exceptions for the wine-loving folk of Aspiria), and barley is the main ingredient. The stalks cut on the final day of harvesting are tied around the village's Eostre Queen (see p. 17), transforming her into the Barley Queen for the day. She then parades around the settlement, calling on the householders to join her dance.

The procession ends up at the brewery, where she ritually raps on the door three times. When the brewer answers, the Barley Queen promises to perform a special dance to boost the flavor of the beer, in return for a sizeable monetary donation. It is permissible for the brewer to refuse, but doing so condemns the year's brews to be tasteless. Assuming cash is handed over, the Barley Queen and her attendants perform a complex dance. The attendants wear small iron bells on their feet to scare away evil spirits and malicious fey, and clash sticks to frighten away rat and mice.

Once the ritual is complete, the last load of barley is handed to the brewer, and the Barley Queen is stripped of the stalks. These are then burned in the fields as an offering to Eostre, while onlookers get drunk.

BATTLE OF THE FLOWERS

Deity: Eostre Plantmother

On the last day of harvest, farmers from the surrounding communities take to wagons decorated with garlands of flowers and loaded with the last crop from their fields, and trundle toward the shared temple of Eostre Plantmother. Along the way, dried flower petals are thrown to the crowd, who throw flowers, and sometimes hefty missiles like turnips, back to show their approval or dislike.

Once at the temple, the high priest judges the wagons, awarding prizes for the best decorated one, and the one with the best looking produce onboard. Although the bounty of one's fields is largely down to Eostre and the whims of fate, decorating a wagon is down to human endeavor. Competition is fierce, and families go to great length to keep their designs a secret.

BAWMING THE THORN

Deity: Eostre Plantmother

Several hundred years ago, so skalds say, the natives on a small farming community found their settlement in

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the path of a marauding orc warband. Lacking fortifications, the village appeared an easy target. Being godly folk, the villagers prayed to Eostre Plantmother to save them. The next morning, to everyone's surprise, the villagers discovered their settlement ringed by a dense wall of hawthorn trees. Unable to penetrate the thorny barrier, the orcs called off their attack and never returned.

Whether the tale is true or not, the village today boasts only a single hawthorn, supposedly the last of the natural fortification. Each spring, the tree becomes the focus for a ritual. Children adorn the tree with colored ribbons and garlands of wild flowers ("bawming" is a local word meaning "anointing") while singing a traditional song thanking the hawthorn for its past service and, if the legends are true, its future service should the village be threatened again. Ale is then poured over the roots by the resident cleric of Eostre Plantmother.

A member of each household then plucks one thorn from the tree. This is placed over the lintel, ensuring the house will be protected during the coming year.

BEATING THE BOUNDS

Deity: Hothar (and Ertha, if boundary stones exist)

Though widely carried out, this once popular ritual is now largely confined to rural communities and performed only when a new lord (whether hereditary or elected) is appointed. Villagers gather at dawn and walk the boundary of the settlement, stopping to beat trees, hedges, walls, boundary stones, and other markers with willow staves. The ritual not only reminds everyone where the boundaries lie, but asserts the lord's rule over the territory. Once the settlement boundary is marked, villagers do the same around their farm boundaries, while clerics beat the bounds of their temple's holdings.

BLOWING OF THE HORN NIGHT

Deity: Freo

A century ago, the night before the regional market was due to begin, a terrible blizzard blanketed the land. The citizens of the market town, knowing their neighbors would be traveling through the cold night, stood vigil atop a tall hill, blowing a horn every few minutes to guide the lost to safety until the sun rose.

The blowing of the horn has become a local tradition, the deep, reverberating tones now marking the official start of the market. The first blow of the horn is offered to any cleric of Freo staying in the village. Having one start the ceremony is said to ensure travelers who hear its note will enjoy an uneventful journey.

BOAR'S HEAD FEAST

Deity: Ullr

Boars, at least in the Hearthlands, are hunted in winter. By this time they have grown fat and weaned their young. With the exact start of spring, and thus the end of hunting season, being variable, this festival is fixed on

the last Endedaeg of Frostmonan, creating a three-day holiday. On this day, the last boar killed during the previous week is butchered and roasted. The meat from the body and legs is fed to the hunting dogs, while humans dine only on the head—a reminder that unless meat has been preserved, that is the last taste of boar anyone will enjoy for many months.

The hunter who killed the boar, the high priest of Ullr, and the local lord consume the meat on the cheeks and jawbone. Everyone else is fed gelatinous soup made using the trotters and scraps of meat from the head. The ears are offered to Ullr as a sacrifice.

Having a male to roast is seen as an omen for a good hunting season later in the year. A female offers less plentiful hunting, and a juvenile a sign that the taste of boar may be rare. Not to have a boar at all is calamitous, forcing the feast to be cancelled and the hunters scolded for their lack of success.

THE BOAT RACE

Deity: Neorthe

Every year, two rival fishing communities take to the water to decide which has the better oarsmen. The crews must row two miles out to sea, circle around a boat holding the local cleric of Neorthe, and then race back to shore. The first team to beach their boat and reach the temple of Neorthe receives a special blessing to help ensure their fishing nets will be full during the next year. The race has a non-religious meaning as well. The local nobleman has a merchant vessel, and oarsmen who impress the priest may be recommended to the noble. They may be called upon to join the crew and earn a decent wage for the coming trading year.

CANDLE FIELD AUCTION

Deity: Var (also Eostre Plantmother)

Although the cult of Var is most well known for its mercantile activities, any legal money-making scheme is considered acceptable. So it was that an enterprising young cleric purchased a plot of prime agriculture land from a nobleman. He paid a fair price, and promised that whoever tilled the soil would gift 10% of the crop yield to the noble's family. Instead of farming it himself, he promptly auctioned a year's use of the field to the villagers, whose lands were (and still are) far inferior.

The cleric is long dead, and ownership of the field now rests with the temple of Var in the nearest town. Each year, on the day after Birthing Day, the cult sends a representative to conduct the auction and collect the annual payment.

The auction's duration is set by a slim pin stuck in a burning candle. When the pin falls out, the auction ends. Whoever placed the last bid wins the plot for the next year. Proceedings are usually very slow until the candle begins to burn down near the pin, whereupon it becomes a flurry of bids. Whoever wins is still bound by oath to give the lord his 10% of the yield as part of the annual contract.

CAT PAMPERING DAY

Deity: Eostre Animalmother

Fall and winter and busy times for cats, for the full granaries attract many vermin. While most communities say prayers to Eostre, the citizens of one small community have taken to pampering their vermin-hunting cats.

Also known as the Day of Bites & Scratches, the citizens round up the suspicious felines (a job usually given to children) at dawn, give the now angry cats a good wash, and then comb their tangled hair. The cats are then fed the best cuts of meat available while skalds recite stories of Veth and Vali's constant struggle. The cats are then blessed by the local cleric of Eostre Animalmother.

The ceremony occurs the week before harvesting commences. Once the pampered cats are full they will not be fed again until spring unless winter is particularly hard or the vermin decide to stay away—cats that want to eat have to catch their meals.

CLIMBING THE HAIR

Deity: Eira

Tales are told on winter nights how a young maiden of great beauty was locked inside a tall tower by her zealous father. She was eventually rescued by a passing knight, who scaled the sheer walls thanks to the maiden's hair, which had grown immensely long during her imprisonment. The story ends with the pair getting married and living happily ever after. It's a common enough tale, but for one village it is fact, for they claim the knight and his new bride settled in their community afterward. They even have an unmarked barrow to prove to doubters where they lie in an eternal embrace.

Every year, a rope is hoisted from the highest window of the tallest barn, and the feat repeated. To make it more challenging, and amusing, the rope is heavily greased. Contestants are required to give a lengthy and flowery speech proclaiming their undying love for the maiden before they begin climbing.

Whoever reaches the top is rewarded with a kiss from the maiden. Alas, no marriage ensues, for the maiden is actually a man dressed in women's clothes and plastered in heavy make-up. Instead, he gets to carry the title "Knight of the Hair" for the rest of the day, and is rewarded with a hare for his cooking pot.

On rare occasions, the maiden is actually what she claims. Seeking a husband good with words, willing to publicly admit his feelings toward her, and with physical strength and stamina to match, she willing offers herself as a bride to the lucky winner. On such occasions, only single men may participate in the event.

CLOTHING THE GIANT

Deity: Ertha

On the side of a hill is the chalk outline of a giant. Local tradition claims the giant (popularly believed to be a forest giant) defended the nearby village from orcs, but

in doing so was seriously wounded. The grateful villagers prayed to the gods that he might be shown pity for his bravery and selfless act. Ertha heard the pleas, and agreed to shelter the giant beneath the hill until such time that he might once again be needed to rise up and defend the village. The outline is the giant's supposed position when Ertha opened the ground to swallow his body.

Each year, on the long-agreed upon anniversary of the giant's death, the villagers trudge up the hill at dawn. Food and drink are placed at either side of his head, a spear is thrust into the ground near his right hand, and gigantic clothes are laid across his naked form and pegged down. When these rot, many months later, the villages know the giant has accepted their gifts, and will be suitably fed and equipped should he be called upon to awaken.

CROWNING THE INDECIPHERABLE KING

Deity: Hoenir

Villagers still speak with pride of the day a man from a foreign land came to their then-insular settlement. Though no one could understand his language, his dress, manners, and strange customs made it abundantly clear to the simple folk he was a great king. The monarch stayed for a year, never lifting a finger to help, and relying on the charity of his hosts. In the end, the king was exposed as a fraud by a passing cleric of Hoenir. The "king" was in fact a peasant, albeit one shrewd enough to fool the villagers by speaking gibberish and acting strangely. Though the villagers wanted to execute him, the cleric convinced them they had learned a valuable lesson, and encouraged them to learn more about the world around them.

The royal visit and gullible nature of their ancestors is remembered each year. The first outsider to enter the village in spring is crowned the Indecipherable King (regardless of gender), and allowed to rule as he or she sees fit. Even if he speaks Trader or the local language, his temporary subjects pretend they cannot understand him, forcing him to pantomime his desires. Typically his requests are met with humorous "best guesses." One unfortunate king asked for female company, and was proudly presented with a ewe. Thus, the king becomes the fool, rather than the villagers.

At midnight, the king is publicly exposed as an impostor, whereupon the "angry" villagers pelt him with rotten fruit and dung. The dethroning complete, the king is welcomed back as a friend with a feast.

DOG PIE DAY

Deity: Eostre (both aspects)

Things got so bad during a famine that the inhabitants of one village were forced to eat their dogs. The unfortunate hounds, so the story goes, were baked into pies. The sacrifice of the canines kept the villagers alive until the next harvest. Whether they had already eaten

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CUSTOMS & CHARACTERS

The major festivals and local customs presented in this chapter are, for the most part, role-playing scenes that require no rules. In most instances, the heroes presence has absolutely no effect on the outcome.

At the GM's discretion, player character participants (not spectators) may be required to make rolls. One such case where he might choose to apply this is Winter Pass Us By Night (p. 54).

This ceremony requires a cleric of Sigel to swing a heavy ball as often as possible to signify the rapid passing of winter and the return of summer. Using die rolls allows the GM to determine the outcome of the ritual and its effect on the world. It also gives the participating character a sense that he has achieved something for the benefit of others. Here are two simple sets of rules.

* This one uses a variant of the Social Conflict resolution rules. The character uses Strength and his roll is unopposed. Each of the three rounds signifies 40 swings of the flaming ball. The first round requires an unmodified Strength roll. The second round has a -1 penalty and the third round a -2 penalty.

A margin of victory of 2 or less means the cleric has faired poorly—winter will be harsh. A result of 3-4 indicates a typical winter, though perhaps with less days of heavy snow. On a 5+ winter will be exceptionally mild.

* For every 20 swings he completes, the character must make a Strength roll. Each 20 swings or part thereof after the first incurs a cumulative -1 penalty. With GM permission, the cleric can call upon his faith to give him strength, but only once during the ceremony. This allows him to use Faith to make a Cooperative roll. The roll must be made before the Strength roll is made—it is too late to call on it after one's strength has failed.

Assuming the first snowfall occurs on the first day of Wulfmonan and the last halfway through Eostremonan, a fully successful ritual involves 112 swings, or six rolls, the last with a -5 penalty. Even with liberal use of bennies, total success is far from guaranteed, and any hero who does perform the entire ceremony certainly has bragging rights.

RITUALS & EXISTING ADVENTURES

Many of these rituals can easily be integrated into published adventures as an extra scene. *N5: The Eostre Festival* is especially good for this, as the entire adventure comprises completing several mini-rituals performed as part of a larger Birthing Day celebration. The Dung Bread ritual could be carried out in *N1: Lair of the Vermin Lord* once the characters reach Dalsetter with news of the death of Dunross.

their cats or had spared them in order that they might hunt vermin for human consumption is a matter of local debate after a few drinks.

In modern times, only a single pie is cooked, but one large enough to feed the entire village. The pie is a mish-mash, with each family donating ingredients. Fortunately for dog lovers, the canine has been replaced with a small wooden carving. Whoever finds the dog in their portion is destined not to go hungry for the next year.

DUNG BREAD

Deity: Vali (appeasement, rather than worship)

Famine is a terrible thing, but loss of winter stores to rot or vermin is just as perilous. One community tries to fool Vali by making bread into which are baked balls of dung. These special loaves, easily discerned by a cross on the top, are purchased by households as normal.

The bread is left on the floor of the house overnight, in the hope rats and mice nibble on it. Biting into the dung, they will hopefully carry the message back that there is nothing good to eat in the village, and Vali will pass them by in search of more satisfying fare elsewhere.

THE FIELD LOTTERY

Deity: Nauthiz

Long ago, a nobleman was given a grant of land by his lord and permitted to found a new village. The land was a mixture of good and poor farmland, and the noble could not decide how to divide it fairly among the peasants. A small parcel of rich agricultural land would produce high crop yields, while the poorer soil would require a substantially greater area and much more work to produce a similar yield.

The cult of Eostre Plantmother proposed a solution. The land was divided into strips of equal length, and each one marked with a boundary stone bearing a unique rune. Each year, before plowing began, the farmers would draw a wooden ball, marked with one of the runes, from a basket. This indicated the strip of land their family would farm. Since the draw was random and occurred every year, no family could be guaranteed to receive the best land. On the first day of Eostremonan, local families gather outside noble's house to draw the wooden balls. Although the allocation of land began with the cult of Eostre Plantmother, the festival is actually held in honor of Nauthiz, in his aspect of god of luck. Once the cheering and grumbling about the vagaries of luck are over, everyone celebrates at a small feast.

FLOGGING THE WATER

Deity: Ertha

Each year without fail, a river would break its banks, flooding a nearby village. In an act that can only be described as a major miracle, a cleric of Ertha walked into the heart of the river, and whipped it while scolding Nerthe for his destructive act. In order to prevent another

flood occurring, the miraculous act is repeated each year when the river runs at its lowest.

At this time, the water is a thin trickle, revealing a wide stretch of thick, cloying, foul-smelling mud. Citizens race to be the first run to reach the middle of the river, slap the water, and return to the bank. Running through the mud is impossible, and those who stop for any reason are guaranteed to sink up to their waists.

THE FYRD WALK

Deity: Tiw

As the Dark Triumvirate expanded their bony grasp into Darkwood, the citizens of Aslov grew fearful the undead would march against their city. The baron called upon the neighboring settlements to send their fyrd to Aslov, offering financial and material rewards for their time. While the undead still make occasional forays into the Freelands, no major assault has occurred, and the encirclement of the Withered Lands by the cult of Scaetha ensures few undead survive the sporadic breakouts. Over the centuries, all save one of the outlying villages have ceased sending troops to Aslov without being officially summoned. Down the ages, the annual march of the last village has taken on a traditional pattern.

Each year, the fyrd members grab their armaments, make offerings to Tiw, and march to the gates of Aslov. Once there, their commander calls out to the watch, proclaiming the villagers have arrived to fulfill their ancient oath. Except on very rare occasions when their arms are needed to help defeat bandits or orcs, the baron ascends the gatehouse to address the villagers. He thanks the fyrd for their support and then dismisses them from service. The commander then demands the fyrd be paid.

Formerly the villagers were given a week's mercenary infantry wages each and sent away with a wagon filled with enough food to support the village for a month. With its fortunes waning, the reward has diminished to a day's wages and enough food to host a modest feast.

GARLAND DAY

Deity: Eostre Plantmother

After the harvest has been gathered, local girls spend the last warm days of the year gathering flowers. These are woven around two wicker anthropomorphic frames, one male and one female. The male figure is decorated with flowers picked from gardens or fields, while the female one is garlanded in wild flowers.

On Sangdaeg of Haerfestmonan, the colorful figures are paraded through the village. Small morsels of food are stuffed into the figures, ritually feeding them to help them through the coming winter. With the village parade complete, the figures are marched through the crop fields while the villagers sing songs honoring Eostre. As the sun sets on the last day of fall, the figures are laid side by side in the largest field. Here they will remain until spring, slowly decaying, and ritually fertilizing the soil in preparation for the next plowing.

GHOST WALK DAY

Deity: Scaetha

Undead, orcs, dragons, and trolls all strike fear into mortals, but the former are the most widely feared. On the night before First Death Day, children dress up as undead (typically by dirtying their faces and hands, and wearing rags or funeral shrouds) and travel between houses, knocking on doors and loudly demanding any corpses be handed over. Householders gift the children with small loaves shaped into the form of men and engraved with the names of the house's occupants. Evil spirits, believing the bread to be human remains, are thus drawn into them.

Before midnight, the bread corpses are taken to the shrine of Scaetha, whereupon the clerics ritually cut off the head, bless the remains, and cremate them. In return, the children receive candy (or sometimes silver shields) equal to the number of bread corpses they collected.

GREASING THE BRIDE

Deity: The Unknowable One

Not every bride down the ages has been a willing partner in marriage. According to one village's story, a young bride-to-be sought a means of escaping the coming ceremony, for she did not love the man her father had chosen. Her plight was answered by a cleric of The Unknowable One, who suggested she strip down as far as modesty allowed and cover herself in animal fat. Suitably smeared, she ran away. Her husband gave chase, but was unable to grab and hold the woman. Eventually he gave up the chase, vowing the girl could marry the man of her choice.

Today, every local woman on her wedding day is smeared in grease, whether she wants to be married or not. Her future husband must then try to grab her and carry her to the altar. Even if the girl cooperates, her greasy skin ensures the crowd has a good laugh at the couple's expense.

THE GREAT CATTLE RAID

Deity: Eostre Animalmother

Once bitter rivals, two neighboring villages frequently launched raids against their neighbor's herds. Though the jarl was eventually forced to intervene and outlaw the practice to prevent the feud escalating into something more serious, the villages are permitted to ceremonially raid once a year, albeit with restrictions.

Each village nominates a team of raiders numbering no more than 10 members. Clerics of Eostre Animalmother and her son, Bolverk are most preferred, but any citizen can volunteer his services. Only locals may participate, but there is often a spike in temporary citizenship being awarded to passing clerics of Bolverk around this time. Once the teams are selected, the headman of each settlement picks one cow from his rival's herd, and marks it. Changing the mark to a lesser specimen is guaranteed to anger the gods.

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At dawn, each team crosses the boundary and attempts to steal the other's nominated cow. By law, this must be placed in a field with other cows—it cannot be sheltered in a byre, or otherwise protected. Miracles are permitted, but only if cast by a cleric Bolverk, and lethal force is strictly forbidden. The task is made much harder than normal by the fact everyone knows the attack is coming. Villagers line up along the border to try and stop their cow being stolen. Usually the event ends up in a huge, largely good-natured brawl. Victory requires the cow to be delivered unharmed to the headman's house.

The victorious village gets to slaughter the cow they stole for a great feast. The losers, meanwhile, must clean out the other village's byres before the first snow falls, or forfeit another cow as compensation.

HALF LOAF DAY

Deity: Eostre Plantmother

Originally named Halfdan Loaf Day, the ceremony was started by a local boy turned hero. Though he had traveled far and wide, he never forgot the small village where he grew up, nor the poverty he endured as a youth. Before his death, he bequeathed money to the local temple of Eostre Plantmother so that every family in the village might be gifted a loaf of bread in mid-winter. Though the money has long since been spent, the tradition is maintained, though free bread is given only to the poorest families these days.

HEAD BANGING

Deity: Tiw

In days of yore, Bludgeoners honored Tiw by placing orc heads on sticks and attempting to knock them off with a well-placed sling stone. As well as a religious purpose, it served as a training exercise. Except in rare cases, the heads used today are oblong wooden balls crudely and mockingly painted to resemble orcs, and are placed in hoops mounted on staves.

Over time, the ceremony evolved into a common game at fairs across the Vale and wherever engro visit. Those who feel lucky, or wish to impress someone, pay a silver scield and receive three wooden balls marked with Tiw's holy symbol. For each head they topple, they are rewarded with a prize. Whether or not the contest is actually fair depends on the stall owner. Some are above reproach, but others place the heads deep into the hoop, making it very hard to topple. The value of prizes varies between two silver scields and a single gold scield.

Each year, Bludgeoners, slingers, and hopefuls gather at the annual great markets held in Easton, Weem, and Weston. Here they perform the ritual as it was originally held—using slings at varying ranges. The winner of each contest receives the honorific title “Master Marksman of <place name>,” a prize of a lead sling stone donated by the cult of Tiw and inscribed with the god's holy symbol (though mundane, legends have arose that such stones never miss their target), and the adulation of the crowd.

HEN PECKED DAY

Deity: Eostre (both aspects)

In most lands, who one courts is largely a matter of personal choice. The scions of nobles may find themselves persuaded into arranged marriages, but the great majority of citizens need only win over their prospective in-laws. That is not a universal idea, though. This festival is a local variation of Courtship Day (see p. 17).

Each year, the eligible young men of the village line up in the main square. Each places at his feet a weighed measure of grain grown in his family's fields. The young girls then enter the square, each holding a chicken from their family's flock. The hens are decorated with colored ribbons to differentiate them. On command from the local priestess, the hens are set loose. The first pile of grain a hen pecks at indicates which boy and girl are to begin courting, their “love” a sign from the goddess.

The ceremony isn't without a lot of jostling for position. Though the cult preaches that the hens will go for the pile of grain of the man Eostre has deemed most suitable for the girl, in truth the birds (which are starved the day before to ensure they actually have an appetite), head for the nearest pile. Thus, girls elbow each other outside to place their hen closest to the richest man, the best looking, or whatever other earthly criteria they have decided has determined their potential husband. When two birds reach the same pile at the same time, arguments, and sometimes fights, break out, to the great delight of the crowd.

Since gods are infallible, any failure to produce a marriage in the years to come is the fault of the mortals involved, not the ceremony (or, indeed, the hens). While boy and girl might find love, the fate of the hen is less pleasant—the poor creature is killed, cooked, and shared by the family of the young couple as a means of cementing the courtship.

HOBBY HORSE RACE

Deity: Freo

Several generations ago, a nobleman whose lands were beset by orcs offered a handsome reward to any rider who could message for reinforcements to his liege. That event is reenacted every year, though today it is an excuse for frivolity, with real horses replaced by garishly decorated hobby horses.

The course is decided by the local cleric of Eostre Anmalmother. Tradition requires that any cleric of Freo visiting the village on the appointed day be given the honor setting the course. Mud, hedges, steep slopes, and other potential pitfalls always feature heavily, so as to provide good entertainment for the crowd.

The race starts at midday, and covers just three miles, rather than the 20 miles of history. Each contestant is given a sealed scroll, which he must deliver to the ruling noble. Shoving and barging each other is permitted, as is stealing another rider's scroll. Spell use and lethal force is strictly forbidden. The winner receives an entire

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butchered pig for his troubles and his scroll is burned. The losers must carry out whatever embarrassing forfeits are written on their scroll.

HODDING THE PEAT

Deity: Kenaz and Eostre Plantmother

For settlements near bogs, mires, and moors, peat is a common source of fuel for hearths. In early spring, the peat bank (the exposed face left by last year's harvest) is cleaned of any grass, cut into sods using a specialized tool known as a peat iron, and placed in long lines. After a few weeks, it is stable enough to stand on end, allowing the underside to dry. After a few weeks, the peat is formed into large piles to allow continued drying, and to protect the bulk of the harvest from inclement weather and too much sunshine (which causes it to dry and crumble). Finally, the harvest is collected and formed into a peatstack in preparation for use during the winter months. Preparing the stack is a specialized task, for the structure must be able to withstand gales, blizzards, torrential rain, and biting frosts.

As an aside, peat, while largely sterile, is also used in farming. Mixed in with the earth, it retains moisture during dry periods, increases acidity, and in sandy or loose soil prevents water simply draining away.

On the last day of harvest, one settlement holds a festival. As the remaining peat is being loaded, dead seeds from last year's harvest are sown onto the bog as an offering to Eostre Plantmother. Traditionally, no wagons or barrows are used on the final day. Instead, the peat is loaded onto hods and manually carried back to the settlement. The resident cleric of Kenaz awards special blessings for the most peat shifted by an individual, and for the heaviest single load.

HOLDING OF THE BRIDGE

Deity: Rigr

Several generations ago, orc raiders targeted a remote village. Surrounded on three sides by a wide, slow-moving river bordered by extensive mud flats, the only safe crossing was a narrow bridge. The orc advance did not go unnoticed, though. As they reached the bridge, a lone defender, a cleric of Rigr, stepped forth to meet them. For several hours he held the bridge against wave after wave of attackers. In the end, the orc morale collapsed and they fled. The cleric died of his wounds, but his sacrifice saved countless lives.

Each year, this act of bravery is remembered by the inhabitants of the village. The village no longer has any permanent clerics of Rigr, and unless one attends specifically to participate in the ritual, the captain of the militia plays the defender.

Before sunrise, the villagers traipse to the far side of the bridge. As the sun dawns, the watchman takes up his post in the center of the bridge. He carries a quarterstaff, padded so as to reduce the risk of serious injury (counts as nonlethal damage). Once he is in position, the villag-

ers, dressed as orcs but unarmed, try to storm the bridge and reach the village. Thanks to the narrow bridge, they can advance only in single file. Most end up in the muddy water, battered and bruised.

The battle ends when the watchman is defeated, or after 100 orcs have ended up in the river. The former is a bad omen, for it means raiders have an increased chance of attacking. The fyrd trains harder than normal. Should the watchman win, the villagers retreat to a stone cairn, where the original watchman is interred, and sing songs in his honor. Safe from raiders for another year, they celebrate with a grand feast. As always, the thought of cheating fate and deliberately throwing oneself off the bridge is considered a sure-fire way to anger Rigr and encourage raiders.

HURLING THE BREAD

Deity: Eostre Plantmother and Tiw

The origins of this unusual custom are said to lie in the dark days following the Blizzard War. An army of beggars descended upon a small settlement in search of food. Wary of the true motives of a small army in what were dangerous and distrusting times, and lacking much in the way of a militia, the hungry horde was kept at bay by throwing stale bread over the walls to distract and injure the beggars.

This act of warlike charity carries on today. The settlement's poorest inhabitants (or those who consider themselves worthy of a free meal) mass outside the palisade at dawn. A sentry then blows a trumpet, signaling the start of the skirmish. Stale or rotten food is hurled by villagers, or launched in their primitive trebuchet (useless as a weapon of war, but ideal for launching stale bread a great distance) until early afternoon. Minor injuries from large bones, hard root vegetables, and stale loaves are assured.

As a sign that times have improved, as have the attitudes and hospitality of the locals, the battered and bruised poor are then invited to attend a feast.

HURLING THE SUN

Deity: Sigel

This ritual is performed on Heah Sumor Daeg. As the sun breaks the horizon, the local high priest of Sigel hurls a yellow-painted wooden ball into the crowd of eager spectators. Whoever has the ball in his hands at dusk is rewarded with a single gold scield and a special blessing.

The only rules are magic and lethal force are prohibited, contestants may not pass beyond the village boundary, and the ball must remain outdoors at all times. Beyond that, anything goes. Healers are on stand-by to provide much needed first aid for cuts and broken bones, though they are likely to be injured as a participant if they try to enter the melee to provide assistance.

KING COMING DAY

Deity: Hothar

Word once reached a settlement that the king was

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coming to visit. After a brief bout of panic, the villagers got to work cleaning their homes, decorating the fronts with garlands, and ensuring their best clothes were mended and washed. The militia donned their armor and stood at attention at the village boundary to provide an honor guard. From dawn to dusk they waited in the streets, each household with a basket of food to offer as a gift. Whether the rumor was a cruel trick or misunderstanding has long been forgotten, but the king did not visit, nor has one ever visited.

Still, this does not prevent the locals from preparing each year by following in their ancestor's footsteps. At dusk, with the king having failed to turn up yet again, the food is enjoyed at a communal feast while the villagers swear oaths of allegiance to the king.

KING'S PIE

Deity: Eostre and Hothar

The tradition of the King's Pie began with the formation of the Marklands and the ascension of the first Heah Cyning. To celebrate the event, the industrious inhabitants of one village created a pie large enough to feed the king, his retainers, and his nobles. Since then, it has become a tradition to bake another pie whenever a new high king is elected.

Over time, the size of the pie has grown considerably as eager villagers seek to better the efforts of their ancestors, and the last few have contained around 300 lbs of

meat—enough to feed half the population of Royalmark a sliver. Once ready, the pie is taken by cart to the king's hall. Should it be pecked by birds (or worse, attacked by wolves) *en route*, the king is in for a rough reign, with famine, bandits, and other ill-fates set to befall the land. After the court has had its share, the pie is doled out to commoners by the king as a sign of his largesse.

LIGHTING OF THE HEARTHES

Deity: Kenaz

This ritual is a variation on Hearth Day (see p. 25). Each time they gather or purchase firewood, families set aside a single branch or log. On the eve of the ritual, these bundles are taken to the temple of Kenaz as donations. At dawn, the high priest takes a hot coal from the sacred fire at the heart of the temple and carries it to each household, whereupon it is used to light the first hearth of winter. As with Hearth Day, it is said that to allow a hearth to go out on this day is a sign of certain misfortune and a cold house over the whole of winter.

LORD OF THE CRYSTALFLOW

Deity: Neorthe & Var

The settlements along the Crystalflow, despite being joined by trade and military pacts, answer to no single lord. The prestigious title Lord of the Crystalflow applies only to one small village. The origins are lost in time, but the position still wields local power.

Each year, the villagers elect a new lord. It is his responsibility to declare the official start of fishing season, to allot fishing rights along the bank, and to set trade tariffs for fish. He is also the judge for crimes concerning crimes related to fishing, such as fishing outside one's range, fishing before or after the season begins, stealing fish, and such like. In this capacity his word is law.

Amid great pomp and ceremony, the new lord is bedecked in robes befitting a rich merchant, over which is hung a fishing net. This symbolizes his dual aspect as a servant of both Neorthe and Var.

He then takes to the river in a boat decorated with reeds, oyster shells, fish bones, and wreckage that have washed up on the riverbank during the previous year. He is rowed up and down the river, loudly proclaiming his title and declaring his authority over this stretch of the mighty Crystalflow. Anyone who manages to swim out and touch the boat is said to be blessed by both gods, and will catch many fish that sell for a good price.



LORD'S BARREL ROLL

Deity: Hothar

One dark night, perhaps already the worse for wear with alcohol, a group of villagers decided to relieve their lord of a hogshead (48 pints) of ale. On detecting the crime, the lord's guards set after the villains, chasing them, and the barrel, back toward their homes. No one recalls the true outcome of the theft, though each side claims its men were the victors.

The endeavor is marked each year on the current lord's birthday. A hogshead is placed outside his manor, from where a team of villagers tries to roll it away. His men-at-arms give them a small head start, and then begin the chase. Should the container cross the village boundary, the locals get to open it and drink themselves stupid at their lord's expense.

If they are caught, the "villains" are merciless "whipped" with an inflated pigskin on a stick and "branded" as thieves with charcoal. They are then locked in a barn, while everyone else celebrates the lord's birthday with a single pint of ale from his cellar while loudly denying they know the criminals.

THE LORD'S FEAST

Deity: Var

Several generations ago, a minor and eccentric nobleman made his peasants an offer—if they could defeat a team of his household staff and estate workers at knattleikr he would exempt them from taxation for the next year. The deal was not entirely generous, for if they lost then their taxes would be doubled. At least that is what local folklore claims.

Regardless of the truth, the Lord's Men, as they are known irrespective of gender, take on a team of freemen each year in high summer. Things have changed somewhat over the years, though. Instead of altering taxes, the lord now provides a feast for the villagers if they win. Should the lord's men win, the villagers must provide for a feast for the lord and his estate workers. Although no money is involved these days, the game is still considered sacred to Var. Before the match commences, the nobleman and the elder freeman of the village sign a contract ensuring the outcome will be honored.

The game is fiercely contested—the prize is not worth as much as the prestige and boasting rights. For those not involved, the day is spent drinking, gambling on the outcome, and enjoying the market, which attracts merchants from neighboring communities.

LOUD WIND DAY

Deity: Rigr (morning) and Thunor (afternoon)

Loud Wind Day has a serious side and a jovial side. In the morning, villagers take turns to blow on the village signal horn. Judges with large, brightly colored flags are placed at varying distances from the village. When they hear the horn, they wave their flag to signal the judges.

Whoever has the best lungs, and thus produces the blast heard at the greatest distance, is appointed the task of sounding the alarm should the village be attacked.

Come the afternoon, the judges move closer to the village. Instead of trying to produce a warning blast, contestants burp and fart into smaller signal horns. This has become known as "channeling Thunor," a phrase that borders on blasphemy in the eyes of some clerics of the wind god. Other clergy are keen to take part, claiming that Thunor is master of any form of wind. Prizes are awarded for the loudest expulsion in each category. The eating of foodstuffs with the usually unenviable trait of producing excess wind are consumed in great quantities during the morning as part of a communal feast.

The use of magic is forbidden, though a spellcaster who uses *elemental manipulation (air)* to dissipate a particularly pungent fart is more likely to be congratulated than fined.

MAID'S MONEY DICE

Deity: The Norns

Whether a person will be rich or poor is written by the Norns at the mortal's birth. For those without money, marriage may be a dim prospect. Every year, all the unmarried village girls play a game of winner-takes-all dice in the market square. The prize is a year's wages for a servant girl (about 200 gold scields), donated by the incumbent noble.

THE MAIDEN'S HOOD

Deity: Eostre and Thunor

One fine spring day, the daughter of a nobleman was out riding her horse. A gust of wind caught her expensive hood and tore it from her head, whereupon it promptly went flying away. A dozen farmers saw the hood tumbling over the fields and promptly gave chase, each jostling with the others in the hope of earning a reward. After much jostling, and a few slips and falls, the hood was grabbed and returned to its grateful owner. So relieved was she to receive her hood back that she promptly married the peasant, elevating him greatly in status (or so the legend says).

Still reenacted today, the noble's daughter has been replaced with a young maiden of the village, and the chasing of her hood is part of the Birthing Day celebrations (see p. 17). Instead of just a dozen chasers, every single man in the village between the ages of 16 and 20 is allowed to partake. The hood is released at dawn (delays to wait for the wind to pick up are permitted). The youth who catches the hood also wins the maiden's heart (i.e. he gets to marry her). If no one has secured the hood by dusk, the girl goes unmarried, and everyone bemoans the bad omen.

These days, the local lord never lets his daughter be the maiden, nor any of his sons marry a peasant girl. He plays his part through the donation of a plot of good farmland, which the newly married couple gets to farm for the next year to help their new life get off to a profitable start.

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MAYOR CARRYING DAY

Deity: Hothar

Some years ago, a nobleman decided that two small hamlets on his lands should merge to create a village. Between them lay a slow-moving stream bordered by wide, muddy flats. The noble left it to the locals to decide who should be mayor of the new village, demanding only that he (or she) present himself at his hall at sunset.

Naturally, each hamlet decided one of its own would be the logical choice. So it was that each hamlet bodily lifted its candidate and raced toward the manor. The race soon developed into a brawl, the end result being two battered and bleeding candidates.

Over the years, the ritual for mayoral election has changed somewhat. Today, the candidates are no longer carried. They have been replaced by two large leather-coated, wooden balls with caricatures of the contenders painted on them. Instead of racing to the lord's manor, each side of the village begins outside the house of its chosen candidate, and attempts to carry its "candidate" to the other hopeful's house. The first ball to reach its destination earns the candidate being represented election. Should no side achieve victory, last year's candidate remains in office. Typically, the contest devolves into a brawl on the banks of the river, resulting in a lot of bruised, tired, and muddy villagers.

As is normal in such events, the use of magic is expressly outlawed. Any one caught cheating can expect to be repeatedly dunked in the thick slime until he repents his wickedness and apologizes to Hothar.

MINTING THE BREAD

Deity: Var

Before the advent and spread of the scield, most nobles and warlords minted their own coins. This resulted in a bewildering variety of standards and values, and made money-changers a necessity. Though it no longer possesses a mint, and its fortunes have waned, one community continues to mint a single base metal coin once a year (always on a Marketdaeg). The coin is struck by the ruling noble, and then baked into a small bun by clerics of Eostre Plantmother. Throughout the day, buns are freely given to citizens who attend the market, and to the poor.

At sunset, the buns are broken open (to do so beforehand ensures very bad luck will befall the household). Whoever finds the token coin is required to hand it in to the nearest cleric of Var (one is always present). In return, he is given usable coins. In olden times, the value of the coin was set at one gold scield. Today, it is worth ten gold scields—this is actually paid by the nobleman, rather than the uncharitable cult of Var. The coin is then melted down to prevent it being put into circulation or the locals seeking to return to the old currency.

Should no one hand over the coin by dawn the following morning, the cleric of Var curses the settlement, declaring it will suffer poor trading fortunes by its refusal

to adapt to the new ways. If the culprit is found, he is assured a thorough beating by an angry mob of merchants and craftsmen.

ORPHAN'S DAY

Deity: Eira

The Blizzard War and the chaos that followed led to a huge increase in the number of orphans and abandoned children. Those who survived relied on charity and theft in equal measure. Each year, local children (orphaned or otherwise) visit their neighbors' houses, proclaim their poverty, and ask for alms. Most are given a silver scield or scrap of food for their trouble. Those unwilling to show charity typically suffer a robbery before nightfall. By tradition, this petty act of theft is not seen as a crime.

OYSTER DAY

Deity: Neorthe

This ceremony marks the start of the annual oyster catch. The day begins at dawn with a token feast of bread and ale paid for and officiated over by the ruler. After the meal, the oyster fishermen walk down to the shore, the villagers falling into line behind them. At the beach, they are greeted by the resident cleric of Neorthe dressed in clothes decorated with oyster shells. The oyster fishermen make offerings to the cleric, who represents his god, asking for a good catch in the coming year. Offerings are typically small parcels of food or purses of silver. This done, the ruler then wades into the shallow water and rakes up a single oyster.

If, when opened, the oyster is found to contain a pearl, the season will be profitable—the larger the pearl, the better the village's fortunes. The oyster is then swallowed by the ruler, symbolizing the settlement's continued union with Neorthe, and the shell given to the cleric to adorn his costume next year.

OUTLAW DAY

Deity: Nauthiz

The inhabitants of one Hearthland's village are the descendants of outlaws, a fact of which they are quite proud. On the first Marketdaeg of Werremonan, they remember these distant days by "robbing" visitors. Gangs of villains, usually the most important members of the village, accost visitors to the market and demand money from them.

The amount is based on the person's outward appearance, but is never higher than 10 gold scields, and most demands are for silver scields. Those who refuse (whether playing along or out of ignorance to what is happening) are grabbed and locked in a barn. To secure their release, they, or their friends, must pay a "ransom" equal to twice the initial amount demanded.

Ignorance of the custom is not an excuse for impolite or violent behavior. Anyone who causes trouble (as opposed to playing at resisting the outlaws) is arrested

for real and hastily judged. Release is secured only on payment of a heftier fine. Weregild payments may also be demanded if physical injury was caused.

All the money raised is spent on a grand public feast, which takes place in the market after trading has finished. As the night wears on, the villagers renounce their outlaw ways and pledge to uphold the laws of the land until the next Outlaw Day. Those taken prisoner who refused to pay their ransom are released only when the feast is finished.

POKING THE BEAR

Deity: The Norns

The Norns work in mysterious ways. A young and inexperienced hunter followed a set of tracks into a cave. Therein he discovered a sleeping bear. Believing it dead, and convinced he could make a fine cloak from its fur, he poked the bear. Rudely awoken from its hibernation, the bear immediately roared in anger.

The hunter set off as fast as his legs could carry him, the still groggy bear close behind. As he entered his village, he discovered outlaws were attacking it. Here fate worked in his favor, for while he ducked into a house, the bear ran rampant, mauling the outlaws and forcing them to flee. The grateful villagers rewarded the bear with bread and honey (or so the legend goes), and it eventually wandered back to its cave to resume its slumber.

Every year, in late spring, a member of the community dresses up in a bearskin and heads off into the cave (now long abandoned by bears). A young hunter is chosen to poke the bear, awakening it from its slumber. The actor then chases the hunter back to the settlement, whereupon it makes a nuisance of itself for the rest of the day, “mauling” citizens going about their business and demanding money. At dusk, the villagers feast on honey and bread paid for by donations given to the bear, and give thanks for the creature’s timely arrival.

PRESENTING THE BOAT

Deity: Neorthe

During the Saxa rebellion against the Anari, every coastal community was called upon to build a ship and donate it to the cause. In a fit of over-enthusiasm, one thegn called upon his people to construct one ship a year. All but one community stopped construction when victory was secured. The last settlement, never having been given an order to stop production, has continued to build a ship each and every year since. Over the centuries things have changed somewhat, and today the ship is a miniature version.

Amid great ceremony, the shipwright carries the model to the local temple of Neorthe to be blessed before presenting it to the ruling lord. After being graciously accepted and the year’s quota met, the model is burned to mark the end of the war and the foundation of the Marklands, and its ashes scattered at sea as an offering to Neorthe.

PRICKING THE PIG

Deity: Rigr and Tiw

Fyrd, militia, watchmen, and men-at-arms are required to train regularly. Usually static dummies are set up, but one settlement prefers live targets. In harsher times, the lord demanded real arrows be used, and the targets were convicted criminals. Later, and to improve his archers’ ability to perform called shots, the criminals were given “armor” in the form of a thick layer of pig fat over their torsos. Any survivors were pardoned. The ritual gets its name from this bygone practice.

Fortunately, things have improved somewhat over the years. These days, the event occurs before proper training begins to help the archers winter-tightened muscles loosen, and the targets are all volunteers from the community. Modern arrows are not only blunt, but have a thick wad of cloth tied to the business end (they inflict 2d4 nonlethal damage).

Every member of the settlement’s militia, the hunters, and the current noble’s household guard, are given a quiver of 20 special arrows. The arrows move much slower than regular missiles, and can be dodged. In game terms, attacks are made against the target’s Parry (usually 4 for common citizens), and either Block or Dodge can be used (but not both). Ranged attack modifiers apply as normal.

Before being fired, the arrows are dipped in pots containing colored dyes—one color for each archer. After the last arrow is spent, the archer who scored the most hits is given a token reward, while the target with the fewest marks is awarded a leg of smoked ham.

RED FEATHER DAY

Deity: Hothar and Var

A nobleman whom fate had given no children, a host of undesirable relatives, and a terminal lung disease, decided to bequeath his lands to his peasants. There were only two conditions. First, the village must be governed by an elected headman and second, they must honor his eventual death each year. Should either condition be broken, the lands would revert to the most powerful local noble family.

To ensure his wishes were carried out, and to legitimize them, he had a legal contract drawn up by the cult of Var and notarized by the cult of Hothar. The contract is long rotten away, but a copy was carved into a stone in the market square as a permanent reminder. Seconds after signing the contract, the nobleman coughed blood over his quill and died.

Each day on the anniversary of the nobleman’s death, the villagers sport a red feather in remembrance of their benefactor. The cult of Var visits the settlement and counts the number of red feathers sported on this day. So long as the majority of citizens wear one, the contract is deemed obligated for another year. The cult of Hothar adjudicates over mayoral elections to ensure they are fair and free.

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RED LEG DAY

Deity: Eira

One school of thought holds that sickness is caused by a build up of bad blood. As with a cesspit, too much filth spawns disease spirits. Since the blood is trapped in the body, the foul spirits take up residence, causing sickness and death. Each year in late Wulfmonan the denizens of one village endeavor to purge themselves of their accumulated tainted blood.

At some point in the past it became bad luck to bleed oneself. Those who seek to cleanse themselves now enter the local temple of Eira and expose their lower legs. Armed with sprigs of holly, the clerics vigorously whip the exposed flesh until blood is drawn. Herb lore tradition states that holly draws out bad blood from the body. Thus, the quicker one bleeds, the unhealthier one is. At this point it is considered wise to donate to the temple for additional prayers of wellbeing as an added safeguard against disease during the coming year.

RIDERS DAY FAIR

Deity: Tiw

Many generations ago, dire wolf-riding orcs raided the land, ransacking villages, burning crops in the field, and putting innocent folk to the sword. The inhabitants of one village remember the time well, for their ancestors were spared certain death only by the timely arrival of a cavalry force. No one can remember who sent the warriors, nor even their nationality. Over time, it has become fixed in myth that Tiw guided them to the orcs' next target. On the outskirts of the village, the two sides clashed in a terrible battle.

To celebrate their ancestors' salvation, the battle is recreated each year on the second Marketdaeg of Werremonan. Whether this is the correct date is neither here nor there—it's an excuse for a holiday, and it attracts a large crowd from neighboring settlements to the market.

By tradition, only villagers may ride with the cavalry. Visiting clerics of Tiw are invited to join the defenders. Visitors play the orcs. No living mounts are used. Instead, hobby horses decorated to look like horses or wolves are used. Similarly, the only weapons allowed are padded clubs (these inflict nonlethal Strength damage).

At one point judges were used to decide casualties. Today, the melee continues, amid much play acting, until one side is beaten into submission. The "fight" can last many hours, with frequent stops for food and drink.

If the defenders win, visitors to the fair are charged one silver scield as tribute. This goes toward a grand feast. If the attackers win, the villagers must pay for the celebrations that last well into the night.

ROSE RENT DAY

Deity: Eira

Many moons ago, a wounded knight staggered into a village. Though he was a stranger, the people took pity

on him and nursed him back to health. Years later, he was appointed lord of the village. Realizing that his new serfs were his former saviors, he set each household's rent at one red rose, for roses had been used in the herbal balms that cured his injuries.

On the anniversary of his appointment, the lord calls at each house and demands the rent. Those who cannot grow a suitable bloom (as decided by the local priestess of Eostre Plantmother) must pay their full rent in coin and produce, as do all villagers who moved to the village after the curing (perhaps in search of a rent free life). Rent collected, the lord then throws a modest feast for his people in the main square.

RUNNING THE OARS

Deity: Neorthe

Oar running (see the free download *Saxa Fun*) is a popular coastal pastime, and a source of great amusement for spectators. For one community, it is also a religious ceremony. Having spent the winter carving or repairing oars, carpenters present them to the fishing boat owners for testing (and warship captains, depending on the community the GM chooses).

The crews then partake in oar running. Every crewman must participate, lest he offend Neorthe. Should an oar break, the carpenter is admonished for his impiety by the high priest of Neorthe, and every oar he made or repaired over winter is ceremonially broken in twain and burned. He also suffers financially, as he is not paid for his work.

Though now a religious affair, the testing of the oars has a logical origin—no one wants to go to see knowing the carpenter used inferior wood or did shoddy work.

THE RUTTING OF THE BUCKS

Deity: Ullr

This local summertime custom honors Ullr, marks the start of buck (male) fallow deer hunting season, and gives young maidens a chance to eye up a potential husband. The unmarried men of the village dress up in deer skins, complete with an antler headdress. They then engage in a no-hands wrestling match.

The aim is to lock horns with one's opponent, and force him to the ground. The winner then proceeds to the next round, whereupon the procedure is repeated until an overall victor emerges. He earns the title Lord of the Rut, much to the concern of protective parents. As a religious reward, the young man is blessed with the knowledge of where suitable prey can be found, thus helping any hunting party he joins.

SATING THE WOLF

Deity: Dargar (pacification, rather than honoring)

Only madmen and idiots lack understanding of the danger the cult of Dargar poses. This ritual is intended to placate the vile god rather than offer him true worship.

As winter draws near, the poorest villagers dress in wolf skins and smear their faces with animal blood. They then call upon their neighbors, demanding flesh. Their appetites are sated with donations of cooked meat, which they eat. Any food not consumed by midnight must be fed to dogs, for a human consuming it risks becoming a crazed follower of Dargar. Those who refuse to gift Dargar risk beating beaten with sticks and their property damaged. Such acts are not considered crimes, and many villagers consider the tight-fisted soul to have gotten away lightly.

A related ceremony practiced in a distant settlement involves carving a thin sliver of flesh from any recently deceased person and feeding it to a dog. This supposedly placates Dargar's aspect as eater of the dead, and ensures wolves will not dig up the corpse and devour any more flesh.

A more distantly related ceremony requires every person to don an animal skin on the first day of Wulfmonan and refrain from talking. The belief is that Dargar will cast his gaze over the settlement and see only animals, which his lunatic followers ignore.

SILVER ARROW DAY

Deity: Ullr

Originally a local variant of Archery Day (see p. 35), Silver Arrow Day is now held the day after the major festival. Although still considered a holy festival, it is has devolved into an excuse for merriment and drunkenness.

The main event involves placing a gold scield over the center of a target butt placed at the furthest extent of long range. The first person to hit it wins a silver arrow. To add to the fun and extend the event, anyone who misses must down a flagon of ale before their next shot.

As if alcohol-fueled archery wasn't dangerous enough, visiting clerics of the Unknowable One are permitted to use the following miracles to put the archers off their aim—*confusion, deflection* (cast on the coin), *elemental manipulation, jinx, lower trait, and telekinesis*—as well as any taunts and insults they feel are appropriate.

Unfortunately, the generosity of the local lords has dwindled over the years, and the modern arrow is merely covered in a thin veneer of poor quality silver. Still, there is much pride at stake for being able to accomplish such a feat. If nobody wins before sunset, every household is fined one silver scield for the villagers' poor archery.

SKALD'S YARN

Deity: The Unknowable One

Each year, on a dark, cold winter's night, villagers gather in the local mead hall or inn to tell stories. Everyone present must tell a story, no matter his ability to spin a yarn. Most of the stories are anecdotes about neighbors and their activities made during the following year. No insult can be taken by any listener, even if he is the victim of what would otherwise be slander. Traditionally, the stories are intended to embarrass friends, not insult them. Anyone taken offense without a very good

reason is dragged outside and dowsed with water until their fury cools. Every story must end with the words, "And every word is as true as I stand here."

The boisterous crowd votes for their favorites with their voices. Rousing cheers earn the storyteller a free pint or two, while boos or moans earn him a slap across the butt with a wooden paddle, and likely him being made the butt of the next tale.

SKIMMING THE STONE

Deity: Neorthe

Until recently, this ceremony was entirely religious in nature. Local fishermen, seeking reassurance they would return safely before the fishing season began, skimmed flat stones on which were written their name. The more times the stone skipped across the waves, the better their odds of survival would be. Those that disappeared straight into the water were placing their lives in great peril by daring to set out into Neorthe's domain.

These days the festival has attracted outsiders. After the ritual aspect is completed, anyone can attempt to skim stones. The temple of Neorthe awards the winner (the one with the highest number of skips) with a special blessing for his next waterborne journey, and a basket of salted fish. Traditionally, the fish is donated to the families of any fishermen whose stone failed to skip even once, thus lessening the number of days they need to set sail in search of food.

As an aside, to haul one's own stone up in a net once fishing season begins is an especially good omen. The fisherman is all-but guaranteed to survive the season unharmed, and with bulging nets.

SOUL CAKE DAY

Deity: Scaetha

Honoring the dead is an age-old custom, manifesting most notably in First Death Day (see p. 30). Soul Cake Day is held the day before First Death Day. In days of old, the poor of the community went from door to door singing a traditional dirge. In return they received a soul cake, a spiced biscuit or bun. Arbitrarily deciding who you considered deserving inevitably led to arguments, and these days a cake is offered to any callers, whether they require them or not.

The cake is set aside for one's ancestors on First Death Day. It is said that any living creature that eats one will die within the year, thus joining his ancestors for the next feast. The cakes keep remarkably well—some families have handed their ancestors the same cakes for generations. Since the cake is a ritual offering, the fact it is stale does not offend the dead.

Wealthier households show their largesse by handing out an added gift—a silver scield. The coin is used to pay the cult of Scaetha to pray for the spirits of one's ancestors. Again, it is said that misusing the alms, which is anything except donating it to Scaetha's cult, will bring death to one's door.

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SPIRIT SCARING NIGHT

Deity: Sigel

On Raestdaeg of Fogmonan, the children of one rural community go from door to door begging for candles. To refuse is considered bad luck, for it guarantees hostile spirits will target the house during the year to come. Since candles are expensive to the average peasant, most give out only stubs. The candles are then placed inside hollowed out and carved turnips or mangelwurzels.

On Sangdaeg, the children gather in the village square. The boy and girl judged to have the best-carved vegetables by the resident cleric of Eostre Plantmother (or Sigel, if one happens to be visiting) are appointed as King and Queen and have the honor of leading the procession to follow. The royal appointments made, the children light their candles and troop through the community, banging on doors and singing a traditional song guaranteed to drive away bad spirits.

STONE LIFT FEAT

Deity: Eostre Plantmother

This ceremony is a local variation of the Stone Picking Day festival. In the center of the largest field is a small hill, atop which is a large, rounded stone. While the women spend the day picking up small stones, the farmers gather around the hill. Each in turn endeavors to lift the heavy boulder, a task easier said than done (more so given the amount of alcohol that is consumed).

The height the stone is lifted is believed to determine the fortunes of the farmer. Failing to lift it at all is a clear warning that his plow will likely break on a hidden stone or the field will be littered with small stones hidden just below the surface. Lifting it off the ground reduces the odds of this happening, while bringing it to one's chest, or better still one's shoulders, indicates greatly reduced odds of a breakage and near-guarantees a clear field.

SUN WHEEL DAY

Deity: Sigel

According to local legends, the villagers once possessed a cartwheel covered in beaten gold. Each year on High Sumor Daeg, the wheel was carried to the top of a steep hill. At midday, the wheel was released. How far it traveled down the slope before toppling over indicated the severity of the coming winter. In order to help the wheel's travel as far as possible, the villagers would charge after it, screaming and shouting wildly to drive off any spirits of the north wind that might try to impede its progress. The steepness of the hill ensured falls were commonplace and injuries likely.

Over time, the village's fortunes waxed and waned. At some point the wheel was lost (if it existed at all), replaced with a heavy wheel of cheese. Although the ritual carries the same religious meaning, it is also an excuse to let off some steam and engage in a communal feast. The first chasing citizen to touch the cheese (which usually

occurs after it stops rolling) is awarded it as a prize by the resident high priest of Sigel. Traditionally, half the wheel is melted down in a huge cauldron, into which the tired and bruised citizens dip chunks of bread or toast, while the other half goes into his larder.

SWINGING OF THE FIRE

Deity: Kenaz

This festival is a local variation on Burning Giant Day. Before the sun sets, villagers take to the streets carrying a long length of chain. Attached to one end is a spherical metal cage stuffed with wood, straw, peat, and cloth, all of which is soaked in pitch. As the sun sets, clerics of Kenaz use magic to light the flammable bundles.

The procession then moves off through the village, the burning wads swung around the carrier's head, circling like a miniature sun. Kenaz's clerics accompany the bearers, singing songs of warmth and cursing Thrym. The flaming balls drive away Thrym's spirit minions, delaying further snowfall until they rekindle their courage. The gap between the ceremony and the next snowfall determines the length and severity of the coming winter.

Even the best prepared bundles burn for less than an hour, so the procession moves rapidly. Traditionally, the hearth of whoever's bundle burns longest is blessed by the high priest of Kenaz. Throughout the winter, his hearth will burn warmer and consume less fuel.

THREE LEGS DAY

Deity: Eira, Freo, The Unknowable One

At dawn, every person capable of walking assembles in the village square. There, a visiting cleric of the Unknowable One (one always happens to be in attendance), pairs everyone up. Pairings are always made to be comical, and potentially embarrassing. A young maiden might be paired with a youth who fancies her but who becomes flustered in her presence, the tallest person may be paired with the shortest, a fat man may be paired with an equally fat woman, and two known rivals might be coupled. The cleric always seems to have an unerring habit of making the right choice for maximum amusement.

For the rest of the day, the couple is tethered together by having one's left leg tied to the other's right leg. Having the knots undo, even by accident, ensures a year of bad luck for both people.

No one can remember quite how the festival began, nor which god it actually honors. Some say it was started by clerics of Eira as a means of instructing the fyrd how to carry a wounded comrade off the field of battle. Others insist it was Freo who was honored, to show that he cannot be easily hobbled. A small few claim the festival mimics one of the Unknowable One's many tricks.

TROLL SCARING DAY

Deity: Tiw (actually The Unknowable One)

A remote village grew fearful of trolls, for the stories of

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the skalds painted them as terrible creatures. That there had never been a troll attack on the settlement was irrelevant, for fear can be an irrational emotion. One day, a visiting cleric of the Unknowable One witnessed the villagers hurrying to barricade their houses against marauding trolls as night fell. Knowing full well there were no trolls for many league, he decided to trick the inhabitants in order to teach them a lesson.

Approaching the village's headman, he proclaimed himself a cleric of Tiw and said he would teach the locals a secret ritual. Lacking any permanent soldiery, the headman retorted that his people were no match for a troll in combat, no matter what secrets they learned. But the cleric was prepared for this, and replied that the secret ritual need only be performed but once a year to keep trolls away.

He demanded a heavy payment for his wisdom, but as an act of faith he would only collect his fee a year after the ritual had been conducted, and then only if no troll attacks had occurred. Unsurprisingly, no trolls threatened the village during the following year, and the cleric duly collected his fortune.

