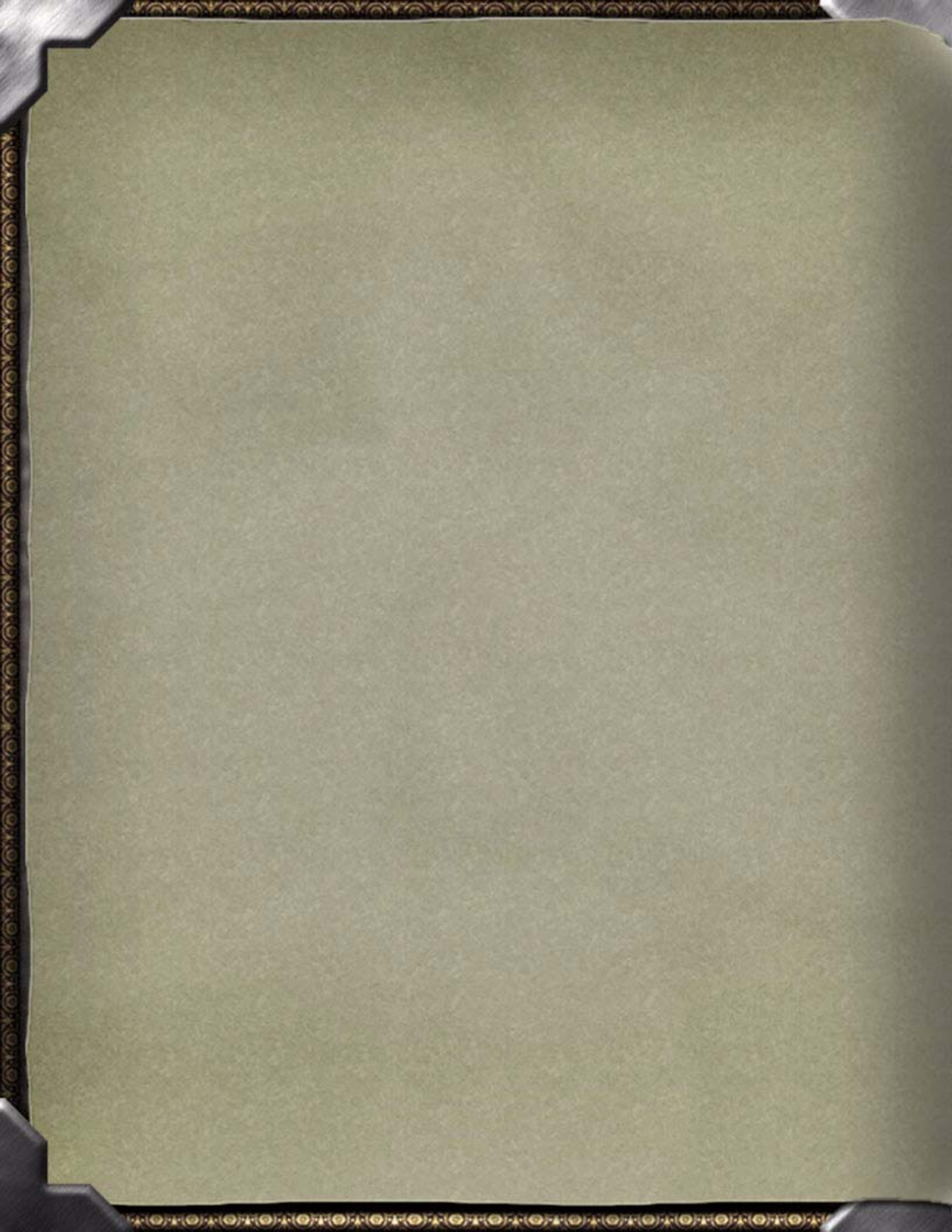


Quoth the Raven



Vol. 15



Quoth the Raven

XV



Table of Contents

Cult of the Morninglord 7

The Light Before the Dawn

By Chris Benton aka Eric the Light Bringer

Verbena 13

Pain and Sorrow in the House of Healing

By Marcin Roszkowski

Devil and the Deep Blue Sea 21

The Kelpie

By Nathan of the Fraternity

Shadow and Flame 33

Dragonborn in Ravenloft

By Eleanor Ferron

New Barovia 43

A Short Story

By Steve Flam

Fairhafen 61

Where the happy ending is yet to come...

By Wolfkook

The Hobby's Ghost-Pipes 75

Piper of Stonedown

By Sharon of the Fraternity

The Northwest Train Line 83

A Bit of Alternate History

By Eleanor Ferron

Sideshow Games 89

A Short Story

By Tami Sammons aka Hadis Deadstalker

Sideshow Games 127

New Performers for the Carnival

By Tami Sammons aka Hadis Deadstalker

Sideshow Game 133

Map and Vardo Layouts

By Tami Sammons aka Hadis Deadstalker

Cult of the Morninglord

The Light Before the Dawn

By Chris Benton aka Eric the Light Bringer

lostshadow3@hotmail.com

"...and no matter how bleak the future may seem, no matter how dark the night, the dawn will come for all those who can stand in the light."

- Martyn "the Mad" Pelkar, recorded conclusion of his very first oration

History

The faith of the Morninglord began almost three centuries ago, in 475 BC when a young child named Martyn Pelkar stumbled out of the Svalich Forest rambling of his salvation from darkness by a "golden morning lord". As the child grew into a young man, Martyn would receive divine visions instructing him to bring the Word of Light to the people and spread its message of hope and salvation throughout the land. In time Martyn Pelkar would be known by the peasants of Barovia as Martyn "the Mad" Pelkar and from an abandoned chapel in the village of Barovia he proselyzed the coming of "his" Morninglord who would lead the world out of darkness and into the daylight.

It was not until Martyn Pelkar adopted a half-vistani orphan named Alexei "Sasha"

Petrovich as his first acolyte that the people began to hear the Word of Light. Martyn and Sasha rebuilt the chapel into Sanctuary of Blessed Succour and attracted a small following to become the first congregation of Mad Martyn's Cult of the Morninglord.

After Martyn's early death Sasha Petrovich left the Sanctuary and Barovia Village to wander in dark and dangerous places of the land, strengthening his faith and bringing the Light to the land as Martyn had instructed him. The faithful of the Morninglord were left in the care of the seamstress and laywoman Cristina, who would become the first priestess of the Morninglord and lead the Cult into the future.

In spite of the infamous Barovian distrust of organised religions, in the centuries since Martyn's salvation the faith of the Morninglord spread across Barovia and other temples were established beyond the Village of Barovia. When the other domains began to appear out of the Mists the Word of Light was brought into the rest of the Core. The Morninglord's message of hope, courage, and salvation was usually received with speculation, disbelief and cynicism.

Present

Today the Cult of the Morninglord is the closest faith Barovia has for a state religion. A shrine or temple can be found in every Barovian settlement, the religious centre of the Morninglord faith having moved from Barovia Village to Vallaki to now Krezk. The people of Barovia are usually indifferent to the Cult, generally considering those who follow the Morninglord are either naïve or idealists, either way fools who cannot accept the bleakness that is life in Barovia.

In the occupied lands of what was once Gundarak the faith of the Morninglord is flourishing as the oppressed Gundarakites (and the Gundarakite Rebels) are drawn to the Cult's message of hope and salvation. The largest and strongest temples of the Morninglord now in Barovia are found where Gundarakites dominate, many native Barovians believing that these temple are refuges for the Gundarakite rebel leaders from Count Von Zarovich's wrath.

Outside of Barovia the faith has never grown beyond cult status, there is little sign of the Morninglord faith other than the wandering champions who pay fealty to the Morninglord. In the larger cities and settlements of the Core there is usually a small, humble shrine with a lone layman or a rarer clergyman caring for the shrine. Otherwise, for someone to find a holy site of the Morninglord outside of Barovia, they would have to look in the lonely and secluded corners of the world for the few quiet monasteries hidden from the Darkness and creatures of the night.

Tenets of the Morninglord

The Morninglord gave his Dawn Prophet, Martyn Pelkar, the Word of Light that expounds the virtues of hope, kindness and salvation from the Darkness that is evil.

Martyn preached that if you hold the Light in your heart there will always be hope and with hope there is deliverance from evil and eternal life. As the arrival of the sun marks the end of the night, the dawn symbolises the liberation of the soul from fear, hatred, dread and sin and damnation. That if you live a humble and honest life there is the reward of peace and salvation in the end and no creature of Darkness could ever take that away.

And finally the Dawn Prophet advocated the faithful to share their lives willingly with their fellow man, treating others with respect and compassion. That the faithful should bring relief from fear and pain to their brothers and sisters and protect the weak and helpless from the creatures of the night and the Darkness that can consume the heart. If you bring this small ray of light into the world it will inspire others to also embrace the Morninglord, spreading the Word of Light and breaking the hold that Darkness has throughout the lands.

Organization

With such a simple doctrine there is very little orthodoxy within the cult, each temple of the Morninglord is autonomous and self-sufficient to itself, lacking any rivalry or antagonism between the temples. Although there is no centralised authority for the Cult of the Morninglord the temple that holds Martyn Pelkar's original pulpit, the first altar of the Morninglord (the Dawn Altar), is considered the nominal "centre" of the faith, now found in Kresk.

The hierarchy of the Cult is just as informal; normally each temple has one priest of the Morninglord guiding a small congregation of lay worshippers and a handful of acolytes. The cult is divided between lay worshippers, named Children of the Dawn or Dawnchild, and clergy, named

Dawnbringers. A novice to the Cult (whether a lay worshipper or clergyman) is called an Awakened while an experience worshipper is named Faithful.

There is little difference in the duties of a priest and a worshipper within the Cult, only the skills and abilities each individual provides to the congregation separates the tasks of the Faithful. It would not be unusual to observe a young Dawnchild leading a sermon or an older Dawnbringer on her hands and knees scrubbing the temple floor. In the eyes of the Morninglord all are equal.

The Faithful of the Cult

It is not the way of Cult of the Morninglord to actively seek out and convert people to the faith of the Morninglord and prefer a potential Dawnchild to have heard the Word of Light on their own. The Cult attracts people from all strata of society though the faith is the most appealing to the weak, lonely, helpless and those with nothing else in their lives. Unlike other faiths the clergy of the Cult is, surprisingly, not a pro-active religion. There is little history of missionaries or holy crusades within the Cult, Dawnbringers of the faith are not aggressive in converting the masses and instead use their deeds to display the glory of the Morninglord.

All human and demihuman races of any non-evil alignment are welcome into the faith of the Morninglord, even calibans and other social outcasts (a being's outcast rating is reduced by 2, to a minimum of 0, when dealing with a true follower of the Morninglord). All non-divine classes have been found in worship of the Morninglord but usually only bards, fighters, monks and rangers choose the god as their patron deity.

Clergy of the Morninglord are always good aligned, the bulk being neutral good (60%) and the other two ethosos bring evenly

represented (20% lawful and 20% chaotic good). The class composition of clergy is divided between the temple benevolents (40% of the clergy), the wandering clerics (35%), divine healers (10%), holy paladins (10%) and other, less common divine classes, such as druids and favoured souls (5%). In fact, the Cult of the Morninglord generates more paladins than any other faith within the Realm of Dread.

Many of the more experienced members of the clergy choose to gain prestige class levels within the Cult of the Morninglord. The most common prestige class chosen by the clergy of the Morninglord is the Radiant Servant, granted powers involving healing, light and the destruction of the undead. The Hunter of the Dead, Master of Radiance, and Sacred Purifier are also common choices for clergy to expand their skills.

For the Faithful without divine classes the most common choices of prestige classes are the Monster Hunter and the Sworn Slayer, both usually focused on hunting the undead, especially vampires.

Typical Temple

A typical temple of the Morninglord is a simple stone structure, normally two stories high with a small crypt underneath. The temples are unadorned except for a number of windows to admit as much light as possible into the temple; anyone with expertise in glassblowing is greatly valued by the Cult. Often the temples also have a small cemetery for anyone that wishes a peaceful afterlife safeguarded by the Cult.

Into the temple a small vestibule opens into the chapel that usually dominates the ground floor. In the chapel there is normally a small altar adorned with candles, an altar cloth and a sanctified cup (the Sun Chalice); pews for worshipers are often padded, especially for the elderly to rest. Braziers and candles

usually illuminate the temple through the night unless there are clergy with enough magic to grant permanent illumination. Upstairs there is the antechamber to meet with applicants, clergy quarters and a modest temple library. If the temple is large enough

there would also be a sanctum for private devotions and ceremonies for the resident Dawnbringers. Below there are cold storage rooms and the temple crypt where clergy and Cult champions are interred.

Cult of the Morninglord - Essentials

Knowledge - Arcana

DC	Result
10	The magic of the Cult of the Morninglord involves mainly the use of light and positive energy.
15	Some priests within the Cult of the Morninglord are masters in healing and restorative magics while others specialize in magics effective against undead foes.

Knowledge - Geography

DC	Result
10	The Cult of the Morninglord is a faith originating in Barovia; a shrine or temple to the Morninglord can be found in every Barovian settlement.
15	The largest temple of the Morninglord, The Sanctuary of First Light, is in Kresk, the oldest temple, The Sanctuary of First Light, is found in the Village of Barovia; this level of success grants knowledge of the name and location of the nearest holy site of the Morninglord within Barovia.
20	Throughout the Core there are small shrines, monasteries, abbeys and temples dedicated to the Morninglord.
25	This level of success grants knowledge of the name and location of the nearest holy site of the Morninglord within a domain outside of Barovia.

Knowledge - History

DC	Result
10	The Cult of the Morninglord, originates from Barovia and is a faith almost as old as Barovia itself; while the Cult has existed for centuries in Barovia it has never been able to gain a foothold outside of that domain.
15	From an abandoned chapel in the village of Barovia the Dawn Prophet, Martyn "the Mad" Pelkar and his acolyte Alexei "Sasha" Petrovich preached the coming of the Morninglord who would save the world from darkness, the foundation of what would become the Cult of the Morninglord.
20	The faith of the Morninglord began almost three centuries ago when, as a child, Martyn Pelkar found salvation from darkness by a "golden morning lord".
25	This level of success grants knowledge of the past history of the Cult of the Morninglord, such as the relocation of the Dawn Altar from Barovia Village to Vallaki to Krezk.

Knowledge - Religion

DC	Result
5	The Cult of the Morninglord is a lesser faith of Barovia and is scarcely found within the rest of the Realm of Dread.
10	The Cult worships the Morninglord, a being of light and salvation who would lead the world out of darkness and into the daylight; priests of the Morninglord are usually healers and ministers to the weak, injured and those in need.
15	The Cult of the Morninglord produces a surprisingly high number of adventurers and champions considering the small size of the Cult, including the holy paladin; this level of success grants knowledge in the dogma and tenants of the Morninglord's faith.
20	This level of success grants knowledge of the different types of servants in the Faith of the Morninglord, such as the Benevolent, Radiant Servant and Master of Radiance.
25	This level of success grants knowledge of the different holy relics such as the Bright Blade, Hands of the Healer, the Holy Symbol of Ravenloft and the Icon of Ravenloft.
40	This level of success grants secret knowledge of the Cult of the Morninglord and the greater Church of Light with it's organized branches such as the Army of Light, the Dawnslayers, the Keepers of the Black Feather and the Knights of the Raven.

Verbena

Pain and Sorrow in the House of Healing

By Marcin Reszkowski

reszkowski.marcin@gmail.com

Verbena

"Verbena" is a small herbalist shop, lost in a maze of narrow streets, hidden between rooftops' shadows. One can pass it several times and do not notice it's small sign. From outside building looks almost like abandoned. It's walls are grey and made of hard stone while windows are always shut. Only a small bell at the door and it's occasional ringing says, that somebody lives inside. The air of loneliness and sadness hung around as well as feeling of some mystery and conspiracy.

One can find shop in few ways: ask medicine man or clergyman who is healing people, or by following some aristocrat seeking love potion or cure for shameful "dementlieuan" disease or by only other means. Shop can be situated in almost every Core's city, either in medieval-like one, where it will be an ordinary business or in any other one, where it will be somewhat strange and curious one. As witchcraft is banned from Tepest and it's practitioners are hunted, so it's little possibility, to find "Verbena" there. Apart from it, almost every

corner of the Core can be "Verbena's" shelter. Where it exists in truth, is entirely up to DM.

Cultural Level

7 (Medieval)

Landscape

"Verbena" is a single, one story building made of stony walls and wooden roof and backyard behind it. Only one door with knob lead to inside from the street. On the first floor there is a shop, filled with herbs, cures, remedies and oils or other natural remedies. Air is heavy with mixed scents of the forest and alchemical substances, lights are dimmed and windows shut. Strange herbs hang down from hooks in walls and roof, shelves are full of jars, bottles and glass. Shop hall is about seven meters long and five meters wide and in the far, right corner there is small counter and behind it another shelf full with more bizarre components (even magical ingredients for spells). Floors are made of wood, covered with dried leaves, sand and straw. There is no way to move

silently, as they crunch under one's feet. Room is about three meters high. Thick wooden bars cross the roof and from them hang baskets with strange and aromatic herbs. If one looks between them, can find mummified and shrink head nailed to wall. If asked, shopkeeper will answer that it's "Bubak", a small and fierce creature with tail, of unsettling similarity to human. Knowledgeable investigators or seasoned explorers will certainly know it's a monkey.

There are three shelves running through almost full width of room and by the walls are situated several tables, each full of dried herbs, fresh plants, oils or other powders. Customer has 50% chance of finding material, non-magical component of natural, herbal origin, required for making potion, spell or any other arcane activity. It's price is up to DM and/or component list, but DM may rule to increase it's value due to circumstances.

Right beside counter are small door, leading to stairs by which, one can climb onto first floor. There are located private rooms: small kitchen, bathroom, two bedrooms and an old guest-room. One of bedrooms belongs to Irka, other one to her crippled aunt. Stairs are wooden and dried. With each step they squeak in different tone, what makes sneaking in silence almost impossible. Moreover, sometimes stairs make noises of it's own, just like somebody or something was running down or up, when nobody sees it.

Kitchen is small and dark. One oven and iron cooking plate, few pots and impressive collection of knives, forks and cleavers make all the items, one can find here. There is also a small, wooden table, slick and soaked with blood. There Irka prepares meals for her and her aunt.

Irka's bedroom is personification of bad taste. Bed with canopy, that could easily fit to brothel is situated next to monk's kneeler.

Whole wall is taken by panoramic mirror and dressing table. Shelves are full of powders, lipsticks, aromas, jewellery and other cosmetic items. Closer inspection will turn out that jewellery is made of fake gold and cosmetics are cheap. Carpet on the floor is thick as are the heavy stores. Dominating colours are purple, red, gold (lots of gold) and regal blue or violet. Under a huge bed there is a box with 654 gp, potion of healing and little picture of happy couple. (It is "marriage" picture of Irka and Milosz, product of her obsessive love and dreams that never came true.) In the huge wardrobe one can find many dresses, each one very baroque and every in very bad taste. They clearly show, their owner is lacking good taste, instead showing "village" view of wealth and elegance.

Ludmila's room is poor. Walls are grey and dull, bed is old and squeaking. Beside it is night stand with two cups (each one is filled with water, in one of them "second teeth" are sank), a religion book (about suffering, martyrdom, pain, death and guilt and sin) and one candle. Old lady almost never leaves her bed. If so, she sits in the wheel chair and stares blankly through the small window.

Bathroom is square and slippery, with little comforts or items. One can find bowl, small oven to warming water and few buckets of it. Each day Irka takes in it from well and brings it upstairs.

Guest-room is most disturbing of all rooms. It's walls are warped, furniture rotten and old. There is a weird feeling about it, something is out of order with dimensions and angles, like their existence was denying laws of reason and physics. Doors are permanently locked and to enter to guest-room, one must smash through the door. When asked about it, Irka will say that room was always such like this, even when her aunt purchased house long, long ago. Sometimes, especially in small hours,

strange noises came from there, so Ludmila decided to bar the doors and never go inside. Close inspections will reveal, that under the layers of paint are inscribed hedge runes of protection against evil.

At the back of house there is small yard with herbalist garden (with green house), water well and storage locker. One can get ther by jumping over two meter-high, wooden fence or by door, that lead from staircase. Garden is small, sunny (when sky is not clouded, of course) and very well maintained. Irka grows here all manner of healing herbs along with vegetables and flowers. In a greenhouse one can find more exotic plants, few oriental fruits perhaps, and after closer investigation, some poisonous herbs, hidden between less malevolent ones. When asked for comment, Irka will say "People have different demand..." If pressed, she will lie, telling that poisonous herbs are needed in small portions for making painkillers. Storage locker is a small closet made of wood. Doors are locked with crude padlock and entering inside will require either easy test open locks or little bit of raw strength. Water well is narrow but deep. To take in water one must use small bucket with rope tied to windlass. It is rested right beside well.

There are two more rooms in a house: attic and cellar. Curious thing, there are no doors or other entrances leading to them. Only one creature that can find a way is Brown, mutant and abomination on services of long deceased Black Witch.

Major Settlements

none ("Verbena" is but one building with backyard).

The Folk

Humans 66%, other 33%(2 people: herbalist and witch Irka living with her crippled aunt Ludmila. Unknowing they share home with a half- human, half-rat hybrid).

The Law

Good behaviour, not stealing and being nice to clerk is expected. Verbena is a shop, so normal laws apply here.

Trade and Diplomacy

Resources: Verbena's owner deals with herbs, cures, oinmenst, unguents, potions, flowers etc. If customer wants to buy something less legal, he must be known to Irka and she must trust him. It means being regular customer, who will never turn her up to local authorities. Imports: Verbena "imports" all manner of goods, that average person needs to everyday life: food, clothes, tools etc. Irka buys also "luxury" items but considering her taste, they are rubbishy and trashy. Coinage: almost every gold and silver coins are accepted, unless the will turn to be fake.

Characters

There are no native Player Characters that come from "Verbena". Irka has no children (actually she never had closer contact with a male and she still is a virgin).

Irka Borova

Darklord of Verbena

Female human, Commoner 1 Expert 4; CR: 5; SZ Medium humanoid (165 cm tall), HD:1d4 + 4d6; hp: 16; Inn -1; Spd 20 (she has a crippled leg, hence lower value); AC: 9

(-1 Dex); Atk +2 melee (dagger 1d4-1), +2 ranged (1k2 improvised weapons); SA: none; SQ: none; AL NE; ; SV Fortitude: +1, Reflex: +0, Will: +6; Str 8, Dex 9, Con 11, Int 15, Wis 15, Cha 8;

Skills and Feats: Craft (Int)[Potions]+7, Handle Animal (Cha)+1, Listen (Wis)+5, Profession (Wis)[Herbalist]+10, Spot (Wis)+5, Bluff (Cha) +2, Craft (Int)[Poison] +4, Decipher Script (Int) +4, Heal (Wis) +5, Hide (Dex)+2, Knowledge (Int) [Nature] +4, Sense motive (Wis)+4, Spellcraft (Int)+4, Survival (Wis) +5; simple weapon proficiency, self sufficient, skill focus (Profession [Herbalist]).

Class abilities: Proficient with all simple weapons, with light armour but not shields.

Spells Memorized: none.

Spells Known: none.

Languages: local language (it depends on that, where DM wants to situate the shop).

Signature Possession: none.

Background

Irka Borova was born 32 years ago in a small village, about a day and half from town. She was quiet and reserved girl, who always thought of herself as a lesser than other girls. Perhaps it was true, as she was little short and plump, and with crippled leg. Her hair was in "no-particular-colour" and her skin wasn't so smooth but full of hairy marks instead. Irka's parents were poor and for most of her childhood, she had only one dress and very few, improvised toys. In time, it was revealed to her, she inherited "a witch gift" after her father's sister, Ludmilla. Soon after, Irka was trained enough to prepare herbs and oils, cures and brews. When she was sixteen, she became a witch of her own. People trusted her and were seeking help or advice. Even other girls, who looked upon her and treated her as poorer cousin, became her friends and customers. They confessed of

troubles and doubts, sought advice or help. Irka liked it, sensing she has real power over them and being able to guide their lives as she have chosen. What nobody ever realised, was that Irka fell in love. Her chosen was Milosz, young man living several houses away. Quiet and reserved, he seemed to be an "other half" of Irka. Wealthy and reasonable, he was a perfect candidate for husband. Although some girls were interested with him, Milosz was unmarried. Irka tried to get closer to him, but found limited success. Although treated with distance and very good, but cold, manners, she was sure that with time they would be together.

Everything changed one day, when a young girl from village, Alina, came to Irka, asking for help. She had an sweetheart, who loved her to, but was concerned with other girls, who were interested with her man. If Irka could brew some potion, which solidify his love to her... Irka agreed and told her, to come over next day. That evening, walking into forest to search for herbs, she heard laughing from bush at the bank of stream. She crept closer only to discover Alina and Milosz, standing together, holding hands and starring into each other eyes with words "I love you" on a lips.

Irka was stunned. It seemed like whole world spun around her. She ran, only to be as far away from source of pain her heart. Sitting in forest she cried and wept, not knowing, what to do. Suddenly, an idea came to her. With one move, although long and risky one, she could invert whole situation.

Next day she presented a special brew to Alina. She had to drink it and look deep into Milosz's eyes, then his love will be solidified. As she promised, so it happened. Milosz proposed to Alina and was welcomed. In the meantime Irka and Alina became close friends. Alas, when the wedding was announced, Alina's health was suffering. With each day she was weaker and

weaker, her skin turned pale, hair turned dull. Milosz was doing everything to cheer her up, was sitting beside bed, riding her to woods and taking care. Irka devoted all almost her time to brew cure to illness. Despite their best efforts, Alina died quietly in arms of her soon-to-be-husband, two days before their marriage ceremony.

Whole village was deeply saddened, but only Irka knew, what has really happened. It was she, who brough slow death upon her rival, slowly poisoning her meals, cures, even hair dryers. Now, with Alina gone, it was matter of time, when she and Milosz would be together.

Days turned into weeks. Milosz was like blind and deaf: h was only remembering her love lost, talked about her and visiting her gravestone everyday. He collected fresh flowers and sometimes visited her parent's house to sit in her room, which remained unchanged since her departure. At first Irka waited with patience and tried to get close to him. But Milosz was blind on her advances. Weeks turned into months and nothing changed. At one time she was even sure, he will kiss her and declare his love, but Milosz lay head on her arm and said: "I will never love anybody in my life. I'm so glad you are my friend, Irka". Her heart burned with rage.

A full year has passed, since Alina's death. Frustrated and with no patience left, Irka confronted Milosz and opened her heart before him. She declared his love, she asked him to become her's man. She spun plans and dreams of house with garden, full of children and quiet love. Milosz declined and Irka became angered. She yelled at him, he was cause of Alina's death and he's one to blame. Young man stumbled, as his closest friend proved his darkest fears. As Irka before, he ran into the forest. Next morning was found dead, hanging from tree upon his own belt.

Irka would slip away with this death, but their argument was heard by Alina's brother.

He accused her of causing Milosz's death and Alina's murder. Although he had no proofs, people believed him and were about to hang girl on that same branch, where Milosz's was found. She fled town and ran into a dark night, loosing pursuers in the thick fog. To her surprise, she found a way to her aunt's home and hidden there. Somehow she got there in shorter time, she could hope for, even despite her crippled leg. Irka had no idea, that Mists of Ravenloft offered her protection, but for a price. She didn't know that Dark Powers offered her secure prison.

Current Sketch

Irka ran to her aunt, Ludmilla. Old woman, chained to wheel chair, was living all but herself in house, lost in the labyrinth of city's street. Irka revamped house's ground floor into herbalist shop, which runs and manages. She never lefts the house: her crippled leg hurts everyday, what was caused by frantic run. She is also afraid somebody will recognise her. Her aunt lives upstairs and is tied to wheelchair. Irka sells cures and oils, prepares mixtures and grows herbs in the backyard. Food and other supplies are delivered by messengers. In the recent months Irka began studying old books of lore and learns magic in hope to expand her knowledge of magical brews.

Irka always considered herself lesser to others and wanted nothing more than to belong to group and shine out of other. Lacking charm and beauty, lacking money and fancy dresses, she always was "the ugly sister". Now, she tries to make up those bad times. Unfortunately, she always ends on the wrong side. Whenever she collects greater income, there is always an tax to pay, repairs to be made or new fashion that replaces older and is out of her reach. Furthermore, she's unable to leave her shop. Sometimes it's hurting of leg, other awful weather or city guards searching for murderer, that's prevent

her from leaving shop. Irka lives in constant fear of discovery and punishment. She always wanted to be respected but being clerk does not gain it. She feels customers treat her as mere servant, look upon her as a "poor, crippled and dumb thing". She hates every one of them, yet fruitlessly tries to win their favour.

Combat

Irka is poor fighter. When attacked, she will stab blindly with her knife, cry for help and try run for cover. As she has crippled leg and is coward at heart, there is 50% chance each round, she will stumble and fall. Ludmila is crippled with both legs and moves on the wheel chair. If threatened she will brake in tears, begging "not to hurt poor old woman".

Lair

Irka's lair is her prison as well. She can never leave the house, although cause is always mundane (as stated above). Moreover, Irka is not even master of building. As she and her aunt well know, something sinister is going on in guest-room. They don't know what it is and have no idea what to do. Between walls, in the attic and in a cellar, of what existence they have no idea, makes home Brown, a half-human, half-rat hybrid, familiar of previous house owner known only as Black Witch. What exactly had happened to her, what terrible rites she conducted in guest-room remains mystery. But Brown still hides in a house, lurks in darkness and does something, but only he knows his sinister agenda.

Closing the Borders

Irka can not close the borders as other Darklords do, but she can lock the door and backyard gate.

Adventure Ideas

Midsummer Wine's Flower

To her surprise, Irka finds a strange flower which is about to bloom in her garden. She never planted one and she know none. After searching ain herbalists guides and rough questioning her aunt, she learns it's Midsummer Flower, a rare and strange plant of potent abilities. When properly prepared, a brew consisting juice from fresh squeezed Flower is able to raise the dad, heal completely of all illness, give everlasting beauty or be part of Midsummer Wine, the most potent love potion in the world. Only things Irka needs are other ingredients... Here's, where PC come in: she may hire them to gather, buy, or steal other components, to rob Milosz grave and to brng his remains to her house, where she will be able to rise him from the dead. Irka does not have much money, but she can convince PC with promise of potent healing oils, deadly potions or other remedies...

Dreams in House of the Black Witch

Guest-room becomes more and more terrifying and Irka is forced to seek help. Strange voices, inhuman bellowing and sounds of incantations come from behind locked door. Neither she, nor Ludmila are willing to take risk and enter there, as they both well know, the have no means to face thing, that is hiding in their house. Every night they cower in fear and cry with terror, as the terrible things happen behind the wall. So, Irka asks for help, but up to now she is denied. Deseperate, she asks a group of heroes (PC's) who accidentally wandered into her shop. What she doesn't know, is that her quest room (which was inhabbited by the terrible Black Witch) is gateway to Nightmare Lands where dreams and fantasies of worst sort dwell...

Shop of Little Horror

What began as a good deal, turned out to be disaster. Few weeks ago Irka bought seeds of strange plant, that was brought from land outside the Core. She paid little money and was sure she struck good deal, as she was convinced it's black lotus. Now it turned out, she bought no poisonous flower but carnivorous one! Last night she was awoken by some strange noises. She looked through window and to her terror, she saw a pair of burglars, entering her garden. Before she could react, the pair entered the greenhouse. Irka was so afraid, that she froze in place, not able to cry for help. Before she done anything, there was a terrible scream from greenhouse, followed by shouts and one more cry of pain. Finally, Irka get down and crossed small garden. Cautiously she looked inside her greenhouse only to see a strange, big plant with green leaves, black stalk and yellow flower, all resembling giant sunflower, which was finishing eating one of thieves. Where flower and seed should be, were teeth and little, evil eyes. Irka watched in terror, as plant extended itself and grew only to feast upon second body and enlarge itself again. When flower finished, it turned around and hissed: More! I want more!"

Now, Irka is a slave of her own plant and she must think quick to find a solution. She invited a beggar for a dinner and sacrificed him to the Queen, as plant calls itself, but she knows it's a short way. Perhaps she will ask PC's to bring some books or scrolls, to gain control over the plant or she will lead them to greenhouse, to kill Queen.

Devil and the Deep Blue Sea

The Kelpie

By Nathan of the Fraternity

Nathan@Fraternityofshadows.com

The Kelpie

Medium-Size Outsider (evil, water) CR 8; HD 8d8+32; 68 hp; Init +4 (+4 Dex); Spd 30 feet, swim 60 ft; AC 18 (+4 Dex, +4 natural); Atk 2 slams +12 melee (1d4+4 + special); SA Spell-like abilities, create mannequin, strangle, drowning in air; SQ bane, chained by the tide, DR 10/slashing, phylactery; AL NE, SV Fort +9, Ref +9, Will +7; Str 18, Dex 18, Con 18, Int 18, Wis 14, Cha 22.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +17, Concentration +13, Diplomacy +21, Intimidate +19, Hide +14, Knowledge (arcana) +11, Knowledge (nature) +10, Listen + 15, Move Silently +14, Sense Motive +14, Spellcraft +16, Spot +15; Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative, Spell Focus (enchantment).

Reality Wrinkle: 16,000-foot radius

Land-Based Powers: None

Corruption Index: 0

Spell-like abilities: At will: *alter self*, *animate kelp**, *charm person*, 3/day: *suggestion*, 1/day: *control weather*, *eyebite*, *raise/lower water*

Description: The Kelpie usually chooses to appear either as a handsome human male

or as a sleek grey horse, but both forms are purely illusionary. Its actual form is a vaguely man-like figure made of seawater and kelp, with a long mane of seaweed hair and sea-shell eyes and nails.

Supernatural Abilities:

Animate kelp: This spell-like ability is exactly similar to the spell *animate rope*, except that it affects only kelp fronds.

Bane: The Kelpie is strongly averse to the wood of the beech tree. A fragment of beechwood presented confidently keeps it at bay, and a blow with a branch of beechwood deals it 1d4 hit points of damage, bypassing its damage resistance. (This counts as a touch attack.) Carrying a piece of beechwood on one's person gives a +4 bonus to saving throws against the Kelpie's spell-like and supernatural abilities.

Chained by the Tide: The Kelpie cannot go any farther inland than the high-water mark of the tides. It can get some additional range by using *control weather* and *raise water*, but to venture far from the sea it must create a mannequin of kelp to serve as its eyes and ears.

Create Mannequin: The Kelpie may create a mannequin of kelp to send to places it cannot reach itself. This process requires one full day; the mannequin's statistics are given in *Dramatis Personae*. The mannequin may be on land for as long as three days before dessication destroys it. The Kelpie has complete telepathic control over the mannequin and can see through its eyes and hear through its ears; directing the mannequin to take an action when the Kelpie is otherwise engaged (for example, in combat) is a move action.

Drowning in Air: By making a successful touch attack, the Kelpie can force any creature touched to become unable to breathe air and, at the same time, able to breathe water (Fort save DC 16). This ability lasts until the Kelpie dispels it, which it may do as a free action.

The Kelpie commonly uses this ability to drive its opponents into the water, where it can then entangle them using its *control plants* and *animate kelp* abilities. Once its opponent is well-entangled, the Kelpie dispels the creature's water-breathing ability and lets it drown.

Strangle: If the Kelpie hits with both slam attacks in a round, it may choose to automatically succeed at a grapple check. The grappled opponent then takes 2d4+8 points of damage per round until it succeeds in an opposed Grapple check to break the Kelpie's stranglehold or until released (usually when dead).

Phylactery: The little church of Aptonen-Mer has always had a piece of driftwood formed uncannily like a human woman set as a statue in a niche over the church altar. Before the conversion of the hamlet to Ezra this "statue" was taken to represent the Sea-Mother; afterward, of course, it was considered a representation of Ezra. This piece of driftwood is actually the Kelpie's phylactery.

Background:

The Kelpie was chained centuries ago by a wizard who bound it to servitude in exchange for "a new bride every year, blonde as beechwood, supple as hawthorn". The Kelpie has given the villagers of Aptonen-Mer and the islanders of Mare Island fair weather and good fishing—but the villagers were less than forthcoming with their share of the bargain. Instead of a human bride, they formed a statue—the Wicker Bride—of beechwood and hawthorne branches, filled with straw, and sent it out to sea in a little wooden coracle as it burned, in the manner of Mordentish funerals in ancient times. As long as this ritual was performed, the Kelpie remained bound to its contract.

But, as humans do, the villagers of Aptonen-Mer forgot the meaning of their ritual as time went by, until the burning of the Wicker Bride on Midsummer's Night was no more than a folk ritual, a tradition of old times. And not everyone was willing to see it continue for old times' sake. Calvin Jessop, a young anchorite and the Warden of Aptonen-Mer, felt that this pagan offering to the sea was not appropriate for a people guided by Ezra Herself, and at length he persuaded the villagers of Aptonen-Mer to stop the tradition of the Wicker Bride.

But when the ceremony binding it ceased, the Kelpie began to free itself from its chains. No longer bound as tightly as it had been before because the Wicker Bride was not offered to placate it, it made a man of kelp and sea-sand and sent him ashore to lure the Kelpie its bride; and that man of kelp lured a young woman, with skin fair as beechwood and supple as the branches of the hawthorn, down to her death below the waves. In the second year, the Kelpie did the same; and so passed the third, the fourth, the fifth, and the sixth years.

On this Midsummer's Day it will be seven years since the Wicker Bride was last offered to the Kelpie, and if it gets a human bride this year, it will be free entirely to take its vengeance on the descendants of those who bound and cheated it so many hundreds of years before...

The Setting

Apton-en-Mer

The village of Apton-en-Mer is home to perhaps a hundred people who live in a dozen or so small houses of stone and thatch; the village is home to a smith and a tanner, and there are outlying farms whose owners visit on market days, but the chief industry of the village is fishing the Sea of Sorrows. There are no paved roads—just paths worn from one house to the next. The people of Apton-en-Mer are reasonably friendly, but reticent with strangers; generally speaking they are very strict Ezrans, and other Ezrans (especially clerics) will get a warm reception, while those of other faiths will get the cold shoulder.

The center of village life is the church, a single-roomed structure facing the beach and distinguished by its size, its double doors of wood, its slate roof, and the fact that it has a single small stained-glass window depicting the Sword and Shield of Ezra in green and white (its other windows, like those of the villagers' houses, are simply waxed paper). Within it is one large space with pews of pinewood; it might hold 150 people in a pinch. Below the stained glass window and behind the small altar is a recess holding a piece of driftwood uncannily suggestive of a woman with lowered eyes, one hand raised in blessing or salutation. This is held by the strict Ezrans to be a miraculous likeness of Ezra, although questioning will reveal that it is much older than the Ezran religion, having held its place for hundreds of years, and that

those (such as Mammy Knass) who are not Ezrans refer to it as the "Sea-Mother".

Mare Island

Mare Island lies across Mare Bay from Apton-en-Mer; it is only an island by courtesy, as at low tide one can walk across the mud flats revealed by the receding tide from the mainland to the island. (At low tide the "island" and mainland resemble the Greek letter Π, with the mud flats as the crossbar of the Π.) The island is perhaps a mile long and a quarter mile wide and is home to some thirty people, most of whom live on the west side of the island. They are taller and paler than the village folk (whom they call "mainlanders", just as they themselves are "islanders") with dark brown hair and eyes; they are very reluctant worshippers of Ezra, if they venerate her at all, and still practice the old ways" which the mainlanders shared before the coming of the church of Ezra to Mordent. They respect Mammy Knass very much, despite the fact that she is a mainlander, seeing her as a "wise woman" in their own old tradition. They have always regarded the mainlanders with some envy and more disdain; these feelings have been exacerbated by Warden Jessop's successful interdict of the ceremony of the Wicker Bride, especially because the first three young women lost in the years since were all islanders.

Devil and the Deep Blue Sea

Midsummer's Eve

The Building Storm

As you come over the rise you see the fishing village below you, quaint but slightly ominous in the red glare of the sun, now setting behind Mare Island. There is apparently a gathering tonight in the village; you can see several dozen people, probably

all the inhabitants of a village this size, and hear someone speaking to them. As you come closer, you see the speaker is a tall young man—a priest of Ezra, by his clothing. The crowd seems worried and tense, as does the speaker. As you come into earshot the young anchorite concludes “I look forward to seeing all of you—all of you—tomorrow at the evening service honoring our Lady Ezra. Please, be careful.” As the crowd disperses, he catches sight of you and hurries toward you, hand outstretched in greeting. “Warden Calvin Jessop, at your service,” he says, smiling. “Welcome to Apton-en-Mer.”

Warden Jessop is a tall, red-headed man in his late twenties, friendly, gregarious, and highly idealistic, but also quick-tempered and rather closed-minded. If any of the PCs ask about the mood of the villagers, Jessop explains that there have been a series of disappearances at midsummer over the last six years—one young woman from Apton-en-Mer itself, Mare Island, or the surrounding countryside has gone missing and never been found, and that some villagers associate this with the discontinuation of a “pagan ceremony” six years ago. If they don’t ask he attempts to work the subject of conversation around to this point as soon as possible. He asks, and, if necessary, frankly begs that the PCs stay in Apton-en-Mer until after Midsummer’s Day, in the hope that they will be able to prevent any disappearance this year.

As you talk with the young Warden, an old woman approaches, listening to your conversation with interest. As Warden Jessop winds up his tale of the disappearances, she spits on the ground.

“It’s what comes of meddling with old ways, innit?” she says mockingly.

“Your pagan magics have no place here anymore, Mammy Knass,” he replies

angrily. A community under the eye of Ezra has no need of such things.”

No need? There’s six girls dead says otherwise.”

What are you trying to say, hag?” Jessop barks, his face flushed brick-red with rage.

It’s on your head, Warden. Their blood is on your head.”

Jessop seems about to burst; turning on his heel, he stalks off into the crowd.

Mammy Knass watches him go, grinning widely. “Fool boy,” she says to you, nodding a greeting. “He thinks Ezra’s the only power in the world, but he’s wrong. Dead wrong.”

Mammy Knass is a small woman, perhaps in her sixties but surprising tough and spry, dressed in clothing than appears to be more a motley of patches than anything else. Mammy Knass tells the PCs about the ceremony of the Wicker Bride that was halted six years ago, and that she is certain that the ceremony was intended to placate some mysterious being that, deprived of its natural bride, has risen from the sea to find its own. This, she claims, is the reason for the disappearances over the last six summers. She also says that she will be preparing to perform the ceremony tomorrow regardless of what Jessop wants, and she invites them to come out with her the following morning while she cuts the beech branches and hawthorn she will use to make the Wicker Bride.

If the PCs try to get more information on the nature of the Wicker Bride or the ceremony for it, Mammy Knass will mention that Silas Atwater, the oldest person in the village, knows more than she does.

