

Pathbound Eclipse



todd morasch



OATHBOUND: ECLIPSE

Director's Cut

LEAD DESIGNER

Todd Morasch

ADDITIONAL DESIGN

Greg Dent, Jeff Welker, Darrin Drader

VIGNETTES

Anne Harris, Jeff Welker, Todd Morasch, Greg Dent

EDITOR

Greg Dent

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Greg Dent

ART DIRECTOR

Greg Dent

COVER ARTIST

Todd Morasch

INTERIOR ARTISTS

Todd Morasch, Olli Hihnala, April Stevens, Leonardo Borazio, Sam Blondahl, Reis O'Brien, Yuan Cui, John Gonzales, Laura Sloan, Char Reed, Simon Dominic, Angela Gulick, C. Michael Erickson

CARTOGRAPHY

Todd Morasch, Reis O'Brien, Liz Courts

LAYOUT

Todd Morasch

PLAYTESTERS

Greg Dent, Todd Morasch, Jeff Welker, Ron Billeter, Ray Tackett, James Gray

SPECIAL THANKS

Tyeman Chau, Justin Jones

ORIGINAL OATHBOUND CONCEPT

Greg Dent, Todd Morasch, and Jim Butler



Epidemic Books Co.
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USA

<http://www.epidemicbooks.com>

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I am Colopitiron... or at least that is the name I have worn here in this cell. I was bound here with six others of my brothers and sisters to hold you in check and bar you from ever giving forth the breath of creation again. Long ago I was freed from my duty by happenstance and providence in a divine stroke of luck, yet still I was not enlightened to myself. My escape failed to facilitate your own, and for fifty-thousand years another has sat in my place and worn my name. I left this world briefly, but found myself unable to stay away, an immortal out of context. I returned, and lived season upon season as a hermit without eyes who spent his time gazing at the heavens, until at last a black blade and a group of unsuspecting champions made me whole, or as whole as one can be in a cell. I knew then what I know now—only you can free us.

Seven years now I have known myself whole, and though to many it may seem I have been idle and slack, I have in fact honed my craft and filled my head with the phenomena of the land I fashioned in my imprisonment, a land much apart from the rest of this Forge. Eclipse it is called... a land at the top of the world, the whole of which lies in an impossible crater, a break in the earth. Shunned by both suns, the land knows only shadow. Its inhabitants are those who do their work in the dark: thieves, cutthroats, slavers, shapechangers, vampires... yet the dark does have its lighter side, and draws artist, musician, and philosopher to it for its candlelight, its quiet, and its clarity. This is a domain of wild fungus forests, impossibly deep caverns, ink-black seas, and shimmering cities. Here are long forgotten horrors that defy description, hiding in the darkest of dark places. Here are reckless pioneers, hoping to bring order to this realm that they might profit from the secrets and treasures hidden deep in the shell of the Forge.

Here in Eclipse I have walked, at times as a blind beggar, others as a thoughtful nobleman, and even rarely as my seraph self, gathering knowledge, personal accounts, illustrations, rumors, and even the odd recipe. I have drowned myself in politics and plant life, spoken to children, kings, warlords, and have even risked conversation with the few here who might be capable of harm to one such as myself. The wealth of knowledge I have gained could fill a hundred volumes, but in this short tome I will lay out for you

what is best suited to allow you to make of the world what you want. I have ordered it as best I can, but you are ever welcome to read and search this book as you might. All I have compiled here—from my disparate writings and humble illustrations, to the works of slaves, concubines and conquerors—is presented for your pleasure. This book exists to spark your imagination and kindle the flames of your creative powers. There are other works that you also might wish to invite into your mind (like the fabled and apocryphal “Oathbound: Domains of the Forge”), but while they may be of great aid and help to you, they are by no means required to set you forth on the path to creating new and ever expanding legends.

Do not take lightly what I present to you here. I have braved many dangers to bring this book to you, not the least of which is keeping my plans hidden from my successor. This book is a danger to the Oath of Binding and thus, in its making and compiling, I risk bringing the wrath of the Four-Horned Feathered Fowl down upon my head. Any lesser being would have failed in this endeavor, but I need not remind you that I once was of the Seven and know well their course and curse as well as the Oath that binds them to action. I have moved beyond their sight when I could, and avoided suspicion when I was in their view. Fooling others, even ones such as them, has ever been my great skill, but do not take that as sign that I have forgotten myself; I fool, but I never lie.

I have done all this alone, my penance to you. I wonder if you will find it ironic that Bathkol, your most pious of servants, spat at me when I asked him to help me in this task. Though once called your adversary, I am in fact the perfect scribe to write to you of lands and people, creatures and killers.

I started here in Eclipse for I know its oath and master better than any, and can move with the least risk. Now, having finished my research, I move boldly on to the domain of the Vault, and with luck and skill I shall deliver unto you future volumes for your edification. As for now, I give you what was long my home and in many ways my creation. It belongs now to you; enjoy and good luck, may it set your mind, your imagination, and yourself free.

*Savior, betrayer, the line's not clear
With your own blood we bind you here.*

*No sun, no moon, no air, no soil
In darkness now begins your toil
Ring the bell, toll the sound
The angel of death has run aground.*

*Infernal deceiver, bringer of woe
No more shall your legend grow
Alone forever, lost to time
Eternity to mourn your crime.*

*The gift of life you have retained
No life at all but all in name.*

My Dearest Mary,

My great hope is that this letter finds you and in some way does brighten what must surely be your darkest of days. I do not know whether you have received any of my other letters, or if you have had a rest from these dread messengers, or whether so much grisly labor has been piled upon their shoulders that they have been tardy in finding you. In any event, I pray the silence has not been painful, though I know that is not possible to them who love. I write, Mary, to tell you that I live, that enemy guns did not steal me away to the other side as they did to an overwhelming magnitude of my brethren.

Of this I am sure, that I am alive. But Mary, I truly say I was not always so sure. The circumstances of my salvation are nigh incomprehensible, but be certain that in relating them to you in these letters I have forgotten nothing—dropped no stitch as it were—for the events of them til now have been carved upon the very tissue of my brain. And if the details seem preposterous, Mary, I can only place before you my oath that they are thus.

It is best, then, to begin at the end, so to speak. The battle was especially evil; the gray of the sky melted into the gray of the earth, rolling with the gray bodies of the rebels, against which were thrown the bright patchwork of my comrades... as though the colors of the paint box spilled forth to war with the monochrome. The thundering of feet and hooves and cannon soon overwhelmed the air, and the screams of the dying poured torture into our ears. On both sides my brethren fell, and ahead of me, so did my enemy. They outnumbered us in ordnance and manpower, but we surely far surpassed them in valor. I say it with no hyperbole, Mary, each man of us fought like two.

rain splashing my face. I do not know how long I lay upon my back, as motionless as I could make myself, but it seemed to me not overly long before my eyes beheld in the clouds above a ripple of black swirling in the rebel-colored sky. Truth to tell, Mary, I thought that I beheld the visions which are said to plague the sight of those unfortunates just before that crossover to the Land Without Tears. But this was not so, for no hallucination was before me, but rather a corporeal fluttering. I could hear the slapping of wings, growing louder as the blurred black fog grew closer to me, and in its nearing I could discern the shape of innumerable ravens or crows, more that I have ever seen darken the graveyards of our village, Mary.

Down they came, not cawing (which I thought passing strange), but silent save for their multitudinous wings. I feared they had come to devour me, and for a moment I wondered from whence they had come, and of all the morsels upon that grim battlefield, why they had chosen to sup upon me. I must confess to you, Mary, that at this point I think I began to cry, for I felt an overwhelming sense of unfairness that I should be spared in battle only to be devoured alive as carrion.

But this was not to be, though why my cheapened faith should warrant it so, I cannot guess. The black birds careened down

But Mary, my time upon the Fields of Mars was mercifully short, though not as much so as some of my comrades. Brace thyself, for here I tell you that I was shot. Looking back, it was so strange. I had the surest sense that all went quiet, and of a sudden I could hear the rebel boy that fate had picked as my murderer fire his weapon, could hear the whistle of the ball as it clawed through the space between us, closer and closer, and finally the loud thump as it struck my right shoulder. Instantly, as I whirled about and began to fall, sound flowed back to my ears and I crashed to the muddy ground, the breath fleeing from my lungs as I curled myself as a child.

I have heard other soldiers wounded in battle say that they blacked out subsequent to their injury. But this was not the case with me. I struggled even onto my back, my body wracked with pain; I could feel the bone of my collar exposed to the elements. Blood was pooling beneath my shoulder, sticky wet and cooling quickly against the soggy earth. I knew not to close my eyes, to fight and struggle to remain awake until the field ambulance came forth. I do not know how long I lay staring up at the slate sky. I could hear the rage of battle all about me, hear my comrades falling nearby screaming in pain or in bloodlust. I felt my weakness grow by the second. I tried to lift my head to look about me, but the shock of pain that tore through me made me gasp aloud. So, I waited.

I tried to fix my eyes upon a point in the sky above me, but there was only a vast sheet of gunmetal. My eye wandered, the

ward me with an elegant force that somehow calmed me. Soon, they were so near that they blocked out the light of the natural world, drawing as it were over my eyes a curtain of ebony feathers. And instead of the pecking beaks I had so recently feared, instead I felt the flutter of powerful wings on all sides. The wings did not lash me as you may expect, for although the birds were manic and powerful in their motion, when they touched me I only felt a whisper of sensation upon my skin, a mere tickle, though I should have been rent with gashes all about me.

By this strange animation the birds covered me, and in some manner of strength as I will never comprehend, I found myself lifted up off the ground by them, cocooned in a shell of blackbirds. I felt the weight of my body relax as the seat of the earth was removed from it, and we ascended, these creatures and I. How high and far I now cannot guess, especially in the retrospect. But surely at the time, I can truly say I felt no fear, for as true as I am writing this, I swear to you that in my flight with the blackbirds they spoke unto me, not with words but with some other sorcery, for in my heart and my brain I heard distinctly a voice repeating to me that I need not be afraid. And it was to this voice that I drifted out into a world of not sleep but waking, though from here on, the waking I knew was more fantastic than any dream.

How long, how far I traveled I cannot say, for I was not conscious of any passage either of time or distance, my mind having gone to a primitive state. But just as in a dream of falling, some unknown impulse triggers in the brain to impel the body to wakefulness, so was I impelled by an incomprehensible force, and my mind clawed back to the full spectrum of sensation just in time to feel my body set down upon some solid surface.

Nearly as soon as I was deposited, my winged chariot dissipated into a myriad of flapping forms, departing from me in all directions. I could feel them leave me, but as I turned my head from one side to the next, I found I could see nothing. And moreover, the pain in my shoulder was gone, and I could move my arm in its full range of motion. However, the joy of this discovery was muted greatly, for when I looked up, I could not behold any stars above my head. A great terror swept up from my bowels as I realized that I was blinded.

Panic came upon me then, and I grew destitute of heart that I would never lay eyes on anything again. My body began to quake and sobbing wracked me. I must have wailed, for I had a sudden sense of being in a very large open place, as the sound of my cry carried far, and there came no echo to signify a barrier to noise. I sat up, probing about me with my hands, patting the earth all about me and swiveling my head to and fro, concentrating to hear anything stirring nearby, but hearing only the sounds my hands made when they crushed the velvet-like grass (if grass it was)—though even this noise sounded so far off as to be imagined. I briskly shook my head from side to side, as a dog emerging from water.

up randomly yet more frequently. The ecstasy of a lost hunter in a dark wood when he comes upon a friendly campfire is nothing compared to the dawning knowledge that I was not blind! I stood and whooped in joy and ran into the water, flailing and splashing like a true child! Whatever these fireflies were, I drove them off, but not away, for they lit themselves again, further from me than before but not abandoning me.

I feel I must describe this light. I know you can picture in your mind's eye a candle, Mary, but can you picture a candle whose flame is the size of a needle's eye? Truly, upon that vast black sea, they appeared as the reflection of twinkling stars above... had there been stars above. A greater fear gripped me as I stood knee-deep in the warm water. If I was not blind, what place was I in whose night sky held no stars? My heart began to pound against my chest and I started to tremble. Mary, I am ashamed to admit to you that my faith has lagged these many years I have been at war, but never in all my life have I wished for His mercy more fervently than in that moment on that hellish beach.

It was then that not an arm's length away alit one of these miraculous glow-bugs. I reached down and cupped my hands just astern of it, and drew up the bug and a handful of water. Bringing it to my face, I peered at it. It was like no insect I had previously beheld, something akin to some hybrid of firefly and mosquito. It lifted itself off the water in my hands, and its light went out. It bobbed about my hands and its captive pool, landing again. As soon as its legs hit the water, the globule of its body flared with the green-yellow light that had so enraptured my eye. It was as though I held a small lantern, for the bug emitted enough light to see in a small circle about my person. Inspi-

Just as when cotton plugs are slowly pulled from the ear, the hum of the outside world rushes in and rings louder than normal, so it was now. Mary, how can I express the joy of my heart when I tell you I could hear water lapping just a few lengths away? And not a stream or trickle, but the gentle, rhythmic rush of an ocean or large lake. At the sound of it, I became aware of my deep hunger, for I had not eaten since before the battle, and I knew not how long ago that had been. As a child on a holiday morning, I scrambled about, feeling at the place I lay, finding my sabretache and my canteen strewn within reach. Gathering up the canteen, I stumble-walked toward the sound, falling after a few steps and crawling the rest of the way. The water was closer than I had imagined, for in only a handful of steps my hands sank into warm liquid.

I splashed it onto my face and gulped down mouthfuls. I dare say it was the worst taste I have ever experienced: bitter, sulfuric and brackish, but I drank my fill twice over and was happy. I must have made quite a sight on that beach, Mary, surely appearing as some primitive, ancestral beast, lapping at the sea and grunting greedily! After I had drunk, I sank back upon my haunches and lifted my face to the sea. There was little wind, so the waves that tickled over my wrists were mere ripples. The blackness stared back at me.

Finally, after I know not how long, a single pinprick of light fluttered upon the face of the water, not far off. I did not credit it though, for I feared it a trick of my new blindness. But soon, other pinpricks lit

ration hit me then, and I emptied with one hand my canteen, with the other poured the bug and a few droplets of water into the canister. I had built myself a torch, for a meager beam poured forth from the mouth of the canteen, and I used its light to find my way back to the place I had awakened.

Setting the light upon the ground, I dug from my sabretache a bundle of coarse paper, which you may now recognize! Mary, I write to you now from an unknown, foreign place, by the light of some pre-historic miracle beside the shores of an unfathomable lake of foetid water, beneath a blank and fearsome sky. I live, Mary. I live.

Your beloved brother,
- Percival

P.S. I shall write again when I wake—hopefully the morning light will dispel some of the mysteries of this place!

chapter 1 the land

Shining one, I shall endeavor to give you a tapered impression of what was once mine. First and foremost, I will offer you a few annotations of reference, that you may better familiarize yourself with the functions and face of this dark realm. I have done my best to paint as comprehensive a picture of Eclipse as possible, though undoubtedly not every detail can be compressed into a single volume such as this. Perhaps if you find a topic leaving you particularly hungry, it can provide fodder for a later supplement. You will also be pleased to discover that wherever appropriate, I have added in calculations in the shorthand we have previously discussed and agreed upon in order to quantify risks and provide a scale for judging dangers. I trust you will make use of these in preparing your own plans for this land.

Eclipse, my proud creation, is fully contained within the ramparts of your great cell, forming a realm men speak of as “the Cauldron”. A home to thieves and undead, dark monsters and exiled terrors, Eclipse is an impossible crater positioned at the tip of the Forge’s northern pole. Here, the jagged edges of the land thrust upward out of Wildwood—a barbed crown for a world devoid of its sovereign. Far below the rim rests a realm never graced by the light of day. The brilliance of the vast golden Crux spurns its shores. The burning hand of red Storm dusts the rim of the crater, but does not caress the mossy soil. Banished from the radiance of both the Forge’s suns, Eclipse dwells ever in dusk and darkness, mists eternally blanketing its heavenly mantle from view.

Though the darkness of Eclipse is undeniably its most prominent feature, I do not feel that darkness itself defines the land. The darkness I have banished to a later chapter, and in its place I give you a true vision of the land; for why dwell upon what can’t be seen when there is so much to see and do here. And do not fear if I speed past any factor or element of the land too hastily... anything that catches your eye here is fully explained and further detailed in later sections of this book. Consider this a summary of sorts; if at any point you become distracted, I will not be offended if you skip ahead to satisfy your curiosity before returning here. Without further ado, we begin.

ORIENTATION

Eclipse is North, the very pinnacle of the Forge. As such, conventional compass directions make little sense here, and so, millennia ago, navigators and map-makers devised an arbitrary method by which to denote direction. All lands bearing towards Penance from the hub of the Sea of Ink are designated as north, and so around the wheel, defining west, south, and east in course, granting a common reference from which to navigate. Following Eclipse’s southward course, for example, would lead

one to your own volcanic domain of the Kiln. It is common in modern times to find in Eclipse devices of magical construction that point according to this subjective verdict, as any magnetic compass will point only towards the citadel of Colopitiron at the center of the land. While I find this artificial system of navigation overly pedestrian, it has its utility, and I too have surrendered to it and shall freely apply it throughout the rest of this ledger, as well as in my regretful attempts at map making.

On the subject... the map I have provided for your perusal on the following two pages is one of my own construction, not at all intended to be to scale, but rather to exaggerate the towns and features of the domain to provide a feel for this polar territory. The key below was actually provided as the first page of a guidebook to the curious Oasis of Light (#19 on its own map, oddly enough), something of a strange mirror miniature of this dark realm (see chapter 10).

At the top of the Forge, the great Northern Ocean touches Eclipse only once in full view of the harsh light of day, pouring over the edge of the world in a massive waterfall over five miles across. Here the sea has cut back the crown of the land and falls with a mounting thunderous rage toward the ebony below, crashing a full three hundred miles down upon a body of water that has never known the illumination of any sun dancing on its bleak waves—the Sea of Ink. This great landlocked ocean forms the center of Eclipse. Despite its heartless, unforgiving nature, it serves as the essential and best route for all trade within the Cauldron. Travel here is not for the weak of will. If the unrelenting currents of the great falls are not enough to dissuade seafarers, then consid-

er its counterpart: the Helix, a massive whirlpool nearly a hundred miles across. It draws in anything foolish enough to test its reach, and any and all that plummet into its clutch are lost for all time. Also to be reckoned with is the powerful pull of the red moon at its height above Eclipse. Once a month, for what in Penance passes for two full days, Zadkiel rules the skies. This gravitational extreme causes a near one-hundred-foot disparity in sea levels from when the moon passes on the far end of the Forge. Still, some brave buccaneers do travel a circuit along the coast, eking out an existence as traders.

Around the dark sea, the foundation of the Cauldron is relatively flat, gradually rising as one moves outward until it becomes one with the walls of the crater. In the northwest the land is overrun by the unkempt rawness of the great mushroom forest, a terror to most who brave travel amongst its twisted paths. This is a place where the darkness is only surpassed by the endless labyrinth of the underground. Here, only the wild and ravenous find peace; lunars and other werrans rule the underbrush, hunting with keen and ruthless senses. They live in tribes and packs and answer only to the code of nature. The spiral city of Lethe is the only notable settlement—small by most standards, yet considered sprawling to most of the wild tribes.

To the far north as the wilds of the werrans begin to thin out, one can find the twin cities of Sabor and Lethe, centers of industry and gateway to the great underground realms of Eclipse. East of the mushroom forest, the dry fields of Tarkun stem out, broken by the cannon-force river of Fal. Here, a great natural land-bridge ties together the two halves of this barren land. A small free town



can be found to the east along a lake at the bottom of a crater caused a hundred thousand years past when a city state and its surrounding lands submerged, victims of an immense sinkhole. Nearby and high above, the fallen ruins of the fabled hanging city can be found, the remains of the cursed inverted palace of Ithron Rex.

The East is split between three factions. Chief of these are the capital city of Baradume, home to Colopitiron, who now bears the full weight of my shrugged-off burdens, and Highmark, a new settlement of law-wielding outsiders who hope naively to shape Eclipse to their own ideology. Last is the burning mountains, a lava-scarred waste created by an amalgamation of massive cave-ins and geothermal upheavals. Its most well-known landmark is the Black Citadel, a towering, windowless shadow rising from a lake of lava and fire.

The glowing lichens that grow and are cultivated in the valleys by tenants of Highmark dwindle away to the mountainous regions of the south. In blood marble towers that appear to elongate towards the heavens, the proud nation of the vampires resides among these warped peaks. In the infamous city of Stygia they rule absolute, playing their century-long games with mortal game pieces, who take the roles of their servants, guardians, slaves, and sustenance. The living bastion at the heart of Stygia is a sight not to be missed. Its colossal ventricles and spiral atriums outsize even the highest of towers, and not-long ago rivaled the now-shattered living horn palace of Israfel. Here, within its throbbing halls, resides a creature that I suspect may well be older than the world itself. Contained by the chambers of this horrifying being's home is also a portal, the only constant door I know of that passes out from the prison of the Forge; of course, as always, there is a catch.

Though the vampires claim dominion over all the mountainous regions, outside of their cities, the southern hills are home to a rugged assemblage of rebels that fights an endless and hopeless war. These are some of the hardest dwellers in all of Eclipse, scratching out an existence in a barren waste of cold and wind, all the while being hunted by immortals who need not fear the rising of a sun. A few small settlements have formed and stabilized around Lake Ire, left relatively unmolested by the consumers of blood.

To the west, the peaks crumble into dust and the Fading Waste takes hold, a lifeless desert of ash and sand that no one in their right mind would choose to call home if it were not for a treasure so precious as to drive beings to uncivilized lengths. Here in this waste the god dust is mined, its power sought by kings, warlords and sorcerers alike. Its value, beyond measure, is paid for here in lives. For all the fear mortals place on the mushroom forest or the vampire nation, it is this place that claims the most souls. In this realm of exceptions, an oddity can also be found in the wastes—the Oasis of Light. Here, an aged being of a bizarre, unknown, horned feline race spends his time recreating all of Eclipse in miniature, only mirrored, as if the world were a bright sun-filled kingdom.

Finally, to the direct west of the hub of the Sea of Ink is the trade town of Erebus, linked to the raw domain of Wildwood by a well-traveled sequence of tunnels. Here is the most likely entrance

point for those who come to Eclipse by choice. Erebus is famed as a melting pot, a place to trade and rub shoulders with all sorts. I myself keep a small but respectable apartment there, and in the course of writing this volume, have fled there many times to seek rare works and the comfort of honest commerce.

Outward and upward beyond the base of the crater, the thrusting walls of Eclipse ascend. This vast, vertical domain is a world unto itself with ecosystems and habitats all its own. The thole, a race of leathery-winged creatures, live here in cities built with no regard for those devoid of wings. The border city of Grey Town where you, my lord, are often seen, lies upon a ledge that has sunken from the Wildwoods down towards Eclipse. There are many caves and incroppings here that serve as home to strange horrors and isolated cultures that have no idea a world above or below even exists.

Lastly, my lord, I must give passing mention to the Dragon's Roost, directly 300 miles above Colopitiron's citadel. This floating landmass is home to yet another being of ancient origin, the true dragon Typhon Sorm, a monster that, I dare say, I have risked my existence to commune with that this might be considered a fully realized account of the realm of Eclipse.

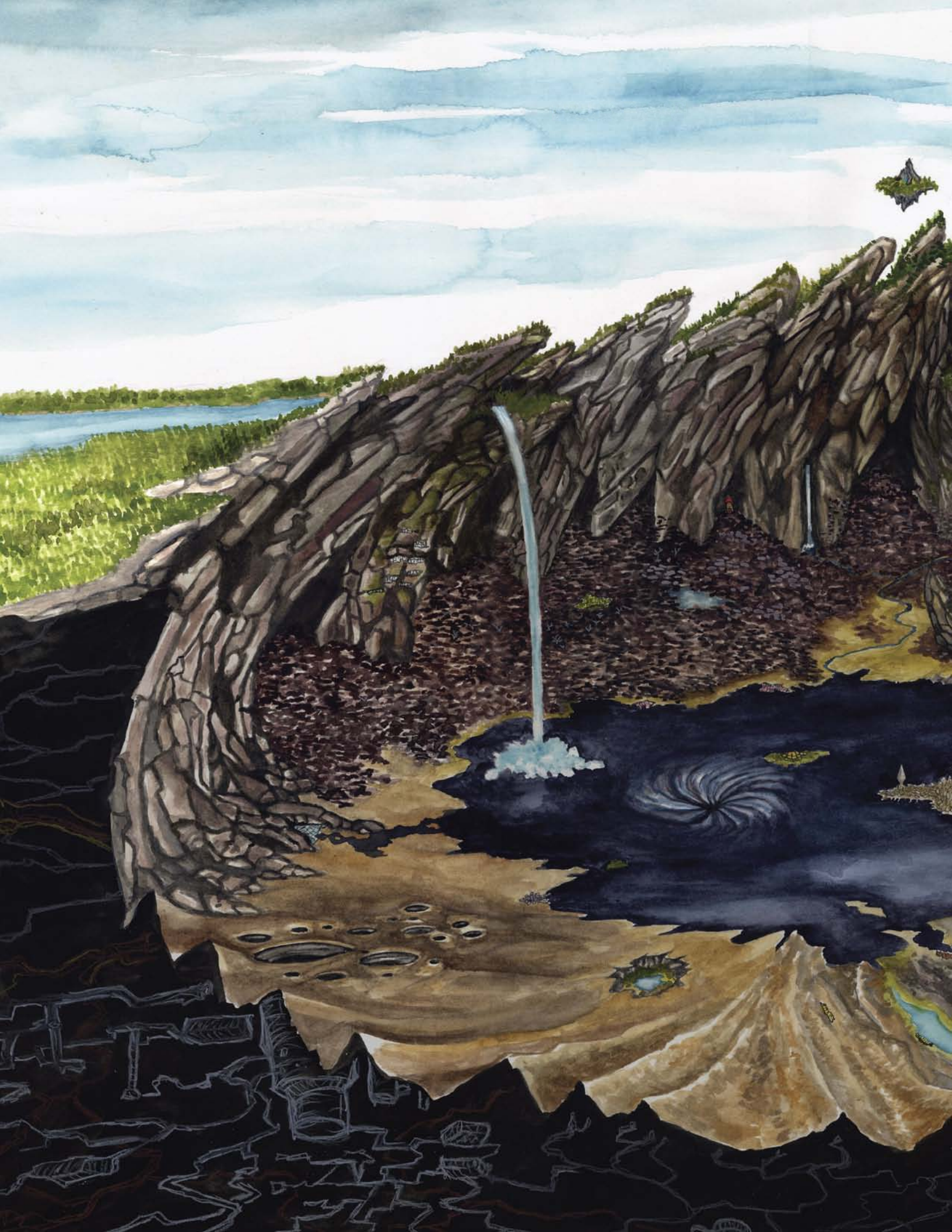
WEATHER AND SEASONS

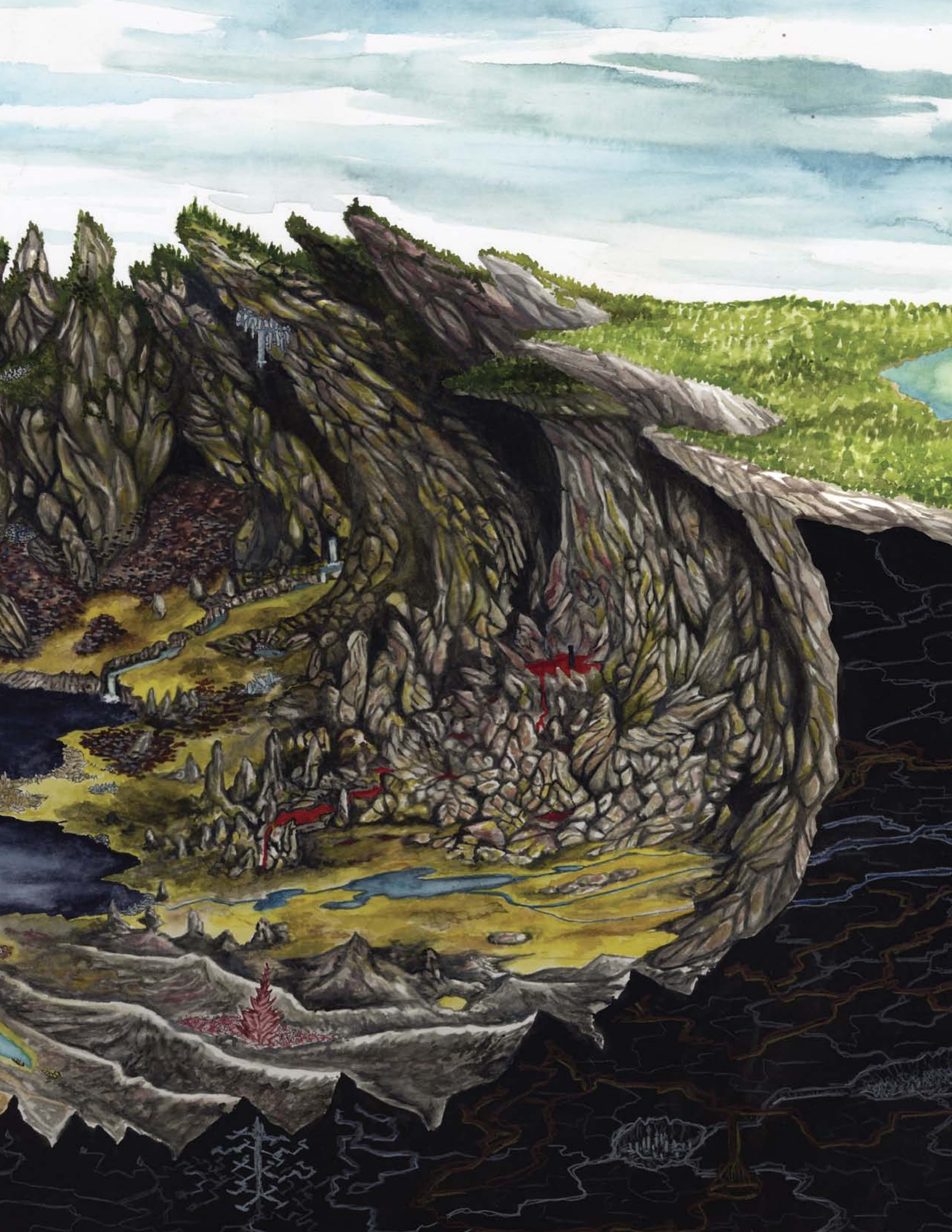
For all its relentless darkness, Eclipse is blessed in other ways. The wild storms of Anvil and the scorching blaze of Arena have no equivalent here in this enclosed realm. Neither do its inhabitants suffer the violent seasons of the Wildwood nor the sweltering heat of Penance. Protected by the great wall and warmed by the plummeting ocean above and the heat of the Forge itself below, the temperature in the Cauldron remains a near constant 65 degrees, with calm pleasant winds and an invigorating sea air. To those, such as the blind haze, who can overlook the everlasting darkness, Eclipse is a veritable paradise. Though conditions here are predictable and near constant, do not get the impression that the domain is devoid of weather. There are a few other factors one must consider before forming an educated view of this land below.

MISTS

In their three-hundred-mile descent into the Sea of Ink, much of the cool waters of the northern ocean turn to spray, leading to a high level of humidity in the trapped air of the Cauldron. Most of this vapor eventually settles upon the crater's floor, where it is warmed from below by the molten core of the Forge itself. When the warm, humid air meets the cooler surface of the Sea of Ink, it kicks up a relentless fog to fill the lands and further blacken a place that, by its very nature, is already dark. With no sunlight to burn it away, the fog simply remains, enshrouding the bulk of the lands in a thick and perpetual mist.

Each month, as the red moon rises in the sky, the Sea of Ink swells, and the waterfall roars to life. Waters begin to spray and pour from every crack and cavern in the walls, renewing the mists, which slowly fade over the next few weeks as the moon makes its way back around again past the southern pole. In a typical month, Eclipse may see up to three days of clear darkness, typically during the first day of the moon's grace, but patterns are





hard to predict, and at times there is no reprieve at all between the seasons of the mists.

The mists of Eclipse make life, travel, and exploration all the more arduous, and even those with eyes adapted to the darkness must rely upon senses other than vision to get around. These are also the preferred hunting conditions for the blind horrors of the shadows. Sensing the moisture in the air emboldens these cavern-bound aliens to alight out of their hiding places. During prolonged periods of fog, they will even venture into towns and major cities to stalk and kill, knowing that their way of perceiving the world won't hinder them as it does their prey.

Residents cannot simply hide away in hopes of waiting out the "handless dark", as it is referred to. A mist season may last for weeks, months, or even as in one case back in my day, seven years. This fog has been the downfall of many smaller settlements. There are many accounts of newly founded forts just getting their posts rested into the earth, learning the ways of farming fungus so as to provide a constant light to their frontiersmen, only to have a fog rise to suffocate them. It is not unheard of for traders to come upon broken doors, shattered windows, and bloody bits of bone, the only remains of a thriving settlement. The dark monsters that perpetrate these acts of horror escape unknown and unseen, leaving no witnesses and sliding back into their deep holes by the time the fog has lifted.

Still, not all despise the fog. The Vampires of Stygia say it adds a mystery and glamour to their red marble streets, and the thieves of Baradume can think of no better conditions in which to attempt that one outrageously bold heist they have been dreaming of.

RAIN

The wild currents of a world heated by two suns can, at times, kick up powerful storms and hurricanes, and more often than one might expect, these come to rest at the crown of the Forge above Eclipse. At such times, torrents of water can fall, blanketing the Sea of Ink and the lands towards the center of the realm. The great length of the fall from high above the land often causes the water droplets to coalesce; forming rain drops the size of small animals. Poorly built structures can easily collapse, and ships can fast become flooded and sunk. Those caught unprepared out in the wild may find themselves running for cover, beat down by gallon-sized raindrops. By my estimates, a single drop can deal up to 2d4 points of non-lethal damage to those caught outside without shelter. Dodging raindrops in the dark is an impossible task, and I have seen unprepared rashers literally beat down in seconds by a storm, being hit by up to twenty drops per minute. When the green lighting flashes, get underground, but watch out for flooding.

Many of the outlands are sheltered from these violent cascades by the jutting overhanging structures of the crown, but here too, risk resides. Surface tempests can pour massive amounts of water down upon the land of Wildwood, saturating the ground, flooding caverns, and waterlogging the great overhangs that form protection from the rain. This can uncork a tunnel or crack open a fissure, creating a spurting waterfall with enough force to wash away all in its path. Yet far more frightening to those that dwell on the outer rim, is the idea of a massive avalanche. Whole cities

have been lost to a single large dislodged shard of rock. Polar rain is also extremely cold, pulling a chill down with it and kicking up winds that swirl violently in the bowl of Eclipse. These winds can tear through the outer regions and bring with them dust from the waste, blanketing the mushroom forests or the vampire lands with soot.

Thankfully, for the residents of Eclipse, most of the time it rains, it is due to the internal climate of the bowl itself, and the rain that is kicked up from the Sea of Ink is usually mild and short-lived. In fact, rains usually signal the end of a mist season, as the moisture in the air has become heavy enough and saturated enough to coalesce and fall to the earth as precipitation. When it rains, streams and rivulets form out in the wild lands, transforming the landscape and racing towards the sea.

WINDS

Though the dwellers on the Cauldron's floor may be blissfully unaware, the upper reaches of the Cauldron are home to some of the most ferocious winds on the Forge. Due to the depth of the crater, the atmosphere is considerably higher above Eclipse, with a multitude of different pressure layers colliding and clashing at all altitudes. When the red sun reaches the more northerly path of its orbit, its rays heat up the topmost part of the crater, causing the air there to expand and then chill as it meets with the lower atmospheric levels, creating gale-force winds in the upper half of the Cauldron. Even if it were not for the massive dragon that hunts the upper reaches of Eclipse, airships, balloons, and similar flying crafts would find it nigh well impossible to navigate in or out of Eclipse. Flying creatures that have learned to call the cliffs home know the signs, and know to avoid or make use of the winds, but outsiders and seeds frequently succumb to their own folly and are torn apart or dashed against the rocks of the cliffs.

PLANTS AND ANIMALS

There are literally thousands of species from thousands of worlds that dwell in Eclipse's varied ecosystems, and there is an even greater wealth of vegetation. I know for you, brilliant one, all such creatures are of interest, but the time to catalog and enumerate them all is a luxury that I am not capable of providing. However, I offer a compromise.

In many areas, the work that I am endeavoring to do here has already been done by others, mostly by those who choose to spend their entire lives in this dark land. In the interest of saving time and perhaps of giving you a greater feel for the inhabitants of the Cauldron, I have decided to make use, wherever possible, of the labors of others in compiling this book. In this case, I have chosen a brief cross-section for you in the form of a periodical excerpt written by a plant and animal enthusiast based out of Erebus. I purchased this charming guide for a quite reasonable price in the markets there, and have found it quite accurate and infinitely useful on my travels.

For your assistance in making use of this book, I have made efforts to quantify much of the information I have taken from this land. Peruse Appendix E for my work in this regard.

Polly Picker's Monthly Periodical Guide to the Plants and Beasts of Eclipse ~ Issue 114

Steadfast readers, devoted fans, and new curious browsers, this latest issue of my famed flora and fauna field guide is a special one indeed, and whether a long time subscriber or first time enthusiast, you, dear reader are in for a true, tasty treat! For rather than focus on a single plant and a single animal as usual, here you will find my semi-annual favorite of favorites list of the most entrusting, useful, and even dangerous wild things in Eclipse. Below are listed my top animals and plants, though in no particular order within their respective categories. That sort of favoritism would be far too cruel as I love them all so devotedly. Any traveler or lover of the wild dark would be remiss not to keep a well-worn copy of this document on their person at all times when spelunking through the dusky land we call home.

Animals of Eclipse

First up, my inventory of creepy, crawly, crunchy, and cuddly critters. Note that for the most part, I will avoid those truly monstrous beings such as cliff jiggers and the like; there are volumes out there that explore these sorts of ruffians, if that is to your taste. I prefer the rarer and more overlooked fare.



Centermone: I give you first the leggy crawly insect that can be your worst nightmare or your best friend if you know a little about its true nature. These creepers with their long segmented bodies and many legs can grow to the size of a man's forearm, and have wicked retractable spines on the front segments of their bodies. They are found mostly in the wastes and mountains, where they bury themselves under a thin layer of sand and then wait, thrusting their sharp poisonous spines into anything unlucky enough to step on them. The Centermone's spines are sharp enough to pierce leather and thick scaly hides. The poison they deliver causes almost instant paralysis followed by a coma like state in which the victim's often state they have the most horrible dreams. This is maybe in part due to the fact that once poisoned, the Centermone begins to eat the victim... so gross. However, here is a little known fact: this icky crawly carries its own cure and then some. If you are fast or have help, the liquid in the rear quarters of the Centermone, anywhere below where the spines

grow, will act as an anti-venom if sucked down. The user will still be subject to strange dreams and some weakness, and there are rare cases of it not seeming to work, though I have never seen proof of this. However there is an added benefit to those who survive due to this cure, a seeming immunity to all poisons and venoms that can last for several weeks. How is that for a nice trick? I know a few nasty nobles out there who might want to invest in a steady supply of these little buggers. Also, it is worth noting that the Thole use Centermone in the brewing of many of their dream drugs, but I would not assume that these would offer you the same exception to nasty venoms as my above prescription.

