

BA'AL VERZI

A LAWFUL EVIL SECRET SOCIETY

By J. Jack

In the shadows lurk death, but worse is when the shadows form around your loved ones

-Barovian Proverb

History:

The Ba'al Verzi (which in Balok translates roughly into "the god slayers") are a sect of highly skilled assassins shrouded in legends and infamy. They possess almost magical abilities of stealth. They kill whatever over whoever if the price is right. In ancient times, almost anyone could have some way of contacting the Verzi due to the fact that almost anyone could be a Ba'al Verzi. Now the Verzi are considered merely myth, or at least inactive. Both the rumors are horribly wrong. After the formation of the Demiplane, only a faction of the assassins were in Barovia due to the fact that the original headquarters was not in Barovia on that prime material plane, but in a desert far to the east of it. Thus between 351 and 398 Leo Dilisnya became the Ba'al (lord) of the assassins. During this time the guild was restructured. Before this time your own mother could have been a Ba'al Verzi, now not anymore. The Verzi committed mass purges, dwindling its members to less than thirteen. From then on it chose its members discreetly and only one new member every 10 years. Before, if an assassination failed, the contract was off; not now, however. Leo declared that if the assassination failed, the failed assassin would be kicked out of the guild until the kill was made.

However, if the assassin was ever slain, the contractor would be slain as well. Then the Ba'al Verzi as a whole would put the target on a black list, hounded down by a horde of shadowy assassins. The only way to ever get off the black list was to kill the Ba'al of the Verzi. To date, the only creature to accomplish removal from the black list was Strahd von Zarovich, who slew Dilisnya in 498. It is unwritten law that no Verzi save the Ba'al himself may ever take a contract on Strahd, whom the guild venerates as the Adversery.

In 500, after a year and a half of secret meetings and assassinations, Carlos Viadi, a mage, was elected the new Ba'al. From 500 to 567 the Ba'al Verzi dropped from the face of existence. They became of a more scholarly bent and researched the properties of the ever growing demiplane. By 698, three Ba'als later, they had a secret hand in creating the Fraternity of Shadows and now have always at least one Verzi in the inner circle of the organization.

In 700, a stranger came out of the mist. He found the Verzi, or rather, the Verzi found him. They were hired by one [Zacariah Gailford DeSoto](#) to destroy the black skinned man. They failed, and the black skinned man followed a retreating Verzi right to the Ba'al himself. When the black skinned man awoke the Ba'al from his sleep, the Ba'al had little to do but listen to the black skinned man's story. The black skinned man was a vampire, an Assamite, an assassin vampire, who came from the same land DeSoto came from. DeSoto was a vampire himself, a Tremere, a wizard vampire. The black skinned man, whose name was never told, came to a deal with the Ba'al. He would make the Ba'al immortal if the Ba'al agreed to two things. One was to put DeSoto on the black list, the other was to instate the worship of the creature the black skinned

man worshiped, Shaytan the Hurter, throughout the guild. That night the Ba'al became the only Ba'al to become "immortal" and since then Zacariah DeSoto has been watching his back. In 750 they shattered DeSoto's plans for core-wide dominance and sent him into torpor, the death like sleep of vampires. In 751 the Ba'al Verzi officialy began scouring for new members and taking new contracts, and now as the tales of gold, black, and red knives circulate throughout Barovia and the Core and elsewhere, the body count rises.

Membership:

The Ba'al Verzi pick only those most capable for stealth attacks. Those who dont accept being "picked" are dispatched. The most common classes in the sect are the assassin (a rogue class redone by michael morris), thief, some wizards, most likely illusionists, and for forest operations very rarely are rangers recruited.

Those who are accepted must as a show of loyalty kill someone who they are close too and make it look like an accident. People chosen usually are family people, those no one would ever suspect... the people who are the most trusted in a target's life.

Recognition:

All the members know a specific series of very subtle and common winks, hand movements, and other forms of body language that no one outside of the sect could know about, which they use to identify each other. Also, when out on a kill, the Verzi carry the famed dagger with the gold, red, and black hilt grip made from the flesh of their first kill with the dagger. Recently, to symbolize the Ba'al's ascendance into undeath, the pommel design is molded to look like a small iron skull.

Activities:

This tight knit association actively accepts and denys concepts with fervor unmatched. They are the alpha of assassins, rivaled maybe only by the assassins of Rokushima Taiyoo or the lands of the Amber Wastes. The contractors who they denied are captured, tortured to reveal how they found out how to contact the Verzi, and then slain. Woe to the targets of the contracts they accept.

Recently the cult has become almost fanatic in its worship of Shaytan, striking down victims in there sleep in the name of there decilish master. In actuality, Shaytan is a pit fiend who is active on Gothic Earth causing death and destruction on a scale only a fiend of lawful bent could. However, the worship of the sect and the murders in his name might draw him out of the service of the Red Death and into the grasp of Ravenloft.

The famed Ba'al Verzi Dagger, the dagger used to murder Sergei Von Zarovich, is also being ruthlessly hunted for as it is a relic of history to the Verzi. Also Zacariah DeSoto's torpored form is somewhere in the core, spirited away by a cotingency spell. The black skinned man and the Ba'al desperately want his head on a silver platter literally.

As a sidenote it is important to realize that one of their most frequent and important contractors is Ivan Dilisnya, as the sect values blood ties greatly.

Headquarters:

Only five people other than the black skinned man and the Ba'al know that the Ba'al Verzi really have a headquarters. A temple of black marble atop the apex of Mount Ghakis serves as the brain of the body.

Joseph Jack

Church of Bane

By P. van Rooden

The Word of Bane

As told in a lecture at the Mordent University by Professor van Royden

One cannot presume to talk about a church without touching on the faith, in this church the worship of the king god Bane.

Some records, mostly from the as yet unclaimed realm of Kartakass, have stated the faith's patron god, Bane, all too easily as evil. The Black God is by some considered cruel and despotic. It is true that the priests of Bane do not tend much to such merits as charity or mercy. They are concerned with order and perseverance, rather than with justice or the aiding of the weak. And Bane is certainly a harsh god. A force who judges and rewards based not on merit, but on personal strength.

But it is easy to see that Bane is also a benevolent patron to those who persevere, and the priesthood has done much good and given a lot of support in cases where the petitioner was a honest, hard labouring man.

Bane is a god of rulers. He himself rules the heavens and is master of the sentinels that do his bidding. Due to the greatness of their patron, it is rare that the Banites themselves call to their god - which they believe is the only true god, I may remind you - as Bane. Commoners may speak of him as such, but for the clergy to do so would not give honor to 'his greatness and omnipotence'.

Instead, in their rituals and private conversations, they call to him in names as the Hand Of Justice, the One Who Assigns, and the Power Above the King. They can name him He Who Takes when confronted with the hardship life in this dark land can bring, or call to him as the Partaker, the Watcher, and the Great King when things go well, and when profits are offered in gratefulness for the blessing of the fields. He is known as the Great Slayer, the Black Hand, the Harbinger, and the Overlord, who judges over the Fates of Men.

And, of course - for this is the big omnipotent Bane - he is the Great Creator, who made life issue forth when his blood spilled in the great battle against Mystra, the fell beguiling witch of delusion and dark promises... No, I do not have an engraving of that woman! Keep your mind at the subject on hand![1]

Now a god like that would make you feel insignificant, small, humble... or it should. For it is the teachings of Bane that for one to hold power, to lead or command one's people, one needs to be called by the faith. And called there are but a few.

Only a blessed few have the spark, lighted by the god himself, that will bring that person to power, that gives the right to rule. And to recognize that spark, to see the inner light of those beings, that is what the faith of Bane teaches to its members. And when the church finds a man -

or woman - with the calling, it is their duty to support, to guide, and to offer advice so the reign of the called one is unchallenged.

But more than that, they guide the flock, and teach them obedience and resilience to the new ruler's reign, so the people will prosper and the land will bring good crops and fortune. In the words of a Priest of Bane: "We belong to the people, and with them we belong to the King, and we all are in the hands of the Black Lord".

History of the Church

The Church of Bane has an extensive documented history.

It is claimed, and people may notice the same is said of the Kartakan goddess Millil, or Barovia's Morninglord, that Bane's origin is from another world, called Toryll or Toril. Many legends exist that tell of the deeds of this god, roaming this far away place and striking the infidel with lightning and thunder and what not. Especially Bane's wrath and sense of justice, often tainted with vengeance and repercussion, are portrayed in these stories. And I do say stories, because obviously this is mere fiction - there is no other world beyond the mists. The fact that the source is Kartakan should tell you enough.[2] However, it is certain that Bane's religion predates the written accounts that we have found, and it is possible that in a long forgotten time, before the civilization as we know it, Bane was worshipped by tribes that would choose their leader based on strength and physical prowess, rather than wisdom, and that the winner would be marked by the god in some significant way, certifying his right to rule... will you stop guffawing! The earliest accounts of an actual priesthood in the Core are found in the libraries of Sidnar and Tempe Falls. Here it seems that, for a very short period, a priesthood only referred to as 'The Black Hand' existed in Arak, at least till that domain was stripped of all its living inhabitants during a violent tempest in 588.

It takes until the discovery of Kartakass in 613 for Bane to be mentioned by name, in the accounts of meistersinger Lumred Elrichsson on a 'Cult of Bane'. His few records on the subject do not show much appreciation for the priests. As noted before, Kartakass does not have a structure or a ruler, and the small cult that wandered this land did not get much support. The last records, dated april 12, 632 Barovian time, mention the cult being driven from the land, allegedly, says Elrtichsson, over the border of the world. Common sense and the official reading of the church teach us that the priesthood in fact moved to Immol in Barovia.

The priest that led the exodus out of Kartakass was named Ramass. This man, who is described as a skinny, bald man with watery eyes and a whole range of nervous ticks, was prone to fits which the Church claim were 'Visions' of their god Bane. His words, sometimes no more than ramblings, during these states, were penned down in a massive tome and are still quoted during the holy sermons.

Regardless whether Ramass actually received these tales from the god himself, it can not be denied that this man had an incredible influence. It is mostly due to this man that the cult did not die out in that period. And it is under Ramass, who was then at a venerable age of 89, that the faith moved to the neighboring land of Nova Vaasa in 685.

Nova Vaasa, at that time, was a country in turmoil. The five most powerful families in this land had a lot of difficulty maintaining order while fighting for power amongst themselves, and when the heavy taxes prompted a peasant revolt, it was the charismatic Ramass and his clergy which calmed the people and prevented civil war.

The priests of Bane then introduced the five-annual rulership to this country, and for a while, this solution worked fine. Rulership was circulated, and the Banites overlooked the process, meanwhile gaining status and blending in with the now nameless faith that existed in Nova Vaasa before them. Most Vaasans are not even aware that Bane was not the state's religion until eighty years ago.

The merge of the faiths in Nova Vaasa did cause a change in the clergy. The new faith seemed more driven with state affairs and order than the more vengeful original cult, which had a tradition of blending in the background. Not only that, but the original Banites (which are now referred to as the orthodox priests), claimed part of the faith had watered. The application of facial tattoos, a token of maturity for many years, was abandoned by new recruits, and there were subtle differences in the miracle gifts bestowed by the Black Lord to old or new priests.[3] Then comes, in 714, the discovery of Hazlan, a domain south of Nova Vaasa. Unlike other neighboring states, Hazlan was very receptive to the Church. Among the earliest settlers in this domain were the priests of Bane, and remarkably enough, the faith quickly grew into power under the protection of that region's hars ruler, the wizard Hazlik.

As the faith grew, this period also introduced the difficulty of handling the clergy on such a large scale. A scandalous affair broke out between a priest and a married woman of the House of Chekiv, in 721. Priests were caught performing unholy rites in the name of Bane. And finally, a few years later, a cult of priests in Egertus tried to summon Bane's avatar by use of a ritual which broke all the churches regulations. The circle, a group of seven priests headed by a man called Lamoudius, opened a gate to the other side, and something stepped through. Whatever had arrived from beyond the mists, however, was not Bane - and it certainly was not benevolent. None of the priests survived the summoning, Lamoudius himself being the first to be torn limb from limb before the eyes of his followers.

The creature, calling himself - ironically - the Black Duke, immediately thereafter set upon a rampage in the city, and hundreds of people in Egertus died that night. When eventually the fiend was driven off, or, some say, when it got tired of it's game, it retreated to the north, where it stayed a potential threat for decennia. Even as the shock of this ritual's outcome hit the populace, the priesthood was taking terms to prevent this thing from ever happening again.

In 725, a group of orthodox priests established the Foundation: a central organ which was to coordinate all church activity. The organ would deal with rogue priests, establish strict rules for the clergy, and create a manifest on dealing with the arcane and spreading the faith to the heathen lands. All this was to be regulated from Sly-Var in Hazlan. Local factions of the faith in other domains where gathered in their own mostly autonomic organizations, named Houses, which had to report back to the Foundation's House of Ramass. Things worked well after this for a while, though as time passed, several local houses arranged for their own rules and policies beside the

ones of the Foundation, sometimes even causing conflict. Regardless, the influence of the church steadily grew.

The year 740 spelled a disaster for anyone in the Core. Heavy quakes shook the land, and whole areas of land disappeared overnight, as if swallowed by the mists themselves. The connection with the Foundation wavered during these dark months, and priests of Bane all over the Core lamented their fate. Some say the Upheaval was Bane's punishment, others that it was due to the force of a great evil trying to usurp Bane's power. Most Banites do not have a real explanation, but agree that whatever it was, Bane must have been indisposed by it, as none of his priests seemed to be able to commune with their patron for that time.

Only a select few, mostly Orthodox Foundation priests, claim they still were granted power. These priests have thereafter started a crusade, claiming the church has to take more harsh measures regarding the faithless.[4] As the shocks subsided, and the land came to rest, the priests gathered their forces and started building anew. However, the structure of the faith had changed. More houses spoke up against the harsh -some say back water - rules of the Foundation, and some openly opposed decrees of their home front.

On the other end, the Foundation tried its best to spread the faith with more vigor, and not entirely unsuccessful, as they acquired the support of some powerful rulers, such as Drakov and Aderre.

They even managed a base in Sidnar in Darkon, and a political fight with the Ezran Church seems to be up in Borca.

Currently, there is still no strong force of Bane in the western part of our lands, but the relentless quest with which some of these priests spread their words - regardless of their good intentions - prompts us to beware that even here their presence may be at hand. And this may end the relative peace we have known for so long.

Power Structure

The Bane priesthood's hierarchy is build on personal strength and experience, and advancement is based upon achievements. True, bureaucrats can rise in the church, but in general a priest's status is determined by his power - either in ritual or in battle prowess.

The church is split in two castes : the warrior priests, referred to as the Hands of Bane, and the clergy.

Most Hands are now a member of the Foundation, but some houses, like House Bolsnik, have their own warrior priests. The Hand's task is to guide the people in times of war, and to maintain order, all, of course, in assistance to a ruler's own forces. In Hazlan, whole regiments are headed and commanded by Bane priests, and in Nova Vaasa the police force is compelled by law to hand judgment regarding treason, murder and matters of the state over to the local Bishop. Fairly reluctantly, I may add...

The clergy can be found in all layers of society. They deal with the bureaucratic organization of the church, and in a lot of cases, those of the kingdom as well. They arrange marriages, births

and burials, dole out food to the poor, maintain the orphanage, and in some cases regulate permits, taxes, and fines.

Most clergy work locally, though the foundation has its share of priests that gather information and spread the church's regulations.

Each House is headed by a Bishop. Most house bishops take on honorable titles to significant their position. These are generally tied to the locale, and vary greatly. The Bishop of Kantora, for instance, uses the title Reverant High Estuary to the Prince.

The bishop is assisted by a Prior, who actually runs the House, and the Councillor, who arranges auditions, communicates with the government, and takes care of the administration. Following them is the Receptioner, who both gathers the tithes and distributes food and shelter to the poor. After him come the Catons, who head most rites and advise on house policies, the Paters, who hold the sermons for marriages, births, and burials, and who actually have most contact with the faithful, the Caplans, who supervise the churches mundane tasks, and the Acolytes, who, of course, do most of the actual work.

Clergy wear long black layered robes, lined with purple (or red for Foundation members), and either a turban (in Hazlan) or a cap. Those few who arm themselves carry scourges or cudgels made of black wood from the southern parts of Barovia. Beards are common among the clergy. Some priests shave themselves and instead apply elaborate tattoos, like the Foundation or the Hand.

If a House has a military faction, then this one has its own power structure. It has an even stricter structure than the clergy, and is headed by a priest with the honorable title Holy Hand of Bane, though like the bishops, these generally take a second title, mostly referring to Bane's vengeance and power. The Holy Hand of Kantora, for instance, refers to himself as the Most Dreaded Wrath of Bane. The second in command of the Hands is called the Scourge - this priest is the actual executioner of the Hands tasks. Equal of power to the Scourge is the Imperceptor, who has the responsibility to keep in contact with the local Bishop (mostly though the Councillor). Below the Scourge comes the Judge, whose task it is to uphold the law and order within the Hand. The Judge is always a member of the Foundation, and is pardoned from any rules upheld by the local house.

The priests after the Judge are all warriors, whose task it is to fight in the name of the church. They are structured in the same system as a military organization, consisting of knights (called Black Lords), chaplains, sergeants, and foot soldiers, the latter mostly consisting of mere laymen. Aside from this structure, a Hand can achieve the honorable prefix 'Vigilant', such as in 'The Vigilant Black Lord of Bane Antonious Zechiv.

While the Hand uses laymen for forces when necessary, it has no own acolytes. Any new priests are drawn from petitioners among the clergy, which are judged on their battle prowess, or sometimes asked after completing a particularly difficult and dangerous mission. The hand chooses the petitioner himself - a priest cannot ask to join this branch of the church.