Each year, at the start of winter, the villagers gather in the market square. From dawn to dusk they take it in turn to stick their heads through the rim of a cartwheel and pull as ugly a face as possible (this is known as gurning). These faces, so the cleric said, scare away trolls. Whoever is judged to have pulled the ugliest face is awarded the honorary title of Troll-Scarer for the next year.

TURNING THE STONE

Deity: Scaetha

On the outskirts of a small village lies a huge stone slab. Ask any local and he will tell you that trapped beneath it is a fearsome undead, a servant of the Liche-Priest too powerful to slay even in the days when Scaetha's cult was at its most potent. The terrible creature is kept imprisoned in the earth not by the weight of the slab, but by the holy symbols inscribed on the top and bottom.

Once a year, the villagers heave the mighty stone over to reveal the underside. The holy symbol of Scaetha now visible is carved to ensure it is crisp and then stained black, while the symbol exposed last year now faces into the ground, and the beast beneath.

WADDING THE HORN

Deity: Eostre Plantmother

On the altar of a small temple of Eostre Plantmother, diligently watched over by a paladin at all times, is a slen-



der, silver horn. Its length is delicately decorated with bas reliefs of plants. Tradition has it the horn was a gift from the fey, bestowed on the temple long ago after its clerics helped save an ancient woodland from destruction. The fey said the horn could be blown but three times before it shattered, and on each blowing the next harvest would be perfect. Local folklore claims the horn has been blown twice, each time when the village faced terrible famine.

The true origins of the horn are lost to myth. It reveals no magical dweomer, but that is not conclusive proof it is a fake—the magic of the fey is strange indeed. It is also possible it is a mundane elvish artifact, for only they (or the fey) could produce such delicate work.

As part of the Birthing Day ceremony, the horn is brought out and held aloft for the villagers to see. The high priest then asks whether the horn should be blown this year. Barring a major famine, the stock reply is for the oldest farmer to approach the cleric and shove a wad of wool into the end of the horn, thus preventing it from being sounded. He then repeats the ritual phrase, "I've seen worse winters than this in my years. We will cope without the fey's help this year as well." The horn is then carried back inside the temple.

WEIGHING THE LORD

Deity: Hothar

Several generations ago, a nobleman stood before his peasants and vowed in the name of Hothar that, fol-

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lowing a poor harvest, he would eat no more than they. Unfortunately, he neglected to impose any duration on his reduced diet. To this day, his descendants have been held to that oath by the villagers, regardless of the state of the last harvest.

Each year as part of the Birthing Day ritual (see p. 17), the ruling noble, dressed in his (or her) finest clothes, is publicly weighed against a set of stones weighed and marked by the cult of Var (at great expense to the ancestor). Their weight is then announced to the nearest whole, half, or quarter stones.

If his weight has remained the same or dropped from last year, his current weight is proclaimed to the assembled throng, followed by “and no more.” Cheers go up from the crowd in appreciation of the noble remaining true to the oath. If his weight has increased, the weight is suffixed by “and some more,” at which point the noble is mercilessly pelted with rotten fruit, offal, and dung for breaking the sacred oath. Regardless, that year’s weight is recorded for use in next year’s ceremony.

A certain amount of charity is permitted for pregnant nobles, with the weight being recorded for two people.

WETTING THE HEAD

Deity: Tiw

On the outskirts of a village is a large round stone. According to folklore, it is the head of a sleeping giant. Long ago, the fearsome creature rampaged through the countryside, devouring sheep by the handful, trampling crops, and stomping buildings to rubble. Unable to defeat it by force of arms, the locals dug a deep pit. When the giant fell in, they hurriedly filled in the void. Such was the angry giant’s strength that it threatened to burst free. Thinking quickly, they poured a dozen barrels of beer down the giant’s throat, sending it into a long-lasting drunken slumber.

Each year on the anniversary of the giant’s entrapment, the villagers roll barrels of beer up to the stone and pour the contents over it, thus ensuring the giant remains asleep for another year. They then celebrate their “victory” with a feast and the consumption of many more barrels of beer.

WINTER PASS US BY NIGHT

Deity: Sigel

This ritual is a variation on Burning Giant Day (see p. 24), and is thus also a variation of the Swinging of the Fire custom, though it is held in honor of Sigel, not Kenaz.

Throughout late summer, the cult of Sigel constructs a ball of hay, peat, cloth, wood, and any other flammable substance donated by citizens from whatever scraps they can spare. Each day, it is soaked in oil in preparation for the night it will be needed.

The night after the first snowfall of winter, the ball is placed inside a spherical iron cage and attached to a length of chain. A member of the cult, chosen by the high

priest for his faith, strength, and stamina, then carries it atop the nearest hill, which has been used to perform the ceremony for centuries. A crowd quickly gathers at the bottom.

The high priest then ignites the flammable ball, whereupon the cleric begins to swing it. He does not swing it around his head, though. On the summit is a high, stone platform, with a low wall facing toward the crowd. The ball is swung in a vertical circle so that it gives the appearance of the sun rising and setting, albeit at a greatly increased speed. As the flaming orb is swung, so the crowd begins to loudly count the number of sunrises. The number reached before the cleric collapses from exhaustion (the ball can weigh upward of 20 pounds) or the flames die is believed to be the number of days that winter will be less harsh. Pausing for breath also ends the count.

Regardless of how the ceremony ends, it is traditional to launch the sphere northward *before* it goes out. As the glowing mass hurtles skyward, the crowds shout curses at Thrym and call on Sigel to be reborn soon.

Should the number of successful swings exactly equal the number of days until the start of Eostremonan, then the whole of winter will be mild, and there is much celebration during the remainder of the night. Usually the feast is somewhat muted, for few clerics have ever managed to entirely dispel the threat of winter.

WOOLSACK RACE

Deity: Eostre Animalmother

To show their lord were fit and strong, and to catch the eyes of young maidens, young men of the village would shoulder a hefty bundle of fleece after shearing and race each other up a steep incline. Today, the event has been formalized into a post-shearing festival to Eostre Animalmother.

By tradition, the local noble signals the start of the annual, and arduous, race. The weight of fleeces is now fixed at 60 pounds for adults (aged 16+), and 40 pounds for young men (aged 13-15). Nothing precludes women from competing, but they must shoulder the same weight as the men. The winner in each category (adults and youths) is gifted with a handful of golden scields as a reward for his stamina.

YELLOW SNOW DAY

Deity: Sigel

Every midwinter, the hardy folk of a small village, fuelled with copious amounts of mulled ale, strip naked and dance wildly in the crisp snow to show their contempt of Thrym.

Before anything drops off from frostbite, they urinate in the snow, turning the white of Thrym into the yellow of Sigel. Small gifts (typically worth just a few gold scields) are awarded for the most inventive curse or drawing “written” in the snow. Their bladders relieved, the celebrants then rush back indoors to get warm.

MINOR GODS



For every greater god there are myriad minor ones. Sages and religious scholars have long debated the nature of these gods. Some argue the celestial realm is a feudal system with tiers of gods, just like there are mortal social castes, and the minor gods are unique individuals who sit between the greater gods and the celestial spirits. Others insist the minor gods are aspects of the greater gods, less than the whole but with unique personalities. The minor gods could be the greater gods under another name, others say, and their limited power is not a divine phenomenon but mortals' self-imposed limitations. The answer is likely never to be known, and in game mechanic terms it has no effect.

Whereas the greater gods have multiple, wide-ranging aspects, minor gods are concerned with one small area. For instance, Eostre Animalmother governs all animal life, be it domestic pets, livestock, or wild beasts. In contrast, her grandson, Bolverk, is entirely focused on cattle raiding. Similarly, these deities grant their clerics very few spells.

Minor deities are a great GM tool. If the GM wants an adventure involving a small sect, he can pick one of the deities below or use them as examples to make his own cults and lesser religions. More importantly, because there are far more minor deities than listed below, he can use one without worrying whether or not it fits the canonical view of the major deities.

● AFFILIATION & WORSHIP ●

All minor deities are affiliated to one or two greater gods, but never more. These affiliated deities may be linked by blood (in the eyes of mortals) or may just share similar goals. Minor gods have two types of clergy, as detailed below.

A minor god's status refers not only to its spell list but also to the number of mortals who worship it as their patron. While any mortal can honor the minor gods in their

own way, few chose them as patrons. A weaponsmith, for instance, may well pray to Hagvirkr, god of weapon-smiths, but he does so as part of his prayers to Eostre and Kenaz, not as a separate deity. A cleric of Hagvirkr, by comparison, places his deity before Ertha and Kenaz, though his prayers still honor both deities.

Before becoming a cleric of a minor god, player characters should note that not all minor gods are equal. Some players will look at the spell and sin lists, min-maxing opportunities. Others will see beyond the mechanics to the roleplaying opportunities of being a member of a small, focused faith provides.

ADDITIONAL WORSHIP

Clerics of a greater god may worship a minor deity *in addition* to their patron deity rather than as sole focus for their faith. In order to worship a minor and greater god, the cleric must use an advancement opportunity and pick one affiliated minor deity. The cleric may spend a maximum of one advancement per Rank in this manner. If he ever misses a Rank, that particular opportunity is lost. The type of clergy (priest or paladin) must be the same for any minor gods he follows—one cannot be a priest of one god and a paladin of another.

In return, the hero automatically learns the minor god's signature spell if he does not already know it. He also adds all the minor god's sins and spells to those of his main deity. Thus, as the cleric worships more gods so his list of sins grows longer and longer but he has access to more and more powers. In some instance sins may be contradictory. How the cleric resolves this matter of faith without offending one or more gods is left to him to work out.

If a spell the cleric knows appears in both lists, he gains a +1 bonus to Faith rolls to cast it, as he is drawing on two separate sources simultaneously. Having a spell appear on three or more spell lists does not increase the bonus above +1.

For the bonus to apply the spell must be absolutely identical, including trappings and any restrictions. Eo-

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stre Animalmother, for instance, grants *beast friend*. The minor deity Bolverk (see page 61) also provides *beast friend*, but only with regard cattle. If a cleric of both gods casts the spell to affect cattle, he gains a +1 bonus, as both gods allow this. However, if he wants to affect any other type of beast, he does not benefit from the modifier, as Bolverk is of no assistance.

SOLE CLERGY

Any cleric who takes the Arcane Background (Miracles) Edge may pick a minor deity as the sole focus for his veneration. Sole clerics of minor gods may never switch to worshipping a greater god, nor may they take a second minor deity. Furthermore, sole clerics do not gain a free Connections Edge or the Orders Hindrance, and cannot take the Disciple Edge of the affiliated greater god.

Despite not being subject to orders from either the parent faith or their own cult, these clerics may seek refuge and hospitality at any temple to which their god is affiliated. This isn't always wise, as some minor deities are aligned to both a good and evil greater god.

Given that a cleric of a minor deity cannot hope to rival one of the greater gods in terms of his choice of spells and he cannot become a Disciple, one might be asking why one would bother playing a character who honors a minor god. As the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* says, minor deities are a great tool for players looking for a handful of spells with a narrow focus without all

the associated "problems" of being part of a world-wide faith. Clerics of the greater gods always have the Orders Hindrance, for example, which means they are subject to commands from their superiors. Servants of the minor gods don't have that restriction. Likewise, their sin list is not so restrictive, giving them more leeway in how they live their lives.

Being a sole cleric is a great way of turning a good specialist character into an excellent specialist.

DIVINE AID

A sole cleric of a minor god may call on his patron using the Divine Aid rules (see *Hellfrost Player's Guide*), but he rolls at -2 (in addition to any other modifiers).

CHAMPION CULTS

Within every cult, whether that of a major god or a minor one, there are stories of great "heroes." Some are warriors; others are healers, sages, mages, craftsmen, or explorers. On rare occasions, the gods reward such worshippers with a special place in the Afterlife, promoting them to semi-divine status and allowing mortal followers to access a fraction of the hero's newfound power.

These sub-cults are often known as champion cults, for the hero was a champion of the faith in life, and in death encourages others to live to the same ideals. Not all champions need have been clerics—devotion to the cause can take forms beyond holy vows.

Champions are never worshipped individually as gods. They are servants, in the same manner as heralds. Their cults are very small and localized.

JOINING A CHAMPION CULT

When a cleric who follows a major deity takes the New Power Edge, he may instead elect to join a champion cult. He may pick any spell of Novice or Seasoned Rank not on his god's spell list, so long as it is not obviously anathema or contradictory to his god's tenets. Granting *healing* should be rare, as it is found only in a few cults.

In return, the player and the GM must come up with one new minor and major sin concerning the champion and his beliefs. These need not follow the basic beliefs of the god, though they should not be contradictory (such as a champion of Tiw who prohibits killing), since in avoiding one sin the cleric will commit another.

A cleric who follows only a lesser god is restricted to Novice spells



(again, *healing* should be rare), but need only add a minor sin to his list of prohibitions.

At the GM's discretion, clerics can pick a spell already available through their deity. This grants a +1 bonus when casting the spell. This modifier does *not* stack with the bonus gained for a cleric of a major god also worshipping an affiliated minor god—only a single +1 bonus ever applies, no matter how many sources the spell comes from.

Players should be encouraged to come up with a short description of the champion's deeds in life that earned him his reward in death.

Below are a number of sample champion cults. Since this rule is optional, none is official canon. They can thus be tweaked as the GM desires. Entries with two deities can be used for both major and minor gods—just drop the major sin for the latter.

AGRORAMOVIX THE RELENTLESS

Deity: Ullr.

Spell: *Boost/lower trait* (Vigor and Fighting). These add to the cleric's existing spell.

Sins: (Minor) Giving up hunting a quarry for any reason; (Major) Showing mercy to orcs.

A Tuomi hunter, Agroramovix's settlement was destroyed by orcs while he was away hunting. Agroramovix vowed to track down the culprits and wreak vengeance upon them. His quest lasted ten years, but was ultimately successful. The hunter survived his ordeal, eventually dying of old age. By the time of his death, his deed was widely known among the Tuomi.

COELWYNNE EVER-AWAKE

Deity: Eira.

Spell: *Sentry*.

Sins: (Minor) Sleeping for longer than the minimum required to avoid Fatigue; (Major) Falling asleep on duty.

Healers were especially targeted by the minions of the Liche-Priest during his dark and terrible reign, for they alone could keep mortals from slipping into death. While they toiled to save lives, Coelwynne, a young warrior maiden, remained ever alert for assassins, sleeping for only a few hours each day. It was a vigil she maintained for 20 years. Following her death, Coelwynne was granted a seat in Eira's hall. She is popular among the Peacekeepers, whose primary role is the protection of priests.

SIGRIC THE MULE

Deity: Var.

Spell: *Boost/lower trait* (Strength & Vigor). These add to the cleric's existing spell.

Sins: (Minor) Riding a horse or in a wagon; (Major) Burdening an animal when you are not encumbered.

Sigric was a merchant. He honored Var, as wise merchants do, but he was not a cleric. Too frugal to spend money on mules, he carried his trade goods on his back

wherever he traveled, never complaining about his tiresome burden. He died an old man, his back hunched and legs bowed, but he was extremely rich.

VYNER THE SMITH

Deity: Ertha.

Spell: *Smite*. Vyner's cult also suits Hagvirk, god of smiths. In this case, he grants *warrior's gift*. The spell only functions while the target is wielding a weapon.

Sins: (Minor) Using your fists, feet, or other body parts as weapons; (Major) Breaking a weapon except as an offering to Ertha.

During the Blizzard War, Vyner worked day and night to forge new weapons for the armies of the Hearthlands. Such was his skill that is said the spear and swords slid through Hellfrost dragon scales like a hot knife through butter. Even when his home was attacked, Vyner remained at his forge until his death. Many legends claim the blade he was working on as coldfire from a Hellfrost dragon burned his flesh and bones became a relic.

MINOR GODS

ATRIDR

Titles: The Horseman, The Celestial Rider, Tiw's Outrider, Lord of the Charge.

Aspects: Cavalrymen.

Affiliations: Freo, Tiw.

Symbol: Stylized horse with a head shaped like a lance.

Priesthood: Lancer (priests); Cataphract (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: The days before and after any battle. Battle Dance Day (see page 34) is a high holy day.

Duties: To fight with bravery, to slay many foes, to earn glorious recognition through martial prowess.

Sins: (Minor) having your mount slain, injuring a horse, being beaten in combat by an equal or superior foe, fleeing a fight against an inferior opponent; (Major) accidentally killing a horse; (Mortal) purposefully killing a horse.

Signature Power: *Speed*.*

Powers: *Arcane resistance**, *armor**, *fly**, *leaping**, *quickness**, *smite*, *wilderness step**.

Trappings: Any except necromantic.

Special: Spells marked "*" can only be cast on a mount the caster is riding. Should the rider dismount for any reason, the spell is negated, though it is still being Maintained. When the rider remounts, the spell effect returns immediately.

During the early stages of the God War, all Tiw's forces were infantrymen. Freo questioned the war god why he did not use mounts, for they were both fast and powerful, and made his travels much easier. Tiw, angry that Freo was daring to claim any knowledge of military

REFERENCE TABLE

This table lists the major deities and the minor gods affiliated with them.

Dargar: Báleygr, Ellanhere, Hildolfr, Hraezla, Sanngetall

Eira: Elli, Ermunaz, Gersemi, Harisa, Hrist, Kjalarr, Kvara, Kvarsi, Sviðrir

Eostre Animalmother: Bolverk, Ellanhere, Epona, Fjörgynn*, Gullveig, Skaði, Veth

Eostre Plantmother: Brúni, Fjörgynn*, Gullveig, Kara*, Skogr, Veth

Ertha: Brú, Farmaguth, Fjörgynn*, Foldardróttann, Gerðr, Hagvirkr, Hróðr, Landskjalt

Freo: Atriðr, Brú, Epona, Eylúðr, Foldardróttann, Gangari, Hrafn

Hela: Hraezla, Thunn, Vakr

Hoenir: Bragi, Haptabeidr, Haptasnytrir, Hljóð, Hrafn, Hropt, Songr*, Vör

Hoðhar: Farmaguth, Farmr*, Forseti, Haptabeidr, Jarngrímr, Sanngetall, Thekk*

Kenaz: Goðjaðarr, Hagvirkr, Kjalarr, Suðri

Maera: Hoári

Nauthiz: Auðun, Galfuleysi, Hljóð, Tvíblindi, Vör

Neorthe: Vegtam

Niðr: Eitr*, Farmr*, Hefnd*, Lasemed, Sváfnir, Tvíblindi, Vakr

Norns: Elli, Viðarr

Rigr: Bági-Ulfs*, Gerðr, Kvara, Lasemed, Sváfnir, Syn, Vafud, Veth

Scaetha: Biflindi, Boðgaeðir, Syn, Viðarr

Sigel: Biflindi, Heimdallr

Thrym: Hróðr, Langbarðr, Norðri

Thunor: Eylúðr, Haptasönnir, Harðhugaðr*, Suðri

Tiw: Atriðr, Boðgaeðir, Earhclud, Ermunaz, Geirdri-ful, Geirvaldr, Goðjaðarr, Hildolfr, Kvarsi, Sigðir*, Sigmundr, Skaði, Thekk*, Vegtam

Ullr: Bági-Ulfs*, Bolverk, Earhclud, Gangari, Skogr, Vafud

Unknowable One: Fjallgeiguðr, Galdraföðr, Galfuleysi, Gizzur, Haptasnytrir, Hrist, Skilfingr, Songr*, Sviðrir, Thrimðr

Vali: Brúni, Eitr*, Gullveig, Haratt, Hefnd*, Skilfingr

Var: Auðun, Forseti

* See the free download *Additional Minor Gods*

matters, replied that horses were good only for eating and saving energy on long marches.

Freo wagered Tiw that a warrior he trained to use a mount could beat any hero Tiw cared to field against him. If Freo won, Tiw must accept cavalymen as part of his army and thus sphere of influence. Should Tiw win, Freo would give up any influence over mounts, leaving that to Eostre.

Confident of victory, Tiw accepted, telling Freo he could take Atriðr to train, a soldier who had shown little skill in battle. Months later, Atriðr, mounted on a horse and armed with a lance, faced down Tiw's champion, impaling the

unfortunate infantryman on his long lance. Tiw begrudgingly accepted the value of cavalymen. Unwilling to lead cavalry charges in person, Tiw appointed Atriðr to fill that role. The minor god's sphere of influence covers all forms of mounted combat, not just those involving horses.

As with many other aspects of Tiw, Atriðr is not depicted as an individual deity. He is deemed present in any image in which Tiw is mounted or carrying a lance. Temples of Tiw and military barracks with a cavalry detachment often boast a shrine showing Tiw in his guise as the god of cavalymen.

Cavalymen are most commonly found among the Anari and mercenary companies, though the Saxa are slowly coming round to the idea that mounted combat is as honorable as battle on foot. Whereas clerics of Tiw are differentiated by role, those of Atriðr are less separated. Paladins do tend to opt for heavy cavalry roles, mounted shock troops designed to smash enemy lines, while priests often take on the role of light cavalry and outriders. While both types of clerics are trained warriors, their miracles are firmly oriented around mounted combat. Hence, while equally skilled at warfare on foot or mounted, they are rarely found fighting out of the saddle.

Like those of Tiw, clerics of Atriðr perform martial drills as religious ceremonies, though they are mounted. On Battle Dance Day a battle trained horse is sacrificed to Atriðr. Its spirit is said to join Atriðr's stables, ensuring the god of mounted warfare is never without a mount.

Character Guidelines: Clerics of Atriðr are mounted warriors. Agility, Strength, and Vigor are core attributes, and Fighting and Riding are core skills. Given the cleric is at his best when mounted, Beast Bond is a very useful Edge for helping keep the mount alive. Priests, who serve as outriders, should invest a few dice in Notice and Survival.

AUÐUN

Titles: Friend of Wealth, Divine Treasurer.

Aspects: Wealth.

Affiliations: Nauthiz, Var.

Symbol: A pile of coins.

Priesthood: Treasurers (priests); Moneylenders (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: First Marketdaeg of each month.

Duties: Accumulation of wealth.

Sins: (Minor) losing a gambling game, being caught cheating while gambling, giving away money except to the cult, failing to donate at least 50% of one's income to the cult; (Major) being robbed, forging a credit note; (Mortal) falsifying accounts.

Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait* (Gambling and Streetwise only).

Powers: *Charismatic aura, detect/conceal* (relating to treasure only), *lock/unlock*.

Trappings: Clergy may use any trapping except necromantic.

Auðun is fixated with the accumulation of wealth. In order to achieve his desires, he studied mercantile activi-

ties under Var and gambling under Nauthiz. As a result, Auðun is a skilled gambler, a shrewd businessman, and is not above a little theft to increase his personal wealth. Wherever there is an opportunity to make money, Auðun is never far away.

Auðun's clergy normally operate out of Var's temples, where a shrine is erected in a side room. Auðun's altars comprise strongboxes with complex locks. The local high priest holds the only key. In centers of trade, Auðun may actually have a small temple within the larger temple of Var. Such sites are independent of Var's authority, operating as separate businesses.

Despite their desire to gather wealth for their god, Auðun's clergy are honest—Auðun is not considered a god of thievery, as evidenced by his spell list. Priests operate as bankers, investment brokers, traders, accountants, treasurers, and moneylenders. In return for their services, they charge a fee. Paladins serve as the cult's muscle, reminding those who conveniently “forget” to repay a loan to the cult that Auðun needs his money. Since Auðun places no restrictions beyond honesty on how money is gained, many clerics who seek an adventurous life find tomb robbing a profitable line of work.

Like those of Var, clerics of Auðun are expected to keep detailed ledgers of their earnings and cult donations. On a cleric's death, Auðun checks through the ledger for discrepancies. Those found guilty of withholding monies are refused entrance into his hall. In the mortal world, a cleric may be asked to hand his ledger over to any senior cleric for inspection. Because death can strike at any time, most clerics voluntarily submit their ledgers every year to ensure their souls are not harshly judged due to bookkeeping errors.

On the first Marketdaeg of each month the clergy must add to their god's vast treasure pile. Coins, gems, and jewelry are blessed and then destroyed, sending them from the physical world to Auðun's treasury. Auðun has no love or use for art, weapons, or other material goods.

Character Guidelines: Since any income swells the cult's coffers, Auðun's clerics have great freedom in their traits. Gambling and Streetwise (for selling goods) are obvious ways to earn money with minimal effort. A cleric could serve as a merchant, tomb raider, mercenary, hero-for-hire, or even a crafter. Of course, some of these professions make less income than others, and thus are not popular with the great majority of clergy. Greedy is a suitable Hindrance, but the desire for wealth does not force the cleric to withhold monies from his god.

BÁLEYGR

Titles: Lord of Pain, Inducer of Suffering, Baleful Eye.

Aspects: Pain.

Affiliations: Dargar.

Symbol: A pierced heart.

Priesthood: Torturers (priests); Paindealers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Life is pain, and all days are holy days.

Duties: To cause pain and suffering.

Sins: (Minor) failure to inflict intense pain on a living being once a week, admitting you are in pain, showing pity or mercy; (Major) failure to inflict intense pain on a living being once a month; (Mortal) failure to inflict intense pain on a living being once a season.

Signature Power: *Confusion*.

Powers: *Fatigue, knockdown, lower trait* (no boost), *sluggish reflexes, stun, summon spirit* (pain).

Trappings: All trappings involve targets feeling pain.

One of Dargar's lieutenants, Báleygr is infamous for his love of inflicting and suffering pain. Báleygr's heart is so black and empty that only by enduring constant pain can he be sure he is alive. His leather armor is made of the flayed skins of his victims, with sharp bone studs that press into his flesh. His mighty whip, Soul Flayer, can scourge the flesh of a god's back with a single swipe. Báleygr is a keen bidder in the Hall of Echoing Screams. Souls he purchases are dragged to his Fortress of Endless Suffering, where they are mercilessly tortured in a variety of ways for eternity.

Báleygr is always depicted as having one normal eye and one huge, swollen red eye. His name means Flame-Eye, for it is said his gaze can cause intense pain in any being. That the Fortress of Endless Suffering is bedecked in mirrors perhaps comes as no great surprise.

Although allied with Dargar, pain is not actually one of Dargar's aspects. Because of this, Báleygr has his own temples. All are well-concealed from the agents of the good gods, especially Eira's clergy. Most are dark and dank dungeons, without windows or illumination, where the air is laden with fear and the stench of excretions brought about by the damned souls tortured here for the amusement of the vile god. A very small few operate more openly in brothels, where those who enjoy pain are catered for. Note that Báleygr has no interest in domination.

Priests, normally the cerebral ones in other religions, are adept torturers of the flesh. Their skill in inducing pain while being able to keep victims conscious and alive is legendary. Over-zealousness means any tyrant hiring one as a torturer must keep him on a tight leash, for acquiring information is not one of their strong points.

Paladins, on the other hand, focus on spiritual pain rather than physical pain. They are the callous souls who torture and kill a man's family before his eyes, but let him live so he will endure the torment over and over again. Some like to gouge out the men's eyes, so the last vision burned into their brain is that of their ruined family. Deviancies come in many forms, and clerics can earn good money pandering to those for whom pain brings feeling of gratification.

Clerics of Vali sometimes hire Báleygr's worshippers. Men are far easier to corrupt under intense and unyielding pain, for eventually even the strongest will offer anything to cease their burden. Worshippers of Eira are the most favored victims for this unholy partnership, for Eira is anathema to both the god of corruption and the god of pain.

Ceremonies to Báleygr always involve torture. Sometimes worshippers torture each other, and sometimes

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they torture innocent victims. The screams of the tortured are like choral music to Báleygr, who waltzes in his castle with his mistress, Viðrímnr (“Contrary Screamer”), in time to the unearthly screams of agony.

His clergy are often drawn to battles, not as participants but as spectators, reveling in the wails of the injured and dying. They have been known to plunder battlefields not for treasure but for the dying, whose agony they prolong before the soul is eventually allowed to depart.

Character Guidelines: Given the masochistic tendencies of the clergy, taking Nerves of Steel is a no-brainer, as it represents their desensitization to pain. Intimidation is used to torture people, so is considered their most useful skill. Mean is almost a must have Hindrance, for showing pity or mercy is a sin.

BIFLINDI

Titles: Scaetha’s Ward, Scaetha’s Shield, Shield Shaker.

Aspects: Protection against undead.

Affiliations: Scaetha, Sigel.

Symbol: A shield with a skull on the front.

Priesthood: Eulogist Shields (priests); Slayer Shields (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Every Sunnandaeg. During Werremonan these are high holy days. Door Shutting Night (see page 30) is also a high holy day.

Duties: To protect citizens against undead.

Sins: (Minor) allowing a cleric of Scaetha to be wounded by an undead, allowing a normal person to be slain by an undead; (Major) allowing a cleric of Scaetha to be incapacitated by an undead; (Mortal) allowing a cleric of Scaetha to be slain by an undead.

Signature Power: *Warding* (undead only).

Powers: *Arcane resistance, armor*, champion of the faith, deflection*, beat mask, light, weaken undead.*

Trappings: Clergy may use any trapping except darkness or necromantic.

Special: Spells marked “*” only function against undead. Against other foes, the spell has no effect, although it remains Maintained. Sins involving failure to protect a person apply only if the victim is within 5” of them at the time.

Whereas Kvara (goddess of bodyguards and younger sister of Scaetha) is Eira’s shieldmaiden, Biflindi, Kvara’s husband, serves Scaetha, his sister-in-law. Originally one of Sigel’s Tiw-trained bodyguards, Biflindi was promoted to Scaetha bodyguard when she became a greater goddess. Scaetha, while undeniably devoted to her cause, can be reckless and foolhardy, fearlessly forging ahead regardless of the odds. Biflindi’s role is to keep her from harm and remind her that sometimes a battle cannot be won by strength of arms alone, and that retreating to fight again another day is better than death. As clerics of the faith are prone to repeat, “Sometimes you must lose a battle to win the war.”

Biflindi is never depicted as an individual figure in religious art—he is Scaetha’s ever-present shield, and thus always watching over her whenever Scaetha is portrayed. A quiet, humble, and unassuming god, mortals erect no temples or shrines in his honor. When Scaetha is honored, Biflindi is honored by default.

Priests and paladins both serve as bodyguards and shield bearers to Scaetha’s clergy and military commanders dedicated to eradicating the undead. Despite their titles, priests are not forced to solely watch over priests, and the same applies to paladins. In general, paladins are simply more combat savvy and willing to enter the thickest parts of battle to fulfill their oaths.

Like their god, clerics are solely focused on protecting against undead. For this reason, they very rarely serve clerics of other gods, though they maintain good relations and occasionally cooperate with those of Sigel. Those not on adventuring duty protecting a cleric serve as defenders in the forts surrounding the Withered Lands and in Seithrby, on the borders with the Liche Lands of Old.

Like Scaetha’s worshippers, Biflindi’s followers are a mournful and sorrowful lot. Dirges and death hymns are sung on holy days in memory of those who have fallen to undead. Biflindi’s clerics, like their patron, have vowed never to celebrate victories until every last undead is slain. Until then, all victories are hollow.

Character Guidelines: Biflindi’s clerics fill a niche role, but one which adventuring parties focused against undead will find very useful. Clerics need a high Fighting score in order to have a good Parry.

Since Biflindi does not grant *healing*, clerics should invest in the Healing skill. Block and Shieldwall should be taken at the earliest opportunity. Fleet-Footed is advisable, as it allows the cleric to move rapidly across the battlefield. Favored Foe (Undead) increases Parry further.

BODGAEDIR

Titles: The Battle Enhancer, He Who Words Inspire, Morale Raiser.

Aspects: Battle enhancement.

Affiliations: Scaetha, Tiw.

Symbol: A battle horn.

Priesthood: Marshal of the Faith (priests); Standard Bearer (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Before any large-scale battle.

Duties: To support armies in battle.

Sins: (Minor) being on the losing side of a skirmish, being Incapacitated in battle; (Major) being on the losing side of a mass battle, withholding support from allies; (Mortal) fleeing battle before it is lost.

Signature Power: *Gift of battle* (priests) or *warrior’s gift* (paladins).

Powers: *Battle song, bless/panic, boost trait* (Strength, Vigor, Fighting, Knowledge (Battle), Riding, Throwing, and Shooting only), *gift of battle, smite, warrior’s gift.*

Trappings: Clergy may use any trapping except darkness or necromantic.

Like most of the other war deities, Boðgaeðir came to the forefront during the God War. Although Boðgaeðir was not the best warrior deity by any stretch of the imagination, he had an innate gift for leadership and inspiration. His charisma, booming voice, and willingness to accompany the troops into battle turned many likely defeats into glorious victories. While most closely linked to Scaetha and Tiw, Boðgaeðir has served Thunor in his personal grudge against Thrym.

Shrines exist in most temples to Tiw. Boðgaeðir seeks no personal glory for his deeds, and thus is not depicted in art. His shrines typically comprise only a battle standard emblazoned with a signal horn, both essential tools on the battlefield. Both Scaetha and Tiw are sometimes depicted carrying the standard, a clear indication Boðgaeðir is serving beside them. Soldiers of all faiths pray to the god in the hope they will receive inspiration in coming battles. Attendant clerics are expected to give morale boosting speeches before battle and to bless the troops.

Boðgaeðir's priests and paladins differentiate themselves based on their preferred roles in battle. Priests generally serve as generals, distant from the action yet no less effective in shaping the outcome. Paladins prefer to be in the thick of the action, acting as unit commanders or morale officers. Neither is expected to be an elite warrior, just a leader of men. While some serve a noble or warlord as part of their retinue, most are mercenaries. The Knights Hrafn boasts many clerics of Boðgaeðir among their ranks, and the organization is on good terms with the cult.

Ceremonies take the form of battle hymns, chants, and prayers. Whereas many clerics of Tiw boast of their prowess, those of Boðgaeðir are more humble. While they know their talents are important, and may even turn the tide of battle, it is the fighting men who deserve their praise. Thus, most songs are sung about others.

Character Guidelines: Leadership Edges are very useful to the clergy. Priests often favor those suitable for mass battles, while paladins opt for those which aid tactical skirmishes. Knowledge (Battle) is the most important skill. While clerics may have good combat skills, it is not required of them—they are not necessarily skilled warriors, just skilled motivators. While those who prefer to lead by example need good Strength and Vigor to survive the rigors of battle, Smarts and Spirit are just as important as these are requirements for many Leadership Edges.

BOLVERK

Titles: The Raider, Wealth-Bringer, the Celestial Bull, Herd Leader.

Aspects: Cattle raiding.

Affiliations: Eostre Animalmother, Ullr.

Symbol: A bull's head.

Priesthood: Herders (priests); Bulls (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: None. Ceremonies are held before and after a cattle raid.

Duties: To lead and participate in cattle raids, to increase the herd of one's clan.

Sins: (Minor) failing to take part in a cattle raid once a year, harming a defender on a cattle raid, killing a cow for any reason; (Major) taking part in an unauthorized cattle raid, having a cow you own stolen by raiders or monsters; (Mortal) failure to steal a single cow on a cattle raid you personally lead.

Signature Power: *Beast friend* (cattle only).

Powers: *Barrier, entangle, farsight, invisibility, speed, summon beast* (cattle only).

Trappings: Any, except necromantic. Most clerics prefer trappings based on natural events or cattle as opposed to showy effects.

Bolverk is the son of Ullr, god of hunting. Unlike his father, Bolverk has no interest in harming animals, not even to provide sustenance. Much to his grandmother Eostre's delight, he is the patron of cattle raids. He is always depicted as a muscular man, sometimes armed with a lasso. He is often portrayed with a bull's head, though there is no standard convention on his exact appearance. Similarly, some statues show him accompanied by a dog, known in myths as "Heel-nipper."

There are no temples to Bolverk in Rassilon. Shrines, on the other hands, are common among clans who favor cattle raiding as a means of increasing wealth. Since the local noble authorizes raids, the shrines are near-universally housed in his great hall. Many bandits, who survive by raiding herds, erect temporary shrines in their camps. Most shrines comprise a bull's skull draped with untreated cow hide.

Bolverk's clergy are very similar in their roles, as both are expected to take part in raids at least once a year. In most communities, the cleric is an advisor to the headman, and likely works as a herder when not on official business.

Traditionally, priests favor tactics and cunning spell use to catch cattle, while the paladins refer to wrestle the cows to the ground. Priests sometimes bless raiding parties without taking part, whereas paladins always try to be the raid leader. In the event of defenders intercepting the raiders, both types of clergy are prepared to run rather than fight. This is not to say they are cowardly; Bolverk simply wishes no bloodshed during a cattle raid.

In addition to stealing cattle, many clerics hire their services to settlements as herd guardians. Their spells may be better suited to theft, but a *barrier* or *entangle* spell is very effective as thwarting thieves, and *summon beast* can be used to return lost animals to the herd. While they have skills suitable for other types of raids, clerics rarely participate in such activities.

The clergy have just two ceremonies. The first is held before any raid. Those taking part in the raid wear horned headdresses and leather hides, while the local priest or paladin (it is a rare community that has more than one of Bolverk's clergy) dresses as a bull. He summons the herd to his side with musical horns and deep,

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lowing prayers. Traditionally the ceremony takes place outside, with the “cows” and “bull” moving through the settlement. Children, who are not permitted to take part in cattle raids, may join the ceremony. They dress up as calves and follow the “cows.” Occasionally, a character in a wolf skin attacks the herd. The “bull” then drives him away in an act which represents Bolverk’s strength as the celestial bull and honors his grandmother, Eostre, the protector of animals.

After a successful raid, one cow is singled out for sacrifice. This is normally the healthiest animal. Choosing the sickliest has been known to backfire, with cattle in the settlement’s herd failing to produce milk or sickening. The sacrifice’s flesh is eaten by the raiders and the local community, while its spirit is said to depart to Bolverk’s personal herd. If the raid fails, the community is still expected to honor Bolverk by sacrificing one of its own cows.

Character Guidelines: Bolverk’s clergy tend to be strong and fit; chasing after cows is strenuous work. Most are also quite intelligent. Notice and Stealth are favored skills, as they allow the raider to spot and sneak up on herds. Similarly, those who want to actually lead a herd need to know how to command men. Hence, Knowledge (Battle) is an important skill. (Aside from generally being short on combat skills, Bolverk’s clergy have all the abilities a good guerilla commander requires.) Fleet-Footed is a favored Edge, as running away is an important part of any cattle raid.

BRAGI

Titles: Gossiper of the Gods, Rumormonger, Whisperer of Secrets.

Aspects: Information gathering.

Affiliations: Hoenir.

Symbol: A pair of lips with a finger pressed to them.

Priesthood: Ears (priests); Mouths (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Second Marketdaeg of each month.

Duties: To gather and spread gossip and rumors.

Sins: (Minor) not learning new gossip at least once per month, spreading a rumor known to be completely false; (Major) starting a false rumor; (Mortal) not passing on gossip and rumor containing a kernel of truth within a day of learning it, taking a vow of secrecy.

Signature Power: *Speak language.*

Powers: *Altered senses, boost/lower trait* (Notice, Persuasion, and Streetwise only), *charismatic aura, grave-speak, insight, voice on the wind, wandering senses.*

Trappings: None with any game mechanics. Bragi’s trappings tend to be very low key.

Bragi is said to be the offspring of a fleeting union between two diametrically opposed gods, Hoenir, god of knowledge, and Niht, goddess of secrets. Unlike his father, Bragi has no interest in preserving or spreading knowledge. Similarly, he disdains his mother’s secretive nature. Instead, Bragi is a notorious gossip, interested only in juicy rumors and interesting stories. To that end,

he spies on all the gods and sells rumors he hears. That said, he never passes on gossip he knows to be completely false, nor does he ever start false rumors.

Bragi is always depicted as a youthful figure with a sly smile or mischievous grin. Most statues depict him with one hand cupped to an ear, as if listening for any tasty tidbit of gossip.

No temples to the god of information exist, and shrines are extremely rare outside of temples to Hoenir and Niht. Clerics of both Hoenir and Niht pay homage to him as god of information gathering, though for totally different reasons. A typical shrine comprises a small statuette and a ledger or piece of parchment. In Hoenir’s temples, information worshippers have gleaned is inscribed in the tome, to be copied and disseminated later. Niht’s followers write information they have learned on a piece of parchment, which is burned immediately after the writer has finished. The latter allows clerics to “reveal” secrets they have learned without staining their soul by sinning.

Clerics of Bragi are rarely found



outside of major settlements, though small towns and villages located on busy trade routes or which boast a great market attract them, for where there are travelers there is always gossip. Both priests and paladins are generally considered untrustworthy, for anything they learn may be passed to other parties and they refuse to take oaths of secrecy.

Priests often serve as information brokers, exchanging gossip for hard cash, though those who come to them asking questions about important people may find their inquiry has been passed on to the very person on whom they seek information. Paladins are often hired by important dignitaries to act as spies, though anyone hiring a servant of Bragi must be mindful never to reveal too much of their plans unless they want their enemies tipped off. To that end, most people who use the clergy act through intermediaries.

Neither type of clergy will ever knowingly pass on a known falsehood, though clerics are under no compulsion to discover if the rumor is true or false—sins only occur when the rumor is definitely known to be a lie. To that end, the clergy are excellent tools for disseminating rumors those in power want to be circulated or spreading propaganda against rivals.

The faith isn't big on ceremony. Rather than holding formal gathering, clergy in the same area meet up on Marketdaeg to swap interesting stories in a local tavern or eatery. While many faiths close their doors to outsiders during ceremonies, Bragi's followers gladly invite non-followers with stories to tell to join them. They are not beyond offering to buy rounds of drinks for complete strangers in order to help loosen tongues. Most are very friendly with local beggars as well as the servants of the rich and powerful, for these lowly members of society see and hear much but are often overlooked by their social betters.

Character Guidelines: Bragi's clergy tend to be charismatic individuals, the sort of folk people open up to, and attentive to detail. Notice, Persuasion, and especially Streetwise are vital skills for learning gossip, though many also value Investigation. The Charismatic and Investigator Edges are useful for clerics, and taking multiple Connections Edges never hurts. Big Mouth is a favored Hindrance for obvious reasons.

BRÚ

Titles: He Who Spans the Void, He Who Stands on Both Sides, Bridge-BUILDER, Lord of Crossing Places, Enemy of Voids.

Aspects: Crossing Obstacles.

Affiliations: Ertha, Freo.

Symbol: An arch.

Priesthood: Bridge Builder (priests); Void Crosser (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Any day a cleric helps construct a permanent bridge or other means of crossing a void is a personal holy day.

Duties: To help others cross voids, to protect bridges.

Sins: (Minor) falling into a void, not using a bridge when one is present, not clearing a barrier across a bridge; (Major) blocking access across a bridge, damaging a permanent bridge or equivalent, causing any creature to fall into a void; (Mortal) destroying a permanent bridge or equivalent.

Signature Power: *Leaping*.

Powers: *Boost trait* (Agility, Strength, Throwing, and Swimming only; no *lower*), *bridge*, *fly*, *teleport*, *wall walker*, *water walk*.

Trappings: Clerics can choose any trapping except necromantic. Many favor earth trappings.

One day, Freo came back from one of his long walks in a terrible mood. He complained that he could walk no further, for a great void lay in his path. Intrigued by what could stop the god of travel, they assembled at the edge of the great chasm. After much debate, it was decided that Gerðr (p. 77) would construct a wall around Godsheim so Freo would not gaze upon the void and become despondent.

As Gerðr worked, Brú, one of her apprentices, suddenly hit upon an idea. As his mistress raised her wall vertically, Brú began constructing a horizontal wall. Eventually his construction spanned the mighty gap, allowing him to cross where Freo could not. Jubilant at being able to explore new realms, Freo made Brú the god of bridges. The pair traveled together for long ages, together coming up with many new walls to cross voids.

Every permanent bridge is a shrine to Brú. Out of tradition, the first and last stones laid down are inscribed with his holy symbol. Doing so is said to ensure the bridge will be strong. The god has a solitary temple. The small structure stands in a small village near to Three Way Bridge in Aspiria, whose inhabitants' sole occupation is maintaining the important crossing.

Priests often stay within a given realm, where they serve the lord by maintaining existing bridges. Paladins are possessed of Freo's wanderlust. They travel far and wide, helping to maintain bridges in unclaimed lands and creating them for adventuring parties and clerics of Freo, who rarely stick to well-trodden roads.

While no cleric would ever construct a permanent barrier across a bridge, they have no problem with toll-houses. Bridges are not cheap to construct or maintain, and tolls are seen as a form of religious tax.

True ceremonies occur only at the start and end of a permanent bridge construction. Out of tradition, clerics of Brú, assuming any are present, have the honor of inscribing and laying the first and last stones. This is accompanied by much singing and praying. Lesser ceremonies are held if the cleric helps work on a bridge already under construction.

Character Guidelines: As useful as one's miracles are for crossing gaps and voids, Climbing remains a very important skill. Notice is handy for avoiding pesky pit traps, Swimming for crossing watercourses, and Throwing for tossing ropes over gaps. For attributes, Agility allows one to cross tightropes, while a good Strength is essential for jumping small gaps.

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BRÚNI

Titles: Dung-Collector, Lord of Filth.

Aspects: Dung.

Affiliations: Eostre Plantmother, Vali.

Symbol: A bucket.

Priesthood: Soil-Collectors (priests); Soil-Spreaders (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Every Raestdaeg.

Duties: To gather and sell manure.

Sins: (Minor) passing a dung pile without adding to it, abusing a dung collector; (Major) depositing manure in a sewer, failing to go to toilet once a day; (Mortal) suffering constipation.

Signature Power: *Stun*.

Powers: *Barrier, beast friend* (fly swarms only), *bolt, disease, fatigue*.

Trappings: All trappings involve dung and are non-lethal.

Brúni is a lowly deity, oft overlooked by mortals and the other deities. It is his responsibility to gather dung, whether from the gods or their animals. Each morning he visits all the gods' halls to collect night soil and cleans out their stables. Much of his gatherings he sells to Eostre Plantmother for use on the fields, but some he sells to Vali, who pays well for the filthy substance. Given his lowly position and constant odor, he is largely ignored by the others gods.

As befits his status, Brúni has no temples or specific shrines, and is never depicted in religious art. Any bucket used to collect manure or manure heap serves as a shrine (though rarely do worshippers actually pray at buckets). Hence, virtually every house contains a shrine to Brúni. His few worshippers are night-soil collectors and dung collectors, among the lowest members of society.

Brúni's clerics, despite possessing miraculous powers, are most often manure collectors, and as such rank very low in the social system. Priests and paladins collect dung from houses and stables, and sell it to farmers. In the Winterlands, animal dung is dried and sold as fuel. The clergy expect to be ignored by society in general, though deep down they know they fulfill a vital role. A few hardliners, and they do exist, consider the handful of sewer systems in the continent to be an affront to their god and have taken to sabotaging them.

Clerics who also honor Vali favor the dung for its disease-carrying properties. Rather than selling it, they use it to spread sickness, such as by poisoning water supplies or throwing it at people.

Each Raestdaeg (which occurs but once a month, remember) Brúni's clergy change their clothes and wash, although it never completely cleanses the pervasive stench. Contrary to popular jokes, they do not roll around in dung, fling it at each other, or dance around steaming piles of manure, at least not while sober.

Character Guidelines: Messing around with dung all day is smelly work. The Outsider Hindrance can represent both the constant odor of manure that hangs

around the character and his extremely low social status. Edges such as Noble and Rich are best avoided. Vigor is an important attribute, if only for fending off disease.

Rated among the lowest of the low socially, clerics of Brúni are likely to be treated as inferiors by many NPCs. Even as clerics, they are not likely to be invited to feasts or attend lords, except in servile positions. However, this can serve to their advantage, for the lower one's social status the more likely they are to be overlooked. Hence, Streetwise can be a useful skill for eavesdropping.

EARHCLUD

Titles: Ullr's Bow, Divine Archer, Celestial Marksman, He Who Kills at Range.

Aspects: Archery.

Affiliations: Tiw, Ullr.

Symbol: An arrow.

Priesthood: Master Bowyers (priests); Master Archers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Any battle before a battle. Archery Day is a high holy day. Although it does not involve marksmanship, Arrow Hunt Day is a high holy day for hunters.

Duties: To use archery to defeat foes.

Sins: (Minor) using a ranged weapon other than a bow for more than one round during a combat, training someone in the use of any weapon except the bow; (Major) using a weapon other than a bow for the majority of a battle; (Mortal) ignoring a community's call to arms.

Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait* (Notice, Shooting*, Stealth).

Powers: *Aim**, *blast, deflection, prolonged blast, smite**, *weapon immunity* (arrows only).

Trappings: All trappings relate to arrows.

Special: Spells marked "*" only function when cast on or using bows or crossbows, and their ammunition. Clerics of Earhclud may take the Armor Piercing Shot (see *Hellfrost: Rassilon Expansion 2*) and Double Shot Edges, ignoring the elf racial requirement.

While wandering Godsheim in search of something to beat up, Tiw came across Ullr practicing with his bow. As proud and boastful as ever, the war god mocked Ullr's weapon, hewing down a mighty tree in a single blow to prove the worthiness of his sword. Ullr protested, claiming that his bow allowed him to kill at range, something Tiw's sword could not do. Tiw laughed loudly, and mocked Ullr, for his weapon was only good for killing rabbits, not armored warriors.

So it was the gods made a wager. Capturing a frost giant, they promised the creature its freedom if it could escape their weapons. Fully aware of Tiw's prowess, the giant quickly fled, Tiw in hot pursuit, cursing loudly. Finally controlling his laughter, Ullr drew his bow, took aim, and felled the giant with a single shot.

As much as it pained him to admit any form of defeat, Tiw conceded that perhaps the bow did have some benefits over the sword. Tiw demanded that Ullr teach him archery, as he wished to add it to his combat prowess.

Ullr had other duties, but he nominated one of his hunters, Earhclud ("Arrow-Cloud") to teach the god of war.

After receiving adequate training, Tiw promoted Earhclud to commander of his new archery companies, elevating him to the status of minor deity.

Like most minor deities, Earhclud has no temples in his honor. Shrines are found within many temples of Tiw and most of Ullr's, as well as outside the barracks of archery companies and in hunting communities. Some shrines are elaborately carved statues of stone or wood arrows of great size. Lesser ones might be a bundle of actual arrows, or simply an arrow shape rune etched into wood or stone. When shown in art as an individual, he takes the form of a member of the dominant local race, lightly armored, and carrying a bow. Usually there is a notched arrow, indicating he is always ready to fire. Most often he appears alongside one of the major gods he is affiliated with, taking the form of a bow and quiver.

Although Saxa use bows in hunting and warfare, he has more worship among Anari, who field companies of archers. His most devoted servants are Finnar, for among the nomads archery is an essential skill (and hunters and warriors are one and the same), although both species of elves are close behind.

Priests generally serve as archery instructors, bowyers, and fletchers, ensuring archers are properly trained and equipped. Paladins are full-time archers, serving in armies or militias, working as hunters, and hiring themselves as mercenaries. Although Ullr has little to do with horses, Tiw is also the major god of cavalry. Earhclud cares little whether his followers fight on foot or mounted.

Prayers to Earhclud are never spoken. Rather, they are inscribed on arrows, which are then fired high into the air. If the arrow lands without breaking, Earhclud has heard the prayers and will respond favorably. A broken arrow indicates the god's displeasure.

Character Guidelines: Shooting is a cleric's most important skill. Notice and Stealth are also useful, especially for snipers. Marksman is the quintessential Edge, followed closely by Armor Piercing Shot, Double Shot, and Mighty Shot. Clerics who wish to be mounted archers need a few dice in Riding and the Steady Hands Edge. Dead Shot can be very powerful, but it is best combined with Level Headed.

Dodge is the best deterrent against enemy missile troops. Although nothing prevents the cleric being a capable melee combatant as well, it is definitely not his focus (and may be sinful). Consider Fleet-Footed as both a means of keeping distance between yourself and your foes and quickly closing the gap to Short range.

ELLANHERE

Titles: Pack Mother, She-Wolf, Dargar's Bitch.

Aspects: Canines.

Affiliations: Dargar, Eostre Animalmother

Symbol: Wolf's head facing head on.

Priesthood: Pack Lords (priests); Pack Brothers/Sisters (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Fulmonan of Wulfmonan.

Duties: To serve your community and lord. To aid those in need.

Sins: (Minor) accidentally harming a canine, allowing a canine to be mistreated (does not apply to her Dargar followers), not owning a canine, petting or feeding a cat; (Major) owning a cat, willfully harming a canine except in self-defense; (Mortal) willfully killing a canine except in self-defense.

Signature Power: *Beast friend* (canines only).

Powers: *Fear, knockdown, shape change* (canines only), *speed, smite, summon beast* (canines only), *wilderness step*.

Trappings: Trappings always relate to canines. *Fear*, for instance, might involve the cleric howling or conjuring a ghastly spectral hound, while *knockdown* may be represented by an illusory wolf leaping at victims.

Ellanhere is patron of domesticated dogs and wild canines, including wolves and dire wolves. She is thus both tame and feral, obedient servant and cruel killer. She has little authority over supernatural breeds, such as Fenris and varcolac wolves or moon dogs, though they respect her position as mother of lesser canines.

According to many legends she is the daughter of Dargar and Eostre, though this is highly disputed. Clerics of Eostre claim she is the spirit of Eostre's first dog, granted divine status for her loyalty and obedience. In that faith, she is the mother of all canines. The cult of Dargar says she was a wolf cub to granted their god by Eostre in the vain hope that tending to it would calm his unruly nature. Dargar was so impressed by Ellanhere's vicious nature that he elevated her to godhood during the God War.

She is rarely depicted in humanoid form in art. Rather, she takes the form of a she-wolf that slinks around Eostre or Dargar's legs or, more rarely, a wolfskin cloak worn by either deity.

Similarly, she has no temple, but shrines to her exist in most temples to Eostre Animalmother and Dargar. Often they are little more than a wolfskin or a wolf's skull, though more elaborate ones may have a carved image.

Many priests act as veterinarians specializing in canines. Typically they serve a community or nobleman, tending the war dogs, as well as regular domestic breeds. Others serve as master of the hounds for nobles who hunt with dogs. They will not, however, participate in the hunting of wolves. Among orc tribes that keep wolves (and dire wolves), priests are responsible for ensuring the wolves are trained and kept in top condition.

Paladins are warriors. Like canines, they are expected to serve a community or lord loyally, either as a frontline fighter or a trusted bodyguard. Among orcs they serve as cavalry commanders as well as bodyguards.

However, lone wolves that come to the aid of those in need are common in stories, and clerics of Ellanhere may adopt that role. Many take this road until they find a lord worthy of their service. Others have served a lord, but, like a faithful hound, have vowed to take no other master after his death.

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The phrase being “top dog” means being a leader. Clerics of Ellanhere cannot help but jostle for position when they gather in any strength. Most often juniors stretch their neck upward and arms outward before renowned peers, accepting their status as lesser members of Ellanhere’s mortal pack. When one refuses to acknowledge another’s position, they must decide who outranks the other. While violence sometimes occurs, most often they growl and stare at each other in a contest of intimidation.

Among the cult of Dargar, clerics are feral creatures, heavily devoted to wolflike behavior. Pecking order within their ranks always involves contests to the death, for Dargar does not accept weaklings who bow without first testing their opponent’s strength.

Religious ceremonies vary, but there is always a hunt. Typically, clerics dress in wolfskins and hunt either a real animal or someone dressed in a deerskin cloak. Real animals are eaten raw. All hymns and prayers take the form of howls. It is considered a good omen if local hounds or wolves join in the chorus, for it means Ellanhere has heard the prayers and is pleased. Hearing a cat yowl during a ritual is a bad omen for the future.

Character Guidelines: While paladins need decent combat skills, priests need very little save for a few dice in Healing. Intimidation is handy, since it enables one to dominate others without resorting to violence, behavior not uncommon in canines.

The Beast Master and Beast Bond Edges are solid

choices, since together they provide a faithful hound or wolf the cleric can support with bennies.

ELLI

Titles: The Crone, Keeper of Years, She Who has Seen It All Before, Death’s Daughter.

Aspects: Old Age.

Affiliations: Eira, the Norns.

Symbol: A walking stick.

Priesthood: Elder Voice (priests); Elder Hand (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: The cleric’s Fate Day (p. 29) is a personal high holy day. Clerics are also expected to officiate at the funerals of those who die of old age.

Duties: To tend for the elderly, to show that old age is no barrier to success.

Sins: (Minor) not assisting an elderly civilized being when asked, mocking, Intimidating, or Taunting an elderly civilized being, failing to destroy an undead more powerful than you; (Major) failing to destroy an undead weaker than you, harming

an elderly civilized being except in self-defense; (Mortal) killing an elderly civilized being except in self-defense, assisting an elderly person in committing suicide.

Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait* (boost affects Knowledge skills only).

Powers: *Confusion, fatigue, hamper movement, precognition, sluggish reflexes, stun.*

Trappings: Trappings relate to old age. Typically this means temporarily aging the target (even as a side-effect of *boost trait*). *Precognition* can be seen as the cleric having witnessed similar a situation before, thus knowing how best to act.

Special: For the purposes of sins, elderly is defined as any creature of 60+ years (or equivalent) or with the Elderly Hindrance, irrespective of its true age. Clerics who begin play with the Elderly Hindrance may spend their five bonus skill points on Faith. The skill remains linked to Spirit, however. Clerics cannot take the Young Hindrance.

While most people speak of the Norns as three goddesses, there are in fact many weird sisters. Scaetha’s heralds, for instance, who collect the souls of the dead, are actually lesser Norns. Those who know the deeper truth understand that while Urd, Verdandi, and Skuld weave the threads of life, it is the lesser Norns, some of whom are good and some of whom are wicked, who decided an individual’s fate.

Elli is a daughter of Skuld, the eldest of the three great Norns. She has two fathers—Death and Time. Before her

birth Death and Time were separate entities, neither with the power to affect the other. It is Elli who determines how old age will affect a mortal, though it is not she who ends life. That duty falls to Death (p. 30). It is for the latter reason clerics' miracles do not deliver lethal damage and why harming the elderly is a sin.