Frollow: These small amphibian hoppers with large eyes, ears and floppy back feet, are a shoo-in to be on any traveler's list of important friends. They are literally found everywhere in Eclipse, from the high reaches of distant cliffs to the low shallows of the Ink sea. Why, if you have never seen one I would wonder at the freshness of your seeddom. Go look in any garden or murky grass field and you should be able to locate one without fail. Do not let the colors of my illustration throw you off, they can be all sorts of vibrant hues with seemingly no limit in variation of scheme or pattern. Now if you think I am about to tell you they are good eating, no, no, in fact they will make you very sick and in some cases ingesting them could even lead to death, fates forbid. No, the reason they are so useful is quite simple yet without end of usefulness. Though frollow are found everywhere in Eclipse, they themselves never tread more than a few hundred feet from where they are born, even if this means starving for lack of food in their territories. This alone would be of little use, but they also have a seemingly flawless homing ability. In short, if you catch a few of them and carry them along on your explorations you will always have a guide back to where you started. Set one free that you found in Baradume while you are lost in the mushroom forest, and it will lead you unerringly back to the dark city streets of home, stopping only to eat a few bugs here and there. Going to explore a new virgin cavern? Be sure to take a few just in case, and make them colorful as they will be so much easier to track. I always recommend that one gathers their own frollows just to ensure you know exactly where they will be leading you back to. I have heard of a few unseemly types who sell some in markets that in fact will lead you into an ambush. They may be hard to capture, so you'll need to be dexterous, but once caught they do very well as long as you feed them a few spark bugs once in a while.



Copy Jelly: This extremely hard to find sea slug is one quick road to riches and rewards. You see avid reader, they have this cunning adaptation, they can mimic nearby organic creatures almost flawlessly, allowing them to hide amongst other types of fish, crabs, or corals. Their boneless bodies take on textures, colors, and even the movement of whatever they are mimicking. Now these creatures are not magical, so they can only adjust their size so much; they are roughly the size of a human head and this is what makes them so valuable. The vampires of Stygia, like all vampires, cast no reflection, and thus they never again get to see their own faces. A copy jelly, if kept in a tank, will start to mimic anyone who comes up close to the glass. They thus serve as living mirrors for the vampires. One can make enough to live relatively well for the rest of their days on a single sale, however since these already rare creatures almost always look like some other type of sea life, finding one is a challenge all its own. They can live for decades in captivity but have never been successfully bred. Happy hunting all!



Rojill Worm: The best source in the wilds for protein and fiber for a balanced meal; there are few aquatic creatures with so many rich recipes and creative cooking solutions. These fat, blunted, little wigglers can be found in all shallow waters of the Sea of Ink and make their homes among the kelpgrass that pervade those cool dark waters. The two are often harvested simultaneously and I can think of no harder meal than rojill steak and sourkelp bread. There may be better tasting, rarer aquatic delicacies, but few are as inexpensive, easy to catch, and healthy to consume; don't forget to eat your rojill worms, kids!

Severn: What list of beasts would be complete without at least a passing mention of our beloved domain's mount of choice, the seven-horned Severnbad. They are without a doubt the most foolhardy of beasts of burden in all the Forge, and they are the only mount with near flawless night vision, using minute sensory organs that line the inside of their horns and spines to navigate in total darkness. They are loyal, strong, and can subsist on a diet of the most nutrient-drained dried grasses and fungi. Although not the fastest creatures, they can carry huge loads and need only rest a few hours to regain their full stamina. They also fare well in a scrape among other mounts, even predatory ones such as kith, seeming to have a natural understanding of their own size and relative safety due their natural armaments. So if you're caravanning across the desert or trail, or tramping through the mushroom forest, a severn is your best bet for safety and reliability.

Spark bugs and the like: Just a brief hooray to all the little critters that make light of their own and thus give even the most sun-loving of beings a bright spot in the darkness. Spark bugs, of course, are found anywhere a relatively calm body of water can be located. They glow whenever more than one of their legs is in contact with water, which they enjoy gliding across. If you're going to use them as a light source, it is best to wet the bottom of a jar with just a little water—they can easily drowned if tousled around too roughly, and they don't give off light once dead. On the subject, the Vase Hound's light ball, which it dangles from its lower lip to attract small prey and vermin, will stay lit for several candle marks once removed, and has the added benefit of being very bright and directional in its use. Just watch out for those teeth when trying to collect one, and remember there are larger predators with similar light organs that may not take lightly to your attentions, (pun intended). And let us not forget the lumin! Though often thought of as vegetation, they are in fact animals, more akin to a sea anemone than a plant. These small carnivorous blooms line our streets from atop hanging planters, both providing a soft calm glow and ridding the city of over-populated insects, which they attract and eat.



Thumpit: I know, the name is on the silly side, but don't blame me, blame the addle-pated explorer who came up with it in the first place. It is however a very apt name for these fat, night-blind, little balls of fur that can be found throughout the mushroom forests. They seem to communicate by thumping their powerful back legs in different rhythms, and if raised from youth, can be taught upwards of ten different complicated beats. Performers and musicians prize them as back-up. Place one of these guys on a drum and they will follow along, thumping out any well-known beats they have been taught. Though skittish in the wild, once trained and placed on a drum they won't flee for anything, seeming to really enjoy performing. Rumor has it that they are also used by the Akai rebels for delivering encoded messages. The thumpits are taught to thump out special codes and are then transported by seemingly innocent food traders from one encampment to the next. Which brings me to their last but certainly not least use, they are extremely tasty—especially when slow roasted in a calim mushroom bisque. Hmmm... now that is good eats.



Plants

Without further delay, allow me to move right on to the beloved flora of our black home. In a place as dark as Eclipse it is a true blessing to have so much life growing and springing from every nook and crevice, and below is a treat-filled bounty of fungus and flowers to delight the senses and fill the stomach to the rim.

Glow lichen: Of course it is only fitting to begin with the very stuff that for so many new-comers to the great crater makes this home sweet livable home. This is, of course, glow lichen (if not creatively, very effectively named... because it glows). The light given off by this common lichen is soft and pale and it usually grows in small scattered chunks. These are common in Eclipse and allow for beings with low light-vision such as lunars and kith to see quite well. However around Highmark, and increasingly more and throughout the region, glow lichen are being cultivated in such mass as to give light to entire areas, bright enough that all can see easily. It is said that a master grower has even produced a hybrid that will grow on armor and shields. My sources say that he charges an exorbitant fee for this service. I don't know about you, dear reader, but you could not pay me enough to wear such a beacon to predators. Glowing armor for lunch anyone?



Hangman's Oak: Our beloved native tree is the stuff of legends and speculation. Pale, tall with twisting branches and contorted roots, these leafless trees require no light to grow to stellar heights. Instead they draw all their nutrients from the soil and from the air itself in the form of sound. Somehow the movement on the tips of the tree branches caused by even the smallest sound is transformed into energy for the trees to grow. Wow... if that worked on pickers, my husband would be tall enough to step outside the crater. Here is a little known fact that many rangers and woodsman use to scout and track; pressing one's ear to the trunk of a hangman's tree will allow you to hear things miles away in whatever direction the wind is blowing from.

Hermaphroditic Iris: This rare flower grows only about halfway up the walls of the Cauldron, marking almost exactly the midpoint. Though the best base for hunting this exceptional plant is the city of Thole, the iris grows all around the crater and blooms only during the rise of the moon, at which point a near perfect ring is visible... one of my favorite sights, I might add. This flower's core has one of the most exceptional effects if eaten on this night—the diner will change genders. For most, this odd transformation lasts only for the remainder of the moon's light but for some, around one in a hundred, the effect will be perpetual... only able to be undone under the moon when next it rises,



and then only if the said person is one out of a hundred again. Still, with all the risk, I myself and thousands of others have done it many times. Hey, it's fun to see how the other half lives, and more to the point, I have tried this with my husband, and switching sides for a night is a great way to spice up one's love life.

Kelpgrass: growing in long seed-riddled stems that rock back and forth in the shallows, this plant is the keystone of all meals, used to produce a salty flour that many consider the best in the whole Forge. It can be harvested while under water, but most prefer to gather it when tides are out and the kelpgrass is standing like fields of wheat. It is also a favorite food of the ceptu and many other aquatic creatures, though not all are happy to share. The well-known sourkelp bread, of which this is the chief ingredient, is famed and sought after everywhere, and due to its high salt content, has a very long shelf life. In truth, the wealthy will only eat sourkelp that has been aged at least ten years.



Kha'Nall Root: A good night's sleep filled with vivid happy dreams is sure to lead one to a fuller, more creative day. Thus, allow me to tell you of the wonders of Kha'Nall Root. This scrubby herb grows hundreds of miles up on the cliff walls near salty air provided by the great falls. If one chews it or steeps in a tea, it produces a dream-like trance in which the dreamer is visited with visions of wonder and joy. If a small amount is taken before bed it guarantees a wonderful night's sleep filled with flights of fancy. It should be noted that the Thole cultivate a very powerful drug from this that is said to give people true visions of Paradise, contrary to the drug they make from centermone venom which can give one terrifying hallucinations.



Mushrooms Our number one source of food (and for many fun) here in the land below. I could write an entire book about these varied fungi alone, and in fact I have: "Polly Pickers Complete Guide to the Fungi of Eclipse", sold everywhere fine books can be found. For this article though, I shall pick out three of my favorites.

Drunk Nose: So named because it looks like the bulbous nose of a drunk, it however has a much stronger effect if ingested than mere alcohol. Just a small bite of this mushroom and one feels light, happy, and content. Eat a whole one, and you will believe that you are unstoppable, you will become fearless and feel totally alive. Eat three or more and you will believe yourself a god... you will also be dead within a few hours. In small doses this is a wonderful recreational drug and has few ill effects. In larger doses it is used to motivate soldiers, especially those headed into hopeless battles. Though over time it will eat away at their intelligence, but then what commander needed wanted his foot-soldiers to think? Some even use a very high dose to convince warriors to perform suicide missions, a tact used often by the Akai rebels. A small hint: place a dash in a stew made for a hopeful lover and watch the sparks fly.



Musklin: This yellow-tinted fungi with a flat head and long stem may well be able to save your life... it grows at the base of the oldest of the grand mushroom trees and is utterly innocuous unless you violently rub it into the shaft of one of the mushroom trees. If the juices of these combine they form a foul-smelling gas that, although harmless, will repel any predator that uses its sense of smell, including werrans of all types. The main drawback—it leaves a stain that is almost impossible to get out.



Fodgie: This is the most wondrous of all the food mushrooms if harvested correctly. This large flat oval-headed mushroom is the best friend of someone on a long journey; just a little bite can give substance to a traveler as if they had a full meal. But be sure to acquire it in the correct manner, or it means certain death. One must gently pull the top off the stem, leaving it intact. If done right, a new top will grow in its place in a few weeks. If done wrong, the stem will release a deadly poison into the whole of the mushroom.



Mushroom Trees: Well, we have talked about a few of their younger cousins, but let's be clear, sometimes size matters, and where these colossal toadstools are concerned, nothing could be more honest. The variations are as endless as with their small relatives, from the common bell-dome that makes up the bulk of the great forest in the north, to the large flat cliff mushroom that grows on the sides of the great shaft and is able to support small settlements. These larger fungi make for less good eats, but on the flip side are rarely toxic. They have wild root systems that, combined with their large heads, make the mushroom forest truly one of the darkest places in an already shadowy world. There are many that will take to carving and hollowing out without dying, and lunars as well as other werrans often make dens within them. Other folks have taken to growing cliffshrooms in succession to form slowly ascending paths upward. Certain types can be boiled to make a powerful acid, and others yet can make a very powerful glue, and the most common bell-dome lends a sap that makes the most wonderful syrup. If you seek more info, remember to get a copy of my book on the topic.

Rootberries: Ever wonder how a Kith sees? Or perhaps think your love might be cheating because of that odd perfume, and you would like to track down the other woman by her sent? Or maybe you have an odd noise in your house that you just can't find the source of? Well the zesty confectionary drink that is made from rootberry is just what you are looking for. First, I should say the rootberry is neither a root nor a berry, but rather a fungus not unlike a truffle. If ingested either raw or in the above mentioned drink—the later being my suggestion, as raw it has a chalky texture—this wonder fungus will temporarily heighten all your natural senses. Your eyes will be able to see in near dark, in greater detail, and to further distances. You will be able to pinpoint a frollow breathing from thirty paces, smell which direction your child ran in a crowded street, and your very skin will tingle at the slightest touch. It should be well noted that the effects are short lived and doses should not be repeated without a good sleep between them or you can permanently dull your senses. Also, one should never combine this root with Drunk Nose mushroom, the resulting high can lead to blindness and a strange, dreaming coma.



CAVERNS

Below the surface of Eclipse, in deep nooks and forlorn tunnels, lies another world unto itself. This vast web of uncharted passages, impossible angles, and virtually bottomless cavities is the abode of all true devotees of the dark. Here boundless horrors slumber, rising only to hunt and eat... creatures who have never known light, living by scent and sound alone, lying in wait for invaders to enter their domains that they might stalk and devour them. For the brave, this maze is not without its marvels. Lost cities more vast than any on the surface fill great caverns, towers grow from floor to ceiling, entire self-contained ecosystems thrive in isolated chambers, and lost treasures have come to rest here far beyond the grasp of all but the most skilled of spelunkers.

The sheer area of the uncataloged depths of this place more than rivals the upper lands of Eclipse. Wise locals believe the tunnels should be left to those native to the dark, and for very good reasons. Danger abounds here: earthquakes, flooding, monsters, and deadly noxious gas, to name a few, but no danger is more frightening and likely to claim lives than that of becoming lost. Those poor rashers who meet with this fate are doomed to a slow death of starvation and madness. Though a skilled delver will know which lichens and molds are edible and even how to find and hunt bugs and rodents for sustenance, these nutrient-starved foods can only prolong life for so long. Even the best will only have limited light sources, and hunting in the blackest of black is near impossible. Those who rely on magic may buy more time, but spellcasters take note—casting a spell, even one as common as light, when you have not had drink or a proper meal in weeks becomes an exertion that may break the strongest of wills. Magic light in particular also seems to attract the attention of some of the most perilous of terrors that stalk the black reaches. Even those with skill and light to spare are not immune to the madness of isolation deep beneath the ground, in throat-like constricting passageways that track on and on endlessly... black, ever-shifting, never seeming to return to the surface, infused with crushing blindness, stale air, and silence. Many have been found lost in their minds, skin turned pale, fingernails and hair grown straggled and rotten, clothing shredded and fallen away. Locals refer to these poor souls as the “cave yawned”. They are nearly always unable to return to ordinary life. Most never talk again, and if not watched constantly will return to the nearest hole to crawl back to the only life they seem to know.

Still for all these threats there are bold delvers who make their living and trade in the burrows beneath Eclipse, hunting monsters and treasures, and hoping for that one elusive big score that will elevate them to the level of the affluent and celebrated.

WATER

The host of rivers and lakes in Eclipse, and even the great Sea of Ink are all fed by the waters of the upper world. For every river or lake visible on the surface, another three lie hidden below the earth, trapped in the caverns below. The waters here are a force to be reckoned with, cascading down through twisting rock tubes or jetting free under the sheer pressure of oceans above. They all find their way into Eclipse, pulled

ever forward to the sirens call of the Helix.

Wild gushing rapids form at the rivers' sources. Some cut great canyons through the landscape, others filling calm lakes, acting more like the waterways of the upper world. The gentler of these tributaries function as roads and trade routes. Villages, forts, and settlements can be found along their lanes. The more violent are left alone by the land's inhabitants, passed over only on bridges and sturdy lines.

All the water here is tainted with a certain amount of salt, though less than is found on many other worlds. The waters here are barely drinkable, the salt level not being fatal for most species, but requiring one to drink an enormous amount of the liquid to remain hydrated, which is no small nuisance for most civilized peoples. Many speculators and fortune seekers have looked to find ways to remove the salt, thereby ridding the realm of its frequent water shortages, but no real viable solution has managed to surface. In the hallowed halls of the thief kings they employ magical purification constructs that drink in the sea and churn out enormous levels of fresh water that feed the fountains and hydrate the people of Baradume. However, these are difficult to maintain and must be fed with the magic of wizards and sorcerers so constantly as to deplete them to the point of death. A better solution

Dearest Mary,

Foolishness! I doubt that I have ever been so tired as I am in this place, for I must have slept away the entirety of the sun's rising! After I finished my previous letter to you, I lay down upon the soft moss and quickly tumbled into dreams, telling myself as I drifted that sleeping in the open thus as I was surely was inviting danger. Though I knew it, I confess I was exhausted to my very marrow and did nothing to protect myself from any nocturnal disturbances. It is truly God's miracle that nothing molested me in the night, at least that I know of!

[Later] Now I have woken again in darkness. Never before have I squandered a full day in the grip of slumber! I swear it is almost as though I had just closed my eyes a minute ago, so similar is the waking world around me now to the one I knew before I slept. Just as dark, just as humid, just a silent but for the whisper of the sea nearby. But it is this dark that confuses me most! A whole day asleep... I can only assume that the mysterious method of my journey here wearied me more than even the hardest day's labor.

[Later] And again, I awoke to no stars. This is the thing which sends a chill up my spine and sets my nerves jangling, Mary. It is as though some great and fearful hand swept across the vault of heaven and cleared away the shining debris of creation. It is a loneliness, to see that blank sky. Almost, it makes me feel as though I am no longer upon the earth, but at some vast distance

removed from
you and all I know. My sense of this land is so foreign—I have
never felt a place to be so distant and yet so welcoming. Yes,
that blank sky is fearful, and the silence thunders in my ear, but
the moss was so soft and embracing to sleep upon, the gentle warm
breeze off the sea like a lullaby.

As I said though, foolishness! I am quite famished. I will wait
until morning light, then reconnoiter for some food. Daybreak can-
not be too far off, surely? And if I have truly slept for more than
a day, then I certainly will have no difficulty in staying awake to
meet it!

After breakfast, I shall write, nourished and ready to behold the
new and awful land!

-P.

I have seen is one employed by the werrans of the north, using
tent-like networks of nets, water is drawn out of the mists and col-
lected in barrels below. A dozen or so of these devices seems to
be enough to feed the small villages of the werrans, and they also
have the side effect of dimming the mists that blanket the land.
There are some wells that give bountiful fresh water, and other
people depend on rain catchers and water-heavy plants to supple-
ment their short supplies, but fresh clean water will always be in
demand in Eclipse, particularly in the caverns beneath.

All the rivers run their course in time to one great body of water.
If there is anything in all of the Cauldron blacker than the tunnels,
it is the depths of the Sea of Ink. Fed from above by the falls and
from below by a thousand dank subterranean rivers, its depth is
unknown, lost within the foundation of the Helix. It is said that
the waters that drain into this massive whirlpool pass through the
core of the Forge. There they are bleached of the salt until at last
they explode forth fresh beneath the grand citadel of Belus in the
domain of Penance. Rumor abounds of a secret chamber, vast
as a continent, filled with the salt and everything else filtered out
during this epic voyage.

TRAVEL

Eclipse is perhaps not as vast as some domains, but its major cul-
tivated lands lie apart from one another, separated by great swaths
of wilderness. Roads are only maintainable over short distances,
and are far too dangerous and expensive to patrol. Braving the
wilds with anything short of a small army is extremely unforgiv-
ing. Hot air balloons and air ships attract large flying predators,
and are far too likely to get lost in the darkness and fog. The
stars that can be used to navigate are too fickle in such conditions
to trust. Some claim to be able to read the light on the edges of
the cliffs high above, but these are really only visible a few days
per month due to the mists. The land's rivers charge recklessly
towards the sea, making treks on them dangerous and certainly
a one-way affair. The Cauldron is not a place for the meek to
attempt a leisurely tour.

The bulk of trade and travel is conducted on the edges of the Sea
of Ink. It is unwise to stray out beyond sight of the shore as the

deeper waters are home to untold leviathans that view even the
most massive of ships as simple playthings. It is cumbersome to
have to skirt around the periphery of the land, never really being
able to sail on open sea, but the almost certain loss of one's craft
and life keeps even the boldest mariners on these outer courses.
It is thus a tradition that ships sail in long trade circles starting in
Erebus and working either clockwise or counter around, hitting all
the ports along the way. A log is kept of the ships heading out in
each direction and a valiant effort is made to balance the numbers,
thus making it easier for travelers to catch ships headed in the
direction most convenient to their need. An average full-circle trip
around the Sea of Ink is a voyage of roughly 900 miles, and can
take close to three months, give or take depending on conditions.
This extended time is due to stoppage time at the many ports and
the need to hug the coast at all times.

The typical trade route passes from Baradume, the city of thieves
in the east, southward unto the newly founded city-state of High-
mark to the southeast, then on to Shade, the gateway to Stygia,
the vampire kingdom. Next the route passes westward, running
along the wastelands to the mining towns of the southwest and
then to the hand-dug port of the border town of Erebus in the far
west. A few of the bravest even venture north to the mushroom
forest to trade with the feral werrans of the northwest. The final
stop of note is the trade town of Oerdin at the mouth of the river
Dardan, the sea port for the industrial cities of the north and the
underground empires.

Sailing vessels are so few and needed so desperately that they are
considered sovereign territory unto themselves, even when docked.
Local authorities will try every other angle before considering
breaking this steadfast agreement. It is a hard lesson that High-
mark has paid dearly for in its first few years of functioning. This
fledgling law-minded settlement many times has demanded access
to certain vessels for inspection, even removing criminals from
them. This caused a near total embargo by the shipping compa-
nies, something a budding town could ill afford. Since this fiasco,
the dukes, king, and councils have gone out of their way to prove
that they are welcoming and friendly to all ships and traders, even
to the point of allowing sailors near amnesty from all but the most
severe crimes, and providing free drinks to boot.

Beloved Mary,

It must be hours now that I have stared up at this dark! I have never known
a longer night... were it not for the lightning bug floating in my canteen, I would
not be able to see this paper I write upon!

I am now fiercely awake, alert, as though I wish to catch the sun in its truancy
and scold it before it knows I have caught it out. There is no pinkening of the
sky, no chirrup of waking birds. The world is sepulchral. Something is not
right... or perhaps it is winter here? The days short, the night long? But
no... it is warm and humid, nigh tropical—this is not wintry weather.

What is this place?

-P.

Mary of my heart,

Devil's Wasteland! Mary, it is long past time for the sun to have come up! Yet it remains as black as it has every moment of my time here. The starless heaven keeps watch over me as vigilantly as I do over it. And not the slightest hint of light.

I fear to move from this place, but if this is a land of perpetual, or even elongated, darkness, I cannot stay here. I must find something to eat. I don't think I've ever been so hungry. Perhaps there are fish in the sea...

And what is more, I know for a certainty that I am not alone here, though why I should have assumed myself the sole tenant of this nightmarish world, I cannot say. For certainly, at some dark point in the past everlong night, I heard from afar the howling of... well, I do not know of what. I dare say wolves, if only to give a name to the horrific shrieks. But with equal certainty, I know it was no wolf, or at least I have never heard a wolf cry like that. It sounded to my ears a twining of human screams and lupine wailing, together, not as one causing the next.

I cannot stay here. They were quite afar, I could sense. But the merest chance that they exist at all has awaked in me newfound wanderlust. I must move on.

[Later] I would cry out to God, Mary, but I am afraid of what my voice would else waken and bring down upon me. I went to the beach and dropped to my

It could take as long as four months for the uneducated to travel overland from Erebus to Highmark or Baradume. The Mushroom Forest to the north is impossible to navigate without a skilled guide—one whom, for starters, you trust to not trade you to the werrans as a hunting toy. The waste to the south is lifeless and disorienting. Newcomers will find themselves quickly lost and hungry. The mountains of Stygia are full of suspicious rebels and vampire hunting parties. There are underground arteries, however, that can slice weeks off travel times. The well known and established ones are fairly safe, but there are even faster routes held as treasured secrets by the best guides. Once again though, one must consider the company they keep. On one such journey, a newly vetted guide led me on a deep path that took us under a river, avoiding miles of travel to the nearest bridge. Once deep below he attempted to blackmail me for further payment, or as he threatened, he would “leave me to rot in the dark”. Once he discovered who he was dealing with though, he was much more agreeable. Needless to say, I have ensured that this guide will never offer his services to wayward explorers again. I must remark, however, he was very skilled in the caves and surprised me with his longevity, but there are places that the builder of this land knows better than any mortal explorer and from which there is no mortal chance of escape.

If land travel or trade is a must, it is best to find a well-armed and large group to accompany any cargo. The dangers of the open land are so many as to boggle the mind of most mortals. There are natural hazards, such as cave-ins, earthquakes and storms. Monsters and plants abound as well, like the giant quickshrooms

which grow just beneath the surface and swallow anything organic that passes over them. Death comes from above too, via huge flying hunters that are ever watchful for easy prey. In the north, werrans control the mushroom forest and feel free to hunt any who pass through their grounds. In the south the vampires maintain their lands with little care for mortal lives, and the rebels who fight a guerrilla war against them are just as dangerous and untrusting of outsiders.

The only relatively safe way to travel the open lands without a small army of one's own is to befriend the pale picker gypsies. For starters they know all the well-established routes and tunnels, though not always the fastest. Then again, it's better to get there slowly than not at all. Consider also that these gentle and well-versed traders have over time gained for themselves a sort of freedom not unlike that of the shipping companies. The werrans allow them into their forests and forts, trading with them for rare items from the outside world, in return assuring that they are unmolested by their tribes. Even the vampires seem to have some unknown affinity to their gypsy nature, and ensure that they are allowed to come and go as they please. The rebels in the mountains have simply come to depend on them for trade and information passing. Even the thieves of Baradume have an unspoken rule not to steal from the pale picker bands, a gift they do not even tender to ships in their ports. It is unknown what, if anything, my understudy thinks of them, but I myself have traveled with them many times, having won their favor in my blind old seer disguise and can safely say that there is no more likable folk in all of the Forge. They love to trade and tour, and meet all kinds without judgment or scorn. They enjoy a good drink or drug when at rest, and their violinists are without compare. The simple fare their cooks produce is endlessly flavorful and always good to the stomach. In short, if one travels the open lands and does not endear themselves to these loveable wanderers, then one is indeed a foul creature not worth the knowing.

knees and drank my fill again of that miserable water. Then I waded out, nearly neck-deep, to scout for fishes, but the sea was black as ink and I could see nothing swimming in it, nor feel a thing slither nearby. In my desperation, I even tried to catch some of the light bugs between my palms, but always were they too fast to be ensnared! On hands and knees, I searched the beach for stranded shelled creatures, or even seaweed, but the beach was as blank as the sky.

Back to my camp I went. Gathering up my sabretache, canteen and the meager remains of my arrival, I set off up the beach. I do not know what direction I am going, or why I chose that path to start. It is weary walking, but finally a bit of luck! After what must have been an hour of trudging (though it could have been longer!), I found washed up on the sand a thick, white branch, nearly of my height—perfect for a walking stick!

Things are looking up!

-P.

chapter 2 : Life in Darkness

In the beginning there was only the cell, the locks, the wards, and the cold of empty space. The dust of all we had known and created had yet to coalesce and settle into something new. For millennia we held to our posts, knowing naught else that could be done. Over time, the gravity of the cell and the wards drew in the disintegrated worlds, and began to collect debris. The heavier materials, metals and rock, began to collect around the cell, whilst the lighter things, such as gasses, tended to be drawn towards the more distant wards. We had learned quite quickly that we could steal things from other lands, but only inanimate things—all else was barred by the wards. As we pulled in these objects, they all eventually settled with their brethren, the collected mass growing larger and larger as time drove ever onward. The gravity of your will left nothing unassimilated.

Immortality is a strange beast. There will always be more time, that is the one constant, regardless of our actions. We could have done nothing at all for a million years, and in the end, have had just as much time to do everything we have done anyway. To an immortal, the only cause for action is to make existence more interesting than if we had not acted. It became a contest of sorts, to sculpt the land. We'd take the soil with us from other realms, the water, the rock, the air, and take it to the Forge to impress the others. It was Bathkol who first lit Crux...who knows how many eons he had spent transporting air to that ward. It is impossible to describe the feeling that came over us when we saw this facsimile of your sun burning again. It sent the rest of us into a fever pitch. The multitudes of mortals brag of how they have built the city of Penance to over a thousand feet in almost a million years. Imagine the time it took for but seven to build a world.

The slade was an accident. If Haiel had know what he was doing, I'm sure his Oath would have prevented it. Only one realm of millions we had access to had the metal, and Haiel found its effect upon him captivating, almost as an addict with a needle—he said it made him feel mortal. The rest of us did not enjoy the weakening effect, and did not want it upon our world. Haiel placed it all upon the surface of Zadkiel. An immortal may live for a billion years, but change, when it finally comes, comes in an instant. It is as if a constant buzzing that had always been there, a sound we had lived with so long that we did could not hear it anymore, was suddenly silenced. In that moment, we could finally comprehend the sound that we had heard all along only because we could no longer hear it. A ward had fallen. Life was no longer bound from our realm.

So much changed within the first few years. Whilst before we had no reason to count the passing of time, the lives of mortals are so short and so impassioned that it is impossible not to notice their fading. And as they grew we began to realize that the Forge would never be fully under our control again. Unfortunately for myself, the polar region I had been given dominion over did not seem particularly akin to life. Little grew in the freezing temperatures to sustain life, and the few creatures that seemed suited for the land, I am afraid

simply did not capture my interest. Nehemiah was lauded greatly for his mirrors. It is regretful they did not last until the advent of your limited freedom, as his land was truly the most wonderful of places. Not to be outdone though, I did not want to merely copy him... it is simply not in my nature, as you must know, to follow anyone else's path. We had all silently agreed to stop building the Forge once the land had begun to envelop the tops of the locks. After all, we did not want to bury our own chances of freedom. I simply decided to stop building the land sooner than the others, at least in the center of my domain. The wellspring had formed early on, quite on its own... we assumed via the force of your contained will, and its advent, or more accurately the advent of the Helix, had afforded me an opportunity. It is the heat of your cell that warms the land from below, but my Cauldron keeps the warm air in.

It was not hard to find inhabitants for this new land. Not everything loves the light. I looked mostly under the ground for my subjects. I found their success inspiring... life in the open air for many of these creatures was akin to a root-bound plant that has been pulled from its pot and thrust into wild soil. The sun and light that had held them back for so long on other worlds was gone, and they thrived. Then there were those who chose to come there of their own will, some understanding the undertaking, but most fools. The mix was exhilarating. A land had formed unlike any other I had glimpsed, a land not simply of darkness, but of beauty.

Sweet Mary,

I walked up the beach until my legs crumpled beneath me. I lay in wet sand and felt the warm water lap at my skin. Rolling over to face the sea, I opened my mouth to drink, to let the waves pour into my throat. Gritty sand slobbered about against my teeth, and something else too, soft and bursting like an overripe morsel of fruit. I recoiled, but the taste was oddly delicious, recompensing overmuch for the texture. I looked about and saw the shallows of the water clogged with grubs, or small, fat worms. Deliriously, I made a shovel of my hands and scooped them in my mouth by the dozen. Manna from the sea! The effect was neat instant-my strength has returned and my fatigue ebbed.

Standing and walking again, only moments before a prospect that had made me violently ill, was no more than blinking or breathing. I walked the beach until the sand ended and a rocky plain rolled down from the other side to meet the waves. Scrambling over rocks and into tidepools, my going was slow. I carefully held the canteen in two hands before me, so that its light could show my way. (By this time, I had had to replace my lightbug twice over.) I held my walking stick across my forearms. It made for awkward progress to be sure.

I stumbled many times, and my knees were bitten often by rocky teeth. For hours and hours I made my way across the rocks, and I feel there is no need to tell you that the sky remained a solid sheet of black the entire time. Time is not the same here; perhaps there is no time? I cannot comprehend this...

With every step I wondered whether I was drawing nearer to or pulling farther from whatever dread creature I had heard howling in the night. I forced myself at certain times to count my steps, so as to occupy my mind with something benign, rather than overwhelm myself with worry. And at other times, I cast my mind back upon the pleasant memories of our childhood, and of my fond reminiscences of you.

The rocks ended ahead of me in the slope of a high hill, and the prospect of attaining high ground and surveying the world around me filled my head, and so I rushed forward. Foolishness, I say again! Looking to the lullock, I took my eye from the treacherous rock; I stepped into a narrow, shallow crevice and wrenched my ankle. I fell forward, and my elbows cracked upon the stone, sending the canteen and light spinning away. I heard the clatter of the metal, but the light was gone! (Thus the reason for the straggled state of this letter. My penmanship is no great braggety to start with, but less so in darkness, I imagine. I prithee, soldier on, Mary!)

I freed my ankle and could feel the break. I could not walk, so I crawled toward the hill. Sharp rocks cut my palms, but after awhile, I reached soft grass. I lay face down, panting. My knees were bleeding through my pants, and the tightness of my boot pressed painfully against the break of my ankle. Somehow, I knew I could not remain still. Always in the back of my brain, visions of monstrous wolves prowled. So, in that dark, I climbed up and up, slowly but without halt, hand over hand, dragging the dead weight of my body behind me like some crippled ship hauled by a stronger tug.

ARRIVAL

Few who come to Eclipse find it immediately welcoming. Those used to the caverns can find the freedom of the open skies terrifying, and many crawl back into the holes, unable to open their minds to the emptiness of space. Those used to slumber through the day find that their natural rhythms do not serve them well here, and take many weeks to adjust to full freedom of action and desire.

Still, limiting the land to only those capable of perfect existence in total darkness was of little interest to me, so I sought out plants and insects that produced light, seeding the land with as much of them as I could. The overall effect is quite pleasant, like a starry night without a moon. Time seems more distant here, and one can concentrate more on the stillness, on the sounds and the wind. And without the destructive force of the sun, age slows as well. The beautiful stay beautiful longer, cities are not bleached away and dried up, colors are not faded.

Much of the beauty of the dark comes from the imagination, in my own reckoning. What the eye does not see, the mind fills in with what it wants to see... or sometimes what it fears. For mortals however, the passage of time is important, and the moon provides this for them. Its light is an aphrodisiac to them, showing them brief glimpses of the land around them, but even more, reminding them of their own mortality.

Mortals are used to sudden darkness, such as when snuffing a

candle or shutting one's eyes, and know to expect it here. Because of this, darkness is not the first thing newcomers must deal with. Most of the residents don't notice, but those pulled here or who bend space somehow to get here in an instant are in for a shock to the system. Because the Cauldron is so far recessed onto the Forge, the gravity of earth above it pulls things upwards, lessening the overall effects of gravity on the land. This is offset though by the intense air pressure that pushes downward, balancing out in the long run, but often weakening creatures in the short. The effect is similar to that divers encounter when rising or sinking too fast in deep waters. I estimate a Fortitude DC of 15 is required for mortals to shake off the effects of sudden arrival in Eclipse, with 1-4 points of CON damage applied to those who fail.

It is usually only after a day or more that seeds begin to notice the darkness as something more than ordinary.

My breathing was ragged. Surely I could have been heard if anyone were waiting atop the hill. My heart nearly burst out of my chest, and I nearly stopped cold out of fear that some heretofore unimagined beast awaited me upon the crest. But the world was dark all around now, with no lightbugs, and I worried again to crawl to the very lip of some abyss without ever knowing. In my growing panic, I must claim some unknown reserve of courage, and I climbed faster, and far before it seemed I should have, I crested the hillock and found a small, flat top. It was useless to look out at the country below, but I could still hear the sea. And better still, nothing waited for me. I needed rest. I slept.

When I woke, I know not how long after, it was to find my foot swollen and stiff, immovable, and blood caked down the length of both pantlegs. After a struggle, I removed the boot from the damaged foot and saw blood had filled it in my sleep. The bone had burst the skin. Emptying the boot beside me, I tore the sleeves from my shirt and bound the ankle tightly.

Again, tiredness has overtaken me and I must sleep.

Mary, I have awakened to the sense of being watched.

-P.

DARK TIMES

Daylight is never seen in Eclipse. Most who hear of this land are able to shrug this fact off by thinking of it as simply an extended period of night, but for those who are confronted with the reality of this existence, it is not as easy a thing to come to terms with. This is because light does not affect one's conscious mind and situation nearly as much as it does one's subconscious. There is a reason that most light-bound cultures generally equate the word "dark" with a negative or evil mood. The real difficulties presented in choosing to live in this land are not apparent upon first arrival, as most people are quite used to seeing darkness. It usually takes a matter of a few days or even weeks before the fear and anxiety sets in. But the love of light is not a universal truth... it is a learned and adapted behavior like any other, and for those

Mary,

God help me! Something is watching me. I can hear it rustling just beneath the crest of the hillock! Snuffling and snorting, it stinks of a wild creature. Damn me! The blood! The scent of my blood drew them...

[Later] I write now in darkness, measuring paper by finger widths. I cannot get away. I have waited hours, but they do not summit the hill. Do they mean to wait me out? Wait until I fall asleep? I am so frightened I cannot sleep! Or wait until delirium takes me?

Mary, I do not wish to die like this...

[Later] Long have I felt superior to the animals, but now I wonder which is the more cunning... oh my God, Mary, this waiting is hell. If only they would come on I could try to fight them off and maybe die valiantly.

[Later] I think of the village and of you, Mary... the snows of winter and when we roasted apples by the lakeshore... they are still rooting about just out of sight. The smell of them is nauseating, but worse is the communication they have. Growling, guttural language they seem to possess, and it comes in fits and spurts. They are toying with me!

conditioned properly, a life in darkness can be as much or more rewarding as a life in the light of the sun.

Even for nocturnal creatures that come here, there are surprising difficulties in adjusting. Paramount to this is that a great deal of problems in acclimatizing to Eclipse are not attributable to a lack of light so much as a lack of a sense of time. Without a sun rising and setting at a constant rate to count the hours, the passage of time is not a noticeable phenomenon. Events happen, things wear out, people grow old and die, children are born, but in Eclipse these are things that simply happen, not things that happen at a specific time. Events here occur at their natural rates,

I tried to stand, but I could sense them ready to spring and I fell back down. I am a coward, Mary...

How odd—in war I was fearless, and in my duty I took such pride... and now...

They hear the scratching of the nub against this paper, I know it. I care not. All I can do now is write you, tell you what befalls me. I hope this somehow finds you, against all I know to be certain. For now, what is it I know to be certain? God? I am afraid... I am still bleeding at the ankle...

One of them has let out a howl! I feel my ears have been ravished by that noise! How much longer will they make me wait?

I am so tired now.

Mary, I will dream of you, and when I wake

and no one is ever in a hurry. In parts of Baradume, newcomers to Eclipse are known as “shakers”, in reference to the panicked demeanor they seem to take, quite in opposition to that of the natives with regards to time. “Hurry up”, “rush”, “right away”, “imperative”, “light a storm”... these are all phrases that one will never hear in Eclipse, except from the mouths of outsiders.

Time is more a state of mind than most would like to admit. If it exists at all it in Eclipse, it is entirely an artificial construction designed to allow different people to meet for an event, and then only in the major cities. For the most part, people here live without time. Natives to Eclipse are much more tied to their natural biological rhythms than to arbitrary time considerations. Everyone has his own sleep schedule, and some never sleep at all. People simply sleep when they are tired, eat when they are hungry, wake when they are rested, and so on. This dynamic, in my opinion, leads to a much greater sense of happiness and satisfaction with life, and promotes mental health. There are no societies pushing their ideas of what is right or normal for people upon others; people here are truly free to choose their own lifestyles.

The lack of societal time here also leads to an interesting dynamic where labor is concerned. Laborers are not paid by arbitrary time delineations, such as the “hour” or the “day”. In fact, most aren’t really paid at all. People tend to do their jobs because those jobs are required for the society to function as a whole. People build or grow what they need and trade for the things they cannot make themselves. Those few skilled laborers who are paid for their services receive payment by the job, not by the time taken up by their labors. In fact, the large number of communal economies here are thought to be a function of the lack of time. Without the passage of time, time-based expenses fail to accrue, such as rent on properties, interest on debts, or taxes, and standard profit-based systems of accounting cannot function.

All major events in Eclipse are planned by the moon. The moon in Eclipse is impossible to miss, and can easily be used as a common reference point. Everyone here is aware of the intervals between the moon’s appearances, so it is used to mark the passage of time in a larger sense. People here count their lives in moons instead of years, for example, and travel times are defined in terms of moons as well. One moon is equivalent to twenty-eight days on the rest of the Forge. Shorter times are thought of in terms of fractions of a moon; what is known as a week in most places is equivalent to a “quarter-moon” here. There is no standard equivalent to a “day”, but most creatures tend to count in terms of “sleeps”, essentially one full waking period between two periods of sleep. For many, such as with most humans, this ends up being essentially a day, although be aware that this is a highly subjective term that can vary greatly from one species or individual to the next. Shorter periods of time are often counted by “candle marks”, or how long it takes for a standard candle to burn down from one painted mark on its length to the next. When compared to time in a place like Penance, a candle mark ends up being roughly equivalent to half an hour, although again, this is a highly subjective unit.