The Hands commonly wear black chain mail armor, embossed with the God's Symbol, the opened palm of a hand. Their outfit is adorned with a helmet and a purple or (for the Foundation) blood-red cloak, and they brandish whips, black maces, and javelins in battle. All shave their heads, and most tattoo themselves in Hazlanian (and some say, true Banite) fashion. Most merely tattoo the baldness of their heads, but veteran priests also adorn their faces with abstract symbols of the faith.

While women are commonly encountered within the clergy, there are only a few female priests within the Hands. Some say this is because the Foundation, who has a strong influence among the warriors, exists solely of men. Others claim women are too soft hearted for this branch of the church. I've my own opinion on this last statement of course...

Back to the Foundation, who heads all these Houses and Hands.

Also known as the House of Ramass, this organization actually exists of three parts: The Holy Order, the Ministries, and the Inquisition.

The Holy Order, also known as The Most Holy Hands of Bane, consist of the seven highest priests in the church. Each year, these venerable old men, some who seem to date back to the time of Ramass, choose a Chair from amongst their midst as the leader and spiritual guide to the faith. The last ten years this has been the Wrathful Storm of the Skies, Most Holy Hand Ezeliek Zimor. Other priests at this Order are the 'Unwavering Harbinger of the Circle' Damien Sullam, head of the Ministry of Charms, and 'The Fist of Righteousness' , Sebastian Mallich , Head of the Ministry of Crusades.

The Order determines the main course of the church, and it's word is law - though some of these laws are hard to uphold. Most famous laws are :

- To accept only Bane as your true god, and pay worship only to Him and the sentinels that sit at his sides. Expose the others for the treacherous demons that they are. No god other than Bane may be worshipped in full. (There seem to be a number of sentinels - godlike beings - who serve as Bane's hands and ears. Nerull, worshipped in Gundarak, and Yutow the peace bringer, in Valachan, are mentioned in the edicts of the church.) * To pray daily to the greater glory of Bane. (the length of prayer and number of times a day varies by House. Five short prayers a day is common) * To fast for a period of no less than three weeks - once a year. This starts somewhere at the end of winter, and continues until the beginning of spring.
- To pay one 10th of your income to the church, as a tithe, to be spent for the misfortunate and the kingdom, as a token of your gratitude to Bane.
- To travel to the shrine of Ramass, in Immol, situation allowing, at least once a year.

Each Most Holy Hand is concerned with a different Ministry, which is headed by a Pontiff. There are seven Ministries in total.

The Ministry of Charms deals with the rites of the church and the magic of its priests. It hands out guidelines on which spells to use or avoid and how the rituals are to be performed. It also

does research to new magic and forbidden lore. Some say these priests now work with Hazlik's new students, and that wizards are being drafted into the church this way.

The Ministry of Crusades actually performs the more dangerous tasks set upon it by the order. This section has it's own Hand, which contains the most vigilant and powerful priests. It also holds close reign to the Judges, who lead the different Hands that are spread about the Core, and who are stationed at the local Houses. They commune with both the inquisition and the ministry, and keep the ranks of the priesthood together like glue. The Chief Judge, 'Smiter of the Faithless' Balthazar Dreggt, is one of the most trusted assistants to the order.

The Ministry of Procedure hands out the edicts of the Order to the local Houses, and keeps contact with the Bishops and Counselors.

The Ministry of Tithes keeps the financial records of the foundation. All tithes and donations, are handled by this branche. It has a smooth and flawless organization, and is one of the reasons of the wealth of the House of Ramass. Ezeliek Zimor, current Chair of the Order, heads this ministry.

The Ministry of State Affairs (also known as the Ministry of the Spark) studies the political structure in the domains. From it's records are made the decisions which rulers have the faith's support, and which lack the spark and should be opposed. This Ministry is generally well aware of a region's powers, though some of their assumptions are quite... far fetched.

The Ministry of Rites gathers and publishes materials concerning the faith itself. All scriptures are run through this ministry, who determines the value of what is found. This ministry is known to have read and rewritten thousands of texts concerning all religions in the core.. Most prized by this ministry is the Book of Wrath, a work detailing the words of Ramass and the glory of Bane. The Ministry of Internal Affairs is also known as the Inquisition - and is headed by the Mulan Abul Grissol, also known as the Ever Vigilant Flail of the Dark King. The inquisition deals with disobedience and insubordination within the church. Most fear these priests, who can judge bishops and laymen alike, and who are willing to go to great lengths to find the evil they perceive has permeated their church.

Head inquisitor Grissol is quite new to the scene, being a Mulan who only recently rose to the rank of Most Holy Hand of Bane.

While strictly just another ministry, the inquisitions influence reaches so far it is considered a separate entity. Officially, it also has the right to question (and probably dispose) the Most Holy Hands themselves, though up to this day that has not yet come to pass.

Religion and the State

Bane is the state religion in both Hazlan and Nova Vaasa. Other religions are not well accepted here, and priests of differing faiths may find themselves at the hands of the Inquisition to elaborate on their beliefs if they are not careful.

In other areas, Bane's influence is less dominant, but traces can be found all the way up to Falkovnia and Necropolis. Let's see who houses the Banites...

House of Ramass

This is the oldest house in name, and it serves as the local house of Hazlan, located in Sly Var, in a large cathedral named the Black Citadel. From this house come the priest that form the Foundation, though it also has a great number of priests to serve local affairs.

It is interesting to notice that only Mulan's seem to achieve any level of power in this branche of the church, and that all those Mulan's in power seem to follow the old faith's dogmas. Young priests sometimes claim that it these old fashioned, orthodox methods that prevent the south of the core to rise above 'the stone age level'. However, those who word these thoughts do not rise quickly, if at all.

All Mulan priests, regardless of station, shave their heads and tattoo themselves. While tattooing is a Mulan tradition, Bane priests draw it much further, claiming that the symbols on their chest, head, and, at times, faces, are holy sigils of Bane, something only the more vigilant of the Hands dare otherwise claim.

Hazlan's other race, the Rashemi, have their place in the church, but a Foundation edict has prevented them from raising their own House, to 'prevent infighting and insubordinance'.^[5] Thus most Rashemi fall under the command of the local, Mulan, Bishop of House Ramass. Since they are still forced to work and pray in separate churches, and have no prospect of rising in the churches hierarchy, rebellion among the Rashemi is thriving. Some priests feel betrayed by their own church, and the Inquisition already has had its hands full once on the suppression of an uprising.

House Immol (High Cult of Bane)

House Immol has the oldest history of the current Houses, and it still proudly calls itself the High Cult of Bane.

Most Banites in this House are solemn and quiet, and actually less concerned with matters of state, as Barovia's lord does not care for these priests. The one priest who tried to bring the word to the Count was never seen again, though tales persist that his fellows could hear his screams echoing though the mountains for days.

Though Ramass' body was never found, this House has a shrine dedicate to him, and every Banite is expected to travel there at least once a year, if circumstances allow.

Houses of Nova Vaasa

The Houses of Nova Vaasa are based on this pryncedom's five noble families: the Bolsniks and Chekivs, Hiregaards, Rivtoffs, and Vistins. The Houses head quarters are in Kantora, Liara, Bergovitsa, and Arbora.

The normal reign in the principedom was circulated, each five years, with every period a different family as the domain's ruler. A solution proposed by the church to solve, for a time, the absence of a divine ruler to this land.

In 728, however, prince Othmar Bolshnik refused to give up his reign after the set period, and this caused a debate within the church, not to mention outrage among the regions nobles. The Foundation lent it's support to Othmar's rule, and the prince stayed in power. Not all of the priests houses in Nova Vaasa, however, were supportive of the prince, and some friction still remains with the houses that support the Rivtoff and Vistin families.

House Krezk

This is a minor house in the high lands of northern Barovia. It is not much concerned with Barovia's ruler, instead aiming to gain more influence in Borca. They hold some ties with the Boritsi family, which holds most of the lands at that side of the country.

The Great Cathedral of Ezra, who resides in Levkarest, has as yet resisted attempts by the Banites to erect a House in that city, but the church is slowly gaining a following, especially among the nobility of the land.

House Havik

The small town of Aerie is the only place in Falkovnia where the Banites are being tolerated. Drakov does not seem to have any interest in the church, and the local priesthood, who's blood thirsty war god seems to go well with the Talons, has taken some openly hostile actions - including a public staking of an overzealous priest in the city of Silbervas.

This House has now promised support to Drakov's forces in the current conflict in Invidia, and indeed some priests have been able to thus infiltrate in a regiment of Talons heading for Karina.

House Hunadora

While still a House of Bane, these priests have recently come under some pressure from the Foundation. In the last couple of years, a new ruler, Malocchio Aderre, also known as the Dukkar, has risen among the people of Invidia. The foundation has already promised their support, and priests from Hazlan, and Falkovnia have been sent to support this Dukkar.

The House of Hunadora, however, instead of following the tenets, contests the rulership of the Dukkar, claiming he has no divine spark and is a monstrous usurper. They have joined the resistance, consisting of the remnants of the former Gundarakan army and a group of rebels in Hunadora castle.

Strangely enough, the House has no direct alternative to offer as a ruler, so their claims fall on deaf ears. While most Banites feel the House's resistance is foolish and a breach of procedures, it is interesting to see that the House of Krest has also spoken up against the acceptance of the Dukkar as the regions ruler.

The Foundation has not taken steps against these Houses yet, and it seems like both parties are resigned to await the final stand at Hunadora to see who will eventually rise to command from this battle - surely Bane will grant victory to the only rightful ruler.

House of Iyachtu Xvim

This house has been cast out of the church as being a vile cult bent on destruction, a treason to the church and its tenets. Its head quarters are unknown, but are rumored to be located in Egertus.

In short, the House of Xvim believe that, when Lamoudius cast his summonings, what stepped through the gate was not a fiend but the Gods Son, Iyachtu Xvim, the son of Bane. This house maintains that Bane must have send his son Xvim to lead his people, and they conduct their rituals to further this claim. While the Black Duke himself has not been heard of for some ten years now, it is still possible he wanders our world, as no report of his demise exists. The Banites meanwhile work hard to prevent the cult from reattempting the summoning, as they know disaster will be sure to follow..

Yet other houses are still being raised. Banites have been found trying - unsuccessfully, thus far - to gain foothold in Valachan, where language and culture are similar to Hazlan, and Sidnar in Necropolis seems to have been abandoned by the priests of the Eternal Order. The Word of Bane is being spread in that city's streets as we speak.

Important Persona

Ramass

Ramass is the great prophet, whose words have been written down in the Book of Wrath. He is the spiritual leader of all Banites, and a shrine has been erected in Immol which Banites are expected to visit every year.

Ramass was, it is said, merely a small man, with big, swimming eyes and a completely bald head full with tattoos. He never wore armor, but he handled a vicious whip, and was said to be exceptionally lean and quick, even at a great age.

It is said that Ramass was still alive when the Great Upheaval took place, even though he would have been over a hundred years old, and had not made a public appearance for decennia.

When the tremors had passed, and things had quieted down, Ramass was gone.

Some say he died in the Upheaval, sacrificing his life to save the world. Others say he is not dead, but at rest, and that he will once return to lead his people to glory.

Abul Grissol

The youngest member of the Foundation's Order is a tall and sinewy Mulan, more than six feet tall, with deep brown, almost black, eyes, and an intricate tattoo portraying two snaked fists on his clean shaven head.

Abul was raised as an orphan in the great city of Sly var. Nothing is known of his parents. He was fed and clothed by the priests of Bane, and rose among their ranks with staggering ambition,

until he finally became the secretary of the Pontiff at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Here he lived to see the blooming of the Inquisition in a well oiled, effective apparatus for the instruction, interrogation and, unfortunately, execution of the less savatory members of the priesthood. It is amazing how deep inside the church's organization the Inquisition was able to find vile traitors, devil worshippers, or rebellious priests who would undermine the faith. The crust of the rebellion was found when the inquisition's Most Holy Land, Yumiel Amaz, was found murdered in his chair. Abul took no half measures, and vigilantly continued his crusade until finally the Pontif's head himself was put on the block.

There was of course, no question after this who would come to be the next Most Holy Hand of Bane, and in 745 Abul Grissol joined the Holy Order.

Michel Ulyek

Michel is quite an item of debate, and several people have even wondered if he is still a priest of Bane, or whether he should be cast out.

Michel heads House Hunadora, a small faction which fights a private war against the current ruler of Invidia, Malocchio Aderre. Michel, a Gundarakite by birth, joined the House of Hunadora, at that time known as House Luna, rather late in his life.

He was a runaway, a rogue and of low esteem when he joined the ranks of the priesthood, but Pater Hiarde saw the spark in this young men, and he was thus, though grudgingly at first, admitted into the priesthood. After the early bumpy years, Michel grew up to be a man most people respected and would gladly ask for advise, as he was compassionate and helpful, though it was obvious that the new Barovian invaders where less charmed of his presence.

When, in 744, a war broke out between the rebels of Hunadora and the forces of Malocchio Aderre, the Foundation wanted to evaluate the case. Michel was sent to castle Loupet, but the atrocities he saw there made it clear that he could not willfully support a man so brutal and callous. Unfortunately, he was taken in and arrested before he could leave to bring his report to House Luna.

Michel suffered in the dungeons of Castle Loupet for four months, before a rebel party rescued him while on a mission to free one of their leaders. Michel followed his rescuers out, and traveled under their protection to the eastern part of Invidia, only to find House Luna disbanded, and the Foundation ready to send troops from Falkovnia and Hazlan to support the Dukkar's claim.

Gathering all loyal priests he could find, the troop traveled north to castle Hunadora where they pledged their support to the remnants of Duke Gundar's army.

From there, the Banites have struck time and again against Malocchio and Drakov's mercenary army. Up till now, they have not had to fight their fellow Foundation priests, yet. But they are aware they can not avoid a confrontation much longer.

Vorbis

His name is only heard as a whisper among the faithful, and even more quietly so in the corridors of the Black Citadel, for Vorbis is the one priest which has as yet managed to escape the clutches of Abul Grissol, head of the inquisition.

Little is known of Vorbis, who heads the renegade House of Xvim in the north of Nova Vaasa. He is told to be a former Hand, who betrayed his fellow priests and joined the ranks of the Xvim, working himself up till he was the leader of the pack.

He is described as an enormous man bulging with muscles, with flaming red hair and an enormous pointy mustache, with the tell tale tattoos that cover his head shining through at the temples. He is a brute, and a common propaganda item when anyone dares question the fanaticism of the Inquisition.

Joining the Church

So, planning to join the church? It is not too difficult... all healthy young man - ahem..and woman, yes thank you Mr LaFonte - can join. Provided he is not terminally stupid, of course.

Every priest joining the church starts at a local House as an Acolyte. Depending on his attitude and background, he will then either become Chaplain or Pater, as a member of the clergy, or should he have the stamina and will, be offered to rise as a warrior priest among the hand of Bane.

The Foundation is not open for acolytes. They instead draft their people from the higher ranking priests of other houses. Most are Mulans from the House of Ramass, but priests from Immol or Kantora are being accepted. Priests of other Houses may be drawn in and can rise to Judge, but none have ever risen above that station. But of course, you can still try...

My, time does fly, doesn't it...?

Well, people, next time we will discuss with you the commandments as handed down from Ezra to Theojust the Wise... and if you think that is something to laugh about, Mr Nichols, I will gladly await your essay on Bane's Words to His People, next week on my desk, thank you...
Class dismissed.

Footnotes

[1] Bishop here refers to the Time of Troubles, when the gods were exiled to the material plane of Toril. He erroneously mixes the accounts of Mystra, the goddess of Magic, and the story of the death of Bane during these times

[2] Again, this account is a bit muddled. Before the Time of Troubles, Bane was worshipped as the God of Tyranny in the Forgotten realms, and there existed an extensive death cult for this god.

[3] Most Banites receive their spells from the Dark Powers, as the portrayal of Bane is not in accordance with his original aspect. Banites have major access to All, Combat, Healing, Law, Necromantic and Sun, and minor access to Numbers and Wards.

Original Bane priests received their spells from Cyric or Iyachtu Xvim. These Banites have major access to All, Combat, Divination, Elemental, Guardian, Healing, Necromancy and Summoning, and minor access to Sun and Creation

[4] During the Great Upheaval, the Dark Powers stopped granting the spells to the new priests of Bane. The original Bane priests, however, kept receiving their spells either from Cyric or Iyachtu Xvim.. The resulting view on the cataclysm has led to a minor rift in the Hazlan church.

[5] After the Great Upheaval, the House officially declared a great number of additional edicts, effectively crippling any power the Rashemi priests would have had, claiming that the church had greatly displeased Bane, and that harsher rules were called for.

Some priests (notably the Rashemi themselves) have argued that during the Upheaval, Bane had been indisposed by dark forces, and that it is the task of the Foundation to veer their attention to the threat of these evil powers, instead of warring within their own people. Few of these words are being heeded though, and it is best hoped that those claims are false...

Banite **(Specialty Priest of Bane)**

Ability Requirements:

Wisdom 10+

Strength 12+

Prime Requisite: Wisdom

Race Allowed: Human

The Ravenloft priests of Bane differ significantly from their bloodthirsty brethren from Toril. A 'Banite', as they are sometimes called, believes in the order of things. All have a place in life, and all fates have been determined on birth. The task of the priests of Bane is to give guidance though that life and to prevent people from reaching above their station, since, as several tales will tell, Bane punishes such behavior harshly.

The priest of Bane only exist in Ravenloft, as does the church. Should a priest of Bane ever find himself out of Ravenloft, he will lose all magical abilities until he returns.

Ability Requirements

In order to become a Bane Acolyte, a character needs to be strong of body and spirit.