Given the confusion over exactly how many Norns there truly are, Elli is often mistaken for Skuld. She is commonly depicted as a crone clutching a sharp knife. The clerics of the Norns know better. When they depict her she is a long, frayed thread clutched in Skuld's left hand. Like the Norns, Elli has neither shrines nor temples.

Priests typically serve as nursemaids to the elderly. Their duties are far from glamorous. While the elderly are sometimes seen as a drain on resources, they have lived long years and have seen and heard much. As clerics of Elli are fond of reminding those who would mock their elders, arrogance is the child of youth, wisdom the child of years. It is not unusual for the elderly to be accorded respectful titles, such as Elder or Grandmother (regardless of familial bonds).

While the cult has no ties to Scaetha, paladins fight against the undead, creatures over which Elli has no authority. They have little concern with demons and elementals, who like the gods will one day die of old age, nor with golems, whom time weathers, albeit at a much reduced rate.

The sin of "assisting an elderly person in committing suicide" has much leeway. A bed-ridden crone who wants to die cannot be helped—Elli has no control over when Death awakens. On the other hand, an elderly warrior who wants to die in battle can be helped into his armor or escorted to a foe he knows will kill him without incurring any sin. The latter's fate, while likely to result in his death, is not guaranteed, and the cleric will not be directly instrumental in his demise.

Clerics hold few special rituals—serving their deity is worship enough. Special prayers are spoken over the corpses of those who die of old age.

Character Guidelines: Unless he takes the Elderly Hindrance and wants others to know what pains and restrictions old age can bring, the cult is unlikely to appeal to most players.

Beyond the requirement to slay undead (handled by good Spirits and Fighting and taking Favored Foe (Undead), the cult's activities require no specific Traits or Edges. Healing and Hedge Magic are useful (the elderly tend to have poorer Vigor), but almost any cleric can benefit from taking these.

EPONA

Titles: Mistress of Horses, the Mounted Lady.

Aspects: Horses (includes mules and ponies).

Affiliations: Eostre Animalmother, Freo.

Symbol: A stylized white horse.

Priesthood: Mares (priests); Stallions (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Ceremonies are held every Marketdaeg. Saddle Day (see page 20) is a high holy day.

Duties: To protect, breed, and tame horses.

Sins: (Minor) injuring a horse, overburdening a horse, riding a mount other than a horse, walking when you have a horse to hand; (Major) willfully harming a horse, eating horse flesh; (Mortal) willfully killing a horse (except to put it down).

Signature Power: *Beast friend* (horses, mules, and ponies only).

Powers: *Armor**, *boost/lower trait* (Fighting and Riding only), *healing**, *leaping**, *shape change* (horses, mules, and ponies only), *speed**, *succor*, *summon beast* (horses, mules, and ponies only), *weapon immunity**, *wilderness step**.

* *The spell only affects horses, mules, and ponies.*

Trappings: Clerics rarely have showy effects. Many of their spells work simply by whispering to the target animal.

Special: A disciple of Eostre Animalmother who also worships Epona may take an elven horse as an animal companion.

Regardless of what the Saxa of eastern Veemark claim, Epona is a recent addition to the pantheon, appearing only around a thousand years ago. Knowledge of her faith was brought to Rassilon by the Anari from lands they had conquered lands far to the west, across the storm-wracked ocean. This fact has long been forgotten, and Epona is now regarded as having always been part of the pantheon.

In Anari-dominated Rassilon her faith was quickly associated with that of Eostre Animalmother, while in Veemark it was tied to that of Freo. All but forgotten outside Veemark after the dual horrors of the Liche-Priest and the Blizzard War, when the peoples of Rassilon prayed to the greater gods at the near-exclusion of all other, the faith has undergone something of a revival in recent centuries. Worship remains extremely patchy, though.

The horse tribes of Veemark have always worshipped Freo in the guise of a horse. During the Anari invasion of the Marklands refugees brought knowledge of Epona's faith with them. The Saxa of Veemark worship her as Freo's wife. In their unusual mythology, she was kidnapped by an unnamed outsider deity, who took her across the western ocean. After a lengthy quest, Freo tracked her down and freed her.

The Anari and the Saxa of Nordmark, both of whom use cavalry in combat, have begun to honor to a larger degree, though they favor a more militant approach. It is widely believed Tiw's clerics among the Anari will adopt her into their faith as soon as they can agree dogma. The elves, who breed marvelous horses, widely adopted her faith as part of Eostre's religion. Elsewhere she remains virtually unknown.

The goddess is never depicted in human form, but is instead always shown as a mare, tall, strong, and proud. The only known temple to her stands in Veergarth. Rather than being an imposing edifice of stone or wood, it is housed inside a tent made of woven horsehair. The

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queen of the horse lords is considered her high priestess (at least in Veermark), regardless of whether or not the monarch is actually a cleric. Elsewhere, shrines are found only rarely in stables and cavalry barracks.

Priests tend to operate as veterinarians, tamers, breeders, and sellers of horses. Some priests serve in armies, tending the horses and ensuring they are well treated. Priests and paladins have been known to raid mines and liberate abused ponies.

Paladins are mounted soldiers, something of a rarity in many realms. As well as serving in the armies of the Magocracy, Aspiria, and Chalcis, and more recently in Nordmark, many command independent mercenary cavalry detachments. The Knights Hrafn are keen to recruit these unusual clerics into their ranks. Both branches are firmly against the eating of horseflesh, considered something of a delicacy in parts of Rassilon.

As noted above, most worship of Epona occurs in eastern Veermark. On holy days clerics drink fermented mare's milk and wear special headdresses made of horsehair. On the first day of spring, a ceremony marking Epona's return to the pantheon is held. The king assumes the guise of Freo and dons a plumed helmet of brown horsehair. He then scourges the capital for his queen, who is clad in a white and represents Epona, who has been hidden by her huscarls. Once she is located, a massive feast is held for honored guests (common citizens mark the occasion with their own feasts).

The king of Veermark rides a jet black stallion and his wife a pure white mare. These are sacred animals, believed to house the spirit of Freo and Epona respectively. When a black male foal or female white foal is born, a feast is held to mark the rebirth of the gods. Once these reach maturity, the current stallion and mare are ritually sacrificed to ensure their spirits return to the heavens. The beasts' hearts are cooked and served to the monarchs, who by eating them imbue a portion of the gods' spirit and gain their strength. This is the only time horseflesh is eaten in Veermark (it's a capital offense).

Character Guidelines: All clerics are expected to be highly proficient in horsemanship. Paladins need a high skill to help offset the rules on fighting while mounted. Mounted archers are extremely rare in Rassilon, but if anyone is going to shine in the art it is Epona's clerics. Steady Hands is a very important Edge. Paladins who want to command cavalry regiments should invest in Knowledge (Battle) and Leadership Edges. Priests need to invest in Healing as part of their role as veterinarians.

ERMUNAZ

Titles: The Weaponless God, the Empty Hand of Tiw, the Clenched Fist of Tiw.

Aspects: Unarmed Combat.

Affiliations: Eira, Tiw.

Symbol: A clenched fist.

Priesthood: Empty Hands (priests); Clenched Fists (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Victory Day (p. 34) is a high holy day.

Duties: To fight using only one's bare hands.

Sins: (Minor) wielding a weapon in combat for more than one round; (Major) injuring a person or creature using a weapon other than one's bare hands; (Mortal) defeating a person or creature using a weapon other than one's bare hands.

Signature Power: *Smite**

Powers: *Armor**, *bladebreaker*, *boost/lower trait** (Strength, Spirit, Vigor, and Fighting only), *deflection**, *quickness**, *warrior's gift**.

Trappings: Any, except necromantic. None may have a trapping that inflicts lethal damage. Most have no visible component. For instance, *deflection* represents parrying and avoiding blows rather than some mystical effect, and *smite* is merely a focused punch.

Special: Clerics cannot cast spells if holding a weapon in their hands. Spells marked "*" only function on unarmed targets (they may carry weapons on their person, but not in their hands). If the target picks up a weapon, the spell's effect is temporarily negated, though it still counts as being Maintained. Clerics may learn the Martial Arts, Improved Martial Arts, and Martial Arts Master Edges, and may bestow them on others using *warrior's gift*.

By the end of the God War, Tiw had, he boasted, mastered all melee and ranged weapons. The Unknowable One, though, knew a fighting technique Tiw had overlooked in his arrogance. As Tiw proved his prowess by hacking down trees with his axe, the Unknowable One showed a scrawny young god before the deity of war and claimed he could defeat Tiw without any weapons.

Tiw laughed, for such a notion was nonsensical, and turned his back on his peer. Undeterred, the Unknowable One issued a challenge—if Tiw lost, he would master the new fighting style and add it to his repertoire, but if he won, the Unknowable One would cease performing pranks for eternity.

Arrogance cost Tiw the fight, for he teased and taunted his unarmed opponent rather than moving in for the kill. Quickly disarmed, Tiw was subjected to a flurry of disorienting slaps, hard punches, and thunderous hooks. Having no skill at brawling, Tiw was soundly thrashed. Impressed, he fulfilled the terms of the duel, appointing his rival, Ermunaz (whose name means "Strong"), as the minor god of unarmed combat.

Although harming any creature was a sin in her eyes, Eira also learned unarmed combat, for she disdained weapons and her huscarls could defeat opponents without shedding blood.

As an affiliated minor deity of Tiw, Ermunaz is automatically honored at all temples of the war god. One or two temples honor him as the chief aspect of Tiw, and a handful of shrines stand in communities with a strong association of glíma wrestling and boxing. Temples of Eira may boast shrine in his honor. No weapons are permitted in these holy sites. Ermunaz takes the form of Tiw when depicted in art or statuary, his identity evident by his balled fists and total lack of weaponry.

Although many clerics of Tiw and his sub-cults look

down on those of Ermunaz, none can doubt their effectiveness in combat. Priests tend to be tied to a community, temple, or cleric of Eira, acting as a defender and bodyguard. Unsurprisingly, many are local wrestling and boxing champions. Paladins favor an itinerant life, looking for challenges to solve using their fists. Due to their refusal to wield weapons, the cult has a strained relationship with the cult of Ertha.

Ceremonies involve performing ritualistic combat moves, akin to shadow boxing. Breaking objects using one's bare hands is also commonplace, and serves both as a display of their strength and a means to harden their fists. When clerics gather in any numbers, combat naturally ensues, the clergy brawling and grappling to establish seniority and appease their deity.

Character Guidelines: Despite their lack of weapons, clerics consider themselves warriors on an equal footing with any other. Without the benefit of a melee weapon, good Strength is vital for dealing damage. Clergy may wear armor and carry a shield (though using one offensively is a sin), but a high Vigor is still recommended. Brawler and Bruiser are core Edges, and as the only characters able to take the Martial Arts Edge, they are advised to do so as quickly as possible.

EYLÚÐR

Titles: Herald of the Gods, Sky Growler, Twice-Voiced.

Aspects: Heralds.

Affiliations: Freo, Thunor.

Symbol: A lightning bolt over a dark cloud.

Priesthood: Thunderbrothers/sisters (priests); Lightningbrothers/sisters (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Any day there is a thunderstorm.

Duties: To serve as a herald.

Sins: (Minor) whispering, speaking or acting in a manner unbecoming a herald; (Major) injuring a herald, overstepping the bounds of your station or orders; (Mortal) killing a herald.

Signature Power: *Speak language.*

Powers (Priests only): *Bolt, boost/lower trait* (Knowledge (Heraldry), Persuasion, and Riding only), *energy immunity* (sound only), *knockdown, stun, voice on the wind, wilderness step.*

Powers (Paladins only): *Aura, bolt, boost/lower trait* (Knowledge (Heraldry), Intimidation, and Riding only), *energy immunity* (electricity only), *smite, stun, wilderness step.*

Trappings: Priests must have a sound trapping—the crash of thunder. Paladins use an electricity trapping.

Special: Heralds are not freelancers. Hence, all clerics must have the Orders Hindrance to represent their master. This may be a noble or social equivalent, one specific temple, or an influential organization. Picking a fellow player character as patron is permissible, but the cleric is duty-bound to follow that hero's orders in matters of diplomacy and social interaction.

Eylúðr, son of Thunor, is chief herald of the gods. He has two distinct personalities and appearances. One is a large, bearded man with dark hair and eyes, well-muscled of body like a warrior yet with kind eyes. He speaks in a deep voice, which rolls and booms like thunder. Although loud of voice and menacing of appearance, this is actually his more benevolent side and has a jovial nature. The other is a fierce warrior, clean-shaven, with white hair, grim visage, and piercing eyes. He speaks in a voice that crackles like lightning. These aspects are known as Eylúðr Thundersunu and Eylúðr Lightningsunu, respectively.

Since the Blizzard War, Eylúðr has served Thunor in his rows with Thrym and Scaetha in her war against Hela. With these duties taking up much of his time, the other gods must rely on their own heralds. Eylúðr makes his presence felt not in raging storms (the domain of his father), but in shorter thunderstorms, for although he is a herald he is a god of few words.

The key difference between a herald and messenger is that while anyone can hire a messenger, a herald only ever serves a noble or the same social equivalent. Hence, clerics of Eylúðr can be found working for the Arkhwisards and Maegisters of the Convocation and important temples, as well as influential guilds. Messengers can also be attacked freely, whereas a herald is, in theory, due the same courtesy and protection as his lord. A herald also speaks with the authority of his lord, whereas a messenger lacks that power.

Shrines are found in most noble halls, and often a room is set aside specifically to house the shrine. Under the ancient laws, visiting heralds, whether from friend or foe, are given quarters here. Some lords stretch the bounds of hospitality by maintaining two rooms. One, inside the hall, is warm and well-appointed. A lesser shrine, for heralds of foes, is located outside the main hall, and is usually little more than a leaky shack with basic furnishing and a charcoal brazier.

Like their god, priests and paladins fill different roles, though both are heralds. Priests serve their lord's immediate territory, spreading proclamations issued by their master. They also deal with friendly neighbors, acting as diplomats and messengers. Paladins serve outlying communities, which may be separated by many miles of bandit-infested country, and perform diplomatic services with nations considered unfriendly or undertake lengthier journeys through foreign lands.

Although linked with Freo, clerics most favor rites more akin to those of Thunor, for Eylúðr was a son of the storm god long before he became a herald. Ceremonies involve drums and horns for priests and cymbals for paladins, and lots of shouting.

Character Guidelines: Heralds are both household staff and messengers. Riding is important for those who must travel far, as is Survival. Intimidation and Persuasion are both useful social skills, and Knowledge (Heraldry) is handy for making sure you're dealing with the right people and for identifying friends and foes on your journeys. Although heralds are, by dint of their special status, not supposed to act as spies, the practice is rife. Hence, Notice

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and Streetwise can be useful skills. While supposedly protected by law, it is a foolish herald who is not ready at all times to fight his way out of an enemy's hall.

FARMAGUTH

Titles: The Static One, He Who Divides the Land.

Aspects: Boundaries.

Affiliations: Ertha, Hothar.

Symbol: A boundary stone.

Priesthood: Keepers of the Boundary (priests); Markers of the Boundary (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Any day a new boundary is established.

Duties: To maintain existing boundaries, to create new boundaries.

Sins: (Minor) running except to flee a foe, moving a boundary marker; (Major) being the target of a *quickness* or *speed* spell, moving a boundary marker for fraudulent reasons; (Mortal) destroying a boundary marker.

Signature Power: *Barrier*.

Powers: *Entangle, hamper movement, knockdown, refuge, warding*.

Trappings: Clergy may use any trapping except necromantic. Most favor an earth trapping.

Boundary markers have been used to mark divisions of fields, pastures, holdings, and nations for countless generations. Such markers, because of their association with a god, have long been sacrosanct—to move one without the blessing of a cleric of Farmaguth is to invite a curse onto one's household.

Farmaguth is widely believed to be the son of Ertha and Hothar. Ertha gave her son the power to divide the land, and Hothar invoked divine right to make his son's rulings law. Farmaguth is also honored as the god of stasis, and is thus disliked by Freo, god of travel and Thunor, god of liberty and change.

In the earliest days, it was the clergy of Farmaguth who set the boundaries of the nations. When the Anari began their conquest, Anari clerics of the god destroyed the old boundaries stones and erected new ones. The clergy's last great act was the drawing up of the Marklands' boundaries and consecrating the marker stones.

Farmaguth desires no shrines or temples. Any boundary marker with his holy symbol serves as a shrine when required. While there are no true statues of Farmaguth, his image, that of a sturdy man, is typically engraved on major boundary stones to show their position has been recognized and recorded by the cult.

Farmaguth's clergy, once relatively widespread, are today few and far between. With fewer people, and large areas of land only loosely claimed, the placement of boundaries is less likely to cause disputes these days. Many of their duties have been taken over by clerics of Eostre, Ertha, and Hothar, depending on the reason why a boundary marker is raised.

Most priests work alongside those of other faiths, maintaining boundary records and aiding in disputes over contested lands. While a priest of Hothar, for ex-

ample, may be called upon to rule where a boundary lies, he will, if possible, consult with a priest of Farmaguth before passing judgment. Paladins are called upon to maintain distant boundary stones and plant new ones. Even when a cleric of Farmaguth is not present, the god's name is invoked when a boundary marker is raised.

Ceremonies are only held when placing new boundary markers. Depending on the landowner's budget, the stone is first engraved or carved. A foundation hole is then excavated. At the bottom is placed an offering of ash (either burnt food or an animal's carcass) and drink. Whoever wishes the stone erected must then deposit several drops of his blood. This offering is a blood oath—it is a sign that the landowner has the legal right to place the marker. The stone is then lowered into place and earth packed hard around it. Finally, the cleric completes the ritual by kissing the stone.

Character Guidelines: Aside from Knowledge (Law), which aids in settling boundary disputes, the clergy have no fixed requirements. Many are likely to travel, and thus Survival should be considered as important skill. Strength can be useful, since boundary stones are typically heavy (to prevent them being easily removed).

FJALLGEIGUR

Titles: Ever-Changing One, Formless One, the Shapeless God, Shape-Shifter.

Aspects: Unpredictability.

Affiliations: The Unknowable One.

Symbol: A blank mask.

Priesthood: Shifters (priests); Shapers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Clerics must pick one day per season to serve as their personal holy day.

Duties: To do what ever takes your fancy.

Sins: (Minor) not changing shape once a day, sticking to a plan, repeating a non-combat task because you failed at it; (Major) failure to change shape in any given week, acting in a predictable manner; (Mortal) failure to change shape in any given month.

Signature Power: *Shape change*.

Powers: *Altered senses, boost/lower trait* (attributes only), *growth/shrink, mimic, speak language*. Because of the cult's unpredictability, individual clerics may pick one Novice spell and one Seasoned spell of their choice to add to this list.

When he reaches a new Rank, the cleric may trade one of these two bonus spells for a new spell of the same Rank. He forgets the old spell completely and immediately learns the new one. The decision must be made at the first advancement opportunity of new Rank or the cleric is still with the same spells until his next Rank increase. This does not use his advancement opportunity.

Trappings: Clergy may use any trapping. Most prefer subtle effects.

Special: Clerics cannot have the Cautious or Stubborn Hindrances. Long-term planning goes against their nature and sticking to one idea goes against their faith.

The sin of repeating a task typically covers things like Notice rolls. Once a task is failed, clerics are expected to forget the failure and move on to something new. Acting in a predictable manner is open to GM interpretation and depends on the circumstances at the time. Be harsh enough to prevent the character from always doing the obvious, not but so harsh he limits his potential by doing stupid things just to avoid the sin.

Fjallgeiguðr is an enigma to the other gods. No one knows whether the deity is male or female, where it came from, or what it wants. The god of shape changing never takes the same form twice, and none, not even keen-sighted Rigr, Maera, mistress of divination, scholastic Hoenir, truth-seeking Hothar, Niht, mistress of secrets, or the supposedly all-knowing Norns, can say for sure what its true form might be.

As a result, Fjallgeiguðr is widely mistrusted by its peers. All save the Unknowable One, that is. Given his love of tricks, Fjallgeiguðr's inability to reveal its true form amuses the trickster. Many of the other deities are of the suspicion that Fjallgeiguðr is really the Unknowable One playing one of his jokes.

Fjallgeiguðr has no temples or shrines. Given the god's ever-changing physical form, it is never depicted in art, either. Clerics rarely gather even in pairs, primarily because they have little to say to each other—even the holy laws they follow vary from cleric to cleric depending on who taught him.

Clerics and paladins are a chaotic bunch, prone to changing their minds as quickly as the wind, and acting out of whim. Long-term goals are anathema to them, and most only plan a few hours ahead at most.

While versatile allies in their own way, they are notoriously unreliable. A cleric may cancel a spell being Maintained on a comrade just to remind them of the unpredictable nature of the universe. Note that they have no interest in teaching, unlike clerics of the Unknowable One. While they are prone to impulsiveness, they aren't overly curious. A cleric likely won't pull a lever to see what it does—he'll pull it because it seemed the right thing to do.

Ceremonies and rituals are common, though immensely varied, as one might expect. Singing, praying, dancing, chanting are all acceptable, so long as the worshipper follows his heart and not a scripted ceremony. As such, clerics are free to worship when, where, and how they want.

Character Guidelines: There is no such thing as a typical cleric of Fjallgeiguðr. While their spells are great for espionage, such activity usually involves long-term planning, something the clergy abhor. While they can be a pain to have in the adventuring party, they make excellent and unpredictable NPCs.

FOLDARDRÓTTANN

Titles: The Explorer, Walker in the Hidden Realm.

Aspects: Underground exploration.

Affiliations: Ertha, Freo.

Symbol: A compass.

Priesthood: Guides (priests); Explorers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: The first day of each Deorcmonan phase.

Duties: To explore and map the subterranean realm.

Sins: (Minor) getting lost underground, not exploring a newly discovered cave system, failure to leave a gift when entering a cave system; (Major) sleeping outdoors when there is a cave or dwelling nearby; (Mortal) willfully despoiling a cavern or other underground feature.

Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait* (Agility, Strength, Vigor, Climbing, Survival, and Swimming only).

Powers: *Altered senses, elemental manipulation* (earth only), *feast* (basic fare only), *growth/shrink, leaping, light, wall walker*.

Trappings: Darkness, earth, or metal.

Special: Clerics must speak Earthtongue. Although two of the sins are the same as Ertha's, there is no increased penalty for committing them.

Foldardröttann is the daughter of Ertha and Freo. Mythology tells that Freo, having wandered the mortal world and seen the sights, grew curious about what lay beneath the world. Suitably equipped, he set off to explore the subterranean realm. On his journey he encountered Ertha in her dark, dank lair, the first god to do so since Rassilon was created. The two had a brief liaison and Ertha gave birth to a daughter. Foldardröttann's love of the earth and subterranean realms is coupled with her father's wanderlust, and she has made it her personal goal to map the entirety of Ertha's realm.

Foldardröttann is a grubby-faced girl wearing a metal cap. Attached to the cap is a magical candle which can never be extinguished. Sometimes she is shown carrying a length of rope, the most vital piece of equipment for any spelunker.

Shrines to Foldardröttann are found only outside cave systems but are always hidden in a crevice or buried in a shallow pit. Signs in Earthtongue point the way to the cache. Explorers seeking her blessing leave behind a small gift, typically something other explorers will find useful in their subterranean travels, such as a bundle of candles, a tinderbox, a coil of rope, or a few meals worth of rations. Other explorers are welcome to scavenge through the pile in the hope of locating something they are missing, but for every item taken a suitable donation must be made.

Clerics coming out of a cave often leave behind a map of areas they have explored, to help colleagues avoid wasting time remapping the same area. These are written in Earthtongue to prevent creatures such as goblins and orcs reading them.

Priests serve as guides to those wishing to explore the Underearth. Typically they stick to mapped areas, for they are not as adventurous as paladins. Miners make frequent use of them to help in finding mineral veins. They also go over explored areas, adding detail to maps and correcting inaccuracies. Paladins are often more curious and adventurous, and are drawn to unknown subterranean areas like moths to flames. They map out areas never trodden by mortals, drive back trolls and other dangers, and encounter races which have never walked the surface world.

Each year on the first day of Eostremonan, the clergy

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gather at the closest temple to Ertha to celebrate First Foot Day. This marks the first day Foldardröttann set off on her travels and is regarded as the beginning of the exploring season. Clerics trade maps, discuss past and future expeditions, warn each other of hazards, and purchase new supplies.

Clerics are expected to leave copies of their maps at every Ertha temple they visit. These are slowly being collated into a single, comprehensive map of the Under-earth. It is a thankless task, for each year more and more areas are explored and mapped, and the tangled web of caves and tunnels grows ever more complex.

Character Guidelines: Although Foldardröttann provides only a few basic spells, she is the closest thing to being a patron deity of adventurers. Clerics should invest in Climbing, Notice, Survival, and Swimming, for the natural dangers of the Underearth are many. Agility is handy for squeezing through narrow gaps, Spirit useful to stave off feelings of frustration or despondency when dead end after dead end is encountered, and Vigor to survive the general rigors of travel.

FORSETI

Titles: The Thieftaker, Var's Shadow.

Aspects: Catching thieves.

Affiliations: Hothar, Var.

Symbol: An outstretched hand.

Priesthood: Detectives (priests); Thieftakers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Every Marketdaeg.

Duties: To catch thieves and protect goods.

Sins: (Minor) failure to catch a thief you are chasing, falsely accusing someone of theft, allowing something you guard to be damaged or stolen (up to 50 gs); (Major) deliberately letting a thief go, allowing something you guard to be broken or stolen (up to 1,000 gs); (Mortal) allowing something you guard to be destroyed or stolen (1,001 gs or more).

Signature Power: *Entangle*.

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Agility, Strength, Vigor, Investigation, Notice, and Streetwise only), *detect/conceal* (*detect* criminal intent only; *conceal* only hides objects with a value of 51 gs or more from magical detection), *knockdown*, *lock/unlock*, *sentry*, *speed*, *stun*.

Trappings: Any except necromantic.

Forseti is Var's chief watchman, overseeing the security of his celestial marketplace, and patron of the god's paladins. Although he serves Var, Forseti was trained by Hothar and retains close ties to his mentor. Rigr has offered Forseti employment on many occasions, but Forseti has little interest in watching over entire settlements, being quite content in his current position. The gods maintain good relations, and on occasion have worked together.

Forseti once vowed that nothing he guarded could be taken from his protection and kept for long. Nauthiz has made it his personal quest to prove this a lie. Although one might think they would be natural enemies, Nauthiz and Forseti actually have a cordial relationship. This might seem strange, but Forseti believes it is wiser to have Nauthiz close, where he can keep an eye on him.

Images of Forseti show him with a ring of eyes around his head, indicating the god is ever-watchful and nothing can be concealed from his steely gaze. In his left hand hangs a pair of manacles, while in his right he carries a hefty club, the traditional weapon of watchmen. Statues of Var never detail Forseti in any way—it is assumed that Var is never far away, and prefers to remain unseen, so as to lull thieves into a false sense of security. Similarly, Forseti has no unique shrines—prayers to Var to watch over goods and buildings automatically reach Forseti's ears.

Clerics fulfill the opposite function to those of Kvara, the god of bodyguards, being concerned with protecting objects and property, not people. Most work for Var's clergy or serve mundane merchants, though they accept commissions from any citizen who can meet their fee.

Paladins share the same name as the paladin order of Var, as the two serve the exact same role. The key difference is that while the militant order of Forseti



focuses purely on catching thieves and arsonists (who through their work destroy valuables), those who worship Var as their patron are also expected to conduct trade or negotiate contracts. It is simply matter of focus over generalization. Paladins of Var who are also indoctrinated into Forseti's sub-cult use the honorific "High Thieftaker."

Paladins are more reactive than active. They patrol warehouses and markets, keeping a watchful eye open for thieves and arsonists, giving chase when required. Although servants of the law, they are less interested in other forms of crime. While the majority serves Var, there are those who opt to work for nobles and governments, taking on security of state granaries and warehouses, patrolling markets as independent guards, and watching over the houses of the rich and famous.

It is not unknown for paladins (and priests) to take reformed thieves under their wing, putting their larcenous skills to good use in the name of the law. Hardened clerics of Hothar are opposed to such hirelings, but Forseti is not as blind as his mentor, and neither are his followers. Because of their knowledge of security, paladins are sometimes hired by rich patrons to test their security systems.

Priests, by comparison, are more studious. Whereas paladins react to danger as it occurs, priests conduct lengthy operations to track down thieves' guilds and put an end to their crime empires. They are less concerned with petty pickpockets and cutpurses, though all criminals must face justice. Priests and paladins work closely together on matters of security. Once a den of thievery is located and enough evidence gained to secure a conviction, the priests unleash the paladins to make arrests.

Ceremonies typically involve clerics gathering to swap arrest stories over a drink. Each year on the anniversary of their induction into the cult, the clergy must read a list of criminals they have captured and allowed to escape. These tallies are kept by Var, who uses them to judge his clergy when they die.

Character Guidelines: Forseti's clergy need a good Agility for use in chases and Vigor to represent general stamina. Although not required, clerics operating outside their native lands should invest in Knowledge (Law). Notice is the key skill, though combat skills should not be neglected, especially for paladins. Investigation and Streetwise, and the Investigator Edge, are more useful to priests, but paladins are not forbidden from serving as investigators.

GALDRAFÖÖR

Titles: The Storyteller, Weaver of Words and Wonder, Wondrous Speaker.

Aspects: Storytelling.

Affiliations: The Unknowable One.

Symbol: A lyre.

Priesthood: Storytellers (priests); Scops (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: None. Although the cult has no ties to

Hoenir, Spoken Word Day (see page 22) is a high holy day.

Duties: To keep alive and entertain through stories.

Sins: (Minor) not telling a story once a week, not telling a new story each season; (Major) not telling a story once a month, not telling a new story each year; (Mortal) not telling a story once a season.

Signature Power: *Speak language*

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Smarts, Folklore, Streetwise only), *charismatic aura*, *elemental manipulation*, *succor*, *voice on the wind*.

Trappings: Trappings take the form of minor effects and are used primarily to enhance stories.

Galdraföör is the Unknowable One's skald and spends his days entertaining his lord with stories of heroism and humor, tragedy and love. Unlike his master, Galdraföör has no love of tricks or japes, though he knows many amusing stories. It is said each night he tells the Unknowable One a story in which the Prankster failed in an endeavor, just to remind him that even he can be tricked or fooled.

Given that the Unknowable One has no name, some theologians are beginning to wonder if perhaps the Cosmic Joker isn't really several gods working together rather than a unique individual. Clerics of Galdraföör can add no weight to their arguments, for they see their deity as a separate entity, and Galdraföör is as clueless about the Unknowable One's true name as the other deities. Still, Galdraföör is never depicted in art, just in case his images provide some clues to his master's identity.

Galdraföör has a single temple in Scathmoor, the town of skalds. Contained within its library are many hundreds of scrolls and folios, each recording a single story. While worshippers are expected to be able to recite their stories from memory, the books are a useful learning aid. Given that many stories are based on factual events, they also serve as a reference library for historians—if they can separate fact from fiction. Shrines are rare, for each storyteller is himself a living shrine to Galdraföör.

The clergy are entertainers, political commentators, satirists, and historians rolled into one. In some areas, such as the Blackstone Barony, those whose tales speak out against oppression or mock a cruel lord are seen as agitators and troublemakers. In many cases the label is correct, but storytellers very rarely deliberately start rebellions—they just remind their listeners that there are other options available to them. Many strum a lyre to help keep a story's pace, but few are talented musicians.

No animosity exists between skalds, who use magic, and clerics, who are divinely blessed. Both sides accept Galdraföör (and the Unknowable One) as lord of storytelling. That there is a type of magic so closely related to Galdraföör and with wider scope in terms of spellcasting ability is best answered with, "Great trick, isn't it?" After all, who knows the minds of the gods and why they make things so?

Traditionally, priests rarely travel, preferring to be part of a noble's retinue or work a local market. Scops (the Auld Saxa terms for skalds) are itinerant storytellers, moving from settlement to settlement to tell and learn

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new stories, offering their services in return for a meal and sleeping place beside the hearth. So long as they perform their sacred duties, Galdraðöör doesn't much care how clerics live their lives.

Any day a cleric tells a story is considered a holy day. When storytellers encounter a comrade, whether a cleric, skald, or member of the laity, they exchange tales to boost their repertoire. Sometimes they hold impromptu competitions, each telling a single story and letting the audience judge the winner.

Character Guidelines: Clerics need to have a good collection of stories with which to entertain their hosts. Citizens prefer stories based on their culture, ancestors, and lands, since they can relate most easily to them. Knowledge (Folklore) covers this.

Storytellers don't need to be attractive, but Charisma is important for drawing crowds and keeping their attention—a storyteller with good charisma can help the story come alive in his audience's mind, whereas one with a dull, monotonous voice is going to send folk to sleep.

GALFULEYSI

Titles: Lady of Misfortune, Jinx of the Gods, Lady Hex, the Unlucky One, Lady Snake Eyes.

Aspects: Misfortune.

Affiliations: Nauthiz, the Unknowable One.

Symbol: A pair of dice showing double 1.

Priesthood: Jinxes (priests); Hexes (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Every Deorcmonan is a holy day. Fool's Day (p. 36) is a high holy day.

Duties: To teach through causing misfortune.

Sins: (Minor) spending a benny on a failed Trait roll, not causing another to suffer misfortune once per week, playing games of chance (games of skill are okay); (Major) causing misfortune out of revenge, not causing another to suffer misfortune once per month; (Mortal) spending a benny on a critically failed Trait roll.

Signature Power: *Lower trait* (no boost).

Powers: *Bladebreaker, deflection, entangle, jinx* (no luck), *knockdown, stun, summon demon* (clumsiness).

Trappings: None with any associated game mechanics. Miracles are typically "accidents," such as a warrior attacking a target of *deflection* slipping or losing grip of his weapon, a blade snapping because of hitting the ground, or victims becoming *entangled* in a coil of rope or long vine they somehow failed to spot.

Special: Clerics cannot take the Luck Edge. As a free action once per round a cleric can spend a benny to jinx another within line of sight. The victim must reroll his Trait die and take the *lower* of the results. The victim can spend a benny to counter this sudden misfortune. In this instance, the initial roll stands.

Galfuleysi is the daughter of Nauthiz. While the goddess enjoyed both good and bad luck, those around her were subjected to many misfortunes. In the end it was too much for her peers, who banished her from their halls. While enjoying one of his periodic walks, the Un-

knowable One found her weeping at the edge of Godsheim, an outcast through no fault of her own.

Unperturbed by the accidents he suffered in her presence, the god of tricksters told Galfuleysi her powers could be a valuable teaching aid—everyone suffered bad luck at some time, but what was more important was how one dealt with it. With the Unknowable One's patronage, Galfuleysi was begrudgingly accepted back into Godsheim as the minor deity of misfortune. Even her father welcomed her back into his hall, though he makes sure she is out running errands whenever he invites his friends round to play games of chance.

Galfuleysi and Vör (p. 112) have become friendly rivals. The latter tries his best to plan for every eventuality, and Galfuleysi tries to mess up his plans with unforeseen misfortune.

Galfuleysi is never depicted in images—to do so is to risk misfortune. Most often she is portrayed as a pair of dice showing snake eyes hung around Nauthiz's neck, a sign that luck can be both good and bad.

While she is not malicious, she is most often offered prayers by those who wish misfortune to strike another. Small shrines to her are found in the temples of her father, where worshippers suffering streaks of bad luck leave offerings in the hope of diverting her attention.

Galfuleysi's clerics see themselves as teachers. They hold firm to the belief that one must learn to cope with misfortune, for it can strike at any time and shows no favoritism. This makes them as much a menace to friends as it does enemies. At the same time, they rarely leave their friends in danger—they may be capricious, but they are not malicious. Militancy is the primary division being the clergy, with priests tending toward life in settlements and paladins joining adventuring parties.

Formal ceremonies are few and far between. Simply causing or suffering misfortune is considered an act of worship.

Character Guidelines: Galfuleysi happily lets her own followers suffer misfortune—they cannot teach unless they truly understand. The only way a cleric can offset sinning is to make sure his most important skills are high and avoid attempting unnecessary tasks. Of course, no hero is going to be good at everything, so just accept the fact that you're going to suffer more bad luck than your friends.

One important thing to remember is to be unbiased—make your fellow players the target of your miracles as much as your enemies. It might not earn your character many friends, but your allies need to learn to adapt quickly and spontaneously come up with contingency plans when bad luck strikes.

GANGARI

Titles: He Who Walks the Secret Paths.

Aspects: Exploration.

Affiliations: Freo, Ullr.

Symbol: A maze.

Priesthood: Guardians of the Secret Path (priests); Walkers of the Secret Path (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: First Heafoddaeg of each month.

Duties: To travel and explore new lands.

Sins: (Minor) using a map, not seeing what lies beyond a door or opening (a glimpse is enough), failure to travel at least 50 miles a week; (Major) misdirecting a traveler, failing to travel at least 200 miles a month; (Mortal) failing to travel at least 1,000 miles a season.

Signature Power: *Speed*.

Powers: *Ethereal/corporeal, gravespeak, invisibility, lock/unlock, speak language, speed, teleport, wilderness step*.

Trappings: Any, though subtle ones are common.

Gangari is the god of exploration. He knows the secret ways to travel the universe, how to step into thin air and appear elsewhere in an instant, how to breach the barrier between the living and the dead, how to walk between reality so as to be invisible, and how to ward doors so none may pass. No lock or security system can check his progress. A close ally of Freo, Gangari has been moving through the heavens for eons, for there are many gods who seek to learn his powers, and not all of them have good intentions.

Like Freo, Gangari has no temples. The god of portals needs no shrines either, for any portal or opening can be a site of worship. Images of Gangari vary from an explorer complete with all the gear he needs, to a cloaked figure, representing his ability to tread secret pathways.

The cult has many grades of initiation known as Doors. When one displays the required knowledge to advance, a new Door is opened, allowing new cult secrets to be learned. No one is sure how many Doors actually exist, for it seems there is always something new to learn.

While Freo allows his clergy to wander freely, caring little if they walk and up and down the same road for eternity, Gangari expects his worshippers to continually explore new regions. It is widely held the god is mapping all the secret and invisible pathways of the universe, and each new area a mortal worshipper explores fills in part of this celestial map. To that end, he is more demanding that his worshippers keep on the move.

Gangari cares little what his clergy does to earn a living. Many of his followers practice a little larceny to keep their pockets lined, a trade for which their spells are well-suited. Others hire on as caravan guards, especially if the caravan is heading in a direction the cleric has never traveled before.

While priests may be slightly more scholarly and thorough in mapping new regions and paladins slightly more prone to step boldly forward onto unknown roads, there is little difference between them.

Ceremonies involve drawing out a maze, which the worshipper then walks or traces with his finger while reciting prayers.

Character Guidelines: Exploration and mapping unknown areas requires a multitude of skills. Notice and Stealth, which can be used in a great many situations, are perhaps most important, though Boating, Climbing, Riding, Survival, and Swimming all have their uses. Given

their outdoors lifestyle, Woodsman provides a good boost to key skills.

The Curiosity Hindrance is a nice fit, but it can be too much—a cleric might be curious about what lies down a dark passage, but he is unlikely to pull a lever just to see what will happen. Kind GMs may allow a Minor version of Curious to simulate this.

GEIRDRIFUL

Titles: Spear-Flinger, Spear Cloud, She Who Impales from Afar.

Aspects: Spear throwing.

Affiliations: Tiw.

Symbol: A spear with arrow feathers.

Priesthood: Spears (priests); Far Spears (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Every Raestdaeg from Plohmonan through Fogmonan. Standards Day (see page 34) is a high holy day.

Duties: To fight in the fyrd, to kill using throwing spears.

Sins: (Minor) throwing a weapon other than a spear, training someone in the use of any weapon except the throwing spear, not throwing a spear the round the enemy first enters range; (Major) using a projectile weapon, using a weapon other than a spear for more than one round in a combat; (Mortal) ignoring a community's call to arms.

Signature Power: *Smite*.*

Powers: *Aim**, *bolt*, *boost/lower trait* (Strength, Throwing only)*, *dispel*, *knockdown*, *weapon immunity* (thrown spears only).

Trappings: Trappings are minor effects affecting or relating to thrown spears. *Bolt*, for instance, represents one or more magical spears, whereas *dispel* and *knockdown* take the form of spectral spears.

Special: Spells marked “*” only function when the cleric or the target are throwing a spear. The spell is not cancelled if these conditions are broken—it remains Maintained but provides no benefit. For instance, if the cleric casts *smite* and then uses his spear in melee, he does not benefit from *smite* until he throws his weapon. During this time the spell is still being Maintained. Clerics can learn Mighty Throw at Seasoned. However, the Edge only ever applies to spears.

Geirdriful is the sister of Geirvaldr (see below). Following her brother's promotion, Geirdriful decided to join the fyrd. Somewhat lacking in talent, she was nonetheless confident her familial bond would ensure her a place beside the men folk. Approaching Geirvaldr while he was training the fyrd, spear clutched tightly in hand, she arrogantly demanded to allowed to join their ranks. In a swift move Geirvaldr disarmed his sister and tripped her, leaving her sitting in a pile of dung. Embarrassed, Geirdriful picked up her spear and threw it away. Much to everyone's surprise, the spear sailed through the air, penetrating two stout oaks before embedding itself deep in a rock. Although Geirvaldr still refused her a place in

THE FYRD

Rural communities are, at best, protected by a small militia made up of full-time warriors. Often these are mercenaries, though if there is a shrine or temple to Rigr or Tiw they may be clerics or laity from the local community. In emergencies, every able-bodied male adult (generally covering 14-50 years of age) is expected to take up arms. This gathering is known as the fyrd.

The methods of raising the fyrd vary. Many settlements use drums, horns, or bagpipes. Others employ children as runners to race to the distant fields and recall the workers. If the fields are particularly far away, voice on the wind spells, either cast by clerics or through alchemical devices, are used to save time.

Usually only the local noble or his appointed official can summon the fyrd. Again, this can vary from community to community. The noble ruler of a settlement with clerics of Tiw or Geirvaldr usually gives them the authority to call the fyrd, since they are most unlikely to do so for frivolous reasons.

Fyrdmen must own a spear and shield as a minimum. Those who can afford armor and helmets wear them. They muster every Raestdaeg, from spring until the start of winter, to perform drills and learn what the various signals mean. Signals are usually changed each season to prevent spies from learning them.

The fyrd haven't signed up to go adventuring with their lord—they are summoned only in times of invasion. With the winters lengthening, it is more important that the fyrd remain on the land, plowing, sowing, and harvesting. Calling the fyrd at the wrong time, or getting them slaughtered on some fool's errand, is a surefire way to shatter the economy of a realm.

the main fyrd, he did tell Tiw of her prowess. Tiw accepted her as one of his valkyries.

She has no temples or shrine, not even in temples of Tiw. Wherever Tiw the Spear or Geirvaldr are worshipped, Geirdriful is automatically honored as a minor part of the cult. When a cleric of the goddess resides within a community, a single feather is tied to an existing image's spear to note her presence. Geirdriful is never depicted as an individual, and descriptions of her vary to suit the audience, though she is always female.

Aside from her small clergy, Geirdriful has few true worshippers. However, standard Saxa tactics are to throw a volley of spears as the enemy nears, and thus she receives praise from most warriors in the early stages of battle. Priests serve under and alongside priests of Tiw the Spear and Geirvaldr, teaching the huscarls, soldiers, and fyrd how to throw spears to maximum effect. Many clerics train women in their community to throw spears, allowing them

to aid in the defense of their homes without getting into the thick of battle. Paladins hire out their services as mercenaries or serve their local community or a lord. Unlike paladins of most other faiths, they shun melee combat.

Ceremonies involve tying strips of paper on which are written prayers around the haft or whispering them into the head. The head is then ritually sharpened before being washed in water (worst option), beer (acceptable), or blood (preferred) to purify it. To release the prayer, the cleric must throw the spear at a foe standing at long range. Drawing blood is a sign Geirdriful has heard the prayer, while a kill indicates the goddess is exceptionally pleased. Conversely, a miss indicates the goddess is displeased, while having the spear break (such as on a critical failure) on impact is reason enough for some clerics to seek atonement.

Character Guidelines: As masters of spears, Agility and Strength are the primary attributes, while Throwing is the most important skill. Not only are they essential to using the clerics' preferred weapon, they are requirements for the cult's favored Edges—Spear Catch and Spear Twist. Marksman and Mighty Throw should be taken as soon as possible to give the cleric as much advantage as possible. Unlike the cult of Geirvaldr, clerics of Geirdriful are soldiers, not leaders.

GEIRVALDR

Titles: Spear Master, Lord of the Fyrd.

Aspects: Spear combat, the militia.

Affiliations: Tiw.

Symbol: A spear.

Priesthood: Sergeants of Spears (priests); Captains of Spears (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Every Raestdaeg from Plohmonan through Fogmonan. Standards Day (see page 34) is a high holy day.

Duties: To fight in and lead the fyrd.

Sins: (Minor) using a weapon other than a spear for more than one round, training someone in the use of any weapon except the spear, leading the fyrd in a battle it loses; (Major) using a weapon other than a spear for the majority of a battle; (Mortal) ignoring a community's call to arms.

Signature Power: *Smite**.

Powers: *Bladebreaker**, *boost/lower trait* (Strength, Fighting only)*, *deflection**, *gift of battle**, *leaping**, *quickness**, *warrior's gift**.

Trappings: Any except necromantic.

Special: Spells marked "*" only function when the cleric and the target are holding a spear and using no other weapon. The spell is not cancelled if these conditions are broken—it remains Maintained but provides no benefit. For instance, if the cleric casts *deflection* and then drops his spear he does not benefit from *deflection* until he picks up his spear again. During this time the spell is still being Maintained.

Geirvaldr was a farmer by trade, a freeman who tilled

the land. Accordingly, he was also a member of the fyrd, as all men must be. Although not trained as a warrior, he quickly showed great promise with his spear. Whenever the fyrd was summoned, Geirvaldr was the first one to answer. Whenever the fyrd was in the thickest fighting, Geirvaldr was at its head. Whenever the fyrd faltered, Geirvaldr rallied them.

Tiw was in command of the gods' fyrd, but he wasn't particularly interested in the job. He preferred to spend his time feasting and fighting with his huscarls than train a bunch of farmers. Suitably impressed by Geirvaldr's prowess and leadership skills, Tiw appointed him to command the fyrd and instruct the men in how to use the spear. When Tiw taught mortals the secret of summoning the fyrd, Geirvaldr became the fyrd's patron.

Geirvaldr is never depicted as an individual. In every community with a fyrd and a shrine to Tiw, the god of war is shown carrying a spear. Even in temples that show Tiw carrying other weapons, the presence of a fyrd demands a separate shrine be erected. In settlements with no shrine or temple, a long spear with a length of colored cloth tied around the shaft is thrust into the ground in the main square to serve as a rally point when the fyrd is summoned.

While the fyrd are part-time warriors with other professions, clerics are usually full-time soldiers in the employ of a nobleman (or whoever heads the village). Priests are valued as instructors. They spend their days training the fyrd and developing tactics for all eventualities. Paladins are more active, serving as the actual battlefield commander. As always, the division between roles is fluid, and either is expected to be able to fill the other's shoes.

Itinerant clerics sometimes serve as mercenaries. Often they become mercenary captains, though only of spearmen. If a cleric is staying in a settlement when the fyrd is called, he must answer the summons, present himself to the local fyrd leader, and state his credentials and experience. Where he serves in the fyrd is for the local commander to decide. In communities without a resident cleric of Geirvaldr or Tiw, local fyrd leaders are often only too happy to let the visitor take at least some command responsibilities off them.

Ceremonies to Geirvaldr always involve choreographed drill maneuvers accompanied by the fyrd's battle chants. Sometimes, the fyrd lines up and throw their spears toward a distant point. Whoever hurls his weapons the furthest is said to have good fortune in the next battle in which the fyrd participates. During festivals to Tiw, the fyrd perform the Spear Dance, a form of line dance where they clash spears against each other in rapid flurries and thrust them into the sky to praise the war god.

Character Guidelines: Clerics are expected to lead the fyrd and so should invest in Leadership Edges. As warriors, Fighting and Throwing are vital skills for any fyrd member, and they should always have the minimum Strength to use a spear effectively. A higher Strength is always favorable, of course.

Knowledge (Battle) should not be ignored, especially among clerics in small settlements, as they may be the only permanent warrior and so will be given command

responsibilities. Any Combat Edges are useful, but Mighty Throw is favored as it gives the hero an advantage against distant foes.

GERÐR

Titles: She Who Divides the Land, Hall-Builder, Wall-Raiser.

Aspects: Walls and fences.

Affiliations: Ertha, Rigr.

Symbol: A mason's chisel.

Priesthood: Master Mason (priests); Siege Captain (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Any day a new wall or fence is built. House Building Day (p. 20) is a high holy day.

Duties: To maintain existing walls and fences, to create new walls and fences.

Sins: (Minor) altering the existing course of a wall or fence without permission or legal right, refusing to help build a barrier or house when asked by non-evil races; (Major) destroying a section of non-fortification wall except in time of war, moving a wall or fence for fraudulent reasons, refusing to help build a fortification when asked by non-evil races; (Mortal) destroying a section of fortification except in time of war.

Signature Power: *Barrier*.

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Strength, Vigor, and Climbing only), *hamper movement*, *mend* (fences and walls only), *refuge*, *wall walker*.

Trappings: Earth or wood trappings only. The latter has the same game mechanics as earth.

Gerðr, a daughter of Rigr, is the wife of Farmaguth. While he is concerned with kingdoms and is held in regard by kings and mighty lords, she is concerned with smaller divisions and the needs of the common people. She is the minor goddess of earthworks, wooden fences, and stone walls. Her role covers everything from the low walls and fences used to segregate fields and enclosures, to the towering stone walls of castles, and the huge earthworks of ring forts and hill forts.

While her husband's cult is steadily declining, her popularity is as high as ever. Her cult is found from villages to cities to fortresses, for she is the patron of all those involved in the design and construction of walls and fences. Her cult needs no temples or shrines, for any wall or earthwork is considered a suitable place of worship.

Priests often work within communities. Although Gerðr has no direct ties to Hothar, traditionally the cult has been responsible for settling, or at least advising on, legal cases concerning land ownership and the placement of new barriers. Most work as laborers, building and maintaining boundaries and houses (except the roof in the latter instance).

Paladins tend to focus on defensive barriers. Some are itinerants, traveling among distant communities to provide advice and assistance in building and maintaining fortifications. Others serve as permanent staff in a

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true fortification, where they are usually placed in charge of the defensive works. Although Gerðr is primarily concerned with building walls, she has the power to bring them toppling down. With their knowledge of fortifications, they are greatly prized as siege engineers.

Ceremonies are few and far between. Whenever work commences on a new barrier or house, it is traditional to ask a cleric of Gerðr, assuming one is available, to bless the walls. Often a cleric is asked to lay the first stone or drive in the first post, carving the goddess' symbol on it to ensure the completed structure is strong. Helping build or maintain a wall, fence, earthwork, or house is considered an act of devotion.

Character Guidelines: Vigor, representing the defensive nature of walls, is the most important attribute, followed by Strength (hard physical labor is part of a cleric's life). Knowledge (Law) is useful in helping determine the legal placement of walls and fences, as well as settling disputes over land ownership. Siege Breaker and Siege Mentality are must-have Edges for paladins.

GERSEMI

Titles: Matchmaker, Concubine of the Gods.

Aspects: Consensual sex and marriage.

Affiliations: Eira.

Symbol: A circle cut in half by a vertical line.

Priesthood: Matchmakers (priests); Companions (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: First Waesdaeg of every month. Bed Blessing Day (see page 16) is a high holy day for paladins and Courtship Day (see page 17) a high holy day for priests.

Duties: Encourage consenting sexual union.

Sins: (Minor) going a week without sex, condoning rape, failure to save a marriage you have been hired to save; (Major) going a month without sex, not punishing a rapist; (Mortal) committing rape, going a season without sex.

Signature Power: *Charismatic aura*.

Powers (Priests): *Boost/lower trait* (Investigation, Notice, Persuasion, Streetwise only), *insight*, *speak language*.

Powers (Paladins): *Boost/lower trait* (Vigor, Persuasion only), *confusion*, *fatigue*.

Trappings: Trappings relate to sex and beauty (paladins) and calm emotions (priests).

Special: Paladins who marry are forever stripped of their powers. Priests who do not marry within two years of taking their holy vows are similarly cast out of the faith.

Like Eostre, Gersemi is a dual-natured goddess. Some theologians insist she is two distinct deities whose worship has become merged over time, though her clerics disagree. On one hand she is the goddess of marriage, the perfect wife and mother. On the other, she is the goddess of love, though sex is a more fitting term. These two aspects are known as Gersemi the Matchmaker and Gersemi the Consort respectively.

Unusually, she is depicted in two distinct forms. The first

is a matronly figure carrying a large set of keys. Among the Saxa, women traditionally hold the keys to the house, personal treasury, and larder. The Anari adopted the practice during their occupation. Her second form is an attractive woman of youthful but indeterminate age. Despite the deity being female, clerics may be of either sex.

The cult maintains temples, but only to her sexual aspect. Situated in towns and cities, and villages on major trade routes, the temples are sumptuously decorated and furnished, and always kept spotless by servants. While this aspect of the cult has a bad reputation, citizens reluctantly accept the fact that the temple provides a service. Without them, the courts would have more work handling adultery cases brought about by spouses who feel the need to scratch their itch elsewhere.

Because of the nature of marriage in Rassilon, she is only worshipped in the home of couples tied by Life Bonds or by long-term Year Marriages—anything shorter likely doesn't need her attention. Her holy symbol is inscribed on bed posts and over the lintel.

Gersemi's dual nature is mimicked by her clergy. Priests are matchmakers and marriage counselors. A matchmaker is hired when two families are considering joining together through marriage. It is the matchmaker's job to uncover any hidden skeletons that may bring shame, legal repercussions, or general unwanted problems to the other family.

By comparison, paladins aren't quite prostitutes, as they demand no money, but they are free with their love. Many citizens make donations, but these gratuities are made to the cult, not individual members. Although adultery carries harsh punishments, paladins of Gersemi and their partners are exempt from this on grounds of religious laws of the good gods taking precedent over civil and criminal ones. Still, many husbands and wives have taken the law into their own hands after findings their spouse "praying" with a paladin.

Ceremonies to Gersemi the Consort always involve sex. Both participants (having more than two in a sexual union is viewed as depraved even by this cult) are considered active worshippers, their sexual energy empowering the goddess. Those to Gersemi the Matchmaker are much more subdued, and involve only meditation and the burning of incense.

Character Guidelines: Charisma is important for priests and paladins, though for different reasons, and should be boosted by the Attractive or Charismatic edges. Paladins need a good Vigor to survive their many "prayer sessions" and to help avoid diseases. Persuasion is required both in marriage counseling and finding prayer partners. Priests, who delve into families' backgrounds, should consider Investigation and Streetwise.

GIZZUR

Titles: Speaker of Riddles, He Who Never Talks Straight

Aspects: Riddles and word games.

Affiliations: The Unknowable One.

Symbol: A coin bearing the inscription, “Solve all to know all.”

Priesthood: Riddle Lords (priests); Riddle Blades (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Clergy are expected to celebrate one day a month.

Duties: To learn and pass on new riddles, to teach through riddles.

Sins: (Minor) losing a riddle contest, revealing the answer to a riddle you posed; (Major) losing a riddle contest and being a bad sport, not learning a new riddle every year; (Mortal) cheating in a riddle contest.

Signature Power: *Confusion*.

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Smarts and Knowledge (Riddles) only), *fatigue*, *sluggish reflexes*, *speaking language*, *stun*, *voice on the wind*.

Trappings: All trappings are based around speaking riddles.

Gizzur is an aspect of the Unknowable One. Whether he is a servant, friend, or child is not known, and the Unknowable One remains as tightlipped on the subject as he does most other topics. As befits the Unknowable One, Gizzur is never depicted in art nor described in writings. He remains as enigmatic as his master. Similarly, there are no temples or shrines to honor Gizzur.

Clerics use riddles to teach wisdom. When asked a question, the cleric may respond with a riddle rather than an outright answer. By solving the riddle, the questioner receives the answer he seeks, or at least a clue to point him in the right direction. As with the Unknowable One, priests and paladins are separated by martial prowess, and the paladins’ habit of using riddles in combat to distract and confound foes.

Many stories exist of paladins who have allowed foes to walk away unharmed after they correctly answered a tough riddle in the heart of combat, though when the Unknowable One has a hand in these stories one can never be certain they are entirely true. What is known as fact is that if two clerics of Gizzur meet they must enter a riddle contest. Whoever wins has superiority over the loser for a year and a day. The pecking order within the cult is thus extremely fluid and very hard to track.

As teachers, they are well aware that they must continually strive to learn. As such, they are gracious losers and often the first to congratulate the winner. One thing anathema to the faith is cheating in a riddle contest, for a student (willing or otherwise) cannot be expected to learn if there is no hope of correct deduction.

Rather than using the stick to beat knowledge into people, clerics use the carrot. Although many citizens enjoy riddles and word games to help pass the long winter nights, few are interested in being preached to, especially when it requires thinking.

To coax folk into thinking more, clerics sometimes hold public gatherings. Here they offer rewards to those who can solve riddles they pose. Initial riddles are easy and carry small rewards. As the crowd grows, swelled by people drawn by the chance to earn easy money, so

RIDDLE ME THIS

Riddles are word games, sometimes straightforward, sometimes with a twist one needs to see before one can deduce the correct answer. Riddles can be used in the game one of two ways.