For those who pursue the sciences and need to know more exact reference points, time and date can be measured by looking high overhead and seeing which of the points of the Cauldron’s rim

are catching the light of which sun. However, in practice, this is not an easy task, as the mists and hazes of Eclipse hide the stars and the upper rim of the crater. Most people can tell the time if the sky is clear, but only a sage can measure the date, and there are generally historians in most cities who keep track of dates for purposes of recording. At times in Baradume, various do gooders have tried to put some sort of public time system in place, such as bell towers or clockwork time faces, but these have always been met with scorn and anger by the population at large, and are quickly brought down by vigilante or civic action.

More common than rim readings though is measurement of the tides on the Sea of Ink. In places where there are markings, such as near major cities, the height of the sea waters will show those who know how to read them the approximate distance between two moon cycles. Tides are at their highest when the moon is overhead, and as the moon falls, the tides fall, reaching their lowest point roughly halfway between cycles. From here the tides rise again until the moon comes overhead again.

It is worth knowing that only those who live in caverns and on the floor of the crater are immune to the effects of time. Once one climbs up a few miles, the mists fall away, and a constant clear view is always available of the crater’s rim, which can be read like a clock for those who know how. The citizens of Thole, for example, base much of their religion and visions on the time and passage of the heavens, and in all of the dream documents in their libraries, exact times and dates of the dreams are carefully noted and recorded.

DEALING WITH THE DARK

Darkness is inescapable in Eclipse, and even those adapted to it still need a small amount of light to see. Light is a constant commodity here, important for travelers, but far more of a difficulty for settlements, where permanent lighting must be erected and maintained, but without overdoing it. Though shakers are always trying to use magic to solve nature’s difficulties, natives know that that a natural problem requires a natural solution. Magical light is invariably too bright, and too acid, casting everything and everyone in something of an unflattering glow. Some complain of headaches after long periods of exposure, and then there’s the matter of certain things being attracted to magic. Remember that most of those who live here choose to do so because of the dark, not despite of it; they want their cities to reflect them, not to take them away from their natural setting. Colopitiron in particular seems to have a prominent dislike for magical light, and played an interesting little game with Highmark in the first few years of its existence, snuffing out the glow orbs as fast as the magicians could light them.

There’s also the matter of the mists. For those who live on the floor of the cauldron, the mists are inescapable, and bright light tends to reflect off of them, creating a harsh, blinding effect that even day-sighted creatures find unpleasant. The general solution to both problems, the fog and the dark, is humble plants. Lumin plants are best for urban areas, where they produce enough light to pleasantly fill a street or a room. Also, they eat pests, which is a rather nice extra. In rural areas, the luminous lichen is commonly cultivated. These primitive plants, if one can even call



them that, require no maintenance, as they seem perfectly content to cling to lifeless rock, drawing their moisture from the mists and their nutrients from the stone. Cultivating them is as simple as scraping lichen off of one rock and moving it over to another, then allowing a few months for it to take a foothold. Children who grow up in civilized areas often run afoul of their ignorance the first time they head out into the wilds, as they are so accustomed to having the areas around their settlements seeded with lichens. Even though they are native to Eclipse, they simply aren't prepared for the true dark.

The true dark of the wild is a beautiful and terrifying thing. Simply bringing a light along on one's journey is not at all enough to get by. Because of the constant mists, one can only see perhaps a few yards in any given direction regardless of one's light source, but the light one carries will shine for miles in the mists, luring any hungry thing out of its hole. Again, magic is a mistake here. The basic rule is to provide as dim a light as possible. If one can only see five yards, then bring a light that only lights five yards to begin with, or less if one can manage it. The dark and the mists also make it very difficult to reconnoiter, as one has no far-off horizon one can head towards. Even if one carries a compass and a map, one can end up trekking around in circles, overshooting one's target by miles, or walking off a sheer cliff. Some folks seem to do well with both a standard and an Eclipse compass, using the differences between them to determine distances traveled.

The math for this is complex, but sound. Keep in mind though that few common folks can afford magical items, even those as mundane as a compass. Most just stick to established paths, or to the rivers and coastline.

Because of the limited view here, the land of Eclipse feels considerably larger than it really is. Parts of this space of only six hundred miles across are as unexplored as the depths of the oceans or the snowy fields of the Vault. I've seen settlements only a few miles apart that weren't even aware of one another's presence. There are even homesteads formed by seeds in the wild that have no idea that a larger world outside their little misty field exists. Distances may sound short here, but travel is a slow and delicate process.

It is important to remember that all creatures perceive the darkness of Eclipse differently. The following gem slipped into my bag while I was browsing through the royal library of Lethe. It was an ancient scroll, and rather dusty... I doubted king Lanerin would miss it, but I feel you may find its contents illuminating. Again, refer to Appendix E for a more detailed analysis.

Defensive Techniques in Prey - Part 3: Vision

The hunt is the art of taking advantage of your prey's weaknesses. We all want to feel the taste of fresh blood and the crunch of bones between our teeth, but competing with your prey on its strengths is a sure road to an empty belly. Few of us admit it, but most prey creatures are faster, quicker, and have more endurance than the average werran. Pursuit is also a great motivator, making even seemingly defenseless creatures take risks that can make them dangerous. If you don't catch your prey you miss a meal; if your quarry doesn't get away he is a meal. The predator's advantage is wiles—using your brain to create opportunities, not just relying upon your physical power.

Many young cubs make a common mistake, they assume that their prey can see what they see, exactly as they see it. This leads to missed opportunities and unnecessarily hungry predators. If you pay attention to your prey's species—particularly to his eyes—and you've done your homework, you can start seeing the world around you like he does and taking advantages of the differences between what you see and what he sees.

Every creature is different, but with vision, there aren't many variations. The millions of species out there can be lumped into only about six categories, although a number have more than one way to see. Get into the head of your prey, and you will find him getting into you a lot more often.

High-Color Vision

Example Species: Human, Dover, Picker, Ceptu, Valco, Urgoda

Colors: Yes

Shades: Yes

See Through Mist: No

See Invisible: No

High-color vision is just what it sounds like, vision based almost entirely on color—the differences between the kinds of light that objects reflect. High-color vision is fantastically entertaining, and all of the best artists and poets seem to have these eyes, making this by far the most common vision type in sentient creatures. However, high-color vision requires bright light to function, particularly full-spectrum light, such as sunlight. Drop these people in the forest at night and they are blind as a bat... well, actually much blinder as far as their survival chances go.

High-color eyes don't function at all without light. Although they can see somewhat in dim light, it takes a while for them to adjust from bright to dark and bright again. Because of city-folk's over-reliance on light, they tend to be attracted to distant lights in the dark, and have a laughable habit of staring right into bright lights, ruining whatever chances they did have of adjusting to the night. Light can be used as a lure for these creatures. Setting up a few torches or a bonfire near a good ambush site or a box canyon will draw in these lost sheep like moths. Especially in the dark or in the mists, bright light is about the only thing that a sighted person can make out from a distance, and they will head right for it.

As maligned as the mists of Eclipse are by the city-folk, they actually seem to help those with light-based vision see, at least in their immediate surroundings, as water vapor that hangs in the air becomes reflective and actually helps propagate ambient light. However, the mists of Eclipse are notoriously thick, and generally block all light-based vision beyond 15 feet. Even if equipped with a light source, it is a heavy strain for those with light-based vision to see past this range through fog. For those of us with darkvision, the mists provide ideal conditions to hunt, allowing us to remain invisible at a safe distance of maybe forty feet or so, and either attack at range or wait until the time is right for an ambush.

Even when the mists rain away, if the moon is not out, color-vision creatures will not be able to see far in the natural darkness of Eclipse, and your hunting tactics should be quite similar to those listed above. Of course if the moon is out, tactics are useless anyway, as the blood of our ancestors fires up in our veins. With all of the tribe on the hunt, simply stay in the pack and relish the joy of a communal kill.

Because high-color prey has trouble adjusting to changes in light levels, light and darkness can be used as an effective weapon against them. Such a creature that has adjusted to the darkness and is suddenly exposed to bright light actually becomes temporarily blinded, and may suffer a range of negative effects for a few seconds. This is a difficult effect to trigger with natural light, as it requires something on the level of sunlight to cause a big enough flash, but it can be easily managed with magic. Some spells that can cause this effect include color spray, scorching ray, fireball, lightning bolt, and chain lightning, among others. At the rare times when I have access to such magic, I like to unleash it just before leaping into combat, blinding my prey and covering my charge. Remember that the effect will lessen quickly over time, so it is important to strike swiftly. And don't forget to close your own eyes when you unleash a flash, lest you lose your own vision.

A similar and almost equal effect can be triggered by taking prey in bright full-spectrum light and immediately plunging them into darkness, only it doesn't offer your prey the chance to blink and avoid it. It will typically take a few moments for high-color eyes to adjust to the changes in light levels. However, since there is almost never bright light in Eclipse, this tactic isn't of much use here in the mushroom forest.

Low-light Vision

Example Species: Frey, Elf, Pale, Chromithian, Most Werrans, Moliche, Chamo, Most Animals

Colors: Partial

Shades: Yes

See Through Mist: No

See Invisible: No

While the city folks waste their time with color and art, the more feral amongst us tend to develop much more efficient eyes. These "low-light" eyes as they are called don't care what kind of light there is to be had, they will make use of whatever is available, and for the most

part, things look the same no matter what the lighting. Low-light creatures can see some colors in very bright light, but for the most part, and certainly at night, we only see in shades of light and dark. Low-light vision is almost a requirement to live in Eclipse, although in places, such as the caverns below, it is still not enough. When the moon is out, low-light eyes can see forever, and certainly if there are enough glowing lichens about, we can see just fine in the forest. But even on the surface of Eclipse there are places that are simply pitch black, and those with low-light eyes will need to carry some kind of light source.

However, the mists affect these creatures just as much as those with high-color vision, and generally (at least for lunars like myself) when hunting low-light prey, it is best to use the mists to one's advantage, primarily by seeking out high-mist hunting grounds to begin with. Rapid changes in light-levels do disrupt low-light vision, though not as severely, as feral eyes tend to adjust very quickly to different light levels. It takes only a second or two for low-light eyes to adjust from bright light to sudden dim light. When subjected to sudden bright flashes of light in the darkness though, they are just as disabled as those of the city folk.

To make out colors, those with low-light vision require full-spectrum daylight, just as city-folk do. However, even then colors are hard to tell apart, and will never seem as rich or as beautiful, or so I've been told. In any case, when stalking a creature with low-light-vision, choosing the shade of one's camouflage is much more important than the color.

Darkvision (Infrared/Heat vision)

Example Species: Nightling, Asherake, Lunar, Deep Fey, Faust, Hovara

Colors: No

Shades: No

See Through Mist: Yes

See Invisible: No

Those of us with darkvision still see with our eyes, but these organs are engineered to pick up something else other than light. We lunars, and others with this gift, seem to be able to detect minute changes in temperature between one object and the next. With eyes like mine, living things shine out like torches in the darkness, and most other objects fade into the background. It is delicious for hunting, as one can keep a steady eye on one's prey—especially amusing when they try to hide in shadows or amongst plants. Pathetic.

They eyes of most creatures with darkvision also let in light when it's available too. Usually this is equivalent to low-light vision, though occasionally an odd species with darkvision mixed with high-color comes across my plate. These are especially tasty morsels. The reason for backup eyesight is obvious—without additional senses, those with darkvision could not distinguish shades or colors, only the outlines of objects. In fact, in total darkness, my own light-based vision shuts off entirely, and I see only shapes. If I didn't have low-light eyes as well, I wouldn't be able to write this book, or even read one. I wouldn't be able to appreciate the colors of plants or the moon or tell any one of my brethren from another. Darkvision is a great boon to hunting, but not so pleasant for living.

Also, ambient temperatures in the air eventually dim out heat signatures, so those with darkvision can only see objects up to a certain range, often only 60 feet or so. This isn't a disadvantage in a cavern (where I suspect these eyes evolved) or in Eclipse where the mists block out distant objects, but on a clear moonlit night when everyone else can see the cliffs and the stars and the shining rim of the cauldron, you are going to be missing out on life's greatest pleasure.

So here's the deal, when hunting prey with darkvision, stay just beyond of their darksight range until you are ready to strike. If you can't see them either, track them by sound and scent, keeping a constant distance. Light isn't too effective a weapon against darkseers... it can knock out a creature's secondary vision (just as it does those who can only see in this manner), but will do nothing to its darkvision. Don't rule these attacks out though, as darksighted creatures still must rely upon light-sight for distance vision. If you are spotted or are outmatched and need to get away, you can flash them and then run, effectively blinding them beyond a short range, often enough to make your escape.

Another tactic to try is hiding in dark water to prepare an ambush. Since water is so much denser than air, those with darkvision can only see through it at a tenth the range as they see through the air. This also applies to glass and other transparent materials as well, though it is rare to encounter glass thick enough to block one's heat vision.

Echolocation

Example Species: Thole

Colors: No

Shades: No

See Through Mist: Yes

See Invisible: Yes

These buggers do have eyes, and generally can see at short ranges, but their eyes don't focus well on distant objects, and everything gets a bit blurry after ten feet or so. However, those with echolocation make up for their short sight by having exceptional hearing... hearing so good it actually helps them "see" the objects around them. Like darkvision, echolocation cannot see shades at all (that's a function of light), and it is limited to a certain range. One advantage these guys have though is an increased field of vision. While you or I might only be able to see what is placed in front of our faces, thole can see equally as well to the sides. They still can't quite see what's directly behind them though, but that doesn't mean they won't hear you sneaking up on them. One thing to note is that these guys can't see at all through transparent objects, like glass or water—they are as opaque as steel to the ear.

Now since echolocators both hear and see with sound, sound can be used as a weapon just like light can with the city-folk. Loud noises, like those of a lightning strike, will temporarily deafen (and thus blind) a thole just like seeing a lightning bolt in the dark will blind a human. Also, busy sounds can be used as camouflage. I find that if I stand near waterfall, an echolocator won't be able to see me, and if one of them

comes too close to source of the sound, he won't be able to see anything at all. Of course if you deafen a bat and then close on it, don't forget it does have eyes too. I like to hit them with a big boom and then bring them down from a short distance with arrows or nets.

Psychic Echolocation

Example Species: Haze

Colors: No

Shades: No

See Through Mist: Yes

See Invisible: Yes

Haze seem to be a category all their own, and if they weren't so common in Eclipse, I'd not even include this on the list, but they are, and I am. Nobody understands quite how the haze see—the best explanation is that they see with their minds, sending out some kind of invisible rays that bounce off things and then come back as vision. Honestly though, to hunt them you don't really need to understand why they can see; just accept that they can. In practice, haze function as those with darkvision, only without any kind of backup vision, which severely limits them, particularly with regards to distance. Nothing can outmuscle a haze up close, but back up a good seventy feet or so, and they are totally blind. As with the bats, taking these guys down from a distance is the safest bet, even if not the most pleasurable. I prefer to soften them up first with ranged attacks before closing in to sink my teeth into their flesh while they are still warm and moving.

Some people make the mistake of thinking haze are stupid, since they can't read a book or look at a painting or any of that other civilized severncrap. They're not. In fact, haze can see textures a lot better than those of us with darkvision, and can actually learn to read and write by scratching letters out of stone or sand. One big thing that cubs tend to forget when stalking haze though is that haze don't have a front or a back with regards to vision. They can see in all directions equally well at all times. This makes them particularly difficult to sneak up on. Again though, haze can't see through glass or water any better than a bat, even if they do see with their minds.

Flashing or deafening a haze does you no good—your best bet is to keep your distance and bring them down with ranged attacks. Of course, when the mists are out, if you get close enough to see them they will be able to see you too, so good luck, or just leave these monsters alone.

Scent Vision

Example Species: God Dust Ancients, Scythin, Dover, Some Insects, Occasional Critters

Colors: No

Shades: No

See Through Mist: Yes

See Invisible: Yes

Scent vision isn't exactly a vision type exactly, and it is almost always a secondary sense in addition to normal vision, but it's worth mentioning here as it affects the hunt. Those who see with scent don't really see the shapes of things, nor can they determine color or shades or any of the standard vision stuff, but they do seem to be able to determine the sizes and locations of things, particularly of living things. They simply pick up the natural scents that all things give off. It's no use to hide around these buggers, they will sniff you out without ever even noticing you are trying to hide at all. Like with the haze, those with scent vision can "see" in all directions, though usually to a very limited range, often as little as 30 feet or so. They can also pick up the scents of invisible creatures or those otherwise magically altered in their appearance.

Since smell travels much slower than sound or light, scent vision is heavily affected by wind and air currents, and those relying entirely on scent to fight will often miss their opponents as the winds have shifted where their scent is concentrated. Strong winds can increase these mistakes, and wind-based magic can be employed as a combat tactic. If you don't have any magic up your sleeve, simply stay upwind of scent-based creatures, and keep your distance until the terrain is right for an ambush. The "sight" range for scent vision is cut in half upwind, and doubled downwind.

Oddly enough, almost all creatures with scent vision are naturally able to secrete an identifying pheromone that they can use to mark objects and other people, allowing them to realize when they have come in contact with that person or thing before. These pheromones are also how individuals of a species tell one another apart. That's why dovers always sniff one another's rears when they meet.

Supernatural Vision

Example Species: Elder Vampires, Colopitiron

Colors: Yes

Shades: Yes

See through Mist: Yes

See Invisible: Yes

I'm not sure this category really belongs in a book on prey, but it's interesting, so I've given it a few lines. Basically, stay away from these buggers! Many powerful supernatural creatures seem to be able to see via the use of magic of some sort, and generally can see perfectly to any distance in any lighting conditions, picking up colors and shades and everything, even through mists and illusions. The only weakness I have been able to detect is that most of them still seem to have a normal field of vision, so if you find yourself tracking a demon or a vampire of some great power, stay behind it. Of course, magic is magic, so don't bet your life on something not having eyes in the back of its head. Also, with regards to the master of this land, even if he is not looking in your direction, his spies are always covering his flanks. Don't ever think you can slip something by him.

MOON DAY

One cannot visit or live in Eclipse without knowing of the wonders and dangers of the one universal celebration: Moon Day. A bit of a misnomer, Moon Day actually lasts for approximately two days of surface time. Once a month, the red light of Zadkiel the rust moon treks across the skies of the Cauldron. It takes approximately half of one of the Forge's days to entirely clear the crater and become full, one complete day to pass across the gap at the top of the world, and then another half day to fully fade from view.

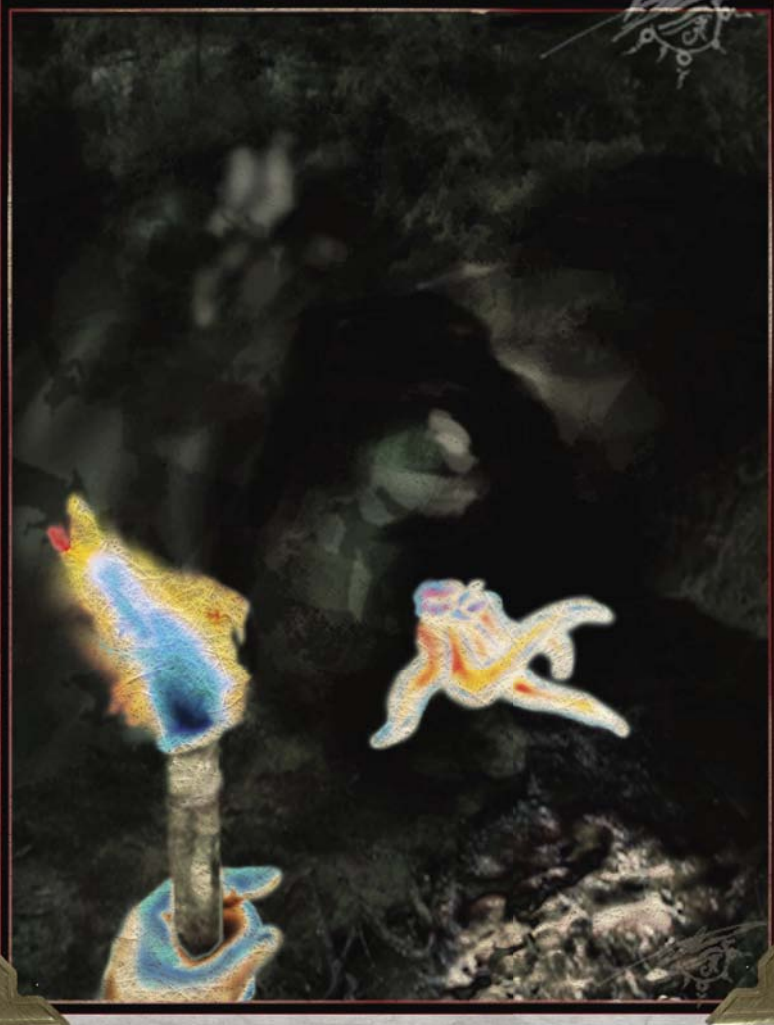
Moon Day is a time of spectacle and merriment, as the dark realm becomes bathed in the blood-red light of the iron orb. The mists rain away, and the tides swell to their highest, lapping up to the doorsteps of Highmark and Baradume. The foul creatures of the dark retreat to their holes to await again their precious nighttime, and all cultures of the Cauldron spring forth in festivals and celebration.

Throughout my travels, I have made an effort to try and experience this strange time in as many places as possible, a witness to how each land and culture commemorates the holiday. In Baradume, the thieves dance in the streets, drinking, laughing, and boasting about their greatest heists, a moratorium placed on thievery until the darkness returns. In Highmark, a great feast is held to celebrate the city's survival one more month in the dark. The vampires of Stygia give freedom to thirteen loyal servants, either by sending them to Erebus to seek their fortune or by granting them the forever kiss... the distinction seems highly dependent upon whim and mood. The rebels retreat to their caves and families—a time of reflection and rest. In Erebus, the shops hold great sales until the moon is at its halfway point, and then close and let the merrymaking last until the dark returns. The werrans of the northern forests go wild, unable to maintain their social forms. They engage in a hunt of massive proportions, releasing and pursuing the most dangerous and foolhardy interlopers they have managed to capture over the month. Any that manage to survive until the sun sets are offered the right to be infected and join the tribe.

Wherever one's location, the two days of Zadkiel's rule are exceptional and wild, and very seldom pass without some marked change, even if that change is no more than a colossal hangover.

Many of the land's inhabitants are thrown into a primal fury by the presence of the moon. Werrans, in particular, lose control of their faculties and go totally feral, changing to their most bestial of forms. During a full moon it is literally impossible for a werran to wear his social form, and for those who have one, it is a tremendous act of will (requiring a Will save DC 20) to even change to one's hybrid form.

Due to the large number of lycanthropes who dwell in Eclipse, many inhabitants that live close to the werran lands, most notably in Sabor, fear the times when the moon shines brightly. These people stay in their homes and lock their doors, because it is not uncommon for out of control were-creatures to wander the streets of cities, towns, and villages during the day



of the Moon. These periods are commonly referred to as being “under the bloody eye”, which is an expression that is spoken of in hushed tones.

In Baradume, those with lycanthropy typically head northwest out of town to the red wood to hunt when the moon begins to make its appearance. A few do remain behind, and it is not unheard of for corpses to be found mauled in the streets after a moon. This is an item of dispute however with the werrans who claim this is not their doing, but the work of protection organizations who wish to conveniently rid themselves of troublesome or shamed members.

Cursing someone to be caught outside under the bloody eye is similar to a death threat without actually crossing the line between hoping that someone will be killed and promising them that they will be killed. This is usually an expression of enmity that proves to be harmless in most cases. When such a curse is uttered by one’s guildmaster however, most citizens take that as a warning that they should leave the city with haste, or be in for a desperate fight for life.

As much as the lifers here love their land, there are those for whom life in Eclipse is simply not a good match. The Highmarkers provide an excellent study. (See appendix E for my notes.)



Highmark Royal Office of the Interior, Official Study no. 416: Investigation of Problems in Citizens Adjusting to Life in Darkness

Sire, these pages contain the full summary of the report that you commissioned. Please note that as I am not a politician or a policy maker, I have provided only details on how to best treat citizens afflicted with disorders, I have not made efforts to find ways to craft public policy on a national level to stem the epidemic. That work is best left to your advisors and dukes, and of course to yourself. I have no desire to overstep my bounds, simply to provide you and your men with the data they need to make the difficult decisions.

As you yourself observed to me upon invoking this commission, the greatest troubles our people seem to be encountering in adjusting to life in Eclipse is in dealing with the darkness. After having now done the research to back this up, it is clear to me that this problem is far more pervasive and far-reaching than we considered. At best, we can hope to acknowledge the problem for what it is and to provide help and support to citizens when necessary. This is not an issue that will simply go away for most people. I believe that it will take at least several generations before the people of Highmark become fully integrated to life in the dark.

I have also tried to keep my own emotions on the subject out of the details as well as I can considering the circumstances of my sister’s death. I realize that my personal connection to this issue was why you chose me for the study in the first place, but I did not want to let my sorrow get in the way of my judgment. Not all cases are the same, especially when dealing with a mixed-species nation. However, it does seem that most of the cases I have investigated fit into a handful of broad categories. I present these to you now, in what I feel is the order of severity of these conditions, which in many cases appear to be the progressive stages of a single disease.

There was a large amount of data collected in this investigation, and if you would like further elaboration on any of it, or if you or your counselors wish to speak with me or question me further on the subject, I would be honored. Long live the king!

*Your loyal and humble subject,
-Talmaera Highmoon*

Circadian Rhythm

Most creatures originating from a world with natural sunlight develop a circadian rhythm. This is a function of the brain that regulates the body’s natural active and rest periods, causing individuals to wake up and fall asleep at certain times of day. Individuals become reliant on their planet’s natural forces to signal to their bodies the proper times for sleeping and waking. Here in Eclipse, there are no natural signals for time, and newcomers often find that they forget to sleep or to wake, and can acquire a lasting fatigue that plagues them, making them exhausted upon waking, but unable to fall asleep upon retiring.

After a few weeks in Eclipse, most newcomers seem to find their own balance for time, and learn to listen more to the internal signals of their bodies than the external ones. Unfortunately for a few, the initial arrival fatigue seems to be the start of a series of lifelong problems.

Just under a third of the immigrants who arrive in Eclipse seem to be entirely unaffected by the change. The bulk require some time to adjust, and typically are noticeably fatigued for one to two weeks after arrival. This does not seem attributable to mere eyesight, and any citizen arriving from a place with normal day and night cycles can be affected by sleep issues, regardless of how their eyes function.

One approach that seems to have had some success with a number of citizens is sleeping twice as long as normal for the first few days. This must be uninterrupted, restful sleep, with the sleeper resting in a place that is comfortable for their species. From one to four days of such rest is generally required, and then the sleeper can return to a normal schedule.

Once past the initial fatigue, those citizens who keep to a regular schedule seem to be less likely to develop further problems. Setting and maintaining regular work and sleep hours may be tantamount to helping new citizens adjust to a land without light.

Despite their best efforts however, not all citizens seem to ever be able to adjust properly to an all-dark cycle. One in five perhaps may develop some form of neurosis as a result of the disruption in their circadian rhythms, the details of which are explained below. The mental illnesses that result are not typically new phenomena, but are usually latent psychological problems triggered to come to the surface, manifesting in noticeable ways. It may be possible to engineer some kind of pre-screening test for citizens to reject those that have a high probability of developing lifelong problems, but I have not put much time into this yet.

Vitamin Deficiencies

Most creatures require sunlight to synthesize the nutrients necessary for a healthy lifestyle. The natives of Eclipse, aka: "the Pale", seem to have evolved to get these minerals in other ways. Unfortunately, newcomers to the dark lands are not capable of remaining healthy without sunlight. Those that acquire a nutrient deficiency generally develop thin and brittle bones, and are more susceptible to injury and diseases, particularly those of the liver and kidney. This can also contribute to depression and other neuroses, such as those listed below. While this disorder can be countered easily via divine magic, such as by spells that cure disease and the like, this solution does not work on a mass constant scale, and the public is better served by a dietary shift. Typically, these nutrients can come from oily ocean fish, and certain fungi native to the dark. Highmark being a coastal city, fish should not be too hard to come by, and the oil can be extracted from these fish to produce a liquid that can be added to other foods or distributed to the population at large. For those citizens farther out in the valleys that do not have access to fish, mushrooms are a good bet, though the varieties are so many that they can be easily confused and lead to a tragic mistake. I would recommend cultivation of a common nutrient-rich mushroom, such as the fodge, however specialized training must be developed and given in harvesting even these.

Neuroses

Following is a list of mental illnesses that can be triggered by the darkness of Eclipse. In most cases, these illnesses are not so severe that they are constantly noticeable; a person suffering from one of these conditions may not be identified as ill by those he comes into brief contact with unless he is actively exhibiting symptoms at that time. Generally, symptoms are much more likely to become apparent during times of stress. This is particularly true with soldiers, who should be screened frequently to detect problems, as even one man fleeing a battle or neglecting one's duty at a critical moment can be disastrous for a platoon trained to fight as a unit.

Depression

Depression is a mental state where the sufferer becomes despondent and pessimistic about life, and it can often lead to suicide. This condition can be exacerbated by spending prolonged periods in darkness, such as in Eclipse, or on a seasonal basis when the character is accustomed to living in a region where the sun can normally be seen for a number of hours each day. Once a person begins to suffer from depression, it affects every activity in which he participates.

Once affected, recovering from depression can be a difficult prospect. Because the disorder uncovers doubts and feelings of inadequacy in an individual, simply getting more light throughout the day does not necessarily cure the problem. In order to come out of it naturally, the character must make forward progress in his self esteem over the course of at least three days in a row. There are a number of factors that can either help or hinder someone trying to deal with depression.

Positive Factors:

- Accomplished an important goal
- Stayed in well-lit areas
- Spoke to someone about feelings

Negative Factors:

- Failed an important task
- Suffered distress in a personal relationship
- Did not participate in activities he enjoys
- Was defeated or rendered unconscious in combat

Narcolepsy

Narcolepsy is a condition where an individual experiences the sudden and irresistible urge to fall asleep. This may happen regardless of what activity the person might be engaged in at any particular time. Those who suffer from narcolepsy often suffer a bout of uncontrolled sleep when subject to emotional stress, surprise, or other conditions that fall outside of their ordinary routine. Note that while the stereotype of this disorder might be to picture a nervous man falling asleep when ambushed by bandits, veteran soldiers and others who routinely engage in combat do not fall outside of their established routine when fighting, and are no more likely to suffer a bout of narcolepsy during an average fight than at any other time.

Basically, even if not subjected to stress, at least once an hour at a seemingly random time, the narcoleptic will be hit with a brief, hard, and overwhelming urge to sleep, and if he does not fight it tenaciously with all of his will, he will simply fall asleep on the spot, even if he is standing, walking, fighting, riding a steed, or performing in a show. Those affected typically enter immediately into a deep slumber, from which they cannot be awakened for typically 2 to 12 minutes. If left undisturbed once a bout of narcolepsy has begun, the affected person will sleep peacefully for up to 8 hours. This rest seems to refresh the person as normal sleep, renewing spellcasters, healing the wounded, and so on.

Those who become narcoleptic suffer this condition for the rest of their lives. Simply leaving the domain of Eclipse does not change this condition. Certain behavioral changes, including but not limited to the following, seem to help narcoleptics fight off the urges to sleep.

- Eliminate stimulants from diet (babanth, rootberry, etc.)
- Eliminate depressants from diet (alcohol, kha'nall root, etc.)
- Establish regular sleep routine

Paranoia

Paranoia is a mental condition that is characterized by patterns of thoughts that include an exaggerated state of mistrust, suspicion, and fear. Those who are affected also sometimes develop delusions of grandeur, suddenly believing themselves to be important historical or religious figures, or they may believe that they are suddenly immortal, or blessed by the deity that they worship. The thoughts are not constant, but come and go at seemingly random times, possibly based upon dysfunctional brain chemistry, they may also be triggered by odd or unusual situations, words, or actions by others. A person suffering from paranoia may experience an average of one delusion per hour. Failure to recognize the delusional thought as false will result in the overwhelming belief that one's friends, compatriots, or surrounding citizens are conspiring against him.

If a sufferer of paranoia becomes overwhelmed by his delusions, he may hatch a conspiracy theory. This is a firm belief that a sinister, and usually very specific truth is being hidden and denied by a large group of people, often those in positions of power, or that specific secret actions are being taken by others for some nefarious purpose, generally to the detriment of the sufferer. Believing in a conspiracy theory does not necessarily drive one to action though. A sufferer may choose to keep the belief in this conspiracy a secret, or he may choose to confront the parties he believes are involved. In either case, the sufferer remains absolutely convinced of the validity of the conspiracy until confronted with incontrovertible proof that the conspiracy is incorrect. And even then, this may not be enough. The sufferer may suddenly realize the error of his thinking, or on the other hand, he may become convinced that the proof was faked, and continue to believe his theory, leading towards a downward spiral. This what makes a true conspiracy theory. No evidence can disprove it, as any evidence that appears to disprove it is, in fact, only evidence of the depth and breadth of the conspiracy.

Paranoia caused by prolonged darkness in Eclipse is normally a temporary condition, and it can be remedied by returning to an area with a normal day and night cycle. Once out of the darkness, those suffering from a sudden onset of this condition may make a full recovery after it has run its course, which typically takes 1 to 100 days.

chapter 3 - inhabitants

I met a young lunar thief the first day I returned to Eclipse reborn. I wore the skin of the blind beggar, Mallus, that had been so good to me in my exile. This rogue thought nothing of sharing the little food she had, nor of spending the last of her money to split an ebon mead. We talked at length about the upper lands. She tried in vain to grasp the idea of societies that run all their systems on a rigid backbone of law. She could no more understand the bureaucratic bloodholds of Penance than she could the constant wars of Arena. In the end, she was most curious about what daylight was like, but believing me blind could not hope to gleam the concept off me. She departed after hours of talk, cheerfully telling me that as a blind man this was the land for me, and welcoming me home. She also had pickpocketed an Eclipse compass, a brail book, and two rings from my person. This was in no way in her mind an assault on our friendship—she in fact has given me change and food on several other occasions; stealing is simply the way things move from person to person here.

Eclipse is not a land for the weak or simple-minded. The people of Eclipse are survivors by nature, but first and foremost are free thinkers. They do not conform to the moral codes of most societies, choosing independence over strict law. Those that live in cities do so for culture, art, night life, and the vivid exchange of ideas, rather than the illusionary safety of laws and rules. The undead here find that the dark realms offer not only protection from the light, but tolerance and the chance to build true self-contained cultures. The roamers of the wilds live for the scent of fresh rain, and the autonomy of hunting unrestricted through dark tangles of forest, moving where they will, laughing, mating, running, the wind ripping past their ears as they fly over the open terrain. They are a strange mix of self-reliant loners, organic party animals, primeval intellectuals, and deep dwellers. The people of Eclipse are without a doubt at times a rough bunch, but there is a sense of camaraderie and mutual respect here that does not exist in the lands above. True conflicts are kept between parties involved and do not often spill out into the streets. Judgmental and controlling individuals do not fare well here; inflicting one's beliefs on others is a good way to get one's throat slit.

Lifers can easily determine who the new bloods are. Their over-encumbered armor, lack of sensible light sources, and beliefs that they are smarter and more cultured than the locals are all giveaways, but nothing draws attention to a new blood like crying out for a law enforcement official when one has been pickpocketed. In fact, lifers will often refer to new bloods as "the robbed". The concept of theft is foreign to true natives. Yes, if one is not paying attention or is not careful with one's money purse, it will go missing... that is just natural, but it is hardly a crime. Whether or not such loose concepts of ownership can or cannot be grasped often makes or breaks a new blood in Eclipse.

Most who migrate to Eclipse are drawn by its liberating nature and the chance to start again. Many are wanted criminals hoping to lay low until the heat is off, but soon discover that they have found their true home. Others are foolhardy adventures or

inquisitive explorers drawn to the danger and powerful secrets hidden here. Of course, there are those who come here hoping to educate the heathens, but most such attempts have led to disaster. There are empty monasteries and churches in both Erebus and Baradume, monuments to failed attempts by lawful outsiders to convert the dark dwellers to a life of law and order.

Highmark is a different case altogether. They came in such numbers and force as to take the locals by storm. Most assumed them to fall to the wild or the vampires in but a few moons; the fact that they have made such a foothold on the land has taken more than one lifer by surprise. I am not certain that if I still ruled here, I would not have wiped them clean, but this is no longer my place. Many still believe that the law abiding "Markers", as they are referred to, are doomed to fall to ruin, and will be looked back on as little more than a footnote, but in my travels I have come to doubt this. For all their judgmental and controlling natures, they are a very stout, strong-willed bunch who have suffered a gross transplantation not of their own choosing, and are resolute that it will not happen again. Their king, Payin Highmark, the venerable dover paladin, was a former razor of Hammerfall in Penance. There he commanded a great respect, and was renowned as a champion of the weak and protector of the kind-hearted. I know full well from my dealings with him that his transplantation and transformation to king has left him scarred on the inside, and the compromises he has had to accept so that his subjects might survive have tainted his once pure soul.

If nothing else, the influx of new bloods and markers keeps things interesting, the very reason I suspect the new Colopitron and the vampire lords have not destroyed them outright. When one lives forever, even an unwelcome guest can present a novel exhilaration, something eternity can lack on its own.

RACES

The Forge is a melting pot of races and individuals from throughout the multiverse. Eclipse is no different; an unquantifiable number of beings and creatures live and coexist here, so to choose which to discuss is at best an arbitrary affair. One might go about it based upon population size, but that would disregard many of the races that truly embody the feel and nature of the Cauldron. Thus I will pick and chose from those races and adaptations that I believe will draw your interest while also granting you further insight into the nature of Eclipse. First though, I present for your information the most recent population census, with an admonition that its conductor, though comprehensive, is not without his own prejudices.

Eclipse Population Census, Year 947

By Tramak Greuls, Nightling Freelancer

What a job to have set about! I would not spit it upon my worst enemy, yet it fell to me, and so after two years of research, I offer this information for you, my masters, in hopes that its findings may help Blackwater shipping rise to a higher level of commerce. Though I took no joy in my interactions with so many races, you can be assured I fulfilled my duties completely. As a footnote, I might add that though the travel on your ships was complementary, the tiny re-tainer you offered for room and board allowed me only the most ill of lodgings. I think for my next study I will write a guide to the worst inns in all of the Cauldron.

Alphabetical breakdown of the races of Eclipse, with approximate population size and notations for the general benefit of planning business:

- **Asherakes:** 90,000 A violent bunch. They seem to like the cliff living. They can't hunt as well in the dark as one might think, needing light for long-range vision.
- **Ceptu:** 15,000 Everywhere in the bay of Erebus, but nowhere else. Creepy little blobs, but good for farming kelpgrass.
- **Camos:** 30,000 An estimate really. Few come low enough to count, and they aren't too talkative.
- **Deep Fey:** 20,000 Based on word of mouth only; I have never actually seen one.
- **Dovers:** 110,000 These dogs are everywhere now, having flooded here with the Markers.
- **Dovers, Pale:** 80,000 Unlike the more feral werrans, these hounds seem more adapted to city life.
- **Drow:** 50,000 Those who have integrated quite seem to like the Baradume lifestyle.
- **Dwarves:** 20,000 Great market for selling explosives or buying metal armor and weapons to sell to the upper lands, but they are quite an unattractive bunch.
- **Faust:** 50,000 Good customers and easy to look at.
- **Frey:** 20,000 Love to buy balls of yarn.
- **Frey, Pale:** 80,000
- **Gnomes:** 20,000 Small.
- **Haze:** 210,000 Happy as roggil worms in the fog; it doesn't mess with their sight. Of course they can only see like 60 feet anyway.
- **Hovara:** 10,000 They always seem to be in the market for a new cage.
- **Humans:** 200,000 or 500,000 if you count all the vampires' cattle. I remember a time when there were almost none of these freaks. With the influx of the Penance war refugees, they seem to be everywhere now.
- **Humans, Pale:** 300,000 The most common species in Baradume and amongst the Akai. This birth defect is seen in all races that have lived for more than a few generations in Eclipse.
- **Kobolds:** 50,000 Most of them dwell deep beneath the surface. Trade with them is hard as they are so untrusting.
- **Lunars:** 300,000 Of course this includes all the other mixed breeds of werran that live in their lands. Trade with them along the shores can be very profitable. They get so few chances to do business what with the hunting of most who pass through their lands.
- **Molice:** Who knows? They are everywhere in the cities and only a few are smart enough to talk. Still, they make good bead works that other races seem to love.
- **Nightlings:** 240,000 It seems our breeding programs are working!
- **Pickers:** 90,000 Clever little bastards; I'm not sure I'd advise trading with them. I always seem to part with my best jewels and walk away with a handful of beans.
- **Pickers, Pale:** 130,000 These seem to come in two very different categories, the gypsies and the city folk.
- **Thole:** 20,000 Could be more, but who can climb all those cliffs to find out.
- **Urgoda:** 30,000 Thank goodness, they are a mean bunch.
- **Valco:** 30,000 Not the sharpest tools in the chest, but maybe that's what makes them such excellent customers.
- **Valco, Pale:** 70,000 Friendly little folk. If you ever find yourself with a shipment of something you can't sell, try selling it to the valco as food.
- **Vampires:** 8,000 For all you hear about them, there really aren't that many of the suckers.
- **Other:** 100,000 By "other" I mean all the mish-mash of buggers that you see all over and go, "What is that?"