A Wisdom score of 10 or higher is needed, as it is sometimes hard to comprehend Bane's lore. A priest has to be able to understand political implications of a domain's lord decisions, and to relate this to his flock.

Priests are also expected to fight for their church - against the creatures of the night, or possibly in war. Also, strength is regarded as a sign of leadership, and as this is what the church reveres, it is what they expect to see in their priests. Thus, a Strength score of 12 or higher is needed in order to achieve priesthood in this church.

Alignment

The primary alignment of the Church is lawful neutral. Priests can be of any lawful alignment, though lawful neutral is most common.

All priests follow both the tenets of their faith, and the laws of the domain they are stationed. Traveling priests, when able, take care to be familiar with local laws and etiquette long before they plan their visit.

Arms and Armor

Priests of Bane can wear any type of armor, but, following the decrees of the Foundation, either use metal armor or none at all. It is, however, possible for a Bane priests to wear leather armor, and some, such as the priests of House of Hunadora, have been known to do this to throw their enemies of guard .

Weapons allowed by the priests are all bludgeoning weapons, and the javelin. Most priests use the mace.

The priests may also use shields, often embossing them with the weapons of the ruler they support. This also helps to identify the house a priest belongs to.

Spells and Magical Items

Banites use the same magical items as other priests do. They have major access to All, Combat, Healing, Law, Necromantic and Sun, and minor access to Numbers and Wards.

Duties of the Priest

While Banites incite leadership and self awareness in others, they are aware of the dangers of an uprising or rebellion, especially when times are troubled. They are therefor especially occupied in keeping the order and preaching obedience and perseverance.

Most Banites do not trust outsiders, and take it upon themselves to protect their people against foreign intrusions; with arms if necessary.

Aside from keeping the peace, the priests also arrange marriages, hold the rites for births and deaths, and take care of a score of governmental duties in those areas where they are trusted.

While Banites encourage people to fence for themselves, most Houses also support the poor and homeless from the tithes they gain from their more successful patrons. Most orphanages are now manned by the priesthood, and a surprisingly high number of those raised in these houses become priests themselves.

Banites have a strong, though often personal, sense of justice, and while it sometimes conflicts with their own ethics, they will generally adhere to all laws within 'their' domain, and preach to their flock to do so too.

Sanctuary of the Church

Any Banite can seek sanctuary in any temple dedicated to Bane. Most of the time Banites are accepted and treated as equals when seeking shelter at another House.

Some Houses do not work well together, but even in those cases a priest can be assured that the House he is hiding will do all they can to keep him clothed, fed, and out of harms way.

Turning Undead

No priest of Bane can turn undead, though they will fight them with no less vigor.

Lawful evil priests may command undead, but are expected to destroy them anyway, as undead are an abomination in the hierarchy of life.

Immunity to Fear

All priests of Bane are Immune to magical fear, as they have nothing to fear but Bane himself. This immunity does not render them immune to other emotion-invoking magic, nor does it render them immune to charm attacks.

Cause Fear

At 5th level, a priest of Bane may generate an aura of fear stretching 10' away per level. Everyone within the area who fails a save vs. spells will try to escape the area at maximum speed.

Those who pass their saves or are unable to escape are affected by ill-ease and a great desire to be somewhere else. This aura can be created at will, once per day, and lasts one round per level.

Priests of Bane are immune to this effect.

This ability is generally used in battle, though the effect has been used in the past to quench a rising rebellion before it took hold.

Pierre van Rooden

Church of Zebulon

By W. K. Bradbury
(Special Thanks to Brian Misamore)

History:

In year 700 of the Barovian Calender, a man known only as Zebulon entered the walls of Pont-a-Museau in the newly formed domain of Richemulot. Like many others, he was struck with wonder at the crumbling dwellings and avenues of the apparently abandoned city. Unlike many others, he was also filled with a bitterness at the loss of whoever built the great city, and burned for the knowledge of what happened to the civilization before his own people. He began searching for answers, but found none. He began to lament that his own life was growing shorter while the answers he sought still lay out of his reach. It was then that he realized that time is the greatest enemy of man. The passage of time had erased the records and history of the former denizens of Pont-a-Museau. Their existence had almost been for naught, future generations would only know of them through the remains of their crumbling buildings. Furthermore, a man who avoided war and disease would still fall prey to time, the most silent and insidious of killers. Zebulon set aside his archeological work, and delved into a new field of study - that of attaining immortality.

Zebulon consulted arcane tomes and experimented with chemicals and herbs both mundane and otherwise. His life passing each day, and feeling more and more the ebb of the hour, Zebulon turned his attention towards mastering undeath. During the course of his studies, he had amassed a large following. His fanatical apprentices scoured the domains of dread for answers. The acolytes of Zebulon were exceedingly harsh in acquiring the information they sought in the name of their master and the human race, and stories of their raids in the name of knowledge persist to this day in some communities.

One apprentice brought back a magical work from castle Avernus itself, braving horrors innumerable in the process. Using this and other tools, Zebulon performed a ritual that ended in with a dramatic explosion, destroying most of his tower and lab. With the apparent destruction of their lord, the cult returned to their normal day to day activities. Months later, they began to receive prophetic dreams of their former master. Returning to the site of the explosion, they encountered a being of neither light nor darkness claiming to be Zebulon. Zebulon revealed to them secrets of the universe that he had experienced since his transformation. While it drove many insane, it convinced all that Zebulon had attained true immortality, and became a creature unto the gods. They fell in worship to their lord, who vanished one year to the date of his manifestation. Thereafter the faithful received unusual powers, and were instructed through visions to attempt to follow their lord into eternity.

Thus the church of Zebulon was formed.

Dogma:

Time is the ultimate enemy; above all else value what time you have and mark its passage. Seek to overcome time through any means: Zebulon was a man once, and his path is open to you as well.

Waste not, yet do not hurry through your lives, as this would indicate time's final victory. Barring your immortality, record your work both on paper and upon beaten metal; this way your work may be continued after your own death.

Lastly, aid the poor, as their lives are consumed by factory owners and landlords; all men are equal and deserve to live their lives.

Day to Day Activities:

Above all else, priests of Zebulon seek immortality through research. They attempt to recreate their lord's work (though with less explosive results). They also act to preserve ancient knowledge and ways, maintaining libraries and museums, as well as restoring historical buildings. They fight oppression, taking up the case of the proletariat in those domains featuring factories and mills.

Dress:

Priests of Zebulon dress in somber black robes with gold buttons. They wear wide-brimmed hats, and their weapon of choice is a morningstar with the head fashioned as a broken clock. When armor is worn, it is always metal, as it lasts the ravages of time better than hide. Their holy symbol is that of a broken time keeping device of some sort, be it a cracked sundial or a stopped pocketwatch.

Zebuloni **(Specialty Priest of Zebulon)**

Description:

To be a Specialty Priest of Zebulon (or Zebuloni) requires not only a strong sense of purpose but also an exceedingly keen mind. Thus only those individuals with a 14 in both Wisdom and Intelligence are eligible to be priests of Zebulon. The path they follow is one often riddled with dark secrets man was not meant to know, ones that may be repugnant to good individuals. Conversely, Priests of Zebulon work for the betterment of the human race, so evil individuals are not suited. Only those of True Neutral or Lawful Neutral alignment may receive spells.

Major Spheres: All, Divination, Healing, Necromantic, Numbers, Time

Minor Spheres: Charm, Protection, Thought Granted Powers:

Powers:

At first level, priests of Zebulon may know the age of any item or individual they view.

Furthermore, by concentrating, they may also know how much longer the person or object will continue to live or function (barring premature destruction by war, disease, intentional breakage, etc). They may also make use of the 1st level wizard spell Mend.

At third level, priests of Zebulon may cast *Deaths Door* (see below) and *Animate Dead* once per week as the third level priest spells.

At fifth level, the priest may add 50 years to his life, and is immune to *Haste* and *Slow* spells. Upon attaining 12th level, the priest is assumed to have acquired the knowledge to become a lich. In doing so, he retains his original personality and alignment. Their appearance remains unchanged, and they do not further deteriorate. Very few priests ever live to see this glorious day.

Priests of Zebulon may command undead as a granted power. They may use any metal armor, as well as any weapon. They receive the Time Sense proficiency (see below) as a bonus proficiency. While they may create undead, they never order them into combat, as this leads to unnecessary destruction. Instead they are used as servants to allow more free time.

The following is a summary of the spell appearing in *The Complete Book of Necromancers*. All credit for the spell should be given to the original author, Steve Kurtz, and to TSR Inc. (All Rights Reserved)

Death's Door

(3rd level Priest Spell)

Sphere: Necromantic

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 1 hour/level

Casting Time: 6

Area of Effect: one human or demihuman

Saving Throw: None

If cast upon any unconscious and dying individual between -1 and -9 hit points (at death's door), the spell stops all further damage, bringing the individual to 0 hit points. The administration of any method of hit point recovery will bring the near dead to full consciousness, with complete recovery of all faculties. If the Dm does not use the "death's door" rule, the spell will function if cast within 1-10 rounds of the character's death. Such an application restores the character to one hit point. The individual must make a system shock roll to survive, if he succeeds, he still loses a point of constitution.

The material components are the priest's holy symbol, a bit of white linen, and any form of unguent.

New Proficiency

Time sense (one slot, wis 0) - through proper usage of this ability, the character gains the knowledge of what time it is, within 5 minutes. The character is also aware of any "lost time" due to blackouts or fell magic.

Adventure Ideas:

- The church of Zebulon maintains several libraries throughout Ravenloft. Some of that knowledge is dangerous to man, and is unavailable to the public. Either the pc's or their opponents desire that knowledge and attempt to acquire it through various means.
- Alternatively a priest has gone rogue. In his experiments he has made something which has resulted in a loss of sanity and life. The pc's are asked to hunt down this individual and creation, preferable returning them both alive for treatment and study. The pc's might encounter the mad priest before becoming fully knowledgeable about the priesthood, and might assume that all followers of Zebulon are dangerous madmen.
- Priests of Zebulon might also be found in the thrall of sentient undead. While they do not condone some activities taken by these creatures, they will possibly fight to maintain their source of research.

- Lastly, a lich hunt may turn up a priest of Zebulon. Hardened adventurers may be shocked by such a creature, researching for eternity without the malevolence normally associated with such undead. They might become pupils or agents of the lich, either through direct contact or through its associates, though they might never fully trust their patron.

William K. Bradbury

CULT OF FOOLS
A CHAOTIC NEUTRAL SECRET SOCIETY
By R. Sweeney

Preamble: *"God watches over fools and children."*

Basis: *"Absolute Truth can only be perceived by the insane, or at least drives one insane."*
The Cult of Fools believes that God doesn't watch over fools, but that fools are watched over by slightly more competent fools. Furthermore, they believe that insanity provides insight, revelations, and truth. "Is it insanity what I do? Or is it insanity to work the land every hour of every day so that some rich landlord can take all your earnings and leave you with only scraps for your children?"

Ravenloft's various 'lost children' and 'madmen' fill the rank and file of this group as well as those maddened by what they have seen or experienced in RL. Some touched by Bluetspur, some twisted by the Nightmare lands, others just driven out of their senses by fright.

They have no deity... at least not of the kind known to planewalkers or experienced theologians. Rather, some form of faith magic based on pure belief follows them around. Psionics is commonly present as well (see below, and some attribute their skills to some form of psionics.) Those who are more 'insane' babble nonsense and gibberish which the others listen to with rapt attentiveness. The more sane handle day to day realities.. such as stealing food or other schemes to secure warmth, shelter, and sustenance for the group.

Role:

The Cult should be an alternative source of Divinations and Auguries for those who have pissed off the Vistani. They do not have to be evil, and in fact often are not.. just mad. They have their own ecology.. based off theft, mugging, and begging as appropriate. They produce little, but sometimes are sought out for the insight of their Lord.. who occasionally spouts something that makes sense.

The cult (if bent towards evil) may be trying to drive others insane to increase their membership. In this case, their psionic abilities should be highlighted.

The cult (if bent toward goodness) should be a dangerous place the PCs can hide. The Cult doesn't care who comes along with them, but their general behavior may result in madness checks due to no active intent on their part. Due to the luck/unluck field around them., they are generally avoided by others. (Not to the extent of the Vistani, but avoided nonetheless. There psionic skills should be downplayed and the hints coming from their delusions hyped.

Members:

Any delusional or insane person. Psychotics or delusional/hallucinating types preferred. Often Psionic.

Alignment:

Chaotic Neutral

Havens:

Overrun insane asylums, or nomadic.

Special traits:

The group is affected as if the community had a 'tween' symbiont from the ethereal plane. Thus, they get two rolls for each action.. taking the best. PCs suffer two rolls.. keeping the worst. It is this bizarre luck that allows them to survive. Their minds cannot be controlled by most forms of magic. They get a saving throw of 20 vs the effects of enchantments or charms if a save isn't normally allowed. If normally allowed a save, they save at +4.

Individual Types:***Lost ones:***

Don't respond to any stimuli and perform repetitive tasks like zombies under the control of higher ranking psychotics. Often deployed in town as beggars. Their lost expression wretches pity from the hearts of passersby, while the tween-like luck effect helps more coins fall into their hands.

They look truly pathetic and, while they can't attack effectively (THACO 20, -2 damage), they can be used as hostages by the leaders if the PCs cause trouble. Being all but defenseless, killing a lost one should be a powercheck if there was any opportunity to avoid doing so.

Madmen:

Madmen form the shock troops of the cult. They are immune to fear and horror. They attack as berzerkers, but without the loss of control. The leaders can always call them back from their attacks. Madmen commonly have a fetish for knives or weapons and their obsession with such can allow them to create deadly weapons indeed (as per exceptional weapon.) A few madmen toy with poisons... typically LSD like poisons.

Delusionary / Hallucinatory:

Seen as oracles/prophets. They have the ability to cast Auguries, Omens, and perform fortune telling feats.

Mechanics:

Due to the tween-like luck effect, these delusions often wind up being at least partially true. (Make a fortune-telling role as per the standard NWP astrology... if they pass by 8 or more, the fortune has some portion of the truth to it. Each point beyond 8 that they pass by indicates more accuracy.)

Psychotics:

The Psychotics are at the top of the chain. They control the rest of the fools due to their strong maniacal personalities. They are the most 'sane' or 'rational' seeming but they have perverse natures. The truly demented might even have a few powercheck abilities.

Lord of Fools:

The Lord of any group will have an affective Int, Wis, and Chr of 18. He's a mad gibbering baboon just like any of the others, but their cumulated madness flows through him.. giving him insight into the fundamental truths behind reality. He has precognitive abilities when involving speaking with spirits and ghosts. He can see the spirit world. (Through his tween).

Backstory: The Tween (First Lord of Fools)

Trapped in RL when his original host came to the demiplane, the tween was drug in as well. Currently he stands at that border ethereal realm where ghosts dwell. As such, he can see/hear/speak with the spirits of the departed. Often he passes this information along to his host, the Lord of Fools.

The Tween's original host was a psionist notable here only for four of his devotions. Convergence, Cannibalism, Psychic Surgery, and Psychic Drain. The bluetspur Illithids drove this man insane.. and his bonded tween along with him. Normally, insanity renders a psionist unable to regain PSPs. However, it does not prevent one from using PSPs already possessed. Thus, the mad psion would use Psionic Drain to recharge his PSPs. The easiest way to do this was to gather comatose people together... Lost Ones.

Being Mad, the Psion would toy with their minds.. trying to awaken their psionic potential. Due to the tween's influence on fate, insane people he met and drew in to his group already has twice the usual chance to be wild talents. His psionic surgery skill gave them yet another shot at this twice normal chance. (4 rolls). One way or the other, he would drain them to recharge. Any with the capacity to be taught psionics were schooled in their use.

Through repeated attempts, the first lord developed a specific KIT for the other fools. (See below).

Over time, the Tween learned enough about these skills to teach a new host. Thus, when the first Lord died, the tween split (normal reproduction) and each tween took half the Cult of Fools. If there wasn't a current lord capable of leading as the previous one had, the Tween can teach a prime candidate the required powers (even though they can't use these powers themselves). In this way, the Cult spreads.

Fool Kit:

Limitation: Can only improve original 'wild talent' psionics. Cannot learn others Except for: Psionic Surgery, Psionic Drain, Cannibalism, and Convergence. Due to their insane nature, they regain PSPs only extremely slowly.. one point per hour. However, they do regain PSPs, unlike normal Chaotic Psions.

Restriction: Must be insane. Restoration of Sanity causes loss of Levels and Level abilities.

Benefits: Start with the ability to use Convergence & Cannibalism at 1st level. Regain PSPs even though Chaotic. Don't lose access to Disciplines/Powers.. even though Chaotic. Automatically "Converged" with the Lord of Fools when they sleep.

Sample Cult:

Lost Ones: (10)

Maureen (saw child eaten by werewolf) * Danger Sense Psion WT

Timothy (saw momma come back as Zombie),

Geoffry (Seduced by Red Widow, but survived),

Spirit Sense Psion WT

Steph (Saw Adam),

Alfred (Master created a 'scarecrow' golem),

Alicia (Family was claimed by a doppelganger plant),

Precognition Psion WT

Anna, Silva, Aaron, Jake (beggars who stumbled into a Rot Grub lair): As beggars these bring in 1-10 sp a day.

Madmen: (5)

James (slew wife in fit of jealous rage... she returned as a ghost to haunt him) * Combat mind Psion Kit

Victoria (Gaslighted by her husband who wanted a divorce, she wound up killing him) * Body Weaponry, Body armor Psion Kit.