Silas Atwater is a nonagenarian; his mind is starting to dim, and he is in poor health, but he can follow the thread of a conversation (with a little help and patience on the part of the PCs). If asked to talk about

the Wicker Bride, he will confirm the description given by Mommy Knass and also mention that “they made the Wicker Bride from hawthorn and beech, you see, because hawthorn is strong against witches, they say, and the sea fears beechwood. It was a riddle they put to us when I was a boy; “What is the shore the sea fears?” And of course it’s the *beech* tree.”

Ella Atwater is a girl in her mid teens, blonde and rather pretty but otherwise unremarkable; she is at the meeting with her great-grandfather. If the PCs don’t approach him after their conversation with Mammy Knass, she will approach them, timid but curious, to ask where they are from and why they are here. Her motive is pure curiosity, with a dash of hero-worship for these bold folk from “outside”. She will confess to being frightened by the previous disappearances and denies having seen any “strange men” in the neighborhood, volunteering (perhaps as a *non sequitur*) that she isn’t allowed to walk out alone with a young man yet.

It is also entirely possible that the PCs will meet (or search out) the town constable, Owen Jackson. In a community of this size, of course, the position of constable is more or less a sinecure, and it has been years since Jackson was required to do anything more than escort a drunken friend home; he makes his living at his “day job” as a tanner. He is a tall, thin man in his mid thirties, with dark hair, blue eyes, and a carefully tended handlebar mustache; he is friendly in a reserved way, but not very forthcoming with the PCs unless Warden Jessop recommends them to him. He dislikes and distrusts Mammy Knass, but likes and admires the Warden very much and is a devout Ezran. He more than half-believes that Mammy Knass is right and that the disappearance of the young women over the last six years is

tied to ending the ritual of the Wicker Bride, but he is very reluctant to say so.

Midsummer’s Day

The Man from the Sea

If the PCs take Mammy Knass’ invitation to visit her while she is preparing the materials for the Wicker Bride, they will pass Ella Atwater and a young man they didn’t see at the meeting last night walking together toward the sea; they are laughing and holding hands, and just before they notice the PCs the young man kisses Ella. Given her shyness and her claim not to have a beau, this should be surprising to the PCs. If they stop the pair and talk to them, the young man will be brusque; Ella will be rather silly, holding on to his arm and looking at him as if completely enamored. (A Sense Motive check at DC 20 reveals that she is enchanted).

Any in-depth questioning will reveal that the mannequin and Ella are not well-acquainted; they call each other Alexander and Ella, but don’t know each other’s last names, and “Alexander” is suspiciously unacquainted with the townsfolk (although he seems to know the area well). If pressed hard Alexander will flee the scene, with much sobbing from Ella at this turn of events.

If the PCs succeed in catching him they may well find out he is not human at all; he is a mannequin of kelp disguised by illusion. (One clue to his nature is that his hip-flask is full of sea-water—not a drink of choice for humans!) Catching him and proving he is a kelp-thing is perhaps the only thing that will get Warden Jessop to consider seriously performing the ritual of the Wicker Bride before the events of Midsummer’s Night unfold; if they can carry out this ritual, the PCs will still have to deal with the events described in the section “At Mare’s Head

Point", but may be able to entirely avoid an encounter with the Kelpie.

If the PCs, for whatever reason, decide not to visit Mammy Knass, this encounter can take place elsewhere. If it does not occur at all, or if the party fails to realize that "Alexander" is about to abduct Ella, "Alexander" will lure Ella to her death and the Kelpie will be freed at midnight, necessitating that the party play the scenario "The Devil loosed".

The Witch's Promise

You find Mammy Knass at the place she had indicated to you the night before; she is industriously cutting switches of hawthorne, and a pile of supple birch branches lies behind her. As you come into view she straightens to greet you.

"Hard work for an old biddy like me," she says, with a cracked chuckle. "But not for strong young backs like yours! Would you care to bear a hand?"

Mammy Knass's principle objective is to get the player characters to be friendly toward her and suspicious of Warden Jessop; she will tell as many half-truths (and, if necessary, outright lies) as she needs to in order to achieve this end, although, like all good liars, she sticks to the truth as much as possible. If she can get the PCs to believe that Jessop is maliciously manipulating the people for his own aggrandizement, she will do so; if not, she'll settle for portraying him as well-meaning but stupidly devoted to a dangerous principle. If the PCs have succeeded in running off the Kelpie's mannequin she congratulates them and hints darkly that he was a "man from the sea", sent to seduce Ella below the waves. She thanks the PCs for telling her and mentions that she will call on Ella later today to see if she is well.

After telling the PCs about the ceremony of the Wicker Bride, the adept swears to the

PCs that she can take care of the problem by performing the ceremony this evening; she has recruited the islanders to help her, and they will perform the ceremony at Mare's Head Point, just out of sight of the village, where Mare Bay meets the ocean. All the PCs have to do is keep Warden Jessop from interfering with the ceremony, and she will do the rest. She is vague on details and seems to imply that outsiders shouldn't be present for the rituals; she does her best to get a promise from the PCs that they will keep Jessop away from the proceedings. If the PCs are extremely sympathetic she might possibly recruit them to participate in the ritual at Mare's Head Point, but it's unlikely they can convince her that they won't object to her real plans.

Mammy Knass actually intends to offer someone—probably Ella Atwater—to the "Water Groom", as she calls the Kelpie, in an attempt to bind it to her will. She believes that using a human victim in the ritual of the Wicker Bride will restore the bonds on it, and allow the person who makes the sacrifice to control the Kelpie's actions. In this she has the complicit support of the natives of Mare Island, who are angry that the Warden Jessop has campaigned vigorously against their ancestral beliefs, and also because the Kelpie took three of its six victims from among the islanders and they think (with some justice) that this tragedy was not taken seriously by the mainlanders until their own daughters began to disappear. Mammy Knass has promised to use the Kelpie's powers to help and support them at the expense of the mainlanders, and they have agreed to help her in exchange.

Interlude

After talking to Mammy Knass, the PCs will have several free hours before sundown; this time might be spent in talking to anyone (Silas, the constable) whom the PCs did not meet earlier, to a tour of the town, including

the church and its strange “statue” of driftwood (a particular point of civic pride for all the villagers, and even the islanders), or in visiting Mare Island; low tide falls at noon, and the PCs can easily walk to the island and back by early afternoon. The islanders are extremely closed-mouthed; they might unbend slightly if the PCs tell them of their intended co-operation with Mammy Knass, but are still extremely unlikely to share anything important with strangers. Both the islanders and Silas may mention that the weather signs predict an intense storm sometime tonight—hard to believe, since the sky is without a single cloud, but they insist it will be so.

Midsummer's Night

The Hefy Man's Warning

If the player characters succeeded in preventing the Kelpie from abducting Ella and have not gone to Mare's Head Point for the ceremony of the Wicker Bride, Warden Jessop will find them just after sundown (if they are not already with him).

The sun has just barely set, and all is seemingly tranquil in Apton-en-Mer, but a strange tension hangs in the air; the sea is eerily calm, the air still; it seems a thunderstorm is coming, after all. Suddenly the quiet is broken; you hear someone shouting your names. It is Warden Jessop; when he sees you he sprints toward you and begins to talk, his words tumbling over each other. “Ella...Silas Atwater saw her in a boat...said she was bound and gagged, they were taking her to the island. I don't know what they want to do, but we have to stop it. We have to stop it.”

(If the PCs have been keeping a close eye on Jessop, in accordance with the request of Mammy Knass, this message can be brought by Owen Jackson.)

Sense Motive checks will show he is telling the truth—or, at least, that he believes what he's saying. Warden Jessop will literally beg on bended knees, if necessary, for the party to come with him to the island; if they delay at all, he will turn and run for the shore, taking a rowboat and setting out across the bay. If the player characters accompany him, go to the section “At Mare's Head Point”. If they prevent him from going, the islanders and Mammy Knass will offer Ella to the Kelpie, at which point it will be freed; if this happens, go to the section “The Devil Loosed”, and include the Warden among those attempting to prevent the Kelpie from retrieving its phylactery. If they do not prevent his going he will be killed by the islanders; the events of “The Devil Loosed” will occur, as above, but without his help at the church. (If they try to prevent him from going by some violent means and the villagers find out about it, they will mount a rescue attempt; try to help the PCs avoid a situation in which they alienate the villagers *and* free the Kelpie, as this will almost certainly lead to the destruction of the entire village.)

At Mare's Head Point

As Mare's Head Point comes into view, you can see the islanders have lit a bonfire on the beach; it throws an indistinct red light on them. Coming closer, you see Mammy Knass gesticulating, and hear her voice cutting through the heavy air. As you beach the boat you see the coracle behind her, and someone seated in it—the Wicker Bride?

But then there is a sudden flare from the bonfire, and you see the long blonde hair of the woman seated there. It seems that Warden Jessop might have been correct—that Mammy Knass intends to give the Kelpie a seventh bride tonight.

Mammy Knass is organizing the islanders for the ceremony; their preoccupation means that the PCs may be able to get quite close

before anyone realizes they are there (assuming they can prevail on Warden Jessop to be quiet, if he's with them—his natural inclination is to run to the gathering to protect Ella and denounce Mammy Knass). Any villager can tell the PCs that Ella is in the place usually reserved for the Wicker Bride.

In the unlikely event that the PCs do nothing, the ritual ends in about half an hour and the coracle is pushed out to sea; it will drift about one hundred yards and be suddenly and violently drawn below the water, and the events of "The Devil Loosed" will occur at midnight. If any villager accompanies the PCs, they will step in well before this happens.

The islanders will do their best to prevent anyone from interrupting the ceremony; they aren't particularly eager to shed blood but are desperate to see the ritual completed (see *Dramatis Personae* for statistics; as many as ten islanders may take part in preventing the PCs from interfering). If the PCs do an excellent job of role-playing the encounter, the DM may wish to consider allowing them a chance to persuade the islanders not to allow Mammy Knass to go through with her plans; if the PCs can succeed on *two* opposed Diplomacy checks against Mammy Knass (one to get the islanders to listen to what they have to say, one to convince them that what they're doing is wrong) they can get the islanders to stop the ceremony without violence. If the PCs did not have significant positive interaction with the islanders before this point, or if Warden Jessop is the person attempting this strategy, give Mammy Knass a +4 on her Diplomacy check.

Without a diplomatic miracle the PCs will have to find some way of disrupting the ritual; grabbing Ella is probably the best and simplest, but extinguishing the bonfire, silencing Mammy Knass, or causing an interruption of more than a minute or so in

the ritual will all work (*web* and *darkness* would be examples of useful spells in this regard). Ella has been drugged and cannot participate actively in an escape attempt; she can follow someone who asks her to, but can't guide herself or run.

If the PCs successfully disrupt the ritual, the following occurs:

There is a stroke of lightning, and you realize that the promised storm is arriving—in fact, it's here already, rising from the west with unnatural swiftness. The rising tide begins to wash higher, and higher still, and you see a whirlpool forming out in the bay. Suddenly, something is coming from the water—something in the form of a man. The Groom is coming to claim his bride himself!

The Kelpie has been attracted by the failed ceremony and is hoping to take Ella with it below the waves. Everyone who sees this unnatural apparition appearing from below the waves must make a fear check (DC 15); to the Mare Islanders the Kelpie is a sort of divinity, and they take a -4 penalty on the check. Mammy Knass will make one last-ditch effort to control the Kelpie, and it will almost certainly attack her first, while using its *suggestion* ability to make Ella come to it. The Kelpie will use its *drowning in air* ability on Ella and Mammy Knass and then retreat into the sea, using *charm person* to spread confusion among the PCs and islanders and *animate kelp* to hinder anyone attempting to follow it. Mammy Knass will do her best to seize a beechwood wand and attack the Kelpie, telling anyone who looks like they'll offer resistance to do the same. The islanders will be of little or no help here; most will fail the fear check and flee. If the PCs, whoever accompanies them from the village, and Mammy Knass can deal more than 34 points of damage to the creature it will retreat below the waves, with or without its prey. If it succeeds in drawing Ella into

the water (as it certainly will unless someone prevents her from going), the events of "The Devil Loosed" happen at midnight. If it fails, the PCs have until midnight to perform the ritual of the Wicker Bride and re-bind the Kelpie; see "The Devil Bound" for the continuation.

Anyone affected by the Kelpie's *drowning in air* ability must receive *remove curse* to have it dispelled; if more people are affected than Warden Jessop can help in one night (he can cast *remove curse* twice), a filled rain-barrel may have to be employed to keep the afflicted persons out of the sea and breathing until Jessop arrives or until morning.

The Devil Loosed

If the party failed to prevent the Kelpie's abduction of Ella Atwater, or did not accompany Warden Jessop to Mare's Head Point, the following occurs at midnight:

You are awakened [*if the party members are sleeping*] by a crack of thunder and rainfall lashing like a whip across the shuttered windows. The thunderstorm you felt in the air at sunset has come with appalling quickness and intensity. Suddenly, above the wind and rain you hear someone scream—and then someone else. As you peer into the street a tall man with a lantern, miraculously still lit, sees you and hurries over. When you can see his face through the driving rain, you recognize him as the constable, Owen Jackson. "It was that way," he says, pointing toward the church. "We'd better see what's happened."

Between the storm surge and the incoming tide, the sea itself has invaded Apton-en-Mer, and you walk calf-deep in salt water as you make your way toward the church. A bolt of lightning rips across the sky, and you look involuntarily toward it. Something shaped like a man is coming up from the sea, standing knee-deep in the foaming water; it, too, is moving toward the church. Another

person follows it, skirts hiked up around her knees.

The Kelpie wants to get its phylactery, the driftwood "statue" resting in the church, and retreat to the sea, nothing more. It will probably not be immediately apparent what the Kelpie is trying to do, especially because the high tide mark, even in the storm the Kelpie has summoned, lies at the door of the church. The woman with the Kelpie is Ella Atwater; she, of course, has been charmed by the Kelpie and is intent on helping it get the statue. It will send her into the church to get it while it holds off the player characters and the constable. The characters will be much better served by finding a way into the church, finding Ella, and preventing her from bringing the Kelpie's phylactery to it than by trying to fight the Kelpie themselves; if necessary, you can persuade the PCs towards this course of action by having Constable Jackson recommend that one or more of the PCs enter the church to help Ella while he and the rest face down the Kelpie (if Warden Jessop is present, he will volunteer to go). PCs in the church will have no difficulty in preventing Ella from leaving with the phylactery; she is neither strong enough nor mentally present enough to offer effective resistance. Once the Kelpie realizes what is going on it will attempt to *charm* its attackers and have them enter the church to bring out its phylactery and its bride back out.

If the PCs succeed in keeping the "statue" and Ella inside the church and beyond the reach of the Kelpie's *charm* ability, it will be forced to retreat at dawn; since it has not yet gotten a bride this year (having lost Ella) it must form a mannequin of kelp to lure a victim to it, and in the meantime the ceremony of the Wicker Bride may be performed, binding it again. If it regains Ella but loses the phylactery, it is freed from service but terribly vulnerable; it will charm

anyone it can reach, then attack again at nightfall with its charmed servitors, repeating this until it gets back its phylactery or is destroyed. If it loses Ella but gains the phylactery, it must retreat below the waves and can be placated by the yearly offering of the Wicker Bride, but retrieving the phylactery to give the fiend its quietus will be complicated immensely.

If the Kelpie succeeds in taking both its phylactery and Ella it will remain in the bay and use its *control weather* ability to scourge Apton-en-Mer and Mare Island until no human or human habitation remains in repayment for its hundreds of years of enforced servitude. After this destruction it will roam the coasts of the Core, bringing bad weather, sinking ships, and charming women to their death below the waves until it can be caught and destroyed.

The Devil Bound

If the party succeeds in preventing the sacrifice of Ella Atwater at Mare's Head Point they must still perform the real ritual of the Wicker Bride to prevent the Kelpie from being freed at midnight. Assuming that the PCs have successfully driven away the Kelpie after the events of "At Mare's Head Point", the continuation is as follows: The ceremony takes one hour and requires the presence of one divine spellcaster of any level who knows the ritual, six women, two men, and the Wicker Bride (thoughtfully provided by Mammy Knass as cover for her abduction of Ella).

Either Mammy Knass (if she escapes the Kelpie) or Warden Jessop (now very willing to help, if present) can take the role of the divine spellcaster, if either is available; if not, a PC can do it with the help of the islanders (requires a successful Perform check at DC 12; 5 or more ranks in Knowledge (religion) give a +2 bonus to the roll). This will require that the PCs get the

islanders back together, or that they get help from the mainland (this would also allow them to get Warden Jessop's help for the ceremony).

Once the ceremony has been performed, the following occurs:

As you set the Wicker Bride out to sea in its coracle, you feel a sudden change; there is a marvelous freshness to the air, and the storm clouds gathered overhead begin to disperse, showing stars here and there among their tatters. When you look again to the sea, the Wicker Bride and her little ship are gone; once again the devil has received his due, and the deep blue sea has been placated.

Postscript

The aftermath of the adventure, even if the Kelpie is bound again, may be complicated. Warden Jessop will probably decline to bring Mammy Knass to justice; after all, she was right about not abolishing the Wicker Bride, and he feels that he is partly responsible for the deaths of the six young women claimed by the Kelpie. No-one else is likely to act against her without his support. On the other hand, she did effectively conspire to murder Ella, and if the mainlanders learn that she hoped to control the Kelpie herself, rather than simply re-binding it, they might well take justice into their own hands. Either way, there will be severe strains in the community, and between the villagers and the islanders.

There is also the moral question, which will surely occur to Jessop, if not to the player characters—if the good fortune and good weather of Apton-en-Mer have been obtained in a devil's bargain, is it right that they should continue to honor it? And how can the Kelpie be disposed of entirely? Careful research into the nature of fiends and the past of this bargain will be necessary to end the Kelpie once and for all; until then,

Apton-en-Mer will remain caught between the devil and the deep blue sea.

Dramatis Personae

The Priest

Calvin Jessop

Male human, C1r5 (Ezra): CR 5; Medium size human (5 feet 10 inches); HD 5d8+5; hp 31; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 11 (11 touch, 10 flat-footed); Base Atk +3 (+3 melee, quarterstaff 1d6, +4 ranged); Grapple +3; Full Atk +3 melee, +4 ranged; AL LG; SV Fort +4 Ref +2 Will +8; Str 10 Dex 12 Con 10 Wis 16 Int 11 Cha 14

Skills and Feats: Concentration +4, Diplomacy +12, Heal +6, Knowledge (local) +2, Knowledge (religion) +3, Spellcraft +1, Sense Motive +5; Courage, Iron Will, Negotiator

Domains: Mists, Healing

The Witch

Mammy Knass

Female human, Exp2/Adt6: CR 7; Medium size human (4 feet 10 inches); HD 8d6; hp 27; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 10, touch 10, flat-footed 10; BAB +4; Grp +2; Atk +2 melee (1d4-2, dagger); Full attack +2 (1d4-2, dagger); SA spells SQ none AL NE; SV Fort +2 Ref +2 Will +10 Str 6 Dex 10 Con 10 Wis 16 Int 15 Cha 14

Skills and Feats: Bluff +10, Concentration +5, Diplomacy +12, Gather Information +10, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (arcana) +8, Knowledge (local) +11, Sense Motive +11, Spellcraft +10 (+12 scrolls), Use Magical Device +8; Brew Potion, Magical Aptitude, Negotiator, Persuasive.

The Constable

Owen Jackson

Male Exp4: CR 3; Medium humanoid (human) (6 ft 2 in tall); HD 4d6+4; hp 23; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 12, touch 10, flat-footed 12; BAB +3; Grp +5; Atk +5 melee (1d6+2, light mace); Full attack +5 (1d6+2, light mace); SA none SQ none AL LG; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +5; Str 14 Dex 10 Con 12 Int 12 Wis 12 Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +5, Craft (leathermaking) +11, Diplomacy +9, Gather Information +5, Intimidate +5, Knowledge (local) +8, Listen +10, Sense Motive +8, Spot +10, Swim +5; Alertness, Skill Focus (Craft (leathermaking)), Toughness.

The Old Man

Silas Atwater

Male Human Com 4: CR 2; Medium humanoid (human) (5 ft 5 in tall); HD 4d6-8; hp 8; Init -2; Spd 20 ft.; AC 8, touch 8, flat-footed 8; BAB +2; Grp +0; Atk +0 melee (1d4-2, clasp knife); Full attack +0 (1d4-2, clasp knife); SA none SQ none AL NG; SV Fort -1, Ref -1, Will +2; Str 7, Dex 6, Con 7, Int 9, Wis 12, Cha 7.

Skills and Feats: Profession (fisherman) +11, Knowledge (local) +6, Listen +10, Spot +10, Swim +5; Alertness, Skill Focus (Profession (fisherman)), Toughness.

The Innocent:

Essa Atwater,

Female Human Com1: CR 1/2; Medium humanoid (human) (5 ft 2 in tall); HD 1d6; hp 6; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 10, touch 10, flat-footed 10; BAB +0; Grp -1; Atk -1 melee (1d2-1, unarmed, subdual); Full attack

-1 (1d2-1, unarmed, subdual); SA none; SQ innocence; AL NG; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0; Str 9, Dex 11, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 14.

Skills and Feats: Craft (seamstress) +5, Knowledge (local) +2, Listen +4, Spot +4, Swim +2; Alertness, skill focus (Craft (seamstress)).

Strangle: If the Kelpie's mannequin hits with both slam attacks in a round, it may choose to automatically succeed at a grapple check. The grappled opponent then takes 2d4 points of damage per round until it succeeds in an opposed Grapple check to break the mannequin's stranglehold or until released (usually when dead).

The Islanders

Mare Islander

Male Human Com2: CR 1; Medium humanoid (human); HD 2d6; hp 11; Init +0 Spd 30 ft.; AC 10, touch 10, flat-footed 10; BAB +0; Grp +1; Atk +0 melee (1d4+1, clasp knife); Full attack +0 (1d4+1, clasp knife); SA none; SQ none; AL N; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0; Str 12, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Knowledge (local) +1, Listen +1, Profession (fisherman) +8, Spot +1, Swim +3, Use Rope +4; Alertness, skill focus (Profession (fisherman)).

The Kelpie's Mannequin

"Alexander"

Medium construct: CR 2; Medium construct (5 ft 8 in tall); HD 2d10; hp 31; Init +4; Spd 30 ft.; AC 20, touch 14, flat-footed 16; BAB +1; Grp +1; Atk +1 melee (slam 1d4); Full attack +1/+1 (2 slams 1d4); SA spell-like abilities, strangle SQ bane, construct qualities, DR 5/slashing, fire resistance 5 AL NE; SV Fort +0 (immune to effects requiring Con saves unless they affect objects), Ref +0, Will +2; Str 10, Dex 10, Con -, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 18.

Bane: Like its creator, the kelpie's mannequin is repelled by even a sliver of beechwood, and a blow from a branch of beechwood deals it 1d4 points of damage.

Shadow and Flame

Dragonborn in Ravensloft

By Eleanor Ferren

isabellepescovich@yahoo.com

That the Redwood Keep even bothered keeping watch was a grand testament to the ways of the past, Foxglove thought to himself. Enemies these days either came charging in, roaring their challenges, or cloaked in disguises impossible to pierce. Either way, there was no point in posting a lookout for them. Yet here he was, sitting in the cold with two other elves, not allowed to speak, staring endlessly at the same few trees.

One of the other elves' ears perked up. Foxglove casually looked over to see what he'd spotted; if he was lucky, a stag might have passed by for some quick target practice...

Hold on. There was something.

Foxglove expertly dropped from the trees without a sound, padding over towards the creature with his bow at the ready. He was circling around to flank it when the creature whirled, letting loose an earsplitting shriek. Foxglove only caught a glimpse of it as it swung at him; the scaly skin, the long muzzle filled with hundreds of glittering sharp teeth, the glowing yellow eyes-

One of the other elves let loose an arrow, which thudded into the creature's shoulder. The creature's mouth lit up like daylight as lightning blasted forth from its mouth. His muscles moving faster than his thoughts, Foxglove just barely ducked in time. The tree behind him exploded into splinters of smouldering wood.

By the time his eyes had recovered, the creature had fled. It took a while before anyone said what they were all thinking.

"Draconian..." Foxglove whispered.

They looked at each other, then one elf fired a whistling arrow high into the sky. For the first time in his life, Foxglove ran back to the keep...

Gargoyles standing atop ruined cathedrals. Unwholesome creatures that lurk in the swamps and sewers. Magical experiments gone awry. Deranged cultists of primordial gods. Feared and despised throughout the Core, these are the Dragonborn, creatures of shadow and fear. To see a single dragonborn is very rare; to see more than one is a once in a lifetime event. Dragonborn are known as Draconians by mainlanders, dubbed thus by

the elves of Sithicus, who claim to have fought these foul creatures long ago. Very few scholars have had the opportunity or inclination to study the Draconians, and so the crumbling records of Sithicus have become the leading theories amongst academics.

Most Dragonborn fear others as much as they are feared, and spend as much of their life as they can in hiding. They have no shared culture or organization past domain borders. Draconian appearance also varies wildly by domain; while some heavily resemble the dragons of lore, others are lanky creatures with more leonine features, and others resemble stone gargoyles from church tops. Dragonborn may have horns, frills, elongated necks, spines, tails, feathered or bat-like vestigial wings, ears, beards, or none of the above. However, it is very common for them to have dark, shadowy scales, which seem to ebb and flow depending on the light.

Faces of the Dragonborn

The Created

Vespiear moved silently through his arcane lab, impatience clear on his face. The egg had cost him much to acquire, and he was determined to get results. He could tell the apprentices were nervous tonight. Fools. They would not be discovered. He was too skilled for that.

"Progress," he commanded. One of the apprentices immediately ushered him to the cage where his creation sat.

It had worked far better than he expected. His creation was already conscious, regarding the world with unsteady eyes. It stared in horror at its taloned fingers, wordlessly hissing a few times before managing to speak.

"What have you done to me?" it wailed, tearing bloody gashes in its arm as if to peel the scales off of its body.

"Sedate it," Vespiear commanded. He'd come too far for it to destroy itself now. His creation breathed forth a cloud of shadow, but it dissipated harmlessly against Vespiear's cold flesh. The apprentices quickly enchanted it, forcing it into magical slumber. The creature let loose a cry of anguish as its eyes shut...

A tragic victim of magical experiments, the Created was once human, but powerful rituals have warped and twisted her into a monster. Trapped in a form she reviles, she desperately searches for a way to reverse the spell and return to the life she had before. The Created is a pitiful creature, forever forced to hide from both the madman who transformed her and the people she once called friends. She desperately desires someone to trust, who can help her in her quest to regain his human form, but dares not give her trust easily; to her mind, any decent person would be driven off by her wretched form, and anyone might be willing to sell her back to her creator and tormentor. Then there is the matter of the creator. The Created may or may not know what her creator intended to do in creating the new fledged Dragonborn, but it is doubtful any good will come as a result.

And there are the true dragons. The dragon who willingly, or unwillingly, gave up its egg to fuel the magical process may now have stake in its progeny's fate. But a Created Dragonborn may find that her issues with true dragons are closer to home. If the egg used was close to hatching, some of the wyrmling's consciousness may have survived the process, and find itself co-habiting the Dragonborn's body. The Created may find herself hearing dark whispers and

feeling strange urges as the wyrmling tries to wrest away control of its host.

The Cursed

Mathieu strained at the ropes that bound his wrists. He'd been on the verge of losing his land, his house, his fortune, everything. So he'd gone to the voodun, thinking he had nothing else to lose. She'd offered to change his fortunes for him. He'd offered to pay her back the moment he could. "I'll agree," she told him, "so long as you give your word you'll be truthful." He'd been delighted and agreed without thinking.

On his way back to his house he'd found a beautiful golden pin lying on the ground on the side of the road. Mathieu couldn't help but put it on. Several people had asked him about it throughout the day, and one of his workers had insisted to everyone it wasn't his. He had been furious, and he violently beat the worker for his insolence, claiming it to be a family heirloom.

He had no idea what the pin was, but when the men came and bound him in the middle of the night, he'd got the inkling it was not a good thing to have as a family heirloom.

With a sudden heave, the men threw him into the swamp. The brackish water swallowed him, filling his nose, and Mathieu began to panic. He thrashed about in the water, to no avail. The thrashing only attracted a crocodile, which slid off its muddy bank to approach the drowning man. He opened his mouth to scream, even gagged as he was, and water poured into his mouth and throat. There was a sudden, terrible pain as something tore into his chest...

Mathieu was shocked when he awoke later, still lying on the muddy swamp bank. Even in his half-conscious state he could tell something was terribly wrong. A soft, human hand was stroking his head, but the sensation didn't feel right. "Not quite as fortunate as I promised," the voodun said



from next to him. "But more fortune than most receive. And more fortune on my part than honesty on yours."

Mathieu looked down at his reflection in the water. The toothy maw of his reptilian killer stared back up at him...

Like the Created, the Cursed was once human. Unlike the tragic victims of magic that are the Created, the Cursed has brought his new form down upon himself. Whether or not he deserves his new body is up for debate, but the Cursed's draconic form is a result of some action he performed.

The nature of the Cursed Dragonborn depends heavily on the curse that created it. An intimidating bully may have found himself transformed to resemble a creature of fear from myth. A man who reneges on his deal with a mystical shaman may awaken to find his body transformed. The possibility of cursed dragon gold is often repeated in legend; those who are overcome by greed and steal from the dragon's hoard, or who fall asleep upon it, may find that greed twisting their form, bit by bit, until their outside matches.

Whether or not the curse can be reversed is also dependant on the situation. Even if there is some glimmer of hope the curse can be broken, it is unlikely to be an easy task.

However, there is a disturbing number of Dragonborn, reverent to loas or dragons, who embrace their "curse" as a sign of favour from their deity. These darks priests even go so far as to seek the transformation into draconic creatures.

The Tainted

"Paquin." The blasted elf was knocking on the door. "Paquin! Are you alright?"

Paquin didn't respond. He splashed his face with the cold, brackish water, trying to wash the dreams from his mind. His mouth still tasted like blood. He quickly checked his reflection in the water, making a variety of faces. It would have looked silly if he wasn't so troubled.

The teeth were bothering him again. They were tearing at the sides of his mouth. In fact, his entire jaw seemed to be bothering him. Paquin shuddered, remembering what

his grandfather had looked like near the end. He rubbed his hands against his eyes to try and relieve his pounding headache. His fingers brushed up against a pair of small scales on his forehead. Without hesitation, he dug his fingers into his flesh and ripped them off.

They were coming in much faster now. He'd pulled so many off of his arms that the bandages weren't soaking up all the blood. He'd need to get a salve or something. There was no way he could ask the priest to help.

With a sudden, hacking cough, Paquin spit out a gob of something that was lodged in his throat. It burned and sizzled as it hit the water in his basin, frothing forth to burn both metal and wood...

Unlike most of the Dragonborn, the Tainted look human, at least, at first. Somewhere in the Tainted's ancestry was something reptilian. While the Tainted starts life no different than others, as she begins to age, traces of her heritage begin to surface. Scales start to grow on her skin, her face begins to extend, her teeth fall out and are replaced with bigger, sharper ones, and elemental energies begin to well up in her throat. Should she live long enough, she will soon transform fully into a draconian creature.

While many of the Tainted are horrified by their eventual fate, there is also a dark desire to seek out their ancestor's kind, and to give in to base urges of greed and rage that plague them, as they plague both dragons and other men. As the transformation continues, the Tainted Dragonborn must make some kind of piece with its nature. Those who do not often die by their own hands.

There is a distinct type of Tainted in Shri Raji who are not as conflicted as Tainted from the Core. Known as the Naga Clan, these people believe that they carry the blood



of sacred guardian serpents within their veins. Not all Naga clan members have a strong enough bloodline to transform, but they all revere these magical serpents and consider transformation to be a blessing, not a curse.

The Monster

Nichele tugged at her coat, trying hopelessly to keep it out of the sewage. She could scrub herself for weeks after these treks and never feel clean. Up ahead, DeVeyrines unhooded her lantern to get a better look at the area. There was a decided lack of rats in this part of the sewers, a fact that seemed to be making DeVeyrines more nervous than their presence. Nichele waved to her companion.

"Put the light away," Nichele said. "It should be safe here." DeVeyrines looked sceptical, not that Nichele could entirely blame her for that. "The light hurts their eyes. They won't come out if you don't put it away."

"I've not yet been convinced I want them to come out," DeVeyrines said, half-hooding he lantern regardless. Nichele noticed her hand straying down and grasping a flash-bomb, just in case she needed to make a sudden exit.

"Crispin," Nichele called out, adjusting her goggles around her eyes. "It's alright. It's me."

In the dim light of the sewer Nichele could barely make out the sickly white form. The lantern light glinted off its pale eyes. Even now Nichele needed to keep herself from wincing at Crispin's appearance; its long snout was twisted and scarred, with jagged teeth tearing through the sides of its jaws. A few more recent cut marred its scaly hide, and unwholesome ichor was dripping from the wounds. There was a definite feel of malevolence and hunger coming from the beast, but Nichele and DeVeyrines kept their ground.

"Crispin," Nichele repeated. "I need you to show me where you said the rats are, alright?"

The albino creature retreated back down the tunnel. "This way...."

Thought of by most as little more than an urban legend, these half-blind creatures lurk in the underground tunnels of cities, feeding on sewage, rats, and whatever else blunders into its lair. These abominations are even more twisted and horrific than their surface counterparts; their white scales are stained with sewage and dried blood, and they are often hulking, brutish creatures. The monsters are concerned mainly with survival, much like any who dwell in the sewers, but a few of the smarter and luckier ones form what alliances they can with wererats or humans.

Those who can befriend one of the monsters will find themselves with an unparalleled knowledge of the underground world, and which demands very little in return. Comfort, wealth, and even friendship are unknown luxuries to the sewer monsters, who seek only the bare essentials to survival.

The Sentinel

All his life the boy had been warned of the great dragon, Banemaw. But it was men that came and destroyed his town with fire.

The boy slipped past the armoured figures and ran out into the woods. He could hear the yelling of the soldiers over the flames. He ran and ran until he came to ruined cathedral that stood in the forest, long forgotten and covered with twining ivy. He didn't like the gargoyles there; there was something too real about their eyes, but they were solid stone and motionless, so he hid amongst them.

The soldiers found him faster than he imagined. One aimed a crossbow at the boy.



The arrow flew straight from the bow... and clinked off the gargoyle's stone wing.

The soldiers and the boy stood in stunned silence. The gargoyles of the cathedral were coming to life...

The sentinels resemble gothic dragons and gargoyles of castle architecture, and they often use this resemblance to hide in plain sight. They make ideal spies, hearing secret conversations that are freely spoken in front of inanimate statues. Sentinels are more friendly than most; they can hide in plain sight among other statues and gargoyles, and are rarely hunted actively by monster-hunters of the Core. They are usually nocturnal, where the darkness can hide their activities and lessen any suspicion that the stone statues are more than they seem.

No one is quite sure what the origin of these creatures is, whether they were animated statues or the creatures the stone gargoyles were based upon. The sentinel Dragonborn themselves have various legends of their own, often varying by domain. For example, the sentinels of Nidalia claim to be statues animated by those wrongly slain by Elena's servants. Nevertheless, the sentinels are now a flesh and blood race of their own, independent of

any magic or curses that might have once created them.

The Born-dragon

The Basilisk sat in the warm sun, watching bemusedly as the kobolds swarmed over the abandoned barracks. One of the little blue creatures broke off from the work lines and skittered over to where he sat, offering some meagre strips of jerky. The Basilisk took it without complaint, tearing into it with its massive jaws. He shook his head incredulously.

"I've never seen anything like this," he said. "I've never seen the like in my life. All I had to do is tell them about a plan that someone else made and three different warrens agreed to help me."

"You're the chief now, you have big sway," the kobold said in its rapid Draconic speak. "Besides, we all want to see it when these barracks collapse right on top of the Talons."

"Don't tell me that's the only reason," the Basilisk scoffed. "You're only doing this because I asked."

The kobold nodded soberly. "In truth, we are not used to fighting like this. We needed a hero. A Drakov, a Gondegal. Someone to believe in."

"But why all rally behind me?" The Basilisk asked. "I'm no war hero or King in Exile."

The kobold paused for a minute. "You're really big," it offered.

The Basilisk threw back its head and roared in laughter...

The "truest" of the Dragonborn, usually found in Falkovnia and Sithicus, the born-Dragons have no ambivalence or revulsion over their forms. These are no cursed humans, or animated statues, or evolved lizards. These are the scions of the Dragons,

creatures of legend, a proud and powerful race.

The born-Dragons are creatures of extremes. Those who fight against tyranny are surprisingly noble creatures, emulating beloved and charismatic knights from legends of old, and being models of virtue. On the flip side, those who embrace the darker side of legends strive to become as the dragons of legend: terrifying monsters driven by destruction and greed. It can be surprising how quickly one extreme can turn to the other; even the cruellest and most bestial of Dragonborn has some aura of nobility about it, and even the kindest of Dragonborn has something about it that reminds those around it that it is still a very dangerous creature.

Domains

Nidalia

The Dragonborn of Nidalia have been declared abominations by Elena Faith-hold, and thus those who remain have become masters of hiding, skulking, and escaping detection. All Dragonborn are hostile towards Elena Faith-hold and her forces; Elena has been terrorizing them for so long that many have become the seething monsters she claims them to be. Surprisingly, the Nidalian Dragonborn are not as hostile and suspicious of other people as they might be, once the initial confrontation is past. Elena's forces hardly bother trying to deceive them, so they are rarely wary of subterfuge. Most Dragonborn that remain in Nidalia are resistance fighters against Elena or allies of the Circle - conditions are too hostile in Nidalia for any but the most dedicated Dragonborn to remain.

Sithicus

The elves claim that the Dragonborn originated from Sithicus, pointing to ancient ballads and crumbling writings that reference them. Whatever the case may be, the Sithican Draconians match the descriptions of yore almost to the letter. They are humanoid draconic creatures often bearing horns and vestigial wings, and their scales are the same color as the long forgotten metallic dragons: bronze, brass, silver, copper, and gold. The elves greatly fear these creatures based on the legends of their ancestors, usually shooting them on sight. Sithican Draconians tend to skulk in places the elves avoid, which are unsavoury at best and highly dangerous at worst. The most successful Draconian outposts are in Soth's abandoned outposts, where the Draconians do their best to repair the crumbling defences. Those that survive have a very strict military culture, and they are always on the watch for possible threats.

The Draconians have recently gotten wind of the elven legends, including those of the deadly death throes of the original Draconians. The Sithican Draconians are eager to learn more in hopes of giving themselves a psychological advantage in battle. Many of them have taken to painting themselves with gold war paint, a tactic which makes elves wary of engaging them in melee.

Richemulot

No one knows where the sewer-stalking Dragonborn of Richemulot came from or how they got there, but most people dismiss them as urban legends. Only the occasional wererat or grimetrekker has ever run into one of these creatures. The sewer Dragonborn bear little resemblance to each other, but they are much more likely than their above-ground counterparts to be hulking, disfigured brutes, far more misshapen and hideous than

the sleek reptilian forms other Dragonborn bear. There is very little culture to be found; the sewer Dragonborn put survival first, and are for the most part uneducated and illiterate. A very select few have managed contacts with the upper-world, usually wererats, and forge a better life for themselves as hired thugs, treasure hunters, and underground guides.

Falkovnia

Falkovnia is, oddly enough, a haven for the Dragonborn. Despite the constant fighting against Drakov's brutal regime, Falkovnia has some of the few places where a Dragonborn can walk openly. Under the leadership of the Basilisk, the kobolds and Dragonborn of Falkovnia have banded together into a fighting force to be reckoned with, and share ties with the Circle and other rebel groups. Though still reviled by the Talons and many Falkovnian villagers, most of the rebels recognize the Dragonborn as trusted allies. Some even work with the Circle on a regular basis, wearing heavy armour to conceal their nature as best they can.

The Dragonborn in Falkovnia tend towards militarism and a nomadic lifestyle due to the constant threat of the Talons; they are held together by the Basilisk's command, their mutual lineage, and the pleasure they take in tormenting Drakov. Dragonborn are found in swamps, underground tunnels, and stolen Falkovnian forts, all of which are riddled with kobold-crafted escape tunnels and traps. Due to their Circle allies they are better equipped than most Dragonborn, although they still use piecemeal equipment stolen from fallen Talons.

Darkon

Darkonian Dragonborn bear a very strong resemblance to the Shadow Dragons Ebb and Gloom, with inky black, semi-

translucent scales. It is rumoured that they were created from a stolen egg of Ebb's, fused with unwilling human subjects as part of an insane mage's experiments. Whether or not this is the case, these Draconians are a broody and untrusting lot, with poor views on humanity, society, and life in general. They become very suspicious of anyone who takes too much of an interest in their nature, perhaps due to a deep seated fear of being "studied" by more people who value knowledge over morality.

Despite their general curmudgeon attitude, the Darkonian Dragonborn are slightly more settled than their counterparts; Azalin has no particular problem with them, so their only threats come in the form of over zealous monster hunters and scholars. For the most part, they lurk in villages hidden in Darkon's thick and uninviting forests, living much as their human counterparts do.

Some of these shadowy creatures have disturbingly embraced Ebb as their creator and goddess, slavishly devoting themselves to her worship and bidding. These cultists put all their effort towards gaining Ebb's favour with tribute, sacrifices, and doing her bidding. It is uncertain if Ebb has accepted these new minions, or if she is even aware of them, but the cultists are nearly fanatical in their devotion nonetheless.

Souragne

The arrival of the Draconians in the swamps of Souragne sparked a civil war among the crocodile-men of the swamp. Some of them took their arrival as a sign from their gods. Others, led by Sandover, the were-crocodile priest, took it as a threat to their power. Most of the bloodshed has died down, but the two still clash in the swamp sometimes, leaving bloated reptile corpses floating in their wake.

A significant number of Draconians have taken to revering the loa Ohuwaghnn, the

Serpent King, and begun trying to erode Souragnen society. The human followers of Ohuwaghnn, such as the voodun Mensonge, may start taking notice of these new allies very soon.

Hazlan

Although the Dragonborn are not as common here as they may be elsewhere, the mages of Hazlan do not have as huge a problem with them as most Core dwellers do. A dragonborn is assumed to be a magical experiment, and more likely to prompt angry complaints to the authorities than a lynch mob. Most of the Hazlani have seen stranger things than walking lizards in their own magical workshops. Some of the wizards have even transformed themselves, either accidentally or purposefully, into draconic form.

Shri Raji

In Shri Raji, Dragonborn are not feared, but respected. Rajians consider Dragonborn to have the blood of the Naga within them, and are properly reverent. The Dragonborn are considered to be of priestly caste and have much influence with their words and opinions. Despite this, Dragonborn are rarely seen outside of Naga Clan lands. For this reason, it is considered a great honor to speak with one of the Dragonborn.