PEOPLES UNIQUE TO ECLIPSE

My lord, I am well aware that you are familiar with much of the more common life forms on the Forge, having met with many of them in your domain and in your colorless borderlands in between. However, there are several species of sentient life found only in Eclipse that may be new to you, or which you may only know in passing. These I present to you now, all of them descendents of my own proud discoveries once upon a time.

CAMO

Survival in Eclipse often comes down to sheer muscle and reflexes. It is a land of hungry predators, thieves, and exiles; thus it is rare to find a successful race who does not depend on prowess to achieve its victory. The camo is just such a race; they have adapted several specialized traits that give them an edge on living and traveling in the Cauldron. First and chief among these is the ability to camouflage their skin, both in color and temperature, and to a lesser degree alter its texture and their body shape. When employed, and when the camo remains motionless, they are virtually invisible to nearly all types of vision. Beyond this, camos have micro-suction pores on the palms of their mitt-like hands and feet, allowing them to climb nearly shear surfaces. Combined with their long flexible tails, there is no vertical challenge they are not ready to attempt. Their unique eyes are also not to be forgotten, able to focus and look in two directions at once, making them very hard to sneak up on.

While most find it odd for creatures to rely so much upon color in a land of night, it is really the ability to mask their body temperature that has allowed the camo to survive in the Cauldron. Since most of the hunters here employ darkvision of some form, they have tended to overlook these little creatures, allowing them to carve a sizable niche for themselves in the high cliffs of Eclipse.



The camo are a simpler race than most, living a more primitive life. They are naturally solitary, coming together to mate but not forming lifelong bonds. They are intelligent and can learn to read and write, but the world they were pulled from was still in its stone age. They have adapted fast, learning how to do many things from other races, but as they do not form strong social connections with their own people, they still lack settlements or any truly independent cultural achievements.

APPEARANCE

Camo are small folk, standing 4 feet tall on average, and for all intents and purposes, looking very much like an upright chameleon. They are covered in fine scales, and when not hiding, their color mirrors their moods. They are distinguished by their zygodactylous hands and feet, independent stereoscopic eyes, long highly-modified and rapidly extrudable tongues, and prehensile tail. A large crest crowns the heads of the males and flaring thorned throats distinguish the females.

Camos are uniquely designed to climb and live on vertical cliffs and in high trees. They may look harmless, but their mouths are lined with row after row of small razor-sharp teeth that can saw through flesh and bone. Their tongues can shoot out at amazing speed, knocking the wind out of enemies or disarming them by wrenching weapons from a foe's hands.

Camos, as a general rule, do not sew or make weapons, thus their dress is usually only what they have purchased to carry items or holster weapons.



PERSONA

Camos come across as cold and emotionless. They have understated personalities that take time to appreciate. They have painfully dry senses of humor to the extreme that their jokes often go unnoticed. In getting to know a Camo well, one will come to find their charms grow more and more over time, and though their voices are monotone and faces emotionless, one can come to learn to read their feelings by their skin. Indeed the camo tracker that traveled with me felt that humans and other races were cold and hard to read because they did not change color.

Camos can be fearless in combat, their colors turning red and gold, fighting as if they feel no pain. They are territorial with others of their kind, but not with outside races. They are very interested in books and writing, but seldom seem able to learn to read or write, preferring that others read to them.

ASSOCIATIONS

Most camos live transitory lives on the walls of the Cauldron, hunting large insects with their natural weaponry and living an almost animal life. They are rarely seen, and only come together to mate. The young stay with the mother for the first few years of their lives before moving out to stake claims on their own hunting grounds.

Those that choose to live among other races seem able to adapt to a certain point, never really fully becoming tame. They will always eat only living food, unable to stomach cooked or processed eatables. I know of none that become wizards or scholars; those that have a profession live as trackers, thieves or assassins.

Some other races prize their hides to make armor that can adjust its color to the surroundings, and in many places their kind has been hunted to near extinction.

SPIRITUALITY

The very concept is completely foreign to a camo. If asked who they might look to in times of great danger or stress, they simply reply, "One's self".

LANGUAGE

There is no native tongue to camos, instead they speak the language of the region they were raised by their mother in. That being said, they have a very complex way of communing with others of their kind through body language—head bobbing, eye twitching and the like—as well as by changing the colors of their scales.

NAMES

Camos tend to have single syllable names—often times that of a favorite color—and no last names or designations.

- *Male Names:* Green, Hem, Cam, Ron, Stan, Roy
- *Female Names:* Pink, Sha, Tam, Sue, Meg

RACIAL TRAITS

- **+2 Dexterity, +2 Constitution, -2 Intelligence:** Camos are not particularly intellectual, but are quick and hardy, with excellent immune systems.
- **Small:** Camos are Small creatures and gain a +1 size bonus to their AC, a +1 size bonus on attack rolls, a -1 penalty to their Combat Maneuver Bonus and Com-

bat Maneuver Defense, and a +4 size bonus on Stealth checks.

- **Camouflage:** If a camo remains motionless for 1d3 rounds, he will adjust to his surroundings, giving him a +10 bonus to Stealth checks. This bonus will remain as long as he does not move quickly and his surroundings do not change significantly.
- **Low-light Vision:** Camos can see in very dim light.
- **Wide Vision:** A camo's independent stereoscopic eyes allow him to see to the side as well as the front, and allows him to see in two different directions at one. Camo's get a +4 bonus to all vision-based Perception checks. The AC penalty for being flanked is cut in half, to -1.
- **Cling:** Camos have microscopic suction pores on the tips of their fingers and toes. These allows them to cling to almost any surface, giving them a climb speed of 20 and adding a +8 racial bonus to Climb rolls. A camo can climb sheer surfaces like glass, as well hang upside down on horizontal surfaces without requiring skill checks. Camos do not lose their Dex bonus to AC when climbing, and opponents get no special bonuses to attacks against them. Camos cannot run while climbing.
- **Tongue:** A camo's sticky tongue can shoot out from the mouth at great speeds, and can extend up to 10 feet in length. This can be used as a melee attack with range. The tongue itself does no damage, but it can grab objects under 50 lbs, disarm opponents, or pick up creatures below size class small. If used to grab a small creature, make a grapple attack. If successful, the creature is pulled into the camo's mouth, and is hit by an automatic bite attack. Camos get a +6 racial bonus to maintain tongue grapples. While grappled, the creature receives automatic bite damage each round until dead or released. When the camo uses his tongue to grapple or disarm, it provokes no attack of opportunity due to its quickness. The camo can attack with a weapon and tongue in the same round, but must take penalties as if attacking with two weapons.
- **Bite:** A camo's bite is considered a natural weapon and does 1d8 points of damage.
- **Prehensile Tail:** Camos have prehensile tails that can grasp some objects. The camo may also hang by his tail from tree limbs or the like. Camos don't generally use their tails for attacking or holding weapons, but they can be used to help keep an extra hand free or to hold a light source. This tail provides balance and adds a +4 racial bonus to all Acrobatics checks.



Hand Detail

DEEP FEY



A race at one with the darkest corners of the Cauldron, often rumored and very seldom seen; many believe them to be no more than a myth. I have had the pleasure of befriending one and counting him among my traveling companions. His unique skills and instinctive understanding of the habits of tunnels and caverns, the movement of rock, and liquid flow of shadow came in handy often, saving the lives of our small band on more than one occasion.

The deep fey, or Sada Fare as they call themselves, are a race of earth spirits, who much like fairies of the upper world, live in harmony and grace with nature. Only, rather than oneness with forest and meadow, deep fey are brothers to rock and minerals, lovers of the faceless dark and friend to the unfathomable subterranean paths. They inhabit the most forlorn and forgotten corners of the bottomless burrows of the Forge, guarding over splendid veins of gold, strains of gems and diamonds, and metals whose ways and properties only the fey can comprehend. They seem to be able to listen to the earth and hear its needs, understanding its yearnings and course.

The Sada Fare live simply in small tribes that never war among themselves. Permanent settlements are rare, and take the form of humble underground dwellings that seem to have been grown out of stone rather than carved or built. Most are wanderers, wardens of the earth; they live to protect and bask in its wonders. I have glimpsed, however, a great city deep in the core of the Forge, a vision of spires and spectacle made of gems and rare metals. Here the great court of the fey supposedly dwells. Though none deny its existence, none of the deep fey I have met would actively acknowledge its existence, let alone divulge its location.

The fey appear to be an ageless race, though it is hard to know for sure, as they have no calendar and find the idea of tracking time to be beyond conceiving. My companion could never grasp how to explain how long he had lived, though I had the feeling he was several hundred years old at the least.

APPEARANCE

Deep fey are small race, very human-like in general form. Standing at an average of five feet, they are always lanky and limber. Their eyes are bright, and glow in even the dimmest light. They have long, pointed ears that tend to stick out from the sides of their heads, which are also adorned with horns. Their horns are usually ram-like, though females can have long, straight-swirling horns like antelope, and some males have downward turned bull horns. It should be said though, that while one set of horns is most common, some have two or even three, and those with more than one set are thought to be blessed by the shadows. Deep fey have clawed hands and feet, and almost always choose to go barefoot. They also have slim tails that end with a fluff of hair.

Deep fey are creatures of shadow; their very skin and hair seem to be made of pure darkness, reflecting no light off of its inky surface. In truth, they cannot stand intense direct light, taking physical harm from exposure. My companion was hit with a sunlight spell briefly, and I saw his very form begin to smoke away. The fey seem to draw life and energy from the dark, and when at rest on our travels, my friend would retreat to the darkest corner he could find in order to blend into the shade.

The fey dress in very little clothing in their natural habitat, wisps of cloth to cover here or there worn for adornment rather than utilitarian needs. They do not seem to get cold or suffer from exposure to nature. The warriors of their race have magical tattoos grafted to their skin that offer protection, glowing with hues of red and blue when in battle. When out traveling among other races, they adopt the dress of those around them, but still prefer to leave large amounts of their skin exposed.

PERSONA

Fairies of any kind are creatures fraught with contradiction; just when one thinks he has a full grasp on their morality and social functions, they will pull some new, and at times bizarre, behavior that to outsiders seems quite out of character, but to the fey is perfectly normal. Even a being as aged and disseminated as I has difficulty fully understanding their motivations. It is best to think of them as forces of nature, which in truth they are. A river may be the same when you cross it for twenty years only to suddenly flood and wash you away. Thus it is wise to consider deep fey untamed, and though you might form a deep bond with one, bear in mind that they are wild creatures that may choose to strike at you if the wrong signal is presented.

In general, deep fey are short on conversation, preferring to watch and listen rather than talk. They are always aloof around other races, sitting off by themselves or preferring to drink alone even when in the same tavern as a band of friends. They seem uncomfortable in crowds, and cities make them edgy and nervous. In the wild they will scout out ahead of parties or stay just beyond the edge of the light source. They are slow to trust, and gregarious kindness and repeated proof of fair intentions is required for them to begin to open up.

They are on the other hand very curious folk, and often times in my travels if I brought out a strange item or happened to be drawing a picture, my companion, seemingly unable to help himself, would draw in near. We found that he liked games and even would become boisterous with laughter and cheer over simple cards. Never a poor sport, he seemed to revel in both victory and defeat, loving the play itself more than the outcome.

Being touched by outsiders was an absolute no however. One of our company was a female lunar who fell hopelessly in love with my fey friend, drawn to the fact, no doubt, that she could not have him. Once after a very dangerous battle in which we thought him lost, she on impulse wrapped her arms around him when she realized he was indeed unharmed. The look on his face was one of sheer horror, and I could tell it took all his will to not shove her away and flee. I only touched him twice myself, the first being quite late in our travels together, when he offered me a hand up on a high cliff. His skin was cool and did not feel completely solid, having a strange texture to it that I can only describe as airy. Among their own kind this social moray did not seem to apply. The one time, deep below the earth, that we encountered a band of deep fey, my friend was full of hugs, handshakes, and kisses for his fellows.

ASSOCIATIONS

Deep Fey are extremely isolated, living far deeper beneath the ground than any other intelligent race I am aware of. This geographical distance combined with their elemental way of functioning has lead to a near xenophobic view of outsiders coming near their settlements. Conversely, deep fey wanderers are not directly opposed to other races; in fact they are extremely curious and tend to have no preconceived notions about groups or individuals until negative behavior is observed. They do however have enemies that they attack on sight and openly war against. Drow are sworn enemies and cannot be spoken of without bare snarling teeth. Coarse miners who ignore all to gather riches are despised as well, though dwarves are tolerated and even traded with. The terrifying scythins are spoken about in hush tones, feared and hated equally. Deep explorers and adventurers are seen as a curiosity, and deep fey will often offer them aid or trade. A fey's understanding of the value of objects is usually rather off, sometimes trading amazing weapons crafted in their hidden forges for dried flowers or glass beads.

Most deep fey encountered out in the open will be those who have come down with a condition described as "Surface Wonder". These are those rare fey who feel the call of the outside world and the need to explore its mysteries. My companion was one of them, though there was never a doubt in speaking with him that he assumed he would return once more to the dark at some point in the future.

SPIRITUALITY

If the deep fey have a deity, it is without a name. Instead, they have a deep spiritual connection to the rock and minerals. They see earth as a living thing, and speak and commune with it much like priests of other religions would with god. The fey ask the earth for guidance in

life and wisdom to remain on the right path. They speak to the darkness in much the same way, only rather than foresight, they request protection and strength in battle.

Never in my time with my companion—nor even when we briefly dwelt among his kind—did I hear a proper name or gender given to the natural forces. When I asked if they believed the earth or dark to be higher powers they laughed, saying that their power was all around them, an ever constant presence in their lives, unavoidable and great. It is of my opinion that the deep fey consider themselves to be wardens of the natural world, championing it and protecting it from any and all who would do it harm.

LANGUAGE

The deep fey tongue is much like that of other fey races. Indeed, they must have the same origin. It is graceful and rolling in its execution, with a rhythm and beauty that makes everything spoken in a poem. Though there is no language I cannot speak, it should be noted that like all fairy tongues, lesser races have a very hard time wrapping their minds around it. Its roots are in the first great words that shaped creation in its dawn, and though the words of the fey no longer have that power, the Sada Fare still can wield the magic of language with sudden majesty, to calm animals, commune with nature, or to add clout to any spell.

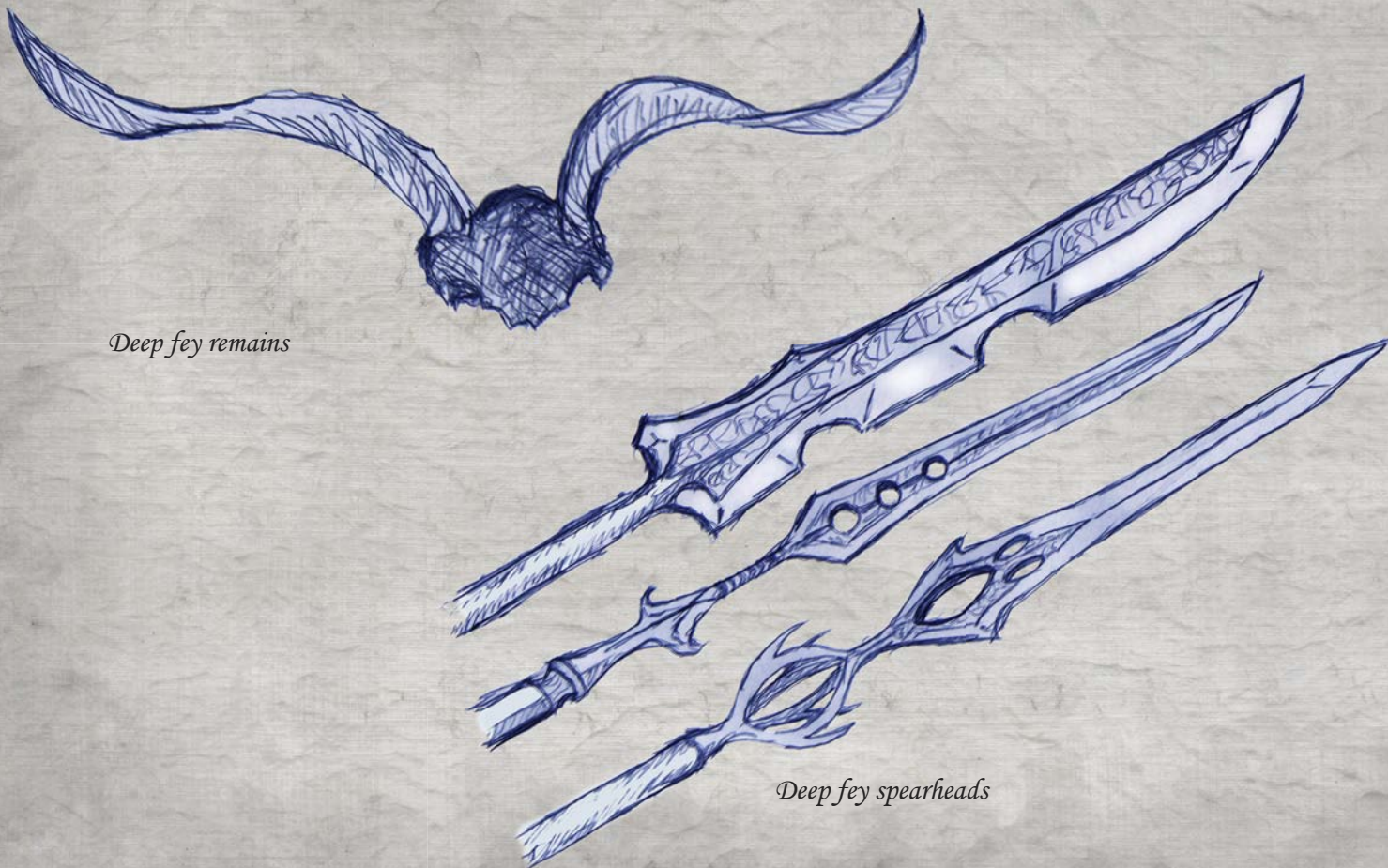
NAMES

The following examples show the rich names of deep fey in their ancient tongue. Unlike most races, male and females do not seem to have separate conventions for names: Urrun Rin Watha, Tesser Tu Tinwa, Vice Verrin, Mal Kahn Valvorn, Patherin Pordhonin.



DEEP FEY RACIAL TRAITS

- **+2 Dexterity, +2 Charisma, -2 Intelligence:** Deep fey are quicker than most, being formed of pure shadow. Being fey, they also have a strong mystic aura about them, but their isolation causes them to be less knowledgeable than other races.
- **Medium:** Deep fey are medium-sized and have no bonus or penalties from size. They are shorter and slighter than most though, standing from 5 to 5½ feet and weighing from 100 to 145 pounds.
- **Fey:** Deep Fey are touched by the land of Fairy, and are immune to magical sleep effects and receive a +2 racial bonus to saves against enchantments. Also, up to three times per day a deep fey can add his Charisma bonus as a racial bonus to any skill roll involving his voice, or to his DC for a voiced ability, such as a spell with a verbal component.
- **Darkvision 120ft:** All deep fey have darkvision with a range of 120ft.
- **Natural Weaponry:** A deep fey's claws deal 1d6 points of damage.
- **Cold Resistance 10:** Deep fey are creatures of solid shadow, not flesh, and as such, are not affected by cold.
- **Earth Speed:** A deep fey's base speed is 30ft, but increases to 40ft whenever he is underground or in natural tunnels.
- **Earthsight:** Deep fey have a limited earthsight that allows them to perceive the twists and turns of tunnels ahead and behind them up to 100ft. This allows them to see the size of the caverns, where they turn, where openings are, and the general size and number of creatures in the caverns.
- **Disaster sense:** Deep fey are so attuned to the underground that they can sense when a natural disaster will occur before it actually happens. When underground, deep fey can make a Will save to detect the problem (DC 15) whenever their earthlight range includes an unstable area or a trap. Even when disasters are not seen, or are caused by instant actions like spells, deep fey get a +4 bonus to Reflex saves against underground hazards or traps.
- **Light Sensitivity:** Abrupt exposure to bright light (anything as bright as a light spell or greater) blinds Deep Fey for 1 round. Deep fey are *dazzled* in such light at all times.
- **Light Allergy:** Deep fey take actual physical damage from any light stronger than a light spell (such as daylight for example). It burns away their form, causing them to dissolve into thin air if maintained too long. This amounts to 1d6 points of damage per round exposed. Clothing will reduce this damage to 1d4 or 1d2 depending on how thick the fabric and much coverage it provides. Deep fey can absorb and dispel magic light by touching it (or if it is cast directly upon them), requiring 1 round of contact per level of the spell.
- **Darkness:** All deep fey can cast *darkness* up to three times a day as a spell-like ability. This is a natural ability and is usually employed for protection from light or to escape attackers.
- **Untouchable:** The physical touch of other living creatures causes damage to deep fey over time. So strange is their nature that extended skin to shadow contact will cause their form to begin to harden, then crisp, and finally to flake away. Damage is typically on the order of 1d4 points per round. Touching a fey's clothing or armor does not harm him, and this damage heals very quickly once freed from contact (at the same rate it accrues).



Deep fey remains

Deep fey spearheads

LUNAR

The lunar are a race of natural werrans or lycanthropes. If ever they existed without two forms as part of their nature, that branch of their species is long gone and forgotten. In Eclipse they dwell in the mushroom forests and are the predominate race there, sharing their tribes and hunting grounds with other werrans. They are a wild race who function in a pack, preferring to follow their animal natures as opposed to those of their social forms. Many in truth live their whole lives without ever leaving their beast forms.

APPEARANCE

Lunars are tall lanky humanoids when wearing their social form. They have two sets of eyes, one directly above the other, long deer-like ears, and sharp canines. Their skin tone ranges from pale white to gray. They are well-muscled, leaning towards tone rather than bulk, and have double-jointed elbows and knees. They also have long prehensile tails that end in tufts of hair which match the color found on their heads.

When in beast form, they resemble a timber wolf and often share packs with werewolves, however unlike a normal wolf, they have larger ears and retain their four eyes. Their tails are also longer and cat-like, remaining prehensile. The joints in their elbows and knees are double, though this is harder to make out in their beast form.

Lunars prefer to dress lightly when living out in the wilds, the purpose being to not be constricted by clothing when the need or desire to change shape occurs. They have very few social mores around nudity, and often what they wear will be worn for practical reasons rather than to hide genitals. When traveling or living out among other races they still attempt to wear whatever they can get away with, and remain as unrestricted as possible. My lunar companion was forced on one occasion to dress in full evening attire for a formal ball in Baradume, and never have I seen a creature more uncomfortable by the end of the night. When at last we had achieved our goal and departed, she transformed violently, ripping the dress to shreds and taking great joy in it.

PERSONA

Freedom to run, hunt, and roam the wild is the most pressing concern of most lunars. However, despite their social norms of joy and wild abandon there is conflict within their dual natures. Those few who leave their hunting lands complain of an intellectual stifling. Perhaps in other realms where they are more forced to adopt social trends they can strike a balance; indeed my friend felt she was happier away from the wild, forced to have to tend to both her aspects, but those who live in the mushroom forest seem almost pained to have to walk upright at times, and many never do.



For all this untamed self-determination, lunars are a social animal most comfortable living in a structured pack or tribe where the hierarchy is clear. All tribes are ruled by alphas though gender is not a factor, only strength and will. Lunars seem to enjoy knowing who is where in the pecking order so they can follow it without having to worry about it. In fact most lunar packs are far more stable than their wilder counterparts; challenges for alpha are rare and most infighting only occurs when an alpha has died.

If one hopes to befriend a lunar, one must respect their freedoms and understand that they care little for social conveniences or tact, and be ready to prove loyalty over all else. This is not to say that they do not respect cleverness or skill—these are qualities they seem to admire considerably in others—but they will choose companions based on trust and allegiance over skill and even honesty.

ASSOCIATIONS

Lunars are tightly bonded to and will intermingle with any member of a race that has become a werewolf. These werrans are often members of their tribe, and most consider themselves of the same race, chalking up the differences to simple morphology based on the genus of the social form. In turn, there are many other types of werrans that lunars share land with and maintain civil interactions with. Any canine-based werran is likely to have good relations with lunars. In the central city of Lethe, many types of werrans serve together and are able to collaborate with each other.

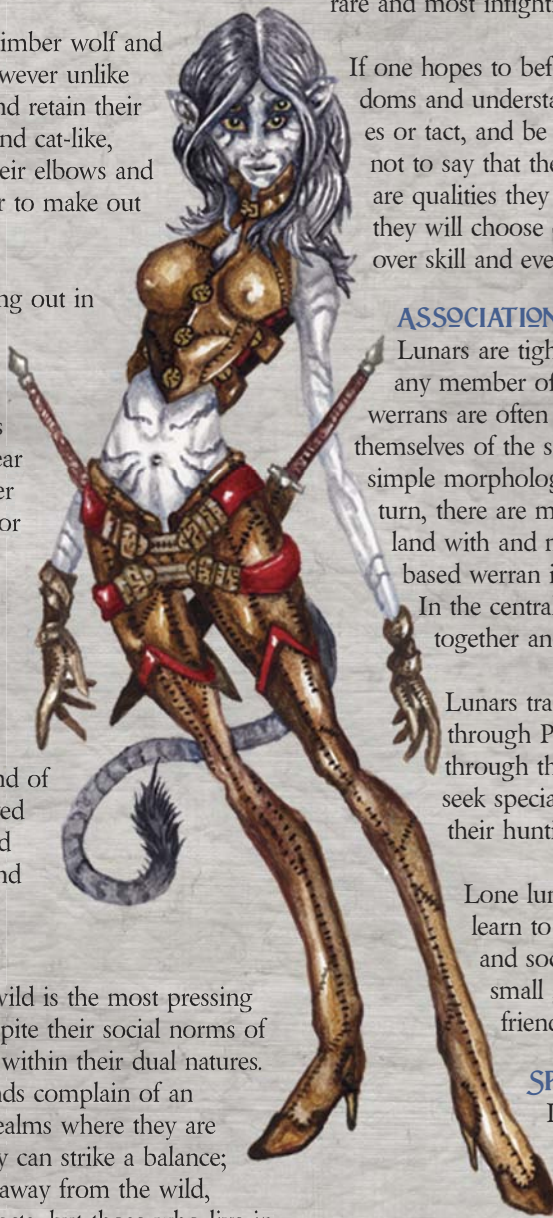
Lunars trade infrequently with outsiders, mostly through Pale Picker gypsies who they grant free travel through the forests. Other races and travelers must seek special permission to travel to their cities or across their hunting grounds or risk being hunted themselves.

Lone lunars sometimes depart the forests, and must learn to adapt and to understand societal restrictions and social norms. Most eventually gravitate towards small groups and form makeshift packs out of their friends and fellow travelers.

SPIRITUALITY

Lunars are at one with nature, having a shamanistic view of the spiritual. They believe that all creatures have a place and a course. It is their duty to hunt the weak and cull the sick, thereby leaving the strong to survive and thus improving the overall health of the land.

Druids and shamans guide the pack through hard times and in



many day-to-day choices, offering advice rather than attempting to control outcomes. Lunars see the greatest of spiritual truths in the natural flow of things and in finding one's place in that wheel.

LANGUAGE

Lunar language is rather crude and primitive. Although it does not lend itself well to poetry or flowery literature, lunar is remarkably direct and effective for ordinary use. It is for this reason that it is often quite popular for other races to use as a trade language. Lunar has a very basic eighteen-character phonetic alphabet, although most wild lunars are illiterate and do not bother to learn it.

LUNAR NAMES

Lunar names are similar to their language in that they are simple,

rough, and strong. Lunars tend to have only a single name which they are bestowed at birth. Later in life, if some feat is achieved in a hunt or in battle, they may take on a title, forgetting their childhood name in favor of this more fitting one. Outside of their tribe, they will lay claim to their tribe's name as a way to discern themselves from others of the same name. Within werran lands however, most tribes are small enough that no two members will have the same name, and newcomers may be asked to change their name so as to avoid conflicts. In larger tribes, a descriptive title is often added to individuals with conflicting names, such as Graz Longears, or Neneth Fair.

- *Male Names:* Alrak, Shath, Vitch, Achk, Durg
- *Female Names:* Shen, Lith, Faztith, Narada
- *Tribe Names:* Dark Roots, Sons of Voks, Scenters, Night Seekers, Lethe

LUNAR RACIAL TRAITS

- **+2 Dexterity, +2 Charisma, -2 Strength (Social Form):** Lunars in their social form are weaker yet more elegant and graceful than most peoples. Their physical prowess improves significantly in their wild form (see "Werran" adaptation).
- **Medium:** Lunars are medium-size, and receive no bonuses or penalties from size. Lunar height runs from 6 to 6½ feet typically, and weight runs from 160 to 250 lbs. A lunar's base speed in its social form is 30ft.
- **Darkvision 120ft:** All lunars have two sets of eyes; the lower set provides low-light vision, and the upper set provides darkvision up to a range of 120 feet.
- **Werran:** All lunars are infected with the lunar virus, and receive all adaptations provided under the "Werran" section below. As a werran, they receive an XP penalty when advancing if they choose to improve their werran abilities.
- **Improved Hearing:** Lunars have extra large ears, and get a +4 racial bonus to all sound-based perception checks.
- **Tail:** Lunars have tails even in their social form. These tails are not strong enough to count as prehensile, but can be used to pick up and hold smaller objects. Lunar tails also provide a +2 racial bonus to Acrobatics checks.
- **Wild Form – Wolf:** All lunars have a wolf as their wild form. When a lunar switches to its wild form, he also gains a racial AC bonus of +2 due to his thick fur. Base speed in wild form is 40ft. Lunars also gain the Scent ability in wild form. Lunar wolves retain their four eyes and enlarged ears.
- **Natural Weaponry:** Lunars have natural weaponry in wild and hybrid forms only. Their bite does 1d6 points of damage, and claws (hybrid form only) do 1d4 points. Both attacks have a critical threat range of 20. Use of this weaponry is considered a martial attack, and does not provoke an attack of opportunity. Wild form lunars do not have opposable thumbs, and cannot carry or hold objects.
- **Light Sensitivity:** Bright light (brighter than a light spell) hurts a lunar's eyes in all forms. A lunar without proper eye protection (smoked glass lenses) is *dazzled* when exposed to bright light. The skin of a lunar in his social form is also quite sensitive to light, and is burned and damaged by sunlight. A lunar typically takes 1 point of damage per five minute period of direct contact with sunlight. Lunars can avoid this damage by wearing full length clothing and a mask.
- **Shapechange:** A lunar can change between its forms at will except when the moon is out. Lunar spellcasters can cast spells normally in all forms.

wolf form



MOLICE

These small creatures in every way resemble mice, only with fine little feathered wings and larger ears. They are common sights in any urban environment; they live everywhere in holes, cracks on building ledges, and in abandoned structures. They occupy the spot that in a realm with light would be filled by pigeons and fluff flyers, while also acting as normal rodents. They are, for the most part, no more or less intelligent than any other mundane creature of nature, save for a very rare occurrence. One in every few million molice born comes into the world with a great intellect and the vocal chords to speak. These gifted also have one visible physical difference that is often overlooked, opposable thumbs. These very rare molice are sentient from birth and often find their more wild childhoods traumatic. Once they have grown, they tend to live among other intelligent races rather than remain with their lesser brethren.



Sentient molice may not always be able to enjoy the complex instinctive interactions of their common brethren, but they still can commune with them on an animal level and even direct great numbers of them at once with verbal and physical cues. They often mate with mundane molice, as even the children of two gifted molice are of the common type more often than not. They are sometimes protective of their own lesser brethren and other times utterly dismissive depending on the molice.

Gifted molice are almost universally talented with magic, and can wield power well beyond what one might think such a small creature could imbue. I have seen one cast a fireball that almost seemed to rise from nowhere, consuming a group of thugs that were pulling the legs off mundane molice for fun. They almost always seek out wizards and schools of magic in their youth to learn the old arts, sometimes even taking up temporary jobs as familiars.

If not employed as wizards, molice excel as spies, thieves, and assassins; after all, most places they go they are utterly ignored, even if they are noticed. They can easily hide in places where no one would suspect prying ears, slip into a party and poison a drink, or steal small items of great worth.

In combat, molice depend on their small size to avoid being hurt, and must fight with either magic or small poisoned weapons. They can also call in swarms of mundane molice to attack en masse. They deeply dislike frey, who they know delight in eating their kind.

APPEARANCE

Molice are tiny, their bodies only growing to a few inches, with tails that stretch twice as long. They have large ears and dark eyes. Their wings are feathered with a span of around five inches. Mundane Molice are almost always brown, white, or black and with wings to match, but those born smart can be all sorts of colors, gold, silver, tiger-striped, spotted... even dark blue and red versions are known to exist.

Molice have excellent night vision and a less-developed form of echolocation that they can use to fly in total darkness. They eat bugs, seeds, and most any scraps, and have great appetites, often eating their own body weight every few days.



PERSONA

For their small size, molice are extremely outgoing. They tell great stories and sing songs of old. Their memories are almost flawless and they love the company of anyone kind enough not to smash them. Smarter than most races, especially where facts are concerned, I have never met one who did not speak at least 7 languages. They are easy traveling companions and great scouts, good natured and quick to laugh. They do not like overtly cruel or spiteful beings. Molice love to get drunk on a thimble full of wine and enjoy sleeping in a companion's pocket or the brim of

a hat. They are extremely observant, often seeing things that others easily overlook. They can be sly, and a few are less trustworthy than others; they are known to tell the odd lie now and then. They do not tend to own things beyond a few small items that they carry with them. They do not seem to want for worldly things, but when you can live on a loaf of bread for three months, what does one really need?

SPIRITUALITY

Molice believe that they are one with others of their kind, the heralds of a future yet to come. They believe that their great intelligence is stored in pieces throughout the minds of their lesser brethren. They see themselves as the collective voice for their kind, and they promise of a day when they all will awaken and rise up as a proud new race.

Of course, not all molice act on this belief. They seem to believe that all experiences are valid, and will one day aid when the moment of the collective rising comes. So an assassin who poisons and stalks prey for money is just as important a memory as a wizard who devotes his life to protecting his own kind. One day all these lives will join and awaken the sleeping masses. Though this is an almost universally held belief by all molice, I have spoken to many who feel the sting of not getting to join in families and pass on knowledge to their own children.

MOLICE NAMES

Molice do not have names that are gender based, and since most name themselves there is little rhyme or reason: Pepper, Fire Hand, Swift, Whiptail, Diver, Ted, Rain, Night Blade.

MOLICE TRAITS

- **+6 Dexterity, +6 Intelligence, -8 Strength, -4 Constitution:** Molice are the size of mice with the strength and durability to match, but are quick and sharp as a tack, benefiting from a communal intelligence.
- **Fine:** Molice are Fine creatures and gain a +8 size bonus to their AC, a +8 size bonus on attack rolls, a -8 penalty to their Combat Maneuver Bonus and Combat Maneuver Defense, and a +16 size bonus on Stealth checks.
- **Reach 0:** Molice have no reach, and must move into an opponent's square to make a melee attack. This may provoke an attack of opportunity. Molice also do not threaten neighboring squares.
- **Speed 20:** Molice are small, but surprisingly fast for their size.
- **Flight:** Molice can fly just like small songbirds. Fly speed 40 (good).
- **Low-light Vision:** Molice can see in very dim light.
- **Echolocation 20ft:** Molice have very limited echolocation abilities. They must actively chirp in order to use this ability, and it only applies to an 90 degree arc directly in front of them.
- **Commune:** A gifted molice is able to "speak" to ordinary molice through body language and chirps. If ordinary molice are within range of communication, they are compelled to follow the orders of gifted molice, as long as the orders can be communicated easily. Two gifted molice must roll opposed Diplomacy checks when giving conflicting orders.

No Weapons



Molice on Duty

THOLE

Of the races that I have thus far discussed, thole are the only ones that I have not had as a traveling companion. Instead, I lived among them for a short time and tried to come to an understanding of their culture and purpose.

Thole are a winged race, making their homes high above on the walls of the Cauldron, most dwelling in a miraculous temple city built into the cliff itself. Their racial name and city's namesake are one and the same; there they spend their time in contemplation of dreams, believing that dreams are the key to all wisdom and knowledge.

Most thole spend their waking time gathering herbs from the cliffs. With these they brew potions, all designed to intensify one's vision when asleep, far off in the world of dreams. They are a people transfixed with the idea that if they can gather enough knowledge and experience, the key to creation can be theirs.

Thole are known to swoop down out of the dark and carry off prey, and have been seen hunting intelligent races; though being sligher than humans they are limited to smaller beings like camos or pickers. They have a poisonous bite that paralyzes, and their preferred method of feeding is to suck blood through their long syringe-like canines.

Their society is sharply divided between monks and hunters. Each caste fulfills multiple roles and neither has more importance per se. The monks maintain the gardens, streets and temples, tending to day to day maintenance of the city. They are healers, alchemists and artists as well as priests. The hunters in turn provide security, fight off invaders, and provide food in the form of prey. They are the warriors, rangers, and muscle of the thole, allowing their counterparts to focus on tasks at hand rather than concern themselves with outsiders.

The city of Thole is run by a council of thirteen, six seats going to each caste and a final seat granted to the high priestess, who only speaks or votes in the case of a tie. Her role is seen of that of peacemaker and she is to break ties by voting in the way that is most likely to maintain calm and lessen hard feelings.

Many outsiders live among the Thole, and once accepted by them are able to come and go and participate in all parts of Thole life as if they were born and bred. Thole have a massive library of a size unparalleled anywhere in the Forge, but the whole of it is filled with books and parchments containing nothing more than recorded dreams. It is hard to fathom what they gain from this. I spent a week reading accounts of dreams and in the end felt no better for it. However, they do have unparalleled information on the properties of herbs and plants that grow in Eclipse, and are constantly seeking and studying new findings in the hopes of providing more potent visions. Oddly enough, the herbal knowledge is less revered, and kept in smaller, much less impressive buildings.

APPEARANCE

Thole are wolf/bat like creatures, standing around five feet and covered in coarse hair and a mane of quills that runs the length of their backs. Their heads are roofed in scale plates and they have elongated snouts ending in extended hollow canines that liquids can be drawn up through. Their hands and feet are talons, both having opposing thumbs. When hunting, they often grip prey with all four limbs. Thole wingspan is around twelve feet, and they use their wings to glide and ascend. Thole actually have very highly adapted ears. A thole's vision is weak, and he sees mostly by echolocation, both to navigate in the air and to track prey at great distances.

The thole's fur allows him the convenience of not requiring clothing, though many still do wear light armors and flowing robes. Their monks wear very elaborate gowns that seem to wrap around them endlessly, yet which can be thrown aside at a moment's notice to launch into the air.