Erik (Saw a former friend transform to a werewolf.) * Chameleon Power WT

Samuel (Alicia's brother.. punched doppelganger taken father and saw hole open in his chest.),

Frank (Falkovian warrior.. tried to take Necropolis),

Telekinetic, Animate Objects Psion Kit.

Psychotics: (2)

Slicer (Knife fetish) *Molecular Rearrangement Psion Kit

Mincemeat (Masochist/Sadist) * Pain Touch, Double Pain WT

Delusionals: (3)

Beeltes (hallucinations of beetles, insects)

Telepathic Projection Psion Aura (sees electric light patterns everywhere)

Aura Sight WT

Nightmares (constant insane monsters pop out at him from everywhere)

Lord of Fools:

Level 10 Psion. (Precognition, Object Reading, Sensitivity to Psionic Impressions, Domination, Cannibalism, Convergence, Psionic Surgery, Psionic Drain) <very good at focused Psi skills>

Recover PSPs: Drain 30 pts from each member every night. = 500 PSPs.. using convergence allows him to share this with the group.

The Lord is a wiry man with a wild grin and eyes that dart back and forth quickly. Constantly murmuring, he doesn't always seem aware of his own speech. He's venerated by the others even though he hardly knows or cares about them most of the time. His mind his sharp.. but insane. Still, his insane plans have a tendency to work due to the favor of the 'tween'.

Robert Sweeney

CULT OF THE WORM

By J.W. Goodwin

Introduction:

The ragged form of a man stumbled through the darkness towards the pond of dark green water. Only faint patches of luminous moss provided light for him to see by. Dried blood caked his skin which was visible through his clothing which looked little more than rags draped over him. His body jerked and convulsed as he fought the power bringing him closer to the pool, overwhelming his will. Surrounding him were tall figures draped in purple robes, hoods obscuring their heads with only writhing tentacles extending beyond their dark recesses.

He stumbled to the edge of the pool as they willed him. Falling over, he couldn't help but notice that it looked as if he was bowing. He felt their will subsiding, feeling his control returning. Suddenly runes beneath him flared bathing him in a red glow. He arched his back in pain trying to pull away from the ground and the fire that raced through his body, but his body remained glued to the ground.

As his vision cleared, he saw a sight that would leave unprepared men shattered. Hundreds of strips of alien flesh rose from the water, waving gently in the air in some form of macabre dance. The briny water sloshed as a huge mass rose to the surface. Several of its tendrils extended towards him, and embraced his face. As the slimy flesh carressed his, his eyes and nose began to leak blood as an unignorable voice pounded in his head.

"You alone of all that pitiful band of inferior beings possessed the power to prove dangerous to our people. It is our will that your knowledge be absorbed by us and that your mind and body is added to our collective, strengthening us by adding your strength and distinctiveness to our own."

He knew what was to happen next. The Illithids had destroyed everything he cared about, and he studied them while beginning his quest to kill all of them. Of course, now he had failed. His decades of research and preparation only led to all of those with the strength to aid him dieing. Now, he faced the ultimate price for his ego. He would not die, but become the host for a new illithid. Actually becoming one of those who he hated most.

He could feel the Elder Brain probing his mind. Absorbing everything he was into itself, leaving only a shell of what he was behind it. With all of his hatred and will he drew upon his nexus. He stood no chance of harming those who he was soon to become, but he would leave one final message and chance for vengeance.

"May I strike at you no matter what form I take, may your people suffer and die from what they fear and loathe, and may you be destroyed by what you need and desire."

Laughter filled his head shattering what little sanity he might have had. Lost in his own mind he couldn't even notice the large slug like creature being placed in his ear that would soon burrow to his brain, replacing the man and becoming a monster.

And thus the High Master of the Illithid of Bleutspurr took humanoid form, rising to power and scheming to destroy what should be his master.

History:

Power lies beneath the earth. Nearly all of the creatures and races that live there possess a strength that their surface dwelling cousins can only dream of. The source of that power is the object of the Deep Delvers never ending search. Before the great upheaval, they explored and knew more about the underground of the mountainous domains than any other group. Of greatest interest were those lands that were known to be ruled by those of the underground.

Maintaining several permanent waystations just on the other side of the border, countless excursions into the underground world of Bluetspur were made. The majority delved far too little into the interior to gain any new knowledge. Of those that went too far, none returned. By the time of the Grand Conjunction very little was gleaned about Bluetspur, and with no permanent link very little more was likely to be discovered.

Unfortunately for those in the group, the largest expedition to date was taking place when the Conjunction happened. Having travelled for nearly a month, their supplies were running low and they were making the trek back to the border. However, with no warning the caverns themselves began to shake. No where could they hide from the ground's fury. Chasms opened nearly at random, and time after time horrible creatures would spill forth seemingly at random. After a long time that they lost the ability to track, their supplies strained to breaking and all but 10 men and women left, the grounds fury abated. The caverns were changed and their charts useless. Completely lost and slowly starving they preyed for a miracle. They called out and pledged service to whatever power would save them from such a horrid fate. Their pledge was heard, and their agony felt.

Al'Lestrath came to them and calmed their fears. What sane men would see as a horrible abomination, they looked and saw the ultimate object of their quest. A god. He spoke to their minds, "Will you follow me?" and as one they responded.

Though their eyes could not see him, their minds could. His body took the perfect form, that of the mighty worm, magnified by his godly essence to proportions that they could not imagine. He showed them a secret way using his power to their new home. They tended to mushroom gardens for food, gathering phosphorescent moss and processing other plants to make oil to provide light. They recorded His wisdom and secrets and they worshipped him. In time, he brought them servants as a reward for their work, slaves of the Illithids that He had liberated. Now they did not need to do menial labor and concentrated on doing a greater work for the great one.

He would touch their minds to give his wisdom, and in time brought them devices that they were to analyze as a test of their skills.

Eventually, he allowed one or two to leave to explore the new caverns to find the way back so that the other delvers could rejoice in what they had found. It was only natural that they offered sacrifices as they found the perfect spot.

It was through these sacrifices that they caught a glimpse of Al'Lestrath's physical body. Suspended high over a mighty chasm in one of the nearby caverns, they hung a slave. From the depths rose 4 tentacles that claimed the sacrifice and dragged it to the darkness below.

Eventually, he called upon them to do more dangerous tasks. Twice they have infiltrated the slaves of the Illithids to gain knowledge of their city, both times escaping only because of His power. Also, they have come across travellers 3 times who were lost in the tunnels and brought them to their master. As was his will, they guided them through the caverns and learned all they could from them. When they were done, they led them to their master's lair where they were consumed.

Current Situation:

The Cult of the Worm are insane beyond comprehension. Totally devoted to their lord, they are willing slaves to their master. Several members have begun to transform due to the evil acts they perpetrate on their slaves, and give credit for their new found power to Al'Lestrath. Interested in this seemingly random gaining of power, he spurns his followers onwards to more dark acts to study these effects. Unfortunately, it seems that the only time these changes happen is when they are not acting at his behest.

Al'Lestrath

Neothelid (Unique)

Intelligence:	Genius (20)
Armor Class:	0
Movement:	9
Hit Dice:	16
Hit Points:	96
THAC0:	5
# Attacks:	1 (bite) or 4 (tentacles)
Damage:	6d6 or 3d6x4
Special Attacks:	Breath Weapons, Psionics, Poisonous Mucous
Special Defenses:	Nil
Vulnerabilities:	Nil
Size:	G (120' long)
Morale:	Fearless (20)
Magic Resistance:	45%
Alignment:	Lawful Evil
XP:	20,000

Notes:

Twice per day Al'Lestrath can use its breath weapon, it is a cone that's 3' wide at the base, 60' long, and is 20' long at the extreme end. It is Al'Lestrath's digestive enzymes, and causes 12d12+6 points of damage (save vs. breath weapon for half) to all living beings, but causes no damage to a victim's equipment or brain. Anyone killed leaves behind only his equipment and brain.

Al'Lestrath is also covered with a purplish mucous that is a deadly poison. Anyone coming into contact with it must make a save or die in 1d10 turn. Al'Lestrath also leaves a trail of this poison behind it while travelling. After 3-4 days it decomposes enough that it is merely disgusting and not dangerous. Unlike traditional Neothelids, this poison is highly poisonous to Illithids who suffer a -3 penalty to their saves.

As if that wasn't enough, Al'Lestrath is also the equivalent of a 9th level psionicist.

Although this won't affect most PC's, the God Brain and the Illithids are wholly unable to locate Al'Lestrath by magical or psionic means. This does not apply to free-willed beings, but those that are dominated by the Illithids are similarly unable to locate him.

Appearance:

Al'Lestrath looks like a huge purple worm stretching 120' long. At its front, 4 huge 20' long tentacles encircle its maw, which is a circle of rows upon rows of razor sharp teeth. It leaves a trail of purple slime in its wake.

It is highly intelligent and can communicate with any intelligent being through its innate telepathy. Its telepathy extends to 360', and can penetrate even solid stone. Using its telepathy, Al'Lestrath can detect all living beings within 360', and is thus impossible to surprise within that radius by the living.

History:

As the the God-Brain lost it's ability to shunt its mass to the Astral plane, it began to grow with the addition of every brain and new knowledge. It soon became apparent that if it didn't enlarge its pool, it would outgrow it and die. During the enlarging process a dozen developed tadpole illithids were lost. Scurrying into the lower caverns, their undeveloped minds were impossible to track by the God Brain, and they were presumed dead from the predators of the underground world. However, one survived. Feeding on its siblings, and other small creatures it grew slowly, moving on to bigger prey. After centuries of hunting it came across a group of Illithid slaves that were mining ores in unexplored caverns. As it consumed their brains, Al'Lestrath awoke into the sentient world.

Not understanding the true nature of this new threat, the illithids sent a small army of slaves to hunt the beast. Noone lived to tell their masters what it was that killed them. Eventually, the masters themselves organized a group to hunt the mysterious creature that had claimed so many slaves. Of the 10 Illithids that went out, only one returned to bring back the terrible truth, and he was mortally wounded and poisoned by the slime left in its wake.

Current Sketch:

Al'Lestrath has become a fearsome hunter. What little life there was in the dark caverns of Bleutspur has been stripped clean by its voracious appetite. Of all the things that he has hunted, only the Illithids, their slaves, and his servants remain. He knows that the time will come when all life would have been destroyed in the realm and he'll have to seek new hunting grounds, but he is delaying the inevitable by taking down only a few Illithids in a month and mainly relying on their slaves to provide the brains that he needs to consume.

He has allowed his cult to live, reasoning that they will serve as a larder and an emergency food source in times of need.

He knows that the God Brain would destroy him if he confronted it, and knows that it should be able to destroy him even now. However, he has found that some force is protecting him, and as a result he has been able to confer a level of protection to his followers, though he enforces a strict curfew and limits their travels to keep his ability from weakening.

Al'Lestrath has been able to overcome his hunger to begin studying the nature of the caverns that he prowls. He dictates books to his followers, who also read tomes and examine artifacts that he finds while he prowls. He has explored nearly every inch of the underground world where the Illithid do not rule, moving using his powerful mind between complexes that do not connect. He's begun studies into the vary nature of the world which he hopes will allow him access to the realms beyond Bleutspurr to hunt more plentiful places. Unfortunately, from all that he can tell his favorite prey only exists in this one place.

Lately, he has begun to have thoughts to elevate the status of the his cult to non-food status, and to possibly build an empire of slaves made up of these lesser, alien creatures. However, that was merely a moment of weakness. The small amount of knowledge he gives him serves only to keep them in line so that he won't have to expend his strength, and possibly attract the attention of the god brain to himself, by psionically removing their will. As of late, some members have begun to gain new powers that Al'Lestrath is trying to discover the source of. So far, his efforts have produced nothing, but since they credit him with their gain, it serves only to strengthen their subservience to him.

Jason W. Goodwin

FALCONS OF THE LAND

by C.D. Nichols

Description:

The Falcons are a semi-secret organization based from Falkovnia. Violent and hateful, they are the extension of Vlad Drakovs hatreds. A dangerous confederation of madmen, bigots, and assorted scum, the Falcons follow a humanocentric doctrine of racism, male dominance, extreme nationalism and religious intolerance. The Falcons target many groups, including demi-humans, non-whites (Sri Rajians, some Valachans and Souragnian, etc), magic-users, clerics, women, and non-Falkovians.

Symbol:

A gold falcon bearing a severed elf's head and bloody saber in its talons. Naturally, the falcon is the sign of Falkovnia, thus the Falcons emblem signifies death at the hands of Falkovnia.

Members:

It's said by some that all Falkovnians belong to the Falcons. It is not true. However, of all the lands of Ravenloft, here their numbers are highest. The membership of the Falcons is restricted to white males bearing the brand of Falkovnia. Most Falcons are middle-class - the butcher, the farmer, or the clerk could be a Falcon, watching you, marking you for the attentions of the his order. A few lower class individuals are present among the Falcons ranks, selected on the strength of their viscousness, cruelty, and hatred. These tend to experience a sudden up-turn in their fortunes as other Falcons work to improve the recruits social standing. The Falcons leadership is comprised of upper class individuals. In fact, most of the Lord-Knights and Drakovs closest advisors are members of the Falcons, most in the top three ranks.

The Falcons have a rigid hierarchy and specific rules within that system. The ranks of the Falcons of the Land are:

1st Rank - Bird

2nd Rank - Falcon

3rd Rank - Falcon of the Hood

4th Rank - Falcon of the Glove

5th Rank - Falcon of the Sword

6th Rank - Falcon of the Skull

7th Rank - Falcon of the Helm

8th Rank - Bloodhawk

9th Rank - Hawk of the Axe

10th Rank - Hawk of the Circle (the Blood Circle) Birds are the new recruits of the Falcons.

They meet with two Falcons and a Hood (rank names are generally shortened). Their bands are daubed in ashes and the first test is issued. The Birds must bloody their dagger on an enemy of the Falcons under the witness of the Falcons and the Hood. Should they succeed, they are given a tabard, white with green trim, and emblazoned with a golden falcon (note: this is based on the flag of Falkovnia is my campaign, feel free to change the design). They are now Falcons. Falcons must first attend the induction of a group of Birds, then they are taken to the local headquarters of the Falcons.

There, before the assembled Falcons of the Land, the new Falcons pledge their lives to the order. Then, they are issued a black hood, and their faces are never seen again by the group, but are marked by a leather thong coded with certain patterns of knots. The anonymity insures that should a member betray the organization, they can not name names. As the members make blows against the societys targets, work to improve the orders abilities, and recruit new members, they ascend through the ranks, gaining the titles and the regalia associated with them. They become Gloves (leather gauntlets), Swords (saber), Skulls (an iron chain with a gold skull), and finally a Helm. There are fewer than 100 Helms in the whole of Ravenloft.

With ascension to the rank of Helm, the Falcon is given a helm designed to resemble a bird of prey (like the coachmans helm in "Bram Stokers Dracula"). To be given the helm, the candidate must appear before the Blood Circle in Falkovnia. There he swears over all his worldly property to the Falcons in a blood oath. The next rank, Bloodhawk, or simply Blood, is formed of those Helms, who have secretly given over one of their male heirs to the Falcons to raise in their society from birth. Barely fifty of these cold-hearted men exist. The last tiers are only open to nobility. With fewer than thirty members, Axes are the judges and leaders among the Falcons, they supply the major funding for the Falcons, execute captured traitors to the order, etc. Finally, they answer to the Blood Circle, ten of the most powerful nobles in Falkovnia. What no-one outside the Blood Circle knows is there is an eleventh member. After each meeting of the Circle, Lord-Knight Kenver Osbourne, leader of the Falcons of the Land and head of the Blood Circle, reports to Vlad Drakov.

Practices:

The Falcons of the Land believe that they are superior to everybody. They seek to subjugate anyone who is not of the order. They do this by extortion, mugging, lynchings, torture, anything to impose their will on these they call "inferior". As most do not know that Drakov is the true master of the Falcons, some even speak of over-throwing him and placing the Circle in his place. Demi-humans are the primary targets of the Falcons wrath. As many in the military belong to the Falcons, the Falcons have access to the "houses" where Drakov places captured demi-humans, actually concentration camps. From there, the Falcons kidnap prisoners, taking them to the Falcons headquarters. There, the Falcons either "play with" the captives, or kill them out-right. Demi-humans are killed in methods befitting their races; thus elves are hung (trees), dwarves are stoned, halflings are buried alive (burrow-homes), kender are "played with", and so on. When a demi-human is being "played with" they are constantly worked on by Falcon torturers 24 hours a day, for at least a week. No one has managed to die before a week passed, but they once continuously tortured an elf for three straight months before he died. It is rumored that the Falcons torturers are as skilled as those of Elena Faith-hold or the servants of the dark angel Diamabel or even the goblins of Forlorn.

Other "inferiors" get different treatments. Spell-casters are burned in lead ovens. Clerics are flayed. Lynchings are the treatment for foreigners. Women are enslaved, working in the Falcons headquarters as manual laborers and in the harem.

The headquarters of the Falcons of the Land is located in a forested region a little over a half-days ride out of Lekar. As one approaches the Falcons land, the woods grow thick and dark, with a thin layer of mist hovering over the ground. The remains of past intruders and captives are

displayed in the trees, indicating that this place is guarded. Halfway to the center of the forest, a ring of briars blocks progress. Just beyond, earthworks and palisades, further warn off intruders. Should the visitor pass beyond this barrier, traps are everywhere and extremely lethal, while the mists rises to waist-high. No Falcons are to be seen.

The Falcons have a complex of tunnel running under the entire forest. These are shallow trenches covered by planks then topped by layers of sod. Several trees here are hollow for observation. The Falcons central structure is an ancient fortified burial mound, long since cleared by Drakovs armies of the wights that originally infested it. This structure contains the assembly halls, offices, dungeons, torture chambers, and all the rest of the holdings the Falcons require.