Surviving in Ravenloft

William openly stared. He had expected the band of mercenaries to be an odd lot but... the armoured man in the back was huge. The black plate mail clanked as he thudded inside, and the helmet, forged into the effigy of a snarling beast, seemed to be glaring at him.

"What are you looking at?" the armoured figure demanded. William quickly averted his eyes.

"N-n-nothing," the barkeep stuttered. "And you know how much I appreciate this. You're just a little-"

"Large, yes." The armoured figure regarded William for a minute, then issued a short noise that might have been a laugh. "So I have been told. I am ektually not that large, where I come from." One of the other mercenaries snickered.

"W-well, I apologize," William said, starting to relax now that it was apparent the man wouldn't stave his head in. "Please, sit down, relax, I'll get you something to eat."

The huge man snorted. "I do not relax when I am vorking. Kristie vill bring it by my room later."

With that, the huge man thudded upstairs.

"Don't mind Ludvig, my good man," one of the human mercenaries said, clapping him on the shoulder. "Poor man's Falkovnian."

Oh, William thought. That certainly explained a lot.



Plausible Deniability

The people of Ravenloft are a fearful and superstitious lot. This can often boil over into violence against those unfortunate enough to look or act different from the norm, especially when a scapegoat is needed for some tragic occurrence. The very nature of these fear driven actions, however, mean that the common folk of Ravenloft are more likely to attack harmless madmen or shy calibans; anyone who is not likely to actually fight back. They are not likely to antagonize well-armed adventurers who happen to be passing through, no matter how frightening or uncouth they are.

What this boils down to is that any Dragonborn hiding its face, be it via armour, masks, veils, hooded cloaks, or magical disguise, is not likely to be attacked or provoked unless it is publicly revealed for what it is. While its towering stature is unlikely to gain it any friends, people will leave it alone because they are frightened of it. It is only when they become convinced that the creature will kill them anyway that they will choose to act against it; until then, no one will want to risk their life to ask probing questions of a hulking figure in full plate armour.

Keep Moving

In the case of a Dragonborn, familiarity bolsters confidence. Once the initial shock is past, if it becomes apparent that the creature is harmless or benign, people become more likely to attack it, because they know that they are able to defeat it. It thus behoves the Dragonborn to keep on the move and not allow anyone to become very familiar with it. This need to keep moving attracts Dragonborn to the mercenary or adventurer's life, where it will be not only on the move, but very well-armed.

A Little Help from my Friends

No matter what life throws at you, it is better to face it with friends; especially if those friends are well-armed, powerful, or influential. Even if the Dragonborn is seen as property of another person, people will be less likely to attack it and risk legal recourse from the bereft owner.

There are those who are willing to befriend a monstrous, draconic creature, and having an influential ally might be enough to keep the Dragonborn from being strung up. While bands of adventurers are always good to have as friends, there are other allies that might allow the Dragonborn some measure of tolerance. Good people for a Dragonborn to befriend include Mordentish Lamplighters, powerful Mulani wizards, members of the Circle, Rajian priests, or even sideshow workers who can pass the Dragonborn off as a harmless freak. There are also other outcasts like Calibans and other demihumans, who can both appreciate the Dragonborn's plight and enjoy having a little extra muscle on their side.

Shelter from the Storm

Even a creature as bizarre as a Dragonborn can find a safe haven for it to call home. In domains like Shri Raji, Falkovnia, and Hazlan, it may even be able to walk about freely and undisguised. In domains such as Sithicus, Darkon, and the Shadowborn Cluster, there are hidden havens for Dragonborn to congregate in. Even in less tolerant domains a Dragonborn may be able to hide itself in a friend's house, or live out in remote areas. Finally, the side-shows of Paridon and the travelling Carnival offer an opportunity for the Dragonborn to be seen freely as a harmless, if scary, circus attraction, and gives it the added rights of being valuable property, if not having rights as a living being.

New Barovia

A Short Story

By Steve Flam

steve.flam@videotron.ca

April 23rd, 771: Somewhere in Barovia

The carriage hurried through the Balinok mountain range. Four guards rode atop. A mission of this importance merited more, but that would have attracted unwanted attention and SHE would not tolerate failure.

I think we'll make it in time. Those Hazlani mages are crafty fellows, but her gold helped in getting these items created. Next month by this time, she will have what she asked. He peered out of the carriage into the late afternoon sky. For one of those rare times, the sun nearly pierced the gloom.

That is nearly. He sighed. Soon enough, he would be rewarded, so she had told him.

The hours passed by and finally after what seemed like an eternity, the carriage came to a stop. His thoughts wandered to those weeks ago and why he'd been asked to go investigate the old decrepit monastery. He had, as per her instructions, stayed for two nights and two days. Just listening to the environs. Sure enough, as she had told him, he heard maniacal laughter, screams and ramblings from far below the ground. This was all she had needed from him those weeks ago. This had brought her to pool

some of her resources to have him go to Hazlan and, with the gold she had supplied, commission a mage to create several items for her. The gold was more than enough and the mage told him to return in one month's time to collect the items.

He pulled his cloak tight around him in the Barovian night. Walking hurriedly he knocked on the door to a moderate home. It opened. A slightly elder woman opened and nodded to him, bidding him enter. After he did, she poked her head out and looked around a few nervous moments before closing the door and locking it behind her and following him. He passed through a hallway into a modest kitchen. A woman sat there sipping a glass of what looked to be wine. She looked up as he entered. He nodded to her as he approaches the table, and she bade him to sit across from her. Always a beautiful scarf she wore around her neck. Sometimes a fancy ribbon adorned it instead of a scarf."So, Stefan. Tell me. Was your trek successful?"

"Yes, Mistress, it was. The man agreed to your terms and I return in one month to collect the items. This is your decision, of

course. I merely took the liberty of accepting his terms as you were so adamant in having these items."

She looked at him. "Very well. You have pleased me and thus I've decided you shall indeed return in one month to collect the items I requested. Now leave me and come return to me in one month's time with the items I requested." She dismissed him with the wave of her hand. He rose, nodded and exited the home in haste, hurrying to the Inn. He'd been well paid for his troubles and had taken up a nice room at the Inn. Working for the Red Vardo Traders had its advantages. He entered the Inn and took the steps to his room, two at a time. Once inside he locked the door and finally began relaxing. The hot bath was there as he'd asked and disrobing he sank into the hot water, sighing in contentment.

During the next few weeks, he traveled from Immol to Teufeldorf then Zeidenburg and back. The purpose was to hire men for the Mistress' next phase, once she had the items in her possession. He cared not what she needed them for. Most people he hired for her never seemed to live long enough to enjoy the gold he gave them. That's not to say he was complaining. He profited from their demises and his purse ever grew. He cared not as long as he did his deeds and got paid.

May 24th, 771 : Barovia

Stefan hurried to the appointed meeting place. She would be definitely pleased. He had the items and the men she had asked he hire were already at the Inn, waiting on word from him. He walked up the path to the door and knocked. Once again the same elder woman opened the door and let him in, peeking her head out and looking around before locking the door and following him to the kitchen as always. She sat at the table, sipping her usual drink. He nodded and she

beckoned him to his usual seat. As always she wore something around her neck, this time a pretty red ribbon. "So? Were you successful?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes, I was" as he handed over a bag. She took it gracefully and actually. smiled! "Ah, perfect. You are dismissed, Stefan. On the table near the door is your wages, as usual. Good evening and meet me at our next rendezvous in two weeks as was discussed previously." Her attention was now on the bag and Stefan a thought no more.

He rose, gathered his "wages" and left. She laughed almost maniacally as she observed the items she had purchased.

Perfect! My plan seems to be working to perfection. That bastard suspects nothing given that I am still living, if you can call it that. He and those Vistani are in for a rude awakening very soon. I can't wait until my plan comes to fruition! That fool Von Zarovich will pay dearly for what he's done to me, and in spades.

She chuckled to herself as she sipped her wine. The day of retribution was approaching and she would savor every moment up to that point and beyond.

June 17th, 771 : Barovia

She couldn't sit still in the carriage. Even as their destination loomed closer and closer, she could barely suppress her excitement. Phase two of her plan was about to be a reality. The third was not as far in the future as she had planned. All the better for her. Not so for that bastard Von Zarovich. He would die knowing she was responsible. Part one of her plan had been very long. Through her various contacts and the gold accumulated through the activities of the Red Vardo Traders, she had learned of this man, a sworn enemy of Strahd Von Zarovich. A Dilisnya at that. The legend went that the devil Strahd had made Leo Dilisnya a vampire and

entombed him alive under the Monastery of Silver threads nearly three centuries earlier. Surely the tales were old wives tales. But the more she heard about it from different sources, the more she began to believe that perhaps there might be an iota of truth in the legends. Unwilling to take anything for granted, she herself journeyed to Hazlan and purchased several items to help her discover the truth. When she arrived at the decrepit monastery she was very excited. She felt that here lay part of her revenge on the gypsies and their partner in crime, Strahd Von Zarovich. Once she was comfortably installed, she unstoppered the potion she'd procured in Hazlan. Moments later she was rewarded with a few incoherent thoughts

"Strahd!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Must feed!
!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Wedding.
.... Assassins failed. "

She felt such overwhelming rage from her subject. It came in jumbles and spurts. Most of it was incomprehensible, but some she did understand. Success! , she thought.

The tales were indeed true. Now I need to find a way to get this monster to the surface and feed. Then and only then will I be capable to deal with him. The men I shall have Stefan hire will be Leo's partial payment in the plot to rid Barovia of the devil Strahd. Then he will be lucid enough to listen to my plan. As it involves his most hated enemy I think success in his help will be forthcoming. All I need now is to procure several items from Hazlan. Their schools of Magic are famous and thus I am positive in getting my items made there!

The carriage stopped. She patted down her skirt and adjusted the scarf around her neck. If her heart actually beat, it would be drumming in a frenzy of excitement. She knocked on the door and several seconds later, it opened. She looked out and sure enough, the men she'd had Stefan hire were

there, waiting. As was Stefan himself. Good! Always nice to see a plan well executed I say. Stefan is worth every gold I spent on him. She exited the carriage and approached him. She nodded to him and with a wave of her hand dismissed him. She looked to the men gathered there, even as Stefan got on his horse and rode off into the afternoon, not questioning her motives. He suspected the moans and screams and incoherent babbling he'd thought he'd heard there weeks ago was part of the reason there was a gathering there this afternoon. He cared not, for the pay was good and he was very discreet.

"Thank you for coming to help us. Shortly you will know what your part is in this affair" she said as she addressed the men. She removed a vial from her pouch and opened it. She sipped it's contents once again, as she had those weeks ago."Your reward for your patience is upon you, Leo. I've several men here to satiate your thirst. Then once I free you, Strahd is to be the next target. Do you agree?"

"Yes. yes. must feed.
.... Kill Strahd!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Feed ...
.... Feed me! ! ! ! ! ! ! !
Wedding,,,,,,,,,,,,, assassins. so
tiny here.
AAAAAAAAAAAAARGHHHHHHHHHHHH
HHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

"Calm down! Listen to me! Want you Strahd dead more than anything?"

She hears Leo giggle maniacally and hum some ditty that she doesn't even know.

"Yes. yes. Strahd is bad.
need nourishment. must feed!
!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! After can kill Strahd. .
...."

Satisfied that Dilisnya would accomodate her, she removed a ring from her purse. She put it on her finger and smiled at the gathered men. Now she began thinking of

Leo being amongst the men she'd hired, and sure enough a scant few moments later an elderly man looking like a lunatic with long white hair, wild eyes, long pointy teeth and claws for hands was amongst them. Before even the men could react, Leo had drained one and had another in the firm grip of his hand. The others had tried to flee but she had other ideas. She turned a ring on one of the fingers of her other hand. Sure enough every man stopped moving, but was still awake. She nearly laughed out loud at their predicament, but refrained from doing so. Leo was of course hungry and she wasn't going to deprive him of his first meal in near three centuries. She reveled in his hunger as well as the total destruction of the men she'd hired for this such purpose.

Several minutes later, the old disheveled man was done feeding. Fifteen men lay lifeless on the ground. He turned to Montari, his eyes having lost much of their wildness, his face flushed with new blood running through his system. Who was this woman who'd freed him and more importantly, why has she freed him from his eternal damnation that was beneath the monastery. It has been his prison for how long? And all thanks to that bastard Strahd? Oh he'd pay, but now was not the time to be bold and careless. Now he had to take the time to plot his revenge with or without the help of his so-called savior. He asked the inevitable question:

"Why have you freed me from my prison?"

His voice was raspy and grating, though he presumed as much from his long imprisonment and not having spoken since that fateful day. His tongue sneaked out and he licked his lips, ridding them of any of the blood that trailed there after he'd fed. His fangs protruded slightly from his lips as well, for he had more feeding to do and no

sustenance besides her in the near vicinity. It didn't bode well for his savior so far.

She looked him in the eyes and responded, "I've my reasons which will be revealed to you when the time is right. Just as you've reason to hate Von Zarovich, so do I. I'll only say that it is my belief that he controls the Vistani and they are responsible for my present predicament.

He was to say something. "I. . . ." Then he stopped and pursed his lips. He had come into good fortune this day. What day was it though? How long have I been under this accursed monastery? ? ? She'd taken great pains, he believed, in freeing him as well. This bore future consideration on his part. Now the important question. "How long have I been imprisoned under this accursed place?"

She told him.

He yelled as loud as he could and for as long as was possible. Three Centuries? ? ? ? He told her in no uncertain terms "Find me more sustenance or you're next." She looked him directly into the eyes, an evil smile gracing her face. "You see, my dear Leo" and as she spoke she removed her ribbon, showing him her curse, before replacing the ribbon. "You see, I can't die that way." To which she cackled. "I'll find you more victims, now come. We have much to discuss and one other person you need to meet, who hides at one of my residences. She is related to Strahd by the way." She turns and enters the carriage. He seems unsure but as he has no other agenda presently, followed her. She taps on the window behind her and the carriage moved into the night. He remained silent throughout the ride, thousands of thoughts flowing through his mind at once. He'd be able to sort them out once he'd had time to acclimatize himself to his new environment and what was expected of him from this woman, of whom he didn't know her name. She left him to his silence,

knowing he must have quite a few questions, but now wasn't the time to answer them. Now she needed him to be at his best, and for that she needed to get him more victims.

The carriage rode for nearly an hour. When it stopped, it was at her main residence in Immol. She disembarked from the carriage and beckoned him to follow. He did and as she passed through the door, he was stopped by some invisible force. He frowned. "Ah yes, according to lore, I must invite you into my home. Please do enter." He does, and follows her to the kitchen and stands, unsure of that to do with himself. "Lyssa, I'm back with Leo!" she calls out. Footsteps can be heard on the second floor. They move a few feet and then move down some stairs and through the same hallway they'd taken after they'd entered. A tall, black haired woman with black eyes stood before them. She was attired in a simple dress and wore a scarf around her head. She nodded to Montari and Leo, then moved into the kitchen and sat across from Jacqueline. Montari looked at both of her visitors and spoke. "Welcome to one of my many homes in Barovia. I am Jacqueline Montari, that is Lyssa Von Zarovich and of course you are Leo Dilisnya." Introductions out of the way, she stood and paced the kitchen. "Sit, Leo. We've much to discuss and I want you to listen to what I have to say." Leo shrugged and took a seat, hunger pains beginning to course through his emaciated, elderly body. Montari removed a bell from a pouch in her dress and rang it once. An elderly woman appeared at the kitchen door. "Esmerelda, make sure those men I've below still breath for our guests, shall you?" The elderly lady nodded and disappeared through the hallway. Elsewhere in the house a door was heard opening and footsteps descending.

"So where were we. Ah yes. The reason of me freeing the both of you. It has taken me a

painstaking amount of gold, time and manpower to gather information on the both of you. Then I could indeed free you once the information gathered was proven true. It was and here you are. In a nutshell I wish to rid Barovia of Strahd Von Zarovich's rule so that we might become it's Rulers. In effect we would police Barovia with Goblins" Lyssa looked at Montari with a raised eyebrow, unsure of how that would work. Goblins were not accustomed to taking orders and she doubted they would do it very well with any of them. They tended to be quite unruly, if what the Illithids had told her was true of them.

"I see your concern, but am prepared. I have had created an item which creates Goblins and controls them as well. I tried to take every precaution necessary. You see, I've had a long time to prepare for this moment and it is now almost at hand. Patience is something that can be very rewarding, wouldn't you agree?" She laughed lightly and let her two guests soak in her revelation thus far. She was secure in her feeling that her two recently freed guests would acquiesce to her plan. Thus she could use them to rid her of the cursed Vistani and then the Devil Strahd! ! ! Perhaps she might come into a spot of luck and finally find her original head, but she wasn't counting on it. Never count your chickens.

"I grow hungry again, Montari" Leo rasped. Lyssa looked at the elder man and grinned, opening her lips, permitting her fangs to slide down her bottom lip. She laughed and nodded to both of the others. "Shall we feast, dear Leo? I think Jacqueline mentioned food for us. Shall we?" She stood even as Esmerelda returned, saying "Yes mum, they breath still." She turned and left. Footsteps receding and then disappearing altogether. Leo stood as well, his hunger beginning to overwhelm him. After all it had only been nearly three

centuries since he'd last been about Barovia. The men below, if what Montari said was true, would sustain him until the morrow. Then he would return to his normal feeding habits. Being that long without blood did that to a vampire! Lyssa nodded to him. "Follow me" was all she said, and he did. They passed through the same hallway they'd come in through. Near the entrance was another door. She opened it and descended a flight of stairs which came to another door and after that, a hallway. A door was at the end of the hallway. She walked to it and opened it. Inside was a large room, almost twenty feet by twenty feet. On each wall, men were shackled, heads bowed. They appeared dead. The rising and lowering of their chests belied that fact. Lyssa and Leo each took a wall. Minutes later, they emerged sated. She looked at him and grinned, blood dripping from the corner of her mouth and her teeth blood red. She licked it away and walked back up to the kitchen, and Jacqueline. Leo followed suite.

During the next month, Leo reacclimated himself with Barovia, steering far from the Von Zarovich castle and any Vistani. In Jacqueline's research and Lyssa's experience, the gypsies tended to show up when Strahd was to be menaced in some way, and get this information to him.

Leo spent this time accustoming himself with his newfound freedom. Jacqueline spared him quite the few gold coins to garner a new wardrobe for himself. Through Montari he learned that what remained of his family was in some land called Borca. He'd tend to that matter once Strahd was taken care of. During the month he also discovered the wall of fog surrounding Barovia and the same that surrounded their entryway to get to the castle. From what he was told, the fog surrounding the village was called the choking fog and deadly to any who passed

through it. On a larger scale, the massive fog surrounding Barovia could keep any mortal, or non-living or breathing individual inside the land. Lyssa suspected that perhaps Strahd was the key to both fogs but couldn't say more. She just felt it.

Lyssa spent her time remembering the castle proper, putting it to papyrus and sharing with the others what she knew of the place. Leo did likewise. Jacqueline sent many an unsuspecting spy to the castle during the daylight hours to learn as much as they could about the cursed place. Many spies perished but some returned with valuable information which she shared with the others. Her plan was nearly ready to be enacted! She hired more cannon fodder through her Red Vardo persona, using Stefan once more. These men she hired would be the first line of attack on the castle and would get through Strahd's first line of defenses! He was also given the task of hiring mages in Hazlan for a handsome price to come to Barovia and work for her for a short period of time. These mages, she felt, would help them with their attack on the castle and Strahd. Finally, through her avid research, she'd discovered about some amulet of the Morninglord and some mention of some vampiric elf who'd perished in using it against Strahd centuries before, nearly destroying the master vampire. A stroke of luck hit her during the month. After a long period of searching, an amulet was found at the monastery! The same cursed place where Leo had been buried. The day finally arrived when the plan was to be swung into motion. Only she, Lyssa and Leo were gathered there. The mages and her cannon fodder were to convene in the village in two days time at dawn and head for the castle with due haste. "So it has come down to this. In two days time, you'll be on your way to the Castle. Thirty foot soldiers will

lead you there. I've also hired six mages to help with the attack. Oh Lyssa, they've taken the liberty to look into your curse and will attempt to remove it this night. I'm sure Strahd didn't foresee this possibility and shall soon regret it. I look forward to roaming his castle with no fear at all as I'm sure you both do. Now I take my leave of you, and we shall meet again in two days time here." She rose, nodded to the man and woman and departed the house via carriage. Leo stood. "I go to feed, I'll see you later." He exited the home as well. Lyssa sat there contemplating her luck!

Finally my curse will be removed! That bastard Strahd has had it coming to him for a long time. I was banished to the Shadowy place and might have perished there if not for Ms. Montari's research and efforts in finding me. How sweet it will be to pass the wooden stake through Strahd's heart!

A knock on the door took Lyssa away from her short reverie. She blinked and stood as well. Walking to the door she smiled. Of course it had to be the mages Jacqueline had promised and she wasn't disappointed. Opening the door she saw only one man before but he put his hands to his lips and his eyes told her to let him in. She did. He was definitely Hazlani. Tattoos all over his bald head. Once inside she closed the door behind her. He said a word and five other Hazlani men reappeared before her. "Shall we go begin, madam?" was all he asked her. She nodded and led them to the sitting room. Opening the doors, she let them in and entered after. She walked past them and sat waiting.

The men gathered in a circle before her and began chanting. Being something of a spellcaster, she recognized that this would be a powerful spell. Two minutes later, the spell was complete. Energy rippled through each man and in unison they pointed at Lyssa and with a word, massive waves of energy flew

into her. A battle ensued between Strahd's magic and the gathered Hazlani mages. Though Strahd's curse was powerful, it was no match for the six gathered men. She felt like a massive weight was lifted from her shoulders and breathed a sigh of relief. The men nodded to each other, then her. They quickly departed the home and as Lyssa looked to follow them, they were not to be seen.



Deep within Castle Ravenloft, an alarm rang through Strahd's head.

This can't be! Who would dare oppose me, he who IS THE LAND!

He immediately moved to his laboratory, looking for a spellbook. Satisfied, he leafed through it and found the spell he was searching for. I'll use it tomorrow, for now a few preparations are required. And it's been a while since I've heard from the gypsies. The time is right for me to speak with them once more. He quickly departed the laboratory and went to the balcony, overlooking his land, Barovia! He merely thought of it and he was a bat, soaring through the night sky. Within two hours he found them. He alighted quickly in the forest close to them and emerged as himself. The gathered gypsies didn't appear to be shocked at his appearance. He walked up to the vardo and knocked. "Come in" a female voice beckoned from within. He opened the door and did as instructed. As always he inspected the inside of the wagon and always the same sights greeted him. He passed them by without further thought and sat at the chair in front of the elderly gypsy. "I've been expecting you. Too long has it been since the Lord of these lands sits with the Vistani. Now what do you wish to know?"

"You already know the questions I seek to ask, old woman" he snarled at her. "Answer them or face my wrath. I'm in no mood for your riddles. Speak now or forever hold your peace."

He sat back and waited. She looked at him with all knowing eyes. She put her hands together and steepled them, fingertips touching her nose. "Someone has gone through a great deal of trouble to assemble individuals to do you harm. I know not the names. Only that the signs I've received as of late lead me to believe that your life may well be in danger. That is all I've been able to discover." She breathed out even as she wrung her hands together, relieving her stress. "Now leave me I am fatigued and wish to rest." She rose and moved back through a curtain.

He stayed there, thinking about what she'd said.

Who were these people and why was Lyssa's curse removed? Not an easy task. Enough! I am master of Barovia! I am the land! Let these individuals worry about me and what they can try to do to harm me.

He rose from his seat and exited the vardo. He hurried back to the castle and began preparing for eventual perpetrators of his home.



He changed to bat form, and soared into the Barovian night.

I've waited this long to give back to Strahd what he gave to me. Now the time is upon me to deliver my vengeance on him! Glorious it will be the demise of Strahd Von Zarovich. I'll relish the moment for many a moon.

He flew high, and observed the moon. It almost appeared blood red. Before he knew it, he was over the village of Hoessla. He surveyed the town and descended. Given the time of night, no soul should have been afoot

and about the town. Luck was with him this night. It boded well for the battle in two days if he was this lucky this evening! He swooped low and followed the man from atop the buildings. He alighted on foot thirty feet ahead of the man, in an alley. Once the man passed him, he moved into the street from his hiding place in the alley. Soon enough he caught up to the man. He placed his hand on his future victims shoulder. The man yelled out and nearly jumped out of his skin. Unfortunately for him, he turned to look, and the last thing he saw was Leo's hungry face descending upon his neck. A scant few minutes later, the body dumped into an alley, Leo transformed once again to a bat and returned to Montari's home. He couldn't wait to be at the castle and to finally defeat Strahd. Once he arrived near the home, he transformed back to his human form in a dark alley and walked back to the house. He used a key he'd been given and descended to his room. Satisfied with his evening, he crept into his coffin. Closing it he smiled and thought again how wonderful it would be with no Von Zarovich around!

The next two days passed without incident and finally the moment arrived where he found himself with Lyssa at the castle. With them were thirty men and six mages. Two men advanced to the massive doors that gave entry to the castle proper. Sure enough as they approached, four gargoyles descended from the castle and proceeded to the two men. A mage began spellcasting and within minutes, the four gargoyles flew towards the men. The mage finished his incantation and the four gargoyles bounced off an invisible wall protecting the men. The gargoyles turned their attentions to the mages even as the two men reached the doors. The doors offered no resistance as the men opened them and waved to the rest of the party, beckoning them to join them. The mages,

meanwhile, prepared their next spells. One mage concentrated and pointed at a Gargoyle, as did three others. A green bolt flew from each of their fingers, each mage's green ray striking each gargoyle. The gargoyles had no chance and disintegrated into nothingness, a threat no more. Satisfied no more trouble would greet them until they entered the castle, the party advanced. Both Leo and Lyssa were impressed with the mages thus far. Gargoyles were a minor annoyance to both of them. They followed the party, staying behind. Strahd hadn't shown his true defenses yet, and thus the both of them didn't feel secure yet. Once the party had passed the double doors, they slammed shut.

Some of the men looked back, jumpy. They proceeded to the entrance hall. Two elaborate stairways greeted them on each side. As well two passages greeted them near each stairway. "To the left" Leo spoke aloud. "That's the way we must go." Before they could even advance. A door was heard opening and from the right passage emerged skeleton after skeleton. There must have been at least twenty! And from above, a statue of a dragon turned into a flash dragon, of small size, but still a threat. The wyrm flew down and breathed at the party, hell fire attacking. Men yelled and screamed in terror or pain, who knew? The mages were prepared and the dragon fire merely deflected off of them. Two men lay dead on the floor, burnt to a deadly crisp. The other living men battled with the skeletons, defeating them. Bones lay everywhere as did a few more men. Montari was smart enough to hire enough men as cannon fodder to take up the brunt of the damage.

Meanwhile the mages were occupied with the dragon, albeit a smaller one. One mage cast the same spell as was cast at the wall,

and burned a nasty gash in the dragon. Another mage cast an orb of acid at the wyrm, opening a severe gash in the wyrm's armor. Ichor ran freely from the dragon now. It fell to the floor, denting it slightly. The other two mages acted quickly. They'd done their homework on the castle through Jacqueline and the information she'd gathered. One mage cast the same orb as the preceding one and the dragon roared in agony. Oh how it roared. The last mage had a sword, and once his spell was terminated, he ran forward, and even as the dragon struggled to rise, he drove the blade with both hands right through the dragon's skull, exiting under the thing's mouth! The party stopped to get their breath and take stock. Two men were down, but more importantly, the first line of Strahd's defenses was eliminated! Lyssa relished in the destruction of Strahd's minions as did Leo. It had been near four hours since she'd been awake now. She grinned as he passed through the passage after the men and the mages. Leo was next to her, face serious. Only twenty men remained from the first assault on Strahd's castle. Leo was concentrated on the passageway. Thus when Lyssa crumpled to the ground in a heap, he registered her fall but didn't act.

So the mages merely gave her another hour, nothing more. Pity. . . I'll get all the glory and she'll be relegated to nothingness.

Perhaps Strahd's minions will depose of her. He passed her by without a second glance, intent on disposing of Von Zarovich permanently. The party passed through the passageway with no opposition. Near the end of the hallway was a door in front of them, one on their right and one on their left. The men looked to the mages as did Leo. One of the mages nodded. He and his compatriots huddled together, having a brief discussion. One of them uttered a few arcane phrases and studied each door. Satisfied he was

correct in his findings, he relayed his them to the others. "This door is the one" was all he said. The door in front of them all was the one he indicated. Another mage uttered a few phrases and the door glowed blue. Then it shattered all together, spraying wood everywhere. The party dodged out of the way of the scattered wood spray, inwardly cursing the arrogant mage. Before them lay a stairwell which descended into darkness. The remaining warriors looked back and one mage nodded. He whispered a few phrases and on one of the warrior's blades a light appeared. Satisfied, the warrior began descending the stairs slowly. Then the next, and the next, until all but the six mages and Leo remained atop the stairwell. One mage became rigid and his eyes went up into his head. He shook, even as the other mages went into action. One pulled him away from the stairwell, while another moved to the entrance, yelling down "Retreat! Retreat! " Even as he spoke, a loud FWOOSH! Could be heard and a massive blast of heat was felt even by the remaining mages as well as Leo. Strangled screams of agony could be heard and hurried footsteps as well. A few seconds later seven men returned, faces black with soot, armor steaming, and coughing. One of them spoke

"All we heard as something. . . . COUGH. . . COUGH. . . . like a click and then before we knew what was happening, a small ball of fire flew toward us, growing in proportions rapidly. That was coupled. . . . COUGH. . . . COUGH. . . with another ball right after it. They both grew to very big proportions. . . COUGH. COUGH. and hit us hard. Only we survived as we were in the rear of the line."

The man leaned down, grabbing his knees and took a moment to catch his breath as did the remaining soldiers. Leo wasn't surprised and cared not that men had died. They were cannon fodder after all, the very reason

they'd been hired was for this such purpose. Stefan hadn't informed them of that very fact though. Let them think they were differently. The remaining men must now realize that this was going to be much more difficult than they previously thought. Ah, soldiers of fortune from another land. Pity most of them would perish. Leo would need some nourishment later.

The mages huddled once more and discussed in hushed tones. Two of them cast spells and both of them approached the entryway, eyes red from their spells. Within a minute they turned to the remaining party and nodded. "The stairwell is safe from any other spells now. We can proceed." They moved aside. The seven remaining soldiers seemed hesitant. Leo spoke then "The Ms. Will reward you even more once the mission is completed. Come now, let's move. We're on a tight schedule. Just think" he smiled "There are less of you, so that means more gold for each of you. Now let's move! " The men looked at each other, and being men with absolutely no scruples, as most mercenaries usually are, they continued down the passage. As they passed, the previous fire attack was evident. Burnt and charred bodies lay on the stairs. As well, the walls were black with soot and steam rose off them and the dead bodies. Once arrived below, the passage continued on for many feet. Leo remembered it well from the map Jacqueline had shown him. He knew not how, but she had managed to get a partial map of the castle through some source in Darkon. Apparently some scholar had actually been inside the castle while Strahd slumbered, or so the man thought. Anyways, the man noted what he could and had since been declared dead. In his possessions was this map and she had to spend a pretty copper to obtain it. He knew the passage would end in a fork. Two doors. The one on

the right led to Strahd's laboratory which he might wish to look at later. The door on the left opened to a long hallway and another door. Through this door was where they'd find the crypt of the deceased Von Zaroviches and the door to Strahd's sleeping quarters. The mages were satisfied about the hallway and urged the men on. Leo followed, secure in the fact that the mages would be detrimental in defeating Strahd. They walked in silence until the two doors. A mage uttered an incantation and approached both doors. In doing so a trap door opened beneath him and he plunged deep into the hole, yelling at the top of his lungs until a loud SPLAT! THUNK! Could be heard from below. As the party passed the hole (The passageway is large enough to accommodate two people in width) if they looked below they'd see the mage impaled on several wooden pikes poking up through the floor. Leo spoke then "The door on the left is the one we take. Let's tread carefully from here on in. Arrogance, not counting carelessness, isn't a trait to have here in that bastard's castle as you can plainly see.

The men nodded to each other and Leo. A mage cast a spell and observed the door on the right as well as the floor, walls and ceiling surrounding the door. Now satisfied, he whispered "It's safe to pass the door, but don't move farther than three or four feet from it. I sensed magic on the other side, but it's faint, meaning it's safe to move in a few feet, nothing more." The soldiers nodded and one opened the door. It made a loud screeching noise, but in all seriousness, the proprietor of the castle knew they were there, so the noise didn't matter all that much at the moment. They proceeded down the hallway and stopped as the mages had instructed. One mage stepped forward and removed a wand. Uttering a word he pointed it in front of him at the floor, walls and ceiling. He moved forward slowly and stopped halfway to the door. He looked back at the party and

then put away his wand. He began chanting and moving his fingers in intricate patterns. When completed the floor in front of his glowed a bright blue and sizzled and flared, temporarily blinding everyone. A few seconds later the passageway returned to normal. The mage ahead of you tipped his finger from his forehead to the rest of the party and turned. He walked slowly to the door and then stopped. Again he used his wand, on the door. He looked back "Jesper I need your help here. Come." A mage left the party and approached the mage at the door. They conversed in hushed tones and the one called Jesper proceeded with another incantation. With his last phrase, he pointed the door and it turned red. Then a deeper red and finally the red disappeared and the door opened. He looked back and said "It's safe to pass the door but hurry, I've only temporarily annulled the magic in it." The party took heed of his words and passed through the door into the Von Zarovich family crypt.

As they walked through, none recognized any names except for one person. Leo. He observed everything with disdain, but thought it better to vent his fury on the one responsible. Let my rage and fury be the downfall of that arrogant bastard Strahd. Too long has he been taking advantage of the Barovian people. It's time for a change Let us be the ones taking advantage and not him. His time is well passed.

"Be very careful now. We are near our goal. Through the door is our target. Let us proceed with extreme caution now. He is expecting us, but I doubt he expected us to make it this far and be of this large a number. Remember your reward will be immense when we succeed." He turned to the mages.

"You remember the spell you'll need against our foe. Ready it quickly and once you see him, cast it. Beware his tricks, I am sure he'll have a few."

Two mages approached the door. The same two mages approached the door and again, cast their spells and used the wand. The door turned green this time and began melting until it's remains lay on the floor, sizzling and bubbling. Ahead was pitch black. Hurriedly the mages handed everyone vials and held vials for themselves as well. "Drink up" one said. The party, mages included, did. Now instead of being pitch black the party saw as if it were lighted properly. The room was large enough. In the center was a large sarcophagus. The room appeared empty. The soldiers looked back, unsure of what to do. A mage nodded to him and waved him in. He gripped his sword tightly and walked in, as did the rest of the seven soldiers. Once they were in a voice could be heard from inside uttering arcane phrases. A mage yelled out "DUCK! GET DOWN! " An electric surge could be heard and screams of pure agony along with them. Several thuds! Could be heard at once. Instantly the five remaining mages began chanting spells even as Leo passed through the door, diving to the side. One mage disappeared and passed through the door, as did the others. Being invisible had it's advantages after all. Four mages saw no opponent, but the fifth one did. He moved as he chanted and once done, a small ball of acid fled his hand. As it flew true to it's target, it grew until it was a nice sized orb of acid. It splashed an area where there appeared to be nothing. The area flickered briefly as the acid covered it's area and dripped down slowly. At first nothing was apparent in the space. Then a resounding yell could be heard and a figure appeared. That of a dark haired man dressed in a finely tailored suit. He was nearly unharmed by the acid, yet his immaculate cloak was burnt through and one of his hands sizzled and hissed. Thus stood before the party Strahd Von Zarovich, rightful, well in his mind, ruler of Barovia. His eyes were red and sharp pointy teeth protruded from his mouth. Five of the

remaining soldiers fled the scene in complete terror, their footsteps receding in the distance. The same traps took care of them. Strahd had kept busy while the party had been passing through his home. Two doors opened and figure after figure emerged. Four stone golems approached the party as Strahd moved back to take a staff from a shelf. He laughed maniacally as one of the mages cast a fireball at him and it struck him dead center in the chest, burning his clothes and his body partially. One mage said "A clone? Can it be? This one is crafty indeed." The fake Strahd cackled and returned a fireball at the group. A mage in the group said a word and his ring flashed once, the fireball entering it. A voice whispered through the room:

"Fools! You enter my home and attempt to destroy me! *I AM THE LAND!* You can't harm me, most certainly in my own abode! "

The party looked around a moment, searching for the source of the voice, finding none.

One mage spoke a word of power and as a golem went to strike at him, he merely touched it. A blue ray of energy surrounded the golem, starting at the arm. Within a few moments the arm turned into mud, as did the rest of Strahd's minion. Three other mages, seeing the success of their compatriot, did the same, and in the time it took for the stone golems to exit their secret doors, they were turned into mud. Laughter could be heard from everywhere in the room. The acid on the clone began eating away at him, it's right arm now gone. It cackled with glee even as it attempted a spell. Though in great pain it removed a stone and a pinch of dust from a pouch. Targeting a mage, a green ray flew from his hand to his target. The green ray enveloped the mage and he screamed in agony just before he crumbled into nothing, disintegrated on the spot! The room shimmered and suddenly the walls disappeared. In the real crypt now stood

twenty large skeletons and ten large zombies. Leo grinned evilly as he lept forward and let his claws and rage do the talking. He plowed through the zombies, limbs and several heads flying everywhere. The remaining soldiers attacked the skeletons, having some success. The undead retaliated. Now the soldiers lay dead, leaving only the five mages and Leo. The five mages cast as the skeletons advanced. Lightning flew towards the bony undead. The skeletons crackled with energy, and in a massive blast, exploded. Pieces and splinters of bone showered Leo and the remaining five mages.

The room now appearing as it really was, they saw the outline of a door straight ahead. No light was apparent from under it. Leo nodded to the mages and grinned wickedly. He reached into the pocket of his vest and removed a ring. He tapped a mage on the shoulder. "This should help to replace our dead comrades. Kerlish is the word." The mage looked at him and donned it. Concentrating he spoke the word and soon after realized just what the ring was. On the stairs and in the room, the remains of their dead comrade soldiers rose. The mage looked at Leo and smiled in appreciation.

"Go to the door, and open it."

He told their new comrades in arms. The zombies all flocked to the said door and one of them opened it. An explosion rocked the room, but only the zombie who opened the door was gone. In his wake was a trail of smoke and ash. Leo urged the others on. "We're so close to our goal. Let's get this over with! " Where the door had been, now was a passage filled with smoke and the aroma of charred flesh. The zombies passed first, then the mages and of course Leo. It descended deeper into the castle proper and minutes later they came upon another door. A mage uttered a word of power, pointing at the door. Sure enough, it glowed blue. He

turned to the other mages and they conversed hurriedly. Two mages pointed at the door and cast spells. The blue glow disappeared. The mage with the ring ordered a zombie to open the door. It did and nothing happened. Before the party was a small room of ten by ten by ten. A coffin was on the far left wall. A man stood in the middle of the room, looking at the party with an air of authority. This, the party presumed, was Strahd Von Zarovich. Leo hung back, not in the room yet, but with a good view of that bastard. .

How I want to rip his dead heart out and feed it to him! Let these people weaken him first, then I'll finish him!

A magical battle of the likes never have been seen now takes place! Though alone, the crafty Strahd casts spell after spell at the party, targeting the mages and zombies. Early in the battle, the zombies perish from both Strahd's and the mages spells. As the battle progresses, the mages begin to gain the upper hand. Though Strahd is powerful, he is but one person. He soon realises he is outmatched against these Hazlani mages. Reaching deep inside himself, digging into his reserves he casts a powerful spell even as the five mages cast powerful spells. Luckily for Leo he is in the next room. What transpires next is something many had hoped but never lived to see. In a brilliant flash of light, the room shakes and a massive explosion rocks the castle to the core! Leo is lucky enough to dive back and close the door of the first crypt behind him. Even as he closes the door, he feels the immense heat of the powerful spells that have caused such destruction. Inside, one mage remains. the four others are but ash. Leo dons gloves and opens the door. Peering inside he sees one mage in the far corner of the room, naked and body smouldering, but unconscious.

Where the four other mages stood is now a large pile of ash. And finally, where his

nemesis and cause of imprisonment stood, now is but a small pile of ash. *Can it be? Is he gone?* In answer to his question, a wolf song began in the distance. Then closer. Finally, though he was below the castle, a song of sorrow, howled by the wolves of Barovia could be heard throughout the land.

Barovians everywhere stirred from their slumbers. The sad eerie wolf song waking them. They were unaware of it's meaning but subconsciously, somehow, knew that their lives would never be the same again. Leo spent the next few days scouring the castle for signs of Strahd. He found none. As well when he found Zaroviches dungeons he found skeletons and zombies wandering around listlessly, no purpose or master to follow. This merely confirmed the fact that Strahd was in fact, dead. He didn't know what to feel. On one hand he felt robbed because he didn't kill the bastard. On the other hand he was glad he didn't have to face him, as Zarovich was a formidable opponent. Montari had chosen her mages well. Though only one remained, they'd got the work done. The mage had since been rewarded for his troubles and after recuperating, agreed to stay in Barovia for a fee. That being whatever he could salvage from the castle and use. Since Jacqueline and Leo had absolutely no use for anything arcane, it was agreed that he had free reign of the castle for all things pertaining to the arcane. This came as no surprise to Lyssa. Over the next few weeks, when she was of course awake, she spent most of her time with the mage. She was eager to learn new spells and he was actually patient enough to teach her. Having been a teacher at the Academy in Hazlani did ease his task with Lyssa.

Soon they discovered that exiting Barovia was impossible. This infuriated Montarri to no end. No business could be done by her

Red Vardo Traders. She still was in search of her head, but had never had any luck finding it. Now that noone could leave Barovia, she'd not be able to send out her agents to search for it elsewhere.

Perhaps Strahd was more connected to the land than we realise. If noone can get out, that means that noone can get in either. Not good at all. I guess it's a fair price to pay for ridding this godforsaken place of him.

Over the next few weeks, Jacqueline created her Goblyn militia. She used them to police Barovia. Soon the population became used to this. The tale going around the land was that the Lord Strahd Von Zarovich had died suddenly and in his place to rule was Jacqueline Montari. Documents were produced and eventually Barovians came to accept their new ruler. She, Leo, Lyssa and the mage all lived at the castle. It was big enough to house them all and more. The mage was still getting accustomed to so much magical paraphernalia in one place. Strahd was not one for believing excesses were wrong. There were more than enough components to serve an army and he had them all to himself. That's not counting the books Strahd had owned. If ever a mage could feel like a child in a candy store, he was that mage.

.....