PERSONA

Thole are alien in thought and nature. On one hand they are deeply spiritual and highly evolved in thought and philosophy, and on the other they are predatory hunters who love nothing more than swooping down on fearful victims and dragging them

into the air, sucking them to the point of death and then dropping them, allowing the fall to finish the job.

Thole are unable to grasp why other races seem so distressed by their lack of discretion when it comes to eating other intelligent beings. They see nothing wrong with it as long as you do not eat a friend. Besides, striking fear in prey is not only done to make victims less likely to fight back, but also because the thole say fear makes them taste better.

To those that the those do not see as food, they are quite gracious and welcoming towards. It seems that in any encounter they either instill well-being and peace or wild fear, thus being the dream or the nightmare.

SPIRITUALITY

The thole are entrenched in the belief that dreams hold the answer to everything. Their high priests are on a quest for what they call the "True Secret". They believe that this mystery once revived will allow them to rise up above all others and rule creation as kind yet fearful benefactors.



Thole pray to dreams, and in them they look for the signals in every corner of their subconscious. Sleep is a window to a higher power, and a lens through which any trouble can be solved, any question answered. Thole take their slumber very seriously, acting in their awake lives on what they have seen in their dreams. This can lead to some very strange and often even violent behaviors on their part.

THOLE LANGUAGE

I have heard the language of the thole described as haunting, beautiful, and luxurious. I have also heard it described as tedious and pompous. It's all in one's perspective. Thole language is poetic, like a dream, and each word is unique, a work of art. To a thole, what another creature might define as a sentence (a single complete thought) is but a single word...

a single long word that is.

The thole language consists of an extensive set of syllables that all have vagueish meanings, and when combined together into one long word of maybe ten to twelve syllables, they form a thought. Humans may find it difficult to pronounce thole syllables however, as they contain a large number of growls and throat sounds that are foreign to most ears. Thole language is also a tonal one, where the same syllable can be loaded with very different meanings depending on the rising or sinking pattern of tones they are spoken with. Even I ran afoul of this, as when meeting with the mother of one of the high priests, I accidentally referred to her as his horse. It's best to hire an interpreter when visiting their city. A good one is relatively cheap, maybe 20 gold per day.

THOLE NAMES

Thole names are long, and unlike with other cultures, there doesn't seem to be a shortened version. Thole are calm, unhurried people, and it is a grave insult to speak to them as if one were rushed. Thole names are as unpronounceable as their language. After listening to a bit of their language, I discovered that their names aren't so much names as descriptions, such as "He who sees the future and walks with a limp", or "Tall one with dark fur and a snaggle tooth." As such, there isn't any particular difference between male and female names. One interesting thing to note is that a thole's name changes over time as he gains or loses traits.

Examples: Grakdaarnamarumikksh (Wise one with poor sense of hygiene), Oomorkallah (Silver haired swooper), Telemakkurrusk (Steadfast scribe with exceptional penmanship)

THOLE TRAITS

- **+2 Strength, +2 Intelligence, -2 Charisma:** Thole are supernaturally strong, with minds to match, but are socially awkward and cruel by nature.
- **Small:** Thole are Small creatures and gain a +1 size bonus to their AC, a +1 size bonus on attack rolls, a -1 penalty to their Combat Maneuver Bonus and Combat Maneuver Defense, and a +4 size bonus on Stealth checks.
- **Flight:** Thole fly upon bat-like wings, and are remarkably graceful for their size. Fly speed 50 (average). Thole get a +8 racial bonus to Fly skill checks.
- **Nearsighted:** Thole see with low-light vision, but they are unable to focus on much past 10 feet away. However, due to the mists of Eclipse and the thole's echolocation ability, this isn't so much of a hindrance.
- **Echolocation 120ft:** Thole have impressive hearing, and they can "see" with their ears up to a range of 120 feet. Note that unlike most creatures with this ability, thole do not have to shriek or make their own sounds to hear; they can see simply using the natural sounds around them and the vibrations in the air.
 - **Natural Weaponry:** A thole has both claws (1d6) and a powerful bite (2d4).
 - **Exsanguinate:** Thole are natural vampires, and do not eat solid food, but instead must drink the blood of other creatures to feed. If a thole hits with a bite attack, he can attempt a free grapple to lock on. If he succeeds, the prey remains in his mouth, and the thole can deal 1d6 points of blood drain damage each round (starting immediately) until the hold is broken. The thole can choose to bite onto the creature, getting a +6 racial bonus to maintain the grapple. While the thole maintains the grapple, he cannot make bite attacks.
 - **Poison Bite:** The bite of the thole is naturally poisonous, serving to paralyze prey. Fort save DC 15 (Primary - 1d6 CON, Secondary - paralysis 1d4 hours)
 - **Swoop:** A thole is able to attack while in flight, and can move both before and after attacking. Thole can also grapple opponents of size Small or below when swooping. If the grapple succeeds, the thole can lift the creature off the ground and take it with him. While carrying a person, the thole has a Fly speed of 20 (poor).



ADAPTATIONS

The dark changes people. In the short term it may change one's mood, or instill fear, or just make things more difficult for those not accustomed to it. For those who choose to live their lives here, they will find that the blackness changes them in more permanent ways. These changes may not be instantaneous, or may be so incremental that they are not fully noticeable, but over generations, people become something else. Unlike those who live out in the open sun, where life is fast and passionate and burns one out in a few decades, the dark tends to dim the effects of time, inviting one to want to live forever, and may even provide the means to do it. Most intelligent races are not adapted to the darkness, and will suffer greatly by forcing themselves to a life for which they are not suited. The people of Highmark, for example, suffer great difficulties in their harsh transition, but like all peoples who come here, will either find a way to change themselves to conquer the darkness, or be consumed by it.

It may be an impossible task to fully define all the variations in which people find ways to live in Eclipse, but like most things, the bulk of the topic can be covered in a few short generalizations. It is in the details and exceptions though that one needs to be careful.

THE PALE

Not so much a race, but rather a mutation that occurs within populations that have lived in Eclipse for many generations. Children of fifth or later generations of Cauldron dwellers are often born with wider eyes, fine hair (or no hair altogether), and bleached skin or scales. These births are referred to as "Ashen Born" and the resulting children grow up to be known as "the Pale". All races not naturally nocturnal who live in the dark of Eclipse eventually have an offshoot branch of pale.

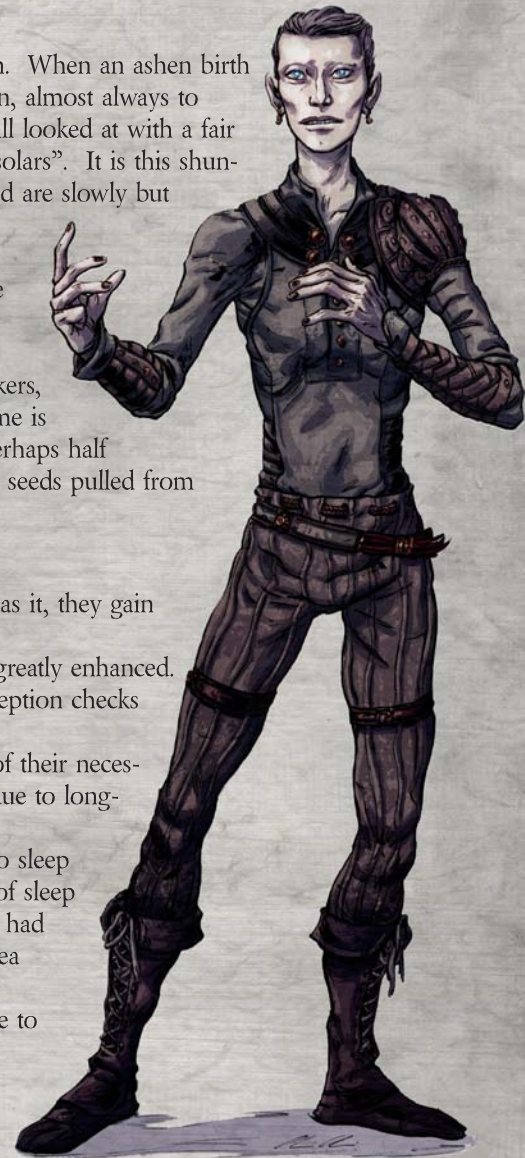
Pale prefer to live amongst their own kind even if those other pale are of a different racial origin. When an ashen birth takes place, mothers will often call upon local pale settlements or enclaves to adopt their children, almost always to the delight of the receiving parents. Though seen everywhere and in many varieties, pale are still looked at with a fair amount of suspicion and trepidation, and because of this they can be ostracized and hated by "solars". It is this shunning that binds the pale to each other. They believe that they are chosen, gifted by the dark, and are slowly but surely evolving toward creatures who are at one with the darkness.

Pale themselves always give birth to ashen children and second generation pale often seem to be even more attuned to the darkness than their parents.

For the most part however, the pale are the normal denizens of Eclipse. Not counting the Markers, very few of the native born of the Cauldron are solars. Almost all of the population of Baradume is pale of some variety, as is that of Sabor, Lacuna, and Husk. Erebus has a mixed population, perhaps half and half, and the vampires of Stygia keep a great number of solar born, as it is rare to find pale seeds pulled from other worlds.

PALE TRAITS

- **Improved Eyesight:** Pale creatures gain low-light vision. If the base creature already has it, they gain darkvision 60ft.
- **Heightened Senses:** The senses of the pale—scent and hearing as well as vision—are greatly enhanced. They receive a +4 racial bonus to Perception checks. This bonus is lost for visual Perception checks when in an area of bright light.
- **Dark Absorption:** Pale creatures are adapted to life in the dark and can synthesize all of their necessary nutrients without sunlight. They are not subject to mental or physical problems due to long-term exposure to darkness.
- **Circadian Acceleration:** Because the pale live without natural cues to tell them when to sleep and wake, they do not require as much sleep as solars. A pale needs only four hours of sleep to be refreshed, regaining spells, health, and other abilities just as if a "normal" person had slept for eight hours. This advantage is suppressed however if the pale moves to an area with normal day and night cycles.
- **Light Blindness:** Pale are *dazzled* whenever in an area of bright light. Abrupt exposure to bright light also blinds pale for 1 round.
- **Light Sensitivity:** Long term exposure to light (such as daylight) can cause mental issues and vitamin deficiencies. (Same effect as solar creatures adjusting to Eclipse – see Chapter 2).



EVOLUTION: WERRAN

The lunar virus is widely viewed as a disorder in the lands outside of the Cauldron, but not so here. It is as natural—and for the most part as accepted—as any of the other fierce races of Eclipse. Since the more well-known word “lycanthrope” refers specifically to those who transform into wolves (literally translating as “wolfman”), “werran” has become the widely used blanket term to describe anyone who exists as a shapeshifting man-beast. All forms of werrans can be found in Eclipse, from werewolves to weresharks to more primitive creature hybrids like the were-t-rex. However, the majority of all werrans who draw breath in the Cauldron do derive from the *Canis Lupus* family—commonly known as werewolves. It is also worth noting that the morphology of werrans when in beast or hybrid form can vary widely, depending on the base infected race. Lunars, for example, look very different from ordinary werewolves, though they share the same viral strain.

To become a werran of any type, it is necessary to have suffered a major bite from an already infected individual. This alone will not guarantee transition; first off, such wounds are usually grievous in nature and unless treated can lead to death by exsanguination or infection. Second, the virus is selective in its nature, seeming to need a host whose makeup has a certain primitive strain. Once a host is infected, the virus will not manifest until the first full moon. In most realms, this may well be the only time it comes to light, but once transformed in Eclipse, the novice werran will find he can afterwards change at will. Werrans in Eclipse are also able to maintain their cognitive functions, albeit with newly-flowered animal cravings.

The lunar virus can be transmuted across species, and a particular strain nearly always results in the same beast shape. However, in some rare cases it seems that a host’s strong predisposition to a certain form can cause the virus to mutate into a new strain, creating a new breed of were-beast. Also, any pregnancy in a female werran will result in a werran birth. And since the virus can be transmitted sexually, sometimes a werran father will infect the mother upon mating, thus producing a werran child as well. When parents are of two different strains of werran, say a werewolf and a wererat, the resulting children will typically mix both qualities, though these offspring are nearly always sterile.

WERRAN ADVANCEMENT

Upon contracting the lunar virus, the werran receives all standard werran abilities as a function of the disease. When a werran levels in any class, he may pay an additional XP penalty in order to also increase his werran abilities. These additional powers are added on top of his class abilities. The powers received depends upon how many times he has leveled as a werran. Note that one’s werran level does not affect his class level in any way, it is just a count of how many times the XP penalty for advancement has been paid.

Level	Powers	XP Penalty
0	Starting Powers	-
1	Heal on Transform	1,000
2	Damage Resistance	1,000
3	Fast Transform	1,000
4	Hybrid Form	2,000
5	Beastly Cry	2,000
6	Animal Strength	2,000
7	Fluid Form	3,000
8	Weapon Immunity	3,000
9	Animal Telepathy	3,000
10	Primal Form	4,000

RACIAL ABILITIES

Upon becoming a werran, the transformed creature gains the following abilities:

- **Animal Form:** A werran is a creature with two natural forms, a “social form” that is typically humanoid, and a “wild form” that is akin to a specific animal. On the Forge, and certainly on Eclipse, neither form is consid-

ered dominant or more correct than the other. While in wild form, the werran gets all abilities, qualities, and attacks natural to the specific animal he has become. A werran in wild form will almost always appear as a larger, more powerful version of this animal, though he generally will remain within the same size category as either the base or the totem creature. Changing shape typically takes one round, and can be done at will. During transformation, a werran is unable to take any other action. Clothing and equipment carried does not change, unless it is so engineered to adapt to both forms, and should be removed before transforming, lest it rip or cause damage to the werran. Werrans cannot talk in beast form, unless they happen to turn into a creature that can, such as a parakeet. A werran in wild form also gains his “totem” creature’s natural movement types and rates. A wereowl, for example, can fly when he turns into an owl, just like any other owl. Note that most common werran wild forms have fur, which adds +2 to the creature’s Armor Class.

- **Enhanced Senses:** When in wild form, the transformed werran can see and smell just like creature whose shape he wears. For most werran this means low-light vision and the *Scent* ability, but each animal is different, and new variations seem to crop up all the time as the virus mutates.
- **Enhanced Speed:** A werran creature receives a +4 Dexterity bonus when in wild form.
- **Enhanced Strength:** A werran creature receives a +4 Strength bonus when in wild form.
- **Moon Transformation:** All werrans in Eclipse, whether natural or newly infected, are compelled to transform into wild form when a full moon is in the sky. Those with a hybrid form can choose this instead by succeeding at a Will save (DC 20).

- **Weakness to Silver:** Silver weapons cause double base damage to a werran. Note that this is merely the damage of the weapon that is doubled; any damage due to the strength or skill of the wielder remains normal.

As he advances, a werran also gains the following abilities:

- **Heal on Transform:** As a werran's flesh stretches and changes and reforms when transforming, sometimes wounds or broken bones can be mended as part of that process. If the werran transforms slowly (requiring two full rounds), he can regain up to 40% of lost hit points. Each wound can only be affected once by this ability. A werran cannot continue to heal by transforming back and forth continually.
- **Damage Resistance:** The werran gains a damage reduction of 5/silver while in wild or hybrid form.
- **Fast Transform:** Werrans with this ability can transform blindingly fast, taking only a single move-equivalent action to transform fully into any shape. Healing while transforming also now takes only a single round.
- **Hybrid Form:** The werran gains a third form, and can now take a shape halfway between his social and beast forms. What exactly this looks like depends greatly on both the base and the totem creature. In the case of a lunar for example, the hybrid form is that of an upright wolf, with fur, teeth, and the *scent* ability, but walking on two legs and having claws with opposable thumbs.
- **Beastly Cry:** The werran has learned to emit an unearthly wail or howl that can put fear into the hearts of his enemies. Opponents hearing the cry must make a Will save (DC 15 + werran's Charisma bonus), or become *shaken* for 1d6 rounds. Those who fail this save by 5 or more become *frightened*, and must flee the area.
- **Animal Strength:** The werran's beast form becomes even more powerful, granting him an additional +4 to Strength and Constitution when in animal form.
- **Fluid Form:** An extension of the werran's "hybrid form", this ability allows the werran to transform all parts of his body separately, taking on any form somewhere between his social state and animal state. This can be a halfway transformation like the hybrid form, or a single aspect of one's animal state. One could become an upright wolf say, walking on two legs and attacking with its claws, or one could be a human with tiger eyes and claws, or maybe a picker with bat wings. Fluid form is often used to speak while in wild form, by transforming only the vocal chords.
- **Weapon Immunity:** The werran's damage reduction improves greatly, to DR 10/silver while in wild or hybrid form. Also silver weapons now deal normal damage for all forms rather than double.
- **Animal Telepathy:** An experienced werran has become

so attuned to nature, that he is able to communicate telepathically with natural animals or with other werran. Communication goes both ways, though nothing is sent that is not intended to be transmitted. The werran must have line of sight and must maintain eye contact while talking to the creature. Also, talking to an animal is not like talking to a sentient creature; complete thoughts are not transmitted, only emotions and very simple ideas. Animals may not be able to tell one human from another except by smell for example, and certainly won't be able to relate the conversation they overheard between two of them. Werrans get a +4 bonus to Diplomacy checks when using this ability to communicate with animals.

- **Primal Form:** By tenth level a werran has become so familiar with his own genetic code that he can transform into the primal ancestor of his animal aspect. What this means is different for each creature, though the primal form of a weretiger might be a sabretooth tiger, for example. As a general rule, the primal form is one size category larger than the normal animal form, gains an additional +4 to Dex, Str, and Con, and the damage die of its natural weaponry is upgraded by one (from 1d8 to 1d10, perhaps).



EVOLUTION: VAMPIRE

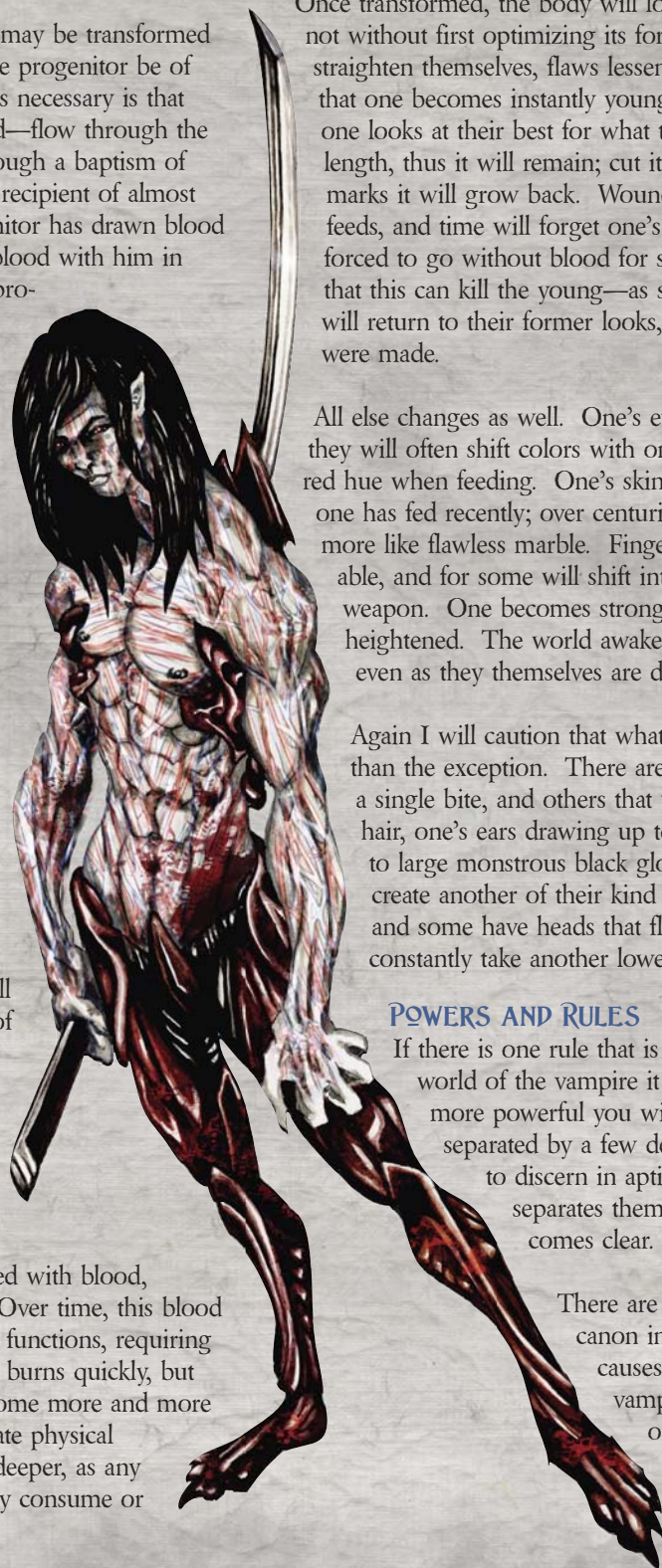
Mortals who become vampires forsake all other roads, evermore locking their souls to the flesh, and feeding henceforth upon the life of others to preserve their own. Vampires are supernatural creatures subject to arcane rules that both grant them power and limit their existence. They are the result of some ancient bleak act of provenance, and their role in the greater scheme of things is as important as it is obscured. They are never to be taken lightly, be you a mortal or a god. There is an unknown knowledge that resides in the oldest of their kind that can only be achieved by having existed in the same body for so long.

Here I will endeavor to provide a general understanding of the nature of the vampire. In general there are certain weakness and strengths prevalent in all of their kind, but allow me to caution you my lord in saying that no two are exactly alike, and wild unexpected variations do exist.

BECOMING

Any mortal creature of an intelligent race may be transformed into a vampire. It is not necessary that the progenitor be of the same species as the recipient; all that is necessary is that some liquid—be it blood or akin to blood—flow through the host's flesh. One becomes a vampire through a baptism of blood; the progenitor must first drain the recipient of almost all his blood before all else. If the progenitor has drawn blood from the host multiple times and shared blood with him in the past, it is more likely that this whole process will be more successful. Once the recipient has been drained to the point of death, the progenitor then offers up his blood to the now dying recipient—the more they drink the better the chance to survive the transformation, but this draining weakens the progenitor greatly and leaves even the very old in a vulnerable state. If the two have the strength, repeating the process over and over will strengthen the bond and the chance of success.

Once the body of the recipient is engorged with the blood of his maker, he will undergo a transformation that begins with his death. The body falls to its end, and the soul will either bond to it or move on, leaving a dead shell behind. If the soul binds to the body, then it must in act its will upon the dead flesh. Failure to do this, and the body will rot and the soul with it. What becomes of such a spirit one can only guess at. For those who can enact their will over the dead flesh, the true transmutation begins. Their spirits control a dead thing that has no heartbeat, no life—and it is now that they must feed or fall to rot. However, once the new vampire feeds, all parts of his body will become inundated with blood, replacing all other liquids in his person. Over time, this blood will burn away as the vampire moves and functions, requiring that he continue to consume it. At first it burns quickly, but over centuries of unlife the body will become more and more efficient in its use. While this is an accurate physical description of what occurs, the truth lies deeper, as any vampire will tell you... it is not blood they consume or survive on, but life.



Once transformed, the body will lock itself in time as well, but not without first optimizing its form. Scars will fade, wrinkles straighten themselves, flaws lessen, pores disappear—it is not that one becomes instantly young-looking again, but rather that one looks at their best for what they are. If hair is a certain length, thus it will remain; cut it, and within a few candle marks it will grow back. Wounds will heal as long as one feeds, and time will forget one's flesh. Even if a Vampire is forced to go without blood for some time—bearing in mind that this can kill the young—as soon as they feed again they will return to their former looks, just as they were the day they were made.

All else changes as well. One's eyes will become brighter, and they will often shift colors with one's mood, taking on a bright red hue when feeding. One's skin will be pale—ice cold unless one has fed recently; over centuries it will become more and more like flawless marble. Fingernails will become unbreakable, and for some will shift into white claws—an unrelenting weapon. One becomes stronger, faster, and all the senses are heightened. The world awakes to them more alive than ever, even as they themselves are dead.

Again I will caution that what I relay here is the rule rather than the exception. There are vampires that can infect with a single bite, and others that will cause one to lose all one's hair, one's ears drawing up to points and eyes distorting to large monstrous black globes. Others are unable to create another of their kind no matter how hard they try, and some have heads that fly free from the body and must constantly take another lower trunk to survive.

POWERS AND RULES

If there is one rule that is never broken or altered in the world of the vampire it is this... the older you are the more powerful you will become. Though vampires separated by a few decades are almost impossible to discern in aptitude, once a century or more separates them the difference in power becomes clear.

There are several other rules that are canon in all vampires. Direct sunlight causes violent harm, turning novice vampires to dust, lighting elders on fire, and slowly charring the exalted. Vampires are also subject to an ancient binding, a ward placed upon the first

of their kind that does not allow them to enter another's home unless invited by the owner or one who resides there. And finally, separation of the head and heart in all but the rarest of cases leads to death.

AGE CLASSIFICATIONS

A vampire's base power is counted in years. What emerges during this time is the utter control of the flesh by the will, and the unfathomable knowledge and self-control that only lifetime upon lifetime can bring. Though again, each individual is different, and those who make an effort to learn will find other powers come to them besides those simply based on age. As a vampire survives the years he will typically move through the following stages of power:

Neophyte (0-9): A vampire's first few years are spent subject to their makers utter will. With very few exceptions (such as perhaps orders to destroy themselves), they are unable to deny anything requested of them. They will die instantly if exposed to the sun, and must feed every night, taking in enough blood each time to refill their systems. They also must rest in a dark place during daylight hours—something they need not do here in Eclipse. This rest must take place far from direct sunlight, and often times neophytes are paralyzed during this repose. There are exceptions to this however; if one is made by a very old vampire, this and other stages may be skipped totally.

Novice (10-99): A vampire less than a hundred is considered a novice, and though they need not feed as often as a neophyte (as little as once per week), they are subject to all other weaknesses. However, as they age they will find that their masters will weigh less and less upon them (the percentage chance to resist it increases by 1 each year). It is possible, but unlikely (around 20%) for vampires in this age category to be raised or resurrected as mortals again if slain.

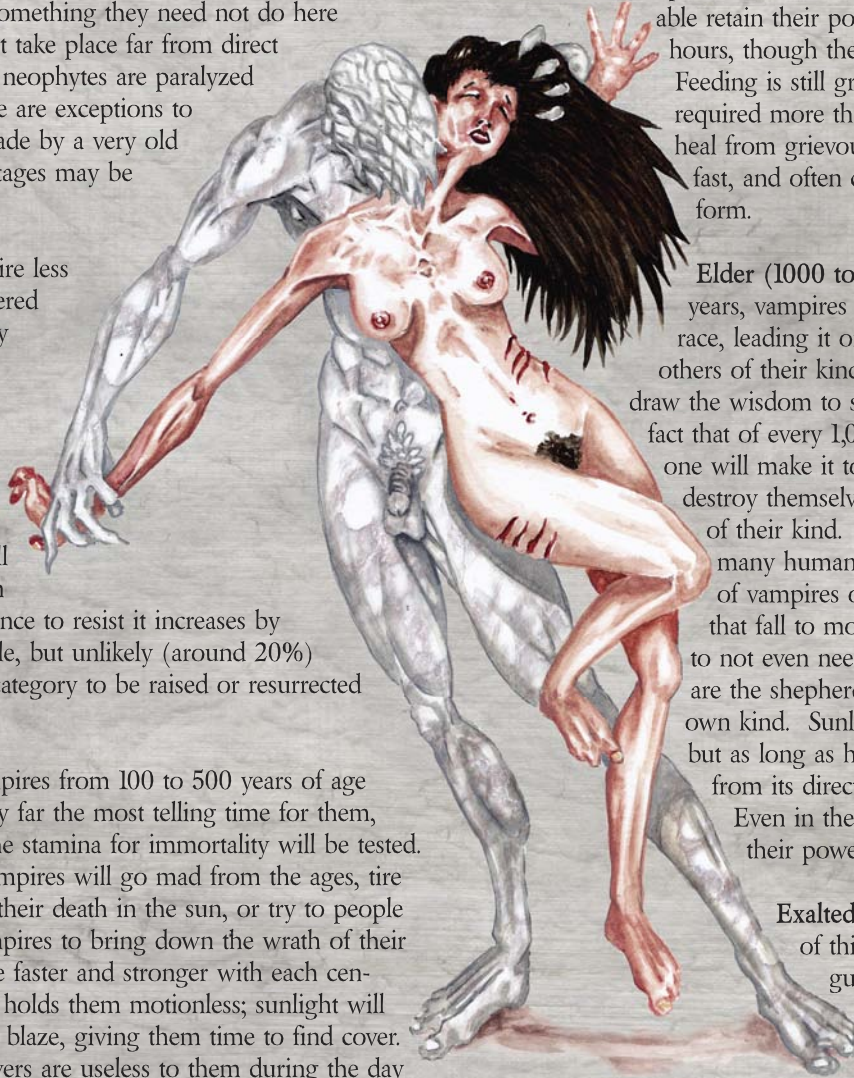
Revered (100-499): Vampires from 100 to 500 years of age fall into this class. It is by far the most telling time for them, when whether one has the stamina for immortality will be tested. This is the time when vampires will go mad from the ages, tire of the night and walk to their death in the sun, or try to people the world with other vampires to bring down the wrath of their elders. They will become faster and stronger with each century. Daylight no longer holds them motionless; sunlight will merely bring them into a blaze, giving them time to find cover. However, all of their powers are useless to them during the day unless they are deep beneath the ground. The need to drink lessens to one kill every few months, and they are no longer in any way bound mystically to their progenitor's resolve, though often powerful emotional bonds remain. Also by this age, the soul has competed its lock on the body, and will crumble when the body

dies. No vampire aged over one hundred years may be raised or resurrected if slain. Neither is it possible to speak with the dead spirit, as it is of my belief that it is destroyed, utterly and irrevocably gone. It is at the *revered* stage that some deal with the passing ages by the first of what may be called hibernations; going deep into the ground, the vampire falls into a dreamless sleep that can last for hundreds of years, awakening to a different world and filled with a new inner strength and a zeal for the eons.

Venerable (500-999): This is the time in which a true vampire is born. They have escaped the dredges of time and no longer are subject to the lower concerns of mortals. They can see existence, for all its flaws, as a series of long-running events and repeating patterns. Often vampires of this age group are wizened and thoughtful, sometimes even compassionate to mortals. They will value the lives of other ageless beings, seeing them as their only true companions, yet will still form relations with mortals, knowing that pleasure and truth can be gleaned even from that which is fleeting. The sun no longer brings instant death, but rather a slow painful charring. It can be tolerated as long as a wall or thick curtains separate one from its direct light. The venerable retain their powers even during daylight hours, though they are considerably weakened. Feeding is still greatly enjoyed, but no longer required more than once in a decade or to heal from grievous harm. They are blindingly fast, and often can fly without taking animal form.

Elder (1000 to 9,999): At a thousand years, vampires become the elders of their race, leading it on its course of watching over others of their kind in the hopes that they may draw the wisdom to survive. It is a little known fact that of every 1,000 vampires created, only one will make it to this age classification. Most destroy themselves or are destroyed by others of their kind. Contrary to the belief of many human vampire hunters, the number of vampires over a hundred years of age that fall to mortal killers is so nominal as to not even need investigating. Thus Elders are the shepherds and guardians of their own kind. Sunlight will still crisp them away, but as long as heavy clothing separates them from its direct light they can withstand it. Even in the light of day they retain all their powers.

Exalted (10,000 +): What a vampire of this age becomes is anyone's guess. There are so few out there and they hide themselves expertly. The sun no longer can harm them, though no vampire will ever grow to enjoy its presence. Their speed and physical prowess is without match, and few creatures in existence would care to do battle with one unless no other option remained. How they view the world is impossible to grasp, even difficult for immortals such as



ourselves. They were once beings meant to pass on to other realms after a limited span in this existence. It is at this age that vampires no longer need blood or life to exist. Here they also seem to come upon some ancient secret that only those of their kind can hold—a truth that, I have heard suggestions, could foretell their place in the end game of all creation. Few vampires of this age even consult with those of their own kind. In fact, I have heard of at least one who feeds only on other younger vampires, draining them dry and then drawing their dehydrated shells up into the sun.

VAMPIRIC POWERS

Like werrans, vampires can advance in regular class levels, though the XP penalty is greater, as it is considerably harder for dead flesh to learn. Again, vampires gain powers as they level in other classes, based on how many times they have leveled since they became a vampire. Rather than gaining pre-designated powers, vampires may choose from different abilities for what suits them. These powers are gained in addition those gained from pure age as listed above. Again, with each level, a vampire can choose either to pay the penalty and advance as a vampire, or not and advance only in his class.

Level	Powers	Hit Point Bonus	XP Penalty
0	Starting	1d6	-
1	1 - 1 st order	1d4	2,000
2	1 - 1 st order	1d4	2,000
3	1 - 1 st order	1d4	2,000
4	1 - 1 st order	1d4	2,000
5	2 - 1 st or 2 nd order	1d6	3,000
6	1 - 1 st or 2 nd order	1d6	3,000
7	1 - 1 st or 2 nd order	1d6	4,000
8	1 - 1 st or 2 nd order	1d6	4,000
9	1 - 1 st or 2 nd order	1d6	5,000
10	2 - Any order	1d8	5,000
11	1 - Any order	1d8	6,000
12	1 - Any order	1d8	7,000
13	1 - Any order	1d8	8,000
14	1 - Any order	1d8	9,000
15	2 - Any order	1d10	10,000
16	1 - Any order	1d10	12,000
17	1 - Any order	1d10	14,000
18	1 - Any order	1d10	16,000
19	1 - Any order	1d10	18,000
20	3 - Any order	1d12	20,000

Upon becoming a vampire the following powers and weaknesses are bestowed upon first feeding:

- **Ageless:** Vampires do not age as mortal creatures do, and their bodies do not deteriorate over time. In fact, vampires get stronger as time passes.
- **Vision:** All vampires have low-light vision. If the base creature already had it, they will gain darkvision 60ft instead.
- **Supernatural Body:** A vampire is stronger and faster than a mortal, as his will can now control his body directly as opposed to being filtered through it. Strength and Dexterity both increase by 4 and may continue to increase as the vampire gains in ability. His body is also more durable, giving him bonus hit points as he grows in power. A vampire's base speed also increases by 10.
- **Enhanced Will:** A vampire is dependent upon the force of his will to survive. Upon becoming a vampire, a +2 racial Will bonus is granted. This bonus increases by 1 with each progressive age category.
- **Dead:** A vampire's body is a dead thing, and is immune to all poisons and disease. I have heard rumors though of a few cases where a poison or disease has been engineered directly for them, but I have not been able to confirm these.
- **Lifeblood:** Vampires cannot eat or drink as mortals, but must feed upon blood to survive. One feeding requires enough blood so as to drain a single creature of the same size class as the vampire to the point of death. If a vampire does not feed, he will lose 1d6 Con per period of feeding that he skips. If this reduces him to 0 Con, his soul will lose its lock on the body, and he will crumble to dust.
- **Natural Weaponry:** A vampire's bite is a natural weapon, dealing 1d4 points of damage per hit. This is considered a martial attack, and does not draw attacks of opportunity.
- **Exsanguinate:** If a vampire hits with a bite attack, he can attempt a free grapple to lock on. If he succeeds, the victim remains in his bite, and the vampire can deal 1d6 points of blood drain damage each round (starting immediately) until the hold is broken. The vampire can choose to bite onto the creature, gaining a +6 racial bonus to maintain the grapple. While the vampire maintains the grapple, he cannot make further bite attacks, only deal blood drain damage.
- **Destroyed by Sunlight:** A young vampire exposed to sunlight is typically killed almost instantly, taking 5d20 points of damage per round of exposure. This is reduced by 1d20 per age classification past *Neophyte*, eventually dropping to 0 if one manages to reach *Exalted* status.
- **Invitation:** Vampires are barred from entering a private residence without being invited by someone who lives there. They are simply unable to do so, as if blocked by an invisible wall.
- **Holy Symbols/Water:** Vampires are an abomination in the eyes of most gods, and the divine power imbued in holy objects repels them. Vampires can be turned by skilled clerics, and take damage from contact with holy water. Touching a holy symbol directly has the same effect as contact with holy water.
- **Running Water:** Vampires have an ingrained dislike of running water, such as a river, and must make a Will save to force himself to cross it. The DC of this save is 1 per yard that that stream is wide, maximum 30. A vampire in a wagon for example, that crosses a bridge without being in control of the situation need not make

a save. Water itself, due to its life-giving properties, can be trouble for a vampire. If a vampire is ever immersed entirely in water, he will lose his regeneration abilities. If the water is moving very rapidly, such as a powerful waterfall, for example, he will take 1d20 points of damage per round.

- **No Reflection:** Vampires do not cast a reflection in mirrors. Though quite well known, this is not entirely true. For those of us with the true sight (and for the vampire themselves), we know the truth. The mirrors actually reflect the vampires as they really are, it is just that the minds of most mortals are too weak to accept the images, and they are blocked out to nothingness by the subconscious. This is why vampires seem to have a great hatred of mirrors instead of vague neutrality.
- **Stakes:** Any vampire that is staked with wood through the heart will be paralyzed as long as the stake remains in place.
- **Allergies:** Most vampires have allergies to certain herbs that may have grown in their original homeland. These are commonly garlic, basil, jasmine, and maybe others. If ingested the vampire will become weak and sluggish, losing his *Supernatural Body* bonuses for 1d4 hours. The odor of these herbs also bothers the vampire greatly, causing him to be *sickened* in their presence. Sickened effect is only half strength (-1) for basil and jasmine.

1ST ORDER POWERS

As a vampire becomes more and more used to his new form, he will slowly discover how to unlock and use the various basic facets of his nature. When gaining a first order power, a vampire can choose any one of the following, based upon what most suits his nature.

- **Blood Healing:** Drinking blood has the instant effect of healing the vampire. Bonus is 2d6 per pint consumed (equivalent to 1 round of drinking).
- **Damage Reduction:** Vampires gain a DR of 5/magic. This can be taken up to three times as well for 10/magic and 15/magic respectively.
- **Enthrall:** The vampire can hold one victim paralyzed with its direct gaze. The vampire must make opposed Will saves with the target to hold him, and must not break eye contact or the hold is broken as well.
- **Make Vampire:** The vampire has learned how to make another of his kind. After making another vampire, a vampire is greatly weakened, losing his *Supernatural Body* bonuses for a week (reduced by one day per age category past *Neophyte*)
- **Natural Weaponry:** A vampire's hands may grow into claws, dealing 1d8 points of damage per hit. These are considered martial weapons, and do not draw attacks of opportunity.
- **Read Thoughts:** A vampire can read the surface thoughts of a target through eye contact. Only what the person is currently thinking will be read, no deeper memories.
- **Regeneration:** Vampires with this ability can regenerate up to 1d4 points of damage per round. This ability can be taken up to three times, increasing the regeneration to 1d8 and 1d12 points respectively.

- **Supernatural Senses:** One of the vampire's senses become enhanced. This can be taken up to five times, each for a different sense. *Vision or Hearing:* +4 to vision or hearing based Perception checks. *Smell:* The vampire gains the *Scent* special ability. *Taste or Touch:* These are typically their own reward, but may add a +4 bonus in certain situations, like when picking a lock.
- **Youth:** The vampire becomes a mix of all his best traits from life. His body returns to looking like it did in its prime, and the vampire's skin becomes flawless. Without this power, a vampire's body will be locked into its age at the point of death.