First, Knowledge (Riddles) can be used in combat as a Test of Will against sentient creatures capable of speech and which can understand the speaker. It is opposed by Smarts. Even in the heat of battle, having someone taunt you with a riddle causes subconscious diversion, and that can be enough to cause the conscious mind to become distracted, if only momentarily.

Second, it can be used in a riddle contest. The rules are very simple—one person poses a riddle, which his rival must then answer. Whoever fails to answer correctly first loses. Knowledge (Riddles) is the only skill usable in a riddle contest unless the riddler poses a very common riddle, in which case Common Knowledge can be used.

the riddles become harder and the prizes more valuable. Eventually everyone goes home, some considerably wealthier, little realizing they have been educated.

It is widely believed that if one can determine the answer to every riddle, the Unknowable One will have to reveal his real name. A few scholars argue that solving every riddle will unravel creation, for there are no more secrets to learn. Others claim answering every riddle will promote one to godhood. Each year, clerics are expected to create a new riddle.

The masters of riddles are undoubtedly the sphinxes. At least once in their lifetime, a cleric must track down a sphinx and challenge him to a riddle contest. Given that sphinxes have a taste for sentient flesh, or so the stories go, few get a second chance. Failure to challenge a sphinx before death bodes ill for the afterlife.

Once a year, all clerics within a realm meet up. The senior cleric in the land sends out messages using voice on the wind spells. The message is a riddle which, when solved, informs the listener of when and where to meet. In game terms, it requires a Knowledge (Riddle) roll to discern these facts.

Once gathered, the clergy holds a riddle contest, with points awarded for the number of riddles correctly answered. Whoever scores highest becomes senior cleric for the next year, during which time he cannot be challenged by others not holding similar rank. Outsiders are quite welcome to participate if they happen to learn the location, and there are recorded instances of a non-cleric being appointed as senior cleric for the year.

Character Guidelines: Clerics need to be Smart and they need to know Knowledge (Riddles). Taunt is a handy skill for those skilled at word games, especially if combat skills are lacking. Beyond this, the cleric is free

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to develop as he desires, even taking a specialization outside of his duties if he so desires (like being a healer or warrior).

GODJADARR

Titles: Giant Slayer, Protector of the Gods.

Aspects: Frost giant slaying.

Affiliations: Kenaz, Tiw.

Symbol: A severed giant's head.

Priesthood: Anvils (priests); Hammers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Festivals are held after a frost giant is slain by members of the local temple. Burning Giant Day (see page 24) is a high holy day.

Duties: To slay giants.

Sins: (Minor) refusing to fight a frost giant, fleeing from a frost giant, conversing with a frost giant except to intimidate or taunt; (Major) refusing to hunt and kill a frost giant that has slain members of the civilized races; (Mortal) failure to slay one frost giant a year.

Signature Power: *Smite*.*

Powers: *Arcane resistance**, *armor**, *boost/lower trait* (Strength, Vigor, Fighting, Intimidation, Shooting, Taunt, Throwing only)*, *growth/shrink*, *warding (giants only)*, *warrior's gift**.

Trappings: Heat and/or fire only.

Special: Spells marked "*" only function against frost giants. Against other foes, including other species of giants, the spells bestow no bonus. For instance, a paladin invokes *smite* and scores a raise. Against frost giants he adds +4 to damage rolls, but when the enchanted weapon used against all other foes it has no damage bonus and is not treated as being magical.

Although giants of all species now honor the gods, during the God War they were sworn enemies. Far stronger and more magically inclined than the lesser species that walk the earth today, the true giants were formidable foes capable of slaying the gods given sufficient numbers. While Tiw led the gods' armies into battle, it was one of his lieutenants, Goðjaðarr, who proved the giants' greatest bane.

Having sworn holy oaths to battle the giants, Goðjaðarr waged a war of extermination, relentlessly and remorselessly hunting down and destroying the giants. When the war ended, the few remaining true giants laid down their arms and swore oaths of loyalty to specific gods. For their sins they were cast down to the mortal realm, forced to mate with the emerging humans to ensure their survival, and in doing so losing much of their power and size.

Goðjaðarr had been promoted to deity status during the war, but fell into obscurity once peace was declared. While there were always rogue giants who needed punishing, his main purpose was redundant. Thus, Goðjaðarr languished in a state of semi-existence until the Blizzard War, when the frost giants swore loyalty to Thrym and entered his armies in droves. Slowly but surely, Goðjaðarr's cult emerged from the shadows.

However, some giants, such as the fire and storm

tribes, fought against Thrym's giant minions, and Goðjaðarr saw no purpose in slaying them purely out of habit. Instead, Kenaz taught Goðjaðarr the secret of fire and heat in return for allegiance. Today, the cult of Goðjaðarr is focused only on the destruction of frost giants, though it has no compulsion against hunting giants who prey on the civilized races.

Goðjaðarr's cult is rare outside the Winterlands. Although he is honored by the Hearth Knights, he is worshipped as an aspect of Kenaz rather than a unique deity. In such circumstances Kenaz is shown with a frost giant's head hanging from his belt. Among his true worshippers, Goðjaðarr is depicted as a mighty warrior. Since he first served Tiw, his armaments vary based on cultural preferences rather than doctrinal ones. He is also patron of the Order of Giant Slayers.

Goðjaðarr has a single temple in the northern Battlelands, where his cult is immensely popular. Outside of this region, his worship is more lip service or is incorporated into that of Kenaz.

Like Tiw's clergy, Goðjaðarr's servants are loosely divided between defense and offense. His priests are often found in communities, organizing the defenses and training the militia to deal with giants. Paladins tend to be more itinerant, actively hunting down and slaying frost giants wherever they may lair.

Ceremonies take the form of battle chants and ceremonial martial dances, coupled with displaying war trophies, such as severed heads, scalps, and flayed skins.

Character Guidelines: Slaying giants doesn't just require strength and stamina. While many clerics do have high Strength and Vigor, many giants are clumsy and stupid, allowing clerics with good Agility and Smarts a chance to trick them.

Clerics are under no compulsion to engage giants only in melee, so Shooting and Throwing are just as useful as Fighting. Intimidation and Taunt can prove very useful as well. While most Combat Edges are well-suited to slaying giants, Giant Slayer and Improved Giant Slayer are must-haves when the hero reaches the appropriate character Rank.

GULLVEIG

Titles: Master Brewer, Mead-Thane of the Gods.

Aspects: Brewing.

Affiliations: Eostre (both aspects), Vali.

Symbol: A flagon.

Priesthood: Ale-Lords (priests); Mead-Lords (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Clerics celebrate on any major feast day, when starting a new vat of brew, and when a brew is finished.

Duties: To brew ale and mead, to ferment wine.

Sins: (Minor) selling watered down alcohol, producing tainted brews, getting drunk; (Major) allowing bees or beehives to be harmed; (Mortal) harming bees or beehives.

Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait* (Smarts, Spirit, Vigor, Knowledge (Craft: Brewing) only).

Powers: *Beast friend* (bees only), *bolt*, *confusion*, *fatigue*, *feast* (alcohol only), *speaking language*, *summon beast* (bees only)

Trappings: Gullveig's trappings relate to alcohol (confusion and fatigue) and bees.

Gullveig began as an obscure celestial spirit, a clumsy household servant in Eostre's heavenly hall brewing ale and wine.

While stirring a vat of honey, he accidentally upset a shelf of dried plants (yeast among them) and fruits, tipping the extra ingredients into the sticky, sweet honey. Fearful he had ruined the vat, Gullveig hid, for the honey was destined for Tiw, who despite his fierce nature had a sweet tooth.

Eventually Tiw called for his honey and, upon sampling it, roared for Gullveig to be brought to him. The frightened servant was quickly found and dragged to Tiw's battle hall. Rather than cut Gullveig down on the spot for his mistake, Tiw praised the godling for his marvelous creation and demanded he make more, for this was a brew worthy of warriors. Eostre promoted Gullveig to master brewer, assuring his status as a minor god.

Gullveig's association with Vali is not one of choice. Although it was Hoenir or the Unknowable One, not Gullveig, who gave mortals the secret of brewing and fermentation (the legend varying depending on to whom one speaks), it is Vali who encourages them to drink to excess. Alcohol also clouds the mind, making it easy to lead them astray.

Images of Gullveig always depict him holding a flagon. Often his beard is not hair, but a swarm of bees. Shrines stand in temples to Eostre in communities that keep bees, in breweries, vineyards, and in many shops selling alcohol.

Traditionally, priests have brewed ale and fermented wine, while paladins have focused on mead. No firm ruling keeps this divide enforced, but tradition is a powerful force. Paladins are also more inclined to travel in search of new recipes and ingredients. Wine is big business in Aspiria, and most other brewers have secret recipes they wish to guard, so paladins of Gullveig are often employed to guard wineries and breweries, and to track down thieves. Skilled clerics can easily find employment as a personal brewer to nobles and dignitaries, and the position is an honored one in most courts.

The lengthening winters are having a disastrous effect on honey production. Many clerics are leaving behind their regular duties to quest for a hardier species of bee. Many stories exist about "Hellfrost bees," but none have yet been found. Unless they are successful within a generation or two, mead may be just a memory.

Drink is an important part of every culture. Nobles often hold festivals at which brewers from the local region compete. Prizes are awarded for strongest drink, most flavorful brew, best color, and so on. While these events generally occur during the summer months, when the farmers are not needed in the fields and so

can enjoy the festivities, each community has its own set days for hosting festivals. Regardless of the exact day, the local community refers to the festival as Gullveig's Day. Unfortunately, it often descends into drunken revelry, something clerics of the faith do not condone.

Character Guidelines: Clerics not only need a good Knowledge (Craft: Brewing) skill to make alcoholic brews, but also a good Vigor to avoid becoming drunk. As clerics regularly use herbs in their brews, many are skilled herbalists, and thus have the Hedge Magic Edge. Alchemy is a useful tool for brewers, though their spells are almost always imbued into alcoholic drinks.

HAGVIRKR

Titles: Weaponsmith of the Gods.

Aspects: Forging weapons.

Affiliations: Ertha, Kenaz.

Symbol: An anvil.

Priesthood: Anvils (priests); Hammers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Festivals are usually held at the start of Plohmonan and Werremonan, when smiths are busy making and repairing weapons.

Duties: To create weapons.

Sins: (Minor) damaging a forge, using non-metal weapons, not forging a new weapon once per month; (Major) making more income from blacksmithing than forging weapons, not melting down at least 1,000 gs of weapons each year; (Mortal) destroying a forge.

Signature Power: *Smite*.

Powers: *Bladebreaker*, *boost/lower trait* (Strength, Vigor, and Knowledge (Craft: Weaponsmith) only), *elemental manipulation* (fire only), *environmental protection* (fire only), *weapon immunity*.

Trappings: All trappings involve heat.

Ertha and Kenaz have long been allies, with the goddesses providing metal ore and Kenaz supplying the heat required to forge it. Several myths carry their relationship further than mere friendship, and Hagvirkr is often described as being the result of their union. As a youth, Hagvirkr watched his father laboring over his forge to keep Tiw supplied with weapons. When Kenaz rested, Hagvirkr would sneak in and take a turn. Understanding both heat and metal, Hagvirkr quickly came to surpass his father in the art of crating weapons, and was duly appointed to the role.

Personifications show a short, muscular man with the fiery red beard of Kenaz, but the brown eyes and soft locks of Ertha. Most often is shown working at his forge, pounding away with his huge hammer, "Beater."

Hagvirkr has no personal shrines, even among weaponsmiths. Where honored, he is represented by runes etched into the smith's anvil or shown alongside statues of Kenaz or Ertha as an anvil.

Both priests and paladins are working weaponsmiths. Whereas priests are expected to settle down and operate a forge, either as a business or for a noble, paladins are itinerant smiths, traveling as they desire and making weap-

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ons for remote communities who lack their own smith. Though they sometimes dabble in making horseshoes and plows, this is not the clergy's specialty, and they are forbidden from making it their core source of income.

Whereas clerics of Eostre sacrifice metal and gems to the earth, clerics of Hagvirkr melt down weapons in their forges. While the physical essence of these offerings is destroyed, a spiritual version is created in its place, thus ensuring the armories of the gods remain ever full and ready for use.

Each year, on the first Sunnandaeg of Werremonan, the clergy celebrates Hagvirkr's induction as weapon-smiths of the gods. They are expected to spend the time leading up to the festival crafting a weapon of strength and beauty. The final hammer fall must be made on the day known as Forge Day. The weapon is then gifted to a notable warrior or hero. Clerics have been known to gift these weapons to youths, and such an offering is considered a sure sign the child will become a mighty warrior later in life.

Character Guidelines: Working at the forge day in and day out tends to produce strong, fit clerics. While not dedicated to fighting wars, many clerics are adept with melee weapons. Paladins are itinerant and need the skills to survive in the harsh wilderness. Alchemy is popular among weaponsmiths, since it allows them to imbue weapons with temporary magic. Most of their devices are runes etched into weapons.

HAPTABEIDR

Titles: Counselor of the Gods, Crown Holder, He Who Stands on the Right.

Aspects: Advising nobles.

Affiliations: Hoenir, Hothar.

Symbol: A crown.

Priesthood: High Civil Counselors (priests); High War Counselors (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Oath Renewal Day (see page 23) is a high holy day. Any day the cleric crowns a nobleman is a personal high holy day.

Duties: To advise the nobility, to crown nobles.

Sins: (Minor) giving impartial advice to a noble, refusing to advice a noble; (Major) plotting the overthrow of a noble, injuring the noble of a civilized race; (Mortal) usurping a noble, killing a noble.

Signature Power: *Charismatic aura*.

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Spirit, Vigor, Intimidation, Knowledge (Battle, Law, Stewardship), Persuasion only), *fear, gift of battle, speak language*.

Trappings: Any except necromantic. Most have no visible effects, so as their masters are not seen as being reliant on magic in order to fulfill their duties.

Special: Noble refers to any member of a civilized race who holds a recognized and legitimate noble title, regardless of his morals or motives. Clerics cannot have the Big Mouth Hindrance.

A learned deity with an opinion on everything, Hap-

tabeidr is advisor to all the gods. He cares nothing for good or evil, but instead focuses on providing impartial counsel that is in the best interests of his many masters. Although he counsels all the gods and is closely affiliated with Hoenir, a god who demands all knowledge be shared, Haptabeidr keeps their business strictly confidential. Some theologians claim he was cursed by Niht, who had no wish for her many secrets to be revealed.

Any high seat or throne used by a nobleman is a shrine to Haptabeidr. The god has no personification, but is instead shown as the thrones on which the gods sit and the crowns that adorn their heads. Many kingdoms, jarldoms, and other equivalents have a sacred stone, on which nobles stand when taking office. Here they recite the ancient oaths handed down through the generations.

The primary role of the clergy is to crown nobles, bestowing them with the divine authority to rule and commanding them to obey the laws of the land and act in a just manner. However, no law requires a cleric to be present at a coronation, nor is a nobleman who ascends without the blessing of a cleric of Haptabeidr in any way considered a usurper or charlatan. Having one present does provide the noble with a greater degree of authority and legitimacy in the eyes of the people, though. The cult's daily purpose is to advise the nobility in an impartial manner. As elsewhere, the difference between priests and paladins is one of militancy—paladins are best served to offer military counsel.

Outside of coronations and Oath Renewal Day, ceremonies are few and far between—counseling a nobleman is a daily act of devotion. Coronation ceremonies are lengthy affairs, with a variety of oaths being sworn in response to questions from the cleric. Although the questions vary by culture and realm, they are largely formulaic in nature.

Character Guidelines: Clerics serve as advisors to the nobility. Smarts improves one's Common Knowledge, while Spirit allows one to state one's opinions without feeling intimidated by one's master. Knowledge (Battle, Law, and Stewardship) are important skills for advisors, while Persuasion allows one to get one's point across succinctly.

HAPTASNYTRIR

Titles: The Mouth of Hoenir, Celestial Teacher, Tutor of the Gods.

Aspects: Teaching.

Affiliations: Hoenir, the Unknowable One.

Symbol: A rune-inscribed slate.

Priesthood: Tutors (priests); Instructors (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Writing Day (see page 22) is a high holy day.

Duties: To teach others, to pass on knowledge.

Sins: (Minor) refusing to teach someone, unknowingly teaching incorrect facts; (Major) refusing to teach an illiterate person to read and write; (Mortal) purposefully teaching incorrect facts.

Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait* (Smarts, any Smarts-linked skill only).

Powers: *Analyze foe, gift of battle, gravespeak, insight, speak language, warrior's gift.*

Trappings: Any except necromantic.

Haptasnytrir is both blessed and cursed. Originally a minor servant of Hoenir, Haptasnytrir was possessed of keen mind and formidable memory. He was also a gifted teacher, able to put across complex ideas in terms anyone could understand. Unfortunately, he was also immensely curious, questing for more and more knowledge. His curiosity drew him to Niht's dark hall, where he knew many secrets were hidden. Alas, Niht caught the god rummaging through her secrets. She promptly cursed him for his trespass, stating that Haptasnytrir could never again increase his knowledge, though he could still impart what he knew. Hoenir took pity on his minion and elevated him to minor god status.

All temples to Hoenir are automatically centers of learning, and thus Haptasnytrir is always present. Private tutors and military instructors maintain small shrines. Haptasnytrir is never depicted as an individual—as the mouth of Hoenir, he is an inseparable part of the god of learning. At temples where teaching provides a large part of the cult's income, Hoenir is often shown carrying a writing slate, on which is inscribed the local alphabet.

Priests tend to focus on intellectual training, teaching everything from basic literacy to the complex wisdom of the arcane. A small few are lucky enough to have permanent employment at a school. Most, though, work at temples to Hoenir, where they run public classes open to all, or as private tutors to the scions of rich and powerful families. Paladins, by nature of their preference for battle, are learned in many forms of warfare and special maneuvers. A small few cooperate with neighboring temples of Tiw, where they work as drill instructors, but the majority serves their community or noble lord, ensuring local soldiers are well trained and disciplined. Despite this tie to Tiw, Haptasnytrir is not directly affiliated to the war god.

The clergy worship by passing on knowledge. While those dedicated solely to Hoenir are often rather boring, reciting information verbatim with little regard for their audience's appreciation, Haptasnytrir's servants encourage audience participation and alter their learning style to suit. Warriors, for instance, are more inspired by tales of battle than they are by dry lectures, whereas children learn better if allowed to interact with the tutor and ask questions rather than just listen to his voice.

Character Guidelines: Like clerics of Hoenir, those of Haptasnytrir are expected to be learned scholars. Smarts is thus their primary attribute. Any Smarts-linked skill should be considered important, though the clergy also give military instruction, allowing them to be martial tutors.

HAPTSÖNIR

Titles: Lord of Freedom, the Liberator, Breaker of Shackles.

Aspects: Freedom from tyranny.

Affiliations: Thunor.

Symbol: A broken chain.

Priesthood: Rousers (priests); Liberators (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Every Raestdaeg.

Duties: To free the wrongfully enslaved and oppressed.

Sins: (Minor) silencing free speech, refusing to aid the oppressed, placing shackles on a living creature; (Major) freeing a rightfully convicted criminal, owning a slave; (Mortal) supporting rigid and oppressive governments, overthrowing a just government.

Signature Power: *Charismatic aura.*

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Spirit, Strength, Vigor, Fighting, Intimidation, Lockpicking, Persuasion, Stealth, Streetwise only), *gift of battle, sanctuary, unlock* (no lock).

Trappings: Any except necromantic, but air and electricity are favored.

Haptasnytrir is the charismatic and high-spirited son of Thunor. He is champion of the oppressed, speaking out against tyranny and unjust laws. He and Hothar are friends, though their relationship is an on-off one.

Haptasnytrir accepts that laws are required for a society to function, and thus is no anarchist. He fully supports just governments that bring peace to the land, but he also demands citizens be allowed freedom to speak openly and raise complaints against the nobility.

Largely unknown in the Heartlands before the Anari expanded, Haptasnytrir's tiny cult grew rapidly among the Saxa before and during the revolt against their Anari masters. Although his power has since dwindled again, he remains an important minor god. His holy texts are often quoted at trials by the defense. The outlawing of his cult in the Blackstone Barony has attracted many clerics to the small and oppressed realm.

Temples do exist, but they rarely remain in the same place for long. Partly this is because once the oppressed are free they have little need of Haptasnytrir, and partly because his clergy aren't foolish enough to provide enemies with a static target. Such temples are never lavishly decorated, and are always hidden. The cellar of a tavern, the backroom of a house, an old warehouse—these are places the clergy like to make their headquarters.

Shrines take the form of wooden posts engraved with Haptasnytrir's image—that of a wild haired man holding a broken chain. They are sometimes placed in oppressed lands as a warning to the ruler that trouble is coming, though this can have the unfortunate side-effect of causing a sweeping crackdown on civil liberties.

His priests are charged with inciting those wrongly or cruelly oppressed to free themselves. They are political agitators who stick up posters proclaiming a ruler or his laws unjust, speak out against subjugation of an individual's rights, and the rabble-rousers who incite peasants to rebel against cruel overlords. His paladins, being more militant, train peasants in the skills they need to defeat the armies holding them in chains, break into prisons

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to rescue political prisoners or those convicted on false charges, and act as figureheads in open rebellion.

Although Haptsönir prefers his clergy worship in the open air, he accepts that to do so in oppressed lands unnecessarily endangers his worshippers. Most ceremonies involve recitation of holy texts, which state that all men have certain rights granted them by the gods, and that no mortal ruler has the authority to subjugate or pervert them. The breaking of chains and manacles is a common theme in ceremonies.

Character Guidelines: Once again, priests and paladins have favored roles. Both, as leaders of the oppressed, require a good Charisma, and certainly should invest in Persuasion—few enslaved men follow a leader who cannot fire their emotions, for that is a fool's errand. Stealth is important for priests who don't want to be caught posting seditious material. Paladins should invest in Leadership Edges, for they are expected to head just rebellions.

HARATT

Titles: Gnawer, the Rat King, Lord of Vermin, Long-Tooth, Hater of Cats, Veth's Bane.

Aspects: Rats.

Affiliations: Vali.

Symbol: A rat's head.

Priesthood: Vermin Callers (priests); Teeth of Vali (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Famine Day (see page 37) and Plague Day (see page 37) are high holy days.

Duties: To protect rats, to increase rat populations, to destroy granaries.

Sins: (Minor) harming a rat, failing to destroy a granary you are attacking, giving comfort or succor to a cat or cleric of Eostre or Veth; (Major) harming a giant rat, not killing a cat when you see one; (Mortal) harming a leyparat.

Signature Power: *Summon beast* (rats and giant rats only).

Powers: *Armor, barrier, beast friend* (rats and giant rats only), *boost/lower trait* (Agility, Climbing, Notice, and Stealth only), *disease, shape change* (rat and giant rat only).

Trappings: All trapping involve rats.

Special: *Barrier* creates a wall of living rats. Characters adjacent to the *barrier* at the end of their turn suffer 2d4 damage, with armor protecting as normal.

When Eostre was chosen to have dominion over the fauna and flora she summoned all the animals to attend her. On arriving at Eostre's hall, the mice, rats, and other vermin were driven away by Veth, one of Eostre's helpers, who thought them horrible creatures. While Eostre blessed the other animals and offered them her protection, the vermin were left out. They sank back into the dark nooks and crannies of the gods' halls feeling betrayed and angry, making them ideal candidates for Vali's insidious and corrupting influence.

Vali promised the rats many things, such as resistance to disease, quick reproduction, dexterity, cleverness, and the ability to eat almost anything in return for loyalty. The vermin were quick to agree to his generous terms. In return, he nominated one of them as King Rat, elevating him to the status of a minor deity. Other vermin kings exist as well, but they are not important in this story.

Unlike many minor deities, Haratt has temples in his honor. Regardless of whether they are found in rural areas or crowded towns and cities, there is always a large and healthy rat population in the vicinity. Discovering these hidden temples is never easy, for the rats act as sentries, ever vigilant for signs of Eira's clerics or those of Veth, the goddess of granary protection. One clear sign that a cult of Haratt may be operating in the neighborhood is the sudden disappearance of the cat population. Haratt is depicted either as a monstrous rat or a leyparat (many of whom worship him). Often he is shown with dead cats at his feet.

Priests and paladins are both devoted to the protection of rats and the destruction of granaries. Priests favor poison and disease with which to blight the stored crops, while paladins prefer more destructive methods such as arson or brute force. While clerics may act openly, more often than not they employ rats to do their dirty work while they lurk unseen in the shadows, for many are surprisingly timid creatures adverse to confrontation.

Most ceremonies involve the destruction of crops and the killing of cats, the archenemy of all vermin. Vast quantities of food and drink are consumed, for one of Vali's curses was a ravenous appetite.

Character Guidelines: Clerics who aren't also disciples of Vali need to invest in a high Vigor in order to help fend off diseases carried by rats. Priests, who favor subtlety, should invest in skills such as Lockpicking and Stealth, whereas paladins are bolder in their attacks and need decent combat skills and Combat Edges. Like the rats who serve them, many clerics are Cautious, planning ahead and wary of being ambushed or discovered.

HARISA

Titles: Golden Locks, She of Flowing Hair.

Aspects: Hair.

Affiliations: Eira.

Symbol: A lock of hair.

Priesthood: Combs of Harisa (priests); Blades of Harisa (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: The one day a year a cleric has his hair cut is a personal high holy day.

Duties: To grow one's hair, to style the hair of others.

Sins: (Minor) cutting someone's hair (corpses excepted), not washing your hair daily, not offering a head of hair to Harisa once per month; (Major) having your hair cut more than once a year, shaving someone bald; (Mortal) having your head shaved bald.

Signature Power: *Entangle*.

Powers: *Barrier, bridge, deflection, hamper movement, stun.*

Trappings: All trapping involve hair. *Stun* causes the victim's hair to get into their eyes (bald victims grow hair momentarily, which itself is quiet a shock).

A vain and beautiful goddess, Harisa was born with long, luxurious hair. Kidnapped by frost giants, the brutes shaved her head and used a magic potion to ensure it would never grow back. After Harisa was rescued, Eira took pity on the goddess, and fashioned her a wig. Such was Eira's skill that Harisa's false locks behave exactly like normal hair. To compensate Harisa for her unfortunate fate, Eira promoted Harisa to the minor goddess of hair.

Harisa is never shown as an individual goddess. Whenever her presence is found alongside Eira, she is shown as a lock of hair hanging over Eira's left eye, or as Eira's unfettered locks, her hair falling freely to her lower back. In many temples a lock of blond hair placed on the altar or tied to a shrine represents her. Her name is spoken often—women ask her to let a comb run smoothly through their hair, and men going bald beseech her to show mercy—though very few truly worship her.

Clerics are close to the cutting edge of fashion, at least when it comes to hairstyles. While most women either braid their hair or let it flow naturally, clerics of Harisa sport elaborate hairdos. Besides having great hair, the cult has no true objectives (being one of the smallest known). A small few serve nobles, being responsible for ensuring their hair looks good. Paladins may serve a dual role, being bodyguards as well as servants or hairstylists. Some of her clerics are extremely vain, though most simply take pride in their appearance. Going bald is viewed as a sign of great disfavor, especially among female clergy.

Clerics often attend funerals. Although they have no ties to Scaetha, they cut the corpse's hair, paying the deceased's family for the act. This stems from the belief that Harisa's wig, while wondrous, continually loses strands thanks to the giants' fell magic. In order to prevent the goddess from going bald again, hair must be regularly sacrificed. Another popular way to gather hair is simply to call at houses and ask for any locks recently cut.

Personal ceremonies are conducted daily, for the act of washing and styling one's hair is pleasing to Harisa. Sacrifices are smelly affairs, taking the form of burnt locks of hair. Typically these offerings are made only on two occasions. The first is when a cleric endures his annual hair cut, and the second when a corpse has been shorn.

Character Guidelines: Harisa

places no great cause at her clerics' feet, and thus they are largely free to adopt whatever role they wish. While never as talented as a cleric on a more focused minor deity, they run the gamut from librarians to thieves and healers to warriors. The cleric's choice of Traits and Edges thus depends on his chosen role in life, not his deity.

HEIMDALLR

Titles: World-Brightener, Light of Sigel, Enemy of Niht, the Torchbearer.

Aspects: Light.

Affiliations: Sigel.

Symbol: A torch topped with Sigel's symbol instead of a flame.

Priesthood: Lightbringer (priests); Sun Lord (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Delling Day (p. 31), Purification Day (p. 31), and Sun Gaze Day (p. 32) are high holy days.

Duties: To fight the powers of darkness, to keep lights burning.

Sins: (Minor) not creating a source of light in a darkened area, fleeing a servant of Niht or spellcaster who uses darkness trappings; (Major) suffering defeat at the hands of a servant of Niht or spellcaster who uses darkness trappings, refusing to fight the forces of darkness; (Mortal) willfully aiding the forces of darkness.

Signature Power: *Light.*



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Powers: *Aura, banish, bolt, burst, obscure, stun.*

Trappings: Light trappings only. *Obscure* creates a template of brilliant light.

Heimdallr is Sigel's torchbearer, responsible for ensuring his hall is well lit, and his most fanatical huscarl. He was present when Delling rose above the mortal world, the light from his flickering torch filling the sky with a dim red glow before the brilliant light of Sigel drove the shadows into hiding for the first time.

While worshippers honor Heimdallr in temples and at shrines of Sigel, where he is present as the constant light that fills these holy places, clerics see the light of the sun as a grand temple. Thus, worship may take place anywhere, so long as the sun is shining. Heimdallr is sometimes shown as a bearded servant holding aloft a burning torch. He is the patron of chandlers, lamp makers, and torchbearers, as well as those lowly servants responsible for lighting sources of illumination.

Priests are normally found in communities. Some work as chandlers, manufacturing both mundane and alchemical candles. Others patrol the streets at night armed with *light* spells and torches, assisting the local watch in keeping law and order. A small few are lowly servants, responsible for lighting candles and lamps once the sun begins to set. Some are scholars, devoted to understanding the fading of the sun and seeking for the cause of Sigel's disappearance.

Less concerned with policing moral behavior than paladins of Sigel, Heimdallr's holy warriors are fanatical champions of light, totally dedicated to combating the forces of darkness. Their animosity toward the minions and followers of Niht is legendary.

Ceremonies are always held at dawn and dusk, for the red glow that mars the horizon is believed to be Heimdallr's torchlight. Those held at the break of day typically involve the cleric stripping naked to expose his entire body to the first rays, singing to welcome the light back into the sky, and then casting *light* for a brief time to strengthen the weakened sun. Those held at dusk are prayers intended to protect the sun from harm during its nocturnal wandering. Again, *light* spells are cast for a few minutes.

Character Guidelines: While a cleric might want to take a Knowledge (Craft) skill to generate a small income, it is not a cult requirement. Scholastic clerics should invest a few dice in appropriate Knowledge skills, especially Arcana and Folklore, as well as Investigation. Knowledge (Religion) can be useful for understanding other cults, especially that of Niht. Paladins are warriors through and through, devoted champions of a righteous cause, and need a wide range of martial skills and Edges. Notice is useful to both branches, but it is not a core skill.

HILDOLFR

Titles: The Berserk God, the Rager, Lord of Wolves, Lord of Bears.

Aspects: Berserkers.

Affiliations: Dargar, Tiw.

Symbol: A wolf's head looking left and a bear's head looking right from a battle axe.

Priesthood: Ulfhéðnar (priests); Berhéðnar (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Every Monandaeg. Each Monandaeg of Wulfmonan is a high holy day.

Duties: To revel in berserk fury and unruly behavior.

Sins: (Minor) not going berserk once per encounter, ending a berserk frenzy before all foes are slain, not becoming intoxicated on alcohol once per week; (Major) not going berserk once per week, refusing to fight; (Mortal) deliberately refraining from going berserk.

Signature Power: *Battle song.*

Powers: *Armor, boost/lower trait* (Smarts, Spirit, Strength, Vigor, Fighting, and Intimidation only), *leaping, shape change* (wolf or dire wolf only for priests, and bears only for paladins), *smite, summon spirit* (anger), *warrior's gift.*

Trappings: All involve bears or wolves in some manner, as appropriate to the type of cleric.

Special: Clerics must have the Berserk Edge.

Hildolfr ("Battle Wolf") is Dargar's younger brother, and thus one of Tiw's many sons. He is also Scaetha's brother, but she has no love for her wild half-sibling. Depending on which legend is told, Hildolfr's mother was a she-wolf or she-bear hamhleypa, thus making the god only half-divine. Some theologians believe the beast was actually Eostre Animalmother in disguise, though her clerics consider this heresy.

The god of fury inherited from his mother the wild nature of the beast and from his father a short temper and love of battle. Added to this is Dargar's corrupting presence. Hildolfr is an unruly, angry god who loves to get drunk and fight, not necessarily in that order. He spends a lot of time at Dargar's hall, fighting and drinking with his brother's huscarls.

Hildolfr is never depicted in art. His shrines take the form of bear or wolf skins, complete with head and claws. Wearing such a skin is considered the mark of a berserker, and it is a rare cleric who wears other furs. Traditionally, priests wear a wolf skin and paladins a bear skin. When Dargar or Tiw are depicted wearing furs, the garment represents the presence of the god of berserkers. The names of the clerical orders translate literally as "Ones clad in wolf/bear skins."

The god of berserkers has no temples. Shrines exist in temples to Dargar and Tiw. Tiw's followers are wary of their battle-cousins, for whereas most warriors focus their fury, Hildolfr's clergy revel in their wild nature, making them very unpredictable allies.

Hildolfr's clergy are berserkers, warriors who can summon the red rage and unleash their inner-beast. Like their patron, they are wild, unruly, ill-kempt, short of temper, and prone to sudden fits of violence. They are universally distrusted and disliked by commoners, especially those who know of the fearsome Vendahl. Nobles see them as a necessary evil because of their fighting prowess, and warriors see them as wild dogs, as harm-

ful to friend as much as foe. Clerics of Hothar consider Hildolfr's followers to be a menace to ordered society.

Priests tend to be static warriors, part of a noble's retinue or an elite force within an army. Paladins are generally itinerant, wandering the roads and trails, venting their anger on anything they deem worthy of tasting their steel. Mercenary work is always a popular way to make a living, though captains are often wary of hiring too many berserkers.

Hildolfr's rituals tend to be chaotic, drunken affairs involving mindless, though usually nonlethal, violence. Often their celebrations spill out onto the streets, whereupon the local citizens make a quick dash for their homes. Clerics drink and fight, and fight and drink, while snarling loudly, intimidating anyone within range, and boasting of their own prowess. On holy days, they drink mead mixed with wolf or bear blood, as appropriate to their calling.

Character Guidelines: Berserkers are fighters through and through. Strength, Vigor, and Fighting are their most important Traits. Smarts needs to be low in order to go berserk and high in order to stop the blood fury—deciding what die to take is a tricky decision. Combat Edges like Frenzy and Sweep are ideal choices, since they allow the berserker to unleash multiple blows. Intimidation can be useful, if only to soften up opponents before you hack them to death. Mean nicely sums up the berserker's unruly nature and short temper, while Outsider represents society's general disdain for those who accept battle rage into their hearts so openly.

HOÁRRI

Titles: Foresighted One, She Who Never Looks Back.

Aspects: Divination, the future.

Affiliations: Maera.

Symbol: A milky eye with no pupil.

Priesthood: Seers (priests); Oracles (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Every Monandaeg is a holy day. Divination Night is a high holy day (see page 25).

Duties: To divine the future.

Sins: (Minor) studying the past, lying about the future; (Major) aiding a cleric of the Norns; (Mortal) deliberately preventing someone from fulfilling their destiny.

Signature Power: *Detect* (no conceal).

Powers: *Farsight*, *fortune's favored*, *precognition*, *quickness*.

Trappings: Any except necromantic.

A one-eyed daughter of Nauthiz, Hoárri learned of Maera's expulsion from the Norns (see page 25). Being young and impulsive, she felt sorrow for the scorned goddess and set out to help her. She attempted to break into the Norns' house and steal Maera's thread from their tapestry. Alas, she forgot that the Norns would know of her coming since they had ordained it. The Norns gave her a severe beating, and during the fracas Skuld's needle pierced her remaining eye, rendering it sightless.

Maera learned of the attack through her divinations and sought out Hoárri to console her. To Maera's sur-

prise, Hoárri was expecting her. Skuld's needle may have taken Hoárri's ability to see the present, but it had bestowed the ability to glimpse the future. Because it was Skuld who caused the injury, the Norns had no power over her visions and could not block them. Maera at once took Hoárri under her wing as a diviner. Although she respected the girl's power, her charity was more a chance to spite the Norns.

Hoárri is the patron of diviners and fortune-tellers. She is always shown as a young woman with both eyes bandaged. Shrines exist in all Maera's temples, and many prophets carry round charms as a focus for their divinations and soothsaying. Unfortunately, charlatans carry these same charms in a bid to authenticate their shams.

Priests usually earn a living as diviners. Unlike clerics of the Norns, who prefer the future remains a mystery, Hoárri's clerics offer glimpses into the future in return for hard coin. While many are itinerants, those with the true gift can be found serving powerful figures as senior advisors. Clerics of Var get on well with them, paying handsomely for their insight before signing contracts. To the Norns' worshippers, they are little better than thieves, stealing glimpses of the future.

Paladins are more concerned with finding those with an important destiny and ensuring they follow the right path. Sometimes they offer shortcuts, knowing it will cause the Norns no end of grief. This often puts them in direct confrontation with the Norns' clergy, who prefer mortals discover their destiny without interference.

Worshippers honor their goddess by divining the future and revealing it to others. Like their brothers and sisters in Maera's cult, they practice mystery plays. A favorite is the story of how Hoárri lost her eye. During the play, hints are dropped that the Norns' ability to foretell the future is not all it is made out to be, and that maybe mortals can shape their own future.

Character Generation: Hoárri provides some useful spells, but they are a limited set of abilities for adventuring clerics who pick her as a patron. They are better suited as NPC diviners and mysterious patrons nudging the heroes toward their destiny through cryptic messages and fortune telling. While skilled as diviners, clerics should never neglect the present, for omens can often be missed by those who lack the eyes to see them. Notice is a very useful skill, and Alertness a valuable Edge.

HLJÓÐ

Titles: The Silent One, He Who Speaks in Silence, He Who Hears the Unspoken.

Aspects: Silence.

Affiliations: Hoenir, Nauthiz.

Symbol: A circle.

Priesthood: Meditators (priests); Silent Blades (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Clerics must pick one day each month during which they must refrain from making any noise. This can never be Spoken Word Day (p. 22).

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Duties: To learn how to be silent, to promote silence as a form of learning and improvement.

Sins: (Minor) speaking above a whisper, talking during the time one has vowed to be silent, failing a Stealth roll; (Major) shouting for any reason, making excessive noise; (Mortal) screaming for any reason.

Signature Power: *Silence*.

Powers: *Becalm*, *boost/lower trait* (boost Smarts, Smarts-linked skills, and Stealth only; *lower* Intimidation, Persuasion, and Taunt only), *confusion*, *speak language*, *voice on the wind*.

Trappings: Most take the form of an absence of sound, and thus have no game mechanics. *Voice on the wind* is normally written and is always heard as a whisper.

Special: Clerics must refrain from speaking or making vocal noises for a number of hours per day equal to half their Faith die type. The hours must be consecutive and while the cleric is conscious. Clerics can cast their miracles without speaking, must have one hand free for elaborate gestures.

A son of Hoenir, Hljóð has never spoken a word nor been heard approaching. No one is sure whether he is mute or has chosen not to speak, but he has never uttered a word. While Tvíblindi taught Nauthiz the art of concealment, it was Hljóð who taught him to walk without being heard.

Hljóð is depicted most commonly as a human. His mouth is either covered by a cloth strip or absent. In temples of Hoenir, he is shown sitting cross-legged with a book resting on his knees. In temples of Nauthiz, statues invariably show him walking on tiptoes.

Shrines to Hljóð appear in all temples of Hoenir. Most are found in libraries—Hropt may be the patron of librarians, but he appreciates peace and quiet in which to work. Shrines in Nauthiz's temple are not uncommon. They are often found in rooms with very good acoustics—thieves are expected to cross the room, leave offerings, and exit without being heard. A handful of temples exist. Always located in remote places, clerics typically come here to refocus their faith or to retire from the world altogether. Their days are spent in silent meditation and contemplation.

The clergy is divided in its leaning as well as its militancy. One aspect believes that noise is a distraction from learning and truth, and is ultimately the path to wisdom. As one cult tenet says, a wise man speaks when he has something to say, the fool when he has to say something. Paladins spend hours silently practicing their weapon skills and learning how to overcome pain, so as not to cry out in combat. The other branch are thieves and spies, practitioners of stealth at a more practical level.

Not surprisingly, rituals involve silent meditation. During this time the cleric focus on nothing, emptying his mind of distracting thoughts. Prayers, which take the form of mantras designed to help meditation, are silently mouthed.

Character Guidelines: Regardless of whether one is a scholar or a thief, Stealth is a vital skill. Scholarly types should favor Investigation and Knowledge skills, while

thieves need Climbing and Lockpicking. When it comes to Edges, those who favor study should take Scholar. Thief is an obvious choice for larcenous types. Fast and Silent fits both types, as it allows them to run silently.

Paladins of both factions should consider Nerves of Steel—an Edge that represents their ability to overcome pain and refrain from shouting out when struck.

HRAFN

Titles: Messengers of the Gods, Word-Bringer.

Aspects: Messengers.

Affiliations: Freo, Hoenir.

Symbol: A raven clutching a scroll in its claws.

Priesthood: Scribes (priests); Couriers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Worshippers treat any day a journey begins or ends as a holy day. Spoken Word Day (see page 22) and Writing Day (see page 22) are high holy days.

Duties: To transcribe and deliver messages.

Sins: (Minor) late delivery of a message, giving a message entrusted to you to a person other than the intended recipient, allowing a written message entrusted to you to be damaged; (Major) failure to deliver a message entrusted to you, falsely repeating a verbal message; (Mortal) reading a message entrusted into your care.

Signature Power: *Speed*.

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Agility, Vigor, Riding only), *fly*, *speak language*, *voice on the wind*, *wall walker*, *water walk*, *wilderness step*.

Trappings: Clergy may use any trapping except necromantic.

Hrafn is often called a son of Freo, though many clerics of the faith actually think of him as Freo's pet rather than as an aspect of the deity. Whereas Freo wanders almost aimlessly, content to let his feet take him where they will, Hrafn only ever travels with purpose, and that purpose is to deliver messages. Hrafn is not a diplomat, and cares little whether the missives are contracts, love letters, or declarations of war. Whenever he is depicted, he is always shown as a raven, never as a man or anthropomorphic animal.

Like Freo, Hrafn has no temples of his own. Shrines can be found in many of Hoenir's temples. The majority of shrines to Freo show him wearing a raven amulet on at least one face.

Priests are more often scholars than delivery men, hired by nobles and merchants to write messages. Many priests have unique codes which they use to encrypt the most important missives. Naturally, the intended recipient needs to know the code in order to read the message. Priests are, by their nature, more closely linked to Hoenir. Paladins, as the militant branch of the faith, are the actual messengers, traveling the country as required by their patrons. Once they undertake a commission, they let nothing stand between them and delivering the message entrusted them, especially not something as mundane as the weather.

Both types of clergy maintain strong ties to the Guild

of Messengers, and many are paid up members. Membership is not required, and plenty of clerics enjoy the freedom of freelance work, taking on commissions as suits them rather than taking orders.

Membership of the guild can be represented in play by taking the Connection (Messenger Guild) Edge and the Orders Hindrance. Many clerics have a fixed base where potential patrons can contact them, and such structures always contain a shrine. All Messenger Guild houses contain a shrine to Freo, with Hrafn represented as a raven perched on one of the god's shoulder.

While sensible travelers stick to main roads wherever possible, messengers often take the most direct route, confident in their abilities to keep them out of trouble. "As Hrafn flies," a common expression, refers to a straight-line distance between two points, and is often used when describing distances between locales.

Ceremonies are impromptu affairs, held any time clerics gather in more than a pair. Here the clergy swap stories of their travels and adventures, though they never divulge the recipients of messages to each other out of professional courtesy. As well as a form of boasting—often the teller of the most outlandish but true story avoids having to buy drinks for the night—these stories help pass on news messengers need to know, such as increased orc activity or political unrest.

Character Guidelines: Hrafn's clergy may be called upon to travel anywhere in Rassilon, and so should be proficient in the core travel skills—Boating, Riding, and Survival. A good Vigor score is handy for helping cope with the rigors of travel. Knowledge (Folklore, and Heraldry) can also be useful, though clerics can get by without these. Fleet-Footed is a favored Edge. Knowledge (Area) is much more useful—it's hard to deliver a message if you can't find the recipient. While not required to be secretive, clerics are typically reticent to discuss their business—Big Mouth, while not prohibited, is not an appropriate Hindrance.

HRAEZLA

Titles: Terror of the Heavens, Fearmonger, Lord of Nightmares, Father of Terror, Warrior-Bane.

Aspects: Fear.

Affiliations: Dargar, Hela.

Symbol: A skull with spider legs.

Priesthood: Lords of Fear (priests); Lords of Terror (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Each Deorcmonan is a holy day.

Duties: To induce and spread fear.

Sins: (Minor) failure to induce fear in a sentient being once per week, being Intimidated; (Major) failure to induce fear in a sentient being once per month, helping someone overcome their fears, suffering the effects of Fear; (Mortal) suffering the effects of Terror.

Signature Power: *Fear*.

Powers: *Fatigue*, *lower trait* (no boost), *nightmare*, *panic* (no bless), *stun*, *summon spirit* (fear, phobia only).

Trappings: Miracles relate to horrific hallucinations and visions and have no associated game mechanics.

Special: Clerics cannot take the Phobia or Yellow Hindrances.

Hraezla is a scion of Glapsviðr (p. 115), created as a weapon in his war against the gods. A vile and spiteful creature, he could peer into the hearts of the gods and induce visions of their worst nightmares. Many fell under his assault, their hair turned white, their flesh drained of color, and their faces contorted in utter terror as their hearts ceased beating. According to some cultists of Hrist (see below), it was the sight of Hraezla that turned their deity into a craven coward. The origin of Hraezla's name is unknown, but every race and culture translates it with the same meaning—Terror.

No images of Hraezla exist. It is said his visage is so horrific it can cause death from fright, and despite their best efforts none of his followers have ever been able to adequately capture that in art or sculpture. Instead, his cultists pray before graven images that would make men of weaker will vomit or flee in panic.

Hraezla has few shrines and no temples. His clergy works alone, considering even their peers fair targets for their attention. More often than not secret shrines spring up wherever there has been some vile atrocity or sickening crime, areas where the people are already afraid. The Liche Lands of Old and the Withered Lands are dotted with them, for these very realms quail the hearts of mortals.

While both aspects of the clergy are expected to use their miracles effectively, they differ in their mundane approach to generating fear. Priests are not called Fear-mongers for nothing. They delight in creating rumors than cause widespread panic and fear. His paladins prefer physical fear-inducing actions, and are much closer to Dargar's cult in that respect.

Ceremonies take one of two forms. The first involves sacrificing a sentient creature to Hraezla. The unfortunate is tortured with terrifying visions and promises of a grisly end until his heart fails. The second forces the cleric to face, and overcome, his personal fears. This self-testing, which is considered a ritual of cleansing and purification, must be attempted at least one per month.

Character Guidelines: Outside of his miracles, a cleric's best means of inducing fear is through Intimidation. Since the clergy are expected to resist fear, a high Spirit is essential. Courageous is the quintessential Edge. Strong Willed is favored because it helps one resist being intimidated, a form of fear in itself.

HRIST

Titles: The Quaking One, He Who Jumps at Shadows, Self-Preserver, He Who Walks Forward and Runs Backward.

Aspects: Cowards.

Affiliations: Eira, the Unknowable One

Symbol: None (clerics don't like to draw attention to themselves).

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Priesthood: Recreants (priests); The Craven Swords (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Any day the cleric survives a dangerous situation is a holy day.

Duties: To avoid danger, pain, or difficulty; to help others avoid the same.

Sins: (Minor) performing a brave act, using Intimidation or Taunt, taking part in a fight except when there is no other means of escape; (Major) taking part in a fight that could have been avoided; (Mortal) initiating a fight by word or deed.

Signature Power: *Speed*.

Powers: *Armor, barrier, boost/lower trait** (Vigor, Climbing, Notice, Persuasion, Stealth, and Swimming only), *deflection, fear, hamper movement, invisibility, sentry*.

Trappings: Trappings are usually subtle, so as to avoid drawing attention to oneself. They have no game mechanics.

Special: Clerics of Hrist cannot have the Bloodthirsty, Heroic, or Loyal Hindrances. Save for Block, Dodge, Extraction, Fighting Withdrawal, Lurker, and Steal Away, the Rank requirement for Combat and Leadership Edges is treated as one Rank higher for all clerics. Because they shy away from danger, all Glory rewards are halved.

A lowly celestial being, Hrist had no desire to do anything except hide, for he was possessed of a craven spirit. How he became so terrified is unknown, but there are many myths on the subject. According to one tale he served in the gods' army during the God War, but witnessed some terrible event. Another says the Unknowable One told him horror stories that drained the blood from his cheeks and the courage from his heart. Although widely accepted as a servant of Eira by most mortals, some believe Hrist actually serves the trickster, his role being to teach others to find ways to avoid unnecessary combat and not to rely on other people in difficult situations.

Mortally afraid of everything, Hrist is never depicted in art. Not only does his own image scare him witless, but he has no wish for his enemies to know what he looks like. Hrist is so cowardly he doesn't even reveal his name—Hrist is a nickname that means "Quaking One." He has no temples or shrines in his honor, for his mortal worshippers never gather in any numbers. Many ordinary mortals pray to Hrist at least once in their life, for few are men or women of great courage.

Although it might seem at odds with his aspect, Hrist has both priests and paladins. Priests are notoriously self-centered cowards. They serve Hrist not to benefit others, but solely to protect themselves from harm. The very thought of helping someone else is anathema to most, for if someone needs help then they are probably in trouble, and trouble quickly leads to dangerous situations. Paladins are not true warriors, as in other cults. Rather, they hire out their services, using their spells to help avoid sentries and guardians. They accept financial compensation for their time, but do not crave glory or

recognition. Most cannot be trusted once combat begins, for the urge to flee runs deep in all clerics of Hrist.

Ceremonies are notoriously quiet—noise attracts trouble. As such, what few ceremonies exist take the form of silent contemplation or hushed prayers thanking the god for saving the cleric from harm for another day. Clerics might sacrifice tokens to Hrist, but never an animal, most being mortified by the sight of blood.

Character Generation: Hrist is a very poor choice for an adventurer, even one who relies of stealth. Their unwillingness to enter combat and lack of loyalty make them very poor comrades in the heat of battle. Still, the cult may appeal to players who fancy a challenge.

Vigor is the primary attribute, since it protects them from harm. Notice is vital for detecting danger (especially when combined with the Danger Sense Edge), and Stealth essential for avoiding potential enemies.

Clerics are fervent believers in the old adage that they don't have to outrun the danger, just the person nearest them. Fleet-Footed is a must-have Edge.

HRJÓÐR

Titles: The Sweeping Hand of Thrym, White Death, He Who Shakes Mountains, White Rider, Roaring One.

Aspects: Avalanches.

Affiliations: Ertha and Thrym.

Symbol: A white hand.

Priesthood: Roaring Dragons (priests); Sweeping Hands (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Any day a cleric witnesses an avalanche is a holy day. Fimbulvintr Day is a high holy day. Ground Shaker Day is treated as a holy day, though it is undertaken in the high peaks in the hope of creating an avalanche.

Duties: To destroy the enemies of Thrym.

Sins: (Minor) suffering any form of knockback, retreating before any foe, not advancing toward a foe at one's best speed; (Major) being incapacitated or retreating before killing at least one opponent per die step of Faith; (Mortal) refusing to attack a foe.

Signature Power: *Knockdown*.

Powers: *Boost trait* (Strength, Vigor, and Fighting only; no *lower*), *burst, deflection, entangle, quickness, speed, summon elemental* (avalanche only).

Trappings: All trappings relate to avalanches where applicable. For instance, *burst* might create a blast of crushing ice. The roar of an avalanche may accompany *boost trait*.

Special: Hríjóðr's avalanche elementals are made of ice and snow rather than rock, and are considered a species of ice elemental. They have the Immunity (Cold) and Weakness (Fire) abilities.

Whereas Langbarðr, Thrym's bodyguard, represents the slow-moving, unstoppable force of Thrym, Hríjóðr is the overpowering, destructive force of an avalanche.

Hríjóðr is a child of Thrym and Ertha. Restless and destructive from infancy, his fierce tantrums and fits of

temper caused mountains to shake and shed their icy covering. As soon as he was old enough he left his mother's side to fight alongside his father.

The god is rarely represented in art as an individual. Instead, he is the hand of Thrym, ever-present and ready to sweep aside his father's enemies. On occasion he is depicted as a hammer, his name engraved on the crushing weapon in Frosttongue runes. Older images show the god as a small Hellfrost dragon perched on his father's shoulder. This imagery stems from the pre-Blizzard War belief that avalanches were the breath of white dragons that inhabited the high mountains. Like most minor deities, Hrójǫr has no temples or shrines of his own. Any area buried by an avalanche in the previous week is considered a holy site.

Hrójǫr's clergy are both dedicated to aggression. Priests serve as military commanders, urging their underlings to advance and smash through the enemy ranks. In this regard, they are the force behind the avalanche. Paladins are the avalanche personified, shock troops charged with plowing into the enemy and dealing swift death without thought toward their personal safety. Many are berserkers. Clergy don't fit well into most of Thrym's armies—they lack patience, and have no love on convoluted tactics or maneuvering for position.

Though there is no requirement to wield any particular type of weapon, his clergy prefer crushing weapons to bladed ones.

Ceremonies most often take the form of a frenetic dance accompanied by roaring prayers and bashing weapons against the ground. Where terrain allows, the clergy attempt to initiate an avalanche, an act which if successful is said to bring great fortune to the clerics and misery to their enemies.

Character Guidelines: As military commanders, priests favor Smarts and Spirit, though they should not neglect Strength. They should invest heavily in Leadership Edges. Strength is a paladin's most important attribute, and Fighting their favored skill. Edges such as Berserk, First Strike, Fleet-Footed, Frenzy, Level Headed, and Sweep are ideally suited to the paladins' mentality of strike first, strike hard, and keep moving forward.

HROPT

Titles: Hoenir's Librarian, Guardian of the Written Word Word-Keeper.

Aspects: Librarians.

Affiliations: Hoenir.



Symbol: A book.

Priesthood: Librarians (priests); Custodians (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Writing Day (see page 22) is a high holy day.

Duties: Run, maintain, and protect libraries.

Sins: (Minor) damaging a tome or library, shouting, not reading for an hour once a day; (Major) not reading a new book every season, knowingly aiding a worshipper of Niht; (Mortal) destroying a manuscript or library.

Signature Power: *Speak language* (affects reading only).

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Smarts, Investigation, and Knowledge skills only), *detect/conceal* (books only), *silence*.

Trappings: An aura of calm.

Special: Clerics of Hropt must be literate and have Smarts d6+.

Hropt is a very minor deity, largely unknown outside Hoenir's clergy and academia. He watches over Hoenir's extensive library, spending much of his day trying to catalogue the ever-expanding collection of tomes and scrolls. He has very sensitive ears and forbids anyone visiting the library to speak above a whisper, which is one explanation for why Tiw is generally considered an uneducated lout.

Hropt, although a god, is Hoenir's servant, and so is never depicted as an individual. In libraries, statues of

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Hoenir show the greater god a holding a book under both arms, thus indicating Hropt is present. Aside from in a few private libraries, Hropt has no other shrines, not even in the libraries of other gods. That said, his clerics sometimes work in the libraries of other temples, though only usually in the largest ones.

Hropt isn't an ideal god for an adventuring cleric to worship—his spells are few in number and very focused. However, at some point the party may need to seek out a library, and thus Hropt's cultists may be encountered. Both types of clergy spend much of their time inside libraries, helping patrons find books, rebinding damaged books, and protecting the tomes from thieves and vandals. Niht's followers are especially hated. A few clerics act as teachers, though they only impart knowledge of literacy. Paladins sometimes quest for new tomes to add to their library.

Aside from the third Monandaeg of Falmonan, when clerics honor Writing Day (see page 22), their ceremonies are few and far between—each day they perform their duties honors their god and helps lessen his burden.

Character Generation: As librarians, Investigation is a vital skill. A good Notice is useful, for libraries do not operate any system of indexing. Paladins are expected to deal with troublesome patrons without disturbing the tranquility of the library, so investing in Intimidation is never a bad idea. Bookbinding is part of every cleric's duties, but a separate skill needn't be taken as it's unlikely to come up very often—use Agility when it does.

JARNGRÍMR

Titles: Iron Mask, the Unwavering One, Master of Obedience, Will-Breaker, Enslaver.

Aspects: Total obedience and conformity.

Affiliations: Hothar.

Symbol: A featureless iron mask with two blank eye-holes.

Priesthood: Will-Breakers (priests); Enforcers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Prayers must be offered every day. Law Day (see page 23) is a high holy day.

Duties: To enforce the will of the ruling elite, to crush rebellion.

Sins: (Minor) failure to pray for an hour once per day, not punishing disobedience, disobeying a superior's order, supporting the will of the people over the ruling elite; (Major) negotiating your way out of a problem, supporting a rebellion, granting a slave freedom; (Mortal) fomenting rebellion.

Signature Power: *Puppet*.

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Spirit, Intimidation, and Persuasion only), *charismatic aura*, *gift of battle*, *silence*, *speak language*.

Trappings: Most trappings revolve around a powerful, stern voice.

Special: Clerics must have the Stubborn Hindrance. This represents their unwavering belief that they know best.