June 22nd, 775, Immol, Barovia

Ilya Ivanovich hurried his breakfast. The five year old could barely keep still. As he stuffed his face with the hot porridge his mother had prepared, he could only think of the fun he'd have today with his friend Pavel. They'd been friends ever since their mothers, neighbors, had introduced them. Pavel was more adventurous of the two. That's not to say Ilya wasn't adventurous. It happened on

occasion that he was adventurous. Ilya was the thinker of the two. When he was done, he grabbed his plate and put it on the counter for his mother. "Ilya, have fun with Pavel. Be wary of the guards, please. You know the rules. I don't want to have to come get you at the guard station again and find you with welts on your back!" She ruffled her son's dark brown hair, then watched him exit the house and head for Pavel's.

She sighed.

It hadn't always been this way. When the count was alive, we had more freedom. Now these red-eyed monstrosities of guards rule the city. We can't even leave our home after curfew for fear of reprisals from Lord Montarri. New ruler? More like self-appointed ruler.

Noone knew what had happened to Count Von Zarovich those years ago, only that he was deceased and in his stead would rule the Lord Jacqueline Montarri as was decreed by the Lord Von Zarovich's last will and testament. The populace was content at first, with the disposal of the "Devil Strahd". They were hopeful that with a new ruler, life would be better. They soon learned differently. Strange guards soon patrolled the streets of Immol, the village of Barovia and other cities of Barovia.



The strange ring of fog to the castle was now long gone. Soon enough, it was discovered that none could leave Barovia. The strange wall of mist permitted none to leave. That was bad for trade. Thus for the next few years, the population of Barovia struggled with being shut off from the rest of the land. Soon it became a way of life, and people adjusted to their new reality.

Now the Goblins policed the land with an iron fist. People cowered in fear when the guards passed them on the street. They

silently cursed the Lord Montarri and her Goblins. Still the land was home to nocturnal beasts, but none as fierce as when the Count Zarovich was alive. So, soon after her rule began, new taxes were levied on the populace. At first the people could pay, but then drought began, and farmers soon had troubles paying their taxes. Farms were seized in the name of the Lord, and people executed for non-payment. Thus began Jacqueline Montarri's era as ruler of Barovia. The population became accustomed to the steep taxes and paid them for fear of reprisals from their new ruler.

June 22nd, 775 Exterior of Barovia

Finrod looked back to the party. "I'm not sure. The fog appears to have diminished substantially, Pierre. We've been here seven times in the past few years and this is the first time we see a change in them." The half elf looked again at the wall of mist. Gradually as he looked at it, the wall began dissipating until it was gone. He frowned.

Could it be? Finally after all these years, we can enter Barovia? I've had similar problems entering Kartakass, but not my home Sithicus. Odd happenings in these lands. Something must have brought out these occurrences, but I've yet to detect why. Even Pierre, with his diving abilities hasn't learned a thing as of yet.

"Pierre, Lucian. Let's traverse the border carefully. It could be a mere happenstance. Wilhelm" the half elf calls to the fourth member of their party "If we don't come back or something happens, get back to the base in Darkon. Then report to the Duchess Kazandra. That's an order." He turned to the other two. "Shall we?"

The other two were both native Souragniens. Far from home indeed. They'd long ago left their tropical island behind. For years now, they'd been part of something grand in detail. Namely the Kargat, based all

over the lands, but mainly in Darkon. It was ruled by the Lady Kazandra. The four of them had been working together for years now, and when the trouble of entering Barovia began, she quickly gathered the four of them and sent them to investigate. Gathering no information at Barovia's doors, they traveled the lands and discovered that some countries were closed to outsiders. That meant not only could noone enter, but none could exit the land as well. This had been going on for near five years now. This was their seventh trip here, and they were about to leave. That was before the mists dissipated.

The half elf nodded to Wilhelm. Along with the two Souragniens, he passed into Barovia. The first visitor there in fact, in five years. Wilhelm was from Falkovnia. He'd fled there years ago. His father was a talon, and he a military man. He didn't agree with his fathers ideals or the King Fuhrer's for that matter. It only took him one night on manouvers with his squadron to flee the country. Of course there was now a price on his head, but that was in Falkovnia, not anywhere else.

Curse his father and the King Fuhrer! I'm better off than I ever was and never will I return to the cursed home of my birth!

Once they'd been in Barovia for ten minutes, Finrod tred to cross back to where Wilhelm was. He did with absolutely no difficulty. He looked to the ex-Falkovnian sergeant."All right, come with us then. I think it's safe to presume the wall of mist is gone for good." Without looking back, he moves back into Barovia, followed by Wilhelm."Okay people, let's head for Immol and see what's been going on in Barovia these past few years."

They traveled for a few days. Meeting few or no travelers. This confirmed their suspicions that the Barovians knew of the closed borders and had pretty much given up

on trying to exit their land for trade or travel. Upon spying the city of Immol, Finrod stopped."I want to approach the city by myself and look around. Get the lay of the land, guys. Keep out of sight here in the woods." He turned his head, listening intently."No wolves howling, and it's near evening. That's not what I'd expect from Barovia in general. For now, keep out of sight. If I'm not back in one hour, come looking for me. Hard. Understood?" When his three companions nodded, he turned and walked down the road into Immol. As he passed into Immol, the first thing he noticed was the citizens hurrying along the streets. *What's the big rush?* That was before he spotted the patrol. He moved quickly to the shadows and hid in a quickly darkening alley. There he got a good look of the patrol, registering that they were in fact, not human. He'd heard tell of these creatures, but they weren't natives of Barovia.

What were they doing here? And why were they patrolling the city. No wonder the population was hurrying home. I bet there's a curfew and these patrols enforce the curfew.

Calrogon watched the patrol walk by. By the time the patrol had passed, the street was empty. He waited a few minutes more. When he was sure the coast was clear, he headed back to the rendezvous with the others. Once he arrived he told them of his findings."We should camp here this evening and tomorrow head into town and get a room at the Inn there. I think we should stay a few days and get the sense of the population. Once we're done here, we should head back to Karg and report. I am betting she'll want us to go and investigate the other cities in Barovia. Let's set up camp and have a good meal. Then we should get some rest. We can split our watches."

The party makes camp in the woods and has a dull meal. Afterwards they settle in and

take their watches as the others sleep. Nothing happens during the evening, which raises concerns in Finrod. All the times he'd been here he'd been attacked or followed by wolves. And not just any wolves but huge monstrous wolves. Now it was way too quiet for it to be a mere coincidence. They'd get the lay of the land soon enough. A few days would learn them a great deal. The night passes without incident.

The next morning they head into Immol. People are milling about the street, on their workplaces or the market. The party makes it quickly to the Inn and enter. A man wipes a glass listlessly at the bar. He looks up from his menial task, then looks back down. He does a double take and looks at the party again. "Praise the Morninglord. New customers! Come in, come in! " He puts the glass down and tosses the dishtowel over his shoulder. He walks quickly from behind the counter to a free table. "Sit, sit! Sit here! I'll get you some coffee to start, then get your orders! " The man pulls the four chairs out from the table for them, then heads off to the kitchen. He seems to be filled with purpose for the first time in years? The party hears pots and pans clang from the kitchen and hushed voices.

He exits soon enough with a tray. On it are four mugs of something steaming. He walks over to the table, and hands each man a mug of coffee. "There you go. Ah my manners have fled me. I am Pietro Duvolich. Proud owner of The Roaring Boar. Welcome, welcome! Now my wife is busy cooking you nice folk breakfast. Might I join you?" He doesn't wait for an answer. Turning, he moves to another table and grabs a chair. He comes quickly back to their table and sets it near them. Turning the chair so he could lay his arms on the back, he sits. "Please, feel at home here! I haven't had a stranger here in over five years. ? What news from outside Barovia? What brings you here, strangers?"

Fairhafen

Where the happy ending is yet to come...

By Wolfkook

email

Once upon a time, not far from here, there was a great king who governed fairly and with justice. Everybody in the kingdom loved him dearly, and he loved them in return. He betrothed a fair lady from a nearby kingdom, and together they had a beautiful daughter, with skin like snow, lips like red roses and hair like burning fire. However, their happiness was not complete, for when the little princess was born, her mother passed away.

Years passed, and with each one, the princess grew in beauty and in grace, but also in kindness and wit, and with time her father, the king, started to long for the company of a woman. He found a suitable wife in an elegant noblewoman who had been left a widower little after he had, and he decided to ask her. She accepted, and soon the king was married for a second time.

Everybody in the kingdom was happy, but unknown to them, the new queen was in fact an evil witch, who had charmed the king into marrying her, and who just wanted a share of his fortune and his power. Soon after she and the two daughters of her previous marriage came to the castle, the king started

to change, bewitched by his new wife. He stopped paying attention to the kingdom, and to his daughter. The princess couldn't understand what was happening to him, and tried to talk with him. One time after another, her stepmother would refuse her the privilege of seeing her own father, alleging that he was too tired and busy to spend time with her, as he used to.

Worse still, her new stepsisters took on their new positions as princesses all too quickly, and they started pushing her around and treating her like a commoner, making her life impossible. For all her education, the princess tolerated their behavior, but their attitude towards her only got worse, verging on the edge of humiliation.

Months passed, and the health of the king started to crumble. She wanted to see her father but everybody would deny it to her. Even doctors and priests had the access she wouldn't. In a couple of months, the king's flame extinguished, and the princess never had a chance to say goodbye.

The Kingdom of Fairhafen

Cultural Level: Medieval (7).

Landscape: Full Ecology (Temperate Mountains, Forests and Plains). In the outskirts of the majestic Rätsel mountains, and dominated by the imposing Marschensloss castle the kingdom of Fairhafen is a rural domain that stands between the tyranny of its queen, and the hope of its people. Its landscape is totally dominated by the Rätsels, which raise like a spiral, having the Sneedronningen, the highest peak of the range, at the center of the kingdom, and giving place to an almost vertical landscape, with treacherous roads and breathtaking views, which include snowy, clouded peaks, and huge falls that give place to almost constant rainbows.

In the valleys and outskirts of the mountains, the sights are also impressive, with the heavy Black Forest covering most of the area, being breached only by the Wichtelmänner and a couple of lesser rivers, that either die or are born in the beautiful Svanereden Lake, to the southwest. Meanwhile, in the western half of the kingdom lays a lush plain where civilization thrives to prosper in small towns and solitary but sturdy houses, usually made of brick or rock, and painted in clear colors, with wooden ceilings, which are usually painted red in the town of Rotkäppchen. Climate is shaped by the seasons, but even summer tends to be somewhat colder than it is in other places.

The landscape of Fairhafen changes at sunset, however. As the beautiful kingdom submerges into shadow, the Rätsels become even more treacherous and menacing, the Marschensloss turns into a dark, evil castle, and the Black Forest becomes twisted and forbidding, as its more sinister inhabitants come out of their lairs. The plains also take a darker shape, as the mists rise from the

Svanereden to engulf most of the kingdom. Few of the kingdom's inhabitants dare to go out in these hours.

Major Settlements: Dornröschen (2,300), a small town of miners and herders amidst the Rätsels, and overviewed by the Marschensloss castle, which seems to be perpetually devoid of joy and laughter, as if dormant; Aschenputtel (8,200), the biggest city in the kingdom, in the shores of the Svanereden, named after the ashy snow which falls on the town throughout the winter; Rotkäppchen (3,600), a little town of gatherers and foresters in the border of the Black Forest, widely recognized by its red ceilings and honest people; Schneewittchen (700), a dwarven town in the northeast of the kingdom, between the Black Forest and the Rätsels.

The Folk: Population – 30,000. Humans 96%, Dwarves 3%, Others 1%. Languages – Falkovnian*. Dwarven, Mordentish. Religions – None.

The people of Fairhafen tend to have a very light complexion. Commoners tend to have broad shoulders and wide bodies, with hair color ranging from dark blond to medium brown, and eyes which go from hazel to brown. Nobles are usually slimmer, and their hair and eye color is usually lighter, with blue and green being fairly common. Men usually grow beards, and cut their hair short, while women leave it long but well kempt. Colorful clothes are common, with green and red being favorites on women's skirts and men's pants. Both genders use to wear black vests over white shirts and blouses, respectively. Married women also use a simple headdress, little more than embroidered kerchiefs.

Fairhafeners are known to treat foreigners better than the people of most other domains. Indeed, most of them verge on being outright friendly. Most have not seen a foreigner in years, and are eager to share time with

people from other lands, and to know more about the rest of the world. By law, however, the people from foreign lands should be taken to the Queen for an official greeting, and soldiers are always looking for such people. Most fairhafeners, knowing better than that, will help strangers at passing through without being noticed.

The Law: Hereditary Monarchy (Feudal Despotism). A long time ago, the royal family of Fairhafen was blessed by the gods, who granted them an unusual tie to their land, which allowed them to communicate with plants and animals alike, and to control them, and the land itself. In exchange, the king of Fairhafen promised to rule with wisdom and fairness. As a result, for centuries, only those of royal blood were allowed to rule.

When King Drosselbart died, some 30 years ago, his daughter, princess Rosenbriar, was not old enough to assume the title of queen. As was customary, then, Queen Avarein, second wife of the deceased king and the princess's stepmother, who was not of the blood and who hadn't been able to bear her husband any children, took on the responsibilities of rulership while the princess grew up. Months later, when the princess was about to celebrate her sixteenth birthday and be old enough to assume the crown, she suffered from a terrible accident, who left her in a permanent state of catatonia, and queen Avarein's rulership suddenly extended until the princess woke up from her slumber.

As a ruler, however, Queen Avarein has proven to be a harsh and despotic tyrant, taking advantage of her political advantage and her numerous troops to enforce the obedience of her people, to collect taxes in a very efficient way, and to punish anyone who dares to question her authority. Curiously, those who manage to defy her and to evade her men, usually end up suffering

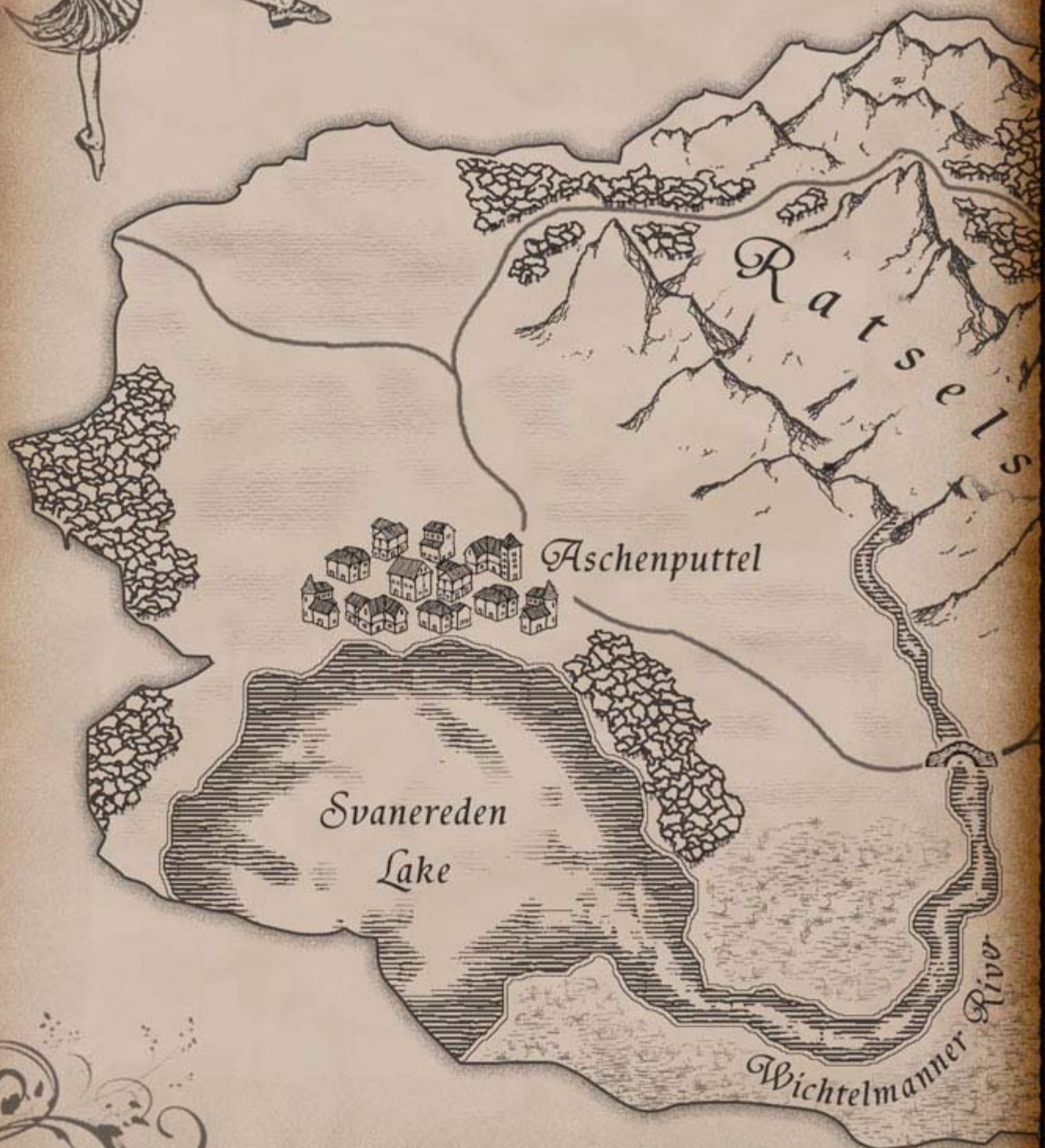
from terrible accidents, or simply disappearing.

As almighty as she may seem, however, queen Avarein is a distant figure at best, preferring to leave most day-to-day issues to local burgomasters and landowners, who are responsible for the administration of their lands or cities. Traditionally, the feudal system in Fairhafen was pretty loose, with little real power in the hands of the nobles; Since Queen Avarein ascended to the throne, however, she gave them much more power and responsibility, trying to ensure her position and to release herself from its burdens. Since then, the nobles have grown accustomed to their newfound power and most have grown prideful and abusive.

Trade and Diplomacy: Resources – Wheat, apples, grapes, hazelnuts, hogs, goats, sheep, cattle, beer, wine, sausage, timber, iron, salt, gems, leather goods, furniture. Coinage – Oak (gp), cedar (ep), willow (sp), bean (cp).

The once vibrant land of Fairhafen, that used to be one of the most important trade centers of the world it came from, has had its trade routes cut off since the mists came to engulf it. Since then, the kingdom has been forced to use only its own resources. Luckily, Fairhafen has enough of them to sustain itself, so poverty and starvation are not serious concerns. In recent years, travelers from distant lands have started to come to the kingdom, bringing with them news of other lands beyond the ever-present mists, and though the people of the kingdom always welcome these travelers, making them feel at home and generally being curious about the rest of the world, Queen Avarein doesn't seem to share her subjects' hospitality: She has ordered her men that all foreigners are brought before her, and those who have been caught by them and brought to Marschensloss Castle have not been seen again.

The Kingdom



of Fairhafen



Schneewitchen

The Black
Forest

Marschensloss

Dornroschen

Granny's
House

Rotkappchen



Characters: Classes – Bards, fighters, rangers, rogues, sorcerers, swashbucklers, warlocks. Skills – Climb, craft (Carpentry, gemcutting, metalworking, stonemasonry, weaving), diplomacy, handle animal, hide, knowledge (Arcana, architecture and engineering, nobility and royalty), move silently, perform, profession (Farmer, fisher, herdsman, lumberjack, miner), ride, sleight of hand, survival, use rope. Feats – Alertness, animal affinity, athletic, combat expertise (Plus derivatives), deft hands, courage, magical aptitude, mounted combat (Plus derivatives), negotiator, point blank shot (Plus derivatives), quick draw, stealthy, track, voice of wrath, weapon finesse.

Personalities of Note: Besides queen Avarein and princess Rosenbriar, one of the most important figures in the kingdom is Count Lothar (Male Human Ari7, Fig3, LE), the brother of late king Drosselbart, and the rightful successor to the crown if princess Rosenbriar was to die. Lothar is a scheming backstabber who used to use his political power to his advantage during the reign of his older brother, but who lost most of his influence when he died and the queen took hold. When princess Rosenbriar had her accident, he saw the opportunity to becoming king, and started convincing other nobles that the best for them would be to end the princess suffering. Avarein learned about her brother-in-law's plans, and responded by kidnapping his only son, making it clear that she will keep him safe for as long as he keeps his delusions of grandeur at bay. Today, Lothar is actively trying to look for people that would infiltrate Marschensloss castle to rescue his son and kill both Rosenbriar and Avarein.

Other important characters are Zmylatrix (Male Grey Jester, Bard 5, NE), the court jester and Avarein's right hand, who carries on most of her dirty tasks for her, and the queen's twin daughters, Brunhild and

Beatrix (Both Female Caliban Ari 3, Sor 3, NE), who are both frozen on their late teens. Everybody knows them for their bad disposition, their cynicism and their capriciousness, but more than anything, they are known as the ugliest women in all of Fairhaven. Spoiled as they are, however, the queen does not deny them anything, and most of the time their wishes soon become law in the whole kingdom.

Finally, there is a mysterious old woman who apparently lives near the town of Rotkäppchen, amidst the Black Forest. She has been seen mostly by the children, who have a great fondness for her, and collectively call her "The Granny" (Female Human Rank 5 Hag, Wiz 9, CE). She is famous for the delicious cookies and candies she gives them, and for the legends that have arisen around them saying that she lives in a house made of candy in the middle of the forest. Many a child had tried to get to her fabled home, and those who have done so have inexorably fallen prey to the perils of the Black Forest, disappearing forever into the woods.

Encounters: The plains of Fairhafen are home only to farm animals and the occasional predator from the Black Forest or the mountain, which in turn are burning with wildlife of all kinds. The forest, in particular, is said to be home to several malignant creatures, among which there is an enormous wolf of reputedly human-like intelligence, which lives near Rotkäppchen (Wolfgang Liebermann, lumberjack, Male Human Afflicted Werewolf, Com 9, LN/CE). It is also said that there is a small dwarven community somewhere on the outskirts of the Rätsels. There are other places which have curious legends around them, as the bridge over the Wichtelmänner river, which is said to be home to a hideous creature which only comes out at night.

Further Reading: The kingdom of Fairhafen is based on the fairy tales written and compiled by the brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen and Perrault, among others. The OGL game Grimm, from Fantasy Flight games, may give a good insight to the tone of the land of Fairhafen.

Queen Avarein

Darklord of Fairhafen

Female Human Ari5, Sor10: CR 15; Size M humanoid (5 ft. 9 in. tall); HD 5d8+9d4+22 (72hp); Init 0; Spd. 30 ft.; AC 10; Atk +7; SA Spells; SQ Familiar, Master of the Covey*; AL NE; SV Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +12; Str 10, Dex 11, Con 15, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 20.

* Queen Avarein can only use this ability when she is around her two daughters.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +13, Concentration +7, Diplomacy +14, Gather Information +8, Intimidate +14, Knowledge (Arcana) +9, Knowledge (Nobility and Courtesy) +6, Listen +5, Sense Motive +12, Spellcraft +11, Spot +5; Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Maximize Spell, Negotiator, Persuasive, Spell Focus (Enchantment).

Languages: Falkovnian.

Spells per Day: 8/7/7/6/4. Base DC = 15 + spell level, 17 + spell level for Enchantment spells.

Spells Known: 0 – Arcane Mark, Daze, Detect Magic, Ghost Sound, Mage Hand, Read Magic, Resistance, Touch of Fatigue; 1st – Charm Person, Magic Missile, Obscuring Mist, Ray of Enfeeblement, Sleep; 2nd – Blindness/Deafness, Detect Thoughts, Eagle's Splendor, Summon Swarm; 3rd – Deep Slumber, Fly, Suggestion; 4th – Crushing Despair, Polymorph; 5th – Baleful Polymorph.

Stunningly beautiful even in her middle fifties, Queen Avarein is widely recognized throughout the kingdom for her skinny figure, her royal bearing, her fine and elaborate dresses, her golden hair and her unsettlingly light blue eyes. Obsessed with her own beauty, the queen wears more make up than she should over her perfectly white skin, and the contrasting shadows, blush and mascara she uses give her a disturbing, if thoroughly magnetic, presence. No matter where she goes, or what time of the day it is, the queen always wears her royal tiara, symbol of her status, and the finest piece of jewelry in the whole kingdom.

Background

Little is known about queen Avarein before she made her first appearance in Fairhafen, when she came from a distant land after marrying one of the nobles of the region who had gone to her home country as an ambassador. Everybody was amazed at her beauty and attractiveness, but as the wife of a nobleman, however, she lacked the manners and courtesy of a woman of her status, and soon she became one of the preferred targets for the gossip of the other members of the court, especially because her new husband seemed enthralled by her mere presence, while she seemed to loath his.

The news of Avarein's pregnancy came very quickly, but as her womb started to grow, the health of her husband started to wane. Some of the nobles started to believe that she was poisoning him, expecting to take a grasp of his title and position which, by law of the state, could not be hers after his death unless she bore her children. Curiously enough, her strongest detractors among the courtesans suddenly started to become her best friends, and rumors of bribes started to spread.

At long last, Avarein had twin daughters. Her husband was overjoyed, but his happiness did not last long. Soon after the birthing, he died. Avarein was left alone, with a noble state of her own, with a title, and with two hideous daughters she despised. She tried to ignore them as much as possible, and to live the fabulous life she had always dreamt for herself. However, she wasted more than the state could handle, and before her daughters had reached the age of ten, she was on the verge of bankruptcy, looking desperately for a way to improve her finances.

And she found it. One day, when attending at a gathering in Marschensloss castle, she ended up speaking with king Drosselbart, who had lost his wife at about the same time as she had, and they ended up talking about their loses. Drosselbart, who was feeling lonely without his deceased wife, and even more so as his daughter approached her teens and the distance between them grew, was an easy prey for the social predator that was Avarein. Soon, a second encounter followed the first, and a third followed the second. Rumors ran wild, but neither Avarein nor Drosselbart paid attention. After a couple of years, the two got married for a second time, and Avarein was able to take a financial respite.

But a financial respite wasn't all that she wanted. Now, as queen, she had a taste of real power, and she wanted more. But, as before, she had an obstacle for her goals. She had a husband. But, as before, that was a problem that could easily be solved. Drosselbart fell sick within weeks, and he was soon confined into his chambers, while his wife took upon herself the responsibilities of rulership. The king died some time later, and as his daughter was too young to inherit the throne, queen Avarein continued her duties as the ruler of Fairhafen.

Her rulership was to be short ended, though; for once princess Rosenbriar had turned sixteen the queen would have to decline in her favor. She wanted to prevent that at all costs, but she knew that killing the princess would only take the throne away from her hands and into those of the next person in the line of succession –Count Lothar, her overtly ambitious brother in law –. She had to get rid of princess Rosenbriar without anyone knowing where she had gone.

How she managed to do so, it's still unknown. The truth is that on the same night princess Rosenbriar turned sixteen, and before she assumed her title as Queen of Fairhafen, the chariot that was taking her to her coronation lost control and fell from the road. The charioteer was found dead, but Rosenbriar seemed only unconscious. The princess has not awakened since then, and she hasn't aged a year after the accident.

Current Sketch

Queen Avarein's political power comes from her status as princess Rosenbriar's stepmother and tutor, and she knows that were she to die, she would lose everything. She had done all she can to protect her life while maintaining her in a state of perpetual slumber. She has even made her an almost impenetrable crystal coffin to keep her away from harm.

The queen's power, however, doesn't come only from her political status. She also has the powers of a 10th level sorceress, which become even deadlier when she is beside her two daughters (See below). She also has a lot of financial and magical resources at her disposition, including a magical window on top of Marschensloss castle which allows her to look directly into any location in Fairhafen, as if she was using clairvoyance. None of these, however, are as powerful as

princess Rosenbriar's powers, which allow her to hear anything that happens anywhere in Fairhafen, and to control nature at will. However, as the darklord of Fairhafen, the dark powers have ensured that the princess will always obey any command she gives to her, though not always in the way she wants.

The queen despises her ugly daughters, but she still pampers them, being aware of how she depends on them to cast her most powerful spells. She also needs princess Rosenbriar, and has taken every step to ensure her safety, though she would prefer to get rid of her. Count Lothar is also an obstacle to her, but the princess's powers doesn't seem to have any way to affect other members of the royal family, and that, in addition to his political influence, have prevented her from taking any action against him, except from kidnapping his son, a young, spoiled and arrogant kid that she also has to tolerate out of need. Her only unconditional ally seems to be Zmylatrix, her court jester and messenger, a disgusting little creature who carries on any of her request, but lately she has started to become suspicious of his true intentions.

In short, queen Avarein walks a fine line at trying to maintain her status of queen, and the fact that she depends so much on the people she most despises enrages her. She would certainly prefer to enjoy the privileges of her new life, but the daily problems of the kingdom and her personal life always prevent her from doing so.

Combat

Queen Avarein will try to avoid direct confrontation if possible, instead relying on the powers of her magical window and those of princess Rosenbriar to see and hear her possible enemies, and to take every possible advantage against them. Smart enough not to call too much attention, the queen will try

to use her troops first, especially if she can frame her enemies with some crime. If this is not enough, she will resort to using Rosenbriar's powers over nature to kill her enemies or to at least make things difficult for them. When forced into direct confrontation she will try to keep away from her enemies and beside her daughters, using her known spells and those she gains when around Brunhild and Beatrix, to crush them.

Master of the Covey (Sp): When queen Avarein is within 10 feet of both of her daughters, the three function like a covey of hags, gaining *animate dead*, *bestow curse* (DC 17), *control weather*, *dream*, *forcecage*, *mind blank*, *mirage arcana* (DC 18), *polymorph*, *veil* (DC 19) and *vision* as spell-like abilities. All these abilities are used with a Caster level 17th, and, unless otherwise noted, their save DCs are based on a Charisma score of 16. Use of any of these abilities requires a full-action, and both Avarein and her two daughters must participate.

Lair

Marschensloss castle used to be a beautiful fortress of white walls and blue-tipped towers encased in the Rätself, which used to welcome anyone from the neighboring towns into its walls. Today, the imposing castle has turned grey, as the paint in its walls and towers fades away for lack of maintenance, and the gates are kept closed almost permanently, zealously guarded by the queen's men. By night, the once calm castle has become a dark place, which stands as a black fortress wanting to devour its visitors.

Legends about the castle abound: It is said that the roses that once adorned the interior gardens of the castle have grown into a thick briar, with perilous thorns that have cause the demise of more than one soldier, that the

basement of the fortress is home to a ravenous beast which has a taste for human flesh, and that princess Rosenbriar still lives on top of the highest tower of the palace, frozen in eternal slumber, and locked into a crystal coffin. Whether any or all of these rumors are true, only those who dare to visit the accursed place would be able to tell.

Closing the Borders

When Avarein wants to seal her domain, it becomes surrounded by a 50 feet wide *wall of thorns* (As per the spell). When that happens, the sky over the castle becomes dark and cloudy, and lightning bolts start to crackle above it.

Princess Rosenbriar

The Frozen Beauty

Female Human Ari 3: CR 2; Size M Humanoid (6 ½ ft. tall); HD 3d8+3 (24 hp); Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 12; Atk +2 melee, +3 missile; SA Obedient Nature; SQ Sounds of the Land; AL LG (CE); SV Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +9; Str 12, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 15, Wis 18, Cha 20.

Skills and Feats: Diplomacy +10, Handle Animal +10, Knowledge (Nobility and courtesy) +6, Listen +8, Perform +10, Ride +6, Sense Motive +9, Spot +8; Great Fortitude, Iron Will, Redhead.

Languages: Falkovnian.

Spells per Day: 0/1. Base DC = 14 + spell level.

Spells Known: 1 – Speak with Animals.

As most other members of the royal family before her, princess Rosenbriar is a beautiful young girl with perfectly white skin, lake blue eyes, burning red lips, and fiery hair, with a delicate but well-formed body which stands well over the majority of the population of the kingdom, and whose

charming presence is enough to soothe and calm the wildest of beasts.

She hasn't been able to do so lately, though, as she has been unconscious for the last thirty years, locked in a crystal prison which remains around her bed in a room on top of the highest tower of Marschensloss castle. As the legend goes, however, she hasn't aged one day since the accident, and she moves once in a while, dangling in the air as if possessed, her long hair waving as it covers the walls of the crystal box and her pupils fading into an all-blue eye, every time queen Avarein asks something of her.

Background

After the death of her father, princess Rosenbriar was utterly alone and helpless from her stepmother's machinations. Her stepsister's treated her like trash, and Avarein turned her into little more than a servant, while she took the mantle of queen and started to rule in place of her father, and the realm gradually turned from green and joyful to gray and devoid of happiness.

Time went quickly, and Rosenbriar turned from a young girl into a young woman. And that became her undoing. One day, as she travelled to nearby Dônroschen, she found an old woman who begged her for help in picking up some goods which had fallen off her cart. In return for her help, the old woman offered to read her hand. Rosenbriar accepted out of curiosity, and received a frightening read: The woman warned her that the day she would turn 16, her stepmother would try to poison her. Seeing the fear in her eyes, the old crone suggested a solution: Just before her coronation, she would go to her cabin in the woods, which she would find by following a sequence of strict (if somewhat strange) directions. There, the old lady would provide her with an antidote for Avarein's poison, and once

she was queen, she could finally throw her stepmother out of her ancestral home.

Rosenbriar remembered the crone's advice, and the night before her 16th birthday, she slipped into the night with the help of a trusted servant, who took her through the black forest, following the woman's directions. Once there, she knocked at the lady's door, and she received her, telling her that her servant could wait outside. She led her in, and looking into her stuff, handed her a magical peach, urging her to eat it quickly, so it could take effect before the queen delivered her poison. She did it, and has been asleep ever since.

Current Sketch

Instead of disappearing forever as Avarein had hoped, princess Rosenbriar unconsciously foiled her elaborate plot by appearing the next morning in the highest tower of Marschenloss castle, where she has been ever since, not having aged a day.

In her current state, she is completely at the mercy of her stepmother's commands, and she answers to them almost automatically, using her land-given powers to the best of her ability.

Would she ever regain unconscious again, she would be the rightful queen of Fairhaafen. Throughout the kingdom, there are hopeful legends of how that would come to happen, and what would happen afterwards once she would become queen. But all of them are no more than that, legends.

Combat

Princess Rosenbriar doesn't have direct control of her actions, and thus she cannot take direct action against anyone unless she is ordered to by her stepmother.

Subconsciously, the princess tries to foil Avarein's commands and to do something else by playing with the wordings of her wishes and taking them too literally or too subjectively, so the queen's plans don't usually end up exactly as planned.

Sounds of the Land (Su): As a member of the royal family, princess Rosenbriar can concentrate in any plant or animal in the kingdom, and hear any noises around it. Usually, the kings and queens of Fairhaven used this power to scan for the opinions of their subjects, to search for possible enemies or traitors, or to overhear the plans of their enemies. Queen Avarein uses this power to get information of those people she considers dangerous for her.

Obedient Nature (Sp): Princess Rosenbriar can also control climate, cataclysms and even plants in the kingdom. She may use *command plants* and *control weather* once per day, *call lightning*, *ice storm*, *move earth* and *sleet storm* once per week, and *cyclone* and *earthquake* once per month. She may invoke any of these powers anywhere in the kingdom, and the effective caster level for each spell equals 14 + spell level.

Rumors, Legends and Dread Possibilities

Granny's Story

The oldest people of Rotkäpcchen remember something about a woman who was accused of witchcraft some 70 years ago. She managed to escape her captors just before she was executed, and promised to take revenge before she disappeared into the Black Forest. The forest has not been the same since then, and some say that this historical figure has turned into the mysterious "granny" the children talk about.

The Abandoned Tower

There's a tower amidst the Black Forest which has no doors and no stairs, only a window which opens more than 30 feet from the ground. Those who have ventured there tell that there is a beautiful song coming from the tower, but no one has been able to guess who lives there. The tower is very sheer, and offers no handholds at all.

The Apple Tree

In some abandoned farm in the plains near Ashenputtel there's a tree that, even as unattended as it is, gives the most beautiful and desirable apple imaginable. The apples look so good that they affect onlookers as if there was a *sympathy* spell (Caster level 9) cast on them, and they are highly addictive. It is said that the farm belonged to a man who wanted to produce the most delicious apples in the whole kingdom, and that he produced apples so provocative that he could not help but keep eating them until his stomach exploded.

The Fallen Giant

There's an enormous grayish rock with a vaguely human shape which lies to the east of Aschenputtel. According to the locals, the rock is in fact what remains of an evil but dim-witted giant who used to live in the clouds, and who fell to earth after some bandit stole something from his castle. It is said that whoever gets hold on this mysterious treasure would be able to reanimate the giant and to take control of him.

The Lost Child

It is said that a human girl lives among the dwarves of Schneewitchen, who found her wandering through the Black Forest and decided to protect and to raise her as one of their own. The girl (Female Human, Com 2, LN) lives as a dwarf girl, and the fact that she is get-

ting older and taller at a much faster rate than the other children troubles her.

The Midnight Dancers

People who have ventured into the Black Forest at night have reported that a group of twelve young girls meet in a clearing of the forest in the nights when the moon is full to dance. They dance all night, and their dancing is so beautiful that those who see them are invariably tempted to join them. When somebody joins their dance, however, the mists rise in a spiral shape from the floor, engulfing the girls and the dancer alike. When the mists dissipate, both the girls and the dancer have disappeared.

The Night Mare

A terrible horse runs through the plains of Fairhafen in those nights when the moon is not seen on the sky, and though many people have heard its thundering gallop and its screeching neigh, no one seems to have met it. Legend says that it is the steed of an accursed knight, and that those who cross its path are never to be seen again.

The Swan Lake

The swans, frogs and other animals that live in Svaderenen Lake or its fringes behave as if they are more intelligent than other beasts of their kind, and some are even said to be able to speak, though those are most surely just old wives' tales.

Adventure Hooks

Hoodwinked

A young girl from Rotkäppchen has disappeared, and her parents are desperate trying to find her. They fear she has gone into Black Forest, trying to get to "granny's house". They have to stop her at all costs before she gets to "Granny's", and before she

is intercepted by the terrible wolf that lurks the forest.

Hushnikvoftnikz

The PCs are contacted by a desperate noble mother who lost his firstborn. She tells them that a little gnome (Male Gnome, Wizard 4, Rogue 5, Arcane Trickster 3, LE) kidnapped him and took him into the forest. As the characters advance on their quest, they get involved in the endless schemes and mind games of the little man, and as they approach their objective, they discover that the noblewoman promised his firstborn child to the creature in exchange for some dark favor.

The Dormant Town

Upon entering the town of Dornröschen, the characters feel how the people in town seem to express no feelings whatsoever. When investigating, they discover that the lack of emotion comes from the feeding of a grey jester who seems to be in the service of the queen, having exchanged a promise of servitude to her for her authorization to use the town as his feeding grounds. As they start narrowing their search, however, it becomes obvious how the jester is in total control of all those bleaked ones.

The Magical Flute

An important businessman in Aschenputtel hires the PCs to recover a magical flute which was stolen from his store, telling them he has news about it having been seen somewhere else in the demiplane. After going on in the quest and bringing the flute back to their employer, he hurries up to get to the giant rock, and using the flute to wake the giant golem, and controlling them to destroy his enemies, unless the PCs are able to stop him.

The Obsessive Princess

Queen Avarein's daughters have a knack for using their influence over the queen to get

anything they want. When they see the PCs in the town of Aschenputtel, Brunhild gets a crush for the most attractive or charismatic of them, and starts trying to get his attention, at first by seemingly orthodox methods (Flirting, sending him letters and invitations), and later by more unorthodox ones (Charming him, sending the guards to catch him, etc.).

The Queen's Palace

The characters are hired by count Lothar to infiltrate castle Marschensloss and rescue his son. He also wants them to murder Queen Avarein and her dormant step-sister, but he is smart enough not to imply this if the characters don't seem to be able to ignore their consciences for a few extra gold pieces.

The Hobby's Ghost-Pipes

Piper of Stonedown

By Sharen of the Fraternity

Sharen@fraternityofshadows.com

"...aye, I recollects the Hobby ... me Da tol me o' him, aye ... in spring, in plantin'-time, afore the fields be sown, we pipes an' dances fer the Hobby's pleasin' ... likes good dancin', Hobby does, a powerful fondness has he fer dancin'... calls the stones, the Hobby does, calls 'em up from the fields, leaves the soil all cleared an' fit fer plantin', t'be thankin' us fer so merry a dance ... but Da said s'gotta be good dancin', mind ye ... dance ye poorly, ol' Hobby might just take of a mind t'call the stone t'ye..."

- Josiah Withers, late of Stonedown, in senile deathbed ramblings to his city-born heirs

Of all the farmland which the nation of Zherisia lost to the Great Upheaval, that of the sleepy, bucolic parish of Stonedown was least missed. A rocky, rugged strip on the southwestern rim of the domain, it seemed like a terrible place to grow crops, its earth riddled with plow-blunting rocks and immovable boulders. Yet despite these obstacles, the farmers of Stonedown managed to feed their families, for they had a secret ally whose annual visits made this

unforgiving corner of the realm arable ... at least, so long as the visitant's yen for entertainment was appeased.

A sylvan fey with a mystical affinity for stones and earth, whose presence in Stonedown pre-dated Zherisia's incorporation into the Land of Mists, the "Hobby" had lived in quiet symbiosis with local farmers for generations. Though reclusive and mysterious, spending most of the year melded with the rock of Stonedown's rugged terrain, the Hobby adored dancing, particularly the Morris dances of the nearby humans. Each spring, farm families would gather to dance for the Hobby's amusement. A special double-reed stone flute, nicknamed the "Ghost-Pipes" for its haunting sound, would signal the creature to emerge from the earth and spy on the proceedings from a nearby bush. If satisfied by their performance in his honor, the Hobby would reward the dancers using his own fey talents, by magically clearing rocks from their stone-riddled fields. Well aware that the territorial fey cherished his privacy, the prudent farmers kept the Hobby's existence a secret from outsiders.

Stonedown disappeared into the Mists during the Great Upheaval, and the Hobby was assumed lost along with the parish by those few Stonedowners who'd been trading in Paridon at the time, and not vanished themselves. This was not the case. While the Hobby had only appeared in Stonedown, the sylvan fey's eldritch affinity with stone had actually permeated the bedrock of all Zherisia, Paridon included. When the domain's borders contracted, the Hobby's dispersed essence retracted into the rock under the city. When Timor later attached to Paridon from below, the disembodied fey retreated yet again, his essence sandwiched between the surface and the Hive Queen's realm.

The Hobby's displacement from Stonedown had weakened his powers, and barred him from physically leaving the bedrock. Timor's arrival compressed his essence, yet again... enough so that, over time, he has concentrated his power and mustered the strength to expel one of his few personal possessions into an empty basement, somewhere in Paridon. This item - a leather pouch containing locks of the Hobby's hair, a pair of shepherd's shears, and his own set of Ghost-Pipes - he hopes will one day serve to guide him back to the world above.