In the deepest crypt of the headquarters, the remains of Sir Hiram Bloodsaber, the founder of the order, are interred by the Circle, although not even Drakov knows.

Finally, in the heart of the Falcons domain, He has a shrine. This shrine is a room filled with mist. Three red circles decorate the floor. Sir Bloodsaber brought the worship of Him from his home-world, a place called Lahkmar. Sir Bloodsaber claimed that as long as the Falcons continued their work He would bless them. And so far it seems to be working. After all, He is with them, His mists permeate the forest...

DMs Note:

He is Hate, a demi-power from the 1st edition Deities and Demigods book, in the section on Fritz Liebers Lahkmar. Hate appears as a cloud of mist with three glowing red orbs floating in it. The supposed manifestation of Hate is actually a construct of the Dark Powers.

History:

In the year 692 by Barovias calendar, a knight came to offer his services to Vlad Drakov, the new lord of Falkovnia. He went by the name of Hiram Bloodsaber, and besides being a powerful warrior, he was a priest for Him, a creature that reveled in hate and slaughter. Drakovs hatred of demi-humans, people of power, mages, and many others suited Bloodsaber well, and Drakov found a like minded individual - hate-filled and bloody. Drakov knighted the man, and together they built the Falcons of the Land, an underground order designed to carry out Drakovs genocidal tendencies. Drakov, in one of his few forays into subtlety, stayed in the shadows of the organization, while Sir Bloodsaber did most of the actual work of running the society.

Eventually, Sir Bloodsaber began to formulate a plot to overthrow Drakov. Unfortunately for Bloodsaber, Drakov caught wind of his plot and ordered him and a sizable group of Falcons to march into Darkon, and raze the demi-human villages there.

The small band succeeded in destroying two tiny hamlets of elves and halflings, before Azalins undead minions slaughtered them. The zombies then gathered their foes corpses, and hauled them back to Azalins castle. Meanwhile, Drakov placed his most loyal generals and knights in the upper ranks of the Falcons, and stepped back to let them begin anew.

But, there remained certain people within the Falcons structure who remembered and venerated Sir Hiram Bloodsaber, and his god. How these individuals attained position in the Blood Circle and retrieved Sir Bloodsabers body is something only the highest ranking Falcons could say....

Note: The Falcons are not limited to Falkovnia, but have cells in every inhabited land of the Core, and at least one agent in each of the more populated Islands. Their strongest non-Falkovnian cells are in Valachan, Darkon, and Invidia.

Christopher Dale Nichols

HELLFIRE CLUB

by Steve

These documents were discovered some time before the events of Azalin's Grim Harvest changed the face of Darkon forever. What has happened since is anyone's guess...

The Hellfire Club is the oldest (and most prestigious) societal club in Il Aluk, or Darkon, for that matter. Only the richest and most powerful nobles are even considered for membership, which is by invitation only. To the greedy, prestige-seeking nobles of Darkon, membership in the Hellfire Club is the ultimate way to flaunt power. Even being invited to a club party is an honor bragged about for months. Little do the mortal (and other) nobles and natives of Darkon know of the Hellfire Club's true nature and ambition...

The Club:

The Hellfire Club is situated in a large mansion on the tallest hill of Il Aluk's "High Town", home of the nobles and wealthy merchants. The mansion is surrounded by a 15 foot high iron fence with sharp briars and ivies growing unimpeded around the metal bars and reaching up to the sharp spikes atop the fence.

The Club is cared for by charmed human servants. The charm is minor and does little to affect the servants, except to keep prying eyes and curious noses out of secret meetings, locked doors, and other "things" they would do better not to see. (The charm works more like a powerful suggestion.)

For the Club interior, I recommend the Castle layout given in the Masque of the Red Death boxset for the Red Death module. My original layout was very similar to Prince Prospero's castle in Poe's Masque of the Red Death... six rooms, each a different color, with a stained glass window and door to the next room, a candleabra burning in front of the window so the glow of the candles casts light through the window into the next room and illuminates the room in the color of the window. (The rooms were yellow, green, blue, orange, violet, and black.) There is a fireplace in each room. The final room is black with a red window. In Poe's novel, party guests circulated throughout the rooms, however always avoiding the final room, since the candles cast a red glow into the black room, which made a person in the room appear as if dying from the Red Death bleeding disease ravaging the countryside. There is also a clock ticking away on the mantle above the fire.

The Members:

The members of the Hellfire Club are not ordinary nobles. While they pretend to be mere powerhungry human nobles at their parties and in public, there is more to them than meets the eye.

Lord Armando Matusio

The leader of the club. 530 yr old vampire. Former Kargat 2nd in command. (How he became a vampire or where he came from remains shrouded in mystery.) One of the first residents of Darkon, Matusio was one of Azalin's early recruits and one of the founders of the Kargat police. Azalin always liked this quiet, devious fellow. While most (younger) vampires that Azalin had encountered seemed to never realize the potential of immortality and spent more time worrying about the next kill or a scheme they would spring in a few years, Matusio planned for centuries. His long term vision, his meticulous eye for detail, his understanding of both the mortal and immortal condition, and his organizational skills impressed Azalin, who used him to build the Kargat. Therefore, when Matusio attempted (and failed) to assassinate his superior a century later, Azalin expelled him from the Kargat. Rather than destroy Matusio as the Kargat demanded, Azalin knew a greater blow would be to banish Matusio from the organization he had built and planned so much of his future around. For an architect such as Matusio, this was hell.

Matusio wandered Darkon for years. Eventually, he found his way to Il Aluk, where he discovered the Hellfire Club, a socialite club of nobles dedicated to amassing more and more power for its members. Matusio established a noble facade for himself and was invited to join after a few decades of impressive accomplishments. (The members really saw this "young", rich aristocrat as a source of funding and planned to induct him into the club, lure him to financially back club activities, and then murder him and steal his money.) Of course, the master manipulator and planner learned of this plot from a charmed noble named Vincent Pierce. Matusio saw potential in Pierce and turned him into his vampire assistant. Together, Matusio and Pierce quietly killed off the twenty or so nobles who made up the membership of the Hellfire Club and assumed complete control of the Club and its vast network of resources and wealth. All the while, Matusio began to recruit new, and very different, members.

In the past, the club had always been careful to admit only mortal human members. By placing various wards and using conventional means, the club had detected more than a few vampires and werebeasts masquerading as humans. Matusio, however, managed to slip through the Club's carefully woven web, thanks to his age acquired resistances and careful planning. Vincent Pierce was also helpful in avoiding certain traps and eventually disarmed many of the wards that irritated Matusio.

The new members of the Club are listed below in the order in which they were recruited:

Vincent Pierce

vampire, 30 yrs old (as vampire), loyal servant/slave to Matusio

DESIRE: still living like a mortal, thus desires social prestige and wealth and (ultimately) freedom from Matusio's leash

Angelina Tressana

penanggalan (excuse the spelling, this creature is depicted in the old Field Folio book. I am unsure whether its stats have been given in any new books.) Essentially, this creature appears

as a beautiful woman, but when it reveals its true undead nature, its head detaches from its body with several major organs still hanging from its neck. It can fly like this and has fangs and red eyes and feeds off the blood of victims, much like a vampire. A really mean witch!

DESIRE: uses the Club as means of acquiring victims. Due to her nature, a good cover is necessary. The Club provides this shelter and allows her to play the role of the "wealthy Southern belle" type.

Viktor Heiserman

wereboar/werebear hybrid. This hulking beast of a man has the ability to transform into a boar-bear hybrid with 4 attacks... claw/claw/tusk/bite (bite does double damage if the tusk hits first) The berserker of the club. A bit of a loose cannon, but quite effective as a sort of "bouncer".

DESIRE: to kill those who have. Since he has been poor most of his life, he has acquired a hatred for the wealthy. The Club, for him, is revenge. Also enjoys flaunting newly acquired wealth, but does so in a crude, uncivilized manner. Often dresses in the finest clothes and takes a carriage to the worst taverns on the waterfront, where he eats like a pig, fights, and visits the "ladies". A bit like Mr. Hyde in RLS's "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde".

André and Andrea

pair of doppelganger twins. Very evil, very cruel, very sadistic. (Haven't really used these two much yet, but have a lot of potential.)

DESIRE: power, wealth, influence, control

Joshua

The schizo-psychopath of the Club. Joshua comes across as the "perfect English gentleman" type, but is easily angered and becomes a deadly assassin. Has complete control over his mood changes however. Enjoys stalking victims in one of the darkened rooms of the club, emerging suddenly from the shadows, whispering "Hello, hello." in the brief second before he strikes with his wicked, modified versions of short swords which do most of the damage on the way out. The twin blades are +3 weapons. He can fight two handed. They do 1d6+3 plus strength on the way in. At the end of the round, Joshua can automatically withdraw the blades from the victim, which does an extra 2d6 per blade to the victim.

DESIRE: Seeks pleasure, pure and simple, whether from wealth and influence, or from cutting someone's throat.

Natalia Vhorishkova

Mountain Loup Garou werewolf. The 'vamp' of the Club. See the original Ravenloft boxed set and George Weathermay's background (in *Champions of the Mists*) for more info on her. I modified her stats and made her a mountain loup-garou: a lot tougher now.

DESIRE: Servants and pleasure/new sensations. The Club, for her, is the ultimate in new experiences.

Sartok Dros

Albino drow from Arak. Necromancer. Conceals his face beneath a heavy black robe with a black hood and a golden metal mask, through which only his pale eyes can be seen. Provides the Club with all its magical enchantments. Secretly harbors a desire to overthrow Matusio for leadership and control of the Club. Considers himself superior to the other members, with only Matusio as an equal. This respect and a lack of real opportunity are the only things holding him back from plotting against Matusio. Also runs an herbalist shop in merchant district of Il Aluk. Sees this as a means of collecting rare spell components. Has also read most of Van Richten's books and is a bit of an admirer.

DESIRE: Magical power.

Malvolio

Vistani Darkling outcast. Born to a wandering tribe, he was cast out in Barovia for his dark experimentations with Necromancy. Dared to enter Castle Ravenloft uninvited, and pried into Strahd's library. Caught by Strahd, held for several weeks in the dungeon. Strahd was impressed by the audacity and resilience of this Vistani, and decided to keep him as a servant and minor apprentice. Malvolio served Strahd for several years, before betraying him to an adventuring party in order to get close to the party to steal a powerful magic object. Fled Barovia and Strahd's wrath through the mists, which carried him to Il Aluk and eventually a place in the Hellfire Club.

DESIRE: Shelter from Strahd's vengence and assassins, as well as revenge upon his Vistani tribe and all life in general. Enjoys cooking up all sorts of abominations. Has learned Strahd's Meld Monster spell and is experimenting with this.

Goals:

The Hellfire Club remains dedicated to the acquisition of power. However, each member defines power differently, whether by wealth, magic, servants, influence, pleasure, or prestige. Matusio's underlying goal, however, is to confound the Kargat. More than anything, Matusio wants to make the Kargat look like fools in the eyes of Azalin. Without him, Matusio tells himself, the Kargat cannot go on. I did not finish what I started, he thinks, therefore it cannot succeed. Matusio is also building his own network of spies and influence within Darkon and other lands of the mist. His ultimate goal is to one day displace the Kargat as Azalin's right hand. This ambition amuses Azalin, who allows the rival organizations to co-exist and permits the occasional confrontation or assassination.

IMPERIAL THRONE OF THE FAITHLESS

By Asplagis

Foreword:

This article is inspired by the fanatical black metal bands that have come from mostly the scandinavian countries (mostly Norway) who practice heinous acts of violence and terrorism. Some names have even been taken from bands and the members of the bands. In no way am I approving their behavior (heck if anything I feel most are dangerous criminals) and I do not mean any disrespect to black metal bands that *do not use violence* and terrorism to further their views. Just wanted to make it clear that this is inspired by fanatic bands, not your smarter bands (like say Cradle of filth). And in no way am I pointing the finger at the culture or people of the countries that these bands hail from, these people and things have nothing to do with all this.

Leader:

The group's leader, Samoth, is a rather calm and "normal" looking man (unlike his fanatics), and he often has a bored or uncaring look.. The tall, slender man rules the organization with a lot of effectiveness, being the "brain" behind all the madness, although his troops often end up disregarding orders and go on frenzies. He tries to run the Imperial Throne of the Faithless like an organization, but his troops act more like cult members, and unfortunately he hasn't got enough people in it to purge out the hotheads. Most of the times he gets suck into rituals and pep talks of a darker nature and he seems exasperated by his men and women. He rules as a pentar (leader of a faction in the *Planescape* setting) yet he isn't from the Planes or the Cage, he was simply a priest who lost his faith in his religion and then his god after seeing how the world outside his church was filled with various religions and beliefs without any god doing whatsoever to change anything.

History:

The Imperial Throne of the Faithless itself was formed when he got trapped in the demiplane in 740 BC: at that time he made contact with the Church of Ezra and a need to fight it raged inside of him. He was in the domain of Nova Vaasa when his quest to destroy the church of Ezra began. He recruited amongst the younger lower class members, those who felt slighted already and forgotten by the gods. He perfected his knowledge of the land from them and in return initiated them to his beliefs. Being a priest he still maintained his priestly spell casting ability (although he took his spells from the Astral plane meaning reduced spell casting) and as such used spells to better his grip on their minds. His hateful speeches and his magic slowly wormed their way into a small group who had stuck with him. Soon some were priests and others had gathered enough attention from the DPs to merit some powers as faction members.

He planned their first attack, simple series of acts of vandilism. Using animal blood they painted hateful messages on the local church's walls. With time, Samoth slowly increased the group's size and also their cohesion, but at the same time, the individuals were growing more intense and violent: robbery, injuring priests, throwing dead animals in the church, sometimes even throwing a deceased victim of disease in the chuch. After a month of terror in Egertus, the group was truly a cult. Every night they hid in an old abandoned thieves guild hideout, where they chanted the

merits of Samoth and used ritual chants, praising their secular nature and beliefs. Shouting out their frustrations against the church, chanting of blood, violence and destruction of the church. Samoth was concerned that his group was becoming almost religious, but as long as they did the job he welcomed them.

One night the members decided to go one step further into their demence and created crude costumes and used blood, soot and flour to make their faces pale lined with black marks and blood near their mouths. Their costumes were roughly made leather tunics died black in soot and pitch. Their chants reached an all time loudness: they were ready to bring it down! Samoth was proud of his band, he knew they were finally there and ready. That night, they went to the church armed with torches and oil. The grim figures set the church on fire with Samoth laughing happily at the warm blaze. Townsfolks came out only to see the grim figures chanting and laughing. The folks quickly hid, thinking they were demons.

Current Situation:

To date, in Nova Vaasa, people talk in hushed voices about these grim figures that stalk the night. Egertus has not rebuilt the church after the main priest was found dead, strangled with his own holy symbol. Elsewhere, some talk of a set of coincidence others of grim fiends and yet others talk about madmen.

The organisation has grown rich, stealing from the churches and Samoth has recruited amongst the intellectuals of Nova Vaasa. Those people serve as leaders of the cult in other domains. They all swear loyalty to Samoth. They give themselves noble titles or are given one by Samoth (Samoth is considered the Emperor). Some even have religious titles, some calling themselves High Pontif or Bishop. The intellectuals also enjoy more powers than the common fanatics and also have absolute authority over the group they rule over.

Equipment & Dress:

Their ritual costumes are usually black ruffled shirts and black pants. They wear boots with a retractable poison needle filled with 3 charges of poison (various types). They carry ceremonial daggers, elaborately decorated daggers with keen black edges (the black coming from soot or some black dye) on their black leather belt. Some particularly influential members have capes as well and others wear masks. When outside on a mission they wear a rough leather shirt with chain mail over it (no sleeves stops at the waist) and carry a short sword or knife as well as a firearm.

The fanatics are almost always wearing black leather outfits adorned with small blades and spikes. They are found of spiked collars and bracelets, sometimes they stain themselves with blood. They are known to carry warped holy symbols of whatever faith they go against. They carry a dagger, some oil, matches if possible and sometimes wear very light coats of chain mail (like the intellectuals), but most only have their leather outfits. Outside of the cult they will look like an average citizen, although if possible they wear black.

Powers:

Their powers are illusion based. They all have a minor capacity at illusions. But their illusions are always used to pervert a religious ritual (the water at a baptism turns to blood, holy water

turns black etc...), anything to make one doubt their religion or fear it. It is similar to a *Phantasmal Force* spell. They also shrug at any "faith" based spells (*Holy Word, Bless/Curse* etc...) which have no effect on them.

Fanatics have the power of berserk rages when burning or somehow desecrating a holy place or anything having to do with violence and the destruction of a faith and its people. This is a disadvantage as well, since they also become mad during that period and as such lose all control, focusing only on the task and any other that seem obvious and apparently useful. They do not gain any combat bonuses or anything, although they gain a +1/+2 att/dam bonus when someone tries to stop them and will fight until death, although they might ignore the hindrance and continue their task. They cannot disobey Samoth and see any intellectual as an extension of Samoth. They can be turned as Wights by priests who worship a lawful greater deity of order, peace or laws.

Intellectuals are learned fellows who have a minor charm ability as well. They can make any atheist who fail both a wisdom check and a saving throw vs. spells to consider their philosophy and this effect can be persuaded, meaning every other day they hear about it from an intellectual they must make another series of checks or fall prey to their charms and join their ranks slowly. They might go to an intellectual's meetings or debate with them, then they could see other members and even see Samoth himself, and it goes on like this until the person is well in their grasp. Each check has a penalty of one per checks failed (1 per wisdom and saving throw together failed). Intellectuals are not turned, but they however are likely to be confused if anyone can provide a sensible, well argued debate (strong arguments that the church is not abusing or misleading anyone or that it is a necessary wrong or something... you figure it out). This makes them halt any action and ask any fanatics to refrain from doing anything while they consider all this. Their powers also only work on people with at least 12 in intelligence and a certain education or "culture". Their illusion powers work on anyone (but with the same limitations as the fanatics in terms of what they represent), unlike the fanatics who can only use them against religious folks.