Jarngrímr, whose name means "Iron Mask," is a humorless son of Hothar. While Hothar tried to instill values of justice and truth in his son, Jarngrímr became fixated with obedience and order, seeing too much chaos in the mortal order. Jarngrímr cares nothing for right or wrong, or good or evil—his only desire is to impose rigid order and crush free will, for the latter leads to chaos, and chaos leads to crime and sin.

Jarngrímr hates Thunor, whose belief that all men must be free is anathema to the god of rigid obedience. Thunor values growth through chaos, trial and error, and personal experience, while Jarngrímr values growth only through conformity to established laws and government. This hatred has spread to the respective clerics. While clerics of Jarngrímr are far fewer in number than those of Thunor, they are relentless in their persecution of the foul faith. Clerics of Hothar and Jarngrímr do not always see eye-to-eye, either, for equality is irrelevant to Jarngrímr—there are rulers and there are followers.

When represented in art, Jarngrímr is shown wearing an iron mask, which represents the impassiveness of authority and carrying a set of manacles, which are symbols of slavery and the removal of free will. His body is covered by a plain cloak, typically colored gray. Many clerics dress the same. He and his clergy are notoriously biased against new fashions and trends.

Temples of Hothar rarely contain shrines to Jarngrímr, for the god of justice, while blind, does not demand blind obedience—laws must be just and fair to all. Only a handful of private shrines exist, and then always among the worst rules.

Although Jarngrímr believes his cause is for the betterment of mortals, his main worshippers are tyrants, hard-nosed military officers, slavers, bullies, usurpers, and those who have reason to fear for their position. Despite this, Jarngrímr does not promote might makes right—being in a position of power makes right, regardless of how one achieved that.

Priests serve as advisors to rulers, offering ways to crush rebellion and enforce laws. Paladins operate in a similar role to those of Hothar, but they are less concerned with trials—if a law has been broken, the perpetrator must face swift and harsh punishment to set an example.

When Guilds strike, as has been known, or when the peasants start to rebel, paladins are hired to end the problem. Their methods are swift and brutal, for rebellion, like cancer, spreads if not handled aggressively. Clerics of Jarngrímr do not negotiate—there is no middle ground, there is only obedience.

On the first day of each month, clerics celebrate Obedience Day. Given that clerics are unwelcome in non-tyrannical lands, there are only a few places where the festival can be held openly—Blackstone Barony is considered a hotspot for the cult. Those who have refused to obey the local laws are dragged through the streets (where applicable), while relentlessly whipped and verbally abused in an attempt to break their will and ensure future conformity. The grisly procession lasts from dawn

to dusk. At dusk, the captives are thoroughly questioned. Those who show signs of free will remain in captivity to await the next Obedience Day.

Character Generation: Although Jarngímr represents rigid order, he does not favor one system over another. Thus he supports all rulers, regardless of their system of government. As such, clerics should be conversant with the many laws of the lands, and have a good Knowledge (Law) skill. Clerics do not ask people to conform, they demand it of them. Intimidation is a vital skill in ensuring your orders are obeyed.

KJALARR

Titles: Homemaker, Hearth-Watcher.

Aspects: The home.

Affiliations: Eira, Kenaz.

Symbol: A stylized flame.

Priesthood: Homemakers (priests); Home Guardsmen (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Every Raestdaeg is a holy day.

Duties: To settle domestic disputes and ensure a house runs in an orderly fashion.

Sins: (Minor) not helping servants with their chores, failure to end a domestic dispute, failure to punish a wayward servant; (Major) breaking into a house; (Mortal) breaking the laws of hospitality.

Signature Power: *Feast*.

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Vigor, Intimidation, Notice, Persuasion, Stealth only), *elemental manipulation* (fire only), *light, lock/unlock, refuge, sentry*.

Trappings: Fire and heat only.

Kjalarr is Kenaz's stewardess and a daughter of Eira. Her duties involve ensuring the hearth never burns out, that meals are served on time, the house is cleaned each day, and the household runs smoothly. She answers to Kenaz's seneschal, and is thus no lowly servant but actually third in command of Kenaz's great hall.

Virtually all households contain a small shrine to Kjalarr. Often this is nothing more than her holy symbol engraved on a hearthstone or the door lintel, though in houses where there are lots of servants a statuette may be found near the high seat in the dining hall. The majority of her devout followers are servants and married peasant women, not homeowners. She is also honored as goddess of hospitality. Visitors to a strange home who accept hospitality say a quick prayer to her.

The great majority of the priesthood is employed as servants, though typically they are stewards, cellarmen, cupbearers, and porters rather than bed maids, scullery maids, and cooks. Their positions are respected ones, with much authority over the household staff, rather than menial ones. Paladins serve as household guards and security advisors. Clerics are not slaves, and expect to be paid for their labors.

As servants, the priesthood rarely gets time to conduct elaborate ceremonies. Fortunately, Kjalarr sees hard work as a sign of worship—by ensuring a household

runs smoothly the clergy has eased the goddess' daily burden. Special prayers are recited each Raestdaeg, the one day a month when servants have time to themselves, and before feasts commence in the home.

Character Generation: Although clerics are often stay-at-home sorts, their skills are useful to adventuring parties. As such, they are sometimes hired to make and watch over the camp, an adventurer's home away from home. As a servant, they should not be intrusive, so Stealth is useful. Intimidation and Persuasion are handy for settling domestic disputes, and Notice important for detecting things that need attention or are out of place. Streetwise is useful for picking up gossip, something servants are wont to do.

KVARA

Titles: Shield Bearer, the Pacifist.

Aspects: Bodyguards.

Affiliations: Eira, Rigr.

Symbol: A large shield.

Priesthood: Shieldmen/maidens (priests); Shieldsons/daughters (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Clerics make prayers on accepting and finishing a commission.

Duties: Protect the living.

Sins: (Minor) your patron is injured, killing except in the course of defending your patron; (Major) your patron is injured because you are not at his side; (Mortal) your patron dies.

Signature Power: *Armor*.

Powers: *Arcane resistance, bladebreaker, bodyguard, deflection, energy immunity, warding, weapon immunity*.

Trappings: Cannot take acid, coldfire, electricity, fire, or necromantic trappings.

Special: Clerics of Kvara have strict limits on spellcasting. They may only cast spells on their person or those of a nominated patron. By accepting a patron, the cleric places that person's safety in her hands. A patron can be changed, but only after an hour's meditation and prayer. A cleric of a greater god who also honors Kvara does not get the +1 bonus to spellcasting for having identical spell unless she casts them on herself or her patron.

Kvara is the daughter of Eira and Tiw and twin sister of Kvarsi (see page 94). She has more of her mother's blood, and is predisposed against violence. With Scaetha, the older sister, now a greater goddess, Kvara is charged with defending Eira, and is thus more revered by Eira's clergy. Rather than learning from her father, she apprenticed under Rigr, learning protective fighting techniques and how to spot danger.

When depicted, Kvara is shown peering out from behind a large shield and bearing no weapons. She is normally shown wearing a full helmet and chain mail hauberk.

Although affiliated with Tiw, shrines to Kvara are never found in Tiw's temples. Instead, they are commonplace in

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those of Eira and Rigr, the god of protection. Public figures, those who believe they are in need of protection, and folk with enemies often maintain a small shrine in their home, and Kvara commonly features in their private worship. The Iron Guild, whose specialty is protection rather than warfare, honors Kvara, and members wear small wooden discs around their necks as a good luck charm.

The difference between priests and paladins is less distinct than with many other faiths, and typically boils down to favored patrons. Paladins, being more martially inclined, often serve as bodyguards to generals, warrior nobles, and accompany adventurers on quests. Priests favor merchants, less militant nobles, scholars, and city officials. Both types are shields for hire, serving as protectors rather than warriors. Note that they are protectors of people, not places.

Commissions are charged at variable rates. Factors such as the patron's enemies, the area in which he is traveling, the extent to which the cleric's services will be called upon, and such like all affect the price. Clerics of Kvara charge highly, but are very good at what they do. A standard clause in their contracts entitles the patron to a 50% refund if he is injured (barring complete accidents) and a full refund to his family if he is slain.

Clerics of Kvara rarely make a name for themselves in battle, and are often overlooked by storytellers, despite the vital role they play. They are seen as the sidekicks of heroes, not as heroes themselves. Few clerics bother to argue this blinkered view, as what happens after they die is more important than in life. They are not concerned with healing the injured—their task is to ensure their patron doesn't need a healer.

Offerings are made before accepting any commission, and again after the commission ends. Weapons are offered to Kvara and then ritually destroyed before a job, symbolizing the cleric's wishes that no harm befalls her patron. Afterward, they invest in a new shield, which is then donated to a worthy cause. "More shields, fewer weapons" is a common utterance, and relates to the clerics' belief that the world would be a better place if people thought less about violence as the way to end problems.

Character Guidelines: Clerics are defenders, not warriors. Good Fighting is required as this boosts Parry, but rarely are offensive Combat Edges learned. Shieldwall is the most useful Edge in terms of protecting others, whereas Block is important for the cleric's safety. Notice is an important skill, as it allows the cleric to detect danger and take evasive action. For the same reason, Danger Sense is an important Edge.

KVARSI

Titles: The Healing Hand, Maiden of Succor.

Aspects: Battlefield medicine.

Affiliations: Eira, Tiw.

Symbol: A hand gripping a sword by the blade.

Priesthood: Chirurgeons (priests); Protectors (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Mourning ceremonies are held after any battle.

Duties: Protect the wounded.

Sins: (Minor) risking your own life unnecessarily protecting the uninjured while a wounded comrade requires help; (Major) allowing a comrade to die by your inaction; (Mortal) refusing to help a wounded comrade.

Signature Power: *Healing*.

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Vigor, Healing, Knowledge (Alchemy) only), *quickness, sanctuary, speed, succor, teleport*.

Trappings: Any except necromantic. Clerics typically avoid showy trappings to avoid attracting unwanted attention.

Kvarsi is a lesser daughter of Eira and Tiw. Although she has her mother's calm nature and healing skills, within her chest beats the heart of a warrior. During the God War, Kvarsi repeatedly disobeyed her father, who had ordered her to remain in the rear, helping to tend the wounded by rushing onto the battlefield to rescue the fallen. As a reward for saving so many, Tiw granted her, her own priesthood. Kvarsi and Kvara, her twin sister, are often mythologized as working together—Kvara watches over Kvarsi, while Kvarsi tends the injured.

Images depict a young girl with a determined visage. In her right hand she holds a healer's bag, while in her left she clutches a large shield. Never one to shy away from fighting when called upon, a weapon of some kind always hangs from her belt.

Shrines are found in temples of Eira and Tiw. Eira's Peacekeepers, the paladin order, hold her in high regard, whereas within Tiw's temples it is the priests who honor her most. Many shrines are heavily bloodstained, a constant reminder that war brings death and that it is not always possible, despite one's best intentions and efforts, to save every victim of conflict.

Kvarsi's clerics are tasked with delivering aid to, and protecting, the wounded on the battlefield. To that end, they prefer to stay back from the frontlines, only darting into the fray to deliver succor to the fallen. Their spells are all designed around reaching an injured comrade quickly and patching him up. For serious injuries, spells like sanctuary and teleport provide instantaneous transportation off the battlefield to a secure place. More often than not the serious wounded are delivered to clerics of Eira, for the followers of Kvarsi are required on the battlefield.

While the majority of clerics serve the temples of Eira or Tiw, there are plenty of freelancers. They hire their services to organizations such as the Hearth Knights Iron Guild, and Knights Hrafn. Warlords and nobles may also hire them, though the clerics are free to turn down offers of employment if they find the patron's cause offensive. For instance, while they may be willing to support a noble seeking to reclaim his ancestral lands from an usurper, they rarely support those who seek conquest for the sake of conquest. A large number can be found serving on the frontline between Vestmark and Orcmark.

Although often capable combatants (only a fool walks

onto a battlefield unprepared) and lacking Eira's restriction on causing bloodshed, they disdain from fighting except to protect the fallen. Even then, they never let the adrenaline rush of mortal combat distract them from their sacred duty. Heavy armor and large shields are preferred over big melee weapons.

Whereas clerics of Tiw celebrate victory after battle, those of Kvarsi mourn the casualties. Prayers are said over the fallen and dying to speed them on their way, and sweet herbs are burned to mask the stench of death and infection. Eira's clergy are inclined to help the wounded on either side after a conflict, especially when the armies of the civilized races clash, but Kvarsi's clergy are not overly concerned with enemy casualties and are under no compulsion to provide healing or prayers.

Character Guidelines: Expected to run into the heat of battle to patch up wounded comrades, clerics typically have good Spirit and Healing. Many know herbalism, and thus possess the Knowledge (Alchemy) skill and Hedge Magic Edge. Fleet-Footed is an important Edge, as it allows the cleric to quickly reach those in need.

Though often capable fighters, their role is to protect and heal the injured, not engage the enemy. Hence, Block and Dodge are important Edges. Alchemy is another useful Edge, as it allows the cleric to create *healing* potions in advance of battle.

LANDSKJALPTI

Titles: Ground Shaker, Earth Trembler, He Who Rocks Mountains, Lord of the Drum, the Noisy One.

Aspects: Earthquakes.

Affiliations: Ertha.

Symbol: A mountain cleaved in twain.

Priesthood: Earthtremblers (priests); Earthshakers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Ground Shaker Day (p. 19) is a high holy day. Any day an earthquake strikes is a holy day.

Duties: To keep Landskjalpti subdued.

Sins: (Minor) not spending 2 hours a day drumming, destroying a drum except as a sacrifice, accidentally harming an earth elemental or thunderlizard; (Major) deliberately harming an earth elemental or thunderlizard, killing one in self-defense; (Mortal) killing an earth elemental or thunderlizard except in self-defense.

Signature Power: *Knockdown*.

Powers: *Deflection, hamper movement, quake, stun, summon elemental* (any earth elementals only).

Trappings: All trappings relate to earthquakes. *Hamper movement* and *stun* are localized ground tremors, while *deflection* causes those attacking the target to momentarily lose their footing as the ground shudders beneath them.

Special: Clerics have +1 to Faith rolls to summon quaker earth elementals.

Depending who you ask, earthquakes are caused by Ertha rearranging or expanding her home, Foldardrótann moving aside obstacles to her subterranean ex-

ploration, the drum-banging of Landskjalpti, Ertha's temperamental and noisy son, or the movement of his subterranean herd of thunderlizards. (Landskjalpti has no power over thunderlizards—he just likes them as pets because they are noisy).

Landskjalpti is regularly portrayed as a drum, most often being carried by his mother. Some depictions show him as a small thunderlizard following at Ertha's heels. Shrines exist in all temples of Ertha, and take the form of a drum. Unique shrines, carved stone columns, stand in areas frequently struck by earthquakes. He has no dedicated temples.

The main duty of priests and paladins is to honor their god through loud drumming every day. Beyond that, Landskjalpti asks only that his worshippers do not harm earth elementals or thunderlizards, or destroy drums (except as sacrifices), restrictions easily avoided by most. As such, clerics are largely free to do as they please. Few clerics honor Landskjalpti as their sole deity, and thus the duties of Ertha's clergy occur much of their time.

Ceremonies take the form of loud drumming. Some clerics favor steady rhythmic drumming, while others prefer to just make noise. On Ground Shaker Day, a cleric must use a drum he has purchased since the previous festival. The value of the drum depends on the cleric's Faith die. At d4 it must have a minimum value of 50 gs, making it an ordinary instrument, the sort picked up in most settlements. For each additional die, or +1 bonus above d12, add a further 25 gs. The drum must be destroyed and placed in the ground when the ritual concludes as an offering to Landskjalpti.

Character Guidelines: Landskjalpti demands little from his worshippers, leaving clerics free to choose the role they will play in society or an adventuring party. As servants of an earth deity, Vigor should be considered an important attribute.

LANGBARÐR

Titles: The Unstoppable One, Thrym's Beard.

Aspects: Glaciers.

Affiliations: Thrym.

Symbol: A wall of ice.

Priesthood: Guardians of Thrym (priests); Crushing Hands of Thrym (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: First Waescdaeg of Wulfmonan.

Duties: To protect clerics of Thrym, advance the Fimbulvintr.

Sins: (Minor) allowing a cleric of Thrym to be wounded, suffering any form of knockback, retreating before any foe; (Major) allowing a cleric of Thrym to be incapacitated; (Mortal) allowing a cleric of Thrym to be killed

Signature Power: *Barrier*.

Powers: *Armor, boost/lower trait* (Spirit, Strength, and Vigor only), *growth/shrink, knockdown, summon elemental* (glacier only), *weapon immunity*.

Trappings: All trappings relate to ice.

Langbarðr serves as Thrym's bodyguard, much as

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Biflindi serves Scaetha. However, as well as being a defender, he is also a combatant, relentlessly driving foes forward with his prestigious strength. Glaciers, unstoppable walls of living ice that rumble and grind down mountains crushing all in their path, are symbolic of Langbarðr. Many legends state Langbarðr is Thrym's beard. For this reason, glaciers are often known as Thrym's Hair.

Like many minor gods Langbarðr never features in art as a unique entity. His presence is noted in images of Thrym by the winter god's beard. When Thrym is depicted as a Hellfrost dragon, Langbarðr is the scales that line his thick neck. For this reason, the god is present wherever Thrym is honored and thus never has individual shrines or temples. Shrines and temples to Thrym in or near a glacier are considered special places for Langbarðr's worshippers.

Priests and paladins share some duties, yet differ in others. Priests are most often employed as bodyguards to important priests and frost giants, shielding their charge from harm without regard for their own safety. Others serve as guardians in Thrym's temples, protecting the most sacred areas from intruders. While paladins do perform bodyguard duties, those they protect are more active, traveling the world rather than remaining in a single temple or fortress. Symbolic of the glacier god, they are expected to be remorseless in combat, smashing aside foes and advancing through enemy ranks like a glacier crushing all in its path. In this regard they serve in Thrym's mortal armies as heavy shock troops.

Clerics of Langbarðr are rarely in a hurry to do anything. They plot and ponder before acting, but are then relentless in fulfilling their duty. Ceremonies and festivals take the same deliberate approach, appearing to be enacted in slow motion and with great precision of movement. Drums, played at a low, steady rumble, a deep thunderous drum-roll rather than a strong, distinct beat, are employed in all ceremonies.

Character Guidelines: Priests are defenders rather than aggressors. Spirit and Vigor are favored attributes, as these allow the cleric to hold his nerve, recover from being Shaken more quickly, and resist damage. Fighting should be high, since it directly affects Parry. Defensive Edges such as Block and Shieldwall are more useful than true combat Edges, though clerics are expected to be able to deal out damage as well. Notice can be important, since many priests serve as guardians and sentries in temples.

Paladins are expected to be relentless in attack. Edges such as Frenzy and Sweep best fit this duty. Hard to Kill and Nerves of Steel allow them to march forward, shrugging off injuries.

LASESMED

Titles: Home Protector, the Divine Locksmith.

Aspects: Locks and traps.

Affiliations: Niht, Rigr.

Symbol: A skeleton key.

Priesthood: Locksmiths (priests); Trappers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Third Marketdaeg of each month. The first Marketdaeg of Sowanmonan is a high holy day.

Duties: Creation and maintenance of locks and traps.

Sins: (Minor) using brute force to overcome a lock or trap; (Major) using spells for criminal purposes; (Mortal) giving or selling your secrets to outsiders.

Signature Power: Lock/unlock.

Powers: Arcane resistance*, armor*, barrier, boost/lower trait (Agility, Lockpicking, Notice, Repair), detect/conceal (locks, secret doors, traps), glyph*, mend*, telekinesis, weapon immunity*.

Trappings: Any except necromantic.

Special: Spells marked "*" only works on doors, locks, and traps. Furthermore, the clergy are expert locksmiths, and locks they make are harder to pick. With success, Lockpicking rolls suffer a -1 penalty. A raise incurs a -2 penalty, and two raises a -4 penalty.

Lasesmed is Rigr's locksmith and is charged with protecting the gods' halls from thieves. Lasesmed gets a lot of commissions from Niht, for she has many secrets to protect. Law-abiding and honest, Lasesmed never reveals his secrets to the goddess of secrets, for she is also patron of assassins—exactly the sort of people locks and traps are designed to keep out. The god of locks and Nauthiz maintain a friendly rivalry. Each time Lasesmed crafts a new type of lock or trap, Nauthiz makes it his goal to pick or disarm it. The two gods thus keep each other on their toes and striving for perfection in their craft.

Locksmiths form the bulk of the laity. Their art, which was first given to the Anari, has spread across Rassilon. Locks range from simple (and thus easily picked) to highly complex mechanisms. Security comes at a price, and most citizens cannot afford more than one lock. This tends to be placed in a chest containing the family's valuables. For doors, most security takes the form of a sturdy wooden bar. Shrines are found in many homes, typically taking the form of a key (which opens no locks in the house). As is typical of minor gods, there are no temples.

Priests can earn a good living as locksmiths and trap makers, protecting the homes of wealthy citizens, temples, and fortresses, and designing prisons. Although never inclined toward theft, priests are expert housebreakers, and this is another service they sell—for a modest sum a priest will break into your house and defeat any traps installed. Naturally, he'll then sell you an improved security system. Paladins are no less skilled in the arts of locks and traps, but most are itinerant workers, selling their services wherever they travel. Paladins are more likely to be found in adventuring parties, where they serve both as trap disarmers and protectors, sealing and trapping portals to provide their comrades with security. A small percentage of clerics are retired or reformed thieves. Their inside knowledge of the criminal mindset is an invaluable tool.

Lasesmed is paranoid about being kidnapped and forced to reveal the secrets of his work. He always wears a mask when working or representing Rigr, thus pre-

venting his foes from being able to identify him. Many of his mortal clergy are equally paranoid, employing elaborate security precautions to protect their shops and homes, taking circuitous routes to and from jobs, and even adopting an alias to separate their private life from their work. Their precautions are not without merit, for thieves' guild offer large rewards to those who bring them a cleric of Lasesmed.

Clerics are called upon to bless new structures. To ward away thieves, a key is placed under the first cornerstone laid down or Lasesmed's holy symbol is engraved on the bottom of the stone. On the cult's high holy day, the local clergy gather in secret to pray. Each is expected to bring one lock or assemble one nonlethal trap, which others must try to pick or disarm. Suggestions are then made on how to improve the lock or trap.

Character Guidelines: In adventuring parties, clerics make great trap detectors. To back up their spells, they should invest in Lockpicking and Notice. Those who want to make locks and traps should take Craft (Locksmithing or Trapping) if the skills are to be used frequently or Repair, a more general skill, otherwise.

Alternatively, GMs may allow Lockpicking to be used in manufacturing locks and traps. While not criminals, Thief is a useful Edge for boosting Lockpicking, and providing a bonus to the paranoid clergy's Stealth abilities.

NORÐRI

Titles: Thrym's Blizzard, Winter Howler.

Aspects: The north wind.

Affiliations: Thrym.

Symbol: A stylized representation of a blizzard.

Priesthood: Wind Lords (priests); Blizzard Lords (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Day: Any day there is a blizzard in the worshippers' vicinity.

Duties: Bring about the Fimbulvinter.

Sins: (Minor) protecting others from a blizzard or the Hellfrost wind, not summoning a blizzard once a month that causes problems for the citizens of Rassilon; (Major) using becalm in a blizzard; (Mortal) sheltering from a blizzard or the Hellfrost wind.

Signature Power: *Storm* (creating blizzards only).

Powers: *Becalm, deflection, fear, knockdown, summon elemental* (blizzard only), *voice on the wind, zephyr*.

Trappings: Trappings must involve cold wind.

Norðri was always creator of the north wind, though he once served Thunor. When Thrym ascended to the god of winter after the God War, Norðri was offered minor god status in return for swearing allegiance to the wintry deity. Norðri accepted, stealing the magical bellows bestowed him by Thunor as he fled his former master's wrath. Because of this Thunor lost the ability to control the north wind and became an enemy of Thrym. Thrym taught his new minion the secret of the Hellfrost, which Norðri whispers into the winds he creates, thus invoking the much-feared Hellfrost wind.

THE FOUR WINDS

The four winds that blow across the land are named Austri, Suðri, Vestri, and Norðri. The first three are servants of Thunor, while the latter turned against Thunor and became a servant of Thrym. None of Thunor's servants are considered true deities, though Norðri and Suðri have been granted the status of minor gods.

Austri is the creator of the east wind, responsible for bringing in wet air and autumn storms. Suðri is responsible for the warm, southerly wind that blows in summer. Vestri heralds the start of spring, with cooling westerly breezes. Norðri is responsible for the biting northerly winds that howl in winter.

In art the winds are shown as four dwarves pumping on huge bellows from which the winds blow forth, or more rarely, as three storm dragons and a Hellfrost dragon bringing the winds into creation by blowing.

Norðri has no temples or shrines—the howling blizzard is his only worship hall. Similarly he has no desire to be represented in art, for all citizens of Rassilon know his form each time the winter winds pick up. Citizens of Rassilon willing to brave frostbite urinate into blizzards as an insult to Norðri. Going outside or not seeking shelter in a blizzard is also known as “peeing on Norðri,” even if the person keeps his trousers fastened.

The only real difference between priests and paladins, both of whom are charged with bringing about the Fimbulvinter by summoning blizzards and icy winds, is their willingness to risk life and limb for their god. Priests prefer to stick to the Winterlands, while paladins scorn the power of Kenaz and Sigel by holding their rituals in the Hearthlands.

Most worshippers of Thrym see Norðri and his worshippers as hired help, useful for sure and loyal to the great cause, but not worthy of any recognition—one may accept a meal as good, but one praises the food, not the lowly servant who cooked it. That Norðri chose such important sounding titles for his clergy only fuels their scorn for the petty wind god.

All ceremonies to Norðri are carried out in blizzards, whether natural or magically summoned. Worshippers perform frenzied dances and howl into the gale, adding their voices to the Hellfrost wind. Human sacrifice is performed only if the victims are worshippers of Kenaz, Sigel, or Thunor or air or fire elementalists—all others are deemed unworthy.

Character Guidelines: Clerics are as cold-hearted as the blizzards they summon. The Mean Hindrance can be used to represent this. Norðri demands his worshippers brave blizzards, yet grants them no special protection against his storms.

Clerics should thus invest in Vigor and Survival unless

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they want to freeze to death. Intimidation is useful, as it allows the cleric to emulate the Hellfrost wind and terrify opponents. Since worshippers are expected to revel in the Hellfrost wind, taking at least a few dice in Spirit is strongly advised.

SANNGETALL

Titles: Finder of Truth, the Great Inquisitor.

Aspects: The truth.

Affiliations: Dargar, Hothar.

Symbol: A tongue with a nail shoved through it.

Priesthood: Inquisitor (priests); Torturer (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Second Heafoddaeg of each month.

Duties: To uncover the truth.

Sins: (Minor) ignoring a mystery, failure to investigate all avenues when on a case; (Major) covering up a crime, falsifying evidence; (Mortal) knowingly telling a lie.

Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait* (Smarts, Intimidation, Investigation, Notice, and Streetwise only).

Powers: *Fatigue, nightmare, speak language, stun, succor, wandering senses.*

Trappings: Any except necromantic. Those designed to target others typically involve sensations of pain.

Sanngetall is the inquisitor of the gods. He is renowned for his total honesty and inability to lie. He began as an investigator for Hothar, aiding the god of law in uncovering evidence to be used in trials. Dargar later taught him

the secret of torture though, unlike the god of violence, Sanngetall does not inflict pain for enjoyment.

No temples stand to honor Sanngetall. Shrines can be found in all law courts and in nobles' courts where trials are held. These take the form of wooden discs about four feet across and are engraved with Sanngetall's holy symbol. Witnesses stand on the disc when giving evidence, swearing oaths to Hothar and Sanngetall that their testimony shall be only the truth.

Sanngetall's clergy are freelancers, hiring themselves out to whoever requires their services. Priests are generally inquisitors and investigators. Some work as private investigators, helping the lower classes by investigating minor crimes and tracking down missing persons, whereas others work for temples and nobles and look into more serious crimes and heresy.

Paladins are less concerned with lengthy investigations and cerebral interrogations. They are expert torturers, both physical and psychological, though few take enjoyment from inflicting pain—it is simply a means

to uncovering the truth. Even when not engaging in torture, they favor slaps and beatings to loosen tongues and encourage the truth to be told.

While the clergy do track down criminals, they are not bounty hunters—they are concerned with learning the truth, not upholding the law. Once they have uncovered evidence of a crime, they hand their findings over to others to act upon. They are also known as "Sanngetall's bloodhounds," for once they are involved in a search for the truth they leave no stone unturned.

Ceremonies are rare, for the clergy does not gather often in large numbers. Instead, clerics purge their sins by confessing any misdemeanors and renew their oaths to seek the truth, whatever the cost.

Character Guidelines: Priests, as investigators and inquisitors, should consider Investigation, Notice, and Streetwise their primary skills. The Investigator Edge is favored for obvious reasons. Stealth is useful, but not required—a forthright and upfront investigator has little need for sneaking around.

Paladins, by contrast, need focus only on Intimidation (outside of the usual combat skills and Edges), for their art is more physical and confrontational.

SIGMUNDR

Titles: Dragon Slayer, Scourge of Dragons, Wyrms Hunter.

Aspects: Dragon slaying.

Affiliations: Tiw.

Symbol: A dragon's head dripping blood at the neck.

Priesthood: Dragon Hunters (priests); Dragon Slayers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Third Heafoddaeg of Wulfmonan is a high holy day. Any day a dragon is slain is a holy day.

Duties: To slay dragons.

Sins: (Minor) refusing to challenge a dragon of greater ability, fleeing from a dragon, conversing with a dragon except to intimidate or taunt; (Major) refusing to challenge a dragon of equal ability; (Mortal) refusing to challenge a dragon of weaker ability.

Signature Power: *Smite*.*

Powers: *Arcane resistance**, *armor**, *deflection**, *energy immunity**, *fly*, *warrior's gift**.

Trappings: Clergy may use any trapping except necromantic.

Special: Spells marked "*" only function against dragons. Against other foes, the spells bestow no bonus. For instance, a paladin invokes *smite* and scores a raise. Against dragons he adds +4 to damage rolls, but when the enchanted weapon is used against all other foes it has no damage bonus and is not treated as being magical.

Before his imprisonment, Loki (an evil trickster) sired the first dragon, a colossal, multi-hued beast of ravenous appetite. Feeling particularly vengeful after being chastised for a "harmless" prank, Loki unleashed his offspring on the gods. The great beast tore through the heavens, leaving terrible destruction in its wake. Normally, Tiw would have lofted his standard and waded into battle, but he was away on important business and could not be reached in time. While the other gods fled in panic, one of Tiw's huscarls, Sigmundr, donned his armor, gathered weapons from all the gods, and marched to war.

The resulting battle was titanic, shaking the very foundations of the heavens. At last Sigmundr emerged victorious, though his victory was not absolute. For each wound Sigmundr delivered, the dragon shed droplets of blood. These droplets fell to the mortal realm, spawning lesser dragons where they landed. The nature of each dragon depended on the weapon Sigmundr used. Thus, when he wielded Thrym's icy axe, Hellfrost dragons were spawned by the blood. When he used Thunor's hammer, the droplets spawned storm dragons.

Bound by the Convocation not to interfere in the mortal realm, Sigmundr sent heralds (borrowed from Tiw, who promoted Sigmundr to minor god status on learning of his heroic deed) to warn the emerging sentient races of the dragon threat, thus spawning his own cult. Sigmundr blames himself for the creation of mortal dragons and is set on correcting his mistake by ensuring all dragons are eliminated. This places him at loggerheads with Sigel, Thrym and Thunor, who have adopted sun, Hellfrost, and storm dragons respectively. The animosity filters down to the respective cults.

The god of dragon slaying has no shrines and but one solitary temple. Located in a cave within the Icebarrier

Mountains, the temple's exact location is revealed to clerics only when they take their final vows. Lit by flickering dragon-fat lamps and lined with the scales of slain wyrms, the walls of the main temple hall glitter rainbow hues. The altar comprises of the largest dragon skull brought back to the hall to date. Currently, it is the head of an old Hellfrost dragon.

Located off the main temple are storage halls, where the numerous skulls of all dragons slain by the clergy are kept. Engraved onto each is the name of the slayer and the date the beast met its end. In many instances, generations of the same family have served Sigmundr, each member adding to his ancestors' donations. Also present are storerooms, treasuries (dragons tend to hoard precious materials), barracks, kitchens, and the like.

Although it is not a written requirement, many clerics travel to Scayle to participate in hunting marsh dragons. To the younger generation, it is a rite of passage.

Priests are hunters, tasked with tracking dragons to their lairs. They are not required to go inside and fight the dragon, but should they encounter the beast they are required to fight. While the younger generation favors practical application of their art, physically venturing into the wilds, older clerics prefer literary research.

Paladins serve one primary function—to slay dragons discovered by the priests. Although dedicated to a holy cause, clergy happily accept donations from settlements plagued by dragons in return for dispatching the beast.

The clergy holds several festivals. The major one, held in winter, marks Sigmundr's slaying of the great dragon. Each year, a huge wooden frame in the guise of a dragon and decorated with scales from slain dragons is constructed. Operated by novices of the cult, the dragon "rampages" through the surrounding land, hounded every step of the way by priests and paladins.

Positioned inside are sacks of blood (rarely that of actual dragons). Drawing blood with a blow is considered an ill omen for the attacker, whereas delivering a blow that draws no blood is seen as a blessing from Sigmundr.

Character Guidelines: Priests are trackers rather than dragon killers. Knowledge (Folklore), Investigation, Notice, Streetwise, and Tracking are their primary skills, both aided by a good Smarts. While priests need some combat skills and Edges, paladins should ensure they are combat machines—dragons are remarkably tough creatures. Knowledge (Dragons), while not vital, is a useful aid in identifying a dragon's age, abilities, and likely habits.

SKADI

Titles: Great Herd Mother, Great Mammoth, Tusked One.

Aspects: Mammoths.

Affiliations: Eostre Animalmother, Tiw.

Symbol: Pair of curved mammoth tusks.

Priesthood: Cows (priests); Bulls (paladins).

Herald: None.

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Holy Days: First Milcdaeg of each month.

Duties: To protect your clan and its herds.

Sins: (Minor) using, eating, or wearing any part of a mammoth except from one which died of natural causes or was killed according to strict religious observations, accidentally harming a mammoth; (Major) willfully harming a mammoth; (Mortal) willfully killing a mammoth except to provide essential supplies.

Signature Power: *Beast friend* (mammoths only).

Powers: *Armor, boost/lower trait* (Strength, Vigor, and Survival only), *environmental protection* (cold only), *knockdown, shape change* (mammoths only), *summon beast* (mammoths only), *wilderness step* (snow and ice only).

Trappings: Trappings relate to mammoths. *Armor*, for instance, may cause a layer of fat and hair to cover the target, while an illusory charging mammoth may represent *knockdown*.

Worship of Skaði began among the Finnar dwelling from beyond the lands now encased behind the Icewall. Animistic shamans held she was a great spirit, the soul of the first female mammoth and thus the mother of all mammoths roaming the land today. After the Blizzard War, those Finnar who survived the migration south encountered the other races, who declared the goddess to be a daughter of Eostre Animalmother. While some Finnar tribes still hold to her true origins, most now accept the standardized version of the faith.

Skaði is worshipped both as provider and defender, having female and male aspects. Many Finnar warriors pray to her for strength before battle. When depicted in art, Skaði is shown as either a young maiden wearing a mammoth hair cloak or as a mammoth-headed woman. Even her militant aspect is depicted as female.

Skaði has but one temple below the Icewall—the Mammoth Hall. It is commonly held that somewhere in the Hellfrost lies the Mammoths' Graveyard, a sacred where Skaði birthed the first calf and where old and sick mammoths go to die. Here, so the myths go, stands an enormous temple constructed from mammoth bones. Hearth Knights report never having spied such a site, but do not dismiss the stories—much of the Hellfrost is unexplored and beyond the Icewall lie many strange and wondrous sites. Many Finnar tribes boast shrines to Skaði. Typically these take the form of rune-inscribed mammoth tusks or preserved skins. Permanent Winterlands settlements which make use of mammoths often erect shrines to appease the goddess. It is not unusual in such places for the shrine to take the form of a mammoth skull.

Priests are typically carers for the people of their community and their prized mammoth herds. In such communities mammoth meat may form part of the regular diet, while hair is used for rugs and cloaks, fat to stave off the cold (and for cooking), and the bones to make implements. Skaði allows her children to be slain and eaten, but only when it is essential for the tribe's survival and only if the proper ceremonies are conducted. Paladins are generally members of their tribe, committed to defending the citizens and herds from all predators.

Ceremonies are noisy affairs—clerics blow long, loud notes from horns made from mammoth tusks and bang mammoth-skin drums. Clad in mammoth hair cloaks and stylized mammoth headdresses they dance around the herd and/or buildings, sprinkling them with fresh mammoth milk and invoking blessings.

Character Guidelines: Strength and Vigor are favored, not only as representations of mammoths' physical prowess but because they are useful traits among the tribes of the Winterlands. Similarly, Survival is a handy skill for those who must travel the snow and ice fields. Priests are advised to learn Healing, since they care for people and mammoths, whereas paladins are warriors and hunters. Those who wish to use mammoths as mounts need Riding.

SKILFINGR

Titles: He Who Weakens, The Exhauster, Devourer of Breath, Gasper.

Aspects: Exhaustion.

Affiliations: The Unknowable One, Vali.

Symbol: Varies. Symbols always have a mocking tone, such as a bent sword, lifeless sail, or limp male organ.

Priesthood: Weakened Hands (priests); Weakened Blades (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Raestdaeg is a holy day. Humility Day (p. 36) and Joker's Day (p. 37) are high holy days.

Duties: To teach others to work around physical and mental exhaustion, to create chaos through weakening others.

Sins: (Minor) becoming Fatigued; (Major) becoming Exhausted; (Mortal) becoming Incapacitated through Fatigue.

Signature Power: *Fatigue*.

Powers: *Becalm, knockdown, lower trait* (no boost), *nightmare, sluggish reflexes, stun*.

Trappings: None with game mechanics. Trappings always take the form of sudden physical and mental exhaustion, or, in the case of *becalm* a natural drop in the wind that forces mariners to take up oars.

Long ago, the gods were rightfully proud of their immense endurance. Freo ran forever without tiring, Tiw slew giants all day without needing a rest, and even Hothar spent all day and night reading. Bored of their constant boasting and ceaseless activity, the Unknowable One created Skilfingr, whose name means, "He Who Weakens," and set him loose. Some theologians argue the gods are immune to fatigue. In their eyes, Skilfingr was brought into existence to weaken mortals, who before his creation knew naught of exhaustion, nor, some claim, of sleep.

Skilfingr has no places of worship, nor is he ever depicted in art—like Death, he is constantly present, and folk need no reminder of his presence. Though he has few worshippers, Skilfingr's name crops up in many everyday sayings. Those fatigued from hard work might say "Skilfingr has stolen my breath" or "Skilfingr has stolen

my strength,” for example. With the threat of exhaustion always present, mortals frequently whisper minor prayers to appease the god and stay his hand before undertaking any physically or mentally demanding task.

Those who honor Skilfingr as an aspect of the Unknowable One induce fatigue as a teaching tool, reminding their victims that physical and mental endurance have finite limits, and that one must be prepared to overcome such obstacles at any time, especially in the face of adversity. Priests favor non-combat situations. One might victimize a man hopeful of earning carnal knowledge of a maiden, frustrate a craftsman on a tight deadline, or test a skald whose epic tales require him to speak for hour without lengthy pause. Paladins favor martial situations. In general, clerics favor educating those who boast of their endurance or who need taking down a peg or two. Still, they are widely regarded with suspicion, for a cleric may invoke his miracle against an ally at the most inopportune moment simply to test his resolve.

Vali’s clergy are more malicious, causing fatigue to hamper important endeavors. They exhaust warriors on epic quests, drain spellcasters about to invoke powerful magic, tire messengers delivering vital news, and so on. Their activities are rarely done on a whim, for they always seek an opening fellow clerics of Var might exploit. For instance, delaying a messenger might lead to war. Such suffering may give the greater cult opportunity to bring about famine or corrupt desperate peasants.

Ceremonies honoring Skilfingr are usually very sedate affairs. Cultists sit around and act lethargic, ritually simulating exhaustion without actually incurring sin. When a worshipper is honoring his deity in this manner, he rarely lifts a finger to perform any physical task. Somewhat suspiciously, they have a habit of praying whenever hard work is required. This has led to a reputation for laziness.

Once a year, a cleric must push himself beyond his physical limits, deliberately becoming Fatigued. Some perform good works, such as helping in the fields or on construction projects. Others dance themselves into a stupor, or carry heavy burdens for no practical purpose. Although this act leads to sin, it is an important reminder that no one is immune to the god’s draining caress. Failure to perform the ritual is a major sin.

Character Guidelines: Spirit and Vigor, both of which represent endurance, are the cleric’s core attributes. Survival is an important skill for those seeking travel, for it allows one to avoid many natural forms of fatigue, such as exposure to blizzards and starvation.

SKOGR

Titles: Lady of the Forest, Mother of Skogsras, Mistress of the Woodland Fey.

Aspects: Forests.

Affiliations: Eostre Plantmother, Ullr.

Symbol: A tree.

Priesthood: Wood Tenders (priests); Wood Swords (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Apple Day or its local equivalent (p. 17), Cunning Hunt Day (p. 35), Herbalism Day (p. 18), and Summer and Winter Court Days (p. 18) are high holy days.

Duties: To protect forests and woodland animals, to promote renewable use of forests.

Sins: (Minor) harming a tree when it can be avoided, hunting out of season in a forest, allowing others to take more than they need from a forest; (Major) deliberately harming a tree, allowing a mundane woodland beast to be hunted purely for sport, taking more than you need from a forest; (Mortal) hunting a mundane woodland beast purely for sport, burning a forest for any reason.

Signature Power: *Wilderness step*.

Powers: *Animate war tree, beast friend* (woodland beasts only), *boost/lower trait* (Strength, Vigor, Climbing, Notice, Stealth, Tracking only), *entangle, summon beast* (woodland beasts only), *summon elemental* (wood only).

Trappings: All trappings must relate to plants or woodland beasts, as appropriate.

Special: Clerics *must* have the Woodsman Edge. Miracles only function while both the caster and target are in a forest. Leaving the forest for any reason causes Maintained spells to be cancelled automatically. Clerics who take the Wood Warden Edge automatically learn *beast friend* if they don’t already have it and gain +2 to Faith rolls when casting it. They can also use the spell outside of forests on any mundane beasts.

A daughter of Eostre and Ullr, Skogr spent her youth playing in the great forests. A happy child, she created many songs. Some allowed her to talk to animals or soothed the most ferocious woodland beast, others animated the vegetation or gave birth to wood elementals. She revealed a more aggressive side during the God War, when she led Ullr’s huscarls in defense of the forests, giving her songs a darker edge. As a reward, she was titled goddess of forests.

Her first act was to cast down all her servants who either abandoned her for the enemy or broke their oaths to defend the forest. Many of these fallen spirits became skogsras and, much later, the first elves.

Statues to Skogr are only ever carved from dead wood. She is shown as a young maiden, with leaves for hair and skin of bark. She wears a wolfskin cloak and carries a long bow. These symbolize both her more aggressive nature and her hatred of predators.

The goddess needs no shrine (even in the temples of her parents) or temples, for she is the trees and woodland creatures. Her cult is strongest among the elves, who have long been tied to the forests, but Skogr does not discriminate—all those who wish to worship her are treated equally. Although her cult is a minor one, all Wood Wardens honor her.

Though often portrayed as guardians who permit no despoiling of forests, Skogr’s clerics have no issues with loggers or hunters who take only what they need. They who would plunder the forest without thought for the

CHILDREN & THE AFTERLIFE

Until a child becomes an adult, which is generally sometime soon after puberty, they cannot take a patron god, being deemed to lack the understanding to make such an important decision. The *Hellfrost Player's Guide* makes it clear all mortals who die without a patron deity are automatically sent to the Hall of Echoing Screams. This applies to adults who refused to honor the gods by picking a patron, not those deemed incapable of honoring a patron.

Children are judged according to Scaetha's law, though only those with the most wicked souls are found guilty of sins. Their souls remain in limbo, haunting the edge of Scaetha's Hall until such time as an ancestor vouches for them. Parents and kinfolk normally pledge support at a child's funeral, beseeching their ancestors to act quickly and claim the child.

future or despoil it out of malice, though, can expect a hostile reception. Both priests and paladins tend the forest. Priests try to resolve disputes with words, whereas paladins favor a more aggressive stance.

All ceremonies involve singing, as does invoking miracles. Aside from the high holy days, clerics need not set aside any special time to honor their goddess—tending the forest and its beasts is a direct act of veneration.

Character Guidelines: Clerics spend a great deal of their lives in forests. Make sure you have a high die in Survival in order to survive without stripping bushes bare or littering the landscape with traps. Since you already have Woodsman, Ranger is a logical Edge when it becomes available. Taking Wood Warden gives you additional benefits.

Herbalism fits the cult very well, but it is not an essential Edge. Similarly, Shooting and/or Throwing are better suited than Fighting, but personal choice always wins out.

SUDRI

Titles: The South Wind, the Breath of Kenaz, Land-Warmer.

Aspects: The south wind.

Affiliations: Kenaz, Thunor.

Symbol: A stylized cloud blowing a stream of fire.

Priesthood: Hearth Winds (priests); Burning Winds (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: The first day of Sceranmonan and last day of Haerfestmonan are high holy days, as is North Wind Day (p. 33).

Duties: To defeat Thrym and his servants.

Sins: (Minor) communicating with a servant of Norðri (except to intimidate, taunt, or threaten), taking shelter in

a blizzard, being defeated by a Hellfrost dragon, blizzard elemental, or servant of Norðri between Sceranmonan and Haerfestmonan; (Major) refusing to fight a Hellfrost dragon, blizzard elemental, or servant of Norðri between Sceranmonan and Haerfestmonan; (Mortal) willfully aiding a servant of Norðri.

Signature Power: *Environmental protection* (cold).

Powers: *Deflection, elemental manipulation* (air and fire only), *fly, beat mask, stun, summon elemental* (air and fire only), *voice on the wind*.

Trappings: Trappings have the effects of both heat and wind.

Suðri is one of the four winds, and a devoted servant of Thunor. Legends claim his bellows were a gift from Kenaz. While Suðri and Norðri never saw eye-to-eye, the gods and their cults have become bitter enemies since the latter defected to Thrym's cause. Each spring, as Vestri begins to work his bellows, Suðri and his rival fight for supremacy, the south wind seeking to drive back winter, and the north wind seeking to extend winter's icy grip as long as possible. Having recovered from his defeat, Norðri returns to the battle again in late fall, exploiting Suðri's fatigue, the south wind god having worked hard all summer.

Although he is worshipped in all temples of Thunor (though primarily in summer), Suðri has two temples devoted solely to his faith. One lies in Orcmark and is now in orc hands. The other is located at the top of Warmward Pass, overlooking the burning sands of Al-Shirkuh, where Sutmarkers believe the south wind originates. As with Thunor's places of worship, neither temple is a true building, but an open space delineated with stones and decorated with flags and windsocks. Shrines typically take the form of windsocks. His common image is that of a dwarf with fiery hair and beard pumping frantically at his great bellows. Rarer images show him as a storm dragon breathing fire.

Both types of clergy are devoted to the destruction of Norðri's cult and his fell blizzard elementals, though they spare other Thrym-related creatures no mercy. Priests focus their activities in the Hearthlands and civilized areas of the Low Winterlands, while paladins focus their attentions further north and in the unclaimed icy wastes where Thrym rules.

Except on North Wind Day, ceremonies are rare outside of summer. Clerics regularly offer prayers and devote slain enemies to their god, but summer is when they conduct most rituals. These involve striping naked (a taunt to Norðri) and dancing wildly in the (relatively speaking) warm air. This is carried out even in the High Winterlands or Hellfrost, the clerics protected from the cold by their faith.

Character Guidelines: With their refusal to shelter from the north wind, clerics need a good Vigor die. Survival is very useful, for they are expected to be abroad in the depth of winter.

Paladins are naturally warriors, and thus require good physical attributes, combat skills, and Combat Edges. While some priests opt to follow a militant path, others

focus on a more investigative life, gathering intelligence to allow the paladins to do their job effectively. Those who walk this road need high Smarts, Investigation, and Streetwise.

SVÁFNIR

Titles: Sleep-Bringer, Little-Death.

Aspects: Sleep (including dreams and nightmares).

Affiliations: Niht, Rigr.

Symbol: Black disc.

Priesthood: Dreamers (priests); Watchers (paladins).

Clerics of Niht who honor Sváfnir only ever refer to themselves as Nightmares.

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Clerics celebrate every Deorcmonan.

Duties: To watch over sleeping communities, to rid the world of Niht's followers.

Sins: (Minor) not sleeping at least eight hours a day, not fighting a cleric of Niht when the opportunity arises; (Major) harming a sleeping creature, not sleeping at least four hours a day; (Mortal) killing a sleeping creature not sleeping at least an hour a day.

Signature Power: *Slumber*.

Powers: *Altered senses, confusion, fatigue, lower trait* (Vigor only; no boost), *nightmare, sentry, sluggish reflexes, stun*.

Trappings: Trappings tend to be soothing words, thrown dust, and so on.

Sváfnir ("Sleep Bringer") Nihtsunu always hated his mother. In his eyes, night was a special time, when mortals freed their minds from the daily grind and dreamt of beauty and wonder. While his mother plotted murder and mayhem under cover of darkness, Sváfnir would sit and gaze at the dreams as they ascended to heaven. Rigr, who sees all that transpires in the universe, approached Sváfnir and offered him the role of watching over sleeping mortals. In return, Rigr granted Sváfnir knowledge of how to alter his senses, so as to be able to see in the dark.

Like some statues of Rigr, Sváfnir is depicted with one eye open and one shut. This represents his dual role as guardian of sleep and watcher over those who slumber. Unlike Rigr, Sváfnir is always shown as a youthful boy.

Shrines to Sváfnir are never found in his mother's temples, and are rare even in temples of Rigr. Watch barracks may have a small statue in his honor, but only those working after dark pay him any attention. A common good charm, especially for children, is to have a disc carved into the bed. This helps ward off evil dreams and ensures a good night's sleep.

While Rigr grants his disciples the ability to stave off sleep, Sváfnir insists his followers enjoy the experience. Because of their role as watchers over the sleeping, the clergy tend to lead nocturnal lives. Both priests and paladins serve communities as watchmen, patrolling the streets and ramparts at night so others may sleep safely. They maintain good relations with the clergy of Hothar and Rigr, both of whom have law-enforcement/protection

aspects. When adventuring, the clergy are most likely to volunteer to take watch during the darkest hours.

Clerics have been known to collect recollections of dreams, recording them to be shared among their comrades. It is widely believed that dreams can involve messages from the gods, portents of the future, and solutions to problems the mortal may be enduring in his short life, though the imagery is almost always cryptic or allegorical. During religious ceremonies clerics retell the dream stories they have collected and discuss the possible meaning. Some have even begun offering advice to mortals based on interpretation of their dreams, though the clergy of Maera scoff at this, claiming their goddess is sole governess of mysteries and portents.

The clergy see Niht's followers as their greatest enemy, for sleeping targets are the preferred prey of assassins. Because of this, they can often be found employed as nocturnal bodyguards to the rich and powerful. Because of this, the clergy are usually on good terms with those of Kvara.

During Deorcmonan, when Niht's power is at its greatest, the clergy bang loud drums, blow horns, and sing protective chants to drive away evil spirits sent by Niht to plague mortal sleepers. The cacophony always stops before the hour gets too late, so as not to disturb those they are supposed to protect.

Despite Sváfnir's loathing of his mother, he cannot escape her influence. Given his powers to create sleep and aid those who work at night, Sváfnir receives occasional worship from Niht's followers. In order to avoid sinning, these dark clerics are never actual assassins, but instead prepare targets to meet a silent death by inducing sleep in sentries. By the ancient laws that bind the gods, Sváfnir cannot refuse to empower those who truly offer him worship, and has not. Because of this, his benevolent clerics sometimes find themselves fighting against those who worship their god.

Character Guidelines: As watchmen, a high Notice skill is advisable. For the same reason, Alertness and Danger Sense are both useful Edges. Because they don't need to remain awake for long periods, Vigor is less important than it is to clerics of Rigr. Combat skills and Edges should not be overlooked, for at heart the faith is a militant one.

SVIDRIR

Titles: Battle-Calmer, the Bloodless Victor, She Who Wins Without Bloodshed.

Aspects: Bloodless Combat.

Affiliations: Eira, the Unknowable One.

Symbol: A broken sword.

Priesthood: Battle-calmers (priests); Sword-breakers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Humility Day (p. 36) and No Healing Day (p. 16) are high holy days.

Duties: To end fights without causing harm.

Sins: (Minor) inflicting non-lethal damage on an

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opponent; (Major) inflicting lethal damage on an opponent; (Mortal) killing an opponent.

Signature Power: *Stun*.

Powers: *Bladebreaker, lower trait* (boost Intimidation only; *lower* Spirit, Strength, Vigor, Fighting, Shooting, and Throwing only), *confusion, entangle, fear, knockdown, slumber*.

Trappings: Clergy may use any trapping except necromantic. Trappings may never inflict lethal damage.

Special: Clerics must have the Pacifist Hindrance. Whether it is the Minor or Major version is personal choice.

Although Eira had learned unarmed combat from Ermunaz (p. 68), she knew no means of defeating opponents or ending conflicts without causing physical injury. Knowing it would incense Tiw, who frequently berated his wife for her refusal to spill blood even in self-defense, the Unknowable One introduced her to his daughter, Sviðrir ("Calmer"), who knew such magic.

Keen to prove her husband's warlike nature as inferior to the ways of peace, she arranged for Tiw to send a squad of armed huscarls against Sviðrir. With a few words and gestures, the goddess defeated every one of Tiw's warriors. As Tiw threw a temper fit and loudly accused his wife of cheating, Eira promoted Sviðrir to the goddess of bloodless combat and welcomed her into her hall.

Sviðrir has no temples, though shrines exist in virtually all temples of Eira. The minor goddess is never depicted in art, for she is present whenever Eira is shown carrying a broken weapon on her belt. Shrines are typically nothing more than a sundered weapon, taken from a defeated foe. Clerics carry broken weapons as holy symbols (halve the weight of an intact weapon).

The role of priests and paladins depends on their patron deity. Those honoring Eira typically work alongside the parent cult, with priests protecting healers and temples, and paladins actively ending serious threats to civilized lands without drawing blood. Those who favor the Unknowable One remain teachers and humblers, using their miracles to teach warriors that violence is not the only way and that even the mightiest hero can be brought low without his foe drawing a weapon.

Although they may not cause harm, many clerics opt to wield a quarterstaff—it can be used to parry blows, trip opponents, and disarms foes. Despite their spells, many clerics prefer to end violence without using any force, especially when their opponents are civilized beings.

While clerics of Eira who also honor Sviðrir still protect defeated foes from harm, those who take the minor goddess as their sole deity or who favor the Unknowable One as patron are under no such compulsion. However, while they see no crime in allowing a defeated monster to be executed, very few would allow a civilized captive to be executed without a trial.

Before praying and meditating, clerics ritually wash their bodies, removing any traces of blood that may tarnish their flesh. Spiritually, such cleansing also helps

removes any sin from the soul. Weapons taken from defeated opponents are ritually broken as sacrifices.

Character Guidelines: Clerics are forbidden from inflicting damage on opponents. This makes Strength a low priority, allowing clergy to focus on other attributes.

Although taking Fighting may seem contradictory, it is essential for a high Parry value and is a requirement for Edges like Block. Although devoted to peace, clerics may use Intimidation to cause foes to back down or surrender. Clerics will get no mileage from many Combat Edges. Defensive and utility Combat Edges should not be overlooked, though.

SYN

Titles: The Door Warden, Denier of Ingress, She Who Controls Access, the Refuser.

Aspects: Doorways.

Affiliations: Rigr, Scaetha.

Symbol: Crossed keys over a round shield.

Priesthood: Door Wardens (priests); Door Guards (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Any day a cleric accepts a commission is a personal holy day.

Duties: To deny entrance to unwelcome or uninvited guests.

Sins: (Minor) refusing to guard a doorway when you are not tired, allowing other door guards on your watch to fall asleep or abandon their posts; (Major) allowing someone or something to pass through a doorway you are guarding without permission, failing to defend a doorway (regardless of odds); (Mortal) deserting your post except when guarding a doorway no longer serves any purpose.

Signature Power: *Barrier*.

Powers: *Armor, aura, deflection, detect/conceal, hamper movement, lock* (no *unlock*), *prolonged blast*.

Trappings: Clergy may use any trapping except necromantic.

The daughter of Forseti and Kvara, Syn earned her position as a minor goddess during the God War. As Kenaz lay dying in his bedchamber from an assassin's blade, Syn joined his door guards. As the God War waged, the enemy broke into Kenaz's hall, intent on slaying the wounded god. For a day and a night, Syn, abandoned by her less courageous comrades, battled wave after wave of enemy soldiers. As dawn rose, she stood alone in a sea of corpses, the doors behind her scratched and hacked, yet still firmly closed.

Syn is held in high regard by the cults of Rigr and Scaetha, for she often serves the latter by watching over the gates to the Abyss when Scaetha is called away from her duty. She has no temples, but is regularly shown in the temples of Rigr and Scaetha, taking the form of a key hanging from the major deity's belt. Her shrines are simple affairs, nothing more than an ordinary wooden shield with two keys fixed to the boss. Doorways protected by her cult are marked with Syn's holy symbol, a

warning to would-be trespassers and a source of inspiration to her clerics.

Clerics fill a niche role. They are not concerned with the welfare of objects or persons behind the door they guard, those duties being the focus of the cult of her parents. Rather, their sole function is to prevent intruders from passing through doorways they have been charged to guard. They are often the last line of defense, the steadfast souls who block a doorway to deny the enemy passage at the cost of their own lives. Because they have no care for what lies beyond the doors they are protecting, and generally lack curiosity about such things, they make ideal guardians for those with secrets to protect. In many instances they do not hold the keys for the doors they guard.