The Ghost-Pipes

Both Ghost-Pipes - the ones from the Hobby's pouch, and the set swallowed up by the Mists with Stonedown - consist of a pair of flutes set side by side, one longer and narrower than the other. They resemble instruments used in seasonal celebrations in the countryside of pre-Upheaval Zherisia, most often as an accompaniment to Morris dancing. The Pipes are crafted from smooth gray stone rather than wood, metal, or horn, however, and appear to have been molded instead of carved. The reeds within are

slivers of oak, originally shaved from the Hobby's own cudgel. The Ghost-Pipes appear hundreds if not thousands of years old. They radiate Conjunction (calling) magic, but only during the old Zherisian planting season.

The Ghost-Pipes: Strong conjunction (in spring only); CL 16th; Craft Wondrous Item, summon monster VI, creator must be a fey with the Earth subtype; Price 7,500 gp.

The Hobby cannot actually make Ghost-Pipes, but can repair them with his inherent powers.

While the Ghost-Pipes may be played normally (and safely) at other times of year, or for other styles of music, sounding a traditional Zherisian folk-dance tune on them in the springtime, anywhere in Paridon, will call the Hobby up from the ground. Unfortunately, this once-mollifiable fey is no longer so tolerant of humans: as a spirit of the green countryside, he'll be appalled by the urban "blight" that is Paridon, inclined to raze it all down to clean, bare earth and let the sprawl-smothered landscape breathe again. Once summoned, the Hobby will gawk in horror at his surroundings, then run off to wreak havoc on Paridon's buildings using his earth-magics until his power runs out, before sinking back into the bedrock in disgust.

The fey won't deliberately target humans in these attacks, but he won't avoid harming them, either. Collapsing an occupied building is not beyond his power, nor is turning the street to mud in the path of a fast-moving carriage. Should the Hobby chance upon active outrages to the landscape in progress, such as construction-work, he will lash out at such offenders directly. Unless he needs to elude pursuers, the Hobby will make no attempt to conceal his appearance or activities from bystanders, so may well rouse panic and chaos as he runs amok.

Should he be summoned to a relatively-green area, such as a private estate's grounds, the Hobby will be less volatile, and might deign to parley with humans. He communicates through pantomime and animal-noises, but can understand both Zherisian and Sylvan. His "conversation" is limited to expressions of outrage and pique, peppered with crude or derogatory gestures and bursts of hoof-footed capering; he jabs people with his cudgel to get their attention, spits in disgust when Paridon's urbanization is mentioned, and is generally obnoxious and ill-mannered. The Hobby lacks patience with other beings in general and humans in particular, and may well lose his temper in frustration, or simply provoke a fight out of boredom with talking. He does have a sense of humor, albeit earthy and uncouth by the Core's standards, let alone Zherisia's.

Whatever his actions on the surface, the Hobby will inevitably return to the stone from whence he came. He'll be back, however, sending his pouch to the surface again next spring: once aware of the dismal state of the terrain above, he won't care to remain below the city-suffocated earth, for long.

DM Tip: Playing the Hobby

In keeping with the confusion and strangeness of fey encounters, game masters should go all-out when depicting the Hobby's animalistic behavior. During in-character 'conversations' with PCs, refuse to answer players' questions in words, only in barks, yips, squeals, rooster-crows and donkey-brays. Muss your hair and scarf down huge fistfuls of chips, spraying crumbs everywhere, as you gesture with mad, feral enthusiasm. Chew up the scenery with clownish facial expressions; blow raspberries, feigned slaps, or kisses at your gaming buddies ... in short, ham it up!

Dancing for the Hobby

If the Hobby should be called at an actual dance, and not merely by the Pipes' music, his response to his arrival on the surface is different. If the dance is accurate (i.e. a traditional Zherisian folk-dance), he'll calmly and critically watch the performance. It only takes a DC 10 Perform (dance) check by all participants to keep him watching, and a DC 15 check will satisfy the fey's taste enough that he'll applaud approvingly, then return to earth without inflicting any harm. A Perform (dance) check of 25 or higher by any individual dancer also earns that participant a reward: a lock of the Hobby's tangled hair. Unless the piper beats a DC 20 Perform (wind instruments) check, the Hobby will snatch up the Ghost-Pipes before returning to the bedrock, satisfied.

Should the Ghost-Pipes ever call the Hobby to an inaccurate rendition of a traditional folk-dance - a style of dancing which, just recently, has been sweeping the elite ballrooms of Zherisia - then the Hobby will punish this mockery of country custom, again in proportion to its quality. If the false dancers' Perform check beats a DC of 20, the Hobby will merely attack physically, punching or kicking a few dancers, then smashing the Ghost-Pipes with his cudgel before vanishing into the ground with the broken Pipes.

If the performers' efforts only beat a DC 15 Perform check, the Hobby unleashes his stone-controlling powers to demolish the building (indoors) or pelt the offending dancers with animated rocks (outdoors), then rampages through Paridon wrecking things as per above. If the dancers fail even to beat a DC of 10, he entangles them in hair-traps first, then brings the roof down on top of them.

Should any individual performers, either dancers or piper, truly disgrace themselves before the Hobby, missing a DC of 5 on a

Perform check, the insulted sylvan fey invokes his Dancer's Bane power on the offenders. This is both a spell-like ability and a Ravenloft curse, so its petrification-effect cannot be reversed by the usual methods. It will automatically last for a century and a day, unless the Hobby (or perhaps another korred) can be persuaded to dismiss the effect sooner. Fortunately, the Hobby is only capable of invoking this power upon those who have - as he sees it - failed to fulfill the Stonedowners' pact by subjecting him to such a miserable performance.

It is because of this power that Stonedown's farmers always practiced their dance-steps very thoroughly, before taking part in their annual spring dance-ritual....

The Hobby

The Hobby is a korred, a faun-like fey metaphysically linked to earth and rock. He resembles a short, brawny version of a satyr, standing barely 3' tall on his salt-and-pepper-furred goat legs and cloven hooves. His upper body is as tanned as a farmer's and as stocky as a dwarf's, with hairy, muscular forearms and hands. If he has horns like a satyr, they're buried out of sight in his thick mane of wild black hair, which merges with his equally-frazzled beard, sideburns and mustache. Only his brow, cheekbones, feral all-black eyes, and feline ears peek out from this scruffy black shag. To cap it off, he's usually quite grimy with dirt and smells like a goat shed.

The Hobby never speaks, but growls, grunts, yips or bays like an animal. When he grins or laughs aloud, pointy wolfish teeth gleam through his thick facial hair. Despite his small stature, the Hobby is fast as a man and as strong as stone itself: he hurls rocks of up to Tiny size as weapons, and easily

carries and manipulates items proportioned for humans.

Always at the Hobby's side is his cudgel, a stout rough-hewn oaken club as tall as he is; he no longer has his belt-pouch, though he'll reclaim it should he chance upon it in Paridon. Lacking his pouch and shears, the Hobby bites off locks of his hair and ties them around his wrists to keep them handy. The fey employs such hair-locks to invoke his entangle spell-like ability, throwing them up to 30 feet as a move action and then causing the tangled hair to animate, ensnaring his opponents. He also gives these tufts of hair away to dancers who impress him.

Most Zherisians don't know it, but the Hobby's hair-locks transform into pure gold (200 + 5d20 gp per lock) if they are sprinkled with holy water. A DC 30 Knowledge (local) check or domain-specific bardic knowledge check can uncover this tidbit of rustic folklore, and native-born Stonedowners old enough to recall it can also reveal that fact. This property only applies to locks of hair which were willingly clipped by the fey himself, not those forcibly shorn from his body.

Though initially unfamiliar with Paridon's urban environment, the Hobby is an elusive little menace, used to hiding among the rugged bluffs of Stonedown. He readily adapts, clambering up walls, wriggling between bars of sewer-grates, or leaping between the rooftops to keep out of reach. He prefers to stick close to rocks or stone slabs big enough for him to hide inside. If chased by enemies he doesn't fear - which, unless and until he suffers a grave injury at their hands, includes all humans - the Hobby reacts to pursuers like a dog playing keep-away: yipping, strutting, and otherwise taunting foes on the verge of giving up, chortling with glee as he prolongs the chase.

The Hobby

CR 6

Male korred

CN Small fey (earth)

Init +1; **Senses** Listen +10, Spot +7

Languages understands Sylvan, Zherisian; does not speak

AC 15, touch 12, flat-footed 14; **Dodge**

(Dex +1, size +1, natural +3)

hp 48 (7 HD); **DR** 10/magic or ice

Immune electricity, stone weapons

Fort +4, **Ref** +6, **Will** +7

Weakness cracked mirrors, dance fascination, sod paralysis

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee mwk cudgel +10 (1d6+5) or

Ranged thrown rock +5 (2d6+5)

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +8

Atk Options Improved Sunder, Power Attack

Special Actions dancer's bane, stunning laughter

Spell-Like Abilities (save DC 16 + spell level; CL 7th):

3/day – *entangle*, *magic stone* (up to T-sized stones), *shatter* (stone only)

1/day – *soften earth and stone*, *spike stones*, *stone shape*

1/day (either one) – *animate objects* (stone only), *move earth*, *stone tell*

Abilities Str 20, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 9, Wis 14, Cha 15

SQ powerful build, stonemelding, stone sleep

Feats Dodge, Improved Sunder, Power Attack

Skills Balance +10*, Climb +13*, Escape Artist +6, Hide +11, Jump +12*, Listen +10*, Perform (dance) +9*, Spot +7, Tumble +9

Bones of Stone (Ex): The Hobby's bond with earth and stone gives him the same Powerful Build special quality as a goliath (Races of Stone). He is treated as Medium for purposes of size modifiers in cases where Medium size would be to his advantage (bull rushes, trip attacks, etc), or as Small where that is preferable (Hide checks, AC, etc). The Hobby can use Medium-sized weapons as if he were man-sized, and can throw stones of up to Tiny size as if he were a hill giant.

Dancer's Bane (Su)¹: Usable only against those who, in the Hobby's opinion, have woefully failed at performing for his amusement, this dreadful curse petrifies its target as if by a flesh to stone spell. It is not correctable by stone to flesh, break enchantment, or other conventional remedies. The effect lasts for 100 years plus one day, or until the Hobby is appeased (which the Stonedowners never figured out how to do). It otherwise functions like flesh to stone, save that the saving throw (DC 16) is a Reflex save, not Fortitude. (It's clumsy footwork that the Hobby is punishing, after all!)

Stonemelding (Su): At will, the Hobby can step into any mass of natural or human-worked stone of his own size or larger, remaining within the rock as long as he chooses, and leaving it at any contiguous point along a given stone's surface. For example, if he melds with the walls of a tunnel through solid bedrock, he could emerge again at any point along that tunnel, but not inside another, unconnected tunnel running parallel to the first. Such transit between entry- and exit-points on a stone takes one standard action, regardless of

1. Dancer's Bane is unique to the Hobby, an ability this ancient fey acquired when Stonedown became part of the Land of Mists. Tales of korreds from other worlds will not mention this power.

intervening distance. This ability otherwise works like the meld into stone spell.

Stone Sleep (Su): If wounded, tired, or merely fed up, the Hobby may merge with the bedrock of Paridon via his stonemelding power, dispersing his essence through the ground. After 8 hours dispersed, the fey begins to draw upon earth-power to heal himself, gaining the benefits of fast healing 5. Every 24 hours after that, the Hobby also benefits as if from a restoration spell. If slain, the Hobby's essence likewise retreats beneath the ground, to remain there, recuperating and unconscious, for ten years' time.

Note that finding exposed bedrock to merge with may prove difficult in Paridon, forcing the Hobby to invade private houses' cellars or pitch cobblestones aside to bare it. Merging with the bedrock when slain is automatic and requires no such access to bare stone.

Stunning Laughter (Su): Three times per day, the Hobby can laugh out loud, affecting all listeners in a 60' radius (even allies). Anyone within range who hears his laugh must make Fortitude saves (DC 16) or be staggered for 1d4 rounds. Those who succeed are dazed for 1 round. This is a supernatural, sonic effect, used by the Hobby to buy time to flee and/or disarm his opponents, or just for the hell of it.

Weaknesses: The Hobby is vulnerable to weapons made of ice - Nature's rock-breaker - including metal weapons affected by a chill metal spell or otherwise rimed with frost. In a similar vein, the Hobby is repelled, much like a vampire, on seeing his own fractured reflection in a cracked (but only a cracked) mirror.

If this sylvan fey can be kept still long enough, laying a strip of living sod across his chest with the roots against his skin acts to immobilize him for as long as the grass remains fresh and healthy.

Finally, if an opponent thinks to make a Perform (dance) check to captivate the korred's attention in melee, this is treated like a Bluff check to feint against him in combat ... but if the opponent's Perform check result is less than 5, the Hobby also gains the option of invoking his Dancer's Bane power against that opponent.

Skills: *The Hobby receives a +2 racial bonus on Balance, Climb, Jump, Listen, and Perform (dance) checks.

Adventure Hooks

- A poor beggar-woman in Blackchapel finds the Hobby's belt-pouch in an alley, sells the Ghost-Pipes and shears, then uses the hair-locks to stuff a rag doll for her daughter. The Pipes fall into the hands of a scholar who knows the Stonedowners' legend, and he recognizes their importance. Greedy for gold, the buyer searches the slums for the beggar-woman and the pouch's contents.
- A Stonedowner employed on a rooftop farm tells his co-workers of the Hobby, but was too young at the time of the Upheaval to recall all the details. Misled by his poorly-remembered stories, they search for the Ghost-Pipes, thinking the fey can be controlled and forced to make their crops prosper.
- This year's Grand Ball in King's Quarter will feature a theme of Traditions of Long Ago, commemorating Zherisian culture over centuries past. Performers of traditional music and dance are recruited from throughout the city, and the leading politicians, alchemists, and celebrities of Paridon's upper crust will all be there for the ceremonial Spring Equinox dance (edited for mixed company, of course). One of the hired musicians recently acquired an unusual set of pipes that will be perfect for the gala event.

- Called up into the city one spring, the Hobby overhears a secret gathering of the Zherisian Brothers of the Land. The saboteurs' anti-technology rhetoric convinces the fey to linger aboveground a while, covertly assisting their campaign of vandalism.
- In the Metropolitan's art gallery, a valuable statue, Dancing Maiden, has vanished! The lone suspect, a young woman with an archaic rural accent, was arrested on the premises and thrown in prison. If her story of dancing in a Stonedown village ritual a century ago cannot be substantiated, she may be hanged as a thief's accomplice.
- Druids from the Core learn of the Hobby's existence, and resolve to remove the fey from the inhospitable city. For their plan to succeed, the fey must be contacted and convinced to abandon his home of countless centuries, then sent into hibernation within a stone monolith that can be carried across the Mists to the continent.

The Northwest Train Line

A Bit of Alternate History

By Eleanor Ferren

isabellepescovich@yahoo.com

Benjamin Oakes wiped the sweat from his brow as he looked over the train one more time. Every train departure never failed to make him nervous. There had yet to be a major hitch with the train line since the Lamplighter, and damned if he would be the one on the job if there ever was. The nobles complained enough about all the little problems as is.

"What happened to those cargo cars we were supposed to load?" he demanded of Gerard, who happened to be passing by.

"Do you have to ask? They were going through Borca," the Richemuloise man replied, contempt obvious in his voice. "The wasps got to the train."

Oakes groaned. "La Grande Dame is going to be furious. That was the No. 4."

"Just as well we're leaving the country, then!" Gerard said, hopping onto the train car. He offered his hand to Oakes. "Hurry, Ben, it's Niklaus conducting. He'd leave the entire Renier family standing at the station if waiting for them would make him late."

"Hold on..." Oakes paused, one foot in the train, as he caught sight of a colourful figure slipping into one of the cars. "That bloody gypsy is back!"

"Let him ride! Get on!" The wiry man caught hold of Oakes, half-dragging him

onto the train as it began to move. "Hey Niklaus, be more careful!" Gerard called down the car. "You nearly yanked Ben right off the platform!"

"The train leaves at 5:15 exactly," the Lamordian replied. He didn't bother to look back from his controls.

Gerard shook his head. "Cold as ice."

"He'll thaw out," Oakes said. "I hope." He watched out the window as steam poured from the engine, forming its own cloud of mist as it sped out across the country...

The Northwest Train Line

The North-West Train Line runs through the Four Towers Nations of the Core, as well as Lamordia and Darkon. Beginning at the Sebrenocht Station in Levkarest, Borca, it heads west through Liberty Station in Pont-a-Museau, Richemulot, and Hope's End Station in Hope's End, Mordent. It then heads north to Grand Tower Station in Port-a-Lucine, Dementlieu, Neufurchtenburg Bahnhof in Neufurchtenburg, Lamordia, and ends at King's Crossing in Rivalis, Darkon.

History

The idea for the train locomotive was envisioned by Henry Tyrell, an engineer

from Paridon who held a fascination with steam power. Given that there was no interest or room for a railway in Paridon, he took his idea and working engine to the Core, hoping to find someone to fund his project. In a bout of extremely good luck, Ivan Dilisnya caught word of the idea and was instantly enamoured of it. With the Treaty of the Four Towers being finalized, Ivan convinced the other treaty-signers to build the railway through each country, citing the economic and military benefits the train line could provide. All four nations contributed to building the Northwest Line as a powerful symbol of their alliance, and Tyrell's engine was built into the first train, the Whitecastle, which departed from Port-a-Lucine amid great fanfare. After this first successful journey, four new trains were commissioned in honour of each country in the treaty: the Quicksilver from Borca (No. 2), the Celeste from Dementlieu (No. 3), the Little Bird from Richemulot (No. 4), and the Lamplighter from Mordent (No. 5).

The railway was not built without a few hitches; one of the major problems was the lack of trained engineers in the less

industrialized nations. Tyrell was pulled thin by all of the various engineering challenges he was called upon to adjudicate, such as building the railway over the Musarde River. Fortunately, his second stroke of good luck came in the form of a group of Lamordian engineers from Neufurchtenburg, who had been considering locomotive technology of their own for helping their mining operations. They offered their assistance on the condition that the railway extend into Lamordia. Pressed for time and budget, Tyrell agreed; he quickly discovered the Four Towers were not as keen on the idea as he was, and thus carried out the rest of the deal in secret. In one of the greatest feats of engineering history, the Lamordian engineers managed to lay down their length of track in less than two weeks. The Council of Brilliance was unaware of anything amiss until the Lamordian line had stretched down into Dementlieu and been connected under the guise of fixing one of the station's broken tracks. In order to save face, the Council left the tracks in place, but Tyrell was less than eager to return to the Four Tower nations after his subterfuge was discovered.



The Ghost Train

No one knows exactly what caused the Lamplighter to vanish on its fateful trip through the mists; perhaps Thomas Fields performed some truly dreadful act in his desperation to complete the locomotive, perhaps there was a latent curse upon his family line, or perhaps it was the dark attention of powers beyond his control. Whatever the reason, the Lamplighter still appears from time to time, no longer needing tracks to make its journeys through the mists. The only place the Lamplighter can never appear is the Grand Tower Station in Dementlieu. It is possible that if the Ghost Train were ever to reach Grand Tower Station, the ghostly apparition would vanish forever.

The Ghost Train offers a myriad of options for the GM:

Quick Travel

The No. 5 has a habit of showing up in odd places. For a GM who wishes to use a domain that is not easily accessible, the Ghost Train provides a method of taking them there. The PCs may unwittingly climb aboard a midnight train, unaware that the locomotive is not of this world, and find their destination to be a different one than what they expected. On the other hand, the PCs may find themselves in need of quick transportation to somewhere secluded, and have to hunt down the Ghost Train purposefully. It is not likely to be a safe trip, but the time saved may outweigh the risks.

The Ghost Train also serves another purpose; a quick escape from a secluded domain. PCs unfortunate enough to find themselves in the Nightmare Lands, Bluetspur, or even domains like Saragoss, might find the Train their only hope of escape, though the price of boarding the mysterious Train may be very steep indeed.

An Audience with the Dead

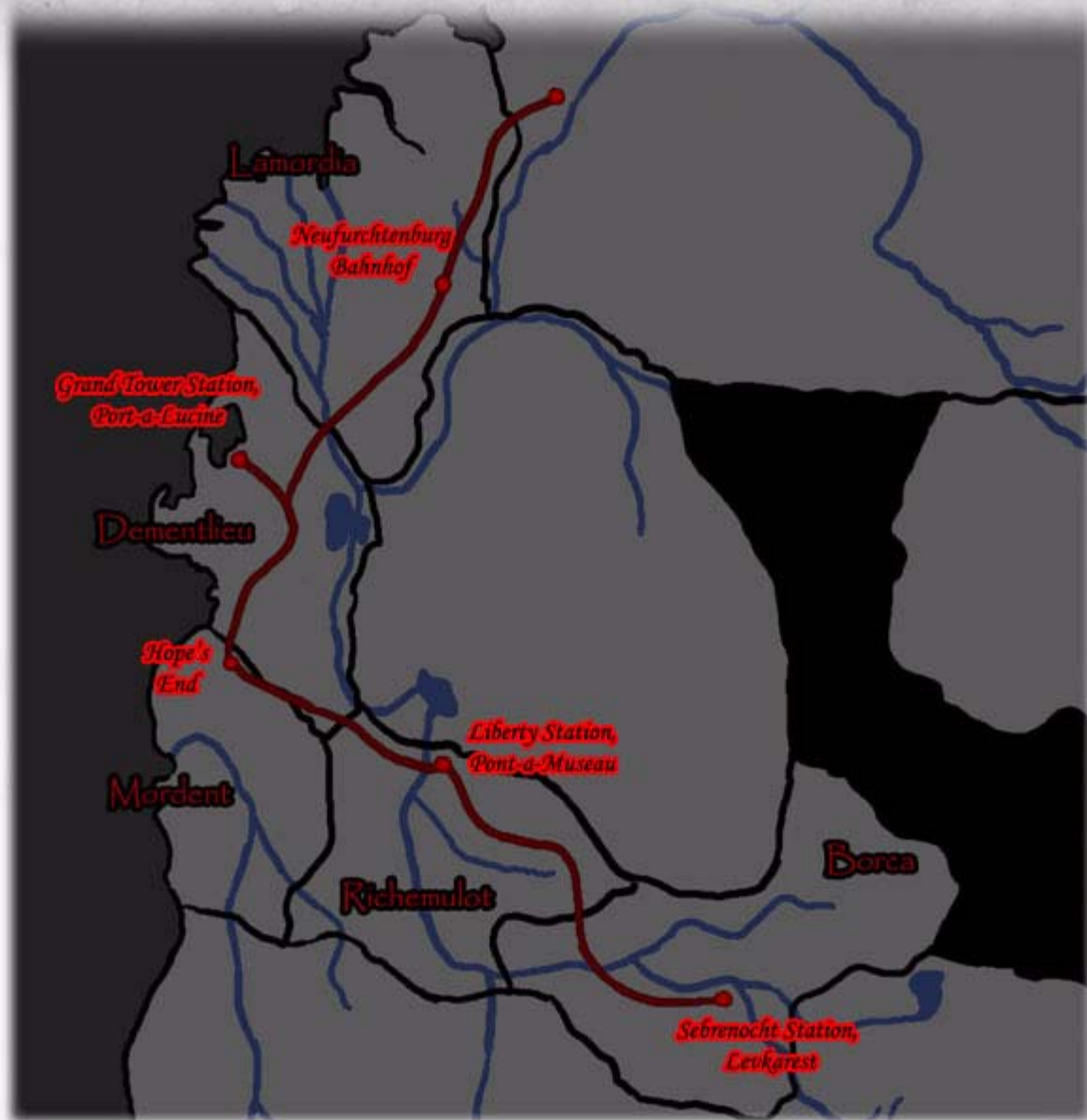
It is possible the Lamplighter now acts as a psychopomp, ushering dead souls onto whatever awaits them, or perhaps it contains the ghosts of all those unfortunates who boarded the Ghost Train and never got off. Either way, the PCs may find themselves in need of information long since forgotten by mortal minds, and the Ghost Train may contain someone who could help them in their quest.

A Bittersweet Farewell... or a Desperate Gamble

If the Ghost Train does carry departed souls, it may offer one final, bittersweet farewell to a lost friend or family member. To some, the chance to say goodbye one last time would be worth whatever risks the Train offers. However, to some, even this is not enough; the Train offers a chance to steal a loved one back from death. Whether taking a dead soul from the Train brings them back to life or traps them forever as a ghost is unknown, but the chance is enough for some to try, despite the difficulty of convincing the conductor to let them go.

Escape From the Mists

For the truly daring, the Train might present a way to escape the Domain of Dread, or plunge deeper into it. No one really knows what happens when the Train vanishes back into the Mists, and those who stay on board to discover it are unlikely to ever return, one way or another.



The Lamordians proved less fanciful when naming their trains, granting one the title of Aubrecker and referring to all others by the train number. Though they are still primarily used for the steel and coal mines in Neufurchtenburg, it is not unusual for passengers to take the train if it is on their route. The train tracks were soon extended to Rivalis, Darkon's gateway town to Lamordia, with the help of some Dwarven engineers.

The Midnight Express

The last of the four trains to be completed, the No. 5 suffered setbacks due to the lack of urbanized centers in Mordent. The townsfolk were unwilling to build the train line through the Forest of the Ancients or over the Great Moor, requiring the labour to move out to the remote location of Hope's End. The impending completion of the train prompted some amusement from the other treaty members, who openly commented on how behind schedule the train was. The engineer in charge of the project, Thomas Fields, was greatly irritated by the jokes at his expense,

and as soon as the train was completed he ordered it to start its journey to Grand Tower Station.

The Lamplighter pulled out of Hope's End at the stroke of midnight, gaining it the nickname "Midnight Express" from the workers, and sped through the fog choked woods towards its destination.

The No. 5 Lamplighter never reached Dementlieu. Though a thorough investigation was launched by both Mordent and Dementlieu, no trace of the train was ever found. The populous was taken aback by this inexplicable occurrence, and the train line suffered until the Council of Brilliance publicly built a new train in honour of Mordent; the No. 6 Gryphon. To this date, there have been no further incidents with the railway, although superstition prevents any train conductor from ever leaving the station at midnight.

It is rumoured the Midnight Express reappears from time to time, often in secluded areas where no train station or tracks ought to be. Very few Mordentish folk are foolhardy enough to go near the No. 5 when it reappears, and those who enter it are seldom seen again.

Current Sketch

The train line has been surprisingly successful at connecting the Four Towers, even lonely Mordent. People can now reach the other countries in a matter of days, not weeks, and the massive carrying loads of the train have caused trade to thrive. The train has become a status symbol to some, who flaunt their affluence by constant trips cross-country. There are also poorer patrons of the trains; vagrants and travellers who hide in the cargo cars. Most notable is a small group of Vistani who have abandoned their traditional wagons in favour of jumping cars on the trains.

That is not to say that the train line does not have his share of problems. Borca charges unreasonable prices for a train ticket, along with heavy taxes on any cargo taken into or out of the country. The Borcan trains are also notoriously late, as they are often shut down and searched by authorities, and Ivan has been known to hijack the train entirely to cater to his mercurial whims. The people of Richemulot are endlessly annoyed by this, though the slowdown of the train line might do them some good; if anything, it has increased the number of immigrants to Richemulot, filling up Pont-a-Museau almost faster than it can handle. The railway bridge over the Musarde River is still a point of concern for many people, who fear it may one day give out and collapse into the water. The train station in Mordent remains secluded and rarely used; Ezra help anyone who has not arranged for a carriage to meet them at the station before they arrive. And though the Lamordian trains heading through the mountains of Neufurchtenburg during the winter are brilliantly kept running by their engineers, the occasional avalanche still poses a hazard.

There are human dangers to the train as well. Though the Four Towers vie with each other for influence over the railway, it is a friendly rivalry on the surface. But there are many organizations, including some of the treaty signers and railway builders, who seek to subvert the railway to their own causes. Mallochio Adere has taken offence to the railway not including Invidia, regardless of the fact he had no interest in locomotive technology in the first place, and has become more aggressive in his dealings as a result. Falkovnia, on the other hand, is openly seeking to sabotage and destroy the rail line. Drakov's aides have realized the potential of the train line and the warlord himself views the train as a threat.

Train Slang

Nightside: East (towards the Nocturnal Sea)

Sorrowside: West (towards the Sea of Sorrows)

Bridge Trolls: Borcan authorities who stop and tax trains on a regular basis.

Glassy/Glass Vase: A person who is afraid of trains and is very uncomfortable riding in one.

Jaunty: People who use the train constantly, taking quick 'jaunts'. Usually young and wealthy.

Wasp: Someone who ties the train up and is generally a nuisance. Usually refers to Ivan Dilisnya.

Running on Borcan Time: Very late.

Running on Mordent Time: The train has had an accident.

Transferred to No. 5: Dead or Missing.

Mountain Boys: Dwarven Engineers.

Snow Boys: Lamordian Engineers.

Snowed Under: Hoodwinked

Sideshow Games

A Short Story

By Tami Sammons aka Hadis Deadstalker

OllivanderGryffen@gmail.com

Prelude: Evening Shadow

*The attraction of the virtuoso for the public
is very like that of the circus for the crowd.
There is always the hope that something dan-
gerous will happen.*

Claude Debussy French composer

Professor Pacali stepped from the Hall of Horrors. It was between shows, so he had time. Tenira, the Squid Woman, followed him.

Pacali leaned in close. "It's time. Find her and bring her to me," he said. There was a sinister smile on his face and an unnatural growl to his voice.

"Yes, Professor," she said walking toward the Midway.

Pacali waited patiently, rubbing his hands together.

* * *

Isolde walked around the midway, sword at her side. She nodded at the Troupers as she passed. She surveyed the Townies. Most were having fun, enjoying the attractions. But some, were horrified. Even the Fates

Three, Leer, Pry, and Scream, acted out the horror in their minds. There was an air, that disturbed her, but she just couldn't put her finger on it. Something was really wrong.

There was an incident earlier. One of the Townies attacked Mola, the Living Skeleton. He was apparently an Arcanist who wanted to rid the world of this "Undead horror." So the warriors among the Troupers were walking around and watching the more unusual of the Troupers, all with weapons at their side; at Isolde's request. And Mola was out of site. As much as they all wanted to, they couldn't leave just yet. One more day and they'd have the money they'd needed to get their supplies in the next town.

Suddenly Tindal ran up to Isolde.

"Isolde, there's a group of soldiers coming from town."

"How many?"

"At least a dozen. Maybe Amelia can find out for sure."

"Amelia!" called Isolde.

They both walked toward the front gate.

* * *

Pacali heard a ruckus in the direction of the entrance. He saw a Trouper running in that direction.

"What is wrong?" Pacali called to him.

"There are soldiers coming from the town." He yelled not stopping.

"It's all coming together." Pacali smiled and walked into the Hall.

* * *

Isolde reached the entrance. Hermos stood there waiting. She saw the soldiers. Amelia landed by her.

"Amelia, how many soldiers are there?"

"I'll find out." Amelia took to the air.

Isolde turned to Hermos and Tindal. "Ready for a fight? Cause it looks like we might have one."

"Maybe we should have left anyway," Tindal said.

"True. No amount of money is worth a fight," Isolde said putting her hand on the hilt of her sword. "But it's a little late now."

* * *

Pacali left the Hall. He stood watching in the direction of the Carnival entrance. He saw Amelia take to the sky.

She's going to survey the soldiers, Pacali thought.

The Runt walked up to Pacali from the Midway. He felt something wasn't quite right. He saw the look on Pacali's face, the manner in which he waited, staring out at the Midway. He knew Pacali was going to do something. It had to do with those pieces he brought back from his sabbaticals. They almost looked like cage walls. And Pacali wouldn't let him into the Hall's back area all day. Then he saw it, Tenira running toward them with Isolde's sword. He stepped from

Pacali's side and ran between the vardos. He needed help.

* * *

Lucian stood across from Mola's wagon. Even though she hadn't gone on stage since the incident with the Townie, he felt she needed watching, and Isolde agreed. He felt a tug at his pant leg. He looked down to see the Runt.

"Is something wrong?" Lucian asked, knowing there would be no answer. "Is it more important than watching Mola?"

The Runt started walking away, looking at him.

"Lead on," Lucian said.

The Runt moved quickly toward the Hall. They passed the Organ Grinder playing his music. A dozen Creeplings danced about him. His back was to them. The Runt pointed to him.

"Organ Grinder," Lucian called.

The Organ Grinder turned to look at them. He did not stop playing.

"Something's wrong," Lucian said.

The tone of the music instantly changed. And Lucian noticed.

Then there was a high pitched shriek from the direction of the Hall of Horrors and the ground shook.

"Isolde!" Lucian screamed. He and the Runt broke into a run.

Screams continued in the direction of the Hall. The ground shook again.

A Pickled Punk ran past Lucian and the Runt. Lucian nearly tripped trying to avoid it. But that was not his concern right now.

Lucian reached the Hall before the Runt. But he could not enter. *Something* blocked his way. It was one of the Abominations. And there were more screams from the Hall.

Tenira ran from the Hall's side entrance, followed by Charlotte.

More Pickled Punks raced about. Twisted Troupers and Townies ran about screaming. Lucian didn't know them. They looked twisted, more so than usual, newly twisted. They ran into him and the Runt knocking the Runt to the ground.

Lucian grabbed Tenira's arm as she ran past stopping her progress.

"What happened?" Lucian screamed at her.

"Pacali was wrong. She's not a demon," she cried, tears running down her face.

"I could have told you that. What has he done to her?"

"She's in a cage he made, and he has her sword."

"How did he get it?"

She shook her head.

"HOW!?"

"Tenira took it from her," Charlotte said.

"Get it back to her," Lucian shook her arm.

"I, I," she stuttered.

"Make this right and I will try to help you later," Lucian said, "Go, NOW!" He pushed her toward the Hall.

The Abomination approached, slowly, five tentacles flailing. Another Abomination came out of the Hall. It had three interlocking jaws and boneless legs.

More screams. And not all of them came from the Hall. The ground shook.

Lucian drew his longsword and attached the tentacled Abomination.

"Charlotte, get help," Lucian said, lunging forward. "Runt get out of the way."

Charlotte ran. The Runt was already gone.

Lucian's longsword glinted in the late evening sun. He ducked and dodged the tentacles. One tentacle fell to the ground.

The Abomination screamed. The ground shook.

Lucian swung his sword with precision. But as a second tentacle fell to the ground, he noticed the stump from the last severed tentacle starting to regrow. *Regeneration*, he thought. *Damn it.*

Several daggers flew into the creature. Without looking he knew it was the Blade Brothers.

"Take the other one," Lucian called. "I've got this one. This one regenerates. That one probably will also. Charlotte!"

Lucian swung at another tentacle.

"Here!" she called.

"Stay back. This thing's got a reach. These things regenerate. Get something flammable. We'll need you to light them on fire once we get them under control."

"Got it," Charlotte replied and ran off toward the Cookhouse.

Immediately blades flew at the second Abomination. The Brothers moved into a flanking position, but close enough so they could see each other.

Lucian's sword cut through the air, cut through the Abomination. Another tentacle fell. The Abomination screamed. The ground shook. Screams came from the Hall.

Lucian and the Brothers heard a voice from above. "A group of soldier's are approaching from the town," Amelia's voice called down. "Isolde was going to get Troupers to help, but Tenira took her sword and ran before she could. What do I do?"

More blades flew at the second Abomination. The Brothers seemed to have an endless amount of daggers. Or perhaps it was just them throwing the same ones back and forth to each other. Like they're known for.

"Get anyone who can fight," Lucian called. Another tentacle fell. The ground shook. "If they attack, fight back."

The Brothers' daggers flew.

Blood flowed freely.

Screams came from the Hall.

Both Abominations screamed.

The ground shook.

"Where's Isolde?" Amelia called.

"Trapped by Pacali. She can't help."

"All the Abominations are loose," Amelia called.

"Go get the others ready."

Amelia flew off. "Clem! Clem! Ready for a Clem!"

"Damn it Pacali," Lucian spat.

Daggers flew.

Another tentacle fell.

Both Abominations screamed.

The ground shook.

Screams came from the Hall.

The first Abomination fell motionless to the ground. Lucian reached to get the two daggers thrown by the Brothers. He slipped them into his boots.

"Brothers, I have your daggers."

A pool of blood covered the ground beneath the two creatures.

Lucian saw the creature regenerating. It would only be a few minutes before it would rise and fight again.

"You need help?" Lucian called to the Brothers.

A wave came between throws. Lucian took that as they had it covered.

A group of Troupers ran past them with a huge net. Lucian noticed Abominations coming out the back of the Hall. Another

group of Troupers ran past with ropes and spears.

More screams, Troupers and Townies.

Charlotte walked up carrying a large bucket. It was almost more than she could carry.

"Cooking oil from the Cookhouse," she said to Lucian as he took the bucket. "Two cooks are bringing two more buckets each."

Lucian dumped the cooking oil onto the regenerating tentacled Abomination.

The second Abomination screamed.

The ground shook. Then it fell to the ground.

Screams came from the Hall.

A large rotund woman approached easily carrying two buckets. Both the Brothers took a bucket each. Another large woman came with two more buckets. Lucian took one of them and threw it across Abomination.

"Light the oil," Lucian said to Charlotte. He took the second bucket from the woman throwing it across both Abominations, linking them together.

The Brothers returned with the buckets to stand next to Lucian, Charlotte and the two cooks.

Charlotte pulled a dagger out of a belt sheath. Then put it into her mouth and drew it out. The dagger was burning. She then spat at the creature as it began to stir. A flaming ball shot from her mouth and hit the Abomination. It exploded into flames.

Lucian, Charlotte, the Brothers and the cooks stepped back. The second Abomination burst into flames also.

Abominations twitched.

Screams came from the Hall.

The ground shook.

Shouts came from behind the Hall directing nets and ropes.

"Your daggers are in my boots," Lucian said to the Brothers. Lucian reached down to get them. One of the Brothers touched his arm, stopping him. "Thanks."

* * *

Pickled Punks were everywhere. They attacked anyone that passed by. Troupers and Townies kicked and batted at them. They added to the mayhem.

Screams came from the Hall.

The ground shook.

Abominations screamed.

* * *

Amelia flew threw the sky. "Clem! Clem! Ready for a Clem!" she screamed while she flew over the crowd.

All the troupers moved.

Elthryn Winter, the Wraith, heard Amelia's call. He was performing his act on the pull-out stage of his vardo when the ground shook and the screams came. His hands moved to his belt. He felt for his pouches and his sword. He jumped from the stage and ran.

"Where?" he yelled to the sky.

"Entrance," came the reply.

Elthryn ran toward the Carnival entrance.

The Abominations screamed.

Screams came from the Hall.

The ground shook.

Troupers arrived with weapons in hand.

Gon Stonesplitter and Tosk approached the group. Gon carried his maul and Tosk had his executioners axe.

"Amelia said to ready for a fight," Tosk said.

"What's wrong?" Gon asked Hermos.

All Hermos did was point toward the group of soldiers.

"There's twenty-eight of them."

Gon looked at them. "They look seasoned."

"Seasoned enough," Tosk said. "Most of us aren't combat ready."

"We are," Gon said.

"I don't think the two of us can stave them all off."

Abominations screamed.

The ground shook.

Screams came from the Hall.

Amelia landed next to them. "Lucian said if the soldiers attack, to fight back."

"That was my plan," Gon said.

Elthryn ran up and stopped next to Amelia. He noticed the soldiers.

"I think you better get out of the way," Elthryn told Amelia. "Unless you want to drop rocks on their heads."

The Skurra arrive. More Troupers arrived also. They were all armed.

"Where's Isolde?" one asked.

"Pacali has her trapped," Amelia said. "She can't help us. Lucian said if the soldiers attacked to fight back."

"Sounds good to me," the Trouper said. He readied his weapon.

All there readied their weapons.

"Shall we try to talk our way out of this first?" Tindal asked, unenthusiastically. He held his cane in one hand and slapped it into the palm of his other hand.

"Go for it," the large round woman who brought the cooking oil to Lucian said. She had two heavy cast-iron pans in hand. "I'll pick you up after they trample you."

When the soldiers were about twenty feet from the entrance, they spread out into a line. They drew their weapons and started chanting.

"That sound like they want to talk?" the cook said.

"Just a thought, Mrs. Renauldi. There are the rules of the Carnival."

"I think this exempts the rules," Mrs. Renauldi said.

The other cook showed up with two pots of steaming liquid.

"What's that?" Tosk asked.

"Boiling oil."

"That'd stop me."

Screams came from the Hall.

The ground shook.

Abominations screamed.

* * *

Lucian, the Brothers and Charlotte watched as the two Abominations burned. They could hear screams coming from all over the Midway. And there was the sound of metal on metal. The fight between the soldiers and the Troupers began. They saw the Troupers with the nets and ropes restraining two of the other Abominations. But there were still two out there on the Midway somewhere.

"Time to go help with the soldiers," Lucian said.

The four of them turned and ran toward the Carnival entrance, weapons in hand. As they neared the Carnival entrance they saw someone enter the Carnival. It was a man. A tall dark stranger calmly walked through the mayhem. He didn't seem concerned about the danger. As he passed people he touched them. Whomever he touched fell to the ground dead, instantly.

"That's not normal," Charlotte said.

"No, it's not," Lucian said. "If I had to venture a guess, that would be a demon."

"Not someone you'd want to get friendly with," Charlotte said.

"No you wouldn't," Lucian said. "But someone has to stop him." He looked to the three beside him. "Let's go, just not too close."

Then they saw Blasse. She ran from the back end of the Midway.

Abominations screamed.

The ground shook.

Screams came from the Hall.

"Blasse," Lucian called to her. "Get into a vardo, it's not safe."

He noticed she was running from an Abomination. Then she stopped. She stood and looked toward the Carnival entrance.

"Blasse?" Lucian called again.

The dark stranger held out his hands to her and waves her to him. He smiled a sinister smile at her. Blasse smiled back. The joy on her face was more than Lucian has seen from her since he came to the Carnival. Blasse smiled at the stranger like Lucian wished she smiled at him. His heart sank.

"No," he whispered.

Blasse was elated.

"Yes!" cried the stranger. "When we embrace, Isolde's defeat will be complete!"

"The three of you, get Isolde her sword and out of that cage," Lucian said then ran toward the stranger.

Blasse ran toward the stranger. Lucian ran, but to stop Blasse from reaching the stranger. Lucian reached her about five feet from the stranger. He grabbed her around the waist and swung her away from the man.

"No!" Blasse screamed. "Let me go!"

"Stop, Blasse," Lucian screamed. He swung his sword and pointed it at the stranger. "He's not what you think."

"Yes, he's my beloved. He's the man I love."

Lucian's heart broke. "He's not what you think. Look what he's done!"

The stranger just stood there looking at them, with a wicket smile on his face.

"He's killed everyone he's touched."

"He is just trying to free me from this horror. Let me GO!"