Darklords And The Sect:

The Brain (Aubrecker's disembodied brain): Has complete control over the local leader, monseigneur Sansfoi. He promised Sansfois and the faithless to eliminate all religions in Dementlieu they helped him in his plan. Sansfoi feels the Brain (he has no clue about the brain's real Nature, of course) is a valid ally and believes that he will join them soon enough, in fact he plans on taking over Demntlieu and getting the Brain to serve him and Samoth. The brain feeds this false idea in Sansfoi's mind.

Jacqueline Renier: Their cult activity is beginning to endanger the rat population since some use animal blood in soiling themselves. She is planning something to get them out of Richemulot and has many wererats in their ranks spying. Local leader Armand Sartraux knows about the wererats and his often feeding them false information on their plans and hiding some rituals from these members. He is known as a respected philosopher, but Jacqueline might use his very public image to get rid of him and reassert her authority on some nobles who might have felt like following Sartraux.

Mordenheim: Finds their philosophies intriguing, but he has better things to do than sit around and debate all day. The faithless leave him alone finding he is too uncharismatic and boring to be of any use. Local leader Frederic Nieter is a lazy leader who cares little about the fanatics and uses the fact thta he is far from Samoth to play it cool. He is often found with Mordenheim whom he personally finds fascinating... almost like they were close friends...

Alfred Timothy: They taste mighty yummy in the tummy. Slaughtered them all when they came into the domain. Werewolves are the ones who cause fear and terror to the villagers and not a bunch of face painted goons.

They are inactive in Barovia, Sithicus, Hazlik, Markovia, Kartakass, Keening, Forlorn and most islands and clusters. They have have just begun infiltrating Valachan, Invidia and Borca.

Asplagis



MAJOR ORDERS OF THE CHURCH OF EZRA

By C.D. Nichols

There are 16 major orders within the Church of Ezra, each based on the teachings of one of the main saints of the Church. The saints are Ezra (technically the goddess of the religion), St. Anchora, St. Hala, St. Mishnad, St. Justine, St. Burach, St. Rachael, St. Yamaki, St. Peter the Beggar, St. Judas the Kind, St. Mary the Orphan, St. Itias, St. Sophia, St. Dominic, St. Danielle, and St. Numerian.

The Fellowship of Anchora (also Anchorites)

St. Anchora was a wandering paladin of the Church of Ezra. Noted for traveling into the Land of Endor, a fiend held portion of the original world of the Church of Ezra. Wandering priests, the anchorites original mission was to travel the world spreading the word of Ezra through deeds and speech. This mission has grown dimmer in the Lands of the Mists.

The Sisters of Hala (Halanes)

St. Hala was a Holy Mother of the Church of Ezra in the pre-exile days of the church. She was responsible for the conversion of many persons of great evil. It was said that a day spent with Hala would lead even the death knights of Endor to tears of remorse. Halanes offer retreat from the world, and spiritual healing and conversion. They have the greatest ill-luck of any order.

Brothers of Mishnad (Mishnads)

Mishnad was the young king of the semitic people Ezra was a part of, ruling from the holy city of Aritezah. The epic love of Mishnad and Ezra was legendary and tragic. Mishnads are the protectors of love, conducting weddings, baptisms, and funerals. They are also charged with artistic duties, working to produce and encourage work of music and art.

The Justine Brethern (Justinians)

St. Justine was the Holy Mother of the Church of Ezra who finally unified the human nations against the Land of Endor. The resulting peace between the human nation lasted until the destruction of that world by the Endorian fiends. The Justinians are political envoys, peacemakers, and diplomats for the Church of Ezra.

The Fellowship of Burach (Burakim)

Burach was Mishnad's court scribe and aide. He scribed the original versions of the books of the Ezran Gospels. This function is continued by the Burakim, who scribe the holy texts of the Church of Ezra.

The Host of Rachael (Rachaelines)

Rachael was a rank and file soldier in Mishnad's army, who was chosen by Ezra to become the head general of Ezra's army. Under her, the fiends of Endor gained no ground, a great victory at the time. The Rachaelines form the military arm of the Church of Ezra. They are a very small order, most serving as guards at the main cathedrals.

The Children of St. Yamaki (Yamakites)

St. Yamaki was a blue dragon who converted to the Church of Ezra. After his conversion, he proved so faithful he was made a bishop. St. Yamaki later defended the city of Erostat against the forces of the Endorian general Takemalech, a pit fiend. He died slaying the fiend, and was post-humously made an arch-bishop and sainted. The Yamakites are exorcists, seeking to destroy fiends and other evil spirits. The rainment of this order consists of a grey hooded robe with a blue silhouette of a dragon and silver chains with Ezran holy symbols on each wrist (like a charm bracelet). The order carries the text Rites of the Adversary, and text of exorcism rituals.

The Brethren of the Rock (Petranes)

St. Peter the Beggar was a street beggar who was picked off the street to become the Holy Mother's right-hand archbishop. The Petranes are charged with the care of the poor.

The Lamed Brothers of Judas (Judasites)

St. Judas the Kind was a follower of Ezra. He served with her as a healer, though he himself had both legs and an arm withered. Judas had a divine talent to heal the lamed and crippled, and while he was able to use this ability on himself, chose not to as a sign of humility. Judasites help the chronically injured and ill - lepers, amputees, and others.

Orphans of St. Mary (Marians)

St. Mary was an orphan in the holy city of Aritezah, who was taken in by Ezra and raised as Ezra and Mishnad's daughter. She went on to become the second Holy Mother of the Church of Ezra, and founded the Great Orphanage of Aritezah, one of the Church of Ezra's prime institutions. Marians run the Church of Ezra's orphanages and perform other work with children.

The Order of St. Itias (Itians)

Itias was a childhood friend of Ezra and followed her throughout her ministry. He was scholar, reknown for the clarity of his explanations of Ezra's word, as well as for their startling depth. The secret book Confessions of Itias also reveals the secret passion he held toward Ezra. The Itians are teachers, seeking to enlighten the people. They also hold sway over matters of science, working to keep man from over reaching the boundaries of nature.

The Children of Sophia (Sophians)

St. Sophia was apparently a Holy Mother of the Church of Ezra, but all records of her time have been lost or destroyed. The Sophians are gnostics, and believe that the physical world is evil and that only pure spirit is pure. Thus, Sophians frequently commune with the spirit world, many times drawing up evil spirits which they believe are holy beings. The Neuvuchar Springs group is primarily Sophians, and it is said that a powerful spirit is pent beneath the cathedral there, but only barely.

The Congregation of Dominic (Dominicans)

St. Dominic the Blind was a prophet whose prophecies came startlingly true. An arch-bishop, he lived for nearly two hundred years. The Dominicans work to generate and interpret prophecy. The order is extremely small.

The Host of St. Danielle (Daniellines)

St. Danielle was head of the defense in the Bloody Seige, when an Endorian army of vampires laid seige to Aritezah. She personally save the Holy Mother from a pack of the monsters. Since then, the Daniellines have been charged to combat the flesh of evil as the Yamakites battle the spirit of evil. They are skilled monster hunters.

(Yamakites handle exorcisable creatures, such as ghosts, spirits, and fiends; Daniellines handle anything else.)

The Order of Sorrow (Numerians)

Numeron was the arch-bishop who lead the thirty year exodus through the Mists. The Holy Mother had perished in Aritezah and the new one was merely three years old. Thus Numeron was called to lead the journey.

The Numerians study the Mists and seek to find a sure path to the new land which the Church will find after 'the time of great darkness.' Also, they watch for the prophecied return of Ezra. Numerians wear black hooded robes, black gloves and boots, and a black face veil with white eye-spots. They are the smallest order, and the most secretive, rarely leaving the depths of the Great Cathedral.

The Elders of Ezra (Ezradim)

Ezra was a goddess worshipped by a desert people. In due time, she incarnated herself as a human. As a human Ezra lived a typical life until she turned sixteen. She became aware of her true nature, and began travelling among the people preaching her gospel, healing (through both medicine and divine means), advocating resistance against the encroaching Endorians. She discovered love, friendship, and joy, making these central to her doctrine. She was martyred at the hands of the Endorians. Over the centuries, the message of Ezra has been blunted, dulled and forgotten. The Ezradim are the true leaders of the Church of Ezra, the leaders and policy makers. Almost every church, save the very smallest are run by an Ezradim. Beyond that, the Ezradim are the church's healers, the physicians who understand the most about the treatment and curing of injury and disease. They work by equal portions of divine healing and medicinal and surgical techniques. The vestaments of the Ezradim are white robes (no hood) with light blue trim, and a gold chain bearing an Ezran holy symbol. Many Ezradim also carry a crozier.

Chris D. Nichols

MORE THOUGHTS ON THE EZRAN ANCHORITE BRANCHES by M. Barrett

We all know the Anchorites have many branches, according to the different faithful's alignments. Among these, the one that has always seemed quite weird and out of place is the LE sect. One might wonder in what way are they evil? Remember that this is an organized evil branch of a neutral religion, which begs the question, what "evil" are they preaching, that still goes along with the teachings of the original? I can see three basic options:

A: The LE branch teaches that the best defense is a good offense, so they actively attack anything that threatens the public good.

B: The LE branch teaches that people need to work for their protection, or rather, pay for it. They promote the idea that by industry, one is made worthy of the protection of Ezra. Thus, the poor are to blame for their own situation, and only the rich (who can pay) need be protected.

C: The LE branch teaches that the Ezran faith is being undermined by the unfaithful, and so they are constantly seeking out "heretics." Shades of Elena Faithhold and Servants of Darkness. All in all, the first option works better for the LG philosophy (go out and fight evil to protect the weak) as I'd see a LE person more likely to strike a bargain with an evil beast than slay it. The last is too misguided to be truly evil, and frankly, I think we've got enough witchburners around to make these guys a little more unique. This leaves me the pay-for-protection version, which some folks might point out was my original idea from way back, in the discussion of simony.

As a final note, I'll remind everyone that the Ezran faith is unique among AD&D religions because of this deversity. Sure, other faiths have several alignments available, but only the Ezran faith is so divided as to have essentially four different philosophies--four organized schools of thought--in the same religion. That, IMO, is grounds for a little leeway in saying that these guys may vary from traditional Ezran teachings.

Matthew Barrett

SEARCHERS

A NEUTRAL GOOD (NEUTRAL EVIL) SECRET SOCIETY

By L. de Pippo

We should use the knowledge we have to promote understanding
- The Keeper

History:

The Searchers were formed five years after the Great Upheavals of 740 in Barovia by the mysterious Keeper of Knowledge, but have since moved into Kartakass. The Searchers look for every bit of knowledge available and bring it back to the leader.

Membership:

Any alignment is welcome but Lawful Good. The majority of members are neutral good or true neutral but that's its not a requirement of the organization.

The organization is divided in three parts. The *Travelers* travel about Ravenloft looking for tiny fragments of information to write. The *Scribes* travel only to copy important books and bring them back to the library. Lastly the *Inner Circle* uses the knowledge to gain power or advantage in each domain, insinuating themselves into positions of power. All members of the Inner Circle are Neutral Evil and geased not to reveal anything about the mysterious Keeper of Knowledge. Every Scribe receives the Forbidden Lore nonweapon proficiency (from MotRD) for free applicable to only one domain. By this proficiency the searcher knows about the domain lord and its laws and feeding habits and knows forgotten secrets from the past of the domain (for example a person with Lamordian Forbbiden Lore knows why the mountain range is called Sleeping Beast Mountains). Further knowledge about different domains can be gaining by devoting nonweapon proficiency slots. Also when a seeker first joins the organization he will be required to learn a specific language to better communicate with its fellows seekers. The Keeper is the ultimate head of the organization.

Recognition:

Every seeker will have in its person a small badge with three volcanoes engraved in it. Should a Seeker suspect another person of being one, he will manage to show the badge, expecting to see another one in return. After that they will talk in the secret tongue of the organization

Activities:

Members travel about Ravenloft looking for knowledge. They copy any an all scraps of information, old legends. They have been told that the knowledge will be used to promote understanding and to help the opressed people of the domains. To that end the searchers promote understanding and look like, for those that do not know about them, a force for good.

Headquarters:

A new monastery build atop a hill in an easily defensive position. The monastery is the greatest repository of knowledge in Ravenloft, surpassing the University of Sri-Raji and Castle Avernus.

Forbidden Knowledge:

Frustrated after his failure during the Grand Conjunction, Inajira tried to destroy Strahd once more but failed. Not knowing why he failed, he was more powerful than the vampire, he decided, in a true Yugoloth manner, to use dupes to search for information about the Land of the Mists. Knowing that people tend to help good people he founded an organization that would appear "good" while helping him.

The Arcanath quickly seized an old monastery in Barovia and set up a library there. But Stradh was not idle and attacked the newly formed group making the fiend flee to Kartakass. After that first attempt at organization failed Inajira put up a new library fortress in the Gundarak part of Kartakass.

The Inner Circle of the organization are all neutral evil and devoted to the fiend. They coordinate the branches of the order and look, with Inajira, for a way to destroy Strahd and escape Ravenloft, in that order.

Luis de Pippo

SOCIETY OF SHATTERED DREAMS

By C. Phipps

"Good Night Sweet Prince"

-Horatio from *Hamlet*

Introduction:

The Society of Shattered Dreams is an organization composed of two orders lead by the brilliant Doctor Mileur and dedicated to destroying the various forces at work in the Nightmare Lands. Named for this ultimate desire, (its name sometimes giving the wrong impression) the society is unaware of the schism within its ranks, for the two groups have never met but are diametrically opposed in their ultimate goal and bound together only by the split mind of their vampiric leader.

Membership:

The *First Order* of the Society is composed of Psionicists, Psychologists (usually talented with mesmerism), Wizards, and any who have been victimized by the Nightmare Court (the latter usually also applying to the majority of the previous categories as well). All must be of Lawful alignment. They must be sponsored by another member at one of the monthly meetings in Mordentshire and must show a genuine desire to stop the Court's activities (Mikhail the Mage from *Children of the Night: Ghosts* is an evil but good example of a Society member's history and goals). A initiate who is being considered for induction is often contacted through his dreams and told about the Society, where to meet them, and the benefits of induction. Those who refuse are usually left thinking it was a mere dream.

The *Second Order* of the society lead by the Evil side of Dr. Mileur is far from similar to the previous composed mainly of renegade Bastelluses, Ghosts, and Cerebral vampires, (usually made from members of the first order who have succumbed to insanity). Sadly Dr. Mileur's brilliance has allowed him to deduce the means to create Cerebral vampires of his own. All initiates are contacted by existing members of the Second Order and usually made to join one way or the other (all three having the power to make their initiates into something similar to them). All are fanatically loyal to the doctor and control is ensured by several magical items under his command.

Recognition:

The members of the First Order of the Society all know and respect the personage of Dr. Mileur who makes it a point to meet with every initiate. Also at the monthly meetings (which a good portion of the First Order is always in attendance and always in Mordentshire) most members eventually get to know all other members. All the First Order's members are required to attend and only the excuse of great research is accepted for not attending. Since so much magical, psionic, and mental information is discussed most try to make it on sheer principle. In addition all members of the Society wear small crystals crafted by Dr. Mileur which allow a +1 to all saving throws in Dreamscapes (being less potent versions of his own). As of yet, no member of the First Order is aware Simeon Mileur is one of the walking dead, especially since he is often seen during the daytime, although many know he thinks his fiancée is being held by undead.

The Second Order is much more brutal in their methods of identification: all members are required to be mystically tattooed with a strange Z-like symbol on their body (whether spectral or not); this is a symbol for "sleep" on the doctor's homeworld. Furthermore all members of the Second Order are required to meet each other at the end of the year in the Nightmare Lands. For the three day cycle of that month, they receive detailed orders on what they are to do to advance the cause of usurping the power of the Nightmare Man and his Court.

Activities:

Currently the activities of the first Order is to simply document the attacks of the Court and attempt to thwart their schemes at every opportunity. The rest of the time they are generally left to their own devices in opposing the Court (curing insanity, discovering away to reach the Nightmare Lands 100% of the time, destroying dreamscapes). One particularly odd cabal has come to the conclusion that the best way to defeat the Court is to end sleep itself. Studying the reverie of elves, they have found an unlikely ally in the Lord Hazlik, who is toying with the idea that these supposed "Dream Gods" are behind his constant nightmares.

Occasionally the Good doctor orders them on a mission for various reasons (gather this mortal's energies, recruit this man, save this town from a Bastellus). He also seems particularly interested in any reports pertaining to the Ghost Dancer.

The Second Order is also similarly occupied with a bizzare project: the gathering of Dream energy for a device being constructed in a hidden dreamscape by BOTH sides of Dr. Simeon Mileur, called the Nightmare Engine. Its purposes and powers are unknown but it is nearing completion and its empowerment has included the dreams of thousands of mortals.

Note: The Nightmare Engine is based on plans of the Apparatus and has a power similar to the "Psionic Shield" mentioned in *Thoughts of Darkness*, which is presumably what screens out the Nightmare Court. If DMs don't like this idea, the dreamscape may just be a pocket domain (like Davion).

HeadQuarters:

The Society of Shattered Dreams First Order's monthly and yearly meetings almost always take place at a secluded manor in Mordentshire that doubles as an asylum and indeed is remarkably close to the one once managed by the great memerist Dr. D'Honneur. Most natives view it as a gentlemen's club for alienists and avoid disturbing their meetings, no matter how odd the occasional noise that comes from it.