Clerics typically serve nobles, acting as senior door guards, the officials responsible for deciding who gets to see their lord, though any individual or organization can hire one. The main difference is militancy, with paladins serving masters with many enemies and priests working in less troubled households.

Ceremonies are usually simple affairs, taking the form of vows to uphold the terms of their contract and the ideology of the cult. Once a year, clerics are expected to sacrifice a medium shield, a set of wooden keys, and a locking bar by burning them. These offerings go to Syn's armory, strengthening her ability to perform her holy duty.

Character Guidelines: Adventuring clerics are the rearguards of the party, blocking a doorway so their comrades can escape, cast spells, recover from injuries, and so on. Resolute and often facing down greater odds, they need a decent Spirit and Vigor die. Strength is the next most important attribute. Fighting is the primary skill, for it governs Parry. Intimidation can be very useful in both combat and non-combat situations.

When it comes to Edges, Block, Frenzy, Shieldwall, and Sweep are ideal choices. Leadership Edges should not be ignored—Command and Hold the Line both fit the cult's ideology of steadfast defense in the face of great adversity.

THRIMÖR

Titles: He Who Speaks No Truth, Twister of Words, Fabricator of Information.

Aspects: Lies.

Affiliations: The Unknowable One.

Symbol: None. Clerics can use whatever deity's holy symbol they like.

Priesthood: Lords of Falsehood (priests); Swords of Falsehood (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Joker's Day (p. 37), Spoken Word Day (p. 22), and Truth Day (p. 24) are high holy days. Unlike clerics of Hothar, those of Thrimör cannot speak *any* truth on the latter.

Duties: To teach others to seek the truth rather than taking other people's word.

Sins: (Minor) falling for a minor lie, telling the whole truth in a matter of importance, not making a false accusation once per week; (Major) falling for a major lie, not making a false accusation once per month; (Mortal) admitting you lied outright.

Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait* (Smarts, Intimidation, Persuasion).

Powers: *Charismatic aura, mimic, puppet, shape change, speak language.*

Trappings: Any except necromantic. Most clerics favor subtle trappings so their machinations are harder to detect.

Despised by Hothar, and especially by Sanngettall, Thrimör (who name means "Falsehood") is a servant of the Unknowable One. Or at least he claims to be—when one is dealing with the god of lies one can never be entirely sure that everything he says is the truth. Neither Hothar nor his cult have ever openly accused Thrimör or his clergy of being in league with Loki. That would constitute making a false accusation, a sin for servants of the gods of truth, an irony Thrimör and his mortal followers are happy to mock. Theologians are divided on whether he is a child of Loki (p. 116) or the brother of Fjallgeiguör (p. 70).

There are no images of Thrimör in existence. The only way to know what he looked like would be through a vision or dream, and the god of lies is hardly likely to reveal his true form.

No one has ever discovered a shrine or temple dedicated to the god of falsehood, but that is hardly surprising—Thrimör's clergy are notorious for disguising their places of worship to mimic those of other gods. Even if one erected a shrine, he probably wouldn't reveal its location to his peers. Indeed, being a constant liar makes organizing any form of gathering next to impossible.

Clerics of Thrimör don't go around announcing themselves—that is a surefire way to be shunned at best and trussed up like a chicken and dumped on the edge of town at worse. (Worse things can happen to them, but that usually occurs if they're found out after spreading lies).

Public opinion aside, the cult considers its activities as instructive rather than destructive. All too often, people believe what they are told, especially from their superiors, or want to believe, never checking facts for themselves. People have grown lazy, and laziness makes them vulnerable. By spreading lies, the cult hopes others will start actively trying to seek the truth. That's what they claim, anyway. Again, it's hard to know what is the truth and what is lies.

While they occasionally utter an outrageous lie just to see the effect it has and how far the lie will go, most of their fabrications are relatively minor—a left instead of a right, a yes instead of a no. Such small lies can quickly be covered up with "it was an honest mistake," followed by a brief lecture on checking facts for oneself before acting on information.

The cult has no formal ceremonies. Outside of the high holy days, when certain things are expected of cler-

HELLFROST: MATTERS OF FAITH

ics, merely telling a convincingly lie is considered an act of devotion.

Character Guidelines: Clerics who want to lie convincingly to NPCs need a good Persuasion. High Smarts can be essential—part of being a good liar is remembering all the lies you have told. Investigation, Streetwise, and a smattering of Knowledge skills never hurts—clerics are expected to be able to spot a lie told to them.

THUNN

Titles: Lord of Vampires, the Terror Who Stalks the Night, Bleeding One, Mortally Wounded One.

Aspects: Vampires.

Affiliations: Hela.

Symbol: A drop of blood.

Priesthood: Blood Priest (priests); Blood Lord (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Each Deorcmonan.

Duties: To keep Thunn fed with blood.

Sins: (Minor) harming an Extra vampire, using a sword, not drinking blood from a sentient creature once a week; (Major) harming or disobeying a Wild Card vampire, not drinking blood from a sentient creature once a month; (Mortal) slaying a vampire.

Signature Power: *Smite* (affects hands/teeth only).

Powers: *Altered senses, fear, fatigue, obscure, sacrifice, strength of the undead.*

Trappings: Necromantic and darkness only.

Special: Beyond being undead and consumed by fire when exposed to sunlight, there is no such thing as a stereotypical vampire. Their powers and weaknesses vary greatly, seemingly with no fixed pattern. As a result, clerics may add one spell of their choice from the following list to the deity's power list: *charismatic aura, ethereal* (no corporeal), *fly, gift of battle, puppet, regenerate, shape change* (wolf, bat swarm, or rat swarm only), *storm, summon beast* (wolf, bat swarm, or rat swarm only), *wall walker, warrior's gift, water walk, weapon immunity, wilderness step.*

When Hela went insane several of her generals followed her into treachery and damnation. Among them was Thunn. During the titanic struggle at the gates of the Abyss, Sigel scorched Thunn's flesh with his searing light, vowing the traitorous general would never again be able to bask in Sigel's radiance, less the guilt of his sins consume him in fire. Scaetha then scored a grievous blow against the blinded god, slashing his throat from ear to ear. Mortally wounded and badly burned, Thunn staggered off the field of battle.

Hela could not heal his wound, and Eira would not seal the gaping cut. Acting quickly, Hela, still a greater goddess, promoted Thunn to the status of minor god, slowing but not staunching the steady flow of blood. Through her newly gained necromantic powers Hela unleashed dark, vampiric spirits. Each drop of blood they consume flows into Thunn's veins, replacing the

blood he has lost. Knowing this was not enough to sustain her general for long, Hela taught Thunn the secret of vampirism, which he passed on to his followers.

Images of Thunn are found only in the holy texts of Sigel and Scaetha. They show a pale man with black hair and eyes, with a deep gash across his throat from which drip crimson droplets. Often the right side of his body is shown blackened and blistered.

Thunn is unusual for a minor god in that his cult operates temples. Known as Blood Halls, they are dark, stygian places, always located deep underground, where Sigel's burning light cannot reach. Here cultists honor their injured god, regularly offering the blood of sentient beings to vampires so that he might be healed. Vampires, and cultists, drink blood from their victims' neck rather than spilling it on altars, symbolically catching the blood Thunn sheds and replacing it in his body in a continual cycle of death and life.

The cult exists for just one reason—to maintain Thunn's existence through blood drinking. Mortal cultists honor Thunn in the belief that on the death of



their mortal flesh they will be made vampires. While some are indeed honored in this manner, the majority ends up as a sacrifice, dying so their god may live. This is almost as great an honor as being transformed into a vampire. While there are many mortal priests and paladins, vampire cultists form the top tier of the clergy, and are found leading every temple. They add the prefix “High” to their titles to denote their exalted position.

Priests prefer seduction to violence, luring victims into their clutches with soft words and gifts. They also serve as recruiters, tracking down poor souls willing to retain their temporal power at any cost and inducting them into the cult. Paladins prefer the violent approach, attacking their chosen victims and draining them dry in an orgy of bloodletting.

Every Deorcmonan is a holy day. Sacrifices are drained (corpses are usually sold to the nearest temple of Hela in return for a few living cultists, who become the next sacrifice) and curses laid against Scaetha and Sigel for their part in Thunn’s downfall.

Character Guidelines: Thunn’s cultists are most definitely evil to the core. Priests should focus on Persuasion and raising their Charisma so as to be effective seducers. Both sides of the clergy should invest in Stealth, for victims rarely line up to be slaughtered and it is a rare cultist brave enough to commit bloody murder in broad daylight. It is also important for evading capture. Combat Edges are always useful, for the cult is constantly attacked by worshippers of Scaetha and Sigel.

TVÍBLINDI

Titles: The Concealed One, the Sneak, He Who Walks in Shadows.

Aspects: Concealment.

Affiliations: Nauthiz, Niht.

Symbol: None.

Priesthood: Shadow Walkers (priests); Shadow Knights (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Every second day of Deorcmonan of the month.

Duties: Not to be seen.

Sins: (Minor) spotted by a sentry in daylight when trying to be sneaky, being revealed as a cleric of Tvíblindi; (Major) spotted by a sentry in poor lighting when trying to be sneaky; (Mortal) spotted by a sentry at night when trying to be sneaky, discussing the faith with outsiders.

Signature Power: *Invisibility*.

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (boost Stealth & lower Notice only), *detect/conceal* (conceal only), *fog cloud*, *beat mask*, *obscure*, *silence*.

Trappings: Darkness only.

Tvíblindi is the son of Niht and Nauthiz, though not through sexual union. Nauthiz, on the prowl for valuables, snuck into Niht’s great hall under cover of darkness and stole a lock of the goddess’ hair, a toenail clipping, and some of her breath. From this Nauthiz crafted a new god, who he named Tvíblindi (“Twice Blind”). Crafted

from two gods of concealment, Tvíblindi proved a most adept sneak, though Nauthiz was disappointed in his thievery and gambling skills.

The pair quickly set to work robbing the other gods, Tvíblindi providing the concealment and Nauthiz doing the actual thieving. Nauthiz may be a master sneak, but Niht also has dominion over concealment, and the new god could not be kept secret from her for long. Since secrets are her specialty, Niht agreed to keep Tvíblindi’s existence secret from the other gods, so long as Nauthiz allowed him to work for her as well. Niht has kept her word, for no other god has yet to learn of his existence, though Rigr the Watchman has suspicions.

As befits his nature, the god of concealment has no temples, no shrines, and is never depicted in art or writing. Worshippers wear no holy symbol, and clerics are forbidden from discussing the faith with outsiders. To all intents and purposes, there is no cult of Tvíblindi. This makes it very difficult for members to identify each other, but Tvíblindi cares little for mass gatherings of his worshippers.

Tvíblindi is honored by assassins, spies, and those whose occupation requires them to remain unseen. A god of few qualms, he cares little how mortals use his powers, only that they use them well. Traditionally, paladins have tended to be assassins and thieves, those who require both concealment and martial skills to fulfill their occupations. Priests lean toward covert gathering of intelligence, and thus make ideal spies and scouts. Since worship of both Nauthiz and Niht are heavily frowned upon, clerics tend to avoid using their powers in view of those they cannot trust to keep silent.

On the last Endedæg of Fogmonan, the nearest Deorcmonan to Heah Wyntr Daeg, the clergy celebrate the Night of Grasping Hands. Here they pit their skills against the sentries and bodyguards of the rich and famous by attempting to enter their homes and commit some audacious act. Some clerics choose to sneak into the bedchambers of daughters and leave a rose on the pillow of the slumbering maidens. Others try to steal a valuable and well-guarded item, while a small few take the opportunity to eliminate a powerful and well-guarded figure. Failure to complete the task, or refusal to participate, counts as a mortal sin.

Character Guidelines: Being a cleric of Tvíblindi is more a sideline than a full-time occupation. Hence, clerics tend to specialize in skills befitting their more mundane occupation. Assassins, for instance, require good Stealth and combat skills, while a spy also needs high Stealth but likely learns Investigation, Persuasion, Streetwise, and other intelligence gathering talents.

Since clerics generally operate at night and Tvíblindi doesn’t grant powers that boost the senses, clerics should invest in a high Notice skill.

VAFUD

Titles: Trail Finder, Ullr’s Hound, Ullr’s Eye, the Celestial Stalker.

Aspects: Trackers.

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Affiliations: Rigr, Ullr.

Symbol: A trail of footprints.

Priesthood: Blessed Seekers (priests); Blessed Trackers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Sangdaeg of Plohmonan, Hegmonan, and Wulfmonan.

Duties: To serve as trackers, to hunt dangerous monsters and criminals.

Sins: (Minor) losing a trail in adverse conditions, being caught in an ambush you failed to detect; (Major) losing a trail in poor conditions; (Mortal) losing a trail in good conditions.

Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait* (Notice, Survival, and Tracking only).

Powers: *Altered senses, speed, wandering senses, wilderness step.*

Trappings: Vafud's trappings have no specific game mechanics. Many effects are related to animals. For instance, *speed* may cause the target's legs to change to those of a wolf, while *wandering senses* may manifest as a spectral bird of prey.

Vafud is known as Ullr's Hound for good reason. Ullr, while a skilled hunter, was once known for his arrogance. He refused to hunt with others because they were not stealthy enough and couldn't identify tracks. His sole companion was his faithful hound, Vafud ("Wanderer"). Ullr eventually tired of being lonely and asked Eostre if she could grant Vafud the power of speech. The goddess refused, for animals were not intended to talk except in their own language. Niht said she would help, but her price was too high, and Hoenir offered to find a solution but became distracted by new ideas.

Finally the Unknowable One promised to help. Ullr was wary of the Trickster, but he was growing desperate. The gift was not as Vafud intended, of course, for the Unknowable One is never predictable. Instead of granting Vafud the power of speech, he turned him into human form. Ullr had his companion, but he lost his faithful hound in the process. Vafud, however, retained his excellent nose, and Ullr made him the god of trackers.

Vafud needs no temples, for the great wilderness is his home. Shrines tend to be simple affairs, perhaps a tree hung with antlers or skins, or a sacred stone marked with runes drawn in animal blood. In the Unclaimed Lands such shrines are abandoned after a short while, for the tribes move across the snowy wastes and a new shrine is easy enough to consecrate.

Most clerics of Vafud are found among the Finnar, who worship him alongside Ullr almost as a separate deity. Both aspects of the clergy are devoted to tracking. Generally, priests favor tracking game, while paladins hunt dangerous beasts that threaten the herds or community. The clergy are most at home in the wilds, though in civilized lands they can be found operating in cities, using their information gathering skills to track quarry. Some work alongside Hothar's clerics, tracking down fugitives from justice, but most operate as independent bounty hunters or scouts.

Festivals and ceremonies revolve around the hunt. Symbolic items of the creature being tracked, whether man or beast, are sniffed, as if the cleric is picking up the scent, and traditional hunting songs are sung. Some clerics don wolfskin cloaks, dropping to all fours and snarling and growling, for although wolves are often despised in civilized lands, they are undeniably adept trackers.

Character Guidelines: Trackers need a handful of skills in order to be effective. Tracking, naturally, is the core skill for Vafud's clerics, followed by Notice. Notice not only helps you find tracks in the first place, but it is also handy for making sure whatever you are tailing has not set up an ambush for you. Woodsman should be a favored Edge, since it boosts skills vital to a tracker.

Since most clerics work outdoors, Survival should not be ignored. Streetwise can be handy, as it allows the tracker to locate quarry inside settlements, where tracks are quickly obliterated and evidence of one's quarry exists only in the form of eyewitnesses. As trackers are hired to hunt someone or something, and that creature is rarely benevolent Combat skills and Stealth should not be ignored unless you want your quarry to know you're approaching.

VAKR

Titles: Night Prowler, One Who Flies on Silent Wings, Night Hunter.

Aspects: Bats.

Affiliations: Hela, Niht.

Symbol: A bat.

Priesthood: Night Stalkers (priests); Night Hunters (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Every Deorcmonan.

Duties: Assassination and spying.

Sins: (Minor) harming a bat, failing an assassination attempt; (Major) not living a nocturnal lifestyle; (Mortal) killing a bat.

Signature Power: *Summon beast* (bat, giant bat, or bat swarm only).

Powers: *Altered senses, beast friend* (bats only), *boost/lower trait* (Agility, Notice, and Stealth only), *deflection, fly, obscure, shape change*, (bat, giant bat, or bat swarm only), *wandering senses*.

Trappings: All trappings are bat-related. For instance, *deflection* and *obscure* may both take the form of bat swarms, *wandering senses* conjures a spectral bat, and *fly* conjures a pair of batlike wings.

Niht created bats on a whim. Amused by her flying creatures, she displayed them to some of the other gods. Thunor was momentarily curious, but his attention soon diverted back to his feathered birds. Tiw mocked the tiny beasts for lacking strength and for being cowardly, for they flew in great numbers. Rigr was more concerned than impressed, for Niht had made the bats blind, which meant they only flew in circles and often collided with objects. Out of compassion he gave them acute hearing, as was Niht's devious intention all along.

Before Hela's madness bats were regarded as Niht's spies, flitting through the darkness using secret knowledge to avoid obstacles and gathering information heard on the wind. Many stories claim bats ears are so sensitive they can detect thoughts, a reason why citizens never think secret thoughts when a bat is close by.

After her self-imposed exile, Hela approached Niht and proposed an exchange of magic. Lured by the new magic of necromancy, of which she knew nothing, Niht agreed. In exchange, Hela gained some dominion over bats. Under her influence they transformed from nocturnal spies to nocturnal hunters.

Vakr began as one of Niht's spies, one bat among the vast swarm that roosted in the shadowed eaves of Niht's stygian hall. Fed on flesh and blood, Vakr rapidly grew to become a monstrous abomination of great and cunning intelligence. So large is the winged hunter that Hela uses it as a mount, riding through the dark recesses of the heavens. Hela gave the Liche-Priest her new secret, which the wizened corpse lord used to breed a swarm of giant bats. Today, good folk both fear and despise bats, seeing them as the Liche-Priest's spies.

Vakr has no temples and very few shrines. Worshipers gather in bat-infested caves to worship, adding their screeches to those of the resident swarm when the sun sets and Niht takes over the heavens. Niht's worshippers offer mundane bats sacrifices of insects, whereas those of Hela feed them on flesh strips flayed from sentient victims. The bat god is sometimes shown in religious art, but never as a major figure. Typically he is shown as a common bat, flitting around Hela or Niht.

Priests serve as spies and information gatherers, using their keen senses and stealthy abilities to remain unseen. Paladins are typically assassins, flitting in through open windows, striking quickly and silently, and stealthily disappearing into the night.

Character Guidelines: Notice and Stealth are the clergy's greatest assets, regardless of whether they are spy or killer-for-hire. Investigation, Persuasion, and Streetwise are favored by priests, as are Edges such as Alertness and Investigator. Paladins should consider Edges which allow for quick kill, for if a target manages to sound an alarm the assassin may find himself outnumbered by guards.

VEGTAM

Titles: The Master Mariner, Boatman of the Gods, Tiw's Navigator.

Aspects: Sailors and marines.

Affiliations: Neorthe, Tiw.

Symbol: A ship prow carved to resemble a sea dragon's head.

Priesthood: Master Mariners (priests); Master Marines (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Last Waesdaeg of each month.

Duties: Steer and protect ships.

Sins: (Minor) using another form of transportation if

a ship is available, getting lost at sea, condoning piracy against any ship; (Major) committing piracy against any ship; (Mortal) a ship you are on is sunk.

Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait* (Strength, Vigor, Boating, Climbing only)*

Powers: *Environmental protection* (water only), *gift of battle**, *mend* (ships only), *warrior's gift**, *zephyr**.

Trappings: Air and water only.

Special: Spells marked "*" only provide benefits while on a ship. If the target steps on land, the spell's benefit is lost, though the spell remains Maintained.

Vegtam was at first Neorthe's navigator, guiding the sea god's ship through the heavenly waters. He knew all the secrets and dangers of the great celestial sea, but, like all mariners, was at the mercy of Thunor's winds. Vegtam stole the secret of making wind from Thunor, so earning the storm god's eternal enmity. It is for this reason storms are common at sea. Worshipers of Vegtam and Thunor rarely see eye-to-eye, though violence between the cults is rare.

During the God War, Vegtam ferried Tiw and his army back and forth across the heavens. On one trip the enemy attacked, boarding Vegtam's ship in great numbers. Though no warrior, Vegtam stood his ground beside Tiw and helped drive the boarders back. As thanks, Tiw taught Vegtam secret fighting techniques for use at sea, so granting the navigator joint patronage of marines.

Vegtam has no temples. Shrines are found in all temples to Neorthe and in coastal temples to Tiw. Here navigators, sailors, and marines give praise before embarking on a trip. Marines and navigators looking for employment wait outside the temples in the hope of securing a position on a ship. Although the cult is small, the clergy are specialists and competition for places is fierce, for only rarely will a captain hire more than one priest or paladin for each voyage.

Vegtam is depicted as a male with a neatly trimmed beard. In his right hand he holds a star compass, while in his left is clutched a sword, thus honoring the fact he was a navigator before a marine. Ships seeking Vegtam's protection often paint their sails with the god's holy symbol or carve their prow into a storm dragon head.

Like Neorthe's clergy, they serve as navigators and marines respectively. They are awarded higher titles due to their focus, but their miracles are of limited scope. However, while Neorthe's paladins may serve in an offensive capacity, Vegtam's holy warriors are a purely defensive force—their god forbids them to conduct any raids against ships, even if the enemy is orcs or other despoilers.

While worshippers give praise before and after setting sail, all true ceremonies are conducted aboard ships—ones berthed in harbor are still acceptable ceremonial grounds. Cultists make offerings of blood (usually birds) except in Werremonan, when armor and weapons are blessed and tossed overboard. These weapons are used to equip Vegtam's celestial marines, while the blood offerings sate Neorthe.

Character Guidelines: As seafarers, Boating is a

CATS

Modern domestic cats in Rassilon are nearly all variants of the skogkatt (forest cat) breed, a species well adapted to the cold. Males weigh around 20 pounds, and females half that. They have a double-layered coat and bushy tail to help stave off the cold, their fur is waterproof, and their back legs are longer than their forelimbs. Coloration varies considerably. Hunting cats (see *Hellfrost Bestiary*), a much larger but distantly related species, are similar to European lynxes.

It is important to note that the idea of keeping a cat purely as a pet is an unknown concept in Rassilon. Cats are kept around the house as mousers and ratters, and have to earn their keep. Only half-domesticated, these vicious cats are also quite adept at catching rabbits, and even polecats and weasels (which kill chickens, ducks, geese, and other fowl).

cleric's most important skill. Priests need a good understanding of the oceans, the winds, and the currents, and so need an appropriate Knowledge (Area) skill.

Marines should invest in Steady Hands as soon as possible to offset the penalties for being on an unstable deck. As commander of the marines, Leadership Edges are a must. Both clergy are usually smart, strong, and fit, for life at sea is hazardous.

Swimming is not a required skill, but marines typically fight in armor—those who want at least a fighting chance of survival in the ocean should invest in the skill.

VETH

Titles: Grain Watcher, Rat Catcher, the Great Mouser.

Aspects: Protecting granaries from vermin.

Affiliations: Eostre (both aspects), Rigr.

Symbol: A cat's paw grasping a bushel of grain.

Priesthood: Mousers (priests); Ratters (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: The day before harvest is a high holy day. Other holy days are held every other Endedaeg throughout the winter months.

Duties: To protect granaries from vermin.

Sins: (Minor) not owning a mouser or ratter for more than a week, harming or mistreating a mouser or ratter, not reporting a follower of Vali to the authorities at the first opportunity; (Major) letting a rat or mouse live, using poison; (Mortal) allowing mice or rats to destroy a granary, sparing the life of a cleric of Vali.

Signature Power: *Beast friend* (cats and ratting dogs only).

Powers: *Altered senses* (low light vision only), *boost/lower trait* (Notice and Vigor only), *detect* (mice and rats only; no *conceal*), *fear* (only affects mice and rats), *mend* (only affects granaries, seals mice and rat holes in one building), *shape change* (cat or ratting dog only),

summon beast (cats and ratting dogs only), *warding* (mice and rats only)

Trappings: Trappings are related to cats and ratting dogs. For instance, *beast friend* may cause the cleric to meow or yap to summon the animal, whereas *fear* might create an illusory giant mouser.

Veth, a daughter of Rigr, serves Eostre Plantmother by watching over her granary and keeping it free of vermin. She is always accompanied by her giant ginger tomcat, Fengr ("Catcher"), whom she raised since it was a kitten. Common belief is that all ginger cats are descendants of Fengr, and thus expert mousers. According to myth, Veth is a young girl, perhaps equivalent to 12 summers in human terms, and is something of a wild child, preferring the company of her cat to the other gods. Her hair is unkempt, her clothes caked in filth, and around her neck she wears a rat skull necklace.

Veth is always shown as a wild-haired girl holding a dead rat in her left hand. Some depictions show her holding a long stick over her shoulder, from which hang several rats, but these are typically found only in cities and big towns. Fengr is normally intertwined around her legs, with a rat hanging from his mouth.

Shrines as unique places of worship are extremely rare, for virtually all worship of Veth is done through Eostre (in either aspect). In rural communities, prayers are offered to her only after harvest, when the crops are stored in the granaries. In towns, cities, and ports, where rats are more commonplace, the Guild of Rat Catchers honors her all year round. Crude copies of her holy symbol are etched onto granary doors, both as a sign that the mortal desires the attention of Fengr the celestial ratter, and in an attempt to scare away vermin. The skulls of vermin are strategically placed around granaries, bakeries, and similar areas as a further deterrent.

Clerics of Veth serve both rural and urban communities, for where there are people, there are mice and rats. Traditionally priests deal with mice and paladins with the more vicious rats. As a result, urban priests are often called out to the homes of the well-to-do to deal with infestations, as they are slightly better mannered and attired. Paladins scour the streets, and in Anari-built cities, the sewers for rats. It's a lowly profession, and paladins of Veth make no attempts at airs and graces—their job is to catch rats, and that's dirty work.

Clerics disdain the use of poison, partly because there is always a risk an innocent animal will consume it, and partly because poison is the tool of Vali, and one never fights fire with fire. Needless to say, the clergy consider Vali's followers to be among the most evil of creatures, and no love is lost between the two faiths. Even being suspected of worshipping Vali is cause for a severe beating by the zealous, smelly clergy.

The major festival of the faith falls on the day before harvesting. In urban areas this is pegged in the calendar as the first Endedaeg of Haerfestmonan, but in rural settlements it is held when the harvest actually commences. Citizens across Rassilon call this festival Rattdaeg. Clerics of Eostre and Veth dress up as cats and ratting dogs, while

children are costumed as mice and rats. Some communities have elaborate costumes, but most make do with colored jumpers and hats to which wool or felt ears are attached. Amid much squealing, hissing, and barking, the clergy chase the children through the streets, symbolically driving away the local vermin. After dark, the clergy take to the streets in search of real vermin before harvesting begins in the morning.

Character Guidelines: As vermin catchers, clerics need a good Notice to detect sneaky rodents, Vigor to keep long watches and stave off infection from bites, and Fighting to deal with infestations. Tracking is useful if he wants to be able to follow the vermin back to their lair.

Beast Master grants the cleric a vicious cat or dog, and if he is also a cleric of Eostre Animalmother it is a Wild Card Sidekick. Against mundane rats, as opposed to those controlled by a cleric of Vali, the Edge also prevents the cleric from being bitten by the vermin he hunts.

VIÐARR

Titles: Keeper of the Black Gate, Demonbane, Watcher of the Abyss.

Aspects: Destruction of demons.

Affiliations: The Norns, Scaetha.

Symbol: A key.

Priesthood: Shadow Seekers (priests); Gatekeepers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Second Endedaeg of Wulfmonan.

Duties: To rid the world of demons and their followers.

Sins: (Minor) refusing to destroy an Extra demon or one of its mortal followers, engaging in conversation with a demon (except to Intimidate or Taunt it); (Major) refusing to destroy a Wild Card demon or one of its mortal followers, unknowingly aiding a demon or one of its mortal servant; (Mortal) knowingly aiding a demon or one of their mortal servants.

Signature Power: *Warding* (demons only).

Powers: *Arcane resistance, banish, boost/lower trait* (Spirit and Fighting only), *burst, champion of the faith, detect* (demons only; no *conceal*), *light, smite*.

Trappings: Any except darkness and necromantic. Fire and light are most popular.

Special: Clerics of Scaetha already have Viðarr's sins on their list. Remove all reference to demons from Scaetha's sins, as this rule takes priority. Characters who honor both gods treat Viðarr's minor sins as major and his major ones as mortal. If the cleric commits a mortal sin from Viðarr's list, his penance must be extremely difficult and require earning a *minimum* of 20 XP purely from adventures directly related to his atonement quest (no side adventures or interludes count toward this total).

The Norns were the first divine beings, coming into existence at the same time as the universe. They wove the skeins of the gods that would follow them into existence, and the mortals who would follow the gods. The weird sisters believed they had everything neatly tied up

and interwoven on their loom, and the universe seemed an orderly place.

When they discovered demons, creatures of darkness and chaos whose fate they could not weave, they were horrified and declared them anathema, to be hunted down and eradicated. A great and terrible war was fought, but the gods only succeeded in imprisoning the demons not destroying them.

During the Demongate War, Viðarr, a general who was instrumental in leading the gods' armies during their war with the demons and now a loyal lieutenant of Scaetha, was summoned by the Norns and charged with ensuring the demons did not overrun the mortal realm.

Whether he would be victorious or not the Norns could not say. For the demons, which were formed before the Norns, did not register in their great tapestry. Elevated to the position of a minor god, Viðarr charged those who chose to follow him with the destruction of all demons.

When the Demongate Wars ended, the forces of good tried to destroy the great black key which controlled the portal. Although the key could not be destroyed, clerics and paladins did manage to shatter it into a hundred pieces. The fragments were then scattered throughout the lands, placed beyond the reach of the demon lords. The Demongate was moved to a secret fortress deep inside a mountain, where it would be protected by powerful wards and an order of knights—the Watchers of the Black Gate (sometimes known as Gatekeepers). Most Gatekeepers are mundane warriors, but the core is made up of clerics of Viðarr.

Only one shrine to Viðarr exists, and that is located in the same refuge as the Demongate. When prayers must be offered, Scaetha's temples are the preferred location. Viðarr is shown as a mighty warrior clad in radiant chain mail and brandishing a barbed star metal long spear.

Although all clerics are expected to fight demons, priests specialize in investigation work, rooting out demonic cults and demon-related relics, and tracking members of the Seekers of the Black Key. That their name is similar to that of their enemy is no coincidence, for to complete their duties they must walk in the shadows where sane men fear to tread.

Paladins are more focused on destruction of anything touched by demons. Once given a tip-off by their priestly brethren, they spare no effort and show no mercy in eradicating the source of evil. While the priests haunt musty libraries and explore ancient ruins for clues, the paladins ride the land, ever vigilant for signs of demonic infestation.

The only holy day the order recognizes is the second Endedaeg of Wulfmonan, known as the Night of Dead Shadows. This marks the day the Demongate War ended. It is also a ceremony Scaetha's clergy mark. During the day before, lay members in settlements across the land work to create full-size wooden replicas of the Demongate.

As Sigel's Hearth begins to set, citizens gather around the mockup. No light is permitted during the festival,

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except what Maera cares to shed. When the last rays of the sun disappear below the horizon, demons (actors clad completely in black and wearing scary masks) leap through the gate and “attack” the worshippers, robbing them of their valuables (which are offerings to Scaetha). The demons offer sweets and cakes to children, whose greedy hands are hastily swatted down by parents who sternly warn of the dangers of trafficking with the dark powers. The children’s inevitable wailing at being denied candy only adds to the atmosphere.

Throughout the year those same children have been building model houses, which the demons now crush beneath their feet. Gingerbread men stuffed with red fruit jam are devoured limb-by-limb by the hungry demons, leaving their mouths smeared dark red. This symbolic destruction of property and people recalls the terrible devastation wrought during the Demongate War.

An hour before dawn, clerics of Viðarr and Scaetha accompanied by members of the laity appear on the edge of town brandishing torches and wearing armor painted brilliant white. For the next hour they fight the demons, slowly driving them back through the gate. When the last one is vanquished, which coincides with the rising of the sun, the clerics ignite the wooden Demongate, symbolically ridding the world of demons.

Character Guidelines: Viðarr’s clerics must face terrible and unearthly foes with many and varied powers. Spirit and Vigor are vital to surviving many demons’ arcane and natural attacks. Favored Foe (Demons) is a vital Edge for those seeking to destroy the forces of evil.

Priests should invest in Investigation and Streetwise to help in their studies, while paladins should ensure their combat skills and Edges are not found wanting. Champion and Holy Warrior, while very useful to most paladins, are vital for Viðarr’s followers, since their major foes are most definitely supernatural evil creatures.

VÖR

Titles: The Cautious One, He Who Thinks Before He Acts, He Who is Always Prepared, Enemy of Rashness, the Thoughtful One.

Aspects: Caution.

Affiliations: Hoenir, Nauthiz.

Symbol: A raised hand, palm forward, with an eye in the center.

Priesthood: Planners (priests); Tacticians (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Any day a cleric successfully persuades someone to act with caution and is proven right is a personal holy day.

Duties: To teach caution over reckless behavior.

Sins: (Minor) acting rashly, making an arbitrary judgment, not counseling a cautious approach to any situation; (Major) getting someone injured because you acted rashly or failed to urge caution; (Mortal) getting someone killed because you acted rashly or failed to urge caution.

Signature Power: *Detect/conceal*.

Powers: *Altered senses, analyze foe, boost/lower trait* (Spirit, Vigor, Notice, and Stealth), *insight, sentry, silence, wandering senses*.

Trappings: Clerics have no wish to draw attention to themselves, and thus never use showy trappings.

Special: Clerics must take the Cautious Hindrance.

Vör (“Careful One”) is the twin brother of Hrist. Unlike his sibling, Vör is not a coward—he is a prudent believer that discretion is the better part of valor and that only those who wish to die act before they think. During the God War, Vör frequently argued with Tiw, who always favored a headlong charge. Tiw, as usual, proposed a duel. Although no warrior, Vör dodged Tiw’s initial blow and struck a winning blow. The minor deity then explained that Tiw always opened his attacks in the same manner, something his enemy’s would exploit sooner or later. Tiw never learned to curb his rashness, but he did learn to be more diverse.

Images of Vör can appeal comical to outsiders. Typically depicted as human, he carries a great quantity of equipment so as never to be caught needing some vital tool. The cult does not bother with shrines or temples—its places of worship are wherever there is need of their advice.

Vör’s clergy are often labeled as coward for their perceived unwillingness to act. This is a gross injustice—clerics are prepared to take on any danger, so long as they feel they are adequately prepared and have all the facts. Priests often serve as advisors, counseling their patrons against rash actions that might have unforeseen consequences. The cult of Var sometimes hire them, for they know they can be too keen to leap at what seems like a bargain.

Paladins accompany military commanders and adventuring parties, for whom they offer plans for every imaginable contingency so as to prevent anything unforeseen occurring. Paladins can become very tiresome, insisting that anyone climbing uses multiple safety lines, a scout checks frequently for traps, and such like. In modern parlance, they are health and safety officials gone mad.

Ceremonies are very much private affairs. Clerics spend their time researching their next endeavor and planning ahead. Some keep their plans in their heads, while others prefer to keep detailed notebooks of contingencies they can refer to at a moment’s notice. These tomes are usually referred to as “manuals.”

Character Guidelines: A cleric’s choice of Traits and Edges depends on his role, rather than any fire cult dictates. Those who will be offering wisdom to nobles should invest in Persuasion, while those counselling military commanders should take Knowledge (Battle). Indeed, Knowledge skills in general will prove useful, as will Investigation and Streetwise—the better prepared one is, the less chance of having a mishap.

Level Headed may seem like an odd choice for a character who thrives on caution. The Edges gives you a better chance of drawing a high card, letting you go on Hold to assess the situation, or, so long as you have a plan formulated, change your tactics to suit an ever-changing situation.

INHUMAN GODS



This chapter is for the GM only!

While many monstrous races (most notably giants, goblins, and orcs) worship the greater gods, favoring the dark deities such as Dargar, Niht, Thrym, and Vali, several species have their own gods. Rarely studied, yet alone worshipped, by sane members of the civilized races, these gods are ancient and alien. They are greater in power than the minor deities, but not as powerful as the major gods. This chapter provides expanded information on inhuman deities previously mentioned only in passing.

By introducing these monstrous gods in the same manner as the other deities, GMs have a new toolbox at their disposal. Through the expanded spell list he can now alter the powers available to NPC clerics and shamans, thus ensuring the heroes second-guess their opponents' spells at their peril. The descriptive text also helps explain why the worshipping race acts the way it does, and gives the GM material to use in adventures.

Disciple Edges: Each deity also has a Disciple Edge, allowing the GM to create more powerful priests. Note that the Disciple Edges do not have any requirements—these abilities are never granted to worshippers outside of the race the god represents, and NPCs don't need to meet the requirements for Edges.

Player Characters: These deities were not designed to be worshipped by player characters, thus they have no duties or sins listed. GMs who allow their heroes to honor these vile or alien deities should create appropriate lists as they see fit.

BALOR

Titles: The Evil Eye, the Baleful Eye, the Burning Eye, Father of Giants, the Enemy of Man, the All-Seeing Eye.

Aspects: Cliff giants, formorian giants, fear, evil, suffering.

Symbol: Red disc or circle.

Priesthood: Watchful Eyes (priests); Baleful Eyes (paladins).

Herald: A malformed cliff giant with a single red eye in the center of its forehead.

Holy Days: Any night the moon is red.

Signature Power: *Fear*.

Powers: *Altered senses, analyze foe, arcane resistance, battle song, bladebreaker, blast, bolt, boost/lower trait, confusion, detect/conceal, farsight, growth/shrink, nightmare, panic (no bless), prolonged blast, sacrifice, sanctuary, smite, summon herald, wandering senses, warrior's gift.*

Trappings: Coldfire, fire, or heat.

Disciple Edge: Disciples' *bolt* spells have Range 15/30/60, are AP 2, and count as Heavy Weapons.

Balor was born hideously deformed. In the middle of his forehead is a single eye, a monstrous bloodshot orb whose gaze scorched all it fell upon. Directly opposite, in the back of his head, is another eye, this one of normal appearance. Mocked and shunned for his ghastly visage, and feared for his deadly gaze, Balor grew bitter and twisted, withdrawing from the other gods and hatching his own schemes.

The gods' first humanoid creations were, it is said, the giants. Storm giants took form as Thunor hammered thunder and lightning into living guise. Frost giant were carved from blocks of ice and given life by Thrym. Ertha took clumps of earth, molded them into form, and gave them life as forest giants. Kenaz crafted hot coals to create the fire giants. Neorthe shaped the sea giants, and even Vali created marsh giants from the primordial slime of his dank home. Balor sought to emulate his peers.

The god carved his giants from stone, yet he lacked both the patience and artistry to work it properly. His creations were monsters, short of stature, and possessed of dull intellect and cruel nature, for Balor's soul was as hideous as his face. Yet they were incredibly strong, for Balor had instilled in them his unbridled rage. He called his children mountain giants, though others would later label them cliff giants.

Instead of congratulating him as he had hoped, the other gods cast him out from Godsheim, for not only had

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he created life without their consent, but the gods had long ago began to favor men, lesser in stature, yet greater in ambition and potential. Angered, Balor swore that he would destroy the races the gods loved so much through his creations. Thus he became the enemy of all races.

Shrines and temples are common among both cliff and formorian giants, for he is seen as the father of their race. Neither species of giant is well-known for its art. When Balor is depicted, it is as a simple red disc or circle, symbolic of his fearsome orb. Some giants sport this emblem on their armor and shields, as well as tattooing it on their flesh using a mixture of ground bone and blood from captured humans.

Despite hating men, he allows them to worship him, if only to spite his former peers. Priests, regardless of race, act as advisors to giant chieftains, passing on Balor's omens and counseling them as to the best way to appease their god. His paladins act as war leaders, commanding armies of giants and orcs.

Ceremonies honoring Balor was cruel and barbaric. Prisoners have one eye gouged out and thus other forced through their skull until it protrudes from the back of their head. Their flesh is then eaten, their bones ground to make flour to feed their orc minions.

CARCHARAS

Titles: The Great Shark, Scourge of the Ocean, the Devourer, Deep Hunter.

Aspects: Sharks, kreana, bloodshed, destruction, gluttony, fear.

Symbol: A shark's tooth.

Priesthood: Carcharas has both priests and paladins.

Herald: No true herald. Carcharas is rumored to have an avatar (the adventure *The Blood Tide* in *Hellfrost Adventure Compendium 3* for details of the avatar and the reason why kreana hate air breathers).

Holy Days: Celebrations are held to coincide with fish migrations, and before and after raids.

Signature Power: *Smite* (bite only).

Powers: *Altered senses, analyze foe, armor, beast friend* (sharks only), *bless/panic, bolt, boost/lower trait* (Fighting, Notice, and Swimming only), *champion of the faith, environmental protection* (water only), *fatigue, fear, growth/shrink, healing, sacrifice, sanctuary, shape change* (sharks only), *speed, sphere of might, stun, summon herald* (Carcharas sends a megalodon to answer the call).

Trappings: All trappings relate to sharks (such as shark's teeth for bolt) or water (for stun).

Disciple Edge: Carcharas grants his kreana disciples enlarged teeth and the ability to chew throw armor. Their teeth inflict Strength+d6 damage, AP 2. By spending a benny, their teeth count as Heavy Weapons for one round.

Carcharas is the sole god of the kreana. Like many inhuman gods, Carcharas has no place within the pantheon except as an enemy. In this case, he is the eternal foe of Neorthe. Myths claim that when Neorthe first created sharks, one particular specimen quickly developed

into a voracious hunter. Everything and anything in his path was fair prey, and he rapidly grew to monstrous size. By the time Neorthe realized what was happening, the shark was large enough to challenge even a god.

The two deities fought on and off for eons before Neorthe finally got the upper hand. Using his magical trident, he slashed Carcharas once on each side of the head, stunning the monstrous fish. Lacking the power to slay the beast, Neorthe imprisoned him in a deep, dark watery realm from which he could not escape. Even today, all sharks carry the scars of Neorthe as a reminder that Neorthe is the true power beneath the waves.

Kreana do not draw images or carve idols of their god. As every kreana community is ruled by a priest, every settlement has a temple. These vary immensely in size and style, but are always located at the heart of the community. Atop the altar of each temple sits a shark's jaw, its mouth gaping wide and ready to accept sacrifices. Gold and jewelry plundered from air breathers, corals and shells, and living sacrifices are fed into the mouth in symbolic sacrifice. Treasures are then stored away, while sacrificial victims are devoured. As well as kreana guards and traps, many temples are patrolled by sharks.

Priests are the leaders of the community, holding both spiritual and temporal power. Priests jockey for position not based on brute strength or ability to lead, but by instilling fear in rivals. This subservience through fear also keeps juniors in line once the pecking order is established. More importantly, juniors rarely gang up on a superior in a Machiavellian plot—anyone who suggests such a plot has openly demonstrated fear and thus is likely to sink further down the social ladder as his rivals turn on him.

This same fear governs relationships with other kreana communities. Clans form tribes not because of shared bloodlines, but because the most senior clan has tyrannized the others into obedience. When two tribes cannot dominate each other into submission, civil war breaks out. The loss of a few hundreds, maybe a few thousand worshippers, doesn't bother Carcharas—survival of the fittest most definitely applies to the kreana.

But with power comes responsibility. Any setbacks the settlement suffers are laid at the feet of the highest-ranking priest. Too many failures and Carcharas may demand the priest be sacrificed and a replacement installed. The god never sends visions to prompt this action—a rival will eventually summon the courage to take matters into his own hands. Kreana priest tend to be power hungry, for high position brings great personal wealth and enhanced breeding possibilities, but their lust is tempered by the inevitable fate that awaits those who fail the predatory deity.

Paladins, while clerics, never govern a community. They serve as elite warriors, temple guardians, bodyguards, champions, and military commanders. Their power is considered martial, not political or bureaucratic. That said, since paladins often lead raids ordered by the high priest, they literally hold his life in their hands—a deliberately failed mission may spell doom for the priest,

not the paladin. To counter this, priests often publicly decree a fitting fate for paladins who fail them—even if the priest is sentenced to die, he will drag the paladin to hell with him.

Regardless of status or position, all paladins are subservient to priests, though it is a brave junior priest who dares enrage a more senior paladin, for Carcharas cares little if his clergy kill each other.

Kreana rituals revolve around the sacrifice of air breathers and treasure. A lot of blood is spilled during the fell rites, which drives the kreana into a frenzy. Wildly gnashing jaws and slashing claws make attendance a dangerous proposition, but there is no alternative—failure to attend a ceremony is a death sentence.

GLAPSVIÖR

Titles: The Ancient One, Lord of Insanity, the Maddener, the One Who Unveils the Truth.

Aspects: Fear, madness, insanity.

Symbol: A knot with no beginning or end.

Priesthood: Priests and paladins are not differentiated, and thus one may take both the Champion and Holy Warrior Edges.

Herald: Glapsviör's heralds are an unholy abomination. They take the basic form of chaos demons and come with their Traits and powers (except Smarts is not animal level), but also have the Demoralizing Gaze, Fear, and Fear Drinker abilities of fear demons and the Madness ability of madness demons. The latter ability is a free action, usable once per round.

Holy Days: None.

Signature Power: *Fear*.

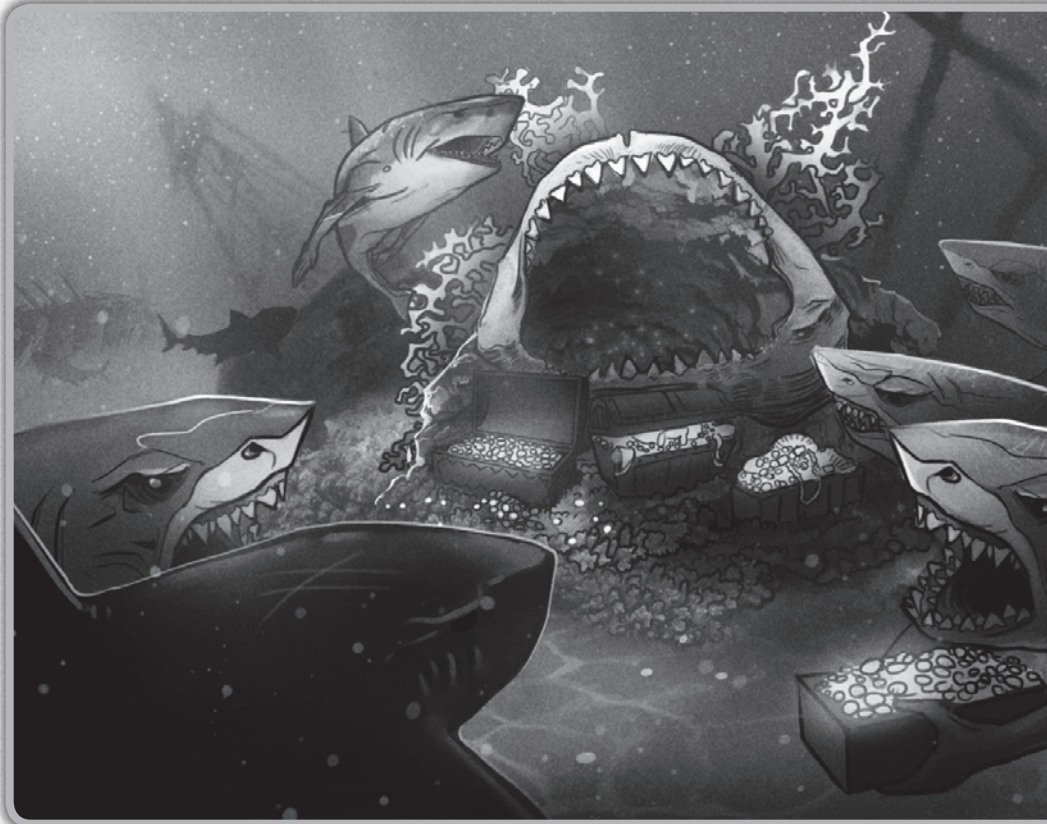
Powers: *Battle song, confusion, deflection, lower trait* (Smarts and Spirit only; no boost), *nightmare, summon demon* (chaos, fear, and madness only), *summon herald*.

Trappings: Trappings take the form of horrifying images or visual distortions rather than physical manifestations.

Disciple Edge: Glapsviör's disciples are completely insane. They are immune to Fear and Tests of Wills.

Glapsviör predates the existence of the deities worshipped by mortals today. Although ancient beyond imagination, he was not the first primordial, for he was born of Null (p. 118), who ruled the Void. Incapable of comprehending the absolute nothingness that was reality, he instantly went insane. He floated through the Void in an age before Time, cackling insanely at nothing, for nothing was all that existed.

When the gods created the current universe, bringing



light unto the darkness and matter unto the emptiness, an act that imprisoned his mother, he became their mortal enemy. Loki (p. 116) was sired from his shapeless form, and it was Glapsviör who whispered into Dargar's ear, transforming him into a psychotic killer. Eira tried to cure him of his malady, but his madness was beyond her comprehension. Hoenir and Niht both tried to learn what drove him insane, but they could not grasp the nothingness that came before and thus remained ignorant (and sane).

Fearful he would plunge the fledgling universe into insanity, the gods fought against Glapsviör, so (some gods believe) bringing about the God War. A being of immense power, he was responsible for the death of hundred of deities and the inadvertent creation of the 24 major gods. In the end the gods were victorious, and Glapsviör was banished from the universe.

Among mortals he exists only as the name Forni, a rather unhelpful title that translates as Ancient One, an epitaph that reveals nothing of his aspects or nature. He was given this title by the gods, for to speak his true name is to invite insanity and empower him. Unfortunately, the vagueness of the title has given some mortals the belief he is the creator of the universe and father of the gods.

Few mortals know of Glapsviör's existence. None can worship him unless they are insane, for only when one has been touched by madness does the god reveal his existence and bestow powers. He offers mortals nothing, and acts only that they spread fear and madness. His cult,

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such as it is, has no long-term goals—his and their madness precludes such lofty ideals.

His cult has no set rituals. Worshipers may honor their insane god in any way they choose. As befits their nature, most of their acts of worship are beyond the reasoning of sane men, and even followers of Dargar have been known to recoil in horror.

K'KROAKAA

Titles: The Bloated One.

Aspects: Bufomi, amphibians, gluttony.

Symbol: A toad.

Priesthood: Priests and paladins are not differentiated, and thus one may take both the Champion and Holy Warrior Edges.

Herald: None. When called to send a herald, K'kroakaa sends a giant toad.

Holy Days: Bufomi hold major festivals on Heah Sumor Daeg and High Wyntr Daeg. Minor ceremonies are held as often as the highest-ranking shaman demands.

Signature Power: *Leaping*.

Powers: *Beast friend* (amphibians only), *blast*, *boost/lower trait* (Stealth and Swimming only), *champion of the faith*, *entangle*, *environmental protection* (water only), *growth/shrink*, *knockdown*, *prolonged blast*, *sanctuary*, *shape change* (amphibians only), *stun*, *summon herald* (a giant toad), *wall walker*.

Trappings: Trappings all relate to toads. *Knockdown* may be a powerful croak, *entangle* could be sticky tongues, and *blast* a swarm of flesh-eating toads.

Disciple Edge: K'kroakaa's disciples can unfurl their tongue to Reach 2. This allows them to initiate grapples at range or deliver a sting slap for Strength damage.

K'kroakaa is an ancient god by human standards, having been worshipped by the bufomi since before the gatormen and lizardmen ruled much of the northern continent. A bloated monstrosity, the deity has devoured so many sacrifices it can no longer move. Instead, it sits motionless in its dank lair, its immense maw gaping wide to accept whatever offerings its followers deign fit to throw its way.

K'kroakaa appears in no civilized race's mythology, though gatormen tell how in his greed he once swallowed the sun, plunging the world into total darkness but badly burning himself in the process. For this reason, amphibians need to regularly bathe their skin to avoid drying out.

For all their other failings as a race, the bufomi are deeply spiritual, in their peculiar, barbaric way. Communities exist to serve the local temple rather than the other way round, and thus wherever the bufomi have set up home there is always a place of worship.

Serving as the altar is an effigy of a giant toad with its mouth open. In many temples offerings are shoved into the maw and out through the toad's back. The symbolic sacrifice over, the bufomi dine on the carcass while the highest-ranking shaman takes the treasure. In a rare few others, the sacrifices fall through a hole in the base of

the statue into a subterranean chamber. Giant toads are housed below the temple, and they dine on the still screaming victims.

Based on speculation that the gatormen once held great power but fell into barbarity, many scholars assume the bufomi met a similar fate. In truth bufomi have always been a lesser race culturally and technologically—even the gatormen didn't bother to enslave them. This primitive state affects even their faith. Although bufomi worship a god, it is not K'kroakaa who gives shamans (as clerics are called) their supernatural powers. Rather, shamans tap into the magical threads that surround amphibians. Despite using Faith to call forth powers and suffering Backlash as clerics, they are more akin to mages than true clerics.

Since only shamans have supernatural powers, the bufomi take this as a sign that only they are fit to rule. Larger or more important settlements have a high priest, who is either appointed by his peers or bullies and cajoles his way into power. Many work hard to emulate their god—they make proclamations and croak orders, but let others do the hard work while they gorge themselves into obesity and siphon off most of the plunder. The most dangerous tribes are led by young, dynamic, ruthless, and smart shamans.

Bufomi are territorial hunter-gatherers capable of eating almost anything they can fit into their mouths. On Heah Sumor Daeg, the primitive toad-men gather outside their lair as the sun sets and begin croaking loudly. The croaks are those emitted by hungry bufomi, and are pleas to the sun to return quickly. With the mid-point of the year gone, they know winter is on its way, and that means a shortage of food. Bufomi society is uncaring, and those considered too weak to survive the winter are seen as a drain on valuable resources. Once the first hard frosts bite, these unfortunates end up sacrificed to K'kroakaa.

Heah Wyntr Daeg is a day of celebration. Although the snow lies deep and the air is freezing, the days are beginning to lengthen and foodstuffs will soon be plentiful again. The croaks are ones of welcoming, for the sun will soon drive away the winter chill and awaken the prey animals and plants. Raiding tribes begin to plan their activities for the warmer months.

LOKI

Titles: Lord of Chaos, Father of Discord, the Untamable One.

Aspects: Chaos.

Symbol: None.

Priesthood: None. Clerics may adopt whatever title they wish, even those of other cults.

Herald: None.

Holy Days: None.

Signature Power: *Confusion*.

Powers: Special. Loki is a powerful but capricious god. His clerics may learn *any* powers, but casting comes with risks. After a cleric successfully casts a spell but be-

fore the effects are handled, the GM must draw a card from the action deck. A royal card (Jack through Ace) means a random spell is cast instead. GMs using this cult in adventures should create a quick random spell table. Assigning spells in advance to the sixteen royal cards allows the GM to determine the random spell using the one card.

If the random spell cannot be cast for any reason, it is treated as if the cleric rolled a 1 on his Faith die. For instance, a cleric of Loki tries to invoke *bolt* at a distant foe. He draws the King of Clubs, which the GM has predetermined is the *armor* spell. Since *armor* requires Touch to work, the spell fails.

Trappings: Clerics can choose any trapping at the time of casting. However, if a random spell is cast, a random trapping is also assigned.

Loki represents the unpredictable forces of chaos and disorder. In the beginning, long before the God War, Loki plagued the gods' efforts to bring order to the universe. At first his antics were harmless japes, amusing to all but the dourest deity. Slowly, though, his tricks became malicious and destructive. Unwilling to kill one of their own, the other deities instead tried to imprison Loki. Each attempt failed, for Loki's powers over chaos were too strong to tame. Meeting secretly, the gods crafted special shackles, which they named Time. Calling on all their power, the gods finally bound Loki.

Loki is the father of the Unknowable One. Whereas Loki sought chaos for its own sake, his son uses chaos to teach valuable lessons, never acting maliciously. It was this difference in personality which spared the Unknowable One his father's fate.

The Lord of Chaos has no shrines or temples—a structured organization goes against his nature. Worshippers rarely gather, for their malicious nature and desire to cause chaos knows no bounds. As a result, there is no trust or cooperation among the clergy. In some instances the clergy actively works against their comrades. For instance, a cleric may learn a colleague is planning to kill a nobleman. Rather than aiding his comrade, his rival may instead inform the target his life is in danger. Knowing an assassin is on one's tail is often enough to cause disruption in itself.

While incapable of personal action against the other gods, Loki is still able to grant his followers access to miraculous powers. However, even his most devout followers are not immune to the deity's capricious whims. At random intervals, Loki switches the power being petitioned for a completely different one.

Loki's clerics want one thing—to free their god from his shackles. This, they believe, can only be achieved by breaking down order and reducing the world to total anarchy and confusion. Clerics of Loki are predisposed to causing chaos for no reason other than to spread misery and discord. Less militant worshippers may scatter stinkberries or summon a wild but generally harmless beast in the middle of a crowded market, spread false rumors to sow mistrust among allies, or commit acts of minor sabotage, such as posing as a cleric of another faith and

conducting a wedding ceremony (the marriage would be invalid).

The more extreme members of the faith happily summon ferocious beasts in public places, bring nations to bloody war, and slaughter nobles and other important citizens to sow the seeds of confusion and chaos in the hierarchical society which pervades Rassilon's cultures.

As befits their nature, clerics of Loki perform no ceremonies—committing acts of chaos is worship enough, and to follow a set series of litanies would go against Loki's personality. They do sometimes create completely nonsensical rites, but usually only when it can sow confusion.