* * *

The Brothers and Charlotte ran through the front area of the Hall of Horrors. A body with tentacles on the arms, Tenira, twitched on the floor in front of the curtained entrance to the back area. They walked through the curtains. They saw a cage in the middle of the circular room.

Screams came from the cage. Isolde stood in the cage. She gripped the bars and shook them.

The ground shook.

They realized the shaking of the ground came from Isolde not the Abominations.

Whimpering came from behind them. They looked to see Pacali rocking in the shadows. There was a sword on the ground by his side.

Charlotte screamed. She threw her hands to her head. She shook her head wildly.

One of the Brothers went and grabbed the sword.

Charlotte lowered her hands and looked to the Brother with the sword.

"Throw it to her."

He turned and threw it toward the cage.

Isolde's arm shot threw the bars and caught the sword. She instantly calmed. With one swing of the sword the cage door shattered. She stepped from the cage and walked toward the three.

"There's a stranger in the grounds," Charlotte said. "Lucian thinks he's a demon. Everyone the stranger touches drops dead.

The stranger said something about when he and Blasse embrace your defeat will be complete."

Rage filled Isolde. "He is a demon. And who I've been chasing since before I came to this plane." She broke into a run.

* * *

The stranger smiled at Lucian. "Another time perhaps." Then he turned and walked out of the Carnival.

Lucian lowered his sword.

Blasse screamed and squirmed in his arm.

"No!" she screamed. "Don't leave me!" She stretched her arms out toward him. "Please! NOOOOO!"

Suddenly there was quiet. An unnatural quiet. There were no screams. No metal clanking. Nothing. It was over.

Blasse began to cry. She went limp in his arm.

Isolde ran up to them followed by the Brothers and Charlotte.

"Where is he?" she growled.

"Gone," Lucian said.

"No," Blasse whimpered.

"He just turned and walked away. Right before you came."

A group of Troupers and Skurra walked up to them. Elthryn, Tindal, Hermos, Gon, Tosk, the Organ Grinder, the Fates Three, Mrs. Renauldi, the other cook, Madame Fortuna. Amelia landed by them.

"No."

"What was he?" Lucian asked calmly holding Blasse.

"A demon, an incubus, what I've been hunting since before I came here. It's what brought me here."

"NO!" growled Blasse. "He is not!" Blasse spat. "You are just trying to destroy my life." She pulled herself from Lucian's embrace.

"He's the only thing that has kept me going all this time. The one hope I've had. That the only man who truly loves me would come and rescue me from this nightmare."

"Blasse, I love you," Lucian said.

She slapped Lucian hard. Everyone was shocked, especially Lucian. He put his free hand to his stinging cheek. "NO! You love a freak. Not me. He's the only one who loves ME! The person I truly am." She waved her hands down her body. "This isn't me. This is a freakish, twisted version of me." She looked at Isolde. "And you made me this way." She pointed at Isolde. "He's my love. He came here to rescue me. And you," she slapped Lucian again on the other cheek this time. "You stopped him. He's a real man. A MAN!" she spat. "You are no man. You will never be a man." She took a step back. "And I," she said with disturbing calm in her voice, "could never love you." She turned and walked away.

Everyone watched her walk away.

Isolde put her hand on Lucian's shoulder. "Don't believe her."

"She's right," Lucian said calmly. "I'm not a man. I'm an elf."

"There's nothing wrong with that," Isolde said. "But there is something wrong with me. Everyone," she called. "Come over here. I have something to tell all of you."

One: The Arrival

Without promotion something terrible happens... Nothing!

P. T. Barnum, circus owner

It was a clear day. The bright morning sun broke the chill left over from the night before. The merchants of the small village began opening their doors. They placed tables outside their shops with merchandise to sell for the day. The villagers were rather

tall average with an athletic build, their hair ranged all the colors as did their eyes. Although the men wore their hair roguishly long and hung wild and loose. The women's hair was long, most beyond their waists adorned with various decorations. Nearly all the villagers were humans, with several Halflings. Their fashions were simple and most wore high black riding boots.

But their routine was disturbed. Several shop owners found flyers attached to their doors. The passers-by found flyers hanging from lampposts. They stopped their work momentarily to look at the swirling images on the flyers. They had pictures of harlequins with painted faces, strange beasts, weird people with wings, skeletal women, huge men and other strange people.

* * *

A gentle breeze blew through the newly plowed field outside of town. A group of five men in the field began picking up bails of wheat and putting them into the wagons. The men's appearance was similar the villagers except their skin was a bit darker with a family resemblance. There were two older men, looking to be near middle age. One of the older men had black hair cut short. He also had stubble on his upper lip and chin. All the remaining men's hair was long and wild, and all was one or two shades lighter than the other older man's medium brown hair. All the remaining men but the youngest boy was clean shaven. The youngest looked to be about fourteen. They all wore comfortable clothes, and all wore wide-brimmed hats.

Near the edge of the field, by the home, an older woman near middle age with three young women and another young man prepared a wagon to take to town. The older woman had light blonde hair and the four younger ones hair was between blonde and medium brown. This young man was clean shaven also with shoulder length wild hair.

Sideshow Lingo used in story

Arena: The large cage in which big-cat acts are performed.

Back Door: Performer's entrance to the Big Top.

Back Yard: The area behind the big top where props, animals, and performers are readied for a circus performance.

Beast Wagon: A trailer fitted up with cages to carry the circus animals.

Big Cats: Performing lions and tigers.

Big Top: The main tent used for the performance.

Blues: The general admission seats, usually painted blue

Boss Canvas Man: The man in charge of making sure the canvas goes up properly and doesn't come down short of a major blow down. Also decides on the placement of tents on the lot, and sometimes functions as lot manager for the sideshow as well.

Buildup: Putting up the tent.

Butcher: Strolling vendor selling refreshments or souvenirs.

Carpet Clown: A clown who works either among the audience or on arena floor.

Chambarrier: A ring whip for horses. Its pole is up to 5.5 m in length.

Clem: A fight.

Cookhouse: Place where circus people eat, not open to the public.

Donikers: Restrooms.

Ducat: Free ticket to the show, also known as an 'Annie Oakley'

Ducat Grabber: Door tender or ticket collector.

Dzigits: Russian word for "Mongol horseman," an act displaying spectacular Caucasian and Cossack horsemanship. Also called "Cossack vaulting." At a gallop, riders somersaulting from the ground to the saddle, hang alongside or underneath the horse, etc.

Equestrian Director: Ringmaster The "stage manager" of the show, in formal riding wear (top hat, red jacket, etc.) who decided and signaled the pacing of the acts. His costume, functions and whistle were later adopted by ringmasters when they became chief announcers instead of livestock-handlers.

Fleas: Local townspeople who arrive early to watch the carnival set up.

Flyers: Aerialists, especially those in flying return acts. The flyer's partner is the 'catcher.'

Forty Milers: Newcomers to circus or carnival life, who (metaphorically speaking) have never been farther than 40 miles away from their home, and might very well quit before they get any farther away than that.

Framing a Show: Planning a circus production.

Galloper: Merry-go-round (q.v.) which most or all seats are horses and most or all have an up-and-down motion.

Hippodrome Track: The oval area between the rings and audience.

Jal Orderly: To come or go quickly; to pack up and get on the road smartly and quickly or set up the same way.

Layout Man: Lot Man, The lot superintendent who decides the location of the various tents.

March, The: The street parade.

Midway: In its broadest sense, the area where all the concessions, rides and shows are located in a circus. A carnival is basically nothing but a midway without a circus, but in a circus the midway is situated "midway" between the 'front door' to the circus lot and the 'big top' where the circus performers do their acts.

Ring Banks: Wooden curbing around the ring.

Ringmaster: The show's Master of Ceremonies and main announcer. Originally, he stood in the center of the ring and paced the horses for the riding acts, keeping the horses running smoothly while performers did their tricks on the horses' backs.

Roustabout: A circus workman, laborer.

Sledge Gang: Crew of men who pounded in tent stakes.

Stain-trapeze: A mobile trapeze.

Zanies: Clowns

Gypsy words used

Jostumal: enemy "wishes you harm"

Foros: town (greek)

They had a bale of wheat and various vegetables in the wagon. When they were satisfied, they put a tarp over the produce and moved the wagon toward town.

Several pieces of paper floated down from the sky and landed on the wagons. The family picked up the papers and looked at them. They all saw different thing, images floating on the pages of strange people. Only the youngest boy had words on his page, "Carnival" it said. They put the papers into their pockets and continued their work. The man with the short black hair, stared for a few more moments at the paper before putting it neatly into his pocket, smiling.

It took nearly all day for the men to complete their job. The sun was hanging low in the mid-afternoon sky, just above the tree line. They were taking the wagons back to the barn when a mist formed in the field. The men stopped to watch. Wagons emerged from the mist. The wagons were brightly painted driven by men and women with painted faces. When the last of the wagons emerged, the mist disappeared as quickly as it came. The wagons stopped. People came out of them.

Two people walked toward the family. One was a tall, wiry man with a black top hat, long flowing cape, formal black suit and a cane. The other man was almost as tall with a lithe build and long, straight silvery white hair that flowed behind him. He wore black pants and a mid-calf length black coat, what appeared to be a white shirt beneath, high hard black riding boots, fingerless gloves and appeared to have no weapons.

When the two men were close enough to the family, the man with the top hat had a cynical smirk on his face and looked like an undertaker. He had a wild mop of curling black hair beneath the top hat. He bowed low and made a dramatic wave of his hand. The other man merely bowed his head to the family. He had vulpine features with amber

eyes, his ears were pointed. His silvery white hair reached nearly to mid-back.

The man with the top hat straightened. "*Buna ziua,*" he asked in Balok.

The brown haired older man nodded his head. "*Buna ziua,*" he said in Balok.

"*Buna ziua,*" the man with the top had said more confidently.

"*E'Roess,*" the black haired man said in Sithicus.

The older man with brown hair moved his head slightly in his direction. The man lowered his head slightly.

"*E'Roess,*" the elf replied.

"My name is Tindal, and this," he waved a hand at the elf by his side, "is Lucian and we are from the Carnival."

"My name is Carlos Perez," the older brown haired man said. "This is my brother Chico," he motioned to the older black haired man. "And my sons Mario, Marco, and Juan." He motions from eldest to youngest.

"It is a pleasure to meet you all," Tindal bows low and waved his arm flamboyantly. "Is there a town nearby?"

"Yes," Carlos said. "About three miles down the road. It's more the size of a large village." He pointed in the direction where the remainder of the family went in the morning.

"We were wondering if we might set up our Carnival in your field for a few days so that we may entertain and amuse your community and restock our supplies in your village."

"Of course. But there is a better place. About a mile down the road there is a clearing surrounded by trees," Carlos said. "There is a stream there where you can water your animals. The trees are safe. You shouldn't have any trouble. It's also closer to the village."

"Thank you, kind sir," Tindal said and made a ticket appear in his hand. "Take this Ducat, a free ticket for you and your family to enter the Carnival. It also comes with a free concession. We will be ready for business by tomorrow at nine in the morning."

"This is Borca, correct?" Lucian asked.

"Yes it is," Chino said almost smiling. Carlos tilted his head toward his brother.

* * *

It didn't take the Carnival long to get to the clearing. And it was perfect for their needs.

The clearing was large and somewhat oval. There were dense trees lining the north and south sides. There was nine hundred and fifty feet from the north set of trees to the south set. There was a one hundred and fifty foot break in the trees to the east that led to the road and a hill to the west high enough so one couldn't see over it. There was eleven hundred and fifty feet from the opening to the hill. The hill rose about a hundred feet before descending about fifty feet on the other side. After reaching the clearing the Skurra checked out the area over the hill. There was about a hundred feet before an almost impassible outcrop of rocks. The area on the other side of the hill was perfect for the Skurra. Because tonight was the night of the full moon and the next was the lunaset, when the Skurra re-applied their makeup.

"Let's ready the March," Lucian said.

The Troupers cheered. The Scurra stood silently, as usual.

"We'll go with the same order as the last town. This is Borca, so we might want to downplay our arcane magic users. Elthryn? Raphael?"

Elthryn and Raphael stepped forward.

Elthryn Winter, the Wraith, Lucian's right hand man, was a tall, handsome Kartakan, clean-shaven with shoulder-length hair. His

skin, hair, and eyes were all shadowy gray, thanks to the Twisting.

Raphael was an older man. He had an average athletic build and was rather tall. He was bald on top with a ring of short grey hair around the sides and back of his head. His neatly clipped mustache and beard was also grey, with some black still remaining to either side of his chin. Other than his hair, the only other betrayer of his years was the crow's feat at his eyes. Despite his unworn features, his hands betrayed a life of hard work.

"Yes, Lucian," said Elthryn.

"Elthryn you'll be in charge of the security for the March. Raphael, since you're Borcan you go along. If there needs to be any change to the Carnival setup, make sure you tell me the minute you two get back. We should have at least the outer ring of wagons, the Galloper and the Donikers's ready when you get back. Also try to see the layout of the town. We'll send people back into town after the March and the set up to get the supplies. That way if we have to Jal Orderly, we'll have our supplies."

"Of course, Lucian," Elthryn said. He smiled and went to get ready.

Raphael bowed his head and walked away.

"Tindal," Lucian turned to look at him. "You're going to be Ringmaster, so put the formal riding gear on with the red jacket. You'll lead the ground procession."

"Yes, Sir," Tindal said with an exaggerated bow. Then he left to go to his wagon.

Lucian looked around. "Raja?"

"Here," came a voice from the back of the crowd. A lithe short statured man approached. He had a trim build. His skin was a medium olive-tan with dark brown eyes. He had short, straight black hair with a glossy sheen. Raja Singh, the Hideous Man-Beast, was no beast. He walked proudly up

to the group, his head held high. On one side of him was Silessa, the Snake Mistress. The beautiful elven woman wore an elegant blue dress that clung to her and a large python wrapped around her shoulders like a stole. Her arm was interlocked with Raja's.

"Prepare one beast wagon."

"Yes, Sir," Raja said.

"Will you want to go along?"

"Not necessary," Raja said.

"Silessa, you'll remain," she smiled. Then she and Raja walked away.

"Brothers?" Lucian called. The Blade Brothers stepped through the crowd. "You're in the March." They turned and disappeared through the crowd. "Stoltz," Lucian called next. Eight men and five women of ages ranging from 12 to 50 stepped forward. "Get the Stain-trapeze ready. Give the crowd a taste of the Trapeze."

They all snapped to attention and danced off through the crowd.

"Zanies!" several Skurra and Troupers stepped forward. "Get your slap on. Send in the Clown."

Two: The Set-Up

The arrival of a good clown exercises a more beneficial influence upon the health of a town than the arrival of twenty asses laden with drugs?

Thomas Sydenham

The Carnival moved down the main street. Their music played loudly. The Clowns with their funny makeup, whether Skurra or Trouper, juggled, made animal balloons for the children and made the townsfolk laugh. Two big cats roared in their beast wagon. The Flying Stoltz family did some of their act on a stain trapeze, a mobile trapeze. The Organ Grinder played his instrument while

the Creeplings and Fidgets played and danced.

The Townies cheered and clapped. The children laughed. They were all happy and smiling.

Elthryn and Raphael sat in the seat of one of the vardos. They surveyed the town and its inhabitants. They seemed pleased with what they saw. Everything was going well.

* * *

Lucian walked around the clearing. He carried a notebook and pencil and drew in it as he walked around Framing the Show. The vardos were just inside the break in the trees, waiting. After a few minutes, Lucian pointed to a spot west near the back of the clearing. "Here," he said. The Skurra driving Isolde's vardo drove it to the spot Lucian pointed out. He walked toward the other vardos. He stopped three hundred feet from where Isolde's vardo was. "The gate," he said. And the Skurra drove two vardos to the area. They parked the two vardos about twenty feet away from each other on either side of where Lucian pointed out. "Bathhouse," he pointed to just past the southern gate vardo. Another vardo moved. He walked back to the area in between Isolde's vardo and the gate. "The Big Top," six vardos moved to the area. He paced around the area some more. He stopped about a hundred and fifty feet south east of Isolde's vardo. "The Galloper," another vardo moved to the spot. He walked back to Isolde's vardo then walked three hundred feet south west. "Hall of Horrors," he said then pointed to either side of the spot, "with the Menagerie of the Macabre there," he pointed south, "and the Arena there," he pointed west. Five lock boxes and seven vardos moved to the spots he pointed. He then moved north. He stopped just beyond where he directed the Arena to go. He looked to where Isolde's vardo was. "Cookhouse," he said. Then he walked around and pointed out where the other vardos went.

Out of the ninety one permanent members of the Carnival, only about three dozen of them went on the Marches. That was only a sampling of them. This was just enough to wet the whistles of the Townies to get them into the Carnival.

The sledge gangs began to pound the stakes for the larger tents, the Big Top, had the largest tent. The Hall of Horrors and the Arena were the next largest, followed by the cookhouse and the bathhouse. The other tents were about the size of the vardos, and were set up by the Trouper's vardo or hung from them. Several vardos had stages that pulled out from underneath. The troupers that had acts used these, Mola Kravvan, the Living Skeleton, Wood'n-Head. He also had a tent set up next to his vardo and stage for his elixirs. Claude and the Imp had a stage. Silesssa, the Snake Mistress had a stage. Tindal's Hall of Mirrors was a tent that was just a little larger than his vardo. Hermos had a tent because he was too large to actually sleep in his vardo. Gon Stonebreaker, the Rock, needed no stage. He and Tosk, the Brute, gathered rocks and piled them near his vardo. The Illuminated Man had both a stage that pulled out from his vardo and a tent next to it to do tattoos. But he was not supervising the set up, because he walked with the March. But then the Skurra who helped him didn't need him to know what to do. Mister ? and Amelia the Vampiress, both had a stage with a tarp and curtain. He rarely went on the March. When Amelia did, she would use Raja the Hideous Man-Beast's former lockbox. He no longer needed a lockbox. Although he was not cured of his lycanthrope he had a beautiful pendant that hung from his neck made of Moon Silver which grants him a permanent cure to his condition, so long as he wears it. Something he will forever be indebted to Lucian for. Several of the Skurra had areas set up for their acts and wears.

The stationary food vardos had stages with railings. Some had a few tables and chairs for Townies to sit at. A few just had a tarp with windows to purchase the food or drinks. The cook vardos were reinforced for the ovens and stoves, both to support their weight and protect them from fire damage. These were usually set up in half rings between the outer ring and the Big Top.

And then there were the tents with the sick. No Townie ever got near these tents. These were the tents for those who suffered from mental problems, from when the Incubus attacked, and when Professor Pacali attacked Isolde. The Carnival has a doctor that specializes in mental disorders traveling with them now. He takes care of those Troupers. Most of those Troupers never leave those tents. Some come and go.

All the vardos except one had a tent or stage set up for them. The Big Top had six vardo that carried its various pieces. The Hall of Horrors had three vardos and four lockboxes that housed the remaining four Abominations. The Arena, a tent with a large cage inside, had three vardos and four Beast Wagons, lock boxes that carried the big cats. The Arena is where Raja and his big cats performed. He had twelve big cats in all and two medium cats. There were four lions, one male and three females. There were three orange tigers and one white tiger. There were two Cheetahs and two Jaguars. The two medium size cats were lynxes. The Cookhouse had two vardos. The Galloper, or the Merry Go 'Round or carousel had one vardo that set away the ring of vardos that carried its parts. The bathhouse had one vardo.

As the remaining Troupers, Skurra and Roustabouts set up their vardos, Lucian walked around surveying their progress. As he did a woman walked behind him. It was Mola. She had more skin and muscles on her bones than when she does her act. After the

Incubus attacked, she realized she was free from her brother Rasulid's influence. After several months, she realized she could make the skin and muscle grow on her bones and dissolve from her skin whenever she wanted, although she always looked thinner than was healthy. She realized she was not as attractive as she was before the Twisting took hold. But at least she was no longer skin and bones. But still, this made her pursuit of Lucian much easier. And she liked Lucian.

She watched him walk around. She liked watching him. But she knew she wasn't the only one. Charlotte watched him too. They were both vying for his attentions. But he seemed not to notice. His first concern was always the Carnival, especially after Blasse spurned him. Luckily, Blasse was no longer on his mind. In fact, he rarely saw her.

Most rarely saw Blasse. Since the Incubus, she has become more ghostlike. If she doesn't want anyone to see her, they don't. This meant no one saw her coming. She also floated around the Carnival. She moved like she was floating several inches off the ground. This meant no one ever heard her coming either. This also meant that she was hard to find if anyone needed her.

"May I help you, Mola?"

Mola was jolted out of her daydreams by the sound of Lucian saying her name. He still walked not stopping to look at her.

"Not really, I just thought you'd like to know, we have flees."

Lucian turned to look at her. She pointed to the area near the opening in the trees. Lucian looked where she pointed. He saw a man, a familiar man, Chino the brother of the farmer who had the short black hair and stubble. He watched the Carnival setup.

"I think we will have another Trouper when we leave," a female voice said from behind both of them.

Both Lucian and Mola turned to see Isolde standing behind them.

"Are you sure about that?" Mola asked.

"That is something I always know, those who want us, and those who need us. For him, it's both, just not *exactly* a deadly need. Unless you consider a lonely life filled with physical and mental abused deadly."

"On the inside," Mola said.

"That's usually the worst kind," Lucian said.

"When we leave, I will invite him to join us," Isolde said.

"Until then we just let him watch? Wishing? Dreaming of a better life?" Mola asked.

"Why wait. We can always use another Roustabout," Lucian said walking away from the two women. "I'll invite him to join us now if you don't mind, Isolde." Lucian didn't stop to wait for the reply he already knew.

When Lucian was out of earshot, "You should tell him how you feel," Isolde said.

"He doesn't even notice me," Mola said watching Lucian walk across the open field.

"Are you sure about that?" Isolde watched Mola watch Lucian.

"Blasse hurt him terribly," Mola whispered.

"And it's been over a year. He's had his time to get over her. I think it's time to move on. Now might be a good time to do just that."

"And if he rejects me?"

"And if he doesn't?"

Mola looked at Isolde.

* * *

Lucian walked across the field closing the distance between himself and Chino. The man watched Lucian approach. He felt a sick

feeling in the pit of his stomach. He was sure the elf would ask him to leave.

"*E'Roess*," Lucian said.

"*E'Roess*," Chino said.

"We noticed you standing here," Lucian began. "Perhaps you would like to help out?"

"Help? What do you mean?" Chino asked.

"We could always use another hand. I'm sure you have some talent that could be useful. Perhaps you could even join us when we leave this domain. But that would be up to you."

The man smiled.

"My name is Lucian, if you don't remember."

"I remember," Chino said smiling. "Mine is Chino."

"I remember."

Lucian held out his hand. Chino looked at the outstretched hand. He took it and shook it. "Nice to meet you Chino. Welcome to the Carnival."

* * *

By the time the March returned from town, most of the Carnival was set up. The Six wagons and one lockbox with the two big cats went to their designated spots in the Frame. The last vardo in the March had a sign that advertised the Carnival would open at nine in the morning. Elthryn and Raphael went to Lucian and told them what they saw in town. And they had nothing to say that would change the setup. They both agreed that the March went very well. The three men discussed who would go to town to get the supplies. The three men agreed that Elthryn and Raphael would be among them. Six of the Troupers and Skurra went to town in one cloth covered vardo to get supplies. Chino offered to accompany them. They were back in less than three hours with

everything they needed. The sun was setting as they returned to the clearing.

Lucian had just finished his rounds as he saw the vardo enter the clearing. Lucian went to the Cookhouse tent. He walked in and went to the serving table. The table had several large metal pans with lit burners beneath them to keep the food warm. There were several metal pans that had frost covering them. He took a plate and started putting food on it. He filled his plate with vegetables only and two slices of bread. He got a cup of coffee and turned to look at the tables. Mola was sitting at one of them. She was watching him. When he looked at her she smiled and waved him over. He walked over and sat down across from her at her table.

"You've been following me around lately," Lucian said.

"Y-y-y-yeah," Mola stammered. "I guess I have been."

"There something on your mind?" He took a bite of his food.

"I was," she began. "Well it's just," she broke off and took a bite of her food.

"You were just what?" he asked taking another bite of food.

She swallowed her food. "Well," she began again uncomfortably. "It's just that, well. Isolde thought I should talk to you."

"I'm right here," he said. "Talk to me."

"W-ah, it's," she stammered. She took a deep breath, "I like you," she blurted, then took another bite of her food not looking at him.

Lucian smiled. "I like you too."

"No, I mean," she looked up at him and stopped when she saw him smiling at her.

"I know what you mean. All this nervousness just to tell me you like me usually doesn't mean you just want to be

friends." He continued smiling at her. "As I said, I like you too."

Mola returned his smile.

Lucian slid his plate and moved to sit next to her. She was just looking at him smiling. He moved his chair close to hers.

"You don't want your food to get cold," he said.

"I don't care about food," she whispered dreamily.

Lucian put his hand on the table palm up. She put her hand in his. Then Lucian took another bite of his food.

* * *

Elthryn and Raphael helped put the supplies away. Chino helped. Elthryn watched him closely. When all the supplies were stowed, Raphael turned to Elthryn and Chino.

"Time for some dinner," Raphael said. "You gentlemen hungry?" Raphael didn't wait for a reply. He turned and walked to the Cookhouse. Both Elthryn and Chino followed. Elthryn eyed Chino suspiciously.

Raphael walked into the Cookhouse tent. He glanced over the Troupers, Skurra and Roustabouts that occupied the tent. He noticed Lucian and Mola sitting at a table next to each other. Raphael went over to the serving tables. He grabbed a plate and started putting food on it. Chino also went to the serving table and did the same. Elthryn walked over to Lucian's table. Lucian and Mola were still holding hands.

"We're back," Elthryn said.

"I noticed. Do you need help?"

"No," Elthryn said. "The supplies are away."

"Going to join us?"

Elthryn sat down at his table.

"I guess that's a yes," Lucian said not looking up from his plate to Mola then to Elthryn.

Raphael walked up to the table. He noticed Lucian and Mola were holding hands.

"Mind if I join you two?" Raphael said.

"Not if you don't mind us," Lucian said.

Raphael sat down next to Lucian. He had a large hunk of meat on his plate. There was a pink pool of liquid beneath it. He also had potatoes and green beans. And three slices of bread with a hunk of butter. He had a metal goblet with red wine in it.

"About this Chino guy," Elthryn began quietly looking to see where Chino was. He was still getting something to eat.

"What about him Elthryn?" Lucian said.

"Why is he here?" Elthryn asked.

"I asked him if he'd like to help. I even suggested that he could accompany us when we leave."

"Why?" Elthryn asked.

"Because Isolde said he would be joining us." Lucian looked at Mola. "And when Isolde says things like that I accept it as law." He looked at Elthryn.

Elthryn didn't say anything at this.

"Perhaps you would like to get something to eat now," Lucian said noticing Amelia enter the tent. "Amelia just walked in."

Elthryn turned to see Amelia walking toward them. She smiled at him.

Elthryn sighed and stood. "I guess if Isolde said that, I'll accept that. But that doesn't mean I have to trust him."

"I never said you had to," Lucian said. "I never said *I* did."

Elthryn turned and greeted Amelia. She put her arms around him and hugged him.

"I heard you were back," Amelia said smiling.

"Hungry?" Elthryn asked her.

"Starving," Amelia said smiling broadly.

The two walked toward the serving table.

Chino was sitting at a table alone eating his food.

Raphael cleared his throat. "I don't think he even noticed."

"Noticed," Lucian said.

"The two of you holding hands."

"No, I don't think he did," Lucian said.

"I guess this means you two are a couple now."

"Yes it would," Lucian said.

Mola smiled broadly and blushed.

* * *

Lucian and Mola stepped out of the Cookhouse tent. It was dark. The moon was full and hung high in the sky. It was warm with a gentle breeze. The sweet smell of flowers filled the air. Lucian took Mola's hand in his.

"Shall we take a stroll around the Midway?" he asked.

"Why don't we just go back to your vardo," she said.

"If that's what you'd like."

"That's what I'd like."

Three: Evening Show

"CIRCUS, n. A place where horses, ponies and elephants are permitted to see men, women and children acting the fool."

Ambrose Bierce

American Writer, Journalist and Editor

It was late afternoon. There was a sign outside the Carnival gate, "Closes one hour before sunset". That was because this was the lunaset, the day after the full moon. This

was the night the Skurra left the camp and re-applied their Skurra-vera.

And with the exception of Madame Fortuna becoming ill shortly after opening, the day had gone well. Lucian placed a guard outside her vardo, so she would not be disturbed.

They had less than two hours before sunset.

But something changed. The mood of the Townies grew quiet. They had all been having a good time, but suddenly, that all changed. And everyone in the Carnival noticed. But none knew why. Not even the Skurra. And their music reflected it.

Lucian heard the change in the music. He was standing outside Madame Fortuna's vardo. Once she closed her vardo door, she answered for no one, not even the Skurra. He watched the Townies intently and listened to their words. But he couldn't seem to figure out what was wrong. He began to walk toward one of the tents near the Carnival gate with the flap closed and a guard outside.

"Familiar," he called without stopping. He didn't have to look over his shoulder to know the boy was there. The twelve year old followed Lucian. They walked up to the tent and Lucian opened the flap. The Familiar walked past him and inside. He followed closing the flap behind him. "Find the Fates, see if they know or can find out what is with the Giorgio's."

Without waiting for a reply he knew would not come, Lucian opened the flap. Then he followed the Familiar outside. Lucian stepped past the Familiar. He didn't have to look to know the boy was gone.

Elthryn walked up to him. "May I speak with you, Lucian?"

"Of course," Lucian said.

Lucian bowed Elthryn inside the guarded tent then followed. Then he closed the flaps behind him.

Elthryn turned. "Lucian," he began, "I've been watching the Townies. They are quiet, but from what they aren't saying and the way they look at the Skurra, I think they might have a problem with Vistani."

"That's not good, especially today. We need to warn everyone. You take the Midway around the left and back side. I'll take the right and the Big Top. We'll meet at the Cookhouse. Use the danger call sign with the Skurra's."

Elthryn nodded and they both left the tent.

"Have you seen *Jostumal Foros* today?" Lucian said to the guard outside the tent.

"No, sir, I haven't." was the reply.

Elthryn and Lucian separated. Elthryn walked left down the Midway. Every Trouper, every Skurra, every guard he came upon, he said the call sign. "Have you seen *Jostumal Foros* today?"

Lucian instantly heard the Skurra's music change to reflect the call sign.

"Have you seen *Jostumal Foros* today?" Lucian said to the Ducat Grabber, the ticket taker, outside the Big Top.

"No sir," he said.

Then Lucian walked into the Big Top. He walked into the Hippodrome Track, the oval area between the rings and the audience. There were three rings set up in the Big Top.

The dzigits were in the first ring, the Equestrian act. At a gallop, riders somersaulted from the ground to the saddle, hung alongside or underneath the horses. The Equestrian Director, Tindal, in formal riding wear with a red jacket, was in the center of the ring with a Chambarrier, a whip on a pole directing the horses.

The Flying Stoltz family, the Aerialists were in the center ring. They flew back and forth across the heavens of the Big Top.

The third ring was being set up for the next act. There was a clown review in the front of the third ring.

He walked over to the first ring's ring bank, the wooden curbing around the ring, and motioned to Tindal. He walked between the horses as they galloped in a circle. Lucian whispered to Tindal then walked away from the ring. Tindal walked back through the moving circle of horses. He stood just inside of the ring of horses. He talked to the equestrian riders as they passed him. Once all the riders passed he walked back into the center of the ring and continued the act.

On his way to the center ring, Lucian walked up to several butchers, strolling vendor selling refreshments and souvenirs. He whispered to them as he passed by.

He continued on down the hippodrome track to a group of Carpet Clowns working among the audience, some were Skurra most were Troupers. He whispered to them as he passed.

He walked over to the area between the center ring and the third ring. He waved to one of the Stoltz's that was on the ground. Then he waved to one of the Roustabouts setting up the third ring. He whispered to them, then walked back to the hippodrome track. He whispered to the rest of the troupers as he walked to the back door.

Before leaving, Lucian turned and looked at the crowd. The blues, blue painted general admission seats, were filled with the Townies. They cheered at the acts in the first two rings and laughed at the clowns. Lucian wondered why the mood of these Townies was different from the ones on the Midway. He turned and passed out the back door of the Big Top.

He walked across to the vendor and Trouper vados in the half ring between the Big Top and the Cookhouse along the outer ring. He whispered to the vendors and Troupers as he passed. Then he walked to the Carnival gate and worked his way around the right side of the Midway until he reached Madame Fortuna's wagon. He whispered to the guard outside her vardo. He thought a second then went to knock on her door. The door opened before he could.

"I know," Madame Fortuna said. "*Jostumal Foros*." Then she closed her door. He felt a bit relieved. He hadn't seen her since she closed her door. She rarely closed her door. And she was rarely ill. And with these events, he had wondered if one of the Townies had done something to her. Or maybe her age was catching up with her. She wasn't a young woman.

Lucian continued around the Midway. By the time Lucian reached the Cookhouse, *Jostumal Foros* was on every Troupers lips, every guards lips, and every Skurra's musical notes.

"Elthryn and I are looking for *Jostumal Foros*, have you seen him today?" Lucian said to the guard outside the Cookhouse.

"No, sir," said the guard. "But Elthryn is inside."

Elthryn stepped from the Cookhouse and stood by the guard. "He's in the outhouse in back," Elthryn said.

Isolde walked up and put her hand on Lucian's shoulder? "I heard you were looking for *Jostumal Foros*. Have you found him yet?"

"He's in the outhouse in back," Lucian said.

"Good," Isolde said.

Lucian's head swung to look toward the Carnival gate.

"What?" Elthryn asked.

"Something's happened," Lucian said.

"How do you know?" Isolde said.

"The music," Lucian said.

The Organ Grinder appeared through the back door of the Big Top and walked into the back yard. Lucian noticed him. The Organ Grinder played his instrument wildly.

"How?" Lucian called at him. Lucian ran waving for Elthryn and Isolde to follow. "Let's go!" he yelled running between the concession vardos toward the Skurra.

The Organ Grinder moved quickly from around the Big Tops' vardos toward the Carnival gate. Lucian followed the Organ Grinder. Elthryn and Isolde followed Lucian.

Isolde looked at Elthryn as they moved. "It's like they talk to him. Can he read their minds?"

"If he can, he hasn't told me," Elthryn said.

"He knows everything that goes on. That's why we made him our Boss Canvas Man and our Layout Man," Isolde said.

They passed Amelia. Her and Elthryn's vardo was one of those in the outer ring in the Midway beyond the Galloper.

"Guys?" she called noticing their urgency.

Lucian held his hand out to her, as if to calm her, but didn't stop.

"Don't worry," Elthryn said not slowing.

She smiled warmly.

There was a scream from near the Carnival gate.

"Fire!"

Elthryn moved. Roustabouts moved. One of the tents near the gate was burning.

They started ushering the Townies from the Midway. The crowd calmly exited the Big Top and walked toward the Carnival gate. The other Townies also moved toward the exit. The Ducat Grabber at the gate

silently counted the Townies as they exited the Carnival.

The fire was under control before the last of the Townies exited the Carnival. The tent was completely destroyed, but the trouper, Red Jack, whose tent it was, was fine. He stood twenty feet away. His vardo was also fine.

Although every one called this Trouper "Jack", no one truly knew whether *he* was male or female. He was tall with a slim, athletic build. . He wore men's clothes in the Dementlieu style a white silk shirt, breeches reaching to below the knees, a burgundy knee-length coat with large folded back cuffs and gold embroidery. He had tight white leggings worn to the knee, with black, heeled buckled shoes. He had an elaborate white silk cravat. He wore a three point hat. But instead of the typical black it was burgundy with gold embroidered and three white feathers in the front. There were also several great owl feathers that swept back toward the back of the hat and a gold medallion in front holding the feathers to the hat with what looked like a family crest. Underneath the hat he wore a white wig with large ringlets, the side ringlets were short, reaching to the jawline, and in back were long ringlets tied back by a large burgundy bow with gold embroidery. And white silk gloves. He also wore a white porcelain mask with ruby red lips and gold paint on the cheeks to match the pattern of the embroidery. His hazel eyes could be seen peering through the eyes of the mask. No one ever saw Jack without the mask. And when he carried a weapon, it was a rapier with a gold wire hand-guard with garnet gems. It looked more ornamental rather than an actual weapon to fight with.

Charlotte ran up to join the group.

Red Jack rummaged through the charred remains of his tent with his foot. He picked up several articles once he was sure they weren't hot. They were blackened doll parts,

masks and dishes. Red Jack looked to Charlotte. "Pity you can't put fires out as easily as you can set them." His voice did not betray his gender.

"Is everything destroyed?" Charlotte asked.

"The porcelain isn't, but it will take a while to make it ready to sell again." He sounded unconcerned.

Lucian called everyone he could see over.

A Skurra carrying a lute approached the group. He had a simple white painted face and unlike the other Skurra it extended down past his chin included his entire neck. And across his neck was a painted scar, a second smile from ear to ear. He wore a simple red long sleeve shirt, a purple vest with multi-colored embroidery and simple purple trousers with hard leather riding boots. At his hips were two wheellock belt pistols. The Pistoleer walked up and stood behind Isolde.

Madame Fortuna approached on the arm of the Familiar. She was off color and hunched over. She had a heavy shawl wrapped around her shoulders despite the warmth of the day. She swayed when she walked as if she would fall over at any moment.

"Yes, Madame," Lucian said knowing she wouldn't be out if it wasn't important.

She stepped right up to him, putting her arm around his neck and pulling him close to her. It appeared like she was going to kiss him on the cheek.

Madame Fortuna leaned heavily against Lucian. He put his arm around her waist. But instead she whispered in his ear, "Do a head count. I've seen death in the cards."

"We need to check the Carnival. Make sure everything is as it should be. Organ Grinder, Pistoleer," Lucian said. "We need a head count."

The Organ Grinder began playing his instrument. Within seconds there was music

throughout the Carnival. The Pistoleer just looked around the Midway.

"Good," Lucian said. "Everyone is accounted for."

"That still doesn't mean there won't be death," Madame Fortuna whispered. "The cards never lie."

"Jal Orderly," Tindal said walking up behind the Familiar. "Do we have enough time to pack up and move out before sunset?"

One of the Roustabouts ran up to the group. "Most of the horses are sick."

"Sick?" Isolde asked.

"I think they've been poisoned," the Roustabout said.

"I guess leaving won't be an option then?" Tindal said.

"Organ Grinder, Pistoleer," Lucian said. "Get your people ready for the night."

The Organ Grinder left with the Familiar playing his music. All the Skurra who wore the makeup started moving.

The Pistoleer stepped closer to Isolde and touched her gently on the small of her back before turning and walking away.

The area over the hill was already secured. The area had dense forest on two sides and a high rocky outcrop. Approach from any way but from the Carnival was nearly impossible, by land at any rate.

"I should like to return to my vardo," Madame Fortuna said. The Roustabout that told of the horses walked over to Madame Fortuna and held his arm out for her. She patted Lucian on the shoulder then leaned into the Roustabout. The two walked away.

"Elthryn, get Chino, gently. I'd like to talk to him," Lucian said. Elthryn walked away. As the Skurra moved, "Everyone," Lucian called. "I want to be able to leave the moment the Skurra return in the morning."

Lucian waved the security force and Roustabouts over to him. He lowered his voice. "After the vardos are packed up, move them in a position to protect them and who's in them, but still within Isolde's protective circle. We should expect trouble," Lucian said. "Roustabouts, pack up the wagons, move them into position then return for your part in tonight's events. We stay awake all night. We're missing some of the security force, send them to me." The Roustabouts nodded then moved away quickly. Lucian looked around the group. He noticed the tall figure with white hair, pale skin and ice blue eyes standing away from the burnt tent. "Armitage," Lucian waved to him, "the fire's out. Come here please."

Armitage walked over to where Lucian and the group stood.

"Is there anything you can do for the horses?"

"What's wrong with them?" he asked.

"They're poisoned. We'll need to be into the mists as soon as the Skurra get back in the morning."

"I'll see what I can do."

"We're also expecting trouble tonight from the Townies. So we might need healing too. But you're not part of the security force, so I don't want you actually in the fighting."

"You believe they set the fire and poisoned the horses?" Armitage said. "Just so they could do something to the Skurra?"

"It's entirely possible," Isolde said.

"Why not just ask us to leave?"

"That would make sense. But who knows what their problem is."

"I'll go look at the horses," Armitage said walking away.

Elthryn returned with Chino. The two walked up to Lucian. Isolde moved to stand next to Lucian.

"Chino, I'm not going to play games. Does your town have a problem with Vistani?" Lucian asked outright.

"No, not that I know of," he said.

Lucian looked at him, as did Isolde. "He's telling the truth," Isolde said.

"Why would I lie?" Chino said.

"Just before the fire, we noticed when your townsfolk looked at our Skurra they didn't look kindly. Why?" Lucian asked.

"I don't know," Chino said, worried. He truly seemed puzzled. He thought a moment. He realized everyone was watching him. He just shook his head.

"I can help," a voice said breaking the mood of the group, Amelia walked up to the group. "I can keep watch from the air." She smiled at Lucian. Lucian returned her smile, uncomfortably.

"Chino, why don't you go to Mrs. Renauldi and the cooks will watch out for you." Chino shook his head and walked toward the Cookhouse. When he was out of earshot Lucian turned back to Amelia. "No, you're not a fighter or part of the security force. It's too dangerous," Lucian said dismissively.

"But I'd be in the air."

"Cross bows, long bows and magic could reach you." Lucian shook his head. "I can't allow it."

"You heard him," Elthryn said touching her arm gently.

"We're the ones who protect you from these things. That's our job. Now if you want to *join* the security force, that's different. After this is over, we can start training you in martial skills, maybe some magic. And if this kind of thing happens again you can help. But until then, let us do our job." Lucian said with finality in his voice.

Amelia sighed and grudgingly walked off touching Elthryn's cheek before she left.

Raja Singh walked proudly up to the group, his head held high. He wore all white accented with gold embroidery and carried a whip. On one side of him was Silessa. She wore her usual strategically placed, minimalist coverings and a large python wrapped around her shoulders like a stole. Her arm was interlocked with Raja's. On Raja's other side was a large male lion. The lion's head reached to Raja's waist.

"Raja, Silessa," Lucian said. "What can I do for you two?"

"Actually, it's what I can do for you," Raja said.

"And that would be?" Lucian asked, curious.

"My cats," Raja said matter-of-factly. "I can use my cats to help fight if the townies attack."

"Wouldn't that be dangerous?" Isolde asked.

"Only for those I direct them to attack."

"The big cats are valuable. We wouldn't want them to be hurt," Lucian said, skeptically.

"I don't know, Lucian," Charlotte said stepping closer to him. "If I saw a lion rushing me, I'm not sure I would be able to do anything but run." She smiled at Lucian. Flames danced in her eyes.