The Second Order, as perhaps a method of mocking the First Order, also has its meetings in a twisted dreamscape version of the manor/asylum. (Dreams are particularly vivid there - think the 7th Guest or the House from the Shining.) The meetings always take place during the three days of Simeon's Evil side, which have been carefully calculated (the Good doctor sadly has only vague memories of his time in this form and truly ironically thinks they are bad dreams). His crystal coffin (perhaps a way of mocking Hypnos) is located in this manor, though he keeps a separate (secret) one in the First Order's manor.

Members have laboratories, asylums, and libraries around the Demiplane's Core (and several of the more prominent Clusters), too.

Dr. Simeon Mileur

Cereberal Vampire, Lawful Neutral/Lawful Evil

Armor Class:	1 (-5 in Nightmare Lands)	Str:	18/23 (25 in Nightmare Lands)
Movement	12, FL 18	Dex:	14 (25 in Nightmare Lands)
Level/Hit Dice:	8+3	Con:	17
Hit Points:	40	Int:	25
THAC0:	16	Wis:	25
N° of Attacks:	2	Cha:	14
Damage/Attacks:	1d4+3 (x2) or by weapon type +2; (1d4+14 or by weapon type +7 in Nightmare Lands)		
Special attacks:	See below		
Special defenses:	See below		
Magic resistance:	5%		

Appearance:

Dr. Simeon Mileur is a comely looking man in his early 30s, with short blonde hair and a slender frame. His eyes are soft blue and usually betray a form of world weariness common to much older doctors. His fangs are faintly visible when retracted and when the "moon madness" strikes him they are almost always out even when not feeding. Also, his gaze shifts terribly during these periods becoming one of a man of incredible power and fanaticism. He is usually dressed in the garments of a gentleman from Mordent but occasionally one from a much more cultured domain (similar to MotRD London). In his hands is usually a notebook, an especially strange sight to behold when encountered in the horrid dreamscapes of the Nightmare Lands! His only jewelry is a small crystal around his neck on a plain black string.

Background:

Dr. Simeon Mileur was born heir to great holdings on his Prime Material homeland and was given the thorough education required to one of his station, even sent away to a foreign university to study. The latter betrayed also the intent of his family to find him a bride while he was away, since the family had become extremely interbred and madness struck regularly its members down. While studying at the university he became quickly entranced with the concept and causes of his family's insanities and spent many of his hours in the local asylums attempting to discover methods of treating them (this was tolerated by the locals for as heir to a neighboring powers lands, he could be forgiven his eccentricities). He also fulfilled his family's wishes to find a wife by courting a local Dukes' second daughter, who had gone on to become a ballerina and dancer of the finest quality. On the eve of his return to his homeland where he and his fiancée would be married he discovered she had not shown up for their meeting and going back to the theatre where she had been performing he found her dead body on the ground, bloody hand prints all over her white gown. Hearing the sound of maniacal laughter fill the hall of the theatre he drew his sabre and ran up the stairs to the balconies to where it seemed to originate. There he found a shadowy figure rushing into the nearby doors, running after him he fell into what seemed like a chasm of shadows, and an incredible amount of mist. He quickly lost consciousness. Awakening he found himself in a far different landscape, he was lying face down on the sands of an island's beach with a huge cliff face reaching above him and a large caravel in port. Walking

up a beaten path and wondering if he had either been kidnapped or had finally been consumed by his family's madness in wake of the tragedy, he saw an ominous mansion and several black robed, clay masked figures grabbed him. He had become a patient on the island of Dr. Dominiani. Finding it an incredible good luck to have a fellow doctor of the mind turn up on his shores, Daclaud Heinfroth quickly began to subject him to his most devious experiments. Particularly the infamous intelligence enhancement treatment (see Bleak House for full details on this insidious process)

His mind already bended by the strangeness of these circumstances and the murder minutes before, his sanity shattered totally as the process was performed over and over again on him, leaving him ranting as bizarre hallucinations about his fiancée and an even more odd land ruled by the shadowy figure which seemed to shift as one passed through it filled his head. The "Good" doctor of the Island then decided to try a new treatment upon Simeon, having grown tired of the subject and wanting to test a new variant of the very process that created him. So he gave his patient a transfusion of his own cerebral fluid, mixed with that of several psionics which had fallen under his care. When he returned a few days later to the patient's cell he was shocked to say the least to find it had worked.

Transformed into a Cerebral vampire like Heinfroth the treatment had more or less restored his sanity and left him with an intellect no human (and certainly no undead) had any right to possess. Making Mileur one of his orderlies, he was unaware that somehow this process had removed a good amount of the control that a creator vampire normally wields over his minion. Learning everything he could about this odd land (his mind still unstable enough to accept it without question) he planned his brutally escape which came to pass hours after the escape of some of the patients: the infamous Dr. Van Ritchen and company. In the chaos, armed patients entrapped many of Heinfroth's vampire minions in the staright jackets and staked them to death, while Mileur, in his incredible desire to escape, plunged his form into the sea and literally began to swim away from the asylum. Many many hours later (as Cerebral vampires rarely tire and are immune to the sun) he saw a vision of his fiancée in the mists complete with bloody handprints on her dress. Swimming faster he fell into the mists and struck ground again: he had arrived in the Nightmare Lands.

Note: As far as Doctor Dominiani is concerned, Dr. Mileur is at the bottom of the Sea of Sorrows (a hideous waste of talent but fitting punishment in his eyes). Recently, however, he has been recording several of his patients ramblings and several have mentioned a figure very similar to his former assistant, despite having no way of knowing of him. Should his study ever reveal the lands existence he would be very interested in recovering him and "analysing" him of every bit of information he has learned.

Current Sketch:

That was close to fifty years ago (at least in Mileur's mind, he has spent many of these years in the dreaming, where time rarely applies). Believing this to be the land where his fiancée was unfairly imprisoned, he has founded the Society of Shattered Dreams to overthrow the Nightmare Court and destroy that evil force once and for all.

(As some of you may have guessed he has come to believe the Nightmare Man was the figure he caught a glimpse of, and Ghost Dancer is his dead fiancée due to some rather startling similarities).

He has mostly managed to keep lawful his neutral alignment despite his change to vampirehood, trading with the Abber Nomads for cerebral fluid (the nomads actually welcoming the insanity the drinking brings as enlightenment) and his great powers of mind allowing him to be possibly the only (im)mortal in the Demiplane who has a chance at actually defeating the Court at its own game.

However, as Heinfroth so horribly knows, his treatment is flawed and so it is on Simeon. Some three days in the middle of each month (when on his homeworld) there is a full moon, he shifts to his Lawful Evil alignment, leading the "2nd Order" of the Society of Shattered dreams in trying to destroy the Court not for sympathy but for the chance at replacing them. He has even developed a desire to "explore" a patient's insanity by driving those who entrust himself further into madness. The "Dark Side" of Dr. Mileur is fully aware of his good side's actions and forges his plans around his to advance his cause, while the "Good Side" ignores the existence of the other one. As for the members of the Second Order's opinions on the good Doctor, they are well aware of his "madness" but have no idea of how to "remove it" without destroying their leader. The "Dark Side" has ordered any attempts to get rid of his "Good Side" to be stopped for simple self preservation.

Most frightening of all is anyone who is familiar with the Doctor can instantly tell that he has become in terms of mannerisms and personality a perfect double of Heinfroth.

Combat:

Dr. Simeon Mileur has all the powers of a Cerebral vampire, and in addition to these already powerful abilities his unnatural intelligence and wise judgment render him immune to all illusions of 7th level or below and to the following spells: Cause fear, Charm person, Command, Friends, Hypnotism, Hold person, Ray of enfeeblement, Scare, Fear, Charm monster, Confusion, Emotion, Fumble, Suggestion, Chaos, Feeblemind, Hold monster, Magic jar, Quest, Geas, Mass suggestion, Rod of rulership, Antipathy/sympathy, Death spell and Mass charm. Not to mention his incredible strength and speed when in a dreamscape (Int and Wis replacing Dex and Str). It is these factors that indeed help him to survive the Nightmare Court and their minions. It should also be noted that the psionicist brain fluid (made a permanent part of his brain by his transition to undeath) has granted him also several spell-like abilities: Enter Dreamscape, Astral projection, Suggestion, Domination, Alter Reality, and Planeshift (which simply allows him to enter another non-closed Domain). He can use all of them three times per day as if he was a 14th level Psionicist. He usually avoids combat unless he is in dire need of fluid (and only then after he is evil and all other methods are unavailable) or when he believes the people are Nightmares (not often but happens). The crystal he wears, made from Abber nomad designs, shows his membership in the Society (it also gives him a +2 to all saving throws in Dreamscapes).

Charles Phipps

THE FALKOVNIAN GUNMEN

By R. Sweeney

History of the Gunmen:

Once, several years ago, Vlad Drakov found a gun-toting adventurer and confiscated the weapon. Seeing the potential of such a device, he spent great amounts of energy acquiring the secrets of such a weapon. In the end, what he found was [Similon Redwiskers](#), a Gnomish Psionist/Cleric. Vlad made Redwiskers an offer he couldn't refuse and Redwiskers began making arquebuses for his lordship. (Exceptional weapons non-magical +1 to hit / +1 damage.) Each of these weapons, Vlad has Redwiskers Empower with Molecular Rearrangement. This gives them an intelligence and the ability to repair themselves. (The weapons have an Align: LE, INT of 12-15, and an EGO of 15).

Being Lawful Evil, the weapons are able to cooperate and form platoons. Vlad made sure the weapons were given to a warrior with good Dexterity but weak will so that the weapons could easily control their 'host' (and maintain loyalty.) Weapons that did not swear an oath to Vlad were destroyed.

Thus the First Squad came to be.

The Falkovnian Gunmen:

Fifteen men armed with (two) exceptional arquebuses and trained (1st level fighters) to be specialized in their use. To each of these men, two apprentices were assigned. These apprentices would reload the weapons after the Gunner fired. Such was the skill of the assistants that these two could reload the weapons quickly enough for the gunner to maintain a ROF of 1 per round. (1-10 + 3 points of damage at +2 to hit. They are +3 to hit if they are able to set up and use their 'gun stand' which stabilizes the barrel for them.) If a Gunner went down, the first assistant would take over his gun. (Another apprentice would be 'hired.')

Alternate: Divide the number of men into three rows. Each row has a gun. Because they are specialized, they have a ROF of 1/3 rounds. The first row fires (5 shots) and reloads (Kneeling). The second row fires [5 shots] (2nd round) over the heads of the first row and Kneels to reload their weapons. The third row fires... and the first row is ready to fire again. Resulting in a 5 shot per round rate of fire from the close formation.

In order to get a supply of gunpowder, the guns themselves would use "molecular rearrangement" to change charcoal and various other components into SmokePowder. (On average, they make 6 shots worth a day.)

Eventually, of course, the Gunners became experienced enough that they were able to control their guns. They then broke out on their own as a random militia and can be found for hire in almost any domain. They are not stupid, however. They do not face down werewolves, vampires, or any such monsters. The only assignment they will face is to track down and kill humans, demihumans, or other humanoids who have broken the law. (For a fee.)

Defenses vs spellcasters: Their leader has a Ring of Spell turning. Another member has a Staff of Grounding (channels magical invocation/evocation magic into the ground if the effect originates from, ends in, or passes through an area of 10 yards from the Staff. The staff must be planted in the ground for this effect however.)

Vlad still uses Guns in his infantry, but these guns are no longer Psionic. Thus the soldiers are tied to Vlad in order to get the Gunpowder to use their favorite weapon. Thus, if the town sheriff finds himself faced with a thief or PC party that is too much for him or her. They may call upon these men. Payments accepted are; Cash, magical items that protect against magic, magical items usable by fighters, potions, young men (to become apprentices), or young women (guess). Sometimes, they will kill a target just to keep the goodies that victim possesses (if the target is or appears to be rich.)

Appendix: Personalities

Similon Redwiskers

Align: LE

Stats: Non exceptional

Class: Psionicist (Psychokinetic)

Psionic Powers:

Telekinesis

Molecular agitation

Molecular rearrangement

MetaPsi: Empower

Class: Forge Cleric (vulcan)

Spells: Fire and Earth. + those that effect metal.

Granted Power: Great skill with blacksmithing and weaponsmithy.

NWP: Blacksmith, Weaponsmithy, Armorsmithy, Gunsmithy, manufacture smoke powder.

Weapons: Hammer (only).

Notes: As a Psi, the Gnome only studied the above powers, continuously increasing his skill with them. These powers, he used in conjunction with this Clerical Forge-skills.

Robert Sweeney

THE NIGHTMARE COURT REVISED

By C. Phipps

This is taken from a letter written by Dr. Illhousen to Dr. Rudolph van Ritchen. The letter was never received as the good doctor himself disappeared a week before its arrival. Something to note also: two days after it was sent the doctor and his staff vanished from Nova Vaasa.

My old Friend, this is extremely odd. My speculations on the Nightmare Court and their horrific corruption of man's most essential function has grown tenfold in oddity.

I received this journal on my doorstep in plain brown wrapping and addressed to me, inside was this extremely odd diary which describes in *vivid* detail one man's account of the origins of my as so far enigmatic foes.

The man who wrote it claims to be a doctor of the mind as myself, though from his account I believe he is teetering on the edge of madness himself. I cannot help but wonder if that's my fate as well, but that is somewhat beside the point.

Please read the journal I have included in this letter and tell me of what you think.

The Journals of Simeon Mileur

An introduction should be in order before I give my journal and account of my knowledge of these horrific beings who tear at the mind and devour men's souls leaving nothing behind but madness. I am Simeon Mileur, a doctor of madness and death who leads the Society of Shattered Dreams in a crusade to break these masters of illusion's hold on humanity.

I will neglect my biography for my history is as tied to these beasts as they are as tied to mine. I have discovered your work and believe you alone can help me fight this madness. My work is a loss, my failure complete and soon I fear my mind will number among the odious histories of these destroyers. At least I shall be with my love... but enough of that.

Here is my survey of the histories of the Nightmare Court and what I have discerned by interrogating the noble Abber nomads who slake my hunger and by reading simple glyphs enscribed by mad hands. Some, I shall admit, has even been raped from the minds of the Court's prisoners via mental powers at my disposal.

If you read on, Doctor Illhousen, you could follow my path to Dark dreams and insanity. But at least you chose it!

The Lord of Mesmerism

(Hypnos, as your primitive journal bespeaks of him)

This man's name is unknown to me but I believe his home was once the gentle land of Mordent. A magician in a time when magic was looked down upon as either perversion or superstition, this man garnered respect, power and wealth by pretending to be a mage of incredible skill and fame. If you were foolish enough not to notice, I chose to say "pretend", for his skill was at the root a charlatane's craft of simple tricks and a weak form of the mesmerism I employ to master my society. He might have had some skill at the art but only enough to pass as a magician of skill. The rest was done through cleverly planned performances and dupes.

Unfortunately the man's ego got the better of him: the simpering thesbian wanted "real" magic, something not a trick and the respect that this "real" magic would have garnered him. It ate at his soul and he began to spend the ill gotten fortune he had acquired in pursuit of this attraction. Then his illusion was shattered all of a sudden when one of the common rogues he'd used to make his performances revealed his duplicity while drunk at a house of ill repute. The Mesmerist had to do something fantastic or suffer the most odious of fates: humiliation.

At this time he had acquired a scroll from a wizard-thief of some small bad reputation who had stolen the dark magic device from a no doubt much more talented master of the art. The mesmerist was ecstatic and ignoring all common sense chose to utilize the scroll which he had erroneously interpreted as a powerful illusion spell, as it bespoke of "waking dreams" and "imagery".

In full public he used the device, making careful use of all the noted props and components. The device failed utterly as there was an explosion and the mesmerist was found lying dead on the city square. The people entombed him in his "tower of wonders" and gave him the highest dignity as his will was quite specific to several charities in the region.

The rise and fall of a incompetent wretch would have been a much better tale to tell but sadly it was not to be. "Hypnos" (your name for him is ash in my mouth) was alive, trapped in his body unable to so much as blink but fully aware and screaming. For years this incredible agony continued until he quite simply went mad at his folly and began to explore the dark areas of the mind - a twisted one to be sure as it was his own.

Ultimately the Dark Monk (your "Nightmare Man" and the beast who tore my love from my arms, may he rot forever in this hell he has made for both of us!) gave him the chance to somewhat escape into the fantasies of others and pay other men for their follies back. This unholy bargain was sealed (though the man I tore this information from was quite mad and insinuated that Hypnos had killed several others before joining the Court - something I find hard to believe) and the mesmerist's tower drawn into the Land of Madness and Illusion. There, the Mesmerist rules over the dreams and minds of his wretched victims, unable even now to end his coma.

The Serpent of Lies *(The Rainbow Serpent)*

This creature of an almost "primeval" myth of temptation has a history that I discovered from an Abber Nomad. I would have liked to have interrogated him further but the hunger overwhelmed me and I slew him quite gruesomely - may the Gods of Goodness forgive my soul.

This story begins in another realm - one most curious as it bespeaks of talking animals and a huge Crocodile. This wildland has a myth about an elder serpent who told "King Croc" (forgive my vulgar usage of the words, but the savage who told me this story was an imbecile) that he would die and specifically how, before refusing his gift and taking all other serpents in the land with him.

The "Rainbow Serpent" (as you call it) despised the idea of leaving his homeland and wished the Elder serpent to have given his gift to the Crocodile, staying to watch humanity's destruction (I do not understand this frankly bizarre tribal mythological lunacy but it's what he spoke of). The Elder serpent simply admonished the young snake for his stupidity (for the elder vermin was "of course" right, according to the Nomad).