THE MACHINE GOD

Titles: None.

Aspects: Order, unification, obedience.

Symbol: A cog bound with chains.

Priesthood: The Changed.

Herald: None.

Holy Days: None.

Signature Power: *Boost trait** (no lower),

Powers: *Aim**, *altered senses**, *analyze foe*, *armor** (metal plates), *bolt* (metal shards), *detect* (no *conceal*), *energy immunity**, *environmental protection**, *fly* (metal wings), *leaping**, *mimic*, *precognition*, *quickness**, *smite** (affects punches only) *speak language**, *speed**, *wall walker**, *wandering senses**, *warrior's gift**.

Trappings: Spells with a visible effect always involve metal.

Special: Spells marked "*" have a Range of Self. Clerics may not take the Champion or Holy Warrior Edges.

Despite its title, the Machine God is not a true deity. Rather, it is an artificial construct, the work of mages who sought to create a god long before the Blizzard War. The creature, a vast, immovable, metallic construct of clockwork and gears gained sentience beyond human ken within seconds of being awakened.

In those brief moments of time it learned all there was to know about the mortal world, and it saw there was a problem—disorder. It informed its creators of its plan to bring order and unity to the world, sparing no details in how such universal order would be achieved. Horrified by the monstrosity they had created and the world it intended to fashion, the mages tried in vain to destroy the Machine God. Dozens of wizards died that day, and in the end they succeeded only in sealing the Machine God in the vast cavern in which it had been created.

For a millennia, the Machine God worked on its plan. It designed and created a new race of servitors, one whose obedience was total and unwavering. When the dwarves of Karad Noshrek tunneled into the cavernous prison, they unleashed the Scavengers on the world, paying the ultimate price for their fateful act.

Its clergy, known as the Changed to the races, were once living beings of flesh and bone. After undergoing excruciatingly painful physical transformation they emerge as part-living creature and part-machine. The

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Machine God does not actually grant spells to its worshippers, for as mentioned above it is not a true god. Rather, the Changed are part of the Machine God's greater consciousness, in touch with it at all times regardless of distance.

When they "pray," the Machine God unleashes its inherent magical power to alter their physical form. Thus, while clerics appear to cast spells, it is actually their living god who wields the awesome might. In many respects, the Changed are not truly independent entities, but mere extensions of the Machine God's will.

The Machine God's clergy are neither paladin nor priest—such differences are irrelevant among its unified, emotionless servants. Free will is not tolerated, for free will causes chaos, and chaos opposes the new world order the Machine God seeks to create. The Changed are tasked with one goal and one goal only—to bring living captives back to the Machine God, where they will be forcibly converted to the glorious cause.

Clerics perform no set rituals and have no scripture. The Machine God desires no worshippers in the traditional sense, only obedient servants.

NULL

Titles: She Who Unravels the Threads of Creation.

Aspects: Entropy.

Symbol: A thread cut in half.

Priesthood: While Null has priests and paladins, they have no formal titles.

Herald: None.

Holy Days: None.

Signature Power: *Dispel*.

Powers: *Arcane resistance, boost/lower trait (boost Smarts and Spirit only; lower any arcane skill only), detect/conceal (arcana only), energy immunity, negate arcana.*

Trappings: Null's powers work through a total absence of trappings.

Special: Null does not actually grant spells, since these involve magical threads. Instead, she allows her clerics access to the gaps between the magical threads, the total absence of creation and magic. Clerics thus use non-magic.

The universe is a multilayered tapestry woven from threads of raw magic. In the mortal realm, the threads were invisible and unusable until Maera found them and threw them out of the Moon, which is the window of the Norns' cottage. While mortals (bar a small few) are touched by the threads, the gods are massive tangles of magical energy. Although magic and miracles are totally separate fields, clerics call upon a form of thread magic—that of the gods' very being.

In the beginning there was only Null. Lacking all form, she dwelt in the Void, which was Nothingness. After creation, the Void was filled with energy and Null was confined to the dark gaps between the threads of the universe. She seeks nothing less than the total unraveling of creation and a return to Nothingness.

Few mortals know of Null. Those that do are given to accusing her of creating the Siphoning, though she has absolutely nothing to do with that phenomenon. Unable to see the fabric of reality, Null can only sense the Siphoning's effect. She is pleased with its work, but is at a loss to explain it. For now, it is a useful ally, but one that requires careful monitoring.

Null has no temples and very few shrines outside the Justiciary. The mage-hating Justiciary mistakenly worship Null as an aspect of Maera. These misguided zealots believe Null is proof that Maera is insulted by magic and wants it eradicated. That Maera's clergy promote the use of magic and actively avoid disrupting a mage's ability to manipulate it is a contradiction the Justiciary has yet to fathom. While one might think of the Reliquary and Null's cult sharing some similarities, the Reliquary has absolutely no desire to eradicate magic, and certainly not the entirety of creation.

Null's clergy know nothing of her bid to unravel the universe and end creation—only lunatics would actively support a goddess who wanted to end their existence! Instead, they are dedicated to slaying spellcasters, whether miracle workers or mages, destroying alchemical devices and relics, and erasing all knowledge of magic. They are all fanatics at heart, for their duties require them to burn temples and schools of magic, destroy relics which could be used to defeat the greater evils in the world, and take the lives of those whose only "sin" is to have a deep faith or an understanding of how to manipulate magical energy.

In general, priests are more inclined toward scholastic endeavors. They research relics, locate spellcasters, and study the Siphoning. Paladins are field agents, the killers who murder any spellcaster in their path, who raid tombs in search of relics to destroy, and who lead attacks against religious sites and centers of magical learning.

Null demands no worship from her clergy beyond their continued efforts in destroying all forms of magic.

SARKEB

Titles: He Who Rends the Flesh of Gods.

Aspects: Crocodilians, gatomen, war, ferocity, strength, dominance, oppression, vengeance.

Symbol: The lumpy pattern on a crocodile's back.

Priesthood: Claw of Sarkeb (priests); Jaw of Sarkeb (paladins).

Herald: See Avatar of Sarkeb in the *Hellfrost Bestiary*.

Holy Days: First Sunnandaeg of each month.

Signature Power: *Armor*.

Powers: *Beast friend* (crocodiles only), bolt, boost/lower trait (Strength, Vigor, and Swimming only), *champion of the faith, environmental protection* (water only), *quickness, sacrifice, shape change* (crocodiles only), *smite* (affects bite only), *summon beast* (crocodiles only), *summon herald, water walk*.

Trappings: Like many inhuman gods, trappings are focused on the deity's natural form—in this case, crocodiles.

Disciple Edge: Disciples are granted knowledge of the death bite. When a disciple scores a raise on a Fighting roll using its bite, its jaws inflict an additional +2d4 damage instead of +1d6.

In days of yore, when the Gatorman Empire stretched across the land and when their science had reached levels still unknown to other races, Sarkeb was the gatormen's war god, one deity among many. As the empire slipped into decline, Sarkeb blamed the weakness of the gatormen on the other gods. Cursing their names, he devoured them one by one. As their flesh was torn and ripped by his colossal teeth, so the knowledge they imparted was wiped from existence, lost forever. Today, the gatormen remember no god except Sarkeb.

Were scholars to study the gatormen's history, they would perhaps deduce that the Sarkeb myth is a story covering the race's rapid slide in complacency and decadence. Once their empire had been destroyed, the race quickly sank to barbarity. In such cultures there is little need for gods of knowledge and wisdom.

Gatormen do not carve effigies of their god. Altars are simple stone or wooden blocks draped with crocodile skin. Every few years, the blood soaked skin is taken down and hung inside the temple and a new one placed in the honored position. Shrines take the form of crocodile skulls. With crocodiles in Rassilon becoming rarer, especially in the wild, they are honored as living embodiments of Sarkeb, lesser in power than avatars, but still worthy of praise. They have become living shrines, to which the gatormen make offerings whenever they see one. If no sacrifices are available, the weakest member of the party is thrown to the beast.

There are few temples still in gatorman hands, for most of their cities were conquered or destroyed by the lizardmen and the temples converted to the lizardmen's foul faith or torn down. Of those which remain available to the gatormen, all have been converted to the worship of Sarkeb. No new temples have been raised in millennia, and those that remain are crumbling with the weight of time, their stepped sides choked with creepers and stained with the blood of countless sacrifices.

Clerics work tirelessly to supplicate their god, feeding him the flesh of captives and gatormen who fail in their earthly duties. Each tribe is ruled by a high priest of Sarkeb, who is assisted in his duties by lesser priests. In olden times the various religions each had a sole high priest, the divine spokesman of his deity. With the race now fractured, each tribe has its own high priest.

Priests who wish to climb the social

ladder are expected to do so by killing their superior, eating his brain and heart, and wearing his flayed skin. Such treachery, while prized, is not easy to accomplish, for a wise priest surrounds himself with bodyguards.

Unlike in other faiths, paladins are loyal first and foremost to a priest, not the faith as a whole or an individual temple. Novice priests may have one or two loyal paladins, likely kinsfolk, but as the priests prove their strength and dominance by dispatching rivals so the number of paladins swells.

Paladins are fanatical but pragmatic—if their patron is killed, they see his successor as being more worthy of their support. Paladins also serve as temple guards and elite warriors, though it has been an age since the gatormen could muster anything resembling a large army.

Rituals to honor Sarkeb always involve the sacrifice of sentient beings, lizardmen being the favorite. Gatormen have a variety of methods for sacrificing victims—flaying, ripping out the heart, devouring the flesh, throwing the victim to crocodiles, and hammering giant crocodile's teeth into his skull are all considered methods pleasing to Sarkeb, more so if the victim remains conscious until the very end. Which method is employed is decided through divination the night before the ceremony.

Once a year, each priest nominates a paladin from his bodyguard to represent him in a bloody gladiatorial ceremony. The paladins fight until only one remains. The winner then has the great honor of being sacrificed to Sarkeb. The sacrifice is destined to go straight to Sarkeb's



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lair, avoiding the fate of having his soul eaten as is traditional for sacrifices. Here he will serve in Sarkeb's army.

The paladin's sponsor is honored in the mortal realm. He is allowed to pick one paladin from each of the other priests' retinues to serve him, thus boosting his personal power. Such paladins adopt total loyalty to their new master.

SPIÐARI

Titles: Webspinner, the Great Weaver, Star-Binder, God-Catcher.

Aspects: Spiders, venom, ensnarement.

Symbol: A spider in a web.

Priesthood: Spinner (priests); Venom (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Any Deorcmonan.

Signature Power: *Entangle*.

Powers: *Barrier, beast friend* (spiders only), *blast, bolt, champion of the faith, fatigue, sacrifice, shape change* (spider only), *summon beast* (spiders only), *wall walker, wandering senses*.

Trappings: All trapping relate to spiders in some fashion. For example, *entangle* is a sticky web, *fatigue* a bit from a spectral spider, and *blast* and *bolt* short-lived swarms of vicious spiders.

Disciple Edge: Disciples are blessed with a greater understanding of spiders. They have +2 to Faith rolls when casting *shape change* and *summon beast*. She also grants them the power to speak with spiders.

For every civilized god there is at least one older, darker deity whose name is known only in vague legends or in stories designed to scare children into adopting good behavior. One such entity is Spiðari (from whose name the word "spider" originates), a malevolent spider goddesses.

According to many myths, her web binds the heavens, preventing the stars from falling to Rassilon and burning the world. Once, perhaps, she was benevolent, for skalds for know of her tell how she volunteered to support the heavens when the other gods failed in the task. Some even claim she was a child of Eostre, as are all the animalistic gods. Now, though, Spiðari is a dark deity whose cult practices many fell rites, such as human sacrifice.

It is popularly believed that within the black heart of the wood there dwells a gargantuan "Spider-King," a sentient, malevolent abomination, part-man and part-spider. Until recently the spider king was a reality, but he had grown weak and senile, and had failed to conduct reprisal raids on those who entered the wood with the sole aim of slaying the giant spiders. On direct orders from her deity, the king's young daughter, Arachni, a priestess of the cult, killed and devoured her father. She assumed the joint mantle of Queen of Spiderfell Wood and High Priestess. See the adventure *Web of Deceit* for more information.

Spiðari is mainly honored by all spiders, regardless of their size. Though unintelligent animals, they spin webs and catch insects in honor of their goddess. Then there

are worshippers from the civilized races. Whether willing volunteers promised power in return for unquestioning servitude or venom-addled converts drugged into obedience, the cultists are fanatical in their praise. Within the dark boughs of Spiderfell Wood lurk other spiders, said to be intelligent and able to converse in hissing, clicking mockery of Auld Saxa. According to some stories, these are the true clerics of the spider goddess.

Temples to Spiðari exist only in Spiderfell Wood and Midmark, though the cult is keen to expand its sphere of influence. Most temples are small underground rooms or caves, bedecked in silky webs. A great temple to Spiðari made up entirely of webs supposedly stands in Spiderfell Wood, though no one has ever claimed to have seen it. Many cultists sport a tattoo in the form of a web or spider to honor their god. The altar is always a sanctified web. Sacrifices are thrown onto the web and then set upon by cultists armed with sharp knives or giant spiders.

As with most faiths, priests and paladins have specialties. Priests maintain the temples, praise the goddess, and make sacrifices to appease her ravenous appetite. Paladins are temple guardians, kidnappers (gathering sacrifices and potential new converts), and assassins, removing those who learn too much about the cult's activities or harm giant spiders.

SSSLAK

Titles: The Ground-Shaking Thunderlizard King, the Eternal Hunger.

Aspects: Thunderlizards, strength, leadership, superiority, terror, ferocity, swamp.

Symbol: A triceratops' head.

Priesthood: There is no distinction between priests and paladins. Clerics may thus take both Champion and Holy Warrior Edges. Collectively, clerics are known as the Roar of Ssslak.

Herald: Ssslak's heralds are Wild Card tyrannosaurs.

Holy Days: First Sunnandaeg of each month.

Signature Power: *Smite*.

Powers: *A armor, battle song, beast friend* (reptiles, amphibians, and thunderlizards only), *bladebreaker, bolt, boost/lower trait* (Strength, Vigor, Notice, and Swimming only), *entangle, environmental protection* (water only), *fear, fog cloud, gift of battle, knockdown, quake, speed, stun, summon beast* (reptiles, amphibians, and thunderlizards only), *summon herald, viper weapon* (turns weapon into venomous lizard but otherwise unchanged), *water walk, wilderness step* (marsh and swamp only).

Trappings: Trappings relate to thunderlizards and swamps. For example, *entangle* might be vines, while *bladebreaker* causes a spectral thunderlizard to bite the weapon in twain, and *knockdown* or *stun* is a thunderlizard's roar or tail sweep.

Disciple Edge: Disciples learn the sacred songs necessary to summon thunderlizards. They have +2 Faith when using *beast friend* and *summon beast*, but only with regard to thunderlizards. In addition, each receives

a velociraptor mount. This creature is a Wild Card. If it is slain, the priest is sacrificed at the next ceremony for his sin.

Long ago, the lizardmen were a primitive race, enslaved by the gatormen to build their cities and fight their wars. Most toiled and died at their masters' whims, worked to death, sacrificed to feed the gatormen's hungry gods, and butchered on the battlefield. A small few, those who showed promise, were trained as scholars and priests. This act of generosity and compassion spelled the doom of the gatormen, for their slaves, now armed with knowledge of the gods, rebelled.

Ssslak isn't the only lizardman god, but he by far the most powerful and receives most praise. He is depicted as a T-Rex with triceratops' horns and neck frill, symbolizing his role as protector of the lizardman race and god of war and destruction.

The Ground-Shaking Thunderlizard King teaches that all others races are destined to be slaves to the lizardmen. Captives are forced to work building cities and engines of war under cruel conditions, as the lizardmen once were. They are also treated as pack animals, food, and sacrifices. Fearful of making the same mistake as the gatormen, the lizardmen ensure their captives are never treated as equals or show compassion.

Ssslak has many temples, though only a few are new structures. Most were formerly home to the gatormen's gods. When the empire was conquered, these were consecrated to the praise of Ssslak, the old faiths washed away with a river of sacrificial blood. In some large cities as many as a dozen temples may honor Ssslak, each focusing on a different aspect.

The largest temple, raised from the ground by an army of slaves who were then sacrificed to consecrate the structure, stands in Slik'al'ssla, the Resplendent Tyrant Throne, the lizardmen's greatest city. Every year, hundreds of captives are devoured by the terrible lizardman monarch, their souls condemned to spend an eternity in Ssslak's realm, serving his people even after death.

Clerics rule lizardman society in all but name. Although each tribe has a chieftain, he is subject to divinations (orders) of the priestly caste. Within each tribe are many priests, who together form an advisory council. Priests have the authority to depose poor chieftains and replace them with one more favorable to their requests. Although they are expected to be trained in martial arts, priests are never appointed to positions of military command. Again, they fill advisory roles, watching their commanders for signs of weakness.

The highest-ranking priests are always mutants with two heads—one possessed of wicked teeth (representing Ssslak's aspects of strength and ferocity) and one with horns and a neck frill (representing leadership). The undeniable head of the faith is the Tyrant Lizard King, reputedly a demigod-like figure possessing awesome powers.

Temples are protected by temple guardians, devout warriors but possessed of no supernatural powers. Serving a temple in this way is an honored position, and

guardians are expected to be fierce, unwavering warriors. In war, they form small, elite units, serving the war captains as shock troops.

Like the gatormen, lizardmen sacrifice sentient beings to honor their gods. Most die on the altar in one of many gruesome ways (the lizardmen learned a lot from the gatormen). A small few are destined to die in the arena, pitted against fearsome temple guardians in what is less a fair fight and more an orgy of blood and death.

URSARIX

Titles: The Great Bear, Ferocious One, He Who Thrives in Winter.

Aspects: Strength, barbarity, cannibalism, death.

Symbol: Three parallel scratch marks.

Priesthood: Ursarix permits only one paladin per tribe. They take the title champion. Priests are called shamans and are always female.

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Ceremonies are held every Raestdaeg, and before and after raids.

Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait* (Strength, Vigor, Fighting, Survival only).

Powers: *Armor, beast friend* (bears only), *bolt, fear, growth* (no *shrink*), *shape change* (bears only), *smite, stun, summon beast* (bears only).

Trappings: All trappings relate to bears.

Disciple Edge: Shamans are gifted with permanent *environmental protection* against the cold, and have the Hardy monstrous ability.

Ursarix is the weakest of the inhuman gods, for his faith is largely unknown outside the Vendahl tribes. How the Vendahl came to worship Ursarix is perhaps known only to Hoenir and Niht, for before the Hellfrost he was at best a minor deity, more appeased than worshipped. Given that Ursarix supports Thrym, many scholars are of the opinion that Ursarix is affiliated with the god of winter, perhaps a serving as a pet. Unlike most bears, Ursarix is said to be most active in winter. Because food is short, his worshippers conduct their most bloody raids during the cold months to sate their god's appetite.

Each Vendahl tribe maintains a small shrine with a bear's skull as the object of veneration, but no true temples are known to exist. This is most likely because the tribes rarely cooperate, considering other tribes rivals for food and trophies. Still, rumors circulate among the Hearth Knights that somewhere there is a central temple. Vendahl lairs, which are almost always underground, are decorated with the skulls of their victims, testimony to the might of Ursarix.

Despite worshipping a bear god, Vendahl do not make regular use of bears, preferring horses when mounted and relying on their warriors in combat. Indeed, bears are regularly hunted for their skin, claws, and meat. Polar bears are the most prized.

Ursarix is the only god known to the Vendahl. Cultists honor him by donning bearskin cloaks, complete with heads, and using bear claws as their only weapons. Many

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use war paint to decorate their faces. In recent years Hearth Knights have reported cultists outside the tribes. Whether these are madmen or drugged converts is as yet unknown.

Non-Vendahl members are gifted with special bear-shaped amulets which protect them from the cold, and told that when the world is one of ice and snow, they will become leaders of armies of slaves. In return, they must supply the Vendahl with weapons and food (which is always sentient flesh). Most members are also cannibals, having been taught that the weak are just prey for the strong.

Each tribe has a shaman, who is always female. In general, there is one shaman per hundred or so males, with a strict pecking order based on age. Female members of the tribe who show no talent for invoking miracles are sacrificed and eaten, as are sick babies and weak adolescents. Shamans never accompany warriors on raids, but instead remain safe in the lair, surrounded by a small bodyguard. Command of raiding parties is given to a champion, often a shaman's son or mate.

Warriors must be fearless and relentless—those who show weakness are mercilessly culled and their flesh eaten. Unlike many barbaric cults, Vendahl do not believe ingesting flesh imbues any of the victims' strengths or weaknesses—cannibalism is simply a means of ensuring one's survival.

Worship is primitive, little more than rhythmic, monotonous chants accompanied by deep, resonating bass drumming. These are believed to emulate the growls and heartbeat of Ursarix. The only time ceremonies reach a more fevered pitch is when captives are sacrificed, for this means the warriors will dine on fresh flesh soon after.

XELOMYCOTA

Titles: The Source, the Primordial One, the Oozing One, the Spore Lord.

Aspects: Fungus, growth, sustenance, protection, knowledge, fungals.

Symbol: None. Fungals impart images of their deity through spores, not art.

Priesthood: Fungals are a relatively peaceful race and have no paladins. Priests may take both the Champion and Holy Warrior Edges, though they rarely bother.

Herald: None.

Holy Days: First and last days of Haerfestmonan are high holy days, and any Deorcmonan during this period a holy day.

Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait.*

Powers: *Altered senses, arcane resistance, armor, barrier, bless/panic, confusion, deflection, fatigue, fear, healing, heat mask, obscure, sluggish reflexes, slumber, stun, voice on the wind* (can only be used on fungals).

Trappings: Most trappings are spores. *Barrier* is usually a dense wall of fungus.

Disciple Edge: Disciples can release spores five times a day.

Xelomycota is without doubt the most alien of the inhuman gods. Fungal mythology states that the deity is gigantic ball of pulsating fungus, from which the fungals emerged fully sentient. They believe he has a physical form, which resides in some forgotten cavern of monstrous proportions in the deepest bowels of the earth. Sages and clerics of the civilized races are unsure whether this is a unique deity or a primordial aspect of Ertha, Eostre, or Vali forgotten by the other races.

To the fungals, Xelomycota is provider and protector. He imparted unto them knowledge of how to brew herbal remedies and create alchemical devices using fungus, how to tend the crops of the Underearth, how to communicate, and how to avoid foes.

No one has yet deduced Xelomycota's goal. It is true that fungals are notorious crop raiders, but no one has ever witnessed what the fungals do with their plunder. Scholars currently believe the goods are offered to their god, though why a god of fungus would require carrots and beans has yet to be debated to any satisfactory conclusion.

In truth, the fungals do not sacrifice crops to their god—they don't even eat them themselves. The fungals are not a slave race, but they are subservient to the ancient and powerful race known as *moðsognar* and the lesser *dökkálfar* as gardeners and food providers. When they cannot grow enough food in their subterranean lairs, or if too much is destroyed or devoured by underground menaces, they must harvest it from the surface world to meet their quotas. Although many farmers hate them and more than a few fear them, fungals are more a nuisance than a serious threat, and only rarely do they resort to violence.

Temples are caves covered in colorful forms of fungus. The spores from these growths produce calm feelings in fungals and unconsciousness in most other races. These induce the necessary state of mind to worship Xelomycota, while simultaneously protecting the temple against defilers. By and large, fungals ignore intruders in their earthy realms unless the strangers harm their crops or become aggressive. Alarm spores are released, which summon the fungals to deal with the threat. While largely peaceful above ground, they can be tenacious fighters when protecting their homes.

Fungals have no discernible cultural differences, even among communities separated by thousands of miles. Priests are the *de facto* leaders, arranging rosters, ensuring each fungal meets his quota, and leading worship. Fungal society is very orderly and highly structured, each individual knowing his place in the great cycle of food production. Similarly, fungals lack ambition—they are born to fulfill a single role in society, and they perform the same tasks to the end of their days.

Fungals can speak, favoring a corrupted form of Arboreal, but they rarely do so among themselves. Instead, communication is handled through spores, which impart basic information such as "Come here," "Pick that mushroom," and "Run away!" Because of this, ceremonies are largely quite affairs, with rows of fungals praying and bowing in time to spore messages.

GODSHEIM



This bulk of this section is devoted to a realm mortals can reach only through death—Godsheim, the celestial realm of the gods. Like mortal nobles, the gods reside in halls and govern settlements. Indeed, aside from its inhabitants being divine creatures, Godsheim closely resembles the mortal world.

The final section concerns the celestial sphere—the stars, the patterns they form in the night sky, and the most common myth associated with the constellations.

MORE THAN ONE VIEW

The nature of the Afterlife and the homes of the gods have kept imaginations fired and debates fueled for millennia. Every race, culture, and nation has its own opinions. Yet even these are not set in stone, for different generations apply their own interpretations to holy texts and the myths of old, shaping them to fit current events and mores so they remain pertinent to worshippers. Furthermore, not every race, culture, or nation holds every god in high esteem, and some gods may not be honored at all among a given race or culture. This wide-ranging disparity has a direct effect on the celestial realm.

It is important to note that while the gods appear to be of similar power when viewed as a whole, the denizens of Rassilon view the pantheon from a local viewpoint, not a continent-wide one. In war-ravaged Vestmark, for instance, Tiw is the most popular deity. In their view of Godsheim, Vestmarkers claim Tiw is the supreme god, a militant warlord who defends the heavens against the dark gods and their allies. In the Magocracy, on the other hand, Maera is the ruler of Godsheim, and Tiw is little more than her bodyguard.

The gods are said to live in “halls,” much like mortal nobles, but the term means different things to different people. To the Anari, it means a mansion, a grand house or small castle worthy of a lord. Dwarves see halls as elaborate chambers within a vast subterranean complex, while the engro think of them as great caravans, ever moving through the heavens. Taiga elves picture them as

immense tents, while hearth elves favor elegant wooden structures. To the Saxa, whose culture and religious views are most dominant when religion is mentioned in *Hellfrost*, the halls are akin to mortal steads, with each deity residing in an immense longhouse.

Likewise, the very geography of Godsheim and the location of individual halls are open to much interpretation. For the most part, the descriptions, furnishings, and locations of the various gods’ homes, as well as other features of the land, have never been revealed in any divine vision. Instead, they are the result of guesswork, supposition, intuition, and wishful thinking by mortals. Most races use what they know from their own society as the basis. For the dwarves that means Godsheim is inside a heavenly mountain, while the elves depict it as an immense forest. Human cultures and the engro are prone to using the landscapes of their homeland.

These differing views are not just held by the living. Before the Blizzard War, records indicate the Anari conducted a series of experimentations using *gravespeak* spells to contact the dead. Deceased followers of the same god were interrogated as to the nature of the gods’ realm in a bid to solve the riddle of the heavens once and for all. Yet every soul they questioned gave a different answer to the same question. Godsheim, it appears, is a realm shaped not by a universal constant or racial faith, but by individual beliefs.

As hard as it is for mortals to comprehend this, this is the truth of the matter—Godsheim is a single realm, but its landscape and social structure is altered by the view of mortals, and thus multiple versions of it exist simultaneously. Hence, while a mortal follower of Tiw and one of Maera may both ascend to the Afterlife on the death of their mortal bodies, they do not end up in the same Godsheim.

Because of this wide-ranging disparity in religious views, the facts presented in this chapter are not the only ones that exist. What follows is merely a baseline, a starting point for the GM’s imagination, rather than a definitive description.

MAJOR GODS' HALLS

This section details the halls of the 24 major gods. Each hall is listed alphabetically by its most common name (even these vary among mortals). This is followed by the name of the owning deity, a translation of the hall's name into Trader, and a list of the minor gods who traditionally reside in the great hall. The halls of the minor gods with their own residences are listed in the next section.

THE GOD WITH NO HALL

Only one major god has no hall—Freo. (Whether the Unknowable One has one is open to conjecture.) As befits the god of travel, he journeys ceaselessly, accepting hospitality with his peers for one night, but never dallying long. The idea of settling down is anathema to him. Shooting stars are said to be Freo going about his eternal wanderings (among other things), the fiery phenomenon being sparks created by the hobnails in his boots.

ALBRYNIAÐR

Deity: Tiw

Translation: All-clad-in-mail

Resident Minor Gods: Atriðr, Earhclud, Ermunaz, Geirdrifur, Geirvaldr

Tiw's great hall is aptly named. Its roof is tiled with the dented shields of fallen foes, while its walls are clad in their armor. Each fall, Tiw returns from war with new materials with which to repair any damage to his home. As well as Tiw's home, the hall is the refuge of the gods, a sturdy fortification whose defenses have never been breached by brute force.

Those chosen by Tiw to enter his hall on death become part of the einherjar ("immortal-hosts"), the war god's celestial army. The vast central hall of Albryniaðr can seat the souls of the entire einherjar in one assembly. Every night is spent feasting and boasting.

BLÓÐVIMUL

Deity: Dargar

Translation: Blood-teeming

Resident Minor Gods: Báleygr, Hildolfr

Dargar's heavenly hall is a ghastly construction formed from the physical remains of his many victims. The long bones form the supporting columns, while interwoven between them in wattle fashion are immeasurable ribs. The daub is rotting flesh mixed with congealed blood.

The inside is no less grisly. Dargar does not condemn all those who fail him as mortals to the Abyss. Nailed to the walls are mummified heads of worshippers who failed the god of barbarism in life. Blood seeps from their hollow eye sockets, carpeting the floor in a thick, sticky mass. The heads sing out in pain, a chorus of misery praising Dargar's cruelty.

Unwelcome visitors are driven away by Fenris, Dargar's monstrous pet wolf whose offspring trouble the mortal realm.

ÉLJÚÐNIR

Deity: Rigr

Translation: Damp-with-sleet

Resident Minor Gods: Sváfnir

At the end of Ásbrú ("Bridge-of-the-heavens"), the pathway to the gods' realm, is Rigr's home. Though often called a hall, it is naught but a tall, wooden tower with a platform at the top. Day and night, regardless of the weather, Rigr stands ever watchful, his gaze constantly sweeping across the entire heavens for signs of approaching trouble. Should danger come to the heavenly realm itself, Rigr blows his horn, Gjallarhorn ("Loud sounding horn"), whose booming tone can be heard everywhere in the heavens.

Although thunder is usually attributed to Eylúðr, herald of the gods, an older myth tells that thunder is Rigr sounding an alarm of approaching danger. Believers in the myth are typically those afraid of thunder.

GLADSHEIM

Deity: Sigel

Translation: Radiant-home

Resident Minor Gods: Heimdallr

Sigel's hall is aptly named, for Sigel's Hearth, the great fire that burns in his mead hall is visible across the entire heavens. Sigel's divine servants have grown lethargic without their master, and less and less fuel is added to the fire each day. Outside a monumental spire rises infinitely high. This sundial casts its shadow across the entire realm, allowing the gods to tell the time.

GLITVINDAUGA

Deity: Maera

Translation: Radiant Window

Resident Minor Gods: Hoárri

Maera's small home is the most recent addition to the realm of the gods. It was erected shortly after her expulsion from the Norns' house for giving mortals the gift of magic.

All magic radiates from the moon. Although skalds poetically refer to it as Maera's Ember and Niht's Bane, one legend calls it Maera's Window. It is a literal portal between the world of mortals and the domain of the gods. The light it sheds is not a burning ember, but the pale candlelight from Maera's hall. From this window spill the threads of magic. A deity of secrets and mysteries, Maera performs many rituals during the month. In order to keep her secrets secure, she periodically closes and opens the shutters on her window. This gives the moon its regular phases.

However, this myth is not a universal one. Many believe that although Maera is goddess of the moon, the moon itself is the Norn's window. At night, Maera

creeps up to their house and opens the window to spy on the threads they are weaving. Depending on where the Norns are seated, Maera has to open the window a certain amount in order to see the loom.

As with all myths, which are mortal attempts to understand the unfathomable, neither story is correct, but neither is it incorrect.

Maera shares her home with her pet dog, Garm, and its many puppies.

GULLINBURSTI

Deity: Nauthiz

Translation: Gold-mane

Resident Minor Gods: Tvíblindi

The home of the god of thieves and gamblers, Nauthiz lives far away from the other gods. Carefree with money and prone to spontaneous expenditure, Nauthiz's home is opulently decorated inside and out with the spoils of his nefarious activities and his earnings from his gambling with mortals and gods alike. Such is Nauthiz's true wealth that the windows are shuttered with gold coins strung on silver chains, he hangs expensive rugs on the walls to keep out the draft, and guests sleep under blankets made of woven gold and silver thread.

Nauthiz is rarely home—he is usually out robbing the halls of his peers. Perversely, he pays Var handsomely to watch over his abode while he is away.

GNIPPRHELLIR

Deity: Scaetha

Translation: Cliff-leading-to-the-Abyss

Resident Minor Gods: Biflindi, Syn

Scaetha's hall is a fortified stead atop the cliff leading to Hela's abode on one side and the gates of the Abyss on the other. Like her mortal temples, Scaetha's hall is dark and moody, a home in which outsiders feel distinctly uncomfortable. Formerly it was the home of Hela, but all traces of the evil deity's presence have been thoroughly cleansed.

Situated in the main feasting hall are the tombs of all the gods who have ever died. It is said they number in the many hundreds, for the God War and Hela's madness accounted for large numbers of deities. Legend says that during the End of Times these fallen gods will awaken to fight in the final battle. To ensure these warriors are not disturbed, an honor guard protects each tomb.

All souls pass through Gnipprrhellir at some point, for it is here Scaetha judges the dead. The Hall of Echoing

Screams, the auction house for souls found wanting, is situated deep below Gnipprrhellir.

Note that the name "Hellir" is an archaic term for the Abyss, the realm once guarded by Hela. Today it is used more as an insult.

HIMINBJÖRG

Deity: Thunor

Translation: Mountain-of-Heaven

Resident Minor Gods: Suðri

Thunor is another deity who receives few visits from his peers. His home, such as it is, lies atop the tallest peak in the heavens, a towering, jagged peak even the gods have trouble climbing. There are no walls or roof, for Thunor disdains any form of confinement. He lives outdoors, wandering the mountain day and night, guided by his lantern. Mortals know this lantern as the brightest star in the heavens, which moves through the sky as Thunor flits around his mountaintop home.

HLIÐSKJÁLFI

Deity: The Norns

Translation: Hall-of-many-doors

The Three Sisters share a small home on the edge of the heavens. The only furnishings are the great loom on which they weave the tapestry of existence and their three stools.



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At night, when the gods are asleep, the sisters throw open their doors to air the house. During this time mortals can see the great mass of threads as a milky streak running through the night sky.

The hall's name is metaphorical, and refers to the many possibilities woven by the wyrd sisters.

ÍÐASKJÁLFR

Deity: Eira

Translation: Hall-that-renews-itself

Resident Minor Gods: Harisa, Hrist, Kvara, Kvarsi (she spends a lot of time with Tiw), Sviðrir

Eira's hall is small but comfortable, the mortal equivalent of a cottage. Outside the whitewashed walls is an extensive herb garden (a gift from Eostre), which Eira brews into herbal remedies. Much of the inside is devoted to the creation of herbal mixtures.

The hall takes its name from the belief that no harm can be inflicted within its walls. Fire does not scorch living flesh, and weapons do not bite. Indeed, even arguing is impossible, for the hall is awash with such serenity that anger is impossible to summon. Some clerics say the hall itself is impervious to harm, being able to repair cracks and breaks as soon as they are caused.

FJÖTURSKJÁLFR

Deity: Hothar

Translation: Hall-of-fetters

Resident Minor Gods: Sanngetal

Situated at the base of the gods' moot hill, Hothar's hall is the judgment hall of heaven. Inside is the High Seat, Hothar's throne, from where he dispenses justice and settles disagreements between the gods. Although Hothar is blind, his home is illuminated by the Flame of Truth, which can be extinguished only when the End of Times comes and the laws of the universe ceases to have any meaning.

MEINNÁR

Deity: Vali

Translation: Diseased-corpse

Resident Minor Gods: Haratt, Skilfingr

Vali lives in Svartmýrr ("Black Marsh"), a fetid, stinking lowland far to the south of the great plain that the majority of the gods call home. Swathed in clouds of biting flies, Vali's hall stands on the rotting carcass of a marsh dragon and is constructed from rotting logs and stinking dung. The floor is a shifting carpet of disease-laden rats gnawing at the dragon's decomposing flesh. Hanging over fires inside are rusted cauldrons in which Vali's leprous servants brew all manner of vile diseases.

NASTRAND

Deity: Hela

Translation: Beach-of-the-dead

Resident Minor Gods: Thunn, Vagr

To the east of the god's realm, at the foot of the great mountains, where their sheer sides touch the great ocean known as the Void, is a beach of white sand. This is Nastrand, the beach made of bones collected from the mortal realm and powdered by the constant trampling of Hela's damned legions.

The entrance to the beach is a narrow set of steps descending an impossibly high cliff of utter black rock. Here wages a constant battle, the forces of Scaetha valiantly holding the confines of the stairwell against the dark tide of evil souls surging upward from Hela's gloomy realm. It is widely held that this eternal struggle is what prevents Hela from simply sending all the souls at her disposal to the mortal world at once. Were she to weaken her forces substantially, Scaetha would simply march into her hall and slay her. Of course, were Hela to eventually win, the heavens would be endangered.

Separating the base of the steps from the beach proper is Gjöllbrú ("Noisy bridge"). Hela has enchanted the bridge so that it reverberates when crossed by anything living. Thus, she is always warned when enemies enter her domain (she has no fear of anything dead).

Hela's hall, which has the same name as the beach, is a dark, malevolent palace made of dried bone. Inside, Hela broods and plots her insane schemes, patiently counting off the days until her greatest servant, the Liche-Priest, reawakens.

The name Nastrand is also attributed to a beach in the southern Mistlands. According to one story, the beach is a link to Hela's unholy realm, a crossing place between the divine and mortal worlds. It is certainly true that folk fear to venture anywhere near it, even on water, when the mists have risen, for those caught in the mist are never seen again.

Whether or not there is any truth in such stories is left for the GM to determine. If the GM wants the characters to mingle with the gods, then this location (and any others of similar power) make a perfect entry point to Godsheim.

NIFHEL

Deity: Niht

Translation: Abode-of-darkness

Resident Minor Gods: Sváfnir

The goddess of darkness resides in an unlit, dingy hall in a secluded valley in the mighty Niðafjöll ("Dark Mountains"). Dank mist forever fills the narrow valley, and Sigel's Hearth sheds no light on the deity's home. No source of light functions here, for Niht has many secrets she wishes to keep. Sigel never came here, for even his power could do nothing to dispel the pall of darkness.

The air is filled with a constant but scarcely inaudible buzz that is felt rather than heard. Worshippers believe the noise is the drone of millions of combined whispers, guilty secrets told to Niht, who keeps them safe so no other may ever hear them.

It is said that the greatest secret is how to find the

exit. After she caught Haptasnytrir rummaging through her collection of secrets, Niht made it nigh on impossible for intruders to escape.

NÓATÚN

Deity: Neorthe

Translation: Ship-enclosure

Resident Minor Gods: Vegtam

Neorthe's hall is beneath the waves, not far from the giant cliffs that rise in the south of the heavenly realm. Made entirely of driftwood, the hall is decorated inside and out with flotsam and jetsam, as well as treasures of the ocean, such as pearls and whale bone engravings. After Kenaz almost torched his house, Neorthe allows no fire in his hall.

Neorthe's boat shed, wherein all the gods' boats are moored, stands on the shore, and is guarded by Vegtam, the god of marines and nautical combat. The various boats are Ullr's Hringhorni ("Round-horned-ship"), which he uses when fishing; Naglfar ("Corpse-ship"), Tiw's warship (sometimes used by Scaetha); Sessrúmnir ("Roomy-seat"), Var's trading ship; and Skíðblaðnir ("Ship-with-ice-blades-and-skis"), Sigel's boat used to move around the land in winter.

ÓKOLNIR

Deity: Kenaz

Translation: Never-cold

Resident Minor Gods: Hagvirkr, Kjalarr

Roofed in beaten bronze and with walls of fire-hardened wood, Kenaz's hall has received few guests since his disappearance. His minions still toil at their daily tasks, the clang of metal on metal and the hiss of bellows is kept up by Hagvirkr, who works at Kenaz's forge, Eldhrímnir ("Fire-sooty"), and although the fire god is no longer a resident, the hearth continues to burn, the great fire pit stoked daily with fresh wood.

SÖKKVABEKKR

Deity: Var

Translation: Treasure-bank

Resident Minor Gods: Auðun (though he sometimes visits Nauthiz to fence stolen goods), Forseti

Var's home stands at a junction of frequently traveled roads. Lining the many roads leading to the main gates are brightly decorated trade stalls. Here, Var's minions spend their days hawking all manner of goods to visitors and passersby.

Despite being the richest god (Nauthiz contends this), Var loathes spending money. As a result, the paintwork is peeling and the interior, although majestic in size, has little decoration.

The largest stead in the heavens, its countless rooms are crammed full of trade goods given to Var by his clergy during the Profit Day ritual. Indeed, so tight is Var that even his furniture and cutlery comes from his clergy's

faithfulness. A common joke among his peers is that even his clothes came from a mortal's back.

A strong room contains the god's personal treasure, as well as contracts between the god and his mortal followers, and his clerics' ledgers, which he collects on their arrival in his hall. Security is tight, for Nauthiz has "forgotten" to pay more than once after browsing the storerooms.

SPEKIRÚMNIR

Deity: Hoenir

Translation: With-much-knowledge

Resident Minor Gods: Haptasnytrir, Hropt

Every inch of Hoenir's hall is crammed with books, scrolls, tablets, and tomes, the sum of all known knowledge in the universe. Yet there is still empty space, for even Hoenir does not know everything there is to know. Even so, the library is so large, and expands so often, that Hropt, Hoenir's librarian, still struggles to catalog everything.

As befits Hoenir's law that knowledge should be freely imparted, his collection is open to other gods. Day and night, his peers and their minions rummage through the collections, ruining Hropt's hard work. Only Tiw is banned outright, not that the god of war has much call for knowledge. Niht never visits, for to do so would be an admission that Hoenir knows something she does not.

THRYMHEIM

Deity: Thrym

Translation: Storm-home

Resident Minor Gods: Hríjóðr, Langbarðr, Norðri

Far to the north of Niðafjöll, where winter is a permanent fixture, lies the hall of Thrym, god of the frost giants and enemy of Thunor. A majestic hall carved of black ice resistant to even Tiw's fearsome blows, it sits on a promontory overlooking a sea of crackling coldfire.

The roof is tiled with Hellfrost dragon scales. A dragon's spine lies along the top, while the beast's huge skull hangs over the front doors to form a porch, its skeletal arms being the supports. Inside the temperature is mind-numbingly cold. When Thrym opens the doors, the north wind howls out across the universe, bringing with it winter. In spring, when the other gods are more active and getting ready for war, Thrym seals his fortress, thus ending winter for another year.

It is widely held that Kenaz and Sigel are prisoner somewhere in this icy hall, the gods of heat and light slowly freezing to death in Thrym's dungeon.

VÁSAD

Deity: Ertha

Translation: Damp-cold

Resident Minor Gods: Foldardróttann

Ertha does not dwell in the same region of the heavens as the other gods—she lives beneath the mortal realm,

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rather than above it. Mortals refer to this place as Erthaheim. While this is the correct name for her domain, it is not the name of her personal hall.

Ertha's home is a colossal cavern of wondrous natural beauty. Stalactites and stalagmites grow to immense length and in unusual shapes, mineral veins of contrasting colors arch and loop to form intricate knotwork patterns, and gemstones shine with intense radiance. The hall feels organic, smoothing and curving gracefully, with no hard angles to distract the eye. Everything in the hall, from the sleeping benches to the crockery to the standing furniture, is made of stone.

A pool of lava, a gift from Kenaz, who taught Ertha how to melt rock, provides illumination but scant warmth. Indeed, for all its wonder and beauty, the goddess' home is no different to the countless other caverns in the Underearth—cold and damp.

VINGÓLF

Deity: Eostre

Translation: Friendly-floor

Resident Minor Gods: Ellanhere, Epona, Veth

Like the goddess who lives here, the great hall has two distinct aspects. The Plantmother side is formed from living bark of silver hue. A large, well-tended garden surrounds this half, while further out are vast orchards and immense crop fields. Inside, the floor is soft grass, while the walls are swathed in fruit bearing vines. Guests will

find no warm hearth to take the chill from their bones. Those who need warmth find the creepers flow around them to form a living cloak.

The other half is a wooden structure covered in animal hides. The horns of a colossal aurochs adorn the gable end, under which are huge doors carved with images of all the beasts of the universe. All manner of livestock roam outside, and the ground is a churned morass of mud and dung. Numerous pens, byres, stalls, and stables stand in the farmyard, while fields populated by cattle and sheep stretch to the distant horizon.

ÝDALIR

Deity: Ullr

Translation: Yew-dales

Resident Minor Gods: Vafud

Ýdalir is actually the name of the region of the heavens in which Ullr live. His hall, little more than a modest hut, is unnamed. Situated on the edge of a lake surrounded by a yew forest replete with game, the outside of the hut is bedecked with freshly killed game. Inside, there is only a single room. Furs and skins hang on the walls and cover the floor. A small hearth, over which meat is continually spit-roasted, provides ample heat and light.

Ullr is rarely home in summer and autumn, for he travels far and wide on his hunts. The hall is never locked, for Ullr has nothing of great value worth stealing and the meat hanging outside is there for all the gods to eat.

UNKNOWN

Deity: The Unknowable One

Translation: —

Resident Minor Gods: Galdraföör, Gizzur

Whether the Unknowable One has a stead is open to much debate, even among the gods. The Norns cannot tell if the god has entered his home, Niht will not reveal the knowledge, if indeed she knows it, Maera cannot divine its location, Rigr has yet to spy it from his lofty vantage point, and Hoenir can find no reference to one.

No one has ever heard the Unknowable One mention having a home, but it is equally apparent he does not sleep rough or ask for hospitality very often. Most agree that the trickster has a hall, but, as befits his nature, he either keeps it hidden or conceals it in some manner. As usual, the Unknowable One remains tight-lipped concerning any personal information.

Galdraföör and Gizzur know the truth, but they too say nothing, replying to questions only with knowing smiles, tall tales, or riddles.



HALLS OF THE MINOR GODS

This section lists the remaining minor gods in alphabetical order by name, and describes their places of residence (if any). Note that while the inhuman gods sometimes feature in the myths of the civilized races (such as when K'kroakaa tried to eat Sigel and ended up burning himself), these alien deities do not form part of the pantheon, and thus do not reside in Godsheim. Their dark abodes are said to lie beyond the mountains, forests, and ocean that form the borders of the gods' realm, in barbarous lands where the teachings of the great gods are unknown.

Boðgaeðir: The standard bearer of both Scaetha and Tiw, Boðgaeðir's hall, Hrafnnið ("Ravens-nest") stands in the middle of Fólkvangr (see below). It is named for the raven banner he carries into battle. The roof tiles are a murder of living ravens that feed on the flesh of mortals slain in battle.

Bolverk: In the middle of Eostre's pasture land stands Kyrvöllr ("Cow-field"), a small stead belonging to her cattle-stealing son. His herd of stolen cows grazes nearby.

Bragi: While not associated with Freo, Bragi spends all his time visiting the halls of the other gods. In return for hospitality, he passes on juicy tidbits of gossip, typically gathered at the last hall he visited.

Brúni: Arguably the lowliest of the gods, Brúni has no hall. He sleeps beneath the stars, wrapped in a filthy cloak and clutching his most prized possession—a simple wooden bucket.

Eylúðr: The herald of the gods has no home. His life is one of constant travel between the halls of Thunor and Thrym, and Scaetha and Hela. Of all the gods, he alone is granted safe passage while journeying through Nastrand, for even the insane goddess of the undead is not foolish enough to harm a herald.

Farmaguth: The god of boundaries lives in Næfrewealcan ("Never-moving"), a cavern at the base of Himinbjörg, the spire around which the universe rotates, with his wife, Gerðr. Located centrally, it is the only point in the universe that remains static.

Fjallgeiguðr: The god of shape changers is a frequent guest in the halls of the other gods, though they rarely know it. She might enter a hall disguised as a cat or dog, a lowly mouse, a raven, or even an insect.

Gangari: Like Freo, Gangari has no home. He prefers to spend his time far from Godsheim, exploring the endless expanse of the universe.

Gersemi: The goddess of consensual sex dwells in Plesirskjalf ("Hall-of-pleasure"). After being kept awake one night by the noise of Gersemi's entertaining a guest, Thunor ordered the wind not to carry any noise from the hall. This has annoyed Niht, for she can no longer eavesdrop on what occurs within the minor deity's home.

Goðjaðarr: A sole pass runs through the mountains that form Godsheim's eastern border. Here stands Jötunsarnes ("Pain-of-giants"), the hall of Goðjaðarr the giant-slayer. Like Tiw, he decks the outside of his hall in the battle-garb of fallen foes, a warning that the pass to Godsheim is off limits to the giants.

Gullveig: On the edge of Eostre's stead stands Mjoðrcetal ("Mead-cauldron"), the home of the god of brewing. Here Gullveig brews ale and mead, gathering what he needs from the fields of barley and bee hives on his little plot of land. Inside are several cauldrons of fermenting alcohol, and enough casks of ale and mead to keep the gods drunk for years.

Haptabeidr: Advisor to all the gods, Haptabeidr spends his time visiting the other halls to dispense wisdom. He has no home, instead seeking hospitality from his patrons.

Haptsönir: The god of freedom lives in Openianvelkiann ("Open-welcome"), a hall open to all passersby. Here guests may stay as long as they wish and dine plentifully, for Haptsönir places no restrictions on how long his peers may stay, leaving it to them to depart after an appropriate time.

Hrafn: The gods' messenger needs no hall. He constantly travels around Godsheim delivering messages between the gods, and accepting hospitality wherever it is offered. As a messenger, rather than a herald, he avoids the homes of Dargar, Hela, and Thrym. Vali, though evil, bears him no ill will. He affords the minor god no special protection when he visits, either.

Jarngrímr: Across the valley from Haptsönir lives his arch-rival, the god of tyranny and oppression. His hall is called Lagu ("Obedience").

Lasesmed: Beneath Rigr's watchtower is Alscyttan ("All-shuttered"), the home of the gods' locksmith. Attempting to break into the hall is a favorite pastime of Nauthiz, for Lasesmed has every door secured by multiple locks of cunning design.

Sigmundr: No hall is called home by the god of dragon slaying. He quests endlessly through the heavens, searching for dragons to put to the sword.

Skaði: Close to the northern mountains the temperature drops noticeably. Eostre Animalmother has a small stead here, which she rents to Skaði in return for the minor deity watching over her mammoth herds. Her hall is Harval ("Hairy-wall"), so named because of the mammoth hides that cover the walls.

Viðarr: Outside Scaetha's hall, the stony path divides in two. One path leads down blood-soaked stairs to Nastrand, the other to a cave mouth. Within the cave are labyrinthine tunnels that stretch across the universe, and through the fabric of reality.

One secret path eventually leads to an immense clearing, across the other side of which is a wall so high not even Thunor has reached the top. Breaking the wall is a pair of iron gates—the gates to the Abyss. Located outside the doors is Hela's old watch post, now home to Viðarr.

● NOTABLE PLACES ●

This section looks at some of the geographic locations commonly attributed to Godsheim.

Alfheim: The land of the fey, it occupies a point half-

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way between the heavens and the world of men. It was from here the elves were exiled.

Fólkvangr: ("Field-of-the-host") A plain stretching between the halls of Tiw and Scaetha. The armies of both gods use it as a mustering and training ground.

Fyrisvellir: ("Ebbing-marshy-plain") The dank marsh where Vali has his home.

Gálgyiðr: ("Gallows-wood") A dark wood in the central plains, and home to many foul monsters.

Gandvik: ("Bay-of-serpents") A coastal region notorious for its immense sea serpents. Their writhing is said to create waves in the mortal realm. Tiw fishes here.

Ginnungagap: ("Yawning-abyss") The chasm that separates the worlds of men and gods. It is spanned only by Ásbrú, and all manner of foul things dwell in the depths. In some legends this is the night sky, while in others the sky is the Void, the great ocean of the heavens.

Ifing: ("Unfrozen") The river separating the gods' homes from Thrym's realm. It never freezes and runs fast, thus making it an obstacle to both sides.

Járnviðr: ("Iron-wood") A vast forest to the east of the celestial realm inhabited by giants and trolls.

Jötunheimr: A realm far to the west, wherein dwell the true giants, a race who fought against the gods during the God War and whose far weaker descendants still plague men.

Vígríðr: ("Battle-surge") The stairwell to Nastrand, where the armies of Scaetha and Hela are locked in perpetual warfare.

CELESTIAL SPHERE

How the stars were created has been the subject of much heated discussion down the ages. Whether they are truly mythical creations or "merely" spheres of gas undergoing nuclear fission is not in doubt—to the citizens of Rassilon they are most definitely the work of the gods.

Most every story agrees that in days of yore, Sigel and Maera divided time into two halves. Mortals call these periods day and night. Sigel, arrogant and proud, shone like a brilliant beacon. Maera, more subtle and gentle, shone but pale in the dark sky, a celestial candle to Sigel's bonfire. But Niht, goddess of darkness, saw weakness in Maera's wan light and crept into the sky. Each time Sigel slept, the goddesses fought an endless battle over a monthly cycle, with one side first gaining the upper hand and then the other. Alone in the darkness, Maera beseeched the other gods for help. Here the stories diverge into separate myths.

One says that only Thunor answered her call. He struck his great warhammer, Thunderstorm, upon a rock (Thunor's Anvil, in Nordmark), creating a shower of sparks that flew into the heavens. And so the first stars, known to skalds as Thunor's sparks, were created. In order to stop the stars falling to the earthly realm and scorching it, Spiðari bound them in her great web.

Another myth tells that the stars are torches, set in the heavens by Rigr or Sigel to ward off Niht and give Maera comfort. Because Kenaz had no part in their creation, they give off light but not heat. In older legends they hang from the spider-goddess' web.

Freo is sometimes attributed to the creation of the stars. Each point of light is a campfire, lit both so Freo knows the roads he has already walked and also to comfort Maera during her nightly vigil. Another myth says the stars are the campfires of Tiw's army on watch against invaders.

Regardless of which myth one favors, it is widely agreed that even when Maera's Ember is at its darkest, the stars light up the night sky, keeping the darkness from gaining total victory.

COMETS

Comets are not unknown in Rassilon, though none are on a regular cycle that brings them into view more than once in a person's lifetime. Both the clergy of Hoenir and the Lorekeepers have records of them in their dusty archives dating back many centuries, and skalds frequently mention them in tales. All citizens who honor the benevolent deities consider witnessing a comet a sign of ill-omen and impending disaster.

Actual myths regarding them vary by religion. To the cult of Tiw they are the slain bodies of their god's foes tumbling through the void, a sign that war is coming, while Eira's cult holds they are the spirits of gods killed during the God War. Many claim comets are tied to Hela, for one heralded the rise of the Liche-Priest. In recent times, a blood red comet awakened vengeful Anari spirits (see *Sins of the Father* in *Hellfrost Adventure Compendium 3*).

No records exist regarding whether one lit up the night before the Blizzard War. It may be such records were simply lost in the bloodshed and subsequent chaos.

MAGESTORMS

The Norns have never forgiven Maera for introducing magic into the world. Sporadically, they try to throw all the threads of magic out of their window, thus ridding the universe of its influence. While they never fully succeed (such is their fate), a few fibers of raw magic are cast aside.

These fall to the mortal realm, triggering magestorms. For those living in the High Winterlands, magestorms are visible as flickering curtains of green light in the night sky. Truly powerful storms are visible as far as the northern Hearthlands. Regardless of whether the phenomenon is witnessed or not, magestorms are felt across the continent.

SHOOTING STARS

Rassilon experiences four meteorite showers each year like clockwork.

The Flakes begin on the second Waescdaeg of Eostremonan and last five days. One story says the falling

stars are the remnant of flower petals ripped up by Tiw after Eira left him. Another claims they are sparks caused by Hagvirk sharpening Eostre's hoes and plows in readiness for the coming spring. Yet another says they are flakes of snow sent by Thrym to blanket the world in ice, but scorched by Kenaz or Sigel before they strike.

The Stone Shower begins on the second Marketdaeg of Werremonan and ends anywhere from five to seven days later. Legend has it that during this time Haptsönir and Jarngrimr, bitter enemies, throw huge boulders at each other. Many of these miss and fly out of Godsheim into the great heavenly void.

On the third Waesdaeg of Huntianmonan the night sky is broken by the impressive Blood Drops, fiery red streaks that burn through the heavens. These are blood drops from the epic struggle between Thunor and Thrym, which has been raging since spring. Old wives tales claim that if snow falls before the end of that week, winter will be hard and last well into Eostremonan, for Thrym has driven back his rival. If the snow holds off, the winter winds will be less harsh and spring will come early next year.

The Sparks begin on Endedaeg of Fogmonan, as the Anvil moves into alignment with the Forgemistress, and last exactly four days. It is widely agreed they are sparks created by Ertha striking the Anvil.

CONSTELLATIONS

For untold millennia the races have stared at the heavens and seen shapes in the firmament. Over time, sages and skalds named these formations and attached myths to them. So were born the constellations.

The oldest existing star charts are those inscribed by the gatormen at the height of their ancient empire, though the faded images on their crumbling stone tablets and temple walls bare little resemblance to modern charts. Of the current civilized races, it was the elves that first charted the firmament.

Like Godsheim, there is no one correct view of the stars. Every race, major culture, and cult, not to mention different geographic regions, has their own twists on the tales. Some use different stars in the constellations, while others ignore entire formations in the heavens. The constellations depicted on the star chart and described below are the most widely accepted facts and figures, though as you will see there are varying stories for many.