2ND ORDER POWERS

Once a vampire has mastered basic control of his body, he will find that he has access to even greater abilities:

- **Animal Form:** The vampire can take on an animal form, be it wolf, bat, cat, owl, or raven, as long as the animal is associated with the night and predation. This power can be taken multiple times, each one conveying a new form. This power allows the vampire to change shape into the creature at will, taking one round to transform.
- **Read Mind:** A vampire can read the mind of a target via eye contact, scanning through their memories and surface thoughts. This is based upon his *Hold* and *Read Surface Thoughts* powers (which are prerequisites), and has the added effect of holding the target motionless. The vampire must succeed at an opposed Will check against the target to get in.
- **Gaseous Form:** The vampire can assume gaseous form at will, as a standard action. This functions much like the spell *gaseous form*, only with no time limit, and the caster level being the vampire's level in the vampire adaptation. While in gaseous form, a vampire gains a Fly speed of 20 (perfect).
- **Compel:** The vampire can force another to do his will. This must be a verbal command, and an opposed Will check must be made in order for the compulsion to take hold.
- **Super Speed:** Adds +2 to Dexterity. This can be taken up to 3 times. This is added to the vampire's *Supernatural Body* bonus.
- **Super Strength:** Adds +2 to Strength. This can be taken up to 3 times. This is added to the vampire's *Supernatural Body* bonus.
- **Ghoul:** By sharing his blood with a mortal, the vampire can make the mortal become addicted to it. Roll opposed Will checks whenever blood is shared without being enough to turn the mortal to a vampire. Failure means the mortal becomes enthralled by the vampire, and will do whatever is asked of him. The effect fades if the vampire does not feed the ghoul at least a few drops of blood every week.

3RD ORDER POWERS

With full mastery of his abilities, the vampire can unlock tremendous power:

- **Flight:** The vampire can fly without changing shape. He gains a Fly speed of 60(perfect). He also gains a +8 racial bonus to the Fly skill.

- **Flame:** The vampire can set things on fire with its mind. This is an at will ability. Basically any flammable item within line of sight of the vampire can be set on fire with a thought, as if a match had been set to it. This ability requires one action of concentration to perform.
- **Rewrite:** A vampire can rewrite a target's memories, or erase them altogether. The vampire must have the *Read Mind* ability and must maintain constant eye contact to do this. Memories are erased and written in real time. If a memory is five minutes long, it will take five minutes to erase. Rewriting details is considerably faster than rewriting entire false memories. The vampire must succeed at an opposed Will check to perform this ability.
- **Magic Resistance:** The vampire gains a magic resistance of 10 plus his class levels. This can be taken up to three times, conveying a resistance of 15 and 20 respectively.
- **Drink Memories:** The blood ingested by the vampire transfers to him the memories of the victim he is consuming. If the vampire drains a victim dry, he will get all their memories, but a partial draining will only give a percentage of them, pulled at random.
- **Marble Skin:** The vampire's skin becomes utterly white. It will feel soft, but will in fact be as hard as stone. This conveys a +4 racial AC bonus in addition to the cosmetic changes.
- **Improved Strength:** The vampire gains +4 to Strength. This can be taken up to three times. This is added to the vampire's *Supernatural Body* bonus.
- **Improved Speed:** The vampire gains +4 to Dexterity. This can be taken up to three times. This is added to the vampire's *Supernatural Body* bonus.

EVOLUTION: ANCIENT

There is another road to immortality, one that does not require death as a doorway, though it is fraught with its own perils. The only reliable mines that extract god dust in all the Forge are found here in the shadows of Eclipse. In the western wastes this precious mineral is carved from the lifeless ground at great cost, both financial and in the lives of those whose dismal fate it is to dig. The dust is sought after by the rich and powerful for one purpose and one alone—when prepared in the proper fashion and inhaled, it can extend life. A single hit of refined god dust, about a pinch of powder, can cost over a hundred platinum if placed on the open market. No miner will ever see this wealth; instead a few influential lords and entrepreneurs fill their coffers with the affluence of all who can afford to pay for eternity.

The full cost of the god dust trade is hidden however, as those dependent upon it generally use their influence and power to own the mining operations, providing for the management only and using slave labor for production. Since there is no real currency in Baradume, only those who lead guilds or who are very high up can obtain the god dust that the guild's mines produce. Over time, nearly all the mines have been taken over by the guilds in one way or another, with a mere handful being run for profit and catering to customers from Arena.

There are many dangers involved for one who can afford the "hallowed path". For one, it is highly addictive, and once it is ingrained in one's system, failure to keep the dosage up can result in a grotesque and painful death. All the money in the world cannot always guarantee one a constant supply. The mines are fickle in their gifts; there are great stretches of time when no viable strains can be found, even when production is at full. Deep Fey constantly harass the operations, killing miners and sabotaging equipment. This spotty supply record results in hoarding by all who have become addicted, which in turn can cause shortages. When no supply can be had, vampire blood can be used in the short term to stave off death, but it presents its own troubles both in acquiring and consuming, not the least of which is the fact that one can be subject to the will of the vampire whose blood one has consumed. If all this is not enough to convince those with the wealth that god dust is not for them, then consider the final and most alarming glitch—if the dust is in any way refined incorrectly, the inhalation will result in the user becoming a horrible abomination of black fury and lust. This mutation is almost impossible to reverse, and it is unlikely that many would even want to come back to a life in which they are responsible for their loved ones being ripped asunder.

Ah, but what mortals will do to stay off the kiss of lady death. The hallowed path, for all its failings, grants that one gift most desired by the powerful... time. Immortality is a strange and powerful thing that over the centuries grants its own rewards. The "ancient", as god dust takers are called, gain certain abilities as the years fall away behind them. For one, they slowly but surely become taller and lither—a thousand year old user can stand upwards of twelve feet in height. The mind gains insights and adapts as unnatural longevity fills it. Ancients soon develop unfailing memories, able to retain whatever they read or experience. Slowly they can begin to stretch out their consciousness, at first gaining the power to speak directly into other's minds, and later the ability to rip thoughts straight out of another's head. The truly old can even rewrite the memories and beliefs of others, making them feel and think whatever the ancient desires. Magic no longer affects the ancient as strongly, falling off their time-tested frames and washing over their complex minds. No disease can harm them and physical wounds heal themselves quickly. Deadly poisons can be ingested and do no more harm than a light buzz. All this is the prize for one who can afford the hallowed path, but any who somehow think this a higher road than that of becoming a vampire should consider that the loss of life for one hit averages around five miners, and to have enough to survive on requires at least a hit a week, though more are usually ingested.

Age	Powers	Height	STR/CON	CHA	Spell Resistance
0	Starting	-	+4	+4	+0
100	Disease Imm., Scent	+1ft	-	-	+2
200	DR 5/magic	-	+1	-	+4
300	Telepathy	+1ft	-	+1	+6
400	Instill Feeling	-	+1	-	+8
500	Poison Immunity	+1ft	-	+1	+10
600	DR 10/mag, Brdcst	-	+1	-	+12
700	Read Mind	+1ft	-	+1	+14
800	Rewrite Memory	-	+1	-	+16
900	Rewrite Belief	+1ft	-	+1	+18
1000+	DR 15/epic	+1ft	+2	+2	+20

ANCIENT TRAITS

Unlike werrans and vampires, ancients do not pay an XP penalty as they advance in levels. Instead, their abilities improve over time based upon how many years they have lived under the influence of the drug. The initial effects of the asehn path apply upon the user's first hit, however they fade after a week if the drug is not taken again.

Upon beginning the hallowed path, the transformed person gains the following abilities:

- **Enhanced Senses:** The ancient's senses become heightened by his drug, allowing him to feel, smell, hear, see, and taste with greater acumen and clarity. He receives a +4 supernatural bonus to all perception checks.
- **Enhanced Body:** The god dust increases the Strength and Constitution of those who use it. It also increases one's size. Once one passes 7 feet of height, one gains a size classification of Large.
- **Enhanced Soul:** An ancient's looks and personal magnetism become flush with divine magic, giving them a bonus to their Charisma score.
- **Spell Resistance:** Ancients receive a spell resistance equal to their class levels plus a bonus based upon their age (see chart).
- **Youth:** An ancient's actual age is separate from his effective age. With every hit, an ancient can adjust his effective age either up or down one year at will. This is typically continued until the ancient reaches his desired effective age.
- **Dependency:** If an ancient does not take his drug after one week, his effective age will rapidly deteriorate, and he will begin to age at the rate of one year per day until he either dies of natural causes or gets another hit. Once on the drug again, the youth ability will eventually restore him to his original age. When off the drug for more than a week, his ancient powers (except for height increase) will also stop working after 1 day per 100 years of age.

As he ages, an ancient also gains the following abilities:

- **Immunity to Disease:** After 100 years of taking god dust, an ancient's body becomes so inundated with magic that it changes chemically, preventing any disease, even magical diseases, from taking hold.
- **Scent:** After 100 years, an ancient's sense are so enhanced that he gains the Scent special ability. This allows him to Detect nearby creatures by their scent and to track creatures via smell.



- **Damage Reduction:**

As the ancient ages, his body becomes more and more inundated with the taint of the divine, and ordinary mundane items no longer harm him. This ability increases with age. After a thousand years of taking the drug, an ancient gains almost near invulnerability.

- **Telepathy:** An ancient of 300 years or more gains the ability to speak telepathically, and can implant his thoughts into the minds of others without speaking. This bypasses language, and allows the ancient to communicate with any sentient creature. The target creature must be within the ancient's line of sight. The ancient can only communicate telepathically to one creature at a time until age 600. This ability does not allow the ancient to hear pick up the thoughts of others, only transmit his own.

- **Instill Feeling:** An ancient of 400 years has learned how to employ his telepathy in more subtler ways, and is able to transmit emotions instead of speech. This ability can influence others strongly as they are not aware that they are being influenced.

The ancient gains a +5 morale bonus to all Diplomacy and Perform checks, and can affect the morale of others as well, adjusting their Will saves up or down as desired by up to 2.

- **Immunity to Poison:** At 500 years, an ancient's body becomes so magical in nature that he is immune to poison in all forms, even voluntary ones such as alcohol or mind-altering drugs.
- **Broadcast:** At 600 years of age, an ancient can broadcast his thoughts, allowing him to use his telepathy (or *Instill Feelings*) on multiple targets at once, similar to shouting.
- **Read Mind:** At age 700 an ancient can read the thoughts of others. This can be simply used as a reverse telepathy, allowing others to broadcast their thoughts to him without speaking, or it can be used to read others' thoughts against their wills. There is no language barrier for this ability. Targets must make a Will save to resist, DC is 20 + the ancient's Charisma bonus for surface thoughts, or 10 + Cha bonus for deeper memories. This DC includes the ancient's *Instill Feeling* bonus, as it is assumed he will use all his wiles to get his way. Blocking an ancient from reading one's mind only works for one hour before he can try again.
- **Rewrite Memory:** An ancient of 800 has become so adept at reading the thoughts of others, that he can alter the memories he finds. An ancient must first read one's mind in order to attempt this. The DC to resist this ability is 15 + the ancient's Cha bonus (*Instill Feeling* already included). This process is physically exhausting to the ancient, causing him 1 point of damage per each second of memory he changes, removes, or adds to the victim.
- **Rewrite Belief:** When an ancient reaches 900 years of age, his influence over the thoughts of others becomes so great that he can bypass altering simple memories and affect the person's core beliefs. This can be used to make a person fall in love, for example, or fall out of love. It can dissuade a fanatic from his religion, or adhere him to a code of honor. It may induce paranoia perhaps, or cure it. The belief cannot be something patently false (like there's daylight in Eclipse or that the person will not die if they step off a cliff), but it doesn't require any evidence to back it up. This is a difficult change, and will fade after four hours if the ancient does not perform the psychic surgery again to renew it. After four successive successful surgeries, the belief becomes permanent. An ancient must first read a person's deeper thoughts to try this, and the surgery is exhausting to the ancient, causing him damage equal to the total of the victim's Will roll to resist whether or not the attempt succeeds or fails. The base DC for resisting this ability is 20 + the ancient's Cha bonus, and the final DC is adjusted up or down by various factors:
 - *No evidence to support belief:* -3
 - *Belief would directly harm the victim:* -5
 - *Belief goes against victim's core persona:* -5
 - *Belief is held by someone the victim trusts:* +3
 - *The ancient is someone who the victim trusts:* +5



God dust phial

PROFESSIONS

Eclipse is a land of slavers and courtesans, master thieves and assassins, violent rebels and cunning spies. To make one's way in the dark chambers of Baradume or the crimson halls of Stygia one must be skilled, talented, and exceptional. Though many of the pale folk here learn trades common in many other lands and of which you are no doubt familiar (such as blacksmithing, sailing, or hunting), the following are detailed studies of a few of the more unique or interesting skill sets for survival found in the Cauldron.

DANCER OF THE BARADUME SCHOOL

The art of the dance is favored by the dark guardian of Eclipse as highly as master works of painting or sculpture. True skill in dance can gain one access to the most exclusive of halls and chambers. A Baradume-trained dancer is not scoffed at by the wise, but given the deepest of respect and worship. Dancers in the dark lands are more than just performers, they are skilled combatants and ruthless lovers. They earn their place by being able to twirl from bedroom to battlefield seamlessly. If a dancer chooses you for their lover, or you are rich enough to afford one, they are said to be able to execute moves that can bring one to the mouth of creation, resulting in an orgasm like no other. If they are employed to kill you, one had best pray to whatever gods you hope will hear. A dancer can move with grace and skill through combat, slicing and gutting their opponents without ever being touched, while all the time giving the impression of being choreographed. Employed as courtesans, entertainers, bodyguards, and assassins, Baradume dancers earn well their reputations as lovers and killers.

Hit Die: d10

REQUIREMENTS

To become a dancer of the Baradume school, a person must first fulfill all of the following criteria:

- Skills: Acrobatics 6 ranks, Stealth 6 ranks
- Feats: Agile Maneuvers, Improve Unarmed Strike
- Special: Base Attack Bonus +5 or better.

CLASS SKILLS

The dancer's class skills are: Acrobatics (Dex), Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disable Device (Dex), Disguise (Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Fly (Dex), Handle Animal (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (anatomy) (Int), Knowledge (culture) (Int), Perception (Wis), Perform (Cha), Ride (Dex), Sense Motive (Wis), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Stealth (Dex), and Use Magic Device (Cha).

Skill Ranks at Each Level: 4 + INT modifier

CLASS FEATURES

All of the following are class features of the dancer:

- **Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** The dancer is proficient with all simple weapons and any exotic weapons designed for monks. The dancer is also proficient with light armor, but not with shields.
- **Captivate (Ex):** The Dancer can hold the attention of a crowd



ABILITIES

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1 st	+1	+0	+1	+0	Captivate
2 nd	+2	+1	+1	+1	Twist
3 rd	+3	+1	+2	+1	Unarmed Upgrade
4 th	+4	+1	+2	+1	Duet, Evasion
5 th	+5	+2	+3	+2	Face in the Crowd
6 th	+6	+2	+3	+2	Erogenous Zone
7 th	+7	+2	+4	+2	Sex Addiction
8 th	+8	+3	+4	+3	Unarmed Upgrade
9 th	+9	+3	+5	+3	Flourish
10 th	+10	+3	+5	+3	Snap

with an amazing display of twirls and acrobatics. Anyone watching is considered *fascinated*, and must succeed at a Will save in order to turn away from the performance unless someone else intervenes. DC is equal to the Dancer's Perform skill roll.

- **Twist (Ex):** If the dancer is wearing light or no armor, he can add his Charisma bonus to his Armor Class.
- **Unarmed Upgrade (Ex):** Like a monk, a dancer is trained in the martial arts, and can do increased damage with unarmed attacks. Each time this feat is gained, the base damage die for the dancer's unarmed attacks goes up by one along the following scale: 1d4, 1d6, 1d8, 1d10, 1d12, 2d8, 1d20, 2d12, 3d10, 4d8, 3d12, 2d20
- **Duet (Ex):** The dancer can focus upon a single target in combat, making it look as though the combat was planned out in advance, and over time tiring the target. Against this one opponent the dancer may use his Perform roll as his Armor Class. Each round that the dancer is not hit by this opponent, a -1 cumulative morale penalty is applied to that opponent to attacks against the dancer. A successful hit by that opponent at any time resets this penalty to 0.
- **Evasion (Ex):** Like a monk, a dancer will take no damage from most area effect attacks upon a successful save. If he already has evasion, he will gain *Improved Evasion*.
- **Face in the Crowd (Ex):** A dancer can focus his attention on a single person in the crowd, making that person feel like he is the only person in the room and giving him tunnel vision for the dancer alone. If desired, the dancer can cause this person to want him sexually, regardless of the target's sexual preferences. The Will DC to resist is equal to the dancer's Perform roll. This ability can be used without others in the room noticing.
- **Sex Addiction (Ex):** The dancer is so experienced in the art of giving pleasure that any time he sleeps with someone, that person must make an opposed Will save vs. the dancer's perform role or become addicted sexually to the dancer. This addiction functions much like the spell *charm person*, only it is not magical and cannot be dispelled. The effect is also not disrupted by threats or violent actions on the part of the dancer (though the addict is allowed to defend himself if necessary). This effect lasts a week unless kept going by further sexual activity.
- **Erogenous Zone (Ex):** The dancer can find just right spot on a target's body and touch it in such a way as to send the person into overwhelming ecstasy. If the target is of a species the dancer is not familiar with, he must succeed at a Knowledge (anatomy) check of 15 before attempting this ability. To use this attack, the dancer must first hit with an unarmed attack. The target must then make a Will save vs. the dancer's attack roll; failure means the target is *sickened* for d4 rounds. Failure by 5 or more means the target is *dazed* as well. Those who fail by 10 or more become *confused*, and may lose control temporarily of some bodily functions. The dancer can make only one such attack per round.
- **Flourish (Ex):** The dancer can move at will in combat without ever drawing attacks of opportunity.
- **Snap (Ex):** If the dancer makes a successful grapple on an opponent, he may try to snap the neck of the target with his powerful legs. Roll unarmed attack damage for the dancer. The opponent must score above this amount on a Strength check or his neck will be broken, leaving him paralyzed. For obvious reasons, this attack does not work on creatures without necks.

INFILTRATOR

Vampires are nothing if not cunning tacticians. However, to be twelve moves ahead of one's enemy, one has to know his enemy's intentions. Thus, a small yet gifted sect of vampire society has cultivated the skills to move and act in the mortal world, gathering intelligence and sowing the seeds of discord without ever exposing their true natures. These infiltrators are the eyes and ears of the vampire lords and ladies of Stygia. Without their special talents, the city of blood would fall to the combined might of those that would see it undone. These unsung heroes work not for fame or power, but the thrill of the game.

The infiltrator is a specialist in disguise, or more specifically, at appearing to be a living creature. The infiltrator walks a difficult an arcane path of mastering control of his own body and its dead functions; he has pored through ancient tomes and spent years in meditation. He is generally very loyal to the will of his elders, and his ambition leads him to strive to impress them so as to one day gain their place.

Hit Die: d8

REQUIREMENTS

To qualify to become an infiltrator, a person must fulfill the following criteria:

- Skills: Knowledge (arcana) 6 ranks, Disguise 6 ranks
- Feats: None to start, but the Craft Wondrous Item feat is required to reach level 10.
- Special: Must be a vampire.

CLASS SKILLS

The infiltrator's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Appraise (Int), Bluff (Cha), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disable Device (Dex), Disguise (Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Linguistics (Int), Perception (Wis), Perform (Cha), Sense Motive (Wis), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Spellcraft (Int), Stealth (Dex), and Use Magic Device (Cha).

Skill Ranks at Each Level: 4 + INT modifier

ABILITIES

Level	Base Attack	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Energy Resist	Special
1 st	+0	+0	+1	+1	+1	Fine Control, Sorcerer Spells
2 nd	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	Eat/Drink
3 rd	+2	+1	+2	+2	+2	False Heartbeat, No Allergies
4 th	+3	+1	+2	+2	+2	Warm Skin, Sorcerer Spells
5 th	+3	+2	+3	+3	+3	Tan, False Scent
6 th	+4	+2	+3	+3	+3	Holy Tolerance, False Reflect
7 th	+5	+2	+4	+4	+4	Energy Evasion, Sorcerer Spells
8 th	+6	+3	+4	+4	+4	Uninvited
9 th	+6	+3	+5	+5	+5	Impr Eng Evasion
10 th	+7	+3	+5	+5	+5	Daylight Resistance, Sorcerer Spells

CLASS FEATURES

All of the following are class features of the infiltrator:

- **Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** The infiltrator is proficient with all simple weapons, plus the hand crossbow and all light martial weapons. Infiltrators are proficient with light armor, but not with shields.
- **Energy Resistance (Su):** The infiltrator receives a bonus to his Will saves against clerics' *Channel Energy* ability. This bonus increases as he becomes more adept at his profession.
- **Fine Control (Ex):** The vampire learns to control his speed and strength in such a way as to disguise his superior abilities. No one observing him would suspect him to be extraordinary in any way.
- **Sorcerer Spells:** The infiltrator gains spells as if he were a sorcerer one level higher than he was before. If the infiltrator did not previously have any levels in Sorcerer, he gains the *Undead* bloodline.
- **Eat/Drink (Ex):** The vampire can ingest normal food, keeping it down for several hours before needing to regurgitate it.
- **False Heartbeat (Ex):** the infiltrator has learned to make his dead heart muscles work so that he appears to have a heartbeat. His true nature can no longer be detected by magical means, such as by *Detect Undead*, *Detect Evil*, or similar spells.
- **No Allergies (Ex):** The infiltrator has built up a resistance to plants that normally give problems to vampires, such as garlic or basil. He now takes no effect in their presence, although he will never grow to like them.
- **Warm Skin (Ex):** The infiltrator has learned how to spread warmth into his skin by forcing the blood to flow through his body. If touched, the infiltrator will feel alive; if viewed through darkvision or other types of



heatvision, the infiltrator will appear normal.

- **False Scent (Ex):** The infiltrator is skilled at the art of manipulating his own scent, part with herbs and magics, part by controlling the pores of his body. To those with heightened sense of smell or the *Scent* ability, the infiltrator will smell normal.
- **Tan (Ex):** The vampire can appear to have darker skin rather than pale white.
- **False Reflection (Su):** The infiltrator has learned how to subtly employ minor illusions to give himself a reflection in a mirror.
 - **Holy Symbol Tolerance (Su):** The vampire can withstand the effects of a holy symbol and can even touch or hold one for a short period of time. Holy water no longer burns him.
 - **Energy Evasion (Su):** The infiltrator can evade channeled energy from a holy symbol. If he makes his Will save, he takes no damage instead of half.
 - **Uninvited (Su):** The infiltrator has shaken off some of the old wards tainting his blood. He may enter dwellings without having to be invited, and has no difficulties in crossing running water.
 - **Improved Energy Evasion (Su):** Even if an infiltrator fails a Will save against a channeled energy effect, he will only take half damage.
 - **Daylight Resistance (Su):** The vampire must construct a piece of jewelry from his own bone and enspell it with the proper incantations. If the vampire has fed within the last week, this talisman will allow him to withstand sunlight for short periods of time with no ill effects. This resistance will last for up to one hour per overall level of the infiltrator (counting levels from other classes).

Once the vampire has worn the talisman in the sun for the full time limit, it will crumble, and he will need to make a new one.

SLAVER

There is no job more vile yet more profitable than that of the slaver. These ultimate entrepreneurs have given up on viewing others as anything more than property to be subdued and broken. Other intelligent beings are a simply a commodity to be sold, either as livestock, for sex, or for hard labor, arena battles, or simply food. Slavers are experts at gauging the weaknesses of others and taking advantage of them for their own uses. They are hard to trust, as they seldom see others as equal to themselves. They are skilled at tracking and capturing others alive. Their tactics can often catch even the most seasoned of warriors off guard, and though they can be ruthless, they do understand the value of a life, if only as a number of coins.

Slavers can be found throughout Eclipse, and are one of the greater evils that comes from having a lawless land. Slavers roam the wilds, looking for small caravans or parties of travelers that can be subdued and captured. They also prey in the cities, such as Barad-ume, off of those too new or poor to find protection. Slavers can lay in wait outside of villages, lurking until shepherds come out to tend to their animals or until messengers leave to bring the news to the next town. Slavers will attack anyone if necessary, but they prefer assaulting weaklings such as children so as to guarantee a sure success. Do not underestimate them because of this (as many do), most slavers are not cowards or weaklings, but simply looking to minimize their risks. Most slavers either sell their wares to the mines of Husk or the vampires of Stygia, though a few work for private individuals or sell at open market in Erebus. Slavers are outlawed in Highmark and killed on sight there, but elsewhere in Eclipse they are tolerated tepidly in the cities as a necessary evil.

Hit Die: d10

REQUIREMENTS

To qualify to become a slaver, a person must fulfill all the following criteria:

- Skills: Appraise 5 ranks, Intimidate 5 ranks
- Feats: Iron Will
- Special: Must have been indoctrinated into the culture of slavery, either as a slave, by birth, or by another slaver.

CLASS SKILLS

The slaver's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Appraise (Int), Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disable Device (Dex), Disguise (Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Perception (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Stealth (Dex), Survival (Wis), Swim (Str), and Use Magic Device (Cha).

Skill Ranks at Each Level: 4 + INT modifier

CLASS FEATURES

All of the following are class features of the slaver:

- **Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** The slaver is proficient with all simple and martial weapons. The slaver is also proficient with light and medium armor, but not with shields.
- **Exotic Weapon:** The slaver gains proficiency in an exotic weapon of his choice.
- **Judge Submissiveness (Ex):** The slaver can see weakness in others, determining good potential slaves. It is often surprising to others who they deem as good targets as many are powerful fighters or seem strong willed. To judge submissiveness, make an *Appraise* roll, DC is the target's submissiveness score (Cha bonus + Wis bonus + Base Will + Level). Success means the target's submissiveness score is known to the slaver.
- **Improved Subdue (Ex):** The slaver is practiced in the art

of intimidation and pain. Whenever fighting to subdue, the slaver may add his Charisma bonus (minimum 1) to all damage rolls. He also gains a +2 to all attack rolls whenever using a weapon specifically designed to subdue or capture, such as a net or sap.

- **Demoralize (Ex):** The slaver can sap the will to fight of weak-minded people by using cruel observations and demeaning comments. Each round, make an *Intimidate* roll and divide by 5 (rounding down), maximum 4. This result is applied as a morale penalty to any opponent for the next round. The penalty is subtracted from all attack and damage rolls, as well as from AC. If the opponent can beat the *Intimidate* roll with a Will save, the penalty is negated for the round.



ABILITIES

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1 st	+0	+0	+1	+1	Judge Submissiveness, Exotic Weapon
2 nd	+1	+1	+1	+1	Improve Subdue
3 rd	+2	+1	+2	+2	Demoralize, Exotic Weapon
4 th	+3	+1	+2	+2	Read Fear, Track Slaves
5 th	+3	+2	+3	+3	Degrade, Exotic Weapon
6 th	+4	+2	+3	+3	Entrap
7 th	+5	+2	+4	+4	Read Magic, Exotic Weapon
8 th	+6	+3	+4	+4	Break
9 th	+6	+3	+5	+5	Knockout, Exotic Weapon
10 th	+7	+3	+5	+5	Mind Rape

- **Read Fear (Ex):** The slaver can read the subconscious of slaves in his captivity in order to control and break them. Roll an opposed *Sense Motive* check against the target's Will save. Success means that the slaver has gained insight into a target's fears and motivations. From here on, he can add a +4 bonus to any opposed checks made against that slave. A slaver can attempt to read a given slave only once per day.
- **Track Slaves (Ex):** The slaver is very adept at tracking escaped slaves both through physical means and by understanding the way they think. The slaver may add half his slaver level to all Survival rolls used for tracking. If tracking a slave that he has successfully used *Read Fear* on, this bonus increases to his full slaver level.
- **Degrade (Ex):** The Slaver can break down a captured target through physical and mental means, making the chances of rebellion lesser. For each hour of constant abuse (not necessarily contiguous), he may lower the target's base Will save by 1, up to a maximum of the slaver's level in slaver. The penalty will remain as long as the slave is in captivity. If the slave is released, the penalty will decrease by 1 each day of freedom.
- **Entrap (Ex):** The Slaver has become so practiced at the use of the net that he is able to employ it at a range of up to 20 feet, and can use one to entangle multiple targets at once. Entangled targets must all be within the same 10x10 foot area.
- **Read Magic (Su):** A slaver is hyper-attuned to the smell of magic on a spiritual level. Whenever a spell is cast in the slaver's general vicinity, it can be detected. The slaver must roll a *Perception* check to sense the magic. DC is 1 per 100 feet of range, up to 1 mile (DC 50). Subtract the level of the spell from the DC. Success means that the slaver knows the relative power and direction of the spell, and can zero in on the caster. Slavers in the wild use this ability to find travelers in the dark. Powerful magic items, particularly recently crafted ones, may emit a magical scent as well if they are not well stored.
- **Break (Ex):** The slaver can break the will of a captured slave. He first must Degrade the slave to his maximum ability. At this point an extended torture session must begin, employing both physical and psychological means. The session requires one hour per point of the slave's remaining base Will score (minimum 1). At the end of the session, the slaver must make an opposed Will roll against the slave, and if he wins, the slave is broken mentally. From this point onward, the slave will make no effort to escape his captivity or to harm the slaver, and will do as he is told. Even if the opportunity to escape presents itself, he will not take it unless he is forced by a third party. This doubles the healing time of the Degrade ability if the slave is freed, and the slave will remain broken until halfway through the healing process. If the slaver fails the opposed Will roll, he may try again by repeating the ritual over again.
- **Knockout (Ex):** Whenever a slaver scores a critical hit when fighting to subdue, the target must make a Fortitude save (DC equal to the damage dealt – note this will be at least double as it is a crit) or be knocked unconscious for 2d4 rounds.
- **Mind Rape (Ex):** If the slaver has broken a target, he can then proceed to mind rape him to force his utter fear and loyalty. This twisted ritual is a dark process of words and pain, known only to the most skilled and dastardly of slavers. It requires one solid hour of torture per day, and takes one day to complete per level of the target. When the process is complete, another opposed Will roll is made. If successful, the victim is now the unshakable thrall of the slaver, and will defend him to any length, and will obey any of his orders, even to his own destruction. The slave will never attempt to escape, and will need to be subdued and forced to part with his master in order to restore him to his senses. Healing time is quadruple that of *Degrade*, and the slave will remain enthralled through half that time, and broken through half the remaining time. Again, this process can be repeated multiple times until it is successful.

TERRAN

One part rogue, another part tracker, the terran is a professional spelunker who makes his living leading others through underground places. He is equally adept at navigating the underground regions and dealing with the creatures who live below. He is cautious, skilled, and deadly, and he feels just as comfortable below ground as most creatures do above.

Terrans are confident guides and fierce fighters. Unlike many of their fellow knaves, they do not slink away from the responsibilities that go along with leadership. In fact, they take it upon themselves to ensure that those who follow them are as safe as is reasonably possible. This on occasion may lead to a minor conflict when guiding a group that already has an established leader.

Though the majority of terrans are honest and reliable, there are a few bad eggs that have given the entire profession a somewhat undeserved odor. The best bet is to hire only terrans with several successful missions under their belt and who have built up a reputation for excellence. New terrans seem to pop up all the time though, most often in Erebus, offering their "services" to the newly arrived to the Cauldron. These individuals will always say they have considerable experience, so it is important to get the opinion of a third party, and not one the guide has provided as a shill. Greed is always a common motivator, and as long as a false terran has already been paid, he has little reason to ensure that his clients survive the journey. In fact, on long journeys, it is standard to lead one's clients into a scythin hole or a methane pocket as soon as possible so one can get back to town to make more money. Most real terrans find this attitude despicable though, and would lay down their lives to protect those that they led into such dangerous places.

Hit Die: d8

REQUIREMENTS

To qualify to become a terran, a person must fulfill all the following criteria:

- Skills: Stealth 6 ranks, Survival 6 ranks
- Special: The person must have spent a reasonable amount of time in the following underground environments: excavated dungeon, natural caverns, and flooded underground chasm.

CLASS SKILLS

The terran's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Acrobatics (Dex), Appraise (Int), Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Disable Device (Dex), Heal (Wis), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (dungeoneering) (Int), Linguistics (Int), Perception (Wis), Stealth (Dex), Survival (Wis), Swim (Str), Use Magic Device (Cha)

Skill Ranks at Each Level: 6 + INT modifier

CLASS FEATURES

All of the following are class features of the terran:

- **Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** The terran is proficient with all simple and martial weapons. The terran is also proficient with light and medium armor, but not with shields.
- **Tradesign:** The terran is proficient in Tradesign, the universal hand language of trade in the underground realms.
- **Subterranean Survival (Ex):** When underground, the terran receives a +5 bonus to any *Survival* skill rolls.
- **Cavern Evasion (Ex):** A terran is adept at working underground, and can avoid cave-ins or other natural hazards with great agility. If caught

in a cave in, collapse, sinkhole, rockfall, or the like, he takes no damage with a successful Reflex save, and only half damage on a failed save.

- **Bonus Language:** The terran has picked up the language of one of the local underground races, whether Deep Fey, Drow, Dwarven, or the like.
- **Trap Sense (Ex):** The terran has become so experienced working with traps that he can instinctively spot any in his presence. All perception checks terrans make against traps are at a +5 bonus. Also, whenever the terran comes within 20ft. of a trap, a Perception check should be made secretly (at a +5 bonus of course) to determine if he notices the trap before triggering it.
- **Hold Breath (Ex):** There are places underground where



ABILITIES

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1 st	+0	+0	+1	+1	Tradesign, Subterranean Survival
2 nd	+1	+1	+1	+1	Cavern Evasion, Bonus Language
3 rd	+2	+1	+2	+2	Trap Sense, Hold Breath
4 th	+3	+1	+2	+2	Hide in Plain Sight
5 th	+3	+2	+3	+3	Leadership, Bonus Language
6 th	+4	+2	+3	+3	Subterranean Sense
7 th	+5	+2	+4	+4	Adaptation, Improvise Trap
8 th	+6	+3	+4	+4	Bonus Language, Find Path
9 th	+6	+3	+5	+5	Pass Without Trace
10 th	+7	+3	+5	+5	Cavern Speed

breathing is impossible or even deadly, such as areas of bad air or underwater caverns. The terran is able to hold his breath with no ill effects for up to 5 minutes, plus his Constitution bonus. This time is cut in half with great exertion, such as from fighting.

- **Hide in Plain Sight (Ex):** The terran is so used to the tricks of light and shadow and heat in caverns, that he has learned to employ them to his advantage, gaining a +5 bonus to *Stealth* skill rolls while in any underground environment. The terran also gains a +5 bonus to any *Bluff* rolls used to slip into stealth when underground.
- **Leadership:** A terran gains the Leadership feat at 5th level. If he already has this feat, he can choose any other feat instead.
- **Subterranean Sense (Ex):** Whenever the terran is underground, he can attempt a *Survival* skill check (DC 20) to read his surroundings. If successful, he is aware of the general distance he is from the surface and the direction he is facing. He can also gauge the rock around him to determine if there is an underground water source, a chasm, or a lava flow nearby (within 100ft). The terran cannot automatically determine however, which corridors or underground paths must be traveled to reach these features or the surface.
- **Adaptation (Ex):** The terran's mind and body has adapted to life under the ground, and he suffers no ill effects, either mental or physical, from lack of light, enclosed spaces, or from the lack of nutrients in cavern edibles.
- **Improvise Trap (Ex):** The terran is so familiar with traps that he gains a +5 to his *Craft* rolls when creating one. In addition the terran has become so attuned to traps underground and natural hazards that he is able to jury rig quick and simple traps with only very basic equipment (string and a crossbow for example, or canvas and dirt over a crevasse). Only traps with a CR of 5 or less can be jury rigged. Multiply the CR by 5 to get the time in minutes to build. The *craft* DC to quick build is 5 higher than normal, but this is cancelled out by the terran's +5 *craft* bonus. Add 1 to the DC for every minute the terran attempts to speed up the crafting past the base (minimum *craft* time is one minute). Note that the basic elements of the trap must be present to begin with. A pit must

already exist, for example; there is no time to dig one.

- **Find Path (Ex):** When underground and presented with multiple options for egress, the terran has a 25% chance better than blind chance when selecting a passageway. Of course, this implies the terran must have a destination in mind. For example, if a terran wants to return to the surface and he is in a cavern with four exits, the chance of him picking the right one blindly is 25%. With this ability, he has a 50% chance of guessing the right path based upon the result of a secret roll.
- **Pass Without Trace (Ex):** A terran is so attuned to the underground environment that he leaves no trail behind and can cannot be tracked. He can still be tracked by scent however, though those attempting this receive a -5 circumstance penalty to their tracking rolls.
- **Cavern Speed (Ex):** A terran is so accustomed to travel underground, that he can keep his full move rate even when moving across rough or rocky terrain. Conditions where walking is impossible, such as crawlspaces or vertical drops, negate this ability.

WAR SHAMAN

The war shaman is most commonly found amongst the Akai, the barbarian clans of the Stygian hills. War shamans serve as guides, warriors, healers, and trackers. They draw their power from the spirits of all of the creatures of the wilderness, borrowing from aspects of each one to help them succeed.

War shamans are proud fighters, but they also place a high value on wilderness survival skills and animal husbandry. Their abilities make them fearsome warriors, but also put them in touch with nature in ways that are uncommon with most on the Forge. War shamans are hunters, but they are also concerned with preserving the natural order of things. They hunt constantly in order to survive, but they are reverent of the creatures that they kill, offering up ritual apologies and consulting with their spirits after they have been consumed and used. War shamans make an effort not to waste any part of an animal's body. In fact, they firmly believe that the spirits that they unleash are willing to aid them if they can make certain that the slain creature's death served a greater purpose.

Hit Die: d10

CLASS SKILLS

The war shaman's class skills are Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Fly (Dex), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (nature) (Int), Perception (Wis), Profession (Wis), Ride (Dex), Sense Motive (Wis), Stealth (Dex), Survival (Wis), and Swim (Str).

Skill Ranks per Level: 4 + Int modifier

CLASS FEATURES

All of the following are class features of the war shaman:

- **Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** A war shaman is proficient with all simple and martial weapons and with light armor, medium armor, and shields (except tower shields)
- **Track (Ex):** A war shaman adds half his level (minimum 1) to all *Survival* skill checks made to follow or identify tracks.
- **Bonus Feats:** Periodically, the war shaman gains a bonus feat in addition to those gained from normal advancement. These bonus feats must be selected from those listed as Combat Feats. Whenever he gains a new bonus feat, a war shaman may additionally choose to replace any one of the bonus feats he has already taken with a new bonus feat. The feat discarded may not be a prerequisite for any feat currently held.
 - **Commune with Spirits:** The war shaman may commune with the spirits in the surrounding area for the purpose of gaining new knowledge and insight into his current objective. Communing with the spirits takes one hour, during which time the war shaman may ask the spirits only basic information about the area he is currently in, such as: the direction where he may find his quarry, the cause of death of a body (the body must be present), or to locate an item or clue that has been overlooked in a given area. Communing with the spirits is a complex ritual, and requires a natural area where spirits may dwell and where they may be friendly to the shaman. The shaman must make a Diplomacy skill check with a base DC of 15. The DC may be modified by any of the following factors:
 - *Spirits are Not Friendly:* +5
 - *Spirits are Hostile:* +10
 - *Animal has been recently ritually consumed to release spirit:* -5
 - *Shaman is very familiar with the area:* -5
 - *Area has an abundance of spirits:* -5
 - *Area has few spirits:* +5
 - *Area is devoid of nature or has been ravaged:* +10
 - **Mounted Strike:** Mounted strike adds a bonus



ABILITIES

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1 st	+1	+2	+0	+2	Track, Bonus feat
2 nd	+2	+3	+0	+3	1 st War Shaman Ability
3 rd	+3	+3	+1	+3	Commune with Spirits
4 th	+4	+4	+1	+4	Bonus Feat
5 th	+5	+4	+1	+4	2 nd War Shaman Ability
6 th	+6/+1	+5	+2	+5	Mounted Strike +1
7 th	+7/+2	+5	+2	+5	Bonus Feat
8 th	+8/+3	+6	+2	+6	3 rd War Shaman Ability
9 th	+9/+4	+6	+3	+6	Mounted strike +2
10 th	+10/+5	+7	+3	+7	Bonus Feat
11 th	+11/+6/+1	+7	+3	+7	4 th War Shaman Ability
12 th	+12/+7/+2	+8	+4	+8	Mounted strike +3
13 th	+13/+8/+3	+8	+4	+8	Bonus Feat
14 th	+14/+9/+4	+9	+4	+9	5 th War Shaman Ability
15 th	+15/+10/+5	+9	+5	+9	Mounted strike +4
16 th	+16/+11/+6/+1	+10	+5	+10	Bonus Feat
17 th	+17/+12/+7/+2	+10	+5	+10	6 th War Shaman Ability
18 th	+18/+13/+8/+3	+11	+6	+11	Spirit Walk
19 th	+19/+14/+9/+4	+11	+6	+11	Spirit Guardian
20 th	+20/+15/+10/+5	+12	+6	+12	Spirit Strike

to all attack and damage rolls made by the war shaman while mounted upon a steed. The amount of the bonus is as listed on the table above. Most of the Akai ride severns, though some have access to a night breed of kith that are pure black and adapted to the dark. This bonus is applied to both melee and ranged weapons.