Lucian did not return her smile.

Two men approached the group. The first man was Professor Arcanus. He was supporting a shorter older man. His hair was grey, his hairline was receding and he had mutton-chop sideburns. He wore a fine, expensive blue velvet robe and half-moon glasses which he looked over the top of. He hunched over somewhat and looked a little lost. His left hand was pressed protectively against his left side like he had a stitch in his side.

"Professor Arcanus, Professor Pacali," Lucian said surprised at the men's appearance. "What can I do for you gentlemen?"

"Lucian," Professor Pacali said, in a voice that seemed almost childlike. He stepped away from Professor Arcanus and walked right up to Lucian and placed his right hand on Lucian's arm in a fatherly manner. He looked into Lucian's eyes. "I heard there might be trouble tonight," he said whimsically. He looked around as if looking for something. Then he returned his gaze to Lucian. "Perhaps my punks can help." He smiled at Lucian.

"I wouldn't want them to be injured, Professor," Lucian said with a great deal of respect in his voice. "They are protected by the Carnival like all its members."

"But if we are attacked, this night, when we are short our Skurra, you might need every hand you can get. We all know the risk if the Skurra are disturbed while applying their makeup."

"Yes, but they don't. Nor do the big cats." Lucian looked to Raja.

"And do the Creeplings understand the risk? And they are asked to fight for us sometimes." Pacali paused. "Sometimes to protect the ones we love, a little risk must be taken," Pacali said.

"He has a point," Elthryn said. "They don't necessarily have to be in the main fight. Perhaps, they and the big cats, could only fight to help protect the troupers."

"If they truly seemed only to have a dislike for Vistani, perhaps they will pass by those who are not," Pacali said. He breathed in deeply, then clutched his side. He lowered his gaze.

Lucian seemed the only one who noticed. He put his hand gently but firmly on Pacali's left hand. He leaned in close to Pacali and

whispered a sense of urgency in his voice. "Is it time for a new one?"

"Soon," Pacali whispered seriously. "Very soon." Pacali straightened up and looked back into Lucian's eyes.

Lucian released Pacali's hand and stood upright. "Will you be able to direct them, without putting yourself into harms way?"

"Yes," Pacali replied, his childlike exuberance returned. "But I do have a few things other than my punks at my disposal. I am not a helpless old man."

"I know you're not," Lucian said warmly with respect in his voice.

"I am a competent Arcanist."

"I know Professor."

"Good," Pacali said joyfully. "I will go prepare my punks." He turned and stepped back to Professor Arcanus. Arcanus took Pacali's right arm. However, Pacali did not move. He turned back to Lucian and said hopefully over his shoulder. "Let us pray we are merely being paranoid. And tonight is as quiet as the last."

"Yes, let's pray," Lucian agreed.

The two professors walked away back toward the House of Horrors which was nearly torn down.

Lucian turned and looked to Raja. "Alright, prepare your cats."

Raja bowed and the three walked away.

Lucian looked to those still in the group. "All right, after everything is torn down, put the vardos in position to pull out the moment the sun rises, the Skurra return and the threat is over. Isolde's will be the only vardo that will not be with the others. Hers still needs to be in the center. But I doubt if anyone can do any real damage to *that* vardo." At this, Lucian smiled at Isolde. Who returned his smile, knowingly. "Tell the mages in the group to put up any and every protective spells they have and illusions. If we are

attacked, perhaps if they believe we are not here, they will leave."

"We can always hope," Isolde said. "What about what Chino said?"

"I don't know. All we know is some people had a problem with our Skurra. After all, those in the Big Top didn't seem to have a problem with them. Let's not point any fingers just yet."

Six other troupers approached.

The group standing before Lucian was quite a strange site.

Elthryn Winter, the Wraith, Lucian's right hand man, was a tall, handsome Kartakan, clean-shaven with shoulder-length hair. His skin, hair, and eyes were all shadowy gray, thanks to the Twisting.

Gon Stonesplitter, the Rock, a Dwarven male from the city of Tempe Falls in Necropolis, was also completely gray, but looked more like a Dwarf carved in stone.

Tosk, the Brute, a mountain of a man. His shirtless torso showed off the huge bulging muscles, his skin was mottle and warty, bristly hair on his chest and arms, and the executioner's hood covering his head, although his tusks still protruded.

Tindal, the Amazing Soul-less Man, his tall wiry frame stood emphasized by the riding outfit and red coat, the Chambarrier sticking out of his back pocket and he carried his thin, knobby cane that he twirled about.

Red Jack, with a rapier, the gold, wire hand guard glinting in the last rays of the sun.

Isolde, a tall stunning human looking woman with pale skin, flowing black hair, and a dark, penetrating gaze wore her usual black and deep blue masculine clothes with high hard riding boots. Her sword hung at her side, her hand resting on its ornate, bejeweled hilt.

Najib al-Auni bin Mutamin, a 6' tall half-elven man with dark tanned skin, straight

black hair short and neat with a colorful headscarf and a well-groomed goatee and mustache. He was lean and muscular. He wore practical clothes, with a Jambiya and a cutlass, which appeared to be worn through the sash and no one saw the wheellock belt pistols he owned, that is until he used them.

Hans, the baker, his once unkempt wheat colored hair was now cut short, to a mere stubble. He might have been an attractive man once, but years of being beaten down robbed him of that. He wore simple clothes, carried a long and short sword at his side. He removed his baker's hat and put a headband around his head to cover the brand of a hawk on his forehead that all Falkovnians have.

Mola, was looking less and less like a skeleton. Skin and muscles grew over her bones as if a balloon being inflated. When the effect was over, she still looked too thin for someone her size, but no longer like a skeleton. She wore a loose dress and simple shoes that would not slip of if she had to run. She was putting two bandoleers of daggers over her head that crossed her chest and back. There were ten daggers in each bandoleer.

And then there was an old man. He had thinning grey hair with a slightly receding hairline. He wore it longer on top to comb over the slight bald spot at his crown. Lines crossed his face. And he had piercing blue eyes. He stood straight and tall and although he looked a bit thin, it betrayed his true agility. He carried a staff nearly two feet taller than him. It was gnarled and twisted as if it grew around a lamppost and black. If the staff was straightened it would probably reach ten feet tall. Everyone called him 'old man' despite the way he moved, acted and spoke, which betrayed a man in his early twenties. Everyone except Ahmed, he called him teacher or sir. Ahmed & his Shadow stood beside the old man. The old man was still training them how to use the

quarterstaff. The Shadow was still learning how to speak. Having no real voice all her life, except the screams all the Wild Children had, it made finding her voice difficult. Since she had no voice when she and Ahmed arrived, she had no name. So the troupers named her, Belle, for the anklet she always wore. Neither Ahmed nor Belle carried their weapons. Neither of them were part of the security force. They merely followed their teacher. They also helped him sell his staves, canes, and walking sticks.

Raphael approached the group. He had a large cigar hanging from his mouth, with rings of smoke following him. He wore a robe which he was untying the belt of as he approached. Beneath the robe was a pair of simple work pants and shirt with a functional belt and riding boots. He carried no weapons. He removed his robe and threw it over his shoulder. He wore a necklace, with an emblem hanging from it. The emblem had a silver longsword superimposed on an alabaster kite shield and adorned with a sprig of belladonna.

Raphael bowed his head to Lucian as he joined the group. "Pardon me Lucian for my tardiness. Nature." He smiled wide, the cigar still hanging from his mouth. And smoke ringing his head.

"Not a problem, Raphael," Lucian replied, returning the smile. Lucian cleared his throat. "It has been just over a year since the Incubus and that other town attacked us. Since those events we've established a plan in the event of another threat to the Carnival. Tonight we may see just how good those plans are."

"But I think we were all hoping the Skurra would be part of this," Red Jack said. "We are short one quarter of our security force."

"We knew this might happen. As rare an occurrence as it might be," Lucian continued. "Anyone not on the security force but with martial skills who'd like to help, can

help protect the Troupers. We need a lookout." He looked to Elthryn. "Send out the fastest runners with night vision to watch for the Townies. Make sure they are aware of the signal patterns to use through the night. If they see the Townies approach, they signal then return. They do not engage. The security force sets up ready to fight here, in the middle of the Carnival next to Isolde's vardo. There will be no lights. So those who can't see in the dark, must have something cast on them. No matter what happens, they can not reach our Skurra."

"I can help," Charlotte said.

Lucian looked at her, unaware she was still there. "No," Lucian said firmly. "You are not a member of the security force."

"I can join now."

"No," Lucian said. "You are not in the plans we've set up for these events. But as I said, if you want to help protect the other Troupers, you may." He motioned his head toward the other side of the Midway.

She sighed understanding the dismissal and walked away.

"What about ditches?" a Roustabout said from behind Lucian. He was packing up the remains of Red Jack's burnt tent. "We could try digging ditches and camouflaging them."

"Might be able to slow them down at least," Isolde said.

"After the vardos are ready, the Roustabouts can begin to dig ditches, if we have that much time. The security force is the front line, though. The Roustabouts will be the second line. Only if it looks like the Townies will get through do we call all the troupers out. We have to protect our Skurra. At all cost."

"What about the Abominations?" a small child-like voice said.

The group parted. There standing at the back of the group was a Halfling. He was

tall, for a Halfling, and thin. He looked like an Elven child. He wore a multi-colored harlequin outfit and was wiping white makeup off his face.

"Brennan, the Abominations are as dangerous to us as they are to the Townies. We have no control over them."

"Unlike the big cats, Pacali's punks, and the Creeplings," the Halfling said matter-of-factly.

"Yes," Lucian replied. "Only as a last resort do we unleash the Abominations."

"We would be fighting them along with the Townies," Raphael added.

Everyone nodded in agreement.

"All right, let's prepare for the worst."

"And pray for the best," Isolde said.

"And pray for the best'," Lucian repeated.

Four: By the Light of the Silvery Moon

I remember in the circus learning that the clown was the prince, the high prince. I always thought that the high prince was the lion or the magician, but the clown is the most important.

**Roberto Benigni,
Italian actor, writer and director**

As this was the Lunaset, the day after the full moon, so the moon was still full. It was high in the sky and illuminated everything. The night went slowly. It hadn't taken long for the camp to prepare. The security force was in a circle near Isolde's vardo. But everyone was on edge. The waiting was the worst part. And the quiet didn't help. The only noises in the night were the sound from the lookouts. Every fifteen minutes an animal call came from the area between the Carnival and the town. Luckily, the clearing

the Carnival occupied was defendable. They tried whenever possible to set up the Carnival in an area that was defendable. But no one felt safe.

There was two hours before sunrise. It was about the same amount of time as earlier, when the fire broke out. It had been five minutes since the last call from one of the lookouts, when another call came out.

The entire security force stood and looked toward the break in the trees. This was the alert that someone on horseback approached. Only one person. The security force watched as a lone individual raced toward the camp.

"Hello!" the individual yelled. The individual slowed and stopped about twenty feet from the group. The person breathed heavily, out of breath despite riding the horse. He dismounted then approached. He raised his hands. "Hello! I am from the town."

"What do you want?" Lucian asked. He wore a hooded cloak that concealed his clothes and hair.

"My name is Edik. I came to warn you," the man said.

Lucian allowed the man to approach. He looked to Elthryn and nodded toward the lookouts. Elthryn disappeared behind Isolde's vardo. Several animal calls were heard. Then Elthryn returned.

"Warn us about what?" Lucian asked. "You can lower your arms."

Edik looked around as he lowered his arms. "Where is everyone?"

"You said you came to warn us," Lucian prompted.

Edik looked to Lucian. "Invidia plans to attack you."

"Invidia? Why? This isn't Invidia."

"That doesn't matter. They will be here soon. You must leave."

"Why are they going to attack us?" Lucian said, more forcefully this time. "This is Borca."

"You're Vistani. They don't like Vistani."

"What do you mean?" Isolde said.

"We're only about ten miles from Invidia. And Lord Malocchio hates Vistani. His troops kill any they find. They even cross the border chasing Vistani just to kill them. We don't like it, but our town guard can't always prevent them."

"How did the Invidians know Vistani were here? And why did your townsfolk act the way they did? It looked as though they had a problem," Lucian demanded.

"You wouldn't know this but there were Invidians among the crowd this afternoon. The mayor saw them, at least three. When he saw them he knew what they were doing here. They had heard there were Vistani here and they sent scouts to find out. The mayor believes someone informed the Invidians. He sent me to warn you."

"How did they know we had Vistani? They wear the makeup. Or was it the fortune teller, Madame Fortuna?"

"No," he shook his head. "Only one Vistani among a group so large, they might have ignored it, but more likely they would have someone sneak into your camp and kill her, or just burn her wagon. But the mayor, he was watching the Invidians. They were watching the harlequins. They must have been suspicious about them. But when he saw the woman with the rose on her face dance with the lute player, he recognized them as Vistani. And if the mayor recognized them, the Invidians would. That's when he looked more closely at the other harlequins. When he realized that most were Vistani he knew your fate was sealed. They plan to kill all of you, not just them."

"Why are you here?"

"The mayor sent me. To warn you, you must leave."

"Thank you," Isolde said.

"But if the Invidians discover you informed us, won't you be in danger?" Isolde asked.

"I doubt it. This is wrong what they do. The rest of you must leave, now, before they come."

"We can't," Lucian said.

"Why not? All you need to do is pack up and leave."

Lucian looked at Isolde. She looked at him. It was as if they spoke to each other. She nodded her head.

"Our Vistani are away right now," Isolde said. "We cannot leave without them and they will not return for a while. Besides, do you see horses?"

"Then they will kill you for being friendly with them. And you will not be able to do anything to stop them."

"No, it will not be that easy," Isolde said.

"We suspected something and believed *your* town was going to attack us," Lucian said, "by the way your people were acting in the midway. When will they come?"

"I don't know."

"Do you know how they will attack?" Lucian asked.

"No, we've never known them to do this before. They usually just pursue Vistani from their borders. But I do know they will not stop until the Vistani are dead or they are."

"Have they ever attacked anyone who was prepared for them?" Raphael said.

"I don't know. All we've ever seen is them chasing," Edik said. "And when they've pursued they've had dogs and sometimes archers. Even with the rest of your people though, they have enough troops to outnumber you."

"You let us worry about that," Isolde said.

"What if they discover we have prepared for them to attack?" Elthryn asked.

"I don't know. I don't think it will matter."

Raphael stepped forward and whispered into Isolde and Lucian's ears. "*What about him?*"

"I don't know," Isolde said aloud. "Now you've warned us. Now what?"

"I'm to return to town," he said. "The mayor is trying to get the local militia ready. I'm not sure how much help we can provide."

"What about the tent fire?" Isolde asked.

"The mayor overheard something about it being a successful diversion."

The man got back on his horse and road toward the opening in the trees. Elthryn made a few animal calls.

"He tells the truth," Isolde said.

"Change of plans," Lucian called. "Raja, Professor Pacali, Skurra, wizards."

There was the sound of movement.

Eight people appeared through the invisible wall and went to Lucian. Then Professor's Arcanus and Pacali approached as quickly as Pacali could move. His hand was clutching his side.

"Although we don't know how we will be attacked, we do know who. It's Invidia." Lucian told them what the townie told them.

"The Dukkar," spat one of the Skurra who did not wear the makeup.

"Does anyone know how Invidia feels about magic?" Lucian asked.

"I think they are even more distrusting of arcane magic than we are," Raphael said.

"I don't think it would be wise to assume they will have none though," Lucian said.

"Skurra, you know the secret language of your people right?"

Four people stepped forward. "Yes," they said.

"Good," Lucian looked at Isolde. "I need you to warn your people, the Vistani, to be weary around this area. That Invidia sends raiding parties. The four of you must go out into the area surrounding the town and mark it. Warn them. Can you get this done before the Skurra return, before sunrise? Because when that happens, we must leave at the first opportunity."

They looked at each other. They all shook their heads. "We will," the woman with them said. "And if not, we can control the mists."

"Good, don't get caught, and don't be late. But if you do miss us, we will go to Professor Pacali's home to rest the horses." He paused. "But just in case, take horses. Hide them somewhere."

"We will not need them," the woman said. They left the group.

"Raja," Lucian said. "Let's see how their dogs like our cats."

Raja smiled and broke into a run toward the beast wagons.

"Professor Pacali, get your punks ready. You will send them after any magic users they have," Lucian told him. "Make sure they can't concentrate and cast their spells. If there are no magic users send them in after all their people have come into the clearing."

"Of course, Lucian," Pacali said, beaming like a child with a new toy.

"Professor Arcanus," Lucian said. "Will you and Professor Pacali be alright alone?" he said, leaving the offer for help unspoken.

Arcanus smiled wickedly. "I think the professor and I can handle anything the punks can not."

The two men turned and walked toward the unseen vardos.

"Wizards," he said to the remaining four. "We can't allow their archers to hit us with

their arrows. We need all the shields and barriers you can muster. It's up to you whether you want to fight with us." Lucian nodded and the four left.

"And Pacali?" Red Jack began, "are you sure he will be able to come through? He's not always entirely with us, not since the incubus. Agreed, he is better than he was. But he has been known to retreat into his own world in stressful situations."

"And that is the price he pays for his previous errors in judgment. When he is with us in both mind and body, he does everything he can to help."

"Sunrise is in less than two hours," Brennan stated. "The sun will be at their backs."

"And in our eyes," Raphael said. "They will have the advantage for it."

"And when the sun rises we will have the Skurra." Lucian turned to the security force. "Before, we were only prepared for an attack we suspected would come. Now we know there will be one. Let's pray we have enough time to implement our changes in the plan before we are hit. If there's anything you don't have you think you might need, now's the time to get it. But make it quick."

No one moved.

Everyone stood near Isolde's vardo. Waiting. There was rustling from the area of the unseen vardos. It only lasted several minutes before everything was quiet again. An animal call came from the area of the lookouts then four men were seen running toward the camp. The four wizards appeared. They walked up to each member of the group and touched them, whispering. When they got to Gon he lifted his hand.

"If this is for the arrows, save it for someone else, I'm protected from them," he whispered. And the wizard nodded and stepped away.

"Time to dance ladies and gentlemen," Lucian said. "Raphael, after the arrows come, there will be no need to subdue."

Raphael nodded.

The security force prepared for the attack.

Elthryn wore dark clothes. Gon Stonesplitter's skin hardened and he lifted his maul. Tosk wore a blackened breastplate. He pulled the executioners mask from his head. His Orcish features more pronounced from the Twisting. Tindal, wearing his normal black formal wear, twirled his cane, a cynical smirk on his face. Red Jack looked like he always did. Isolde stood with her hand was on her sword hilt. Najib and Hans drew their weapons. Mola wore studded leather armor. The old man leaned on the gnarled staff. Brennan looked bored with his hands on his hips tapping his foot on the ground. He still wore his harlequin clothing. Lucian wore a dark cloak.

Raphael wore a dark poncho that covered his torso. He checked pouches that hung from his belt. There were twenty pouches in all. When he moved the poncho to check the pouches something glinted beneath. "Oh great and wonderful Ezra," Raphael began. "Look down upon us and show us your grace and grant us your protection on this dark and evil night so that we may protect those who cannot protect themselves."

Raja appeared with twelve large cats of various species. Hanging from his neck was a moon shaped pendant that glowed in the light of the moon.

One of the wizards, the only one in robes, walked up to Raja. He touched Raja, whispering. Before moving on he leaned in close to Raja, "might want to put that into your shirt," he pointed to the necklace. "Wouldn't want to lose it." Raja looked down and saw the pendant then slid it under his shirt.

The four wizards moved. The robed wizard walked ahead of the group and stopped twenty feet in front of them. Two stayed by the group. And another, the only woman of the four, moved quickly to stand sixty feet behind the group.

Two figures appeared ahead of the group and moved toward the trees where the lookouts had been. There was a large dark area that moved behind them. When they were within ten feet of the opening in the trees they stopped and disappeared.

A noise came from beyond the opening in the trees. It was growling. Then twenty dark figures came into site from between the break in the trees. The figures ran on all fours. They growled.

Raja raised his hand and pointed toward the approaching dogs. "Attack!" he commanded. The twelve large cats broke into a run toward the dogs. The cats closed the distance quickly and quietly. The two groups collided. The dogs growled and began barking. Roars erupted from the cats. It echoed through the area. The dogs yelped. Two dogs broke from the fighting group and raced toward the camp.

The robed wizard raised his hand, whispered something, then lowered it.

The dogs still approached. Suddenly twenty five feet from the wizard the dogs hit something and fell motionless to the ground.

Three dogs broke from the group and ran back toward the opening in the trees. One of the big cats broke from the group and pursued.

"Raja," Lucian said.

"Belgar return!" Raja commanded.

Belgar broke off the pursuit of the fleeing dogs and raced toward the fighting animals. The cat passed the fighting animals and raced toward the camp.

The robed wizard turned and looked toward the group. "Ten feet to either side."

Raja called to the big cat. The cat turned sharply to run ten feet to one side of where the dog fell. Belgar passed the wizard. The cat stopped in front of Raja and sat down at his feet. Raja put his hand on the cat's head and petted him. Belgar was a large tiger. His head reached to Raja's waist.

It didn't take long for the growling to stop. When the dogs no longer fought back and silence filled the area, Lucian said, "Raja."

"Return," Raja commanded. The cats broke into a run toward the group.

The robed wizard lifted his hand and waved it in front of him. The cats passed the fallen dog, and the wizard. They slowed as they approached Raja. They all stopped in front of him and sat at his feet. Raja petted each of them.

"Injuries?" Lucian asked.

"Some," Raja said.

"Badly?" Lucian asked.

"Not very," Raja said.

"I don't want to lose any," Lucian said.

"Understood," Raja said. "I have that covered."

There was a whistle that came from near the opening in the trees. They fell silent.

Dark spots appeared in the opening.

"Ready," Lucian said.

The wizards appeared to do nothing. The dark spots by the opening continued into the clearing. The group walked up to where the fallen dogs were and stopped. They lifted their arms, bow strings could be heard. Dark spots littered the sky. The wizard closest to Lucian raised his hand, whispered something and lowered it. As the arrows approached they suddenly flew off to the right, away from the group and away from the invisible vados and fell harmlessly into the woods.

Another volley of arrows came, but the same thing happened. A cry could be heard from the archers. "They are prepared!" A group cry came from the other side of the trees and a rush of people ran through the opening. When they reached the archers, the archers joined them and all rushed toward the camp. Within moments another group appeared in the break.

"Go," could be heard and a dark mass appeared and swarmed them. Screams were heard as the group of people fell to the ground.

"Raphael," Lucian said. "I think it's time."

With his left hand Raphael pulled the poncho off. He wore a beautiful breastplate. He waved his right and a longsword appeared in it. He waved his left hand and a shield appeared in it. Both gleamed in the moonlight. On both the breastplate and the shield was the same symbol as on the emblem hanging from his necklace, the symbol of Ezra.

Isolde drew her sword, it glowed a bright blue.

Lucian released the cloak pin and let it fall to the ground. He wore Elven Half-Plate that gleamed in the moonlight like Raphael's breastplate. His silver white hair also seemed to glow. He drew his rapier-like weapons lifted his left high.

"Charge!"

The security force ran forward to meet the advancing Townies. The robed wizard followed them. The other three wizards remained where they stood.

"Attack!" Raja said pointing to the attackers.

The two groups met where the Carnival's gate had been. Clashing metal rang throughout the clearing.

The big cats were the first to reach them. They roared as they ripped into the attackers.

Isolde's blade came down hard on the blade of the man she greeted. He was so surprised by the force of her blow that it set him off balance. Another swing of her sword and the man fell motionless to the ground. She moved to the next person. She made short work of that man also. This was her fighting style, the hard first strike that made her opponents drop quicker. The only problem was, it didn't last. She could only do this for three, maybe four opponents before losing the initial burst of strength. Then she would have to go to a normal style. Her third opponent stepped up to her and met her initial blow prepared. She knew this one would take awhile.

* * *

Lucian stopped just before the group of attackers and pointed his rapier-like Thinblade, in his left hand, at them. "Oh great and powerful Ezra, look down upon our attackers and show them your wrath." He then sprinted the last few feet. Lucian's blades came down hard on the attacker's longsword. Several swift moves and Lucian's Thinblade pierced deep into the attacker's chest, who fell lifeless to the ground. Lucian moved to the next attacker. He parried the man's first swing with the Lightblade, the shorter rapier-like blade. He then lunged with the Thinblade, piercing the man's chest. The next attacker was not so easily dispatched, instead of slashing down with his longsword, he went for an uppercut. Lucian still parried with the Lightblade. But this man had a second weapon as well and slashed across in front of Lucian's chest. Lucian jumped back to avoid the blow. Then the man swung his sword at Lucian with a backward movement. Lucian stepped back to avoid this blow also but the attacker's other blade came down across Lucian's leg. Lucian grunted at the pain then slid the point of his Lightblade up under the man's ribcage.

* * *

Raphael ran headlong into the onslaught. He brought his shield down hard into the face of one man and slashed the other across the chest. Both men fell to the ground. He turned and did the same to the next two attackers. Then his shield came down and hit metal, the attacker blocked with a shield of his own and swung his sword at Raphael. Raphael stepped back out of the man's range separating their shields. Raphael swung his sword before the man could recover, but the man was too quick for him. His shield was there to block the blow. The man swung again meeting Raphael's shield. Their shields and swords met several more times.

* * *

Elthryn ran into the crowd and brought his longsword up to block an attacking blow. He swung his sword directing the attacking blow away from him, then he brought his sword back across the attacker's chest. The man dropped to the ground. He moved to the next man.

* * *

Red Jack ran up to one attacker, he blocked the oncoming sword blow with the scabbard of his rapier, then drove his rapier deep into the man's throat. He pulled the rapier out quickly as the man grabbed his throat with his free hand. Then Red Jack drove his rapier into the man's chest. The man fell to the ground. Another man stepped up to Jack. He had a sinister smile on his face. "My, aren't we pretty," the man said. "I wanna see what's under that mask of yours."

"You'll have to kill me to get it off," Jack said.

"Planned on it. *En Garde!*"

The two men took a fencing stance. Jack placed his scabbard hand behind him. The man did a forward hop and lunged his rapier at Jack.

"Balesta," Jack said.

There was a back-and-forth play of blades with several gaps where neither blade touched each other.

"Conversation," the man said.

Another conversation ensued. The man deflected Jack's blade.

"Attaque au fer," Jack said.

The man then advanced by crossing one leg over the other. "Passe avant."

Jack retreated the same way. "Passe arrière."

The man made an attack with a chopping motion of his blade.

"Coup de taille," Jack said. Then Jack parried the attack. "Contre-parade." Then Jack made an attack that swept the man's blade through a full circle.

"Enveloppement." The man moved for an attack with an aggressive leap off his leading foot, attempted to make the hit, and then passed Jack at a run. As he passed, he brandished a main-gauche in his other hand and went to stab Jack with it. The blade hit Jack's coat but lands flat.

"Fleche," Jack said. "Coup plaque." Jack brought his scabbard hand around quickly to hold the man's main-gauche to his coat. Jack spun the man around to bring it up behind him. There was a cracking sound. The man screams. Jack stood behind him with the man's arm in an unnatural position. He stepped back and drove his rapier into the man's back. "Coup d'estoc." The man fell to the ground. "Match."

Jack turned to look for another opponent. He didn't have to look long. A sword hit Jack in the cheek of his mask. His head whipped to the side with the force of the blow. He straightened to see his attacker. It was a woman with a broadsword.

"Not fair, mademoiselle, hitting a man when his back is turned."

"And what of your backstab?" her voice was musical.

"He did not establish a two-weapon fencing match."

"I guess all's fair in love and war."

"I would much rather make love."

"Next time we meet, we'll make love," she smiled broadly.

"Deal." Jack took the fencing stance, with his scabbard hand held high. "*En Garde!*"

She held her broadsword high with both hands. "Engage."

* * *

Tosk and Gon raced side-by-side, despite their size difference. They barreled through the onslaught, swinging their weapons as they went. They moved through the crowd of attackers, dropping all they came upon. They continued until they reached the other side of the opposition taking out eight opponents total. They turned and brandished their weapons high two attackers approached. They did not have time to charge so they stepped up to the attackers and engaged. They made short order of them.

* * *

Both Najib and Hans stepped up to the attacking group together. They turned so their backs were toward each other. They made the same moves, blocked with the short sword and attacked with the longsword. It took two blows to drop both of their attackers. Then they stepped up to their next pair.

* * *

Mola ran into the crowd. She ducked once to avoid a blow by one attacker, only to block a blow by the attacker behind him with her left dagger. With the first one behind her she brought the dagger in her right hand back to stab him in the back. As she pulled the dagger out of the man's back and brought its

hilt hard into the second man's jaw. His head swung, spraying dark liquid from his mouth. She swung around and dug the left dagger into the first man's throat. With her right dagger she brought the blade across the second man's throat. Both men fell to the ground. She turned to see two others approach her.

* * *

The old man raced into the crowd. He tucked the quarterstaff into his stomach and rolled, bringing two men to the ground. He jumped to his feet before the two men could move let alone get to their feet. The old man brought the staff down hard with one end onto one man's back, then brought the other end down onto the others. He pummeled both men until neither moved, then turned to face a man and woman with long swords.

He swung hitting the man's longsword, knocking it from his grip. The longsword flew off into the crowd of attackers. Then he swung the other end of the staff hitting the woman's sword. She held tight to her weapon. But it did off balance her. The old man turned and swung on the man, hitting him hard in the chest, knocking him to the ground. Then he turned and swung at the woman again. She tried to meet the attack with her sword, but his force was too great and she stumbled backwards. He turned to see what the man was doing. The man was still on the ground. The old man brought the staff down hard onto the man's chest. There was the sound of bones cracking. He turned to face the woman again. She was running at him. He stepped to the side at the last moment and swung the staff around hitting her hard in the back. She fumbled forward falling onto the man. The old man swung in a downward motion to hit her in the back. But she rolled over, off the man and out of the way. She was obviously winded but she continued to roll. The old man followed, bringing the staff down to try to hit her.

Another man came up behind the old man and swung his battleaxe at him. The old man sensed something and swung around to block the blow with the staff. He countered, swinging the other end of the staff around to hit the man in the arm. The man cried out in pain then dropped the axe. The old man did an uppercut with the staff, hitting the man under the jaw. His head flew back hard and he continued falling back onto the ground.

* * *

Tindal stepped casually up to an attacker. He twirled his cane in front of the man's face blocking all the attacking blows. When the man swung wide, Tindal brought his cane down hard on the man's head. The man fell to the ground. He chuckled to himself and stepped toward another attacker. He twirled the cane casually as if a baton. He stepped in close to the attacker, hit him several times with the cane, then stepped back. The man didn't know what to make of it. He grew tired of the game Tindal was playing with him, so he timed the canes movements then lunged in. Tindal tried to dodge, unsuccessfully. The sword's blade slid under his arm and cut into his side just under his left arm. Tindal stopped twirling the cane and looked at the man. The man smiled at him.

"You cut my jacket," Tindal said, shocked.

"You look like an undertaker."

"Then you'll know what will happen when I'm through with you." Tindal began twirling his cane again, more aggressively. Several swings of the cane and the man fell to the ground. Then Tindal checked the cut on his side. When he pulled his hand away, there was blood on it. He still seemed more bothered by the cut in his jacket.

"A little less play, a little more fight," a voice said from behind him.

Tindal turned to see the robed wizard running past him.

* * *

The robed wizard stopped just past Tindal. He looked at the area in front of him. Then he chose an area that none of the security force were in. He opened his mouth and shouted. A wave moved from him and hit the attackers. Eight attackers were hit with the cone-shaped wave, six fell to the ground the other two put their hands on their ears and fell to their knees. They kept shaking their heads. The robed wizard nodded in approval. Then he lifted his hand toward two kneeling attackers. Five missiles flew from his hand, two hit one man in the chest, three hit the other. Both men fell to the ground.

* * *

Brennan was the last to reach the attackers. He leapt into the air kicking one man in the face. He then landed on the man's shoulders, kicking the man several times about the head. When the man began falling to the ground, Brennan leapt to the ground. No other attackers were near him. He crossed his arms disappointed. So he looked around the battle field to decide his next move. There were still plenty of attackers, but he would have to pass through his people to get to them.

* * *

The sky grew brighter.

* * *

Raphael and his opponent clashed swords and shields. *This is taking too long*, Raphael thought. Then his opponent grunted and fell to one knee. Raphael came down hard on the man's head with his shield. As the man fell to the ground, Raphael saw a small multi-colored figure run from behind the falling man. "Thanks, Brennan."

* * *

Swords clashed and Isolde stepped back as her attacker swung his sword high, at her

head. Their swords clashed again, then he swung low. She jumped over the blow. Their swords clashed again. He swung at her stomach. She tried to move back out of the way, but the blow hit her hard in the stomach. It didn't cut her, but the blow certainly did hurt. It took the wind from her. He was surprised there was no blood. But he did notice she was winded. He moved in for the final blow while she was vulnerable. "Ahhh!" he screamed as his foot came out from underneath him. Despite being winded, Isolde moved in and with one swing, he fell to the ground dead. She saw a small multi-colored figure run from behind the fallen man. "Brennan?"

"He, he he!" he laughed.

* * *

The woman swung her broadsword at Red Jack. He deflected the blow with his scabbard. But he felt the blow in his wrist. She was strong, maybe stronger than him. But she did have a larger weapon and was using the strength in both arms. He moved in for a stab with his rapier, but she swung at him again. He deflected the blow again. But the force behind her blow was as strong as the last. He knew he wouldn't be able to take another blow. He tried to come in for another blow with his rapier, but she came in again with another blow. He deflected it with his scabbard, but this time, he felt his wrist crack. She broke something. He gritted his teeth behind his mask to keep from letting her know he was hurt.

She screamed and fell to her knees. Jack took advantage and hit her hard across the jaw with the basket hilt of his rapier. Her head whipped around, her body moved with the force and she fell to the ground.

Jack saw a small multi-colored figure run past behind her. "Brennan," he said. "Thanks."

* * *

An attacker stepped up to Tindal. This one had a short staff in each hand. He started swinging both of them in circles. He came in and swung at Tindal. He blocked one of the blows, but the other hit him under his left arm. It hit him right in his wound. Tindal grunted. The man chuckled and gave Tindal a cynical smile. The man came in with his weapons again. Tindal dodged one blow and blocked the other. Tindal stepped back and began to spin his cane. The man came in with his weapons. They hit his cane and they were deflected. So the man stepped back and leapt over Tindal. He landed behind Tindal and went to attack him from behind before he could turn. Tindal began to turn, but he didn't think he could turn in time to get his cane up to protect him from the blows he knew were coming. Then he heard the man cry out. Tindal turned around to see the man only holding one weapon. The other hand was holding his back, by his kidney. Tindal brought his cane down hard on the man's head. As the man stumbled backward, Tindal saw a small multi-colored figure run from behind the man. "Brennan," Tindal said. The man began shaking his head to clear it. Tindal stepped in and hit the man again on the head. The man fell to the ground. "Thanks."

* * *

Mola stepped up to her two attackers. The first man went into a roll and came up behind her. The second stepped up to face her. She turned to try to see the one behind her, but he stepped out of her view. She swung one of her daggers behind her, hopping to make contact. She felt her dagger make contact and heard a grunt. In her distraction trying to catch the first man, the second caught her off guard. He got his attack off before her. All she could do was hope she could get her dagger up in time to block. The two blades met inches from her face. She ducked under

his arm using her dagger to push the sword up so she could get a better position on the two men. She stepped back and brought both daggers up. The two men turned to meet her. The first man rolled again coming up behind her again. The second man swung his sword at her. Her dagger came up to meet the blade. She managed to deflect most of the force, but she felt the blade cut her cheek. It stung. She couldn't think about it though, she swung her dagger behind her to hit the first man. It didn't make contact. She felt a pain in her side as the first man's blade slid into a gap in her studded leather armor. She screamed. She saw the second man's sword come at her. She knew she couldn't get her dagger up in time. But instead of the man hitting her with his sword, he fell backward onto the ground. She didn't have time to think. He was down, so she turned swinging hard with her dagger. Her blade came across the first man's throat. His hand went to his gaping wound as he fell to the ground. *The other guy*, she thought. She turned to see a small multi-colored figure standing on the second man's chest kicking him in the face. When the man no longer moved Brennan turned to look at Mola.

"Thanks, Brennan," she said.

"Anytime," he said jumping off the man and running into the crowd.

* * *

The sky brightened.

* * *

Lucian didn't have time to look at his wound. Two attackers stepped up to meet him. They swung their swords at him. He brought his blades up to block the attacks. He jumped into the air and kicked the men in the chest. They both stumbled back, but they recovered quickly. Lucian stepped in to attack both men. Men blocked his blades. He stepped back and came in again. The two men blocked his attacks and stepped wide

coming in on either side of Lucian. Lucian stepped in toward the man on his right and stabbed his Lightblade at him. This time, he made contact. His blade pierced the man's off-hand shoulder. The man stepped back. Then Lucian turned and stepped in toward the man on his left. He stabbed his Thinblade at him. This one made contact also. The tip of the blade went into the bicep of the man's sword arm. The man stepped back. Lucian turned to face the man on his right. The man was lunging. Lucian stepped easily out of the way and stabbed at the man with his Lightblade. The blade pierced the man's back behind his shoulder blade and went deep into the man's chest. The man fell off the blade onto the ground.

Then Lucian heard a scream. *Mola!* He whipped his head in the direction of her scream. *Damn it!* He thought just before he felt the pain on the right side of his face and his ear. He turned to see the man who had been on his left, standing on his right. The man smiled. Then Lucian was blinded as the sun broke over the tree-line. He knew he was in trouble. He brought his swords up to try to block whatever attacks came.

A loud explosion echoed through the clearing.

Lucian held his blades high waiting for the attack that didn't come. He shielded his eyes and looked in front of him. No one was there. He looked to the ground and saw the man who just cut him lying on the ground. There was a small hole in his forehead with black powder around it. Lucian turned to where the explosion was. The Pistoleer stood there still holding his pistol high, smoke coming from the barrel.

The Pistoleer wasn't the only Skurra. All of the fighters among them were racing from the over the hill.

Lucian nodded his thanks to the Pistoleer. Who merely lowered his pistol and raised the other to take another shot, at another target.

The Skurra raced into the crowd of attackers.

* * *

Once the Skurra arrived, it didn't take long to finish off the attackers. Once they realized they were losing, several ran for the opening in the trees.

The swarm of Pickled Punks ran toward the escaping attackers.

"Pacali!" Lucian called.

"Come," Pacali said, and the swarm returned to their master.

The fleeing attackers ran past the group the Punks had taken care of. They ran from the clearing.

Professors Arcanus and Pacali bought the Punks back to the camp.

"Load up," Lucian called. "And get any of ours who've fallen. We leave no one behind."

Pacali stopped at the area where the Punks attacked. He looked through the mass of fallen bodies. He picked up the bodies of several Punks that died or was injured in the attack.

Red Jack checked the woman he fought with the broadsword. She still breathed. He smiled and walked to his vardo.

The group raced to pick up their fallen and pack up. It only took a few minutes.

The clerics raced around to the security force and the Skurra who fought. They healed anyone who needed it, including several Pickled Punks and a couple of the big cats. When one walked up to Lucian he waved him away.

Lucian first went to make sure Mola was alright. The clerics had already healed her wounds. She put her hand on the right side of his face. When she pulled her hand away there was blood on it.

"You should get that looked after," she said tenderly.

Lucian put his hand to his head. He noticed the tip of his ear was missing. "I can think of worse things to lose than part of my ear." He put his hand on her cheek. Then leaned in to kiss her. When he straightened, he motioned for her to go to the vardos. He looked around.

"All accounted for?" Lucian called.

Elthryn stepped up to him. "The four Skurra you sent out haven't returned."

"Is everything ready to leave?"

"Yes," Elthryn said.

"We can't wait. They knew that. They know where we'll be." Lucian walked up to the lead vardo. "Professor Pacali's estate."

The two Skurra sitting on the bench moved. The man whipped the horses into motion. The woman just closed her eyes. Mist formed before them. The vardos move.

Lucian jumped on the back of Mola's vardo. He opened the door. Mola was sitting alone inside. He stepped into the vardo and closed the door.

Lucian and Mola stepped from the vardo. He had a bandage on the side of his head and ear. He also had a white cloth tied around his leg where he had been cut. He left Mola and walked toward Professor Pacali and Arcanus' vardo. The door was opening as he went to knock. Arcanus was holding Pacali who gripped his side with both hands. Lucian held his arms out.

"I'll take him," he said. Arcanus handed Pacali to Lucian. Pacali sat down into Lucian's arms. Lucian carried the older man and walked toward the house. Just before he reached the porch a mist formed near the back of the clearing. Four people stepped from the mist, then it disappeared. Lucian nodded to them, all was accounted for. He stepped up to the front door and opened it. Then he stepped inside with Pacali and closed the door behind them.

Epilogue: R n R

Time is a circus, always packing up and moving away.

Ben Hecht, writer

The area was dark and gloomy. There was a clearing with a large bog on three sides of a neglected, ramshackle wooden house and trees on the other. The area was large enough for all the vardos. When the last of the vardos emerged from the mists everyone jumped out of them. Several Skurra and roustabouts went to the two cookhouse vardos and began to set up the tent.

Sideshow Games

New Performers for the Carnival

By Tami Sammons aka Hadis Deadstalker

OllivanderGryffen@gmail.com

Esthryn Winter, The Wraith

Created by Henry Eshleman aka Cole Deschain

Male human, Ftr5/Wiz5/Rog2: CR 12; Medium-sized Humanoid; HD 5d4+5d10+2d6+12; hp 61; Init +1; Spd 30ft; AC 13 (+1 Dex, +2 *ring of protection*); Base Att Bonus: +9/+4 Melee (1d8+4; crit 19-20, x2, *Elven long sword* + 3) or +5 Ranged (1d4; crit, x2, darts); SA Spells; SQ Familiar; AL N; SV Fort +5, Ref+5, Will +10; Str 14, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 18, Wis 14, Cha 11.

Skills and Feats: Alchemy +14, Climb +4, Concentration +9, Craft (weapon smith) +8, Gather Information +10, Intimidation +7, Jump +4, Knowledge (arcane) +12, Knowledge (the planes) +7, Knowledge (Ravenloft) + 7, Knowledge (religion) +12, Listen +10, Ride +5, Scry +10, Sense Motive +12, Spell craft +14, Spot +12, Swim +4; Alertness, Craft Magic Arms and Armor, Empower Spell, Expertise, Iron Will, Quickdraw, Scribe Scroll, Silent Spell, Spell Focus (evocation), Weapon Focus (long sword), Weapon Specialization (long sword).

Languages: Vaasi*, Balok, Darkonese, Draconic, Mordentish.

Wizard Spells per day: 4/4/3/2. Base DC = 14 + spell level, 16 + spell level for Evocation spells.