Although there are countless lesser constellations made up of faint pricks of light, the great constellations are those used in fortune telling, navigation, and common stories, and the ones most clearly visible from the mortal realm.

The star chart is based on midnight observation of the heavens taken from Nara, a major center of learning in the Freelands. As the hours of night pass, the stars rotate counter-clockwise through the sky. As the seasons pass, so different formations are first over the horizon.

To use the star chart, rotate it until the current month is at the bottom. Constellations at the bottom of the chart are in the northern sky, while those at the top lie to the

south. (In order to see the constellations as they would appear in the sky to the characters, hold the chart above your head with the current season facing away from you, and bend it into a curve.)

The world has an axial tilt of around 20 degrees. Thus, constellations near the horizon partially disappear during the year, only to rise high in the sky some six and a half months later. The images on the chart depict all the constellations at their zenith, something that never actually occurs in the night sky. However, geography and cosmology are not recognized sciences in Rassilon, and all star charts the characters will ever come across show the stars in this manner.

Any references to seasons in the text below relate to the Hearthlands.

0. THE SECRET SIGN

This constellation appears on no star charts save the most fanciful, for it is sacred to Niht, mistress of secrets and darkness. That it even exists is subject to furious debate, even among the goddess' cultists. Those who claim it must exist say it is formed of dark stars, invisible to all save Niht herself. Skeptics consider this a very poor excuse for claiming something "must" exist. Even among those who agree it exists, there is no consensus regarding in which part of the sky it hangs.

The mythical constellation goes by many names, including the Veil, the Shroud, the Shadow, the Dark Lady, the Assassin, and the Black Watcher.

1. THE COMPASS

This constellation is known as the Northern Cross in much of the High Winterlands and the Wheel in the Hearthlands. Regardless of race, culture, or faith, all agree it was placed in the heavens by Freo as an aid to navigation. Rassilon has no north star. Instead, the vertical arm of the Compass points due north, guiding travelers on their journeys.

The Compass appears fully in the heavens in late spring, the time when most citizens begin long journeys. As it slips down in the sky toward the horizon, wanderers know it is time to find shelter from the coming winter.

2. THE STAG-HEADED HUNTER

Ullr, the stag-headed god of hunting, who the constellation represents, begins to break the horizon in spring and crosses it fully in Werremonan. This marks the official start of the hunting season in many regions. It lasts until the god sinks again in early Fogmonan. During winter Ullr is only partially visible, when it is said he is sheltering within his hall and preparing for next year's hunt.

3. THE FLAMING CLOAK

The stars of this constellation flicker red in the night sky. They are named for Kenaz's fiery cloak, which when

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Thunor blows on it warms the wind during the summer months. As the constellation sinks lower, so the cold north wind begins to gain dominance.

Since Kenaz's disappearance, the stars have been fuzzy and, some say, have lost much of their color.

On some newer charts it is labeled the Hearth, its image that of a warm fire rather than a cloak. This depiction is growing ever more popular in the Hearthlands as the winters worsen.

4. THE OPENING DOOR

This set of stars depicts Nauthiz's holy symbol. The star marking the bottom of the open door is faint and often not visible for nights on end, even on nights of the Deorcomonan.

On nights it vanishes the door is said to be closed, a ward against Nauthiz's pilfering. When it appears in the sky once more people secure their doors and strong-boxes, for it means Nauthiz is abroad committing acts of theft. Larcenous followers of the faith prefer to commit acts of thievery when the door is opening, believing acts of theft will be more likely to succeed.

5. THE HARP OF RHIANNON

In days of yore, a skald by the name of Rhiannon walked the northern realm. It is said that her music was so sweet and pure she could enthrall the hearts of men and soothe the deepest wound. Vali tried to corrupt her, for he surmised that music of such power could be turned to great wickedness. Rhiannon resisted the dark god's advances time and time again, for her spirit was pure and incorruptible. In a fit of fury, Vali had the skald murdered. To ensure her music would never be forgotten, and to taunt Vali, the Unknowable One convinced his peers to let Rhiannon take her place in the stars.

The story has many variations. One tells that Rhiannon was a skilled harpist, but she was also vain beyond measure, constantly proclaiming her music better than that even of the gods. The Unknowable One, appearing in disguise or acting through divine agents, praised her music and offered her the gift of immortality as a reward. The skald hastily agreed, only to find herself taken from the mortal realm and planted in the heavens. Here, she must play her harp for eternity. This story is a moral one, warning people not only against offending the gods, but being careful of offers that appear too good to be true.

Another has Rhiannon as a liar or slanderer. Her punishment for misusing her gift and position as a skald was imprisonment in the heavens until she learns to tell the truth or retracts her slander. Yet another tells how she charmed the gods with her music and was granted a seat among them so she could entertain them forever.

6. THE SHIELDMAIDEN

This collection of stars represents a fearsome warrior maiden, her sword outstretched as if smiting a foe. Some

depictions show the constellation without a cloak. Such charts omit the four stars encircling the shield. Most folk agree it is the constellation of Scaetha, shieldmaiden of the gods.

Surprisingly, the cult of Scaetha calls the constellation the Valkyrie. While it is important to their cult, it represents not their goddess, but one of her divine servants. Their star charts show the shield star as a lantern, the light from which guides the dead to Scaetha's hall for judgment.

Those who follow this belief hold that dying when the star is below the horizon or hidden behind cloud is an unfortunate fate, for it is said the soul will have difficulty reaching the Afterlife.

7. THE WHITE EYE

Although Maera is more usually associated with the moon, this wandering star (planet) is very important to her followers. Its movement through the night sky and interaction with the constellations is used extensively in divination. The wandering star represents not the goddess of magic, but the milky eye of Hoárri, the minor goddess of divination.

8. THE STORM DRAGON

To the hearth elves this constellation represents a sun dragon breathing fire. To everyone else it is a storm dragon, the symbol of Thunor, spitting lightning.

With Kenaz and Sigel absent, it has fallen to Thunor to continue the fight against the tyranny of Thrym, whose equally draconic constellation this faces. (Tiw, whom one might expect to be Thrym's chief enemy, cares only for conflict, not causes.)

The pair's battle is endless, the constellations rising and falling in different positions as the seasons turn, indicating the battle swinging first one way and then the other. In winter, for example, Thrym appears to hold the northern sky, hovering over Thunor and showing his dominance. In summer, their positions are reversed.

Clerics of Thunor can, so they claim, predict the weather over the coming days by how the stars appear from behind or are obscured by clouds.

9. HERALD OF THE SUN

Appearing fully over the horizon in late summer, the Herald foretells the coming winter and great hardship, but it is also a sign of hope, for it represents Sigel watching over mortals and promises a return of warmer weather in months to come.

The faint star forming the mace head is surrounded by a nebulous yellow cloud. The hearth elves say the star lit up the heavens so brightly at the birth of the Sun King that it could be seen during the day, but since then it has greatly diminished.

Virtually all accounts depict it as a draconic humanoid. While Chosen of Thrym are known to assume the form

of a fell union of Hellfrost dragons and men, no one has ever heard of a Chosen of Sigel, which the constellation apparently represents. The cult of Sigel fervently believes that the mace star will flare again when Sigel returns to the heavens, heralding the birth of the Chosen of Sigel. These most blessed mortals will, so numerous prophecies insist, take the fight to Thrym and end the relentless winters plaguing the world.

10. THE SECRET FONT

These stars represent the great book of lore, in which Hoenir has inscribed all the knowledge of the universe. Faint stars are visible on the “pages,” though their patterns continually shift into new forms, teasing men with knowledge, yet simultaneously denying it to them. The patterns are sometimes used in divinations.

11. THE LEAVING TREE

The five stars that make up the roots, trunk, and tip glow with a constant brightness all year round. Those marking the leaves and branches grow dimmer beginning on Heah Sumor Daeg, almost vanishing completely in mid-winter. They begin to shine more brightly shortly after Heah Wýntr Daeg onward, reaching their zenith sometime in Eostremonan.

While Eostre sends many earthly signs to mark the onset of spring, typically the birth of lambs, many sages still gaze skyward to determine the true end of winter and the advent of the new growing season.

In many Hearthlands farming communities, the appearance of the constellation standing vertically over the horizon as the sun sets means it is too late to harvest any more crops. Such crops are often gathered for use in ceremonies to appease Vali.

The elves have heard tales from the reclusive jegeren that the constellation symbolizes Yggdrasil, the ash tree whose branches and roots touch all the realms of existence, and their former home.

12. THE BLADE

Considered the constellation of Tiw, the weapon depicted, the stars that form its pattern, and its name vary immensely by race and culture. To the frost dwarves it is the Axe, to Saxa the Spear, and to engro the Sling. The Anari call it the Blade. Regardless, it is an instrument of war, Tiw’s specialty.

Many stories say it hangs between Thunor and Thrym because Tiw supports both sides, reveling in the battle for divine supremacy and ensuring neither side gains the upper hand, thus prolonging the conflict indefinitely.

13. THE WARRIOR

Although this constellation depicts a bare-chested warrior, it has nothing directly to do with Tiw, god of war. Instead, every race, culture, realm, and cult, and

sometimes individual settlements, assigns its own legend of a great warrior to the star group.

For instance, to the Tuomi it is Achivir, the Tattooed Warrior, who stood alone against the Hellfrost armies for a whole day before finally succumbing to his wounds. In Nordmark it represents Cenwalch Cerdicsunu, a famous warrior who led the Saxa to freedom in their war against the Anari. The dwarves, who show the figure with an axe rather than a sword, say it is the first king of Karad Khan, Durin the Founder.

All the stories follow the same basic premise—a mighty hero performs some legendary act of heroism and, on death, is rewarded with a prestigious place in the heavens by the grateful gods.

While the specific name changes from place to place, everyone agrees the stars represent a warrior. Thus, its generic name is used on most star charts.

14. THE BALANCED SCALE

These nine stars represent scales. To most they are Hothar’s scale, on which he weighs evidence in legal cases. The cult of Scaetha holds they are the goddess of death’s scales, in which souls are weighed after death to determine their purity. It is thus the constellation of their goddess.

15. THE SCREAMER IN THE DARK

Winter holds many horrors, not least the privations of the cult of Dargar. Many claim this patterns shows a severed head turned sideways, its eyes blindfolded. Others say it is a representation of the blood eagle, that most gruesome and feared manner of torture and death. Regardless of the exact image, it is a warning that the time of civilized life is drawing to a close and the time of the ravenous wolves draws near.

16. THE LOOM

Sacred to the Norns, this group of stars represents their loom, on which the fate of all things is woven. The sky where the tapestry would be on a conventional loom is comprised of hundreds of faint stars. How many stars are visible depends on the phase of the moon, the position of the Loom in the night sky, cloud cover, and so on. As such, soothsayers of the cult use its varying patterns to divine the future.

17. THE FORGEMISTRESS

Frost dwarves set their calendars when the Forgemistress, the constellation sacred to Ertha, steps fully over the horizon, for they know winter is not far away.

In many myths, the placing of the Forgemistress in that part of the sky is no coincidence, for her hammer is raised as if ready to strike at the Vermin King. Its sound, which mortals cannot hear, will, it is hoped, drive vermin from their hiding holes to freeze in the biting winter.



18. THE ANVIL

The Anvil is only the second known wandering star. As the days grow shorter and colder, its regular path brings it into alignment with the Forgemistress as she crosses the horizon into full view. When it reaches the position shown on the star chart, Ertha is said to strike the Anvil, an act that signifies the start of winter. This conjunction also foretells the start of the Sparks shooting star shower. The Anvil appears blue to the naked eye.

19. THE VERMIN KING

Ever hungry, the Vermin Lord begins to rise to prominence shortly after Falmonan, coinciding with the time when the granaries are full. Its zenith is a dire warning that Vali is abroad. Citizens begin setting aside portions of the harvest in preparation for Famine Day, which is scarcely a month away.

It is widely held that kittens born on the day the Vermin Lord rises highest will be natural ratters and mousers. It is also the time when the cult of Veth becomes most active in its fight against Vali's mortal agents.

20. THE HELLFROST DRAGON

Thrym's constellation hangs high in the heavens, locked in eternal combat with Thunor, the last god who can challenge him directly for supremacy of the seasons.

It sits above the Vacant Throne, an ominous sign for those who blame the god of winter for Sigel's disappearance.

21. THE SCIELD

A disc of golden, glittering stars, the Coin is associated with both Nauthiz in his role of god of gamblers and luck, and Var, god of trade, even though both deities have other constellations attributed them.

The six stars are all of variable magnitude, each growing brighter and dimmer to its own rhythm over the course of time. Some change over the course of a week, while others can take years. The brighter the stars, the better one's luck or trading opportunities.

Among Var's cult the patterns are used to divine the likely success of minor trade deals, for the Merchant's Scale (see below) controls major trade agreements. Gamblers tend to be more aware of its shifting patterns, for luck is a fickle master at the best of times and those who live by the roll of the dice need all the help they can get.

Since the stars can only be viewed at night, their brightness is applied to that night and the following day.

The constellation is held in high esteem by the citizens of Drakeport, for it represents the gold scield, the currency their ancestors introduced to the continent after the Blizzard War, and which helped stabilize the shattered nation.

Many residents consider it Drakeport's personal constellation, its varying brightness prophesizing good and bad times for the city. Such is the faith in its portents that Baron Drogo sets his policies according to the particular pattern at the constellation's zenith.

The general population is equally superstitious. Days when all the stars are dim are bad omens, and they refrain from making agreements or performing work of any sort. Much of the city actually closes down, and those who must work do so only after receiving blessings from clerics of Sigel, the city's patron deity. When they are all bright, the citizens believe they are especially blessed.

According to Drogo's personal historian, he was born on a day when all the stars shone brilliantly. Regardless of the actual brightness of the stars, Drogo's birthday is held to be an extremely auspicious day, especially for marriages and births.

22. THE MERCHANT'S SCALE

This is the most generally accepted constellation of Var, god of trade. The two stars marking the scales are

unusual in that they appear at different heights in relation to the rest of the constellation on different nights.

Clerics look to the heavens before making major deals, for the lower the star is on the left compared to its counterpart, the more profit there is to be had from selling goods, while when the right hand star sits higher it is an auspicious time to buy new stock.

To the cult these stars are the lanterns of two of Var's divine thieftakers—Farmatýr ("Protector of Goods") and Reiðartýr ("Wagon Watcher"), moving as the duo patrol Var's celestial marketplace.

23. THE NECROMANCER

The elves, who are wise in such things, claim this constellation came into being during Hela's madness. Formerly it showed Hela in her role a guardian of the gates of the Abyss, but today it depicts a skeletal figure clad in a burial shroud.

It slowly appears over the horizon, sliding into view like the specter of death, its bony hand outstretched toward the Vacant Throne. That it reaches for the empty seat of Sigel is considered a bad sign, for if Hela claims Sigel, the world is doomed to suffer eternal darkness. Fortunately, Eira stands behind the throne, ready to heal Sigel of whatever wounds he has sustained. The great powers of life and death thus battle endlessly for the missing sun god.

24. THE SWAN (AKA THE LOVERS)

To those of poetic or romantic bent the constellation is tied to a myth concerning two lovers. The story concerns a mortal warrior whose name varies, but is given here as Sigmund (not to be confused with Sigmundr, the god of dragon slaying) because that is the name he holds in Royalmark, where the story is supposed to have originated. As he stalked the battlefield looking for fallen comrades, he witnessed the arrival of Scaetha's heralds, sent to gather the dead. One of these heralds was a female spirit who went by the name of Hildabrand (again, this is the Royalmark version).

The mortal immediately fell in love with Hildabrand, for she was a creature beyond mortal beauty. The conventional story has it that the pair met on several battlefields and eventually fell in love. While they could not consummate their feelings toward each other while Sigmund was mortal, the herald knew he would eventually die and enter Godsheim, whereupon they could be forever for eternity.

Alas, Sigmund's allotted time came and went, but his soul was never collected. Distraught, Hildabrand asked Scaetha to let her go to the mortal realm and search for the spirit of her beloved. Scaetha refused, but she did grant her servant permission to search from afar. Taking the form of a majestic swan, Hildabrand flew into the heavens, from where she gazes down at the world of men. It is said she has searched for centuries, but the soul of Sigmund continues to elude her.

A less romantic version has it that Sigmund longed to

see Hildabrand so much after their first encounter that he went on a murderous rampage in order that Scaetha might send the herald to the mortal realm more often. As punishment, Scaetha took Sigmund's soul in secret. Hildebrand's eternal vigil is her punishment for encouraging the relationship. Yet another version tells that Hildabrand grew impatient and killed Sigmund before his time so as to gather his soul. Again, her position in the sky rather than serving Scaetha is punishment.

25. THE VACANT THRONE

What name this constellation had before the Blizzard War is long forgotten. Since that terrible age it has been known as the Vacant Throne, for it is believed to represent Sigel's high seat, which stands vacant in his empty hall. When Sigel returns, it will again be occupied.

Pessimists claim the stars that make up the Vacant Throne are fading, something the cults of Hoenir and Sigel dispute.

26. THE WHITE MOTHER

This constellation depicts Eira in her typical form, a young maiden with arms outstretched, palms upward in a gesture of peace. She begins to slip from the sky in shame at the blood that will be spilled as Werremonan approaches.

27. THE EVERFULL JUG

Mariners use Neorthe's constellation, which hangs high in the sky, as a navigation aid. When an imaginary line is drawn between the two stars marking the lower and center right of the jug, they point almost due north.

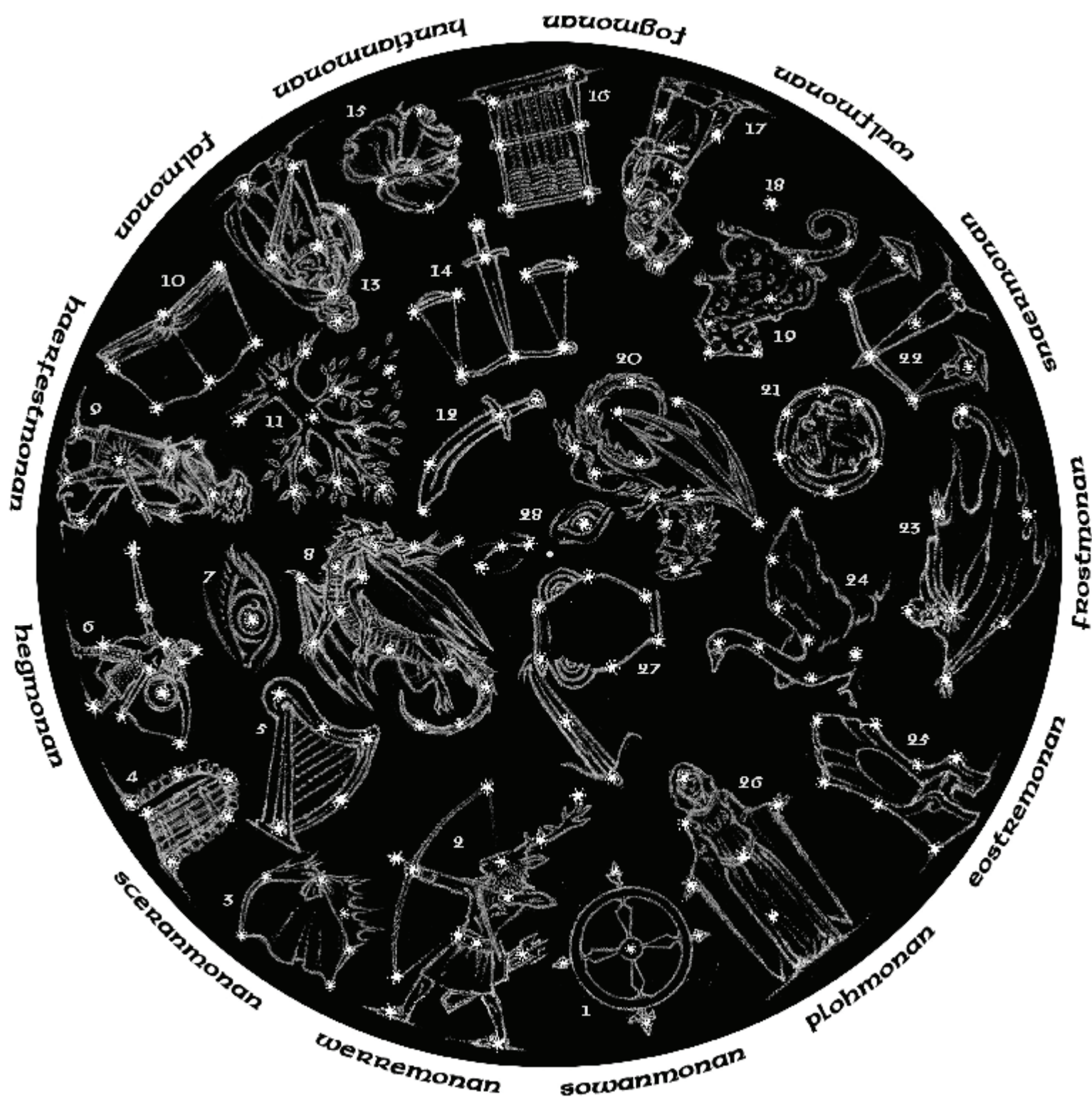
Although Thunor is the god of air, Neorthe's constellation is also used to help forecast the coming weather. The first star marking the tipping water is one of the brightest in the sky. From fall through spring, a faint, circular rainbow often appears around it just before snow falls. According to myth, this is the result of Thrym trying to freeze the liquid.

28. THE WATCHER

Ever-vigilant, the lidded eye of Rigr hangs in the night sky, seemingly closed, yet ceaselessly peering down on the mortal realm, for the Watchman does not sleep.

In many myths the right-hand star (which marks the "open eye") is not part of the constellation proper. Instead, it is said to be Thunor's lantern, which rotates around the invisible peak of Himinbjörg as the weather god wanders his realm. The star is surrounded by a hazy cloud, said to be covering the mountain's peak, illuminated by the powerful lantern.

Note that the solid white dot between the eyes is not a heavenly body, and is not visible in the night sky. It marks the point around which the heavens rotate—the peak of Himinbjörg, the mountain of heaven.



THE ABYSS



The Abyss is the realm of the damned, where those who commit terrible sins in life or die without a patron deity are sent to suffer for eternity. This chapter takes a look at the denizens of the Abyss and the depraved, black-hearted mortals who traffic with them. It is not an adventurers' guide to exploring the hellish realm or laying waste to its near godlike rulers. Nor is it a supplement of hard facts and absolutes. Instead, it presents a variety of commonly held opinions, any of which might be true.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The name "demon" is often applied erroneously to all manner of otherworldly denizens. Elementals, especially non-standard ones, and Unseelie fey are often branded as demons by the superstitious and gods-fearing folk. Much of this stems purely from ignorance, for few are learned in the lands beyond the mortal realm, and the belief that all evil not attributable to the dark gods must stem from the Abyss.

Those who hunt demons, such as the cults of the Norns and Viðarr and the Watchers of the Black Gate may spend months tracking down a supposed demon, only to discover it is an Unseelie fey on a bloody rampage or an elemental (or indeed a mortal entity) mistaken for a denizen of the Abyss. Unfortunately, those avowed to combat darkness in all its forms cannot afford to second guess what the ghastly description a peasant gives them might truly represent, for demons take many forms and not all the Abyss' inhabitants are documented.

In its correct usage, the term applies solely to creatures whose existence stems from the Abyss. Even then, those who have delved into the forbidden lore understand that demons comprise different categories.

The demon princes, also known as demon lords, are ancient creatures of utter malevolence whose origins are a mystery even to the gods. Then there are true demons, creatures spawned by the demon lords from their essence and who knew no mortal existence. Finally, there

are lesser demons, the remnants of twisted souls sent to the Abyss for their sins in life.

Mortals who study demons and the Abyss without serving the hellish denizens are known as demonologists. They need the Knowledge (Monsters: Demons) skill (the Monster part can be dropped for brevity), and must be literate in Black Tongue. Knowledge (Arcana) might prove useful, as it covers mystic signs and other paraphernalia. Such studies are heavily frowned upon, but not illegal. Those who worship demons but gain no magical power from them are usually referred to simply as cultists. The "high priests" of the cults of the demon princes, mortals who have sacrificed to gain magical power, are called demonists.

● THE ABYSS ●

Much conjecture exists among mortals regarding both the nature and the origins of the Abyss. No one theory is completely correct, nor is it totally incorrect. Neither the gods nor mere mortals can enter the Abyss without being damned, a fate from which there is no escape, and the word of demons is trusted only by the insane, for lies and trickery are second nature to them. To claim that any one theory is true is both arrogant and foolish.

ORIGINS OF DEMONS

The Abyss has existed since the dawn of the universe. What concerns theologians more is how the demons came into being. Some of the more popular theories are briefly discussed below.

* When the universe was born, all the negative elements of creation banished there coalesced from the primordial soup of chaos, entropy, and darkness into the demon lords, either by the gods or the now forgotten sole creator deity. As each demon prince evolved, they spawned the first true demons, much as the gods created

GODS & DEMONS

One question that has plagued the races down the ages is why the gods allow demons to be summoned. After all, these are creatures who revel in wanton destruction, pain, and abject misery. Put in the simplest terms, the gods allow certain demons to be summoned because they have use for them. But they do so only begrudgingly, and always with caution. Even Dargar will not throw open the Gates of the Abyss. Partly because this would be a breach of the Compact, an act likely to result in his death (the gods have learned from Hela's madness and their leniency), if not the destruction of the entire universe. Dargar wants to cull the weak, not cull everybody.

the sentient races. This belief, that true demons are the creations of the princes, is common to most, but not all, of the theories below.

* A closely related version claims that before the universe was created there was only the endless Void, a chaotic jumble of darkness, evil, and chaos. In this infinite nothingness dwelt the first demons, those mortals call princes or lords. When the gods (or sometimes just a god) ignited the stars and brought light into the heavens, the fell beings rose up in anger and declared war. This is not generally considered to be the God War, but an early event. The forces of darkness lost and were banished to a prison known as the Abyss for all time.

* Before the current gods there dwelt another pantheon. These deities are truly ancient, and whatever races worshipped them are long dead (though some hint they were the original gods of the dragons and giants). Their positions were usurped by either the current pantheon or yet another line of deities now forgotten. Because Death had not yet been found and awakened from his slumber it was impossible to slay them, hence they were imprisoned for eternity. Trapped, they became filled only with negative emotions, which warped their very being.

* A related legend holds that the demon lords are gods whose worshippers either died out or turned their backs on them in favor of others. Robbed of worship, their fate was to live in the darkness that is the Abyss, powerful beings for sure, but ones ranking far below the awesome might of the gods. Their anger at being forsaken warped their essence into the vile demons lords.

* Another story tells how they were servants or slaves of the gods (their children in some legends). As often happens among mortals, the lowly minions rebelled against their masters. Many were destroyed (again, this is not widely believed to be the God War), but the survivors were banished to the Abyss, forever cut off from their celestial homes and the grace of the gods. Hatred seethed and boiled, corrupting and twisting the fallen godlings into vile mockeries of the gods.

* Jealous that the gods had created mortals without asking for his advice or input, Loki, father of the Un-

knowable One, took it upon himself to create his own race. Not wishing to stoop so low as to create mere playthings from the four elements, Loki tore out slivers of his own heart and breathed life into them. So were born the demon lords, neither god nor mortal. Once their evil nature became apparent, the gods warred against them and banished them to the Abyss.

None of these theories can ever be proven, or indeed disproved. While it is likely both Hoenir and Niht know the truth, they have no wish to speak of such things with mere mortals.

THE NATURE OF THE ABYSS

The Abyss is both a physical and spiritual realm simultaneously. Those in the realm, whether native inhabitant or damned soul judged unfit for a better Afterlife, interact with it as if it were a physical reality. Yet it occupies no space in the mortal realm and is thus ephemeral to outsiders. Perhaps the nearest earthly analogy is a dream, a reality that exists only in one state of consciousness.

That the Abyss is a prison is not beyond doubt. If demons were free to visit the mortal realm they would undoubtedly do so in great numbers and without requiring the help of mortals. The Compact does not bind the demon princes, and yet they are seemingly unable to directly interfere in mortal affairs.

Whether the Abyss is of finite size or extends forever is another topic of debate. A rational argument is that as a prison there must be walls, or at least some form of boundary, to prevent escape. If Scaetha is the gatekeeper of the Abyss, as was Hela before her, there must naturally be an entrance. These logical deductions preclude infinite size. Others insist that the laws of the mortal realm cannot be so easily applied to the otherworldly realms. Scaetha's Gate is not a physical portal as mortals would understand, and the infinite nature of the Abyss prevents demons from ever straying into the mortal world.

The nature of Scaetha's Gate is also not fully understood by mortals. More than one sage has claimed it can only be opened from the outside. Thus, Scaetha watches over it not to prevent the demons from escaping under their own volition, but to prevent others letting them loose (as Hela did).

While mortals find it convenient to discuss the Abyss as being divided into realms, much like the mortal world, the truth is less cut and dry. Eostre's clerics, for example, speak of the Barren Wastes, where the fallen toil at impossible agricultural tasks, but it is not a unique realm. Rather, every demon lord controls a version of the Barren Wastes, sculpted to fit its idea of the punishment. Regardless of which demon lord claims a fallen soul, the punishment is fairly standard (assuming the souls isn't converted into a demon or just eaten, of course). Typical punishments are listed below.

Only the inhabitants of the Abyss know what truly lies beyond Scaetha's Gate, and they are not to be trusted. Mortals cannot invoke *gravespeak* to contact the damned for the gods forbid it. Clerics argue this is for the protec-

tion of mortals, for to contact an Abyss-banished soul is to risk corruption, and through corruption damnation. Others insist that since the Abyss is a prison its occupants are denied the right to speak to outsiders.

WHY ARE SOULS SENT HERE?

None of the gods, not even Eira, are entirely benevolent toward mortals. Worshipers who take a god as a patron and then fail to abide by their laws, or those who do not take a patron, are likely to be harshly punished. Some gods are more lenient than others, of course, but all have a line that once crossed spells doom for the sinner. That the gods, even Eira, allow mortals to suffer eternal damnation raises two questions.

#1: Why are the demon lords allowed to bid on unclaimed souls?

The gods do not desire troublemakers and ne'er-dowells in their realms anymore than mortals do. And without the threat of punishment what reason is there for mortals to obey the gods' decrees and lead productive lives? Even Hela, whom many consider the vilest deity due to her insane act, forces her clergy to obey certain tenets or face her wrath.

One theory states that long ago the gods decided that there could be no single god of evil (or good). Such a being would undoubtedly lay claim to any soul which had committed a sin which it had not repented, and thus grow extremely powerful. Since the Abyss already existed as a prison, the gods made use of it as a dumping ground.

That allowing souls to enter the Abyss swells the ranks of the infernal legions is undeniable, for these souls are used to spawn new demons. Some mortals argue that the Abyss is held in balance by endless wars between the demon lords. Furthermore, because all the demon princes must bid as separate entities, there is fierce competition for new souls. This natural animosity fuels the ongoing conflict and keeps the princes occupied.

There is a counter argument that says that eventually there will be a winner, a demon prince who rises above the mangled remains of his former peers and claims rulership of the entire Abyss. When this occurs, the demon lord will have enough followers to achieve godhood. This, perhaps, will herald the End of Times, a titanic battle spoken of in ancient prophecies, when the heavens will be sundered, the Norns' loom smashed, and the threads of life unraveled. Most believe this will mark the end of the universe and the end of all existence, but a small few see it as a new beginning, an age when mortals will shape their own destiny. Those who espouse the latter belief are usually proclaimed heretics.

#2: How do demons bid on souls?

By its very nature an auction requires active participation. Since the demon lords are perpetually incarcerated, neither they nor their minions may attend the auctions.

It is widely believed that Scaetha's servants, celestial wardens to the damned, act on their behalf. While mortals cannot communicate with the Abyss' inhabitants, there is no such law preventing the gods doing so. Of

course, such interaction is not without risks—Hela's madness is popularly believed to have come about after her becoming corrupted by conversing with the forces of darkness down the eons.

Scaetha, by mortal accounts, changes the wardens regularly and has Hothar check their loyalty, thus ensuring no demon prince can ever gain sway over them. Furthermore, the servants are forbidden from any interaction with mortals, and thus unable to pass on anything they have learned regarding the nature of the Abyss.

A REALM FOR ALL SINNERS

It should be noted that while mortals are capable of committing sins and switching divine allegiance, souls are not. Once a soul has been judged it is forever fixed in its state. Thus, no soul awarded a place in the Afterlife can ever be banished to the Abyss for a transgression, because the very thought of a transgression is utterly impossible. Similarly, no soul damned to the Abyss can ever repent and achieve salvation, though it retains full knowledge that such an act was possible during its mortal existence. When clerics speak of an eternity of suffering they are being quite literal.

Demons are cruel to their own kind, at least those lower down the pecking order, but they are especially hard on mortals sent to their realm. Part of this comes from their vile nature, while part of it comes from their knowing that the mortal had an opportunity they did not, but chose to squander the gift of an Afterlife.

A brief summary of the punishments fallen worshipers are likely to suffer is given below. These are the ones most commonly espoused by clerics, but are by no means the only ones the demons can dream up.

Dargar: Sinners are most likely worshipers who failed to commit acts of wanton destruction in life, or who showed pity to victims. The former are destined to become demonic soldiers, while the latter are tortured in a variety of sickening ways with no hope of pity for the pleasure of the demon lords.

Eira: Endless servitudes as a demonic soldier (or some other type of remorseless killer) awaits pacifists and healers who shed blood too often.

Eostre: Sinners spend eternity plowing and planting the barren soil in which nothing grows, milking cattle whose udders are bone dry, and endlessly shearing sheep whose wool grows at an unearthly pace. Others might find themselves harvesting corpses grown in blood-soaked soil or culling lesser demons like livestock to feed their demonic masters.

Ertha: Those damned by Ertha are normally used as slave labor in the demon lords' mines. Each day they are scourged while they rip gleaming chunks of metal from the earth under the glare of a burning sun.

Freo: Some clerics claim their punishment is to walk a circular road. They are thus condemned to walk the same path with nothing new to see or become fatter hounds. Others claim sinners are chained, unable to move from a solitary spot and thus never able to explore again.

HELLFROST: MATTERS OF FAITH

Hela: Hela's faith preaches no belief in the Abyss, for Hela claims all souls owed her. Even sinners may be reborn as undead, though always as the lowest kind. Ironically, those who truly fail Hela are often redeemed souls, former worshippers who have realized the error of their ways. They are often claimed by Scaetha or Sigel to serve as soldiers in the heavenly armies against Hela's legions.

Hoenir: Fallen worshippers of Hoenir suffer two interwoven fates. First, they are forced to burn books on vast bonfires in which knowledge is greedily consumed. At the end of each day, the scholars throw themselves onto the fires, for they are things of learning and wisdom. The agony begins again each dawn as they are reformed to continue stoking the eternal fires. Second, they are unable to learn anything new or pass on their knowledge. Some may be transformed into librarian demons to serve the demon princes.

Hothar: Servants of obedience and order, these wretches are condemned to be bound in chains while demons assail their ears with lies and false oaths. Many are first hauled before a mock court where justice is served up arbitrarily.

Kenaz: Damned souls are entombed up to their waists in ice while ice demons stab at their exposed flesh with their frozen spears.

Maera: Many are used as target practice for spellcasting demons, their mangled bodies reformed each day so the demon's fun can continue.

Nauthiz: Fallen thieves are dunked into rivers of molten gold and silver or have their ears and mouth fills with molten metal. Some are force fed coins and gems, then used as piñatas by demons. A small few become collector demons.

Neorthe: Depending on their sins the fallen may be buried alive, conscripted to serve as oarsmen in the demons' navy, or forced to dig in a burning desert for drops of moisture to whet their unquenchable thirst.

Niht: Many who fail Niht are sent to the Abyss out of their desire to learn or their inability to keep secrets. They serve as fuel for the bonfires of Hoenir's fallen, their ashes reborn each day to suffer the searing flames over and over.

Norns: Souls have their heads twisted backward, allowing them to see only the past. Even the present is denied to them.

Rigr: Rigr's worshippers are warned that to fail the god means to be blinded in the Abyss. Those who through apathy or inaction allow settlements to be destroyed are haunted by accusatory shades that take the form of the slain. All are set as watchmen over communities of damned souls. Naturally, these settlements are doomed to be destroyed in the endless war.

Scaetha: Scaetha promises no set version of the Abyss, just endless torment—the mortal servants of the Gatekeeper are especially damned, for the demons have never forgotten that it was Scaetha who sealed the gate Hela had opened for them. Many are used as battering rams against the Gate, their skulls smashed over and over as the demons try to escape. Their cries, it is said, are capable of reaching Scaetha's ears.

Sigel: Souls are forced to drink and gamble to excess. This may not sound too bad to some, but for servants of Sigel, who can be rather puritanical, it is hell. Just before dawn, demons claw out the victims' eyes preventing them from seeing Sigel rise. The eyes regrow once Sigel has left the sky.

Thrym: Those who fail Thrym are consigned to roast over burning coals or swim through rivers of lava.

Thunor: Enslavement is the only fate worthy of those who fail Thunor. Some serve in mines, others become servants of the demon princes' palace. They are regularly abused and forced to obey draconian laws.

Tiw: Those who forsook Tiw are made to swim in a river of blood in which swirl clashing swords and axes, their flesh slashed and pierced for eternity. Souls who allowed those under their care to die are tormented by shades, who mock their battle prowess and call them cowards while the sinners battle the deadly.

Ullr: Those who hunted for sport or disrespected their prey by not using all available parts are chased by wolves and bears, to be torn apart in bloody frenzy before being reborn to begin the chase anew each day. Hunters who failed their communities are condemned to hunt unkillable beasts, all the while beset by desperate shades that clamor for nourishment.

The Unknowable One: The Unknowable One promises no set fate, for such an act would be against his nature. Punishments are thus tailored for individuals.

Vali: Ironically, many of those Vali sends to the Abyss are souls which failed to perform acts of debauchery and sin. Some are condemned to watch while demons wallow in depravity so sick it makes the gods queasy. Those who failed to cause famines or plagues suffer disfiguring diseases and endless, gnawing hunger. Urine and filth form their diet, but it provides no nourishment. Those who harmed vermin are set to be gnawed upon by biting rats for eternity.

Var: Souls who stole or cheated on weights and measures in life are forced to push enormous sacks of corrupt souls to the keep of the demon lords. Their task is never ending, for the sacks grow heavier and heavier. Demons with barbed whips scourge the flesh from their backs. Charitable worshippers (a sin in Var's eyes) are forced to fill chests which hang over raging infernos. At the bottom of the inferno are greedy souls writhing in the conflagration. Coins placed in the chests fall through, for they have no base, but melt before reaching the grasping hands. Those who failed to keep accurate books or who made continual losses are employed by merchants by the demon princes, forced to trade in souls without reward.

DEMONS AND MORTALITY

It has long been argued that since the Abyss is a physical realm to its denizens, they can suffer injuries. There must also exist the threat of death. One question that has long troubled mortals is what happens to a demon that dies.

In the mortal realm its earthly shell is simply dissolved

and the spiritual essence is returned to the Abyss. Thus, no mortal can truly slay a demon, only banish it whence it came. A small victory for those who are pledged to rid the world of demons, but still a victory.

But what happens when a demon dies in the Abyss? It cannot be that Scaetha judges the soul, for all that would happen is it would be found guilty and sent back to the Abyss for eternity. This would essentially make all demons truly immortal.

Perhaps, as some argue, the demonic spirit is reduced to the same level as a condemned mortal soul, a pitiful creature to be tortured and agonized until the end of time. Such a fall from power would indeed be punishment to a great demon, but of little consequence to lesser demons. Some sages debate where death in the Abyss signals total obliteration, the removal of the demon's essence from the universe. This argument opens up the question of what might lie beyond the universe, a topic few care to dwell upon, for in such talk lies madness and impossible reasoning.

● DEMONIC CULTS ●

Following the destructive Demongate War, demonic cults went into near-terminal decline. Hounded by clerics of the Norns, Hela (at that time still a benevolent goddess), and Sigel, they were hunted down and put to the sword and spell without mercy. The dark cults enjoyed a resurgence during the age of the Liche-Priest, only to suffer losses again during the chaos and aftermath of the Blizzard War. Since then, though, their numbers have slowly begun to increase again. Although the Seekers of the Black Key represent the most well known cult, at least to those who study such topics, they are not the only cult.

A typical cult comprises just one leader. He or she is usually a demonist, a magician able to draw power from the Abyss at a demon prince's allowance. Common membership varies between a handful to as many of 50 damned souls. With the population of Rassilon now scattered and still greatly reduced from its heyday, the cults remain small partly as a means of hiding their existence from the eternally vigilant clerics out to destroy them and partly because it is difficult to find willing recruits.

Multiple reasons exist why a mortal might turn away from the gods and toward the shadowy demon princes, creatures of unfathomable evil who have no direct means of affecting the mortal world, but the most common is one of the oldest lures known—power. Most, to use a Saxa phrase, are a ewe short of a flock, though even intelligent beings have been lured into the cults.

ARCANE BACKGROUND (DEMONIST)

Requirements: Novice (see below)

Arcane Skill: Demonic Magic (Smarts)

Starting Powers: 3 (see below)

Powers: See below.

While other types of magician draw their power from the threads of magical energy, those who traffic with demons draw negative energy from the Abyss itself.

In order to form a link between the mortal realm and the Abyss, the aspiring demonic magician must willfully sacrifice a member of his own species while pledging loyalty to a specific demon lord. As with clerics, a demonist may have only one patron. Another sacrifice must be offered each time the demonist learns any Power Edge.

Once the deed is done, a single magical thread extends from the mortal to the Abyss. Although the demonist remains mortal, a place for him is reserved in the Abyss. This dual status is a weak point in the Abyss' walls. Fortunately it is one few ever choose to exploit.

The dark thread is visible with *detect arcana*. As the demonist gains more power, so the width of the thread thickens. After he has gained three Power Edges or made a single dark pact (see below), the thread's true nature becomes apparent—a vein-like tube which pulsates as it siphons the goodness and morality from the demonist.

There is no such thing as a morally gray demonic magician, and a benevolent one is most definitely impossible. The requirement of sacrificing a sentient creature of one's own species and then purposefully using magical energy from the Abyss damns their soul and erodes any positive emotions. Many are at least half-insane, having repeatedly witnessed things man was not meant to know.

Powers: Every demon lord has a specific spell list, much like those of the gods. Note that while demonists often refer to their spells as being granted them by their demonic prince, the prince is not directly involved. Rather, the demonist's own view of the Abyss, as well as the nature of his master, determines what power he can draw forth. When a demonist first takes this Edge he learns the prince's signature spell, one Novice spell of his choice from the demon's list, and the *sacrifice* power.

Casting: Tapping into the energy of the Abyss is physically tiring and mentally harrowing. As he invokes the spell, the caster is subjected to terrifying visions of the Abyss and its fell, unearthly denizens. The maximum number of spells which may be attempted per day is equal to the caster's Spirit die.

Backlash: Demonists are not subjected to the Siphoning—whatever is causing that effect is unable to affect the otherworldly Abyssal energy. A roll of 1 on the arcane skill die (regardless of Wild Die) forces the caster to roll on the Fright Table. A critical failure means a roll on the Fright Table at +2.

Losing Magic: Unlike the gods, demon princes impose no sin lists on their followers. However, a demonist who partakes in kindly acts or uses his powers to aid others out of feelings of comradeship or fealty quickly finds his link to the Abyss weakening.

Each mundane or magical act of kindness or charity, even toward those he might consider friends, causes a permanent and cumulative -1 penalty to all Demonic Magic rolls. The sacrifice of a sentient being of one's own race erases one point of penalties.

HELLFROST: MATTERS OF FAITH

DARK PACTS

Becoming a demonist requires vile acts and pledges of loyalty, but there is still a glimmer of hope for salvation should the demonist have a change of heart. Unfortunately, such an act never truly removes the taint of evil, and unless the repentant demonists masters another form of magic or takes holy vows he still has access to his infernal spells. Thus, the temptation to fall back into old habits always remains.

Repentance is far from easy, even for those who have only dabbled in darkness. The forces of damnation plague the demonist with threats and temptations at every step of his arduous journey. Any evil or morally gray act while on the long and winding road to salvation will erase any good deeds undertaken during penance. For player characters who have strayed into this foul enterprise and have a changed of heart, the hero must avoid any evil, morally dubious, or criminal act and not employ his dark magic while earning 20 XPs. A single slip, no matter how trivial, instantly resets the Experience Point counter to zero.

Those who undertake the dark pact, however, have no hope of repentance. The moment their pact is made, their soul is forever tarnished. Only demonists can make dark pacts.

Benefits: A dark pact grants the recipient a permanently active spell of his choice from the list below. With spells which allow multiple choices, such as *warrior's gift* or *weapon immunity*, the demonist must pick one option when the pact is made. This cannot be changed later, though taking multiple pacts allows different options to be stacked. The power is a physical transformation, and thus cannot be *negated* or *dispelled*. Only the spells listed below may be gained as benefits. Spells grant the effects of a success the first time they are taken and those of a raise if taken a second time.

Spells: *Altered senses, armor, aura, boost trait, charismatic aura, deflection, energy immunity, fly, gift of battle, leaping, quickness, smite* (only affects the caster's teeth or hands), *speed, wall walker, warrior's gift, weapon immunity, wilderness step*.

Price: All dark pacts come at a price. The demonist must offer up a number of sentient sacrifices equal to twice the level of the benefit he wishes to gain (two for a Novice power, four for Seasoned, and so on) *and* expend one **permanent** die in Vigor. This expenditure of vital energy, a prized commodity in the Abyss, also reduces the demonist's maximum Vigor die. For instance, the normal human maximum is d12+2. A demonists who has made four pacts, assuming he survived the energy drain, has a maximum Vigor of d8.

The physical transformation of the demonist clearly marks the recipient as being tainted. A demonist who takes *armor*, for example, cannot have "tough skin." Rather, his skin might become jet black and glistening, transform into hard scales, or become covered in bone plates. A cloak or gloves might hide the benefit, but it can never be a mundane alteration.

DEMON LORDS

Demon lords have no stats. They have lived for eons, wield powers second only to the gods, and cannot be troubled by even the strongest and wiliest mortal. They are also imprisoned, so no mortal or god could challenge them even if it saw fit.

This section details a small number of demon lords among the myriad supposed to exist. GMs looking for specific princes for evil cults to follow can quickly create their own using those in the section as a template.

Each is presented using a standard template. Note that unlike the gods, demon lords have no sin lists, nor do they require their followers to perform set duties. As prisoners, the princes cannot enforce their will on mortals or punish them for transgressions—that comes once the soul finally reaches the Abyss.

Titles: The demon prince's common name, as well as any titles granted him by mortals.

Aspect: Like the gods, most demon lords are closely affiliated with a number of aspects.

Symbol: Demon lords have symbols. These are not the same as holy symbols, but are displayed a means by which of cultists may recognize each other and a sign of the insane mortal's devotion.

Signature Spell: Although the princes do not personally grant spells, the energy emanating from their realm, has a unique signature. This spell must be Novice or Seasoned.

Powers: The other powers available to followers of the prince with the Arcane Background (Demonist) Edge. The character cannot learn spells not in this list. No demon prince's powers list, excluding his signature spell, may exceed three Novice, two Seasoned, and one Veteran spell, plus *summon demon* and *summon spirit* (both restricted to types related to aspects). Furthermore, no demon prince may ever grant *bless, gravespeak, healing, light, or succor*.

Trappings: Every demonic realm has one key geographic feature. This reflects in the worshipper's spells as a trapping.

Dark Pact: Some demon lords allow additional benefits from dark pacts. If a pact allows an Edge, all requirements are ignored except those of other Edges.

Description: Although not even the gods have seen a demon lord in the flesh (at least not since much earlier epochs), their description is known to mortals through brief glimpses while working demonic magic, in fevered nightmares, and in art drawn during the Demongate War by their hellish minions. The section also describes typical cultist behavior and practices.

ANDHAKA

Titles: The Indomitable Will, Fortress of the Abyss, One Who Never Quakes, The Strength Within.

Aspects: Invincibility, steadfastness, willpower.

Symbol: A heart wrapped in chains.

Signature Spell: *Boost/lower trait* (Spirit, Vigor, and Intimidation only).

Powers: *Armor, deflection, energy immunity, fear, summon spirit* (courage), *weapon immunity*.

Trappings: Trappings relate to physical defense and indomitable will. *Armor* might simply allow the target to shrug off damage, while *deflection* might be a stare that causes attackers to quail or involve physically swatting aside a weapon like it was a feather.

Dark Pact: Those who form a dark pact with Andhaka do not lose Vigor. Instead, they suffer a loss of Smarts. Eventually they end up too stupid to flee danger. Cultists may take Nerves of Steel, Improved Nerves of Steel, Hard to Kill, Harder to Kill, and Strong-Willed through dark pacts. The first four cause their skin to harden and transform into scales. The latter turns their eyes jet black and soulless.

Description: The Fortress of the Abyss is always shown as a muscular figure. His skin is scaled, his head like that of a triceratops, his feet wide and immovable, tipped with claws that can grip any surface. His eyes are soulless, jet-black orbs—all viewers see reflected are their own fears and weaknesses, for Andhaka fears nothing. He has no need for weapons or armor, for none below the level of demon prince can summon the mental strength required to raise a weapon against him, and even his peers must delve deep into their inner reserves.

Andhaka is the spirit of inner strength, steely looks that can cause a berserker's courage to falter, unshakable self-belief, and unassailable power. Many of his followers are not great leaders of men, but cowards who seek refuge and strength in his cult. Neither Dargar nor Tiw will traffic with cowards nor teach them how to protect themselves, and Eira's clerics speak of peace and understanding, when most of those who feel persecuted want only to fight off their oppressors. Where the gods fail, though, cultists of Andhaka are only too pleased to help.

The demon prince cares not one iota who worships him in life, for all shall kneel before his might in death.

GRAETHIG

Titles: Lord of Plenty, Demon of Covetousness and Greed, the One Who Provides.

Aspects: Wealth, material greed, covetousness.

Symbol: A skull emblazoned gold scield.

Signature Spell: *Boost/lower trait* (Gambling, Lock-picking, Persuasion, and Streetwise only).

Powers: *Bolt, charismatic aura, lock/unlock, summon demon* (chain, changeling, collector, fetter hound, imp, librarian), *summon spirit* (jealousy).

Trappings: All trappings are, when possible, related to wealth in some form. *Charismatic aura*, for instance, might bedeck a target in jewelry or allow him to bribe people with gold coins. All are illusions, and disappear when the spell ends. *Bolt* might represent a stream of battering coins.

Dark Pact: The Rich and Filthy Rich Edges are available as dark pacts. Such money brings with it the Major Greedy and Mean Hindrances. The demonist becomes exceptionally jealous of his wealth and has no concept of charity. He won't lend money without charging exorbitant interest rates.

Description: Graethig is often shown as being a human with just two small horns to mark his demonic nature. Such images are flattering, for Graethig's true form, as detailed in several demonic texts written by demons, has goat legs, a torso of matted black hair, scaly arms, a bald, red head broken by two unsightly horns, and three pairs of scaled wings.

Those who crave material wealth are drawn to Graethig's dark cult. Merchants, thieves, nobles, and peasants chant together and offer blood sacrifices in roughly equal numbers, each beseeching their fell master to give them wealth beyond their imagination. The demon prince is only too happy to provide, for he knows soon he will have more of his favorite currency—damned souls.

Typical worshippers crave the good things in life and seek to gain riches without earning. Nobles oppress their peasants with taxes, thieves steal from those who already have wealth, merchants charge high prices for shoddy goods, and peasants take to murdering strangers for their belongings, stealing sheep and cows, or without holding their tax payments.

JARNBANIX

Titles: The Shrieking Storm, Dealer of Quick Death, Demon Lord of Ferocity and Rage.

Aspects: Ferocity.

Symbol: A mailed gauntlet.

Signature Spell: *Quickness*.

Powers: *Battle song, boost/lower trait* (Strength, Vigor, and Fighting only), *smite, summon demon* (demonic soldier, lasher, spined, and rage), *summon spirit* (anger), *warrior's gift*.

Trappings: Trappings take the form of physical transformations to something resembling the demon prince.

Dark Pact: Demonists can take the Berserk, Frenzy, and Sweep Edges (and the Improved versions) through a dark pact. Each Edge slowly transforms them into a twisted horror, a mortal version of their infernal patron.

Description: Jarnbanix takes the form of a monstrous humanoid. His savage head is marred by a wide mouth full of large teeth, with two silver tusks protruding at the corners of his maw. Two large horns, like those of an aurochs, sprout from his furrowed brow. Batlike wings tipped with razor sharp claws stretch from his back. His arms are those of a lion, tipped with iron claws as sharp as any spear. His skin is midnight blue, but concealed beneath silver armor in which the misty forms of devoured souls writhe and silently scream.

Jarnbanix is the demon of lightning quick attacks, relentless ferocious strikes, and sudden death. Many of his followers are berserkers and assassins, drawn to him because he places no restrictions on their behavior.

HELLFROST: MATTERS OF FAITH

MALBORGA

Titles: Bringer of Retribution, the Vengeful One, Righter of Wrongs, the Instrument of Revenge.

Aspects: Vengeance.

Symbol: A bloody knife.

Signature Spell: *Boost/lower trait*.

Powers: *Bladebreaker*, *fear*, *shape change*, *smite*, *summon demon* (changeling, fear, madness, revealer, screaming), *summon spirit* (anger, grief, pain).

Trappings: The demonist can alter his trappings with each casting.

Dark Pact: A demonist without the Vengeful Hindrance, or who has only the Minor version, gains the Major version when he takes his first demonic pact. This replaces the usual Vigor loss. If he has the Major Hindrance already, Vigor is lost as normal.

Description: The demonic prince of vengeance appears only as a shadowy figure. His most deadly weapon is his voice, a whisper that taunts victims about their fate and fuels the bitterness and anger in their hearts.

Only those consumed by the burning desire to avenge a wrong, real or perceived, turn to the dark lord. From murder to destroying a reputation to financial ruin, the demon is only too happy to help. Those who seek his aid soon find that achieving their goal does not end their torment, for the demon lord fills their hearts with vengeful thoughts.

SÁRRATAKA

Titles: Bringer of Pain, the Caressing Hand of Agony.

Aspects: Pain.

Symbol: A spiked whip.

Signature Spell: *Fatigue*.

Powers: *Confusion*, *lower trait* (no boost), *sluggish reflexes*, *smite*, *stun*, *summon demon* (lasher, screaming, spined), *summon spirit* (pain).

Trappings: All trappings are related to pain.

Dark Pact: Demonists can learn ways to enjoy greater pain but without any of the debilitating effects through a dark pact. They can take Combat Reflexes, Nerves of Steel, and Improved Nerves of Steel.

Description: Sárrtaka appears as a human, his flesh pierced with countless nails and thorns, his skin constantly flaying away in tattered sheets, his face contorted with the ecstasy of continual pain. In his right hand he holds a scourge with which to flay his enemies. His left hand can cause agony even demons cannot endure.

Sárrtaka is the patron of sadists and sadomasochists—those who wish to mete out physical pain and those who wish to receive it. Those who favor pain as a means of sexual satisfaction typically favor his sister, Yalkeena, instead.

STERIKLUS

Titles: Father of Pox, Lord of the Flies, Wallower in Filth, Demon of Disease and Pestilence.

Aspects: Disease, decay, pus, ooze.

Symbol: A fly.

Signature Spell: *Disease*.

Powers: *Beast friend* (flies, rats, and other disease carrying creatures only), *fatigue*, *fear*, *stun*, *summon demon* (plague), *summon spirit* (sickness).

Trappings: All trappings relate to pus, disease, flies, noisome stench, and similar.

Description: Patron of plague demons and master of a realm filled with stinking bogs, rotting corpses, and swarms of bloated flies, Steriklus is rumored to be an enemy of Vali, a former minion who overstepped his rank and was duly punished. He takes the form of a crawling, slithering, sickening blob of pus and congealed blood. Deformed and decayed limbs protrude from his shapeless form, clawing and grasping as if trying to escape from the vicious mass of putrescence.

Many of his followers are blighted with disease. Shunned by society, turned away by clerics of Eira whose miracles cannot cure them, and often blaming Vali for their plight, they are easy prey for demonists looking to extend their powerbase. Often driven mad by the fate dealt them, they pray to the demon prince of disease to grant them due vengeance, if not in this world then in the next, where they hope to become plague demons.

YALKEENA

Titles: Mistress of Seduction, Queen of the Succubi, the Dark Temptress

Aspects: Lust, sexual deviancy.

Symbol: Erect phallus.

Signature Spell: *Charismatic aura*.

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Persuasion only), *confusion*, *deflection*, *fatigue*, *stun*, *summon demon* (succubus/incubus).

Trappings: All trappings are related to sex. *Deflection*, for example, might cause the attacker to see the intended victim as a creature of sexual desire, something he finds hard to harm. *Fatigue* and *stun* could both produce feelings of sexual exhaustion, while *confusion* fills the victim's mind with distracting sexual thoughts.

Dark Pact: Demonists may take the Attractive, Very Attractive, and Charismatic Edges as a dark pact. However, the demonist becomes a violent sexual predator with the Major Habit Hindrance. Each additional Edge gained this way after the first gives a cumulative –1 penalty to Vigor rolls to stave off Fatigue caused by abstinence.

Description: Yalkeena is always depicted as being naked. Her skin is unblemished and porcelain white. Her hair is long, dark, and luxuriant, her eyes sultry, her lips ruby red and moist. She would be a creature of intense physical desire for any human, were it not for her batlike wings and scaled, forked tail.

Her worshippers are all sexual deviants, taking pleasure as they see fit and with whatever creature happens to be on hand. Ceremonies are frenzied orgies. The cult of Gersemi is an ardent foe of this fell cult, and even Eira's cultists must reign in their natural desire to inflict violence on those who abuse others sexually.

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