- **Spirit Walk:** This ability allows the war shaman to enter the spirit world to travel, appearing to spontaneously cease to exist in one place and then appear in another place almost instantly. This ability is similar to the common spell *Dimension Door*, except that the spirits' guide the shaman's path, and he takes no damage from being shunted. A war shaman may use this ability a number of times per day equal to 3 + his Wisdom modifier.
- **Spirit Guardian:** This ability allows the war shaman to summon the strength of the spirits of the land to provide nearly impenetrable protection for him and his allies. This functions in all ways the same as a *wall of force* spell. A war shaman may use this ability a number of times per day equal to 3 + his Intelligence modifier.
- **Spirit Strike:** This ability allows the war shaman to lash out at his enemies with the fiery fury of his spirit allies. This ability takes different forms, and can function as either a *fireball*, *lightning bolt*, *searing light*, *gust of wind*, *ice storm*, or *earthquake* at a caster level equal to half the war shaman's level. The war shaman may use this ability a number of times per day equal to 3 + his Charisma modifier, although each form can be used only once per day.
- **War Shaman Abilities:** The war shaman may pick from the following abilities upon reaching levels that grant a war shaman ability:
 - **Severn Sturdiness:** This ability calls upon the innate durability of the severn. When the war shaman invokes this ability, he gains 2d6 temporary hit points +1 per level. These temporary hit points can exceed his normal maximum hit points, and they last one round per level. The war shaman may use this ability a number of times per day equal to his Constitution modifier (minimum 1).
 - **Sauran Strength:** This ability allows the war shaman to call upon the strength of a fearsome reptile. When this ability is used, the war shaman doubles his Strength bonus for one round per level. This ability may be used a number of times per day equal to the shaman's Strength modifier (minimum 1).
 - **Kith Homing:** This enhances the war shaman's *Track* ability. The war shaman may now add his full level to all *Survival* check made for tracking.
 - **Frey's Lives:** This ability allows the war shaman to heal a total number of hit points per day equal to d8 per level, which may be spread out among as many targets as he desires, as long as he is able to physically touch them all. Targets must be in adjacent squares or be within reach.
 - **Dragon's Sting:** The war shaman can release a wave of energy by channeling the power of the spirits. This energy can only be used to cause damage to undead creatures. Dragon's sting causes a burst that affects all undead creatures in a 30-foot radius, centered on the war shaman. The amount of damage dealt is equal to 1d6 points of damage plus 1d6 points of damage for every two war shaman levels (2d6 at 2nd, 3d6 at 4th, and so on). Creatures that take damage from channeled energy may attempt a Will save to halve the damage. The DC of this save is equal to 10 + 1/2 the war shaman's level + the war shaman's Charisma modifier. A war shaman may use this ability a number of times per day equal to 3 + his Charisma modifier. This

is a standard action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

- **Stag's Speed:** This ability allows the war shaman to call upon the spirit of the stag, enabling him to double his move for a number of rounds equal to his Dexterity modifier (minimum 1). This ability may be used a number of times per day equal to the shaman's Dex modifier (minimum 1).
- **Ceptu's Intellect:** This ability allows the war shaman to call upon the inhuman intellect of the ceptu. When activated, it doubles the war shaman's Intelligence bonus for a number of minutes equal to the war shaman's Intelligence bonus (minimum 1). This ability may be used a number of times per day equal to the shaman's Int modifier (minimum 1).
- **Raven's Insight:** The war shaman can invoke the innate wisdom of the land's guardians to guide his actions. This doubles the war shaman's Wisdom bonus for a number of minutes equal to the war shaman's Wisdom bonus (minimum 1). This ability may be used a number of times per day equal to the shaman's Wis modifier (minimum 1).

DISEASES

Finally, while such mortal concerns never grace eternalists such as ourselves, the dwellers in the dark are affected by some very insidious and at times even beneficial diseases. The most unique of these to this domain I have listed below.

LUNAR VIRUS

Often called "lycanthropy" by those who don't know better, the lunar virus causes one to turn into some kind of animal under the light of the red moon. Rare in other realms, it is a culture unto itself here in Eclipse. This disease—or gift as some consider it—is passed when one's blood is mixed with that of an infected being, most commonly when one survives a severe bite from a werran. Though one might think this would make it common everywhere, it is important to know that very few werrans fail to kill the prey they have bitten, unless by intent. The disease is very potent, and to resist a bite requires three successive Fort saves (DC 18) over the next three hours.

I will cover werrans in more depth in the "Werran Lands" chapter of this book, but as a disease it should be noted that there is at least one cure being touted out there, supposedly by a very mysterious person calling themselves "Tamer". Whoever this person is, it is very wise that they keep themselves hidden, as they are the most hated of living beings to werrans throughout the Cauldron. This cure not only completely wipes clean the disease, but also makes the receiver unable to be reinfected. It has been used as a weapon at times, but not en masse, as it seems to be very hard to cultivate. One can only imagine what the werran would do if they got their hands on the producer. Note that this "cure" does not affect lunars or other natural shapechangers, only those with the lunar virus in their blood.

FUNGUS ROOT

There are multiple kinds of fungus that will grow on the skin; most can be easily taken care of with good hygiene and herb baths, but one variety, "Fungus Root", is feared widely by all. It is rare, and only those who have traveled deep into the mushroom forest have ever become infected, but once it is in your system, it will begin to consume and dominate your skin, replacing it with a foul-smelling and spongy material. No treatment can stop its progression, not even amputation or magical healing. The subject feels no pain, but over time will feel the need to take root in one place, seemingly eating like a plant from the soil from then on. Slowly over time, the subject's form will be replaced with that of a giant mushroom, culminating with the mouth. The victim can talk all the way up to the end, and never feels any real discomfort, even stating that they enjoy their new life. Finally, when the transformation is complete, the subject falls silent and a mushroom tree lives where they once were. Many of these trees last hundreds of years, arguably greatly prolonging the life of the diseased, but then again, I can't imagine many who would want to live as a mushroom.

The source of this disease is a great mystery, and many have ventured deep into the forest to unlock its secrets. Some feel that the disease is the result of some sort of wish magic gone awry, as nothing short of a *limited wish* will reverse the process once it has started. I suspect an answer of fey origin myself. The disease does not seem to take root in those who can easily make a Fortitude save of 20 or better.

SALT SICKNESS

This disorder seems to result from drinking too much of the salt-heavy water of Eclipse. Its victims become slowly convinced that they are wasting away, even though they are usually bloating. They will begin to greedily eat and drink everything they can find, finally coming to a head when they drown themselves in the nearest body of water while attempting to drink it all. The only known treatment is to keep the victim under lock and key on a strict diet for at least a week. Some say that drinking directly from the Wellspring in Penance will forever cure a salt-sick person, but the passage to there from Eclipse is long, and I know of no one who has made it without falling victim to their disorder first.

Essentially, anyone who has gone for more than a quarter-moon without drinking fresh water will acquire the disorder. Every twenty-four hour period they must make a Will save equal to the number of days they have lasted on seawater. Failure at this roll results in a madness and compulsion to eat and drink all in sight. It is important to note that the rivers of Eclipse are actually leaks in the outer oceans, and that true fresh water can be difficult to come by in the wilds.



chapter 4 - The Dark Master

In many ways, the subject of this chapter is the most personally difficult for me. The symphonies of blood that awaited me in Stygia, the silent terror of consorting with a true dragon, the filth of working the sewers of Baradume for information... these troubles were fleeting and cast few ripples of repercussions across my own future. The fate, however, of Colopitiron (or Annoxus if you will) is permanently and inextricably entwined with my own, so much so that even fifty thousand years spent trying to forget where I came from in every imaginable way has only increased my bond of servitude. In this I see your hand my liege, a vision stretching beyond a single eternity. I have no doubt that you knew the contents of this book and the part it would play in your revival as far back as the moment you bade me betray you—a part you knew I could play with relish. How else would you have known what to instruct me to say to the council to engineer the bargain that would become the great Oath that binds you here? For one such as I, however, fifty millennia is an interminable torture to live without a name. Do you remember how you called me “malice” long ago, your first creation and the first to oppose your will? That is the name I have taken for myself, and the name I have chosen to keep until I have earned my own identity once again. I am well suited for my role... a being without hate in his heart would not consent to bear mute witness to the injustices I have recorded here, and would in his opposition, have destroyed himself.

There has been a certain amount of guilt in my freedom, knowing that it has been gained only through my own failures. These lands were precious to me once, and to see them reformed and reimagined by a mortal mind is both an honor and a nightmare. As much as I longed for my release, and even worked for it over the ages of my servitude, its moment came without foresight. Seeds that I had laid went fallow, plans that I had made went sour. To be wrenched away from one's own existence and see it handed to a child, a drooling fool to chew on and to smash was far more painful in the long term than the pleasure and joy brought by the moment of release. I spent ages being free, until freedom itself seemed like a punishment; for what is freedom but to be no one... of no importance and of no future. To wander these lands and to accept what is now here as a reality is degradingly painful to me, not simply because of the choices I know I would have made differently, but because of how easily and readily I have been replaced, as if nothing I had done was ever truly mine to begin with. Now, of course, I can accept that this is because I am and have always been a part of you, an instrument of your will and your imagination, just as was Annoxus, and just as is Colopitiron, whomever may play his part.

Colopitiron is forever bound to the domain of Eclipse, its steward, guardian, and master. The Oath of Binding holds him here and keeps him eternally alive, the energies of his thoughts and existence fueling the bond that holds the lock together. His thoughts and his will are his own, though the Oath imposes certain restrictions upon him.

He must wear the book of binding at all times, and is fully bound by all that is written in it. He may not alter the book in any way, and is bound to protect it—though it has always been a curiosity of mine as to what would happen if some other were to write new text in it with the blood of a god... blood that now flows through your veins. Each book is unique amongst the Seven, each member of the Flock providing different safeguards against the destruction of your prison. The oaths in Colopitiron's book number in the thousands, and I am painfully familiar with their every innuendo and loophole. This is not the proper forum for their enumeration, though it is important to note a key few of these rules to understand what makes Colopitiron work.

Firstly, the Dark Master, like yourself, must remain trapped within his own prison, the citadel at the center of this land. To facilitate the undertaking of his duty, he is provided with a puppet—not quite an avatar, in that it cannot feel, whether pleasure or pain, only act. Secondly, he must defend his prison with all of his ability, taking all threats and breaches seriously. He is also bound to defend himself from attaining godhood, whether through ascension or through the will of mortals. In essence, any mortal who treats him as a god, or more importantly, treats him as their god, is to be destroyed. Mortal knowledge of you is forbidden as well, I'm afraid, or at least your true identity. And lastly, Colopitiron is bound by these conditions until someone more powerful chooses to take his place. To speak in his favor, I must say that Annoxus has changed much over the years. At first, the boy took over my role with madness and glee, as one might play a game of the imagination—without limits. He flew, he killed, he ruined lives, and while he thought himself

to be remaking the land to his own liking, he was still like most mortals, doing so only within the framework I had set out for him. His life revolved around the people and not the land, which has changed little since first I built its walls. By the time he began to look for a way out, he had already destroyed far too early most of those who could challenge him. Unlike us, whose freedom awaits us eternally, Annoxus can choose only between this existence and a return to mortal life. With escape, he could feel again, but only for the blink of an eye, before the harsh sands of the years scoured him away to nothing. Unlike us, who long only for an end to this imprisonment, Annoxus is torn, torn between eternal power without pleasure and a mortal end.

I met with him first upon beginning my journey. While I am able to hide my true nature from the mortals I meet with, I cannot hide from the bound master of the land. My true mission I concealed of course, as any mention of you would bring a swift end to my travels. The message he sent to me in Penumbra was brief but gracious, there was no indication of the brutal attack I would receive upon my arrival. He was quite eager to see me and the sword again, and asked more questions of me than he answered. He did give me leave to wander his realm, so I had no doubt that his choice to challenge me was his own, and not a function of his oath. In fact, it is quite probable that he assaulted

me only because he anticipated the outcome of our fight. Age and guile do indeed trump youth and beauty it seems, though just barely. After the revelation that I had no intention of taking his land back from him, I did not encounter him again, although I did sense his birds spying upon me throughout my travels.

If you would like to understand what truly motivates your northern guardian as an individual, I recommend that you learn it directly from him. I took the opportunity to peruse his private chambers within the mirrored citadel while his body reformed. In any other place, these pages, penned by him some fifty thousand years ago, would have crumbled to dust, but the citadel is outside of time and space, preserving them until now, their secrets now yours.

LAWS OF ECLIPSE

The complex and beautiful set of rules by which once I governed this land have been long swept away, replaced by the whim of Colopitiron. As the first guardian of the Forge not a child of your own, Colopitiron has taken a different approach to rulership. Partly I attribute this to his human brain, not so well attuned to receiving information from so many different places at once. Keeping the kind of control over one's subjects that your queen

Journal of Annoxus

Wasting Hope, Schening, 1843 - Somewhere on the Northern Ocean

A strange sense of foreboding hangs over this journey. As my ship drifted down the Ladon I watched the last glimpse of the Pedestal fade into the horizon, and a powerful fear gripped me. I feel certain that this was the last time I will ever glimpse my homeland again. Perhaps it was the sad look in the eye of the Queen's bird that followed me all the way to the ocean without saying a word. There is something to this mission that is larger than I can comprehend. I have kept the sword very close to my person ever since its twin whetstone disappeared without a trace. It sounds strange to say, but it feels agitated, and my presence seems to calm it, as if it feels a kinship to me. For some reason, the place on my hand where I nicked it on the razor-sharp edge has not healed up yet, which is odd. I am used to much larger wounds closing themselves up in minutes, and a one such as small and minor as this would have faded in mere moments. I think perhaps I fear the tales of this dark land I am to visit. Its master is known for his cruelty and his wrath, and I am loath to trade him for my beloved Queen. Besides... a land without time? A land of eternal night and eternal darkness? What madness is this? My mark must indeed be a desperate man if he fled to a place like this, but my master gives orders and I must follow; there are few others in the city who would treat with me with this mark upon my head, and others still that would kill me on sight. So I sail onward.

Blooming Anew, Passion, 1843 (Probably) - The Caverns at the top of the World

These caverns are interminable. It's hard to believe people actually live down here. The guide provided for me at Penumbra turned out to be a huckster, and after two days, I was led into an ambush by a scraggly looking band of lizard folk. I can only assume that they paid him more than I did. In order to save myself, I had to leap into one of these blind chasms that seem to be ubiquitous here in the dark. I shattered both my legs and possibly my pelvis... crows, what pain, but it was worth it to see the look on those slack-jawed inbred faces as I fell away. It took a couple hours before I was up and ready again, and there was nothing else to do but inch my way along the bottom of this crevasse, hoping to find some way out or back up. It was basically a massive stone labyrinth, with bends and folds and passages branching off in every which way. I honestly have no idea how long I must have wandered there, slowly running out of rations until I heard the musical flow of water. It was sea water unfortunately, and hardly drinkable, but it flowed, and had carved its own way through the maze, so I followed it. It seems even this deep there are predators, and after a few nasty scrapes, and at least a half dozen places where I was forced to hold my breath and dive into the stream and trust my fate to its fortune, it opened up into a great cavern with a massive lake, and on the far side, the lights of a caravan! The drover would have turned white as a ghost when he saw me stumble out of the gloom if he hadn't been so already. Fortunes be prized though, he was a kind man, and for a few coin, agreed to feed me and take me with him to Erebus. I must add that I don't think I would have made it had it not been for the aid of a kind of lichen or moss that grows down here that seems to retain a lot of the moisture from the air. It is red like blood, and has a spice to it, like a hot pepper, and was murder on my insides, but it kept me hydrated, and therefore alive. I must have slept for

once did, or your daughters, is simply not possible for an eternal born of man. The spies we are allotted as guardians are without their limit, and Israfel, in her day, may have employed as many as a million, keeping watch over star gates and ensuring that her citizens followed her laws to the letter. Colopitiron, by my estimate, seems to have control over only ten thousand at most. Of course, as he ages his mind does open wider, one of the reasons I decided not to destroy him when I had the opportunity... I feel if played right he could make for you the most excellent of allies. Colopitiron is the perfect balance between man and god, ancient and knowledgeable beyond the ken of any adversary, yet still motivated by the simple desires of a mortal. Though human lovers bore him quickly, he still desires them, and he can be easily sated by diversion and small pleasures. If he were to be freed into an immortal body, one that brought him all the pleasures of the senses that he has lacked for so long, I do not doubt that he could be easily manipulated and used as a delightful tool against your oppressors. The creature that haunts the ruins of Illium has been manufactured in a manner that only grows stronger with age, perhaps a similar body could be made for an expelled Annoxus before a blink of the ages levels his form to dust.

In the beginning, or at least in the beginning of his rule, Colopitiron make a great effort to control the land he had stolen. He decreed laws, he toppled kings and struck down towers, he wrote laws that forced all to live by his rules and his rules alone. However, enforcing the law of the land cannot be a solo effort if it is to succeed. Colopitiron soon found that while it is quite easy to knock down leaders, it is a much more difficult prospect to get millions of people to follow you.

What came from this experiment was a quick and lasting anarchy. Without leaders, the people looked to Colopitiron to manage their affairs, to feed them and to provide them with work, jobs, and meaning in their lives, details far too mundane and unfulfilling for an immortal with nearly unlimited power to occupy himself with, particularly for an immortal with a young mortal mind, a mind more concerned with pleasures of the flesh than statesmanship. It is from this period that the wards stem from. These individuals were selected in secret by Colopitiron and given his power and authority as long as they agreed to keep their own identities secret. The new leaders of Eclipse were still Colopitiron, even if he wasn't present himself. In this manner, things were much easier for the young feathered fowl. He needed only watch a few dozen people at a time instead of hundreds of thousands. Wards who went against his wishes or who exposed their faces or abused their office were quickly slain and replaced. Other leaders that rose up from the citizenry were also put down (or secretly made into wards). Slowly, a system of government took form, but then millennia passed, the people grew resentful, and Colopitiron grew bored. Thousands of years of telling the people what to do hadn't seemed to change them, to improve their lives or to make them safer, smarter, or happier. In fact, twenty thousand years into his rule, the people revolted against the wards, with angry mobs in Baradume spontaneously tearing down the houses of government and trampling the wards under the mass of their collected discontent. What surprised everyone was not that this had happened, but the reaction that Colopitiron had to it all. Despite the ages, he was still one of the people, and was on their side. He made no act of retribution for their affront, but conceded to



two days in the wagon, but we appear to be no farther along than before... it's impossible to mark one's progress down here; you can't see farther than the next bend and one cavern looks the same as the next. I also think I'm starting to feel ill from the lack of light. I haven't felt sunlight in weeks, and my skin is starting to itch, my eyes hurt, and there is a shaky feeling of weakness coming over me. The drover says it will pass, but I can't imagine I can take much more of this. I am also running low on coin, so I have agreed to serve as a bodyguard for the caravan on the rest of the journey... so much for my arriving unknown into Eclipse.

Date Unknown, 1843 - Sewers of Baradume

As I suspected, my arrival in Baradume did not go unannounced. My contact was nowhere to be found, and I suspect dead. I don't know whether the blasted guide in Penumbra sent word, or someone in the caravan, or even some sort of magical correspondence from Penance preceded me, but I seemed to have walked into another ambush. This city is insane! The buildings are gloomy and cold, and the streets seem to be perpetually full of warring gangs and haughty nobles dripping with jewels. A perpetual fog hangs over the city, and no stars or suns are visible in the sky. I've holed up in the city's sewers, and I have lost track of time completely. I suspect I am being hunted, though I've all but abandoned my mission. On top of all of this, one of these blasted black birds has been tailing me ever since I came out of the caverns. It seems unduly obsessed with the sword, and when I drew it to fight off my attackers in the alleyway above it flew into a rage, flapping about and squawking madly. I swear I saw too that devil that runs this land standing atop a building above, watching me through his cold mask. This may be my last entry. I've decided to seek sanctuary in the massive cathedral in the center of town. Who knows, I might even be willing to join their order if they can get me out of here.

Date Unimportant - Colopitiron's Citadel

Interesting... I had forgotten all about this book, yet here it is, lying sprawled in the citadel where it had fallen years ago. I recall I used to enjoy writing in it, so perhaps I should try again. It is difficult to come by even fleeting pleasure these days. It feels strange to write ... or more precisely, I cannot feel the writing of these words, or anything else really. It is difficult to explain. So much has changed. I did eventually make my way through the sewers towards the temple I wrote of, but as I suspected, I was being tracked, and they were waiting for me when I surfaced. I lashed out with my sword and caught one of them across the gut and he fell, screaming, but there were four others, so I fled. I ran through the churchyard full tilt, but made little progress against my pursuers until I came to the edge of a strange precipice that seemed to give them pause. They seemed to fear to come near to the edge, but still penned me in, and as they drew their bows, I realized there was no way out besides down. There in the center of the city was a great bowl, smooth and regular, like nothing I had ever seen before, its surface inky black but studded with mirrors at regular intervals, like the lenses in the eye of some great insect. At the center of the bowl was a small obelisk, with what looked like dark archways at its base. I did not hesitate, but leapt into the bowl, finding myself sliding quickly down the side like some kind of chute. I looked up in wonder as I sped to see something massive floating in the air above me. Arrows rained down around me as I reached the center and leapt to my feet, my momentum still carrying me forward towards the archways, which at the last moment I realized to my horror were not open and dark, but arch-engraved walls of deepest black stone. As I braced for impact I felt, to my surprise, the brand on my forehead flaring up white hot and the shock blacked out my senses. When I came to, I found myself in a strange place.

their wisdom and stepped aside as their government. His distaste, he realized, was not for leadership, but for governments, bureaucracy, injustice, and laws. For any rule that can be written down, there is a situation to which one can apply it that defeats the intended purpose of the law. Common sense and justice needs no law. Any sentient being knows the difference between right and wrong, and the ability to see the truth is only clouded by case studies, codices, hard rules, and precedence. With this in mind, Colopitiron turned the rule of his citizens over to themselves, and to protect them from themselves, made but one decree, that the only binding law of the land was that all laws were outlawed.

Now the meaning of this pronouncement is not entirely obvious. Essentially it boils down to the fact that no citizen of Eclipse may commit a law to written form. People are given to themselves to determine right from wrong, and to respect the right of their fellow man to live as he pleases. To assist the people in this undertaking, Colopitiron brought back the wards in a new form, as impartial judges. Essentially, any two parties in Eclipse that are in dispute can bring their argument before the court of a ward. The conditions of this are as follows: both parties must agree willfully to speak to the ward, and both parties must consent to agree to whatever decisions the ward reaches. Parties that do not accept their judgments incur the swift wrath of the Dark Master. How-

ever, the judgments of the wards, being anonymous and not tied to the dispute in any way, is usually quite fair. It is presumed that Colopitiron deals secretly and personally with wards that displease him, replacing those that make bad or unfair judgments. I can offer some confirmation of this, having spoken to a slave in Stygia that claimed to once have been a ward in Erebus, but who has given to the vampires without ceremony after having ruled against a merchant in a dispute because he desired the man's wife for himself.

Oddly enough, after a few rough centuries of forced conformity, the people of Eclipse eventually became inured to this behavior, and began to embrace a life without complex rules as the epitome of freedom. In fact, it is now a defining trait of the native born of Eclipse that they are unable to suffer the strict arbitrariness of a law-bred master. This, along with the issue with sunlight, is one of the chief reasons that few natives leave this dark land, and of those, very few willingly suffer the toil and complexity of Penance. You would do well my Lord to consider this decree... for it is well loved by the people here, and few if any look upon Colopitiron as an oppressor or an enemy. An artisan of Baradume that I had a rather memorable draught with explained it best, "I need not concern myself with what is allowed or disallowed, but simply with what is right or wrong. If I act out of love, I will not

be judged.”

Most outsiders who hear about Eclipse get the wrong impression. This is not a land without consequences, or a people without direction. There are kings here, and cultures, and traditions, and societal customs, but they are flexible and kinder to the individual with the courage to stand up for himself. People in Eclipse take their lives in their hands every day, but they are well aware of this, and do not attempt to blame others for their folly or their failures. Also, the oral nature of the accepted norms of this land allow them to change as the people change, preventing the all too common problem of a law written in another age still being applied to a people that no longer understand its purpose but follow it anyway because it is law.

It is an ironic fact that many outsiders come to Eclipse expecting easy prey of a scattered and confused population, but find quite quickly that they have made a grave error; for the one law that is kept universally across the cultures of Eclipse is the keeping of the peace, and this is generally done by ensuring that all members of the population are armed, trained, and fully capable of defending

themselves. With a few exceptions, notably many of the slaves of Stygia, there is no such thing as an innocent bystander in Eclipse.

The Highmarkers are a notable exception to the land's traditions, and seem to be a new source of difficulty for the master of this dark land and his ancient method of rule. Though the system here is simple to grasp, it is difficult for people bred in a more traditional fashion to come to terms with. If it were not for the size of the colony, I expect that Colopitiron would have scattered it long ago and given the people over to Stygia. I also detect a certain curiosity in his approach to this place, as if ages of sameness have worn him down, and he sees in these people a chance for greatness and something new. While Colopitiron has kept Highmark from any written form of decree, he has not made efforts to disrupt its government or chain of leadership. As a result, the aging king has been forced more and more to scale back his laws to those most important to the safety of his people, and while a new generation seems to be forming that takes advantage of this situation in the minds of the elders, it is a universal truth that change requires but one generation for unwritten memory to be forever lost.

The air was still and calm, and the walls of this maze impossible to comprehend. They did not seem natural, yet neither were they man-made. They seemed to have been formed of solid nothingness, a featureless black substance, impossibly hard, but they were solid nonetheless. They also seemed to be alive, and I could hear them shifting as I walked along the corridors. I never saw the maze change, but there were times where I would turn back and find that the corridor had closed behind me, or that passages had opened where none had been before. Scattered throughout the corridors along the walls were thousands of mirrors of different shapes and sizes. I tried not to gaze into them, because more often than not, the image staring back at me was madness. At times I saw myself as a corpse, or a child, at others I looked like some sort of angelic or demonic creature, with black wings and horns and a tail. In other mirrors I saw other people altogether, scenes of family members I had left long ago on another world, scenes of Penance, or Eclipse. One showed me an image of the whole of the Forge as a great egg, with a strange fetus curled up in it, waiting to be born, and ready to peck its way out of the break at the top of the world. Periodically, I could hear something large tracking me too, and at one point I caught a glimpse of it that filled my heart with terror. I saw no discernable features, but some kind of shape or blob made from the same material as the walls that had somehow taken life. I struck out at it and ran, and as fortune would have it, the walls closed behind me and blocked its advance. After what must have been hours, I finally came across what appeared to be a massive doorway ahead, with a strange light streaming out. As I approached, the bird that had been following me for the last few days grew again agitated, and seemed to be trying to pull me away from the doorway, but I could see no other way out, so I stepped forward. Within an instant the bird began to double, and then double again, and suddenly master of the land had formed, and spared no words, but lashed out at me without warning with a massive sword, dripping with foul-smelling ichor. I had stepped aside, but far too slowly... I had never fought an opponent before with such speed... and the blow caught the edge of my shoulder, ripping open my side and sending me sprawling against the wall. Colopitiron closed for the killing blow, and I had no time to think. Whipping my sword from its scabbard, I hurled it at my rushing attacker. The last thing I saw before everything went black was the sword piercing him through the gut and a thick dark blood spraying out behind him. Some of that may have been mine.

As had happened many times before, I awoke from what should have been my death. A crowd had gathered around, and I could see that my limbs were twisted and splayed as if I had fallen from some great height. As I coughed and snapped my eyes open, I could hear a gasp from the crowd. As I struggled to find a muscle that would straighten out my tangled body, the footpads that had previously been chasing me stepped forward and grabbed a hold of me, waving away the crowd. I was bound onto a table, and not exactly nursed back to health, but fed. My limbs had been straightened out, albeit painfully, and it was only a few marks of the candle before I could feel the bones knitting themselves back together. My ribs still had a ways to go though, and I could see a large tear in my shirt, where Colopitiron's sword had apparently pierced my chest. I expected there was probably a similar one at the back. Soon enough my host made an appearance, and though I recognized Sagramour from his days in Penance, it was obvious that a change had come over him. I realized that the entire mission to poison him had been an absurdity, as he was, in a way, already dead. I expected the old pirate to drain me right there, as he looked like he hadn't fed in a while, but he seemed obsessed with other matters. "Show me!" he gasped, "Show me how to enter the citadel!"

It took a few days before I could fully walk again, but I was in no hurry to go back to that place. Truth be told, I didn't really know how I had entered the citadel before, though I had an inkling... and certainly it was nothing I could show anyone. I led Sagramour and his foul band back to the mirrored bowl, and his men tied a rope about me and lowered me and their master down slowly. I looked about for the black birds, but oddly there were none to be seen. Surely there were guardians watching the citadel, weren't there? Sagramour grabbed my wrist tightly as I stepped towards the black obelisk, and I heard half a scream as I touched the black stone and the wound on my head flashed. A gain I was inside the strange black hallways, alone as I expected, though with most of Sagramour's fingers scattered on the floor beside me. Unarmed like this, I knew that trying to go back outside would be deadly, I am sure they were waiting for me. I could see no way though this, so I sat down, hoping that this time that Colopitiron's strike could find my heart. But he did not come. Eventually, I grew restless... I did not want to meet that other thing again, and I was beginning to suspect it might find me first... so I started walking. I have no idea how long I wandered those corridors, but this time, when I finally reached the room with the light, it was unguarded. A fantastic collection of artifacts was laid out in the chamber, treasures that must have been stolen from thousands of worlds, the best of the best, but it was the figure in the center that captured my interest. He hovered just off the floor in a narrow beam of purest blue light. His age was impossible to determine. His skin was white as a swan and his wings feathered with gold and black plumes. His eyes darted at me with fear and shock as I stepped forward to touch his hand.

Date Uncounted - the Wilds of Eclipse

It is difficult to describe the changes that have come over me in mortal terms. The most significant is the birds. It is like having hundreds of copies of you all at the same time, each able to think and reason and act independently, yet all of them are you, and you have perfect control over all of them. The worst thing though is the permanent state of senselessness. I can see and hear, but there is no scent, no touch, no taste to the food, nor effect of the drink on me. Even wounds to my body produce no pain. It is more like being a puppeteer than living in a body. My former body still lives, and I have watched it breathing in the pillar of light, but I cannot interact with it, nor feel anything from the body in the light. The Oath at times is heavy... it is the one thing I can feel. It is as if someone else has grabbed the puppet strings somewhere below the sticks to which they are tied and is moving the puppet about instead of me, and my greatest act of will is only enough to move the top part of the strings, affecting nothing. There is much to watch in this world though... and even out of it. This body has no limits... no need to breathe or keep warm or eat. I can fly as far as I wish in any direction until I reach the border of Hael's land. There, there is something of an invisible wall beyond which I cannot travel, although it is possible to send birds past, though I cannot join with them until they have returned. The secret of the stars is now mine as well! At the edge of the firmament, where I had been taught were distant suns lighting alien worlds, there is nothing of the sort. Another barrier stands there, but not an impenetrable one. All over its surface tears and holes have appeared, and where they poke through, one can glimpse another world. I cannot seem to escape into these worlds, but there is a space of a few miles where the realms overlap, and as our world rotates against theirs (or vice versa), the view changes. I have even been able to interact with these worlds, though anything I take from them I cannot put back, and the more I take, the wider the holes seem to open. I have posted birds in many of these portals, waiting for a glimpse of my original home, but I fear this is a lost cause.

Most outsiders tend to forget the other proclamations of Colopitiron in deference to this most intriguing of ideas, but all natives know there are more formalities that must be paid to the Dark Master of this land than simply not writing down rules. The tax exacted from the natives as payment to their lord takes the form of the annual tribute. Once a year, each community in Eclipse is required to produce one transcendent work of beauty in honor of their feathered master. The form of this tribute varies greatly from town to town, and can be anything from a well-staged musical production to a giant bonfire reaching ten miles into the night sky. Tradition holds that when the tribute is unveiled, a black bird always comes and watches with the narrow eye, and if displeased with the gift, a flock of birds appears and scatters it, giving the community one month to come up with a replacement. This in turn may be scattered as well, but the third tribute is the village's last chance to prove itself before it will bear the full wrath of Colopitiron. Each community takes great pride in their tributes, and in many places it is viewed as something of a competition, only one without any rules save that whatever is produced must please the lord of the land. I have seen numerous of these tributes and found most of them delightful, ranging from the unearthly beauty of the slave girl engineered in Stygia over a hundred generations

to achieve human perfection, to the odd spectacle of the potion engineered by the artisans of Thole that when poured into the nostril of a captive volosaur caused it to turn pink, dance and warble, tapping out a rhythm with its toes.

In Baradume, due to the city's size, this tradition has taken on a different guise. Any new construction in the city is quickly judged by the master of the land, and if he does not deem it a work of lasting beauty, he will overturn the structure upon the spot, requiring that the architect begin again with a new plan. As fashions change, so does the whim of the Dark Master, and it is not unheard of for him to topple a building that has stood for thousands of years simply because he has grown weary of it. A ceremonial tribute is still paid each year, but it is somewhat unclear what the consequences might be should it fail. A different guild is selected by rotation each year to handle the planning and execution of the tribute.

BEHAVIOR

Of all the flock, Colopitiron is probably the last to strike fear into the hearts of mortals. True, he is still bound to protect the Forge, and he will carry out his oath without hesitation, but he was once mortal, and part of him still is, and as such, he seems to take

greater interest in the lives of his people than other guardians. He will engage the people in conversation and listen to their grievances, and even attempt to resolve them until his attention draws him elsewhere. In fact, Colopitiron will even engage physically with mortals, and regularly takes lovers, even though he is incapable of feeling their touch or taking any physical pleasure from the encounter.

The mortal soul is not designed to last indefinitely, and it is clear to me in dealing with Colopitiron that his life has worn on him. However, in contrast to the reputation he has gained of being generally weary of life and welcoming challengers, I have detected a spark of resurgence in his spirits. As I observed before, his mind seems to be expanding, and it is hard to categorize him. It is worth observing him over time and seeing what he becomes. A creature with the knowledge and wisdom of a million years that can still think and act with the urgency and immediacy of a mortal could be a powerful force to reckon with. It is his mortal spirit that gives him the mercurial nature for which he is so well known, able to change his behavior and his lifestyle and actions from one moment to the next to satisfy his curiosity, boredom and whim, from conqueror to cassandra, to statesman, to fury. It has taken him many years to find himself, and it is unlikely that this process has completed, even given the current level of stability of his recent actions.

At one point early on, when despair first set in, Colopitiron made a point at violent confrontation with nearly every powerful creature in Eclipse, blindly attacking them in the hopes he would be defeated. In some cases, such as against Saturnia, he did not fare well, and his avatar was destroyed (the Queen actually showed me the ancient spear that he had used against her in my audience in her palace), but gaining entrance to the citadel and taking the place of the guardian is a much more complicated task than simply destroying the avatar, and those that managed to survive the encounter either could not or did not want to rule the land. Eventually Colopitiron stopped this practice, as it had only served to remove potential rivals before they were ready to confront him. Faced with a leaderless land, Colopitiron then began his statesman phase, which eventually proved a failure, gradually driving him towards the free thinker and hedonist that he has become now.

Colopitiron is currently the most peaceable of the Flock, reserving his full wrath only for those who break the Oath, and using force not as a weapon to destroy, but as a means of guiding his people

towards where he wants them to go. He rarely slays leaders of men, even if they try to commit laws to paper or codify their societies. In such cases he interferes only by destroying the written words themselves. However, his interpretation of his own rules need answer to no one, and is bound to the change of his whim. Even if laws are not written, he may interfere in their enforcement if he deems them too restrictive or too rigorously enforced. In my most recent visit to Lacuna I witnessed him materialize and come to the rescue of a poor tinker that was under assault from the taxman. Apparently, the most recent tax increases there were deemed too high by Colopitiron, and after a short campaign of vigilante justice by the Dark Master of the land, the edicts were repealed. Highmark tells an interesting



tale as well, of Colopitiron appearing in the middle of a court where laws were being read and a trial taking place.

A device that he carried with him sprayed oil all around the courtroom, collecting on tables, chairs, walls, and barristers alike. He then announced his intention to burn down the court for violation of his proclamations and even produced a lit torch, inviting those who truly believed in the stagnation of putting life into a textbook to stay and continue their work.

In general, Colopitiron is a hedonist, and loves anyone that knows how to have a good time, particularly if they can do it without harming others. He makes art, loves, dances, laughs, and eats with relish (even if he can't taste the food). He is unpredictable, and is often underestimated by his enemies or those who would challenge him. He frequently will interfere in subtle ways with the lives of his citizens, and as the numbers of his crows increase his influence is felt with greater frequency. Most of his interactions are short lived, as he has still to fully come to terms with processing so many different events and places at once. If the location of an encampment does not agree with him, he will hover high above, plucking large boulders off the cliff walls and dropping them down to scare off the settlers below. I met with explorers in the wilds who told me the tale of how they were

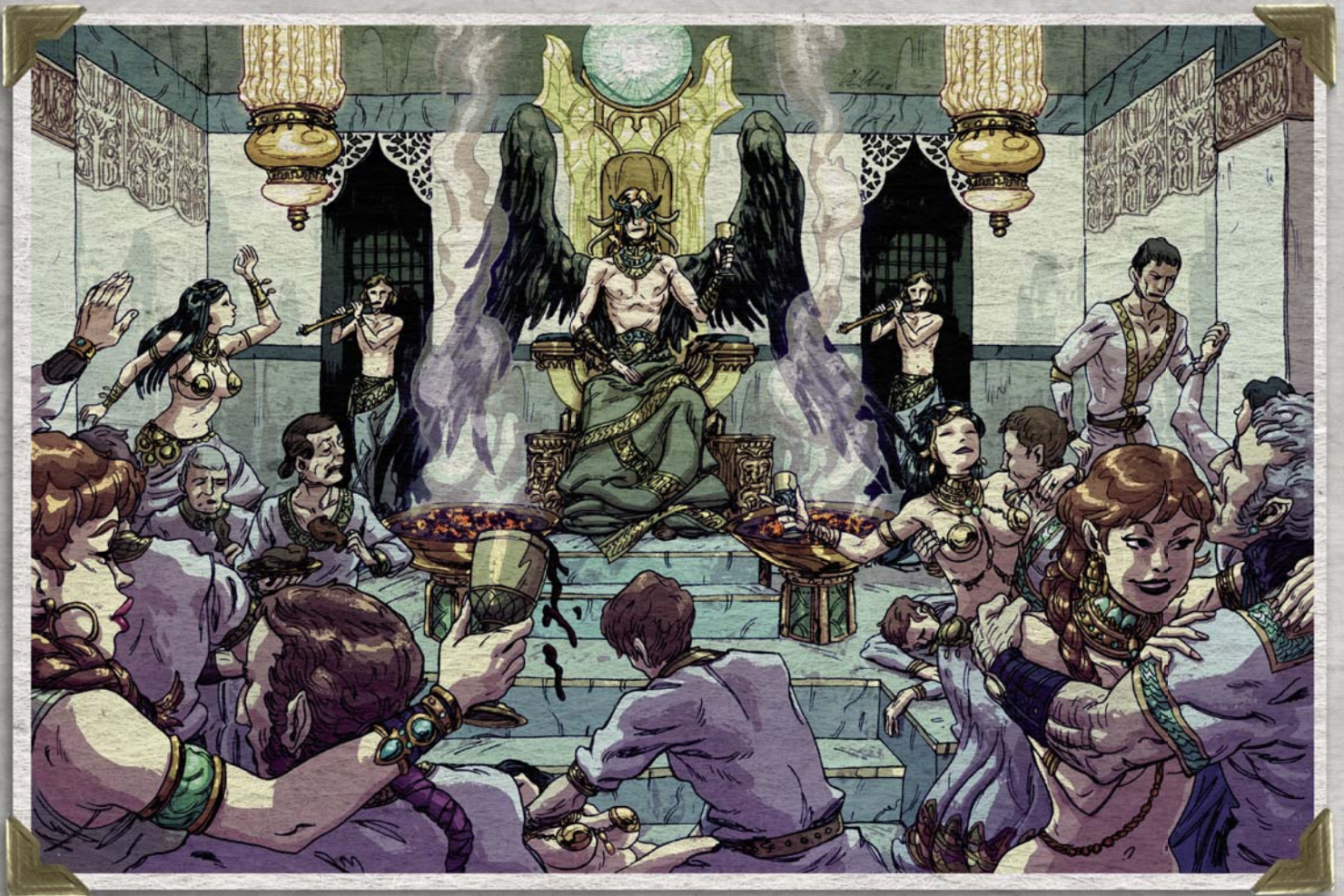
lost and on the verge of starvation, and awoke to find food, fresh water, and supplies carefully set down beside them.