Spell book:

0 - Daze, Detect Magic, Flare, Light, Mage Hand, Mending, Ray of Frost, Read Magic;

1 - Burning Hands, Comprehend Languages, Identify, Mage Armor, Magic Missile, Magic Weapon, Mount, Ray of Enfeeblement;

2 - Darkness, Daylight, Flaming Sphere, Locate Object, Melf's Acid Arrow, Pyrotechnics, See Invisibility, Whispering Wind;

3 - Clairaudience/Clairvoyance, Fireball, Flame Arrow, Gust of Wind, Keen Edge, Lightning Bolt.

Introduction

The Wraith is a rather striking individual. He is a tall, handsome Kartakan, clean-shaven with shoulder-length hair. His appearance is made even more striking by the fact that thanks to the Twisting, his skin, hair, and

eyes are all the same shadowy gray. Unfortunately, his personality is best described as caustic. Due to his own high intelligence, he has little patience with those who cannot keep up with him. However, those who earn his respect find him a friendly individual, if still somewhat tactless. Since joining the Carnival, he has warmed somewhat, but he remains distant and secretive with new acquaintances.

Background

The man who would become The Wraith was born Elthryn Winter, in the town of Skald, Kartakass. He was always a secretive type, and few suspected it when he took up the study of magic under a retired adventurer. Elthryn saw magic as a very effective route to power. Unfortunately for him he caught the attention of Harkon Lukas, and he was forced to beat a hasty retreat out of Kartakass. Luckily for Elthryn, the Carnival passed through the area and was able to protect him from Lukas. His secretive nature manifested itself in the darkening of his skin, eyes, and hair. Now entirely shadow-gray, The Wraith has lost the conspicuousness that almost ended his life.

Original Sketch

The Wraith has taken rather well to life with the Carnival and it's unlikely that he will ever choose to leave. He has developed a strong romantic interest in Amelia, the Vampiress. She remains unaware of his infatuation, largely because, for all of his experience, he is almost pathologically shy around her. He has also taken up the study of swordplay, because, as he is often heard to say, "A sword would look really good in my act!"

Update Sketch

In the years since he's been with the Carnival, he has put more of a focus on his

martial skills. Since the events of the Incubus attacked, he has become a member of the Carnival's security force. He has also added some rogue skills, all to benefit his position on the security force. He is a bit of a workaholic. Since he and Amelia married, he's actually mellowed somewhat. He's a much friendlier guy in general. He's both contented and happy.

Original Combat

In spite of his recent martial training, The Wraith hardly considers himself a warrior. Generally he relies on his magic, unless all else fails. He will then employ a simple, non-magical long sword.

Updated Combat

Since becoming a member of the Carnival's security force, he has put all his martial skills into his long sword. He is very observant of the Townies and is skilled at picking out the troublemakers. When in a fight he will use whichever is the quickest way to quell the threat, whether sword or magic.

Lucian

Male Elf, Ftr4/Knight of the Shadows4/Rog3 CR 11; Medium-sized Humanoid, HD 8d10 +3d6+22, HP80, Init +3, Spd 30ft; AC 20 (+3 Dex, +7 Elven Half-Plate Armor), Base Att Bonus: +10/+5 Melee (1d8+4 Crit 18-20/x2 *Elven Thinblade* +3) primary weapon, +4/-2 Melee (1d6+2 Crit 18-20/x2 *Elven Lightblade* +2) secondary weapon; SA Spells; Trap Finding, Evasion, Trap Sense +1, Virtue is it's own Reward, Guardian of the Innocent. AL LG SV Fort +11, Ref+8, Will +5; Str 18, Dex 17, Con 14, Int 15, Wis 14, Cha 13.

Skills and Feats: Ambidextrous, Courage, Craft (Weaponsmith, Elven Thinblade) +9, Dead Man Walking, Diplomacy +7, Gather Information +8, Intimidate +10, Jump +11,

Knowledge (Local), +7, Listen +8, Ride +9, Search +8, Sense Motive +6, Spellcraft +6, Spot +8, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (Elven Thinblade).

Languages: Sithican*, Vaasi, Balok, Mordentish

Divine Spells per day: 3/3/0/0, Base DC - 12 + spell level

Divine Spells:

1st -- bless, change self, deathwatch, detect undead, expeditious retreat, invisibility to undead, magic weapon, obscuring mist, protection from evil, sanctuary.

2nd -- aid, blur, consecrate, darkness, fog cloud, invisibility, mirror image, misdirection, shield other.

3rd -- blink, deeper darkness, displacement, halt undead, haste, magic circle against evil, negative energy protection, nondetection, prayer.

4th -- death ward, detect scrying, freedom of movement, improved invisibility, greater magic weapon, shadow conjuration, solid fog, status.

Introduction

Lucian is an attractive elven male and has the typical features of elves from Sithicus. He has aquiline features and stands 5' 7" tall. He has waist length silver-white hair, except on the right side where it is cut just above the ear. His right ear is missing an inch off the tip and there is a scar on his temple where his ear is missing. His clothing is drab, the preferred colors being white, beige, ash, and gray-green. Since joining the Carnival he has grown very protective of his new family. So much so the Twisting has amplified that to his advantage. He has gained four spell-like abilities: Arcane sight, as per the 3rd level Sor/Wiz spell, *Clairaudience/Clairvoyance*, as per the 3rd level Sor/Wiz spell, *Comprehend Languages* as per the 1st lvl

Sor/Wiz spell and *True Seeing*, as per the 6th level Sor/Wiz spell. All except *True Seeing*, which he can use once per day, are always on however the range is different depending on where he is. When within the confines of the Carnival, within 300 feet of Isolde's vardo, the range is the entire Carnival grounds. And although he may be able to see something the 600 feet from one end of the Carnival to the other, he may not be able to see exactly what that something is until he is closer and baring physical obstructions. Or if he leaves the Carnival grounds as long as he is within 300 feet of Isolde herself the range is 300 feet. Anywhere outside of these two conditions the range is as per the spell. *Comprehend languages* is only for spoken words not written. Arcane sight has made his brown eyes glow blue. He is considered a wisp. His glowing blue eyes are the only physical change to occur from the Twisting.

Background

Lucian grew up in Sithicus. And although he no longer lives in his homeland, he tends to stick to the traits that were ingrained into his nature. This is, however, transferred to his new home, the Carnival, and his new people, the Troupers and Skurra. He is very protective of his new home and new people. Outsiders, the Townies/Georges, are treated with suspicion, disdain or even hostility. He tends to be grim and cold with outsiders, but no where near as much as he was when he lived in his native land. He is warm and almost friendly with the Troupers and Skurra. The solemn apathy the Sithican elves feel for nature and beauty has changed to a more neutral feeling since joining the Carnival. He has begun a relationship with Mola, the living skeleton.

Sketch

Before joining the Carnival, Lucian had been living in Borca. He had a good reputation as

an adventurer in the southern area of Borca and had been hired on several times for security on their trade routes. He joined the Carnival shortly before the Incubus attacked. He was camping in the area where the Carnival arrived. Since he was between jobs at the time, he joined the Carnival as one of the Roustabouts. When the Carnival left, he went with them. He was first attracted to Blasse. There was something about her sad distant demeanor that made him want to cheer her up. While trying to do so, he fell in love with her. But when the Incubus attacked, she spurned him. This was also when he suggested creating a security force to protect the Carnival against attacks by outside forces. Everyone, including the Skurra, through Madame Fortuna, agreed. The made him head of it. Having just been spurned by Blasse, he put everything into it. This just reinforced his overprotective nature for the Carnivals members. Mola Kravvan, the Living Skeleton was the first to join. She had been attracted to Lucian from the first moment she saw him. This helped break her brother's hold on her. Now he has developed a relationship with Mola.

Combat

Lucian is left handed. He carries an *Elven Thinblade* +3 in his left hand and a masterwork Elven Lightblade in his right. When going into battle he usually casts *Magic Weapon* on the Lightblade. When entering battle he wears *Elven Half-Plate* +1. The *Longsword* +3 he used to carry he gave to Elthryn, whom he feels a strong friendship for, although he's not sure the feeling is returned.

Red Jack

Male human, Bard5/Ftr5: CR10, Medium-sized Humanoid, HD 5d6 +5d10+20, HP90, Init +1, Spd 30ft, AC 11 (+1 Dex), Base Att

Bonus: +8 Melee (1d6+3, Crit 18-20/x2, *Rapier*+2) Primary Weapon, +3 Melee (1d6+3. Crit x2, *Metal Scabbard*+2) secondary weapon, SA spells, Bardic music, bardic knowledge, countersong, *facilitate*, inspire courage +1, inspire competence. AL CN, Fort +7, Ref +6, Will +5, STR 14, DEX 16, CON 14, INT 16, WIS 10, CHA 6.

Skills and Feats: Agile, Balance +10, Bluff +8, Combat Reflexes, Combat Expertise, Concentration+9, Craft (Pottery)+16, Diplomacy +8, Escape Artist +16, Improved Disarm, Jump +10, Open Locks +7, Profession (Pottery) +8, Ride +13, Search +9, Two-Weapon Fighting, Two-Weapon Defense

Languages: Mordentish*, Lamordian, Falkovian, Halfling

Spells per day: None

Introduction: Although every one calls this Trouper Jack, no one truly knows whether *he* is male or female. *He* is tall with a slim, athletic build. . He wears men's clothes in the Dementlieu style a white silk shirt, breeches reaching to below the knees, a burgundy knee-length coat with large folded back cuffs and gold embroidery. He has tight white leggings worn to the knee, with black, heeled buckled shoes. He has an elaborate white silk cravat. He wears a three point hat. But instead of the typical black it is burgundy with gold embroidered and three white feathers in the front. There is also several great owl feathers that sweep back toward the back of the hat and a gold medallion in front holding the feathers to the hat with a family crest. Underneath the hat he wears a white wig with large ringlets, the side ringlets were short, reaching to the jawline, and in back are long ringlets tied back by a large burgundy bow with gold embroidery. And white silk gloves.

He also wears a white porcelain mask with ruby red lips and gold paint on the cheeks to match the embroidery. His hazel eyes can be

seen peering through the eyes of the mask. No one ever sees Jack without the mask. And when he carries a weapon, it is a rapier with a gold wire hand-guard with garnet gems. It looks more ornamental rather than an actual weapon to fight with. His voice does not betray his gender. Since arriving at the Carnival, Jack has become more and more androgynous. And the Twisting began to changed his body to reflect his androgyny. He started to lose his sexual identity.

Background

Red Jack was born Jacques Chevalier, the eldest of three children, with a younger brother and sister. His family was once held among the higher ranks of Port-a-Lucine's aristocracy. And Jacques' father was quite the lady's man in his day. But his father had fallen in love with, wooed and married his mother who was betrothed to another man. Rather than fight a duel with the other man over the dishonor he chose to leave Port-a-Lucine for Chateaufaux.

His family became quite an influential family in Chateaufaux. And Jacques and his siblings grew up in the lap of luxury. And he got everything he wanted. But Jacques was not the most attractive of men. No that was his younger brother. But despite his lack of beauty, Jacques grew up to be quite the ladies man, as his father before him. Unfortunately they were not the right kind of ladies for his father's tastes. He tended to romance the ladies from the lower ranks. He didn't like women of his own station. He felt they were arrogant and just favor his attentions simply for his family's influence.

But the ladies of lower ranks appreciated him. And when Jacques fell in love and brought the woman he wanted to marry to meet his family, his father hired a local thug to "take her honor". When Jacques found out what his father had done, he was furious. Jacques married her anyway. But before he

and his new bride could depart on their honeymoon, his father stopped him. They got into a terrible fight that ended in the family estate catching fire. His father and wife both died in the fire. And he was horribly burned.

While he was recovering from his injuries, his brother took over the family, telling everyone that he had also died in the fire. He locked Jacques in the cellar of the new estate. And for almost a year, Jacques lived there in a dank, dark musty room. One night while his brother held a masquerade party upstairs, Jacques picked the lock of his prison and escaped into the night, but not before going to his mother.

He cleaned himself up, donned a suit and mask and joined the party. There, he found his mother and convinced her he was her son. She confronted Jacques brother and exposed him to the town. Jacques watched his brother's humiliation before all of Chateaufaux then ran into the night. Shortly thereafter, he happened upon the Carnival, or was it the other way around.

Either way, he has been with them ever since. When he first arrived, Jack fell in love with Silesssa, but since she was and still is in love with Raja he considers her off limits. But he still has feelings for her. Recently he has come to realize he is also in love with Claude, or rather the Imp. He also believes that Claude might actually be the only one who would accept him with his burns. But because of his burns, he hasn't said anything, and probably never will. Although he knows the Troupers are more accepting of people's flaw than others, he still is afraid they will be horrified by his burns. Despite his being burned, Jack is not afraid of fire in fact he is becoming obsessed with it. And he has developed a strong friendship with Charlotte, the Fire Eater because of it.

What he doesn't realize is this is the Twisting. Although he doesn't play with fire,

whenever there is fire around he must make a Will save in order to keep from touching it. This is a dangerous obsession. And thus far he has controlled his urge to touch the flames or someone has arrived in time to stop him. He has been able to hide this obsession despite being stopped several times from putting his hands into the flames. But he knows someday nothing will stop him and he believes he will burn alive. But what he doesn't realize is the Twisting has made immune to fire. Also, the Twisting has given him the ability to control flames. He can't start them, but he can control the intensity and size, he can even put the flames out.

Combat

Jack uses his Rapier+2 in his right hand and the Metal Scabbard +2 in his left. He prefers to use the scabbard to block rather than strike, but he can strike with it if needed. He appears to wear no armor. However he has a suit that has Elven Chainmail+1 woven into his jacket. Also, the masks Jack wears are made with metal, so they function almost like a helm. The masks will take 20 points of damage before cracking and 30 points total. Since his Charisma is below 10, he can not cast spells. Current Sketch

Jack is a man in his mid-thirties. Although no one would ever know to look at him, not that he allows that to happen. The fire that took his father and wife left him burned over 80% of his body, including his face. He remains hidden beneath a porcelain mask with all of his burned skin hidden from view.

and a *breastplate* +2 also encrusted with the symbol of Ezra.

Brennan

Brennan is a Halfling male. He is a 7th level monk. He carries no weapons and wears no armor. He tends to become bored quickly.

Wizard #1, 10th lvl Envoker (Wizard in Front)

0 - 4: Flare (Ev), Ray of Frost (Ev)

1 - 4 + 1: Chill touch (Ne), Magic Missile (Ev), Prot fm Evil (Ab), Shield (Ab)

2 - 4 + 1: Protection from Arrows (Ab), Scorching Ray (Ev)

3 - 3 + 1: Ray of Exhaustion (Ne), Vampiric touch (Ne), Wind Wall (Ev)

4 - 3 + 1: Ice storm (Ev), Shackle (Ev), Shout (Ev), Stoneskin (Ab)

5 - 2 + 1: Bigby's Interposing hand (Ev), Cone of Cold (Ev), Wall of Force (Ev)

Raphael

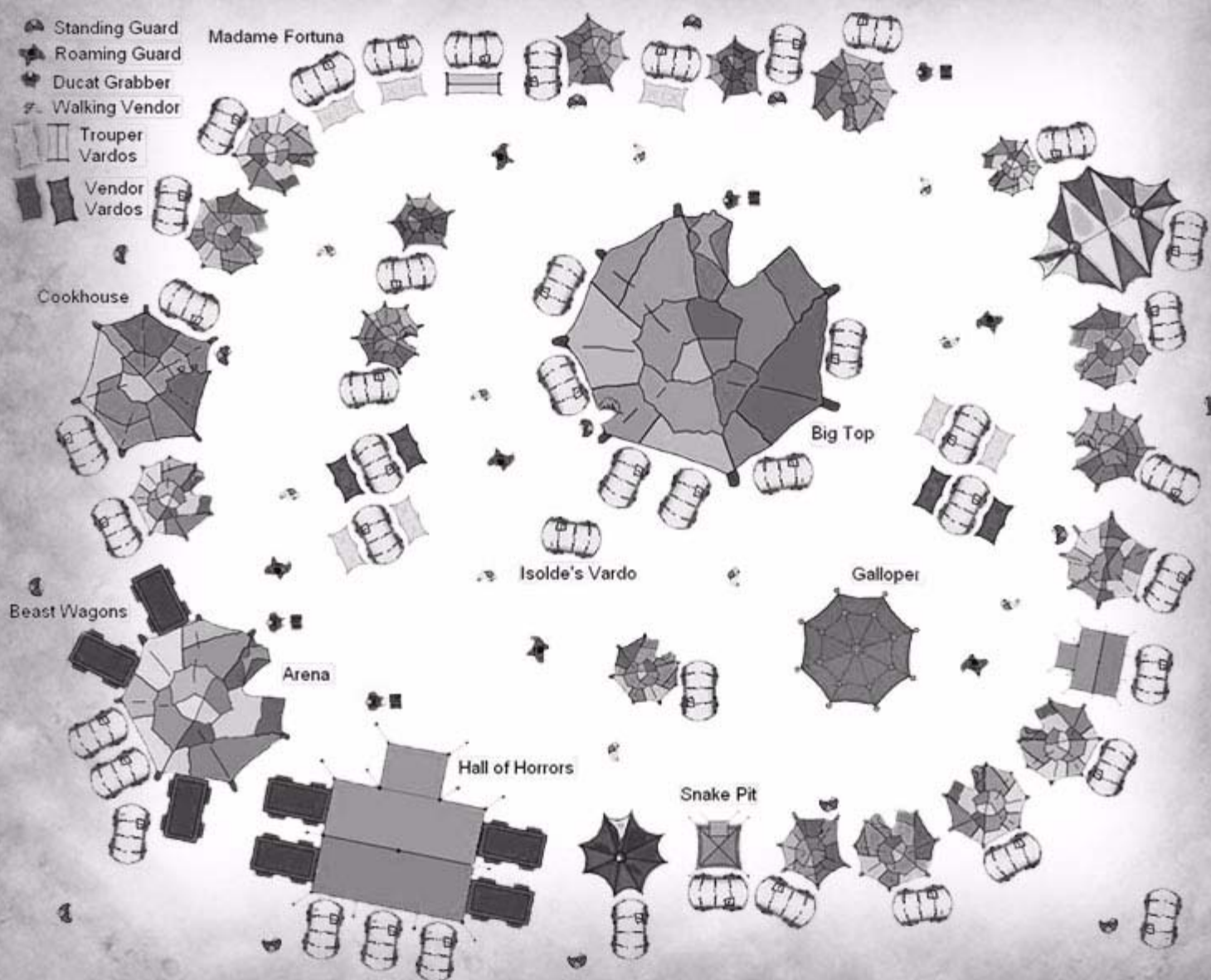
Raphael is a human male in his middle age from Borca. He is a 5th level cleric, 6th level Anchorite of the Mist. When going into battle he has a *longsword* +3, a *medium Shield* +2 encrusted with the symbol of Ezra,

Sideshow Game

Map and Vardo Layouts

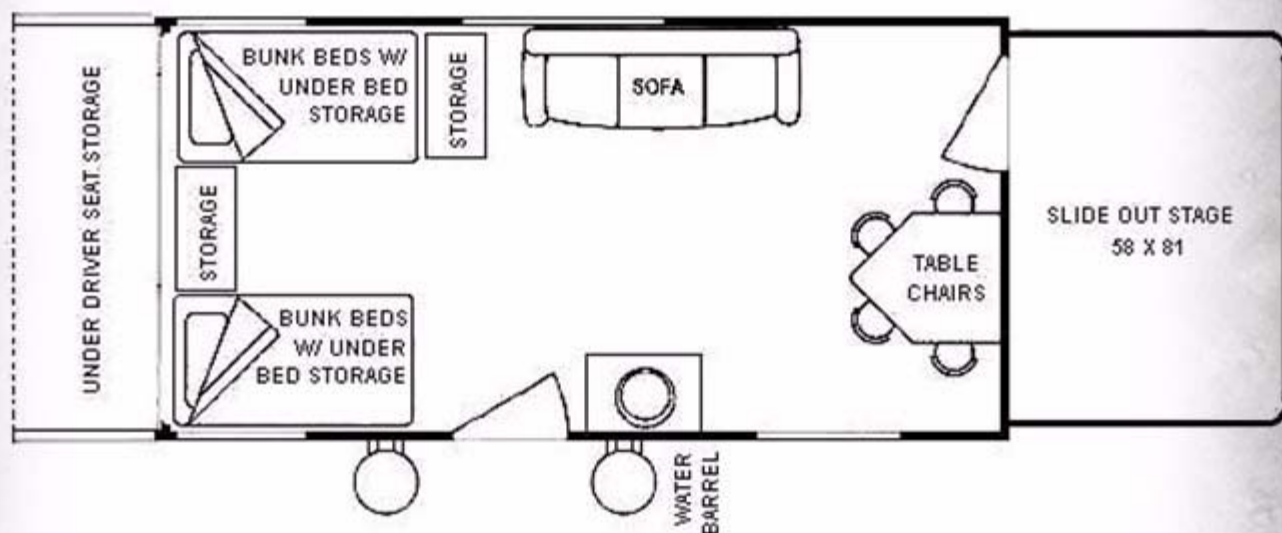
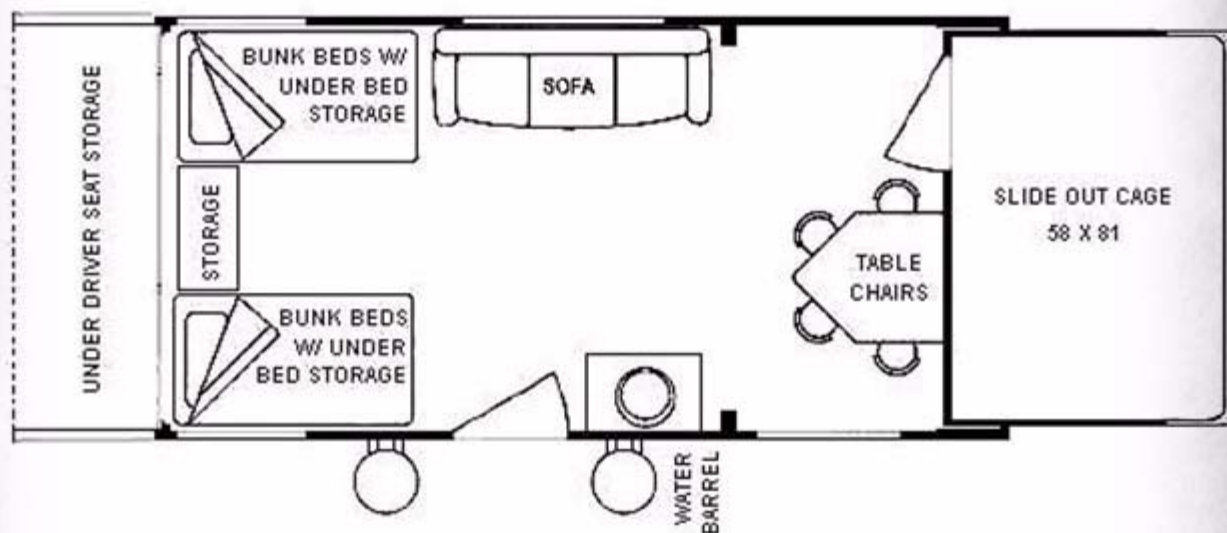
By Tami Sammons aka Hadis Deadstalker

OllivanderGryffen@gmail.com



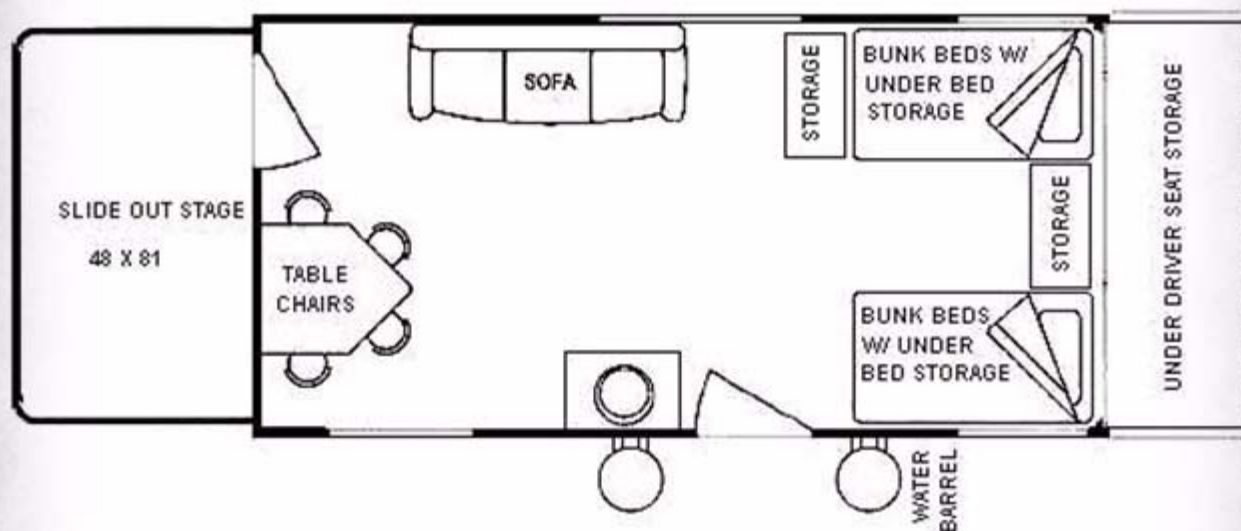
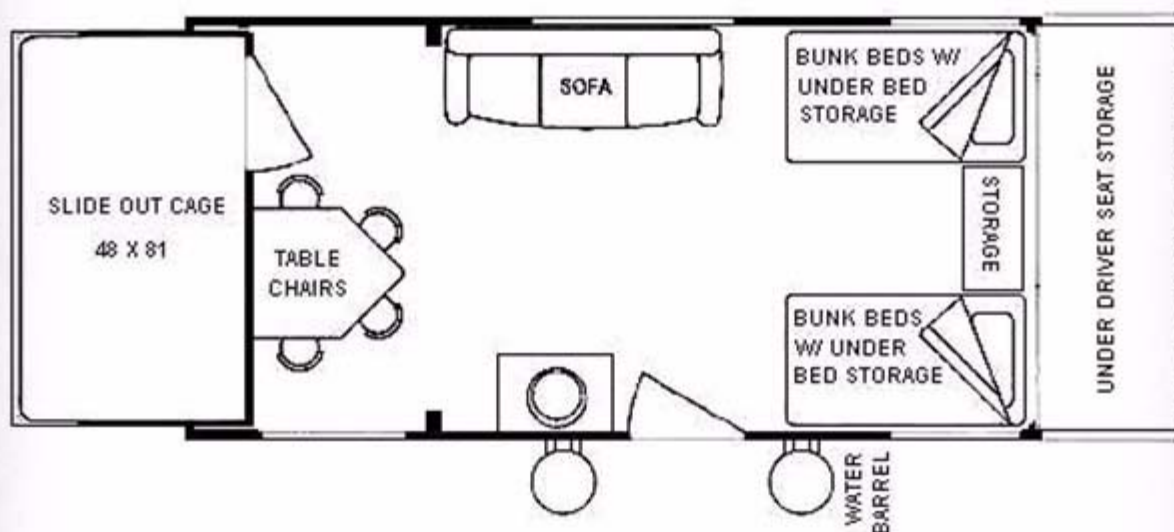
7-1/2 Foot Wide

TABLE ATTACHED TO CAGE WALL



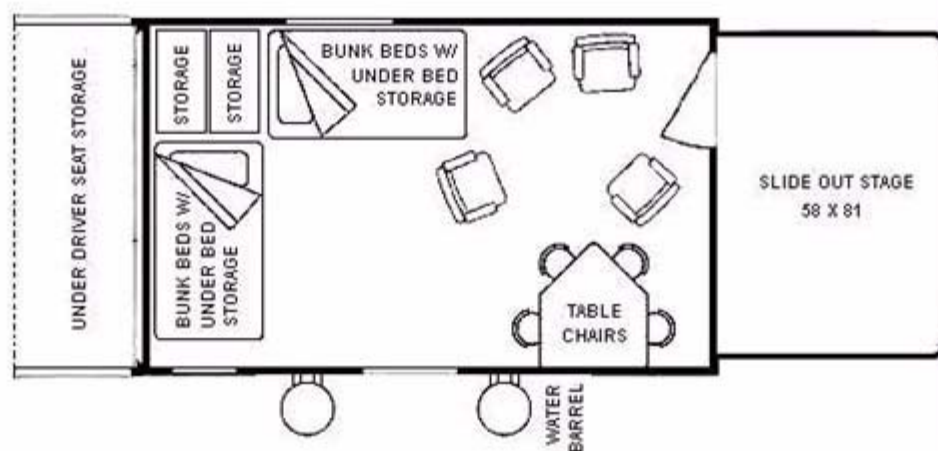
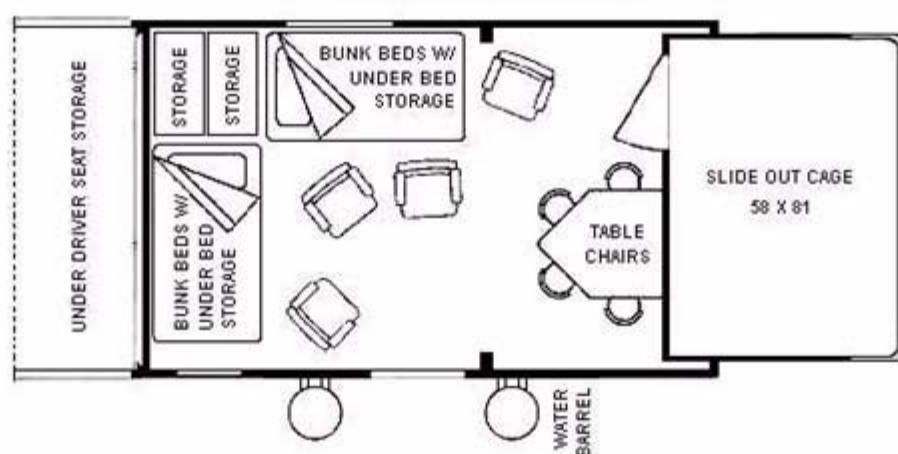
7-1/2 Foot Wide

TABLE ATTACHED TO CAGE WALL

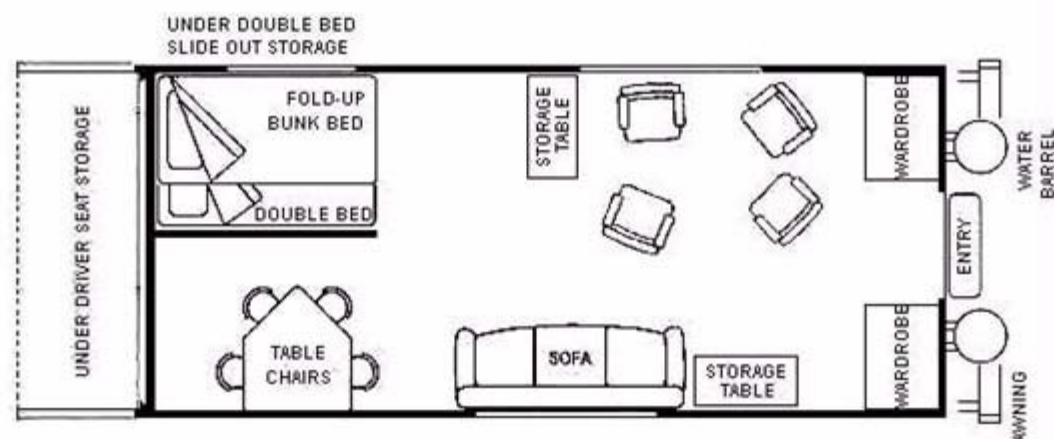


7-1/2 Foot Wide

TABLE ATTACHED TO CAGE WALL

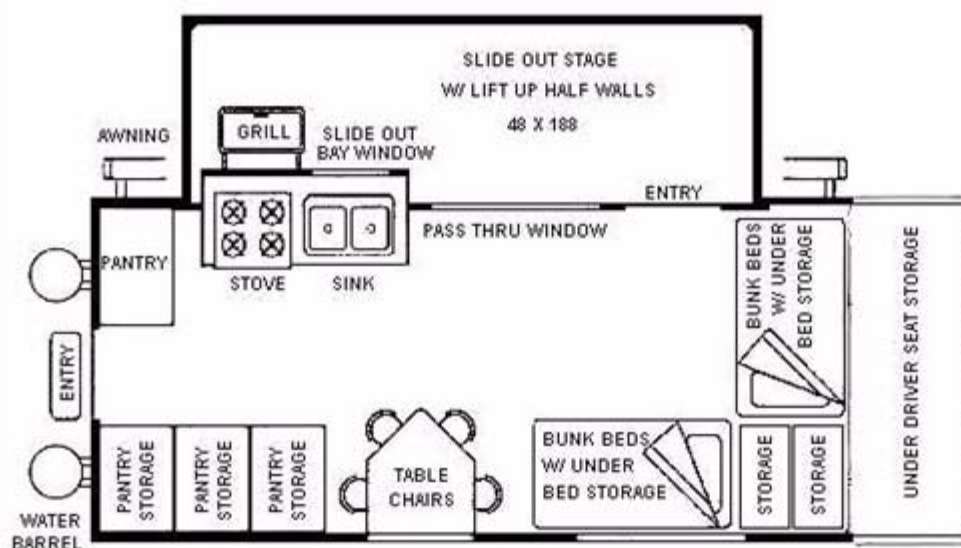


7-1/2 Foot Wide

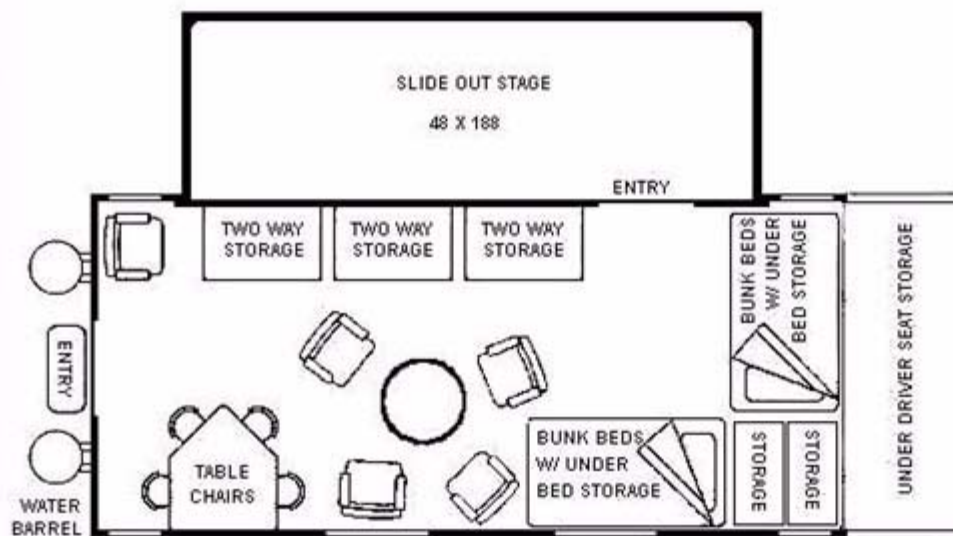
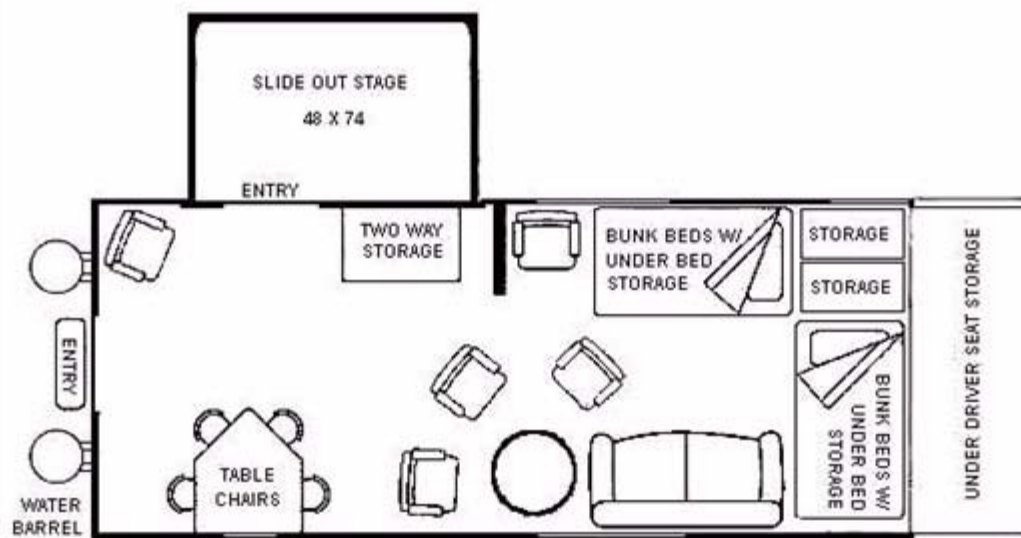


3-4 PERSON FAMILY

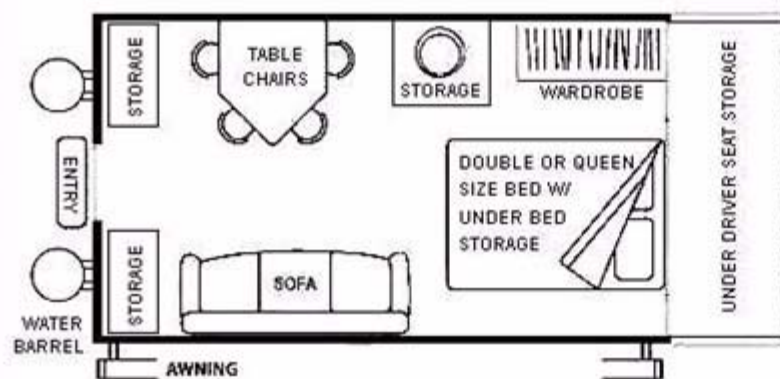
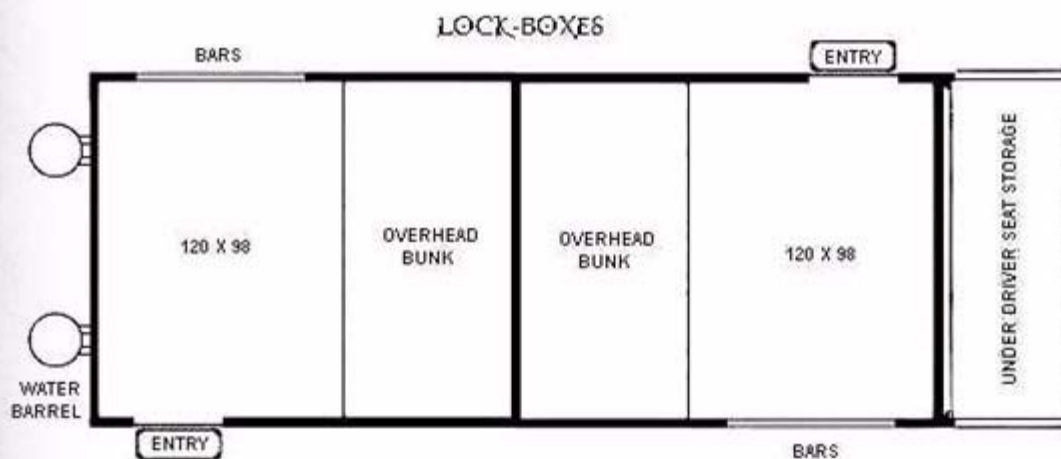
CONCESSION WAGONS



7-1/2 Foot Wide

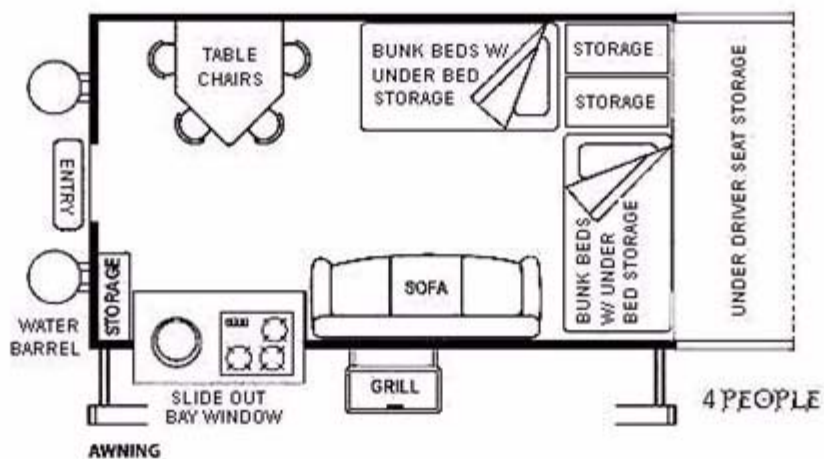
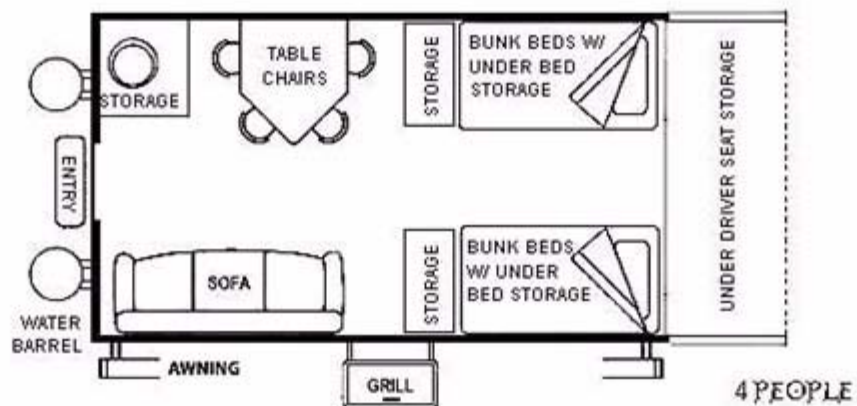


7-1/2 Foot Wide



ISOLDE, HERMOS, COUPLE

7-1/2 Foot Wide



Dangerous Knowledge

History would teach us
two great truths: Knowledge is Power
and Power Corrupts. If so, then what greater evil
is there than the simple book you now hold in your
hands? Within this seemingly innocuous tome are the
collected works of the Fraternity of Shadows, a cabal dedicated
to the search for dangerous knowledge and the power it brings.
Inside these horror haunted pages are secrets not meant for the living.
Those who will delve these depths may find the power to set them
apart and above mortal man. But be warned: The price of this
knowledge may be your very soul

For use with these Dungeons and Dragons® core books :
Players Handbook™, Dungeon Master's Guide™, and
Monster Manual™ as well as the following Ravenloft
core books: Ravenloft Campaign Setting 3rd
edition™, Ravenloft Player's
Handbook™ and Ravenloft
Dungeon Master's
Guide™