Ultimately the Rainbow Serpent desired to return to the jungles and to aid Crocodile in his efforts to get rid of humanity, for the beast was "doomed" without his race, as he believed. To do this he began to plant seeds of misdoubt in the migratory reptiles that the Elder one was keeping the largest kills for himself, smashing eggs that held beings he felt would pose a threat to him, and other things that would offend a primitive mindset. Ultimately he gathered a group of the youngest in the "nest" around him and they rebelled against the Elder serpent and his prophecies. The Serpent of Lies finally confronted the Elder and killed it, helped by its younger allies. Then he proceeded devouring it in hopes of gaining its powers. With its final breath, the Elder cursed the vicious Serpent with these words: "Indeed you will have my magic: yet you will rule nothing but illusion and mistrusts of your own devising!" At that point the snake finished it off and was engulfed by the mists (something which lends veracity to this tale, though very little).

When he emerged he was in the Realm of Insanity and the Dark Monk made him a member of the Court for he is cursed to forever try and destroy humanity but to never succeed.

Mullonga

(the hag from the hell's name is her name)

This is a tale I managed to wrest from the undead lips of one of the creature's floating craniums (I have since acquired the spell and used it to a most useful effect). Apparently Mullonga was a tribal shaman of *another* primitive people living in a frontier region. Her land was a holy spot of great power (and this belief is seemingly backed up by the odd nature of this realm) and her tribe lived in idyllic foolishness relying on a temperate climate and excellent game and crops.

Then in another slight against high culture, the "wicked" pale ones came and took the land from the neighboring tribes. Mullonga knew her tribe would be next and her warnings were headed: so her tribe prepared for war. Backed up by dark spirits of evil, Mullonga nearly lost her soul trying to find a way to halt the seemingly endless tide of the pale settlers. However, the tribe managed to achieve independence thanks to Mullonga.

However the fear of her enemies overtaking the tribe still came to pass by simple unavoidable progress. The aborigines were drunk and debted into extinction by unscrupulous merchants. The survivors allowed the pale settlers to live on their ancestral lands and the newcomers constructed a huge city. Mullonga paranoid that the spirits were too powerful and were secretly at fault for her people's decay did not release them against the pale ones. She became simply another old woman in a slum. (Her slum I assume duplicates her original on her homeworld)

Then a drunken group of pale "townsmen" (I substitute this word as they are no longer settlers) came and murdered every one of the remaining members of Mullonga's tribe in the slum. The hag of course snapped and brought the spirits of fear down on the town. One by one every settler went mad and died in terror as the shaman took revenge in the most horrific manner possible.

Eventually she turned them against one another and the last two living beings (save herself) shot each other believing the other to be a demon from the Abyss.

At this point she began to plan on moving onward until all of the lands were free of the pale ones, but at this point she was taken away by the mists.

There she was met by the Nightmare Lord and he showed her her "dream soul", which he had captured. Now she works to cause paranoia among the "outsiders" but fears eternally the Nightmare Man will crush her spirit.

The Changeling

(Morpheus)

The tale I garnered about this man is the most peculiar I have ever encountered (which says far more than your intellect could ever comprehend, Doctor). According to the Abber legends the Changeling was actually born in the Nightmare Lands (making him unique among the Court). According to this supertious bunkam (collaborated by men driven insane whose memories have been harvested by my magic), he was the son of a woman who was trapped in the realm physically. The woman pleaded with the masters of the realm not for release, not for sanity, but for companionship. Her plea was answered by the mists and a dark handsome stranger arrived and the woman immediatly fell in love with him, making love with the stranger on the first night after his arrival (showing dubious morals that prove she deserved her fate). The stranger was actually a shadowy monster of the pit with wings of a bat, who, after leaving the woman (having done his deed), went on to other "calls".

Nine months later the agonizing woman died in labor but not before her demonic offspring wrenched himself free. The child immediatly bonded with the land in a way humans cannot understand (but a way I understand all too well). He was born under the most powerful totems of the Abbers.

The Changeling child was mad out of his mind and possessed the powers of a god. To say the least his constant changing of the land and foul devouring and destruction of wandering fools attracted the Dark Master of the realm's attention. An obscure pact was struck and the forest he was born into became the creature's abode as he constantly "plays with mortals" and trucks in mad pranks.

Unfortunately his greatest wish, to meet his father and discover the meaning or "truth of his life" (no doubt caused by his chaotic existance), has never been (and will never be, I presume) fulfilled.

The Dark Monk

(your Nightmare Man, the source of my madness)

Here Dr. Illhousen is the master of the Nightmare Court, the source of my pain and possibly the most evil thing time has ever produced. I am telling his history as gleaned from a source I can only now describe as disreputable: my own mad dreams at night.

On a forgotten world in another plane (for I have deduced something you cannot understand Dr. Illhousen: that our world is a prison on a false plane!) the Dark Monk was spawned to his hellish existence (much to my later torments!). His actions of more horror than ever come later though for originally he was the gentle patriarch priest of a Cult devoted to a god that ruled all dreams in his world. His existence (that will ultimately culminate in my death, I know!) was devoted to inspirational sermons and to capturing the subjects of others' dreams on canvas, which proved to be of astounding beauty and incredible greatness. Unfortunately the foul cretin of wickedness could not capture one subject's dreams well, much to his discontent: his own. His god had always given the priest pleasant dreams but they were boring and unimaginative (how he has changed!) Things changed after he went to exorcise a spirit, a creature of the Abyss which had been summoned by a foul wizard and had later invaded his son, blasting him with hallucinations and incredibly vile images. He succeeded in destroying the beast, but he was wounded horribly and he dreamt that night of such things as to be undecipherable. Why his god's protections failed I do not know nor care, but that morning he painted a thing of such horror that it was said to have caused men to faint or scream.

The patriarch was overjoyed for his portraits had always given him insights into his subject's minds and now he knew a bit more about himself. As a doctor, I think he was not insane but simply shaken and would have recovered if he hadn't read too much into that portrait. He did, however, and with each passing day, as he failed to duplicate the subject in his paintings, he became obsessed that he himself had gone mad and began to carefully observe instead of healing the more horrific images in men's mind. This occurred gradually and after a while his cathedral became a den of madness.

His god stripped him of his powers but the monk did not cease his studies. Armed with wealthy coffers and fantastical followers, he performed horrific experiments trying to uncover the secret of his insanity, using spiders to inject in his victims a special hallucinogen toxin that finally caused them to go mad. He recorded all their visions in his portraits, trying desperately to understand why he was doing this: he was obviously already crazed at this point even though he didn't understand it.

Ultimately he dragged the last of the true priests of the land back to his cathedral and tortured him to madness: in his madness, he didn't even realize that his last victim was his own son! At that he was brought into the realm of dreams and from that moment on this creature became the lord of nightmares and madness. His only goal seems to create more evil and to drag more men into insanity with him, trying vainly to understand the sickest mind of them all, his own, but no longer able to imagine even the most banal thing.

The Night Maiden

(your Ghost Dancer and my lost love)

(Rudolph, you should note how the man's writing seems to shift from mad ranting to almost gentle text at this point - G.I.)

My lovely Katerina was a dancer and the second daughter of the Duke of one of the largest domains on our homeworld. There she was the greatest ballerina in the most advanced and civilized place on our world. Her skill indeed was matched only by her beauty.

However, evil hung to her like a cloud. Her mother, the Duke's first wife, was an abused and battered woman who ultimately died to her father's hate (I did not know this until I spoke with the spirit of one of her deceased audience). As a girl she foolishly believed it was because her mother did not love her father enough - or so he told her as she was a witness. Oh gods if I had only known...

Dancing became her only passion, for indeed there was no other pastime that would not take her back to the man she was increasingly realizing was evil but could not help but love. Her dances were as beautiful as they were filled with tragedy.

Her first love then came, the handsome son of an aristocrat whom her father was very pleased to have introduced to her. Ultimately she opened herself up to him and began to love him. However on the night of their engagement he was drunk and demanded she satisfy his lusts. She of course refused, but oh gods... he took what he wanted with force. Her father can only be thanked to have shot him in the skull as soon as he arose from his deed. Right in front of my poor Katerina's eyes. I then came into her life five years after. She was a broken figure but I courted her still and although she resisted my advances at first, she opened herself once again up and finally we fell in love. True passion filled but chaste love.

Her nightmares were constant during our courtship and more than once we broke up. But I loved her with more soul than any mortal before or since and so every time we were drawn back, until she finally gave into me and we agreed to wed.

On the night of our wedding she was to return with me to my homeland but then... under the ballroom an obsessed fan possessed by delusions attacked her and the horror of the attack chained her spirit as she was beaten to death. ***And I couldn't help her!! I wasn't her to help her!...***

She is now forever condemned by the Nightmare Man, whose spirit was the first to capture her soul after the deed, to do the dance of the scimitar (a dance made by her that tells of her wounds throughout life) and constantly seek to understand WHY she was chosen for such pain. That moment she was drawn in and I was too...

My soul be damned, but now my only desire is to join her again ... for ***I am the cause of her fate! ..***

The journals end here, Rudolph. This text, if it is accurate, could provide us with the weapons to defeat our foe. I am gathering Dr. Tasker and my new senior nurse to prepare a more detailed investigation. I'd like your input on this topic.

Your faithful companion in humanity,
Gregorian Illhousen

Charles Phipps

THE WHITE INQUISITION

By Jack the Reaper

History:

Many years ago, Elenia Faith-Hold decided that spreading her faith and influence into other domains and eradicating the evil that exists there, will be the right thing to do. After a failed attempt at sending an army of crusaders, she figured that perhaps a secret underground organization would have proved better than a brute militia force. With the help of her counselors, she established the White Inquisition, a branch of the Nidalian Inquisition, to act as her agents and missionaries in other domains. Each one of the inquisitors was selected for his fanaticism and unquestioning belief in Elena and her religion. Like their mistress, they devoted themselves to the destruction of all evil things on the world. And like their mistress, they fail to understand that in the process they only create much more suffering.

Goals:

The White Inquisition's declared goals are:

- conversion of people to the "one true religion";
- destruction of all kinds of evil beings;
- punishment of sinners.

Hierarchy:

There are three orders inside the White Inquisition:

The Order Of Scythe: The executing authority of the WI. Its role is the physical hunting and fighting of creatures and darkness, and the carrying out of the leaders' orders. Its members are all skilled warriors and rangers, familiar with all the known creatures of darkness, their weaknesses, their powers, and the methods of hunting and destroying them.

When on Mission, they usually wear long white robes over a chain armor, and fight with special holy silver scythes. They also carry all manner of holy and mystical protections and weapons, depends on the creature they hunt at the moment. However, they usually try to catch the creature in question alive and bring him before their "court" to judge him according to the rules. Only if it's not possible, he will be judged without being present, and then the Scythes will be sent to destroy him.

It must be noted, that the Order Of The Scythe is not restricted to the hunting of undead, lycanthropes and fiends. They are also the ones responsible to the capture of sinners and blasphemers and to their bringing to justice.

The Order Of Stake: The adjudicating authority of the WI. Their role is to watch for people and creatures who act "evil", declare their sins, and judge them with or without their presence. When someone has been deemed a sinner or a blasphemer, it is the Scythe's job to bring him before the Stake's court. The Stake only detects the "evil beings" and declare their punishment. However, when they suspect someone at being evil or "creature of the devil", they'll go to any length to find enough proofs to incriminate him.

They are experts at making people confess, and their skill of extracting information from their victims is infamous all across the world. That means, of course, tortures.

The Order of Light: The legislating authority of the WI, which consists of priests and missionaries, making all in their power to make people "see the light". And they can be *very* convincing when someone refuses to accept the one true religion... Their role is to enact the laws and rules of the faith. They are also the ones who supply the mystical and magical help to the other orders. Some of those items and rituals are unknown anywhere else. They include protection against mental attacks and influence, protection against evil, and the ability to detect evil, which doesn't function for anyone else in Ravenloft. Though this is not always evil that they detect...

Activity:

The WI is active especially in the medieval domains, but it has headquarters also in some renaissance and others. In most of the domains, they are outlawed and must act underground. No member is allowed to know the identity of any other member, so that in a case of capture he won't be able to give away any information. Only the three local orders' heads know the identity of all the members, but not of the other orders' heads. In the rare cases on which all the members gather together, they wear long white robes and hoods, hiding their faces. Each one of them has a personal alias and password, which he must repeat in the leader's ears, in order to prevent strangers from infiltrating. Should a stranger will indeed be discovered, he will be immediately executed. In those meetings, the leaders hear the members' reporting, and instruct them about future activities. Those meetings are usually held in secret basements, forest clearing, ancient ruins and similar locations, and always at night.

Most of the time, the members of the WI live as normal folks, doing whatever mundane work they are skilled at: innkeepers, carpenters, farmers and so on. They will go to any length to disguise their membership in the WI. However, they are always watchful for people who break the Faith's laws, and for people suspected at being creatures of darkness.

When someone has been declared a blasphemer, he will get a warning in the shape of a red circle, painted on his door, table or even bedroom's wall. If he doesn't repent (a difficult task, since the Inquisition don't bother to tell him in what crime he is blamed), he will mysteriously disappear one night, probably never to be seen again. It is said that no kind of protection or guards can save a marked victim from the Inquisition's hands.

They can penetrate any fortress, pass any magical defense. Sometimes they trick the victim to get out of his home, sometimes they use a drug which causes the equivalent of *Feign Death*, exhuming the victim after the burial and bringing him to the court. After the trial, the inquisition always arranges for the corpse to be found in some public location with a scroll detailing the victim's sins attached to him, in order to warn other folks from going his ways. If the punishment doesn't mean death, the victim will be released, after the inquisition makes sure that he won't be able to reveal anything.

If someone is suspect at being a creature of darkness, i.e. a lycanthrope, a vampire and the like, he will be tortured until he admits being indeed such a creature and reveals everything he knows about other "servants of the devil". Then he would be executed in the proper manner: werebeasts by silver blades, vampires by staking and decapitation, fiends by holy weapons and burning. While many of those monsters are really what they are, still more many are not.

When they are able and powerful enough, the White Inquisition may cast collective punishment on a whole village or group which was declared evil. Sometimes it means a nightly raid on a village, burning it to the ground and putting all the villagers to the sword and cross. Sometimes it means bursting into a local church and the hanging of the priests. Those acts are always carried out swiftly and effectively, all the inquisitors disappearing immediately after it.

Laws & Rules:

Here are some of the laws legislated by the White Inquisition. Breaking a law shall always bring punishment, even though almost nobody knows about the laws except for the inquisitors themselves.

However, their rules state that he must be judged first. If the Order Of the Scythe is not able to bring him before the court, he is judged without his presence and punished later.

- Blasphemy (Any priest or believer of any other religion except the True Faith is considered a blasphemer, punishment is death if doesn't convert);
- Causing harm to other peoples (ranges from murder to unpolite behavior, punishment ranges from death to lashing);
- Infidelity (includes intimacies between unmarried couples, punishment is death);
- Lies, swears and gossip (tongue is cut out);
- the Seven Sins;
- Thievery (hands are chopped);
- Witchcraft (includes all manner of spellcasting and psionics, punishment is burning at stake).

All of those among other laws, which change from time to time.

The Inquisition goes according to the rule of "Let the punishment fit the crime" most of the time, but sometimes they are more enthusiastic, and may punish much harshly than even their laws dictate. Their methods of execution differ from crime to crime and from case to case. They include burning at the stake, crucifixion, hanging, and decapitation among others. As has been said, they leave the body and the record of his sin somewhere public.

The White Inquisition In Darkon:

Three months after their arrival to Darkon, all the inquisitors forgot their homeland. However, they didn't forget their holy mission. They now believe that their organization has always existed in Darkon, but their goals and methods remained the same.

They discovered somehow that Azalin is a lich, and they devoted themselves fanatically to his destruction. Because of the Kargat, they must play much more carefully than in any other domain. The two secret organizations play an incredibly sophisticated struggle, trying to transplant agents in each other, and to expose as much of the other's secrets as possible. The Kargat has been trying for years to uproot the WI, but though they reveal some Inquisition members from time to time, the majority and the leaders had always successfully evaded them. The White Inquisition considers the Kargat as servants of the devil from the worst kind, killing their agents (and people suspected at being agents) mercilessly. In one occasion they have successfully crucified a Kargat vampire to the very door of the Grim Fastness itself! No organization will show mercy toward the other, and this conflict has caused much suffering from

both sides on the good people of Darkon. The White Inquisition is known to cooperate from time to time with another Enemies Of The Crown, such as the Hellfire Club or Falkovnian agents. There is also some interacting between them and creatures such as the head of organized crime in Darkon, the psionic lich Professor Nostarius, and with the great dragon Vyrem and his reptilian minions, which are both arch-enemies of Azalin. But the nature of those evil beings prevents them from cooperating successfully, and it's not known whether the WI seeks help from them or trying to destroy them too.

The leader of the White Inquisition in Darkon, Thomas Monzone, achieved an important position in the Kargat, and uses this position to further help the inquisition in their crusade against Azalin. What he hasn't revealed to his brethren however, is that he had to be turned into a werewolf in order to get promoted to Kargat's officer rank. He secretly hides this particular to other members of the Inquisition because he knows this would bring his ultimate doom: however, he is still loyal to his principles and intends to uproot the Kargat and Azalin more than ever, possibly also trying to find a cure to his curse.

Final Notes:

Elenia's god is good. However, he doesn't grant her spells and powers since Elenia's corruption. The Dark Powers do grant priest spells and paladin powers to Elenia and her followers, including the White Inquisition (the more mischief they cause the better...).

Jack the Reaper