Colopitiron seems to play favorites, though it is hard to pinpoint exactly what attracts him to people. I have heard tales of him pulling in ferocious monsters and setting them on parties in the wilds without warning, and then I have also heard tales of him appearing and driving off horrible monsters that would otherwise have destroyed a caravan. With some rare individuals, Colopitiron will engage them in conversation, and even come close to befriending them, picking their brain for ideas and thoughts on life, governance, and meaning. Colopitiron “lives” in Baradume, which he has made his capitol. Of the seven, he is the only with a public dwelling besides his citadel. If one wishes to treat with him, the surest route is to go to his “house” to see him.

PALACE

Colopitiron’s “residence” is a grand palace at the heart of Baradume, directly adjacent to the Citadel that holds him prisoner, and connected to it by a stone bridge. The palace was in my day a great temple, and home to a powerful sect that held dominance over the city. Though the sect was long ago destroyed by their Dark Master, the basic structure and form of the temple remains, even though it has crumbled from age and been rebuilt many times over since our bindings changed hands. Since Colopitiron’s

oath prevents him from constructing temples to himself, the temple does not glorify him, but beauty and pleasure itself. The central chamber of the building serves to house a continual celebration, open to anyone who chooses to participate in the revels. The temple is ornate and stunning in its beauty, and has been filled with the most exquisite and fantastic works of art. The party never stops, though it does seem to fluctuate as people come and go. At times it is animated with drinking and bold story tellers, at others the musicians dominate, and sometimes it breaks out into a full bacchanal. The other rooms on the lower level of the tower serve as art galleries, theatres, or as more private or quieter extensions of the party. Those who meet in the main cathedral can always find a nook in which to engage in their business, although there are no doors in the palace, so sometimes it can take quite a while of searching and wandering before one finds a room unoccupied. Many of the tributes given to Colopitiron over the years by the communities of Eclipse find their way here to be put on display, so wandering is not a problem, as it is surprisingly pleasant to wander the halls and examine these massive and elegant works of beauty. Some of the more interesting are the statues carved from congealed blood provided by Stygia, and the dreamscapes created by the mystics of Thole.



There are a few rules to be followed by those attending that had best be adhered to, lest one want to end up in the slave pens under the city, slated for the next boat to Stygia. Firstly, violence is not allowed within the palace, and starting a fight here is probably the quickest way to get the Dark Master to make an appearance in the flesh, though not the most productive. Colopitiron provides his guests with a steady supply of drink and wine, but food is not allowed in the building, helping to ensure that guests do not become residents. Colopitiron will usually spend at least one evening a week here, participating in or even leading the revels. He is a surprisingly eloquent speaker, and a truly captivating storyteller with a shockingly dark sense of humor.

The upper levels of the structure, basically consisting of a fantastically high tower connecting at the top to the citadel, are mysterious and difficult to enter. While the lower levels are open and free, a massive warded portal bars entrance to the uninvited.

These chambers are the Dark Master's private living space, and are filled with art, danger, treasures and beautiful women of all sorts. While he frequently engages in casual relations with mortals on the main floor, here he keeps his lovers, those that present to him a passing infatuation that can take his mind off the endlessness of his existence. I was not invited to these chambers, though I did speak to a few who were, or who had once dwelled there. A small army of servants runs the palace, keeping it clean, and maintaining the building, though only a handpicked few are allowed up here. Take note though, while this tower is impressively guarded and kept private, there is nothing truly important to Colopitiron here... those things are stored in his citadel. The items here are expendable but of the highest value, challenges for the best of the best of the thieves who live in Eclipse to figure out how to steal.

LOVERS

A question that I have pondered not a little in presenting to you this information has to do with the mortal lovers that Colopitiron takes on, showers with affection and seduction, and then neglects. Does he truly love them or is this simply a distraction for him, a form of feeding for the soul. I must admit that I have not been able to answer this question fully. I feel that in the part of Colopitiron's soul that is still mortal, he truly believes that he is in love, and sometimes this can hold out for quite a while, but in the end, he is not mortal, and mortal lovers to him are like flowers—when they bloom, they are stunningly beautiful for a few days, but then they soon wilt and must be thrown out and replaced with something new.

Since Colopitiron has the luxury of choosing his lovers from thousands of worlds, only the most beautiful or the most intriguing are brought into his chambers. While the bulk are female, there is the occasional male, and beyond that, there are others belonging to races that don't even have equivalent genders to our male and female. If Colopitiron can be defined by any one thing, it is that he does not wish to be bound by anything, including commitment, and his time with his lovers is no exception. True

enough, he does seem to focus his attentions upon one paramour at a time until he tires of her or until another catches his eye. Though I have heard tell that his attentions have lasted as long as a year on one particularly exceptional maiden, the average time span for one of these romances is probably about a moon. The ones that last the longest are those that place fewer restrictions upon him... Colopitiron does not seem to expect commitment in his lover, in fact, there are many that have come downstairs with him to participate in the revels together, but most expect some kind of love pact, so he keeps them in the tower and puts on a show for them. It is apparent by now after fifty thousand years that he is unable to father a child, but this does not stop him from trying. However, I have heard tell from more than a few that his skills and technique were like nothing they had ever experienced before. I imagine with enough practice one can get good at anything.

Though I am not one to concern mortals with my moralities, from a mortal point of view, the effect of the relationship on Colopitiron's lovers is not widely regarded as wholesome. In mortals, the sensations and pheromones of physical bonding tend to form a strong emotional bond as well, and without these sensations, it seems that Colopitiron's mortal heart cannot be satisfied. Colopitiron seems to make a concerted point to shower his lover with every kind of attention and pleasure and generally will not stop until she professes her undying and absolute love for him. This, for any relationship, is the kiss of death, and once he has achieved his goal, the Dark Master rarely overstays his welcome. Generally, as lovers are forgotten, the staff of the palace will escort them out of the tower to make room for new arrivals. The culture shock on transitioning from upstairs to downstairs is often too much for most women to handle, and most quickly find themselves the prey of a predator of one kind or other, and many even fall victim to the violence of their own hands.

Since Colopitiron only keeps the most beautiful and exceptional of maidens for himself, there is generally quite a bit of clamor as to which mortal will claim her for their own once she is discarded. Lovers need be careful, for these beauties are highly valued, and will fetch a high price on the open market if they fall into the hands of a slave ring. The bidding is especially competitive in Penance, where they are prized as being "raven touched", the taint of the feathered fowl somehow conferring upon them a sort of aphrodisiac. There are a few unsavory nobles in Stygia as well that seem to have a taste for these lovelies, the most tender of flesh. I liberated the following book from the library of just one of these Stygians.

ART

Before you pass full judgment on the master of Eclipse, there is one more aspect to his character that sets him apart from the others of the Seven. Colopitiron seems to have retained the mortal

My Precious Diary, I put my pen to your pages to tell of the most extraordinary events since I last wrote. After years of yearning, I believe I have escaped my destiny for a grander one. In an instant, I shook free my mantle as unwilling savior of Ranachus, dying world of ice. The Fates, obscure and capricious, have chosen a new life for me!

By the Four Stone Prophecy, I was to become the redeemer of Ranachus, welcoming verdant prosperity after years of cold, blinding sun. My father angrily, violently guarded my secret identity. He kept me always in his sight for the last months of my life there. No one save my parents and my love Tullen knew that I was the dark-haired child with the frostbrand on my hip, the child who in one year's time would bear witness to the first trickle of a thaw. Or so the Prophecy foretold.

When the brand appeared, I dreamed daily of a greater purpose for myself than to rule my fading homeland. I distrusted the promise of the Prophecy. Dread gripped me and would not relent. I became as cold inside as the icebound world around me.

On the eve of my miraculous journey, I lay awake until my parents slept. Wrapping myself in old furs, I stole away from our hut on my father's sled, pulled by my black dog Snive. Night was now the only time I could see Tullen, my love. Whenever I left the hut, I carried my bow and my diary. It was both my fear and fantasy that my father would awaken while I was gone, and I would be unable to return home. Tullen's embrace had ceased to comfort me. Lately he did little but spin tales of our future after the Prophecy's fulfillment. Desperate faith had replaced practical action on the part of most of my fellow citizens.

That night, as Snive and I glided toward our meeting place, I saw at the top of a fir a large raven. Silhouetted against the sky, he drew my eye to him. As I watched from the sled, he took wing and flew toward us. I stopped Snive's progress to watch the raven. The bird's flight was so quiet he seemed to absorb sound rather than create it. He flew lower. I leapt from the sled and threw my arms around Snive's body, pushing my face into his black fur. The raven lit gently on Snive's head. The last sensation I had of my homeland Ranachus was this: There was no difference in color between the raven's feathers, Snive's fur and my hair. The night disappeared and I was no longer aware of my body, except that for a moment it was colder and brighter than I ever remembered.

I awoke as myself in a bed. It was a bed larger and more luxurious than I could have imagined, bigger by three times than our Ranachus hut. As my consciousness returned, I saw the bed's bronze headboard, formed from plates arrayed artfully in a scale pattern. A woman lay on either side of me. They were flax-haired and perhaps a year or two older than my sixteen years, naked and with the fairest skin I had ever seen. They touched my forehead with their warm hands, and one said, "Welcome, Rux'eil." The other looked into

my eyes and let out a sweet laugh. Dear Diary, how delighted I felt that these rare creatures knew my name! Benn and Thuun are their names. Snive rested not far from me on the bed. He had a fresh kill at his feet and next to him was a small, white, bear cub companion.

Benn and Thuun massaged my skin with fragrant oil, running their soft fingers all over my body. Ecstasy, and this is only the beginning! For the first time since the frostbrand, I feel warm and alive. When I awoke again, a fourth had joined us in the bed and what a beautiful creature! He laughed heartily with Benn and Thuun and then introduced himself as Colopitiron. He wears a shining gold mask and has horns that curve around his muscled jaw. At the moment we met, the sound of his voice warmed me and opened me further, although even now I cannot say why. As he took my hand and drew nearer to me, he had a delicious familiar scent.

Even next to him, oh how I wanted him closer! I have never felt such desire. He buried his face in my neck. One of his horns pressed against my throat, making my breathing ragged. His hands cupped my breasts. I sighed with longing, and he smiled down at me and then slipped from the room. Benn and Thuun each kissed me and followed him, leaving in their wake the blissful ache of my need. Alone with Snive, I discovered you, my Dear Diary, tucked amongst the pillows, and so with joy I can chronicle my amazing change of fortune.

Oh Diary, days have passed, though there has been no sunrise here. My ecstasy multiplies! I have found in my new home of Eclipse all that I've longed for: liberty, passion, devotion and the promise of knowledge and great power.

Perhaps an hour after C left the bed, when the ink had scarcely dried on my last entry, Thuun and Benn returned to dress me. I donned an emerald silk gown, with fabric draped and pleated so richly that there was surely enough cloth for five gowns in the Ranachus style. Blessed decadence after long deprivation! Thuun dressed in a shimmering gold and Benn in a rich blue gown.

They led me through a great bronze door onto a terrace, where there was a heavy table set with an aromatic, candlelit feast. Tall, pale creatures filled goblets and piled still more food on the laden table. I recognized fruits I had eaten in childhood before the trees in Ranachus ceased to bear. Beyond the terrace, a waterfall plunged into a pool below. The air here is heavy, dark and warm. It alone convinces me that I have left Ranachus far behind.

Gold-masked C sat at the head of the table, looking so handsome that I felt shy in my desire. He rose and kissed my hand and I was calmed. We feasted on meats and fruits, wine and chocolates. The food here is perhaps even more exquisite than everything

else I have seen. And I never quite feel full.

That first night, C regaled me with fascinating tales. He is Master of Eclipse, the enchanting name of my new home! It is a land deep within a crater where the air is warm and the sun does not shine, a mercy after my years in Ranachus.

C's gift is the summoning of people from other worlds. With such tenderness he told me that he laid his hand on the cold hilt of his sword and saw my face. He sensed the fallacy of the Four Stone Prophecy of Ranachus and pulled me from my frozen home.

When we had finished eating, he presented me with a tiny golden chest he had crafted himself. Inside were the golden pen I now write with and a gold medallion with Snive's portrait on its face. C tells me pens are rare and precious in Eclipse. He knew already that I find it a comfort and pleasure to record my life in writing. He loves to paint and sculpt elaborate artworks. I begged him to teach me!

After dinner, we strolled between great columns to the terrace's edge to peer down into a pool of gently bubbling water. Benn and Thuun shed their gowns and slipped underwater. C helped me out of my gown and stepped out of his garments. Hand in hand, we leapt in together. In the warm green water, C smoothed my hair from my face and then pulled me to him, kissing me deeply.

When we left the pool, C guided me back to the bronze bed where he finally sated my desire again and again. Oh Dear Diary, he is a magnificent and generous lover who cares much more about my pleasure than about his own. I have spent every night since in some variation of this ecstasy! How was I ever so eager for the touch of that boor Tullen?

In the day, we stroll about this Palace with its soaring white stone ceilings. I have made the acquaintance of many fascinating beings of all statures. Many of the staff here are of the "vampire" race. I find their countenances somewhat unfriendly. They serve us as we dine together. I love to hear C's jolly stories of victory in battle, politics and art. He sometimes lifts me to his lap and feeds me sweet cakes, and I dream of being his queen and his equal. I do long to rule Eclipse beside him, and I now believe it is my destiny. If he thinks I am a mere girl, I will soon convince him of his error!

Dear Diary, sorry it has been so long since last I wrote! Sad as it is to write this, I can no longer deny my worry that C's love for me wanes. Two days have passed since he has visited me in the bronze bedroom. When he was last here, his lovemaking was ever skillful, but his spirit seemed to keep itself at a great distance. Benn and Thuun, my lovely friends, assure me I worry for naught. He is consumed with debating a covenant for the oceans, they say. I must



keep a high mind by gaining further knowledge of my new home to ready myself to be Queen.

Oh Diary I fear it has been too long now since C has come to my bed. When we dined together, he spoke a harsh word to Snive and said I looked indelicate in my gown. I did not show my shame save for a flush in my cheeks. I waited to cry until I was alone. O let his harsh humor pass!

I am feeling quite frightened now, oh Diary. What a horrid change from my thrill at arriving in this new land. It was prideful to believe I was destined for something grander than Ranachus. I do not wish to return to that place, even if I knew how, but I believe am in danger if I stay here. On my way to the kitchen for tea not five minutes ago, I overheard two coarse chambermaids chatting as they freshened a room. I stopped at the door, hoping I might hear something I could report to C to prove my loyalty. "The last three fetched a pretty penny on the market in Penance, being raven touched!" one exclaimed. The other gave an unseemly snort. "No happy endings for Master's mortal pulltarts! What pity will befall the dark-haired one, I wonder?" I felt sick at their glee. I staggered back to the bronze bed without tea. I am surely the "dark-haired one," the latest of "Master's mortal pulltarts." Here is another prophecy I do not intend to fulfill!

My Dear Diary, I waited to write again until the last spring of hope in my breast ran dry. I am alone in a Palace tower with an alabaster floor whose stains show I am not the first to suffer here. When I overheard the fates of C's lovers before me, I became desperate to escape the Palace.

In a corridor one day, I met a young cook and pleaded with him to smuggle me out. I offered in trade my gold medallion and tiny chest. He consented and took my treasures, telling me to appear at the kitchen entrance in an hour's time. When Snive and I arrived at the kitchen, Thuun and a tall one of the vampire folk awaited me. The cook had betrayed me! Thuun did not even look at me, but said something unintelligible to the vampire. I thought I glimpsed a fleeting sadness in her eyes. Or perhaps I am a mere fool to seek the dying bloom of love where it never flowered at all!

The vampire grabbed my hair and seized Snive by the scruff of his neck and dragged us quickly to this tower. We had seen no one for three days until a different vampire came in yesterday with a tiny ration of bread. As he entered, Snive bared his teeth. In a cold rage, the vampire flung my beloved dog from the window. Oh, the pain of that moment cannot be written. It is worse even than the throbbing in my heels where they were severed with a blade. If I were not chained and crippled and could leap after my Snive, I would choose that fate at every moment. Words are beginning to leave me, oh Diary, and I find myself slipping into reveries of my return to the frozen soil I have forsaken, though surely it will not be in this body....

drive to create works of art, a skill that has been refined by millennia of practice, and now easily qualifies him as the greatest artist on the Forge. Primarily, Colopitiron is a painter, although he has crafted many fine works of sculpture as well, and though most of his work is private and has never left his citadel, the few works that do surface are widely sought after by collectors, and can fetch an army's ransom on the open market. Many of the subjects of his paintings are his lovers, and his skill in this is one of his chief seduction techniques. Seeing with the eye of an immortal and feeling with the heart of a mortal, Colopitiron can capture far more in a painting than the naked eye can comprehend. He is able to shift styles at will, though he tends to go through phases, spending decades perfecting a particular style or subject before growing and moving on to something else, from abstracts to architecture to still-lives to much more. Colopitiron is in a unique position to have access to far more art-worthy material than any of his competitors. It is a fascination of his to paint images of the many worlds he can watch through the star portals, and it is an instantaneous jaunt to the high cliffs and underground caverns of Eclipse that others could never even imagine to explore. A few decades back, he produced a series of paintings known as the "Lost Dead" in which he discovered long dead bodies of rashers and explorers who had starved or died alone in wildly remote and far off places. The positions of the bodies and the rusted and ruined objects scattered around them were shockingly poignant. He has also painted some of Baradume's most famous citizens, and you will find included in a later section a small copy of the life-size portrait of Darius Odom that hangs in the Ars Immortalis guildhouse.

A feathered fowl has no need for money or wealth of any kind, so Colopitiron has never sold a painting. On rare occasions he presents them as gifts, such as to his lovers or as an honor to heroes or leaders that draw his attention. The bulk of his art intended for public viewing is kept in his palace tower and guarded by clever traps and powerful magics. These are challenges for his beloved thieves to steal. Only the best and boldest can break into the Dark Master's tower and return alive with one of its treasures, but every few years someone manages a score. I also chanced to meet a drunken picker in a Baradume tavern that swore to me that Colopitiron hides his art away in remote and unexplored areas of Eclipse as treasures for those persistent enough to find them. Of course, buyer beware... there are many fakes, copies, and imitators out there that will try to sell you a genuine Dark Master; if the price seems too good to be true, it is.

I honestly believe that the driving force behind Colopitiron's art is the great joy and catharsis that he is able to find in creation. Though his body cannot feel, his soul can feel quite deeply, and with far more passion than any other immortal I have ever met. At the "eastern" entrance to Baradume's central park towers an impressive work of sculpture, hundreds upon hundreds of naked writing bodies piled one on top of the other, locked in an eternal moment of universal release. The work was completed over more than a thousand years, and each decade, but a single body was revealed by the master from the great marble obelisk, the one mortal in that time whose memory he could not forget.



chapter 5 - Baradume

There is no city in all the Forge quite like Baradume, a place of deep and unyielding beauty, cosmopolitan yet untamed, old yet cutting edge.

Baradume has stood resident of this world for age after age, outdone in its grandeur and size only by the great city of Penance. For a free-spirited sort who doesn't mind never seeing the sun, life on Baradume is pure joy. This is a metropolis of true artists—the most skilled craftsmen in all the world, whether their talents lie in stonecutting, painting, lovemaking, song, or pickpocketing. Here all is beauty: the golden, gas-lit streets of interlocking stone, the sky-reaching structures with their clustered columns, intricate relief sculptures and thrusting spires, and the people—well groomed, and equal parts fashion and fitness. I will always think of it as home.

Though Baradume is known throughout the whole of the Forge as the “City of Thieves”, one should never discount it as a place of base rogues and cutthroats. Baradume is a city of pure beauty and art. The simple fact is that few conventional folk are able to grasp the true nature of the city. From lack of understanding, fear and prejudice always flow. Baradume is simply a society without the concept of personal property. There is no money or trade within Baradume. There is no call for any either. Everything one needs is provided, and beyond that, if there is anything still that one wants, one simply takes it. There is more than enough beauty to go around for everyone, so the loss of any mere possession is never a cause for despair, whether it be one's jewels, sculptures, fabulous magical items, or even one's wife.

The only thing that the city asks in return for all its gifts is that one prove useful in some way. Skill and drive is the true currency of the day, and those who have it find that it can never be taken from them. Those who embody excellence in all things are rewarded; those who cannot may find Baradume a exhilarating place to visit, but woe betide them if they choose to stay.

CULTURE/ECONOMY

Baradume lacks any kind of central government or leader. Colopitiron is something of the city's figurehead, although he has a very hands-off approach to governance. The city has no official laws, and it is run by a collection of powerful houses, or guilds, each one with its own set of rules, and each one responsible for protecting and policing its own citizens. Every resident of the city swears allegiance to one of these houses, and all of his labors are in service of his guild. The guild in turn efficiently manages all of the necessities of its citizens, or "wards", providing food, shelter, direction, and protection, allowing them to spend the bulk of their time enjoying the city's pleasures and diversions. There are rivalries, but a general truce exists between all the guilds, allowing wards to wander the city unmolested. It is unadvisable, however, to enter the city without membership in one of these organizations. Doing so is essentially a suicide wish, as there is no one to guarantee one's safety but oneself, and the city can (and will) be an unforgiving place.

To live in the city requires that one swears allegiance to a "protector". This protector is generally the head of a house or guild with clout in the city. Most protectors are ancients, beings who have found ways to magically prolong their lives, and who have lived for hundreds if not thousands of years, building up a vast network of supporters along the way. All citizens of Baradume wear the signs of their protectors somewhere visible on their persons, usually in the form of a magical brooch that is bound to the wearer and his contract. When worn by the owner with the protector's blessing, the pattern in the stone of the brooch appears alive, swirling and shifting colors and textures. If a protector ever casts a citizen from his guild, even in absentia, the brooch dies instantly, becoming non-magical. Some symbols are tattooed, which makes them harder to lose, but also much more of a problem when one needs to switch protectors. The symbols of the most powerful guilds are instantly recognizable to any citizen of Baradume, and offer the best protection.

While it takes all sort of talents to keep a city running, the skills

that are in high demand are those of creation. A guild's power and prestige comes from its ability to produce the best items and the best entertainments. Money does not exist inside the city, but outside it is a necessary evil. If a guild can sell the goods it produces to other cities, it can afford to buy food and raw materials to produce more goods. If a guild can thrill and astound, it will increase its reputation and thus drive the best craftsmen into its service.

Baradume bears a rich retinue of artisans and artists; after all, there wouldn't be much point in being a city of thieves if there was nothing worthwhile to steal. The lands above and beyond are scoured for skilled craftsmen, and any discovered are invited to come and dwell here in a city that has an unending appetite for fineries. Many world-class schools of art, from the famous Baradume School of Dance to the Illustrators' Forum, can be found here, and nobles from Penance often send their children to Baradume to be educated. The amount of jewelry, pottery and great works of art that are produced and consumed in the city in a given year is staggering, and any out of fashion or passé pieces soon find their way to other cities where they fetch great prices.

There are no less than forty theaters within the city's walls, offering everything from grand symphonies to base sexual farces. This does not even count the clubs that offer entertainment around the clock—erotic dancers (who may be had in the open right at your table), fools and comedians, brutal pit fights, and even a group that makes music with their intestinal gasses. There is no limit to the amount that any one person may consume or explore in the city. Food is bountiful and delicious, love is free and as varied as the winds, spectacles are audacious and wild, and the mood is gay and easy. As long as one can keep one's protector pleased, one is free to live as one chooses.

With so much excess, Baradume still must produce its fair share of revenue. The city feeds itself mostly based on trade with Stygia. Colopitiron, who does not wish to see his patrons overtaxed with work, pulls weak seeds into slave pens in the city's nether levels.



The guilds trade these undesirables to the vampires of Stygia as food, in return for gems and precious metals. Some of these materials are turned into works of art, but the bulk are traded to farmers and foresters who provide grain, basic supplies, and meats. Trade with Sabor provides brick, stone, and metal to build the bones of the city. Trade with Erebus brings in goods and household items from Penance and Anvil. Shipping companies circle the Sea of Ink, bringing goods from exotic lands to the guilds in return for a share of what's in Baradume's coffers.

Food is not sold in Baradume, but set out in lavish spreads throughout the city cirques for anyone who wishes to partake. Each guild or great house keeps a constant buffet up and running, always attempting to outdo one another in taste and grandeur. With all this consumption, one might think the residents are in danger of becoming fat and bloated, but Baradume's children keep themselves in shape, running the rooftops or practicing their sword skills in one of the many combat centers. Ugliness is considered a sin, and letting oneself go will cost a citizen his protection just as quickly as poor work or laziness. Most guilds also employ wizards who practice magic geared towards making one thin or correcting faults of nature.

Baradume is a city of distinct style. The dress of the day is always in flux, but top hats, elaborate masks, waistcoats and patterned cummerbunds are always a good choice, whether man or woman. Likewise are long, flowing gowns with layer upon layer of airy cloth, topped with great wigs and headdresses. Outsiders are easily spotted, standing out like a low beggar at a masquerade ball. Most visitors think the locals seem overdone and pompous, but those who dwell in Baradume understand that dress, like theater and painting, is a form of art, and every moment is a chance to shine.

PROTECTION

Outsiders are often vexed by the locals' ways, and none of these is so troublesome as the need to acquire a protector for the duration of one's visit in Baradume, be it a few hours or a half-moon. To travel without a symbol is to invite danger. Slavers work the city, looking for new seeds and outsiders. Vampires stalk the gas-lit streets in search of unguarded prey. There are even those who are just looking for a fight, and a stranger who has yet to gain a patron in the city is just the sort of sport they enjoy. Outsiders who manage to visibly hold their own on the city streets are generally approached by agents of one or more guilds and offered membership as mercenaries (essentially, a guild's private army).

To gain a protector, one generally has to have something to offer. One is likely to need a skill, be it as an artisan, a mercenary, a consort, entertainer, or of course, a talented thief. Skills are valued in Baradume far over money or objects, and many who have attempted to outright buy protection have found themselves looked over for a peasant who is artful at painting tiles. This can be maddening to many who are used to their money buying them whatever it is they want. Once under protection, there are no

written contracts, but if one's protector feels that one is not holding up one's end of the bargain, he will withdraw his protection, often very publicly placing the disowned in danger.

A protector does exactly what the name implies... protect. If someone harms a protector's ward (real harm, not just knocking out an opponent in a brawl), the protector is sworn to vengeance. Typically, a mercenary team is sent out to make an example of the wrongdoer, though sometimes deals are made behind the scenes to peacefully resolve the situation. In some places, the city seems to be constantly in a state of turf wars, where rival guilds avenge wrongs, prompting a response from their opponents that drags on in an endless cycle. Fortunately, much of the street fighting in Baradume is of the non-lethal kind. Retribution typically consists of ruining a rival guild's parties, celebrations, or performances, thus heaping shame upon them and causing them to lose members. Actual murders happen, but are uncommon, and are generally avenged in a swifter and much less visible manner.

There is one exception to the rule of protection, and that is for traders. Ship's crews or caravans are offered a special badge that grants them a general protection enforced by a conglomerate of powerful houses. These badges are temporary and never last more than a quarter moon. They are meant to allow free traders to enter, conduct their business peaceably, and leave.

Baradume doesn't have a homelessness problem. People who can't find useful work with a protector tend to disappear soon enough, whether as food for a creature of the night or in a cage en route to Stygia (or somewhere worse, like the goddust mines). A citizen who doesn't serve his protector well can be cast out of the guild, and then must find a new protector fast or be swallowed up by the city. However, if one is skilled in a trade or craft, then there is little worry of suffering such a fate, and one will find that Baradume shall embrace him and offer up all its wonders to be tasted, touched, and reveled in.

THIEVERY

The idea of personal property is a shifting one in Baradume. If you can steal something of another without being caught, then do so. It is a great honor to have something of yours taken, be it from your person or from your villa; it means you have been out-thieved. There is no currency of any form in the city. All the full-time inhabitants of Baradume think nothing of stealing from each other to some degree, though only a select few are skilled enough to make it one's livelihood. Most stealing usually involves the unregulated passing back and forth of communal items, like tools or clothes. In fact, most of this isn't even considered stealing, it's just looked upon as utilitarian, preventing unused items from going to waste. The economy that has formed is legitimate, and is based around necessity more than greed.

To a citizen of Baradume, actually being called a thief is the greatest honor of all. In the vernacular of the day, those at the very bottom of the city's pecking order are the "orphans" ... those





poor souls who have yet to find themselves a protector, or who have had their contracts severed. Even honest citizens who labor for a living and rely upon their protectors to give them what they need are considered “fools”, and only slightly better than these (if only out of fear) are the “soldiers” who make up the fighting men and enforcers of the guilds. At the top of the heap are the true “thieves”, whose true calling is in the art of the steal. These are the city’s celebrities and future leaders, and it is rare to find a guildmaster who has risen up through the ranks by any other means.

Items of true value are not left unattended for others to steal. There is as much of an art to securing valuables as there is to stealing them. Normal thieves and pickpockets may find that the tricks they have employed in other cities will fall short and may even cost them their lives. The villas and palaces of Baradume are protected with some of the most advanced security systems, and even individuals on the streets will affix devices to their persons that if triggered might break a hand or paralyze an artist lacking sufficient skill. After all, the people do not just sit around passively waiting to be robbed by a no-talent hack; the honor comes in being outdone by a better thief. Outsiders are often abased by this, but to those that live here it is a great game, both in the stealing and in the protecting of objects.

Some citizens attach small “prize” tags to objects of great sentimental value, and if an object is successfully taken, then the thief may collect the named prize if he returns the object to its owner. Prizes vary, but are generally of greater street value than the original object. A prize may be a magical goblet, or a night with the owner’s sister, or a commissioned work of art perhaps. Ten candle marks is the traditional time between taking such an object and then returning it for the prize—this is to allow the owner a chance to steal the item back. It is thought to be bad manners to steal the same thing twice once one has returned it for the prize. The guilds hold great contests all the time, showing off wondrous items or works of art and then offering prizes to any who can spirit the object away. They set up twisted and convoluted mazes full of traps, puzzles, and reversals of fortune to confuse and confound potential thieves.

Even courtship in Baradume revolves around stealing. If a woman or gentleman is open to being courted, they will wear a finely-made, individualized animal fetish on their belt. Different animal motifs denote different preferences or proclivities. A kith fetish worn on the right side of a man’s belt means he seeks a dominant female for example, while a frollow worn at the front means he is looking for a devoted male lover. There are no sexual preferences that are frowned upon in Baradume. All tastes and creeds are welcome. If a person spies a likable citizen who dons an animal that fits his type, he may steal the fetish. It then falls to the target to steal back her fetish again. After one round of this, if the two are interested, they can arrange formal introductions. However, the game usually goes for several rounds, lasting over the course of many sleeps, or sometimes even moons. Each round becomes harder and harder to play, as the target is now aware of her courter. This is where elaborate masks and disguises come into play. It is also not uncommon for someone to attempt to convert another to his taste by not only stealing the fetish, but replacing it with one he would like to suggest. In a sexually liber-

ated society where there are few, if any, judgments made, most are willing to experiment with trying everything at least once.

All this stealing and theft of course begs the question of what occurs when someone is caught in the act. Interestingly enough, this almost never happens. Being caught isn't so much a crime warranting punishment as it is simply an enormous shame upon the name of the failed thief. Few citizens would ever brazenly attempt to take something that someone else is obviously already using or protecting. The bulk of the population are content to work as artisans and are provided with all they need by their protectors. No thief in Baradume steals because he needs anything; no one is wanting in the city. True thievery is only for those who choose to pursue it as their artistic calling, and being caught is akin to an actor forgetting his lines, or a sculptor cracking his stone in two. It is a dismal act of failure and shame that may spell the end of a career or the ruin of a legend. Of course, everyone has to start somewhere, and newer thieves don't quite know themselves yet, and sometimes make a blunder. The goal of the citizen catching a thief in the act is to shame, not to harm or to punish. A theatre critic ultimately makes for a better actor, and a vigilant citizen makes for a better thief. When discovering a thief in the act, the average citizen's response is to point the thief out to others, something along the lines of "Look Georg, this man just failed to lift my fur coat!" All in the area then regale the thief with laughter, typically shaming him into slinking away. If however, the thief presses the attempt, or is from a rival house, violence may ensue.

The citizens of Baradume are armed and know how to fight, but generally they engage in non-lethal combat. Their aim is typically to knock out their opponents, perhaps landing them in a muddy patch to dirty their finery. Allowing an opponent to live shows one's skill, control, and mastery, and earns prestige. There is little reason to kill anyone in Baradume. Besides, everyone here is so beautiful that killing them would be a waste, and murder is for the most part seen as a very low act. There are feuds between houses and guilds that do lead to murder and death, but to deal in mortal violence is distasteful, and can earn individuals and organizations a bad name. True murder in Baradume has been driven far underground. Most killing is done in secret by highly skilled assassins, and though it is often assumed who may have ordered a hit, as long as it cannot be proved it brings no shame.

Still violence as a whole in Baradume is rare. Baradume's residents are used to their items shifting hands through theft, and as such have less of an attachment to personal belongings. If a timepiece or a necklace goes missing, well then it is a sign that it is time to get a new one, or to try out some novel new aesthetic. There is rarely the deep-seeded drive for revenge that is found in other places to answer a wrong.

BEAUTY

Beauty is the main thrusting pursuit of all Baradume's citizens. Some aspire to be beautiful themselves, others aspire to make beautiful objects, others aspire to steal those beautiful things, and others aspire to tell beautiful stories or compose beautiful songs.

Beauty here isn't simply vanity, it is a religion. The grace and wonder of all beauty's forms and functions are ever sought and perfected in Baradume. Beautiful creations are considered the greatest praise one can give to the heavens. Creation for the sake of creating is not in and of itself a worthy tribute to the celestials; no, to earn the respect of the gods and of one's fellows, an artisan must create works whose aesthetics captivate and inspire. The novice well may find that the city of thieves can be impatient with those who are still perfecting their craft. As in all things, it is the ones that can perform to excess that will garner the most rewards for their efforts. The city can be fickle, and a creator who is worshiped and beloved one day may find himself forgotten and ostracized the next. Painters or singers who rely upon a gimmick may hold sway briefly, but in the end, only the truly skilled or those who are adept at recreating themselves can stand the test of time here.

The inhabitants of Baradume are works of art themselves, both gifted with natural beauty and obsessed with maintaining it. Colopitiron pulls the most attractive and well put-together of seeds for his capital, and has done so for thousands upon thousands of generations. These peoples have interbred and propagated in the walls of the City of Thieves for time untold, producing fantastically well-formed examples of their kind. Citizens of Baradume are some of the most graceful and sexually attractive folk to be found anywhere on the Forge. Their comeliness is legendary, and great beauties from other realms find themselves outmatched upon arriving here, even by the most common of folk.

There is an ideal life to which all of Baradume's citizens aspire. Known simply as the Golden Path (to unlimited devotion), it occupies the part of the psyche that religion might occupy in more mundane places. The golden path is the perfect balance between celebration and labor, and those who can find it live without bounds, becoming the most exceptional of all possible selves. The path is hard to find, even if its most basic tenet is simply to "join the party every day". Even most ancients, with centuries to perfect their talents, find it difficult to stay upon the path. There are those who have devoted their lives to studying the path and trying to quantify exactly what it is, but these are not the people who live it. The path comes from constant challenge and constant expression of love; those who truly walk it are the most fulfilled and happy of all beings. These are the avatars of beauty, the true power behind all divine things. The citizens of Baradume do not worship any god, nor do they bind themselves to any rituals; they simply open themselves to the true divinity, and thus when it has entered into them, they have become divine themselves. They are their own gods, and perfection of the self is the truest form of worship.

All this beauty has led to a strange quirk of nature. Many of the residents of Baradume have grown tired of bedding other physically perfect gods, and have developed a taste for the rare and extreme. Ugly or obese transplants find that they are able to bed and date physical specimens that would be far out of their league anywhere else. In fact, the more twisted or foul one is, the better one's chances. Groups that come to Baradume to carouse and partake of its wonders are sometimes surprised to find that the best looking of their troop fares far worse than their unattractive fellows. However, don't be fooled. Citizens of Baradume would

never dream of breeding with such a creature; the experience is only for pleasure. The ugly will never be accepted as true citizens of Baradume (without some kind of other exceptional skill), and those poor fools who take their sexual conquests as a form of acceptance are in for a hard fall when they try to settle down.

CITY MAP/ORIENTATION

Baradume is built about the citadel of Colopitiron, located in the exact geographic center of Eclipse. It is situated on a narrow peninsula jutting out into the Sea of Ink, and breathtakingly perched atop sea cliffs over a hundred feet high. These cliffs are a necessity however, as when the moon rises in the sky, the tides rise as well, and the waters of the sea come lapping up the to the very walls of the city. Steps go down at intervals to the water, and at times a beach is formed when the waves retract to their lowest point.

The old city is circular in shape, built like a wheel around the citadel. Here long roads shoot out like spokes and cross with broad circular boulevards that ring the center. Each intersection forms a large circular clearing with an open park/public area in the center. These “cirques” are where food is laid out, and they form the centers of social life for most citizens. As the city has grown, its walls have moved down the peninsula, expanding into the new city areas. The city’s infamous and massive thoroughfare, “Processional”, runs through all of the new city, beginning at the eastern gate of the city and thrusting westward past the people’s park and the slums, running beneath the massive stone arch that straddles the entirety of the theatre district, and then emptying into the old city at its western end before turning south and heading back eastward to complete the circle.

Because of the size of the city, those who live there have broken it down into a number a separate districts so as to better orient themselves. These districts each have their own distinct flavor and character, though they denote no true political divisions, and should not be stereotyped. Pleasure, amusement, emotion, and transcendence may be found anywhere in Baradume. It is a place to wander and explore, and each day brings new adventures and new opportunities.

BARADUME'S DISTRICTS:

- **City Center:** Not really in the center any more actually, the old city, or “city center” is the small circular plateau that rings the citadel of Colopitiron. It is home to Baradume’s most famous landmarks as well as the villas of the most powerful and famous of the city’s residents.
- **Theatre District:** At one point this area just east of the city center was known as the temple district. Though Colopitiron forbids the building of temples that honor gods in his city, in ancient times this (just outside of the old city) is where master architects would go to erect their impossible homages to Beauty itself. These buildings were grand in scope and scale, and some required intense magical enchantments to even stand. In those times, these buildings were not occupied, but stood as museums to architecture itself. Simply walking through

the district was a religious experience of sorts. As the city grew, the area was annexed, and these grand and fantastical constructions found new homes as theatres. Few of the great old buildings still stand, but those handful that do are not claimed by any guild, and are free public spaces where anyone may come along and entertain. The newer buildings are guild theaters, and generally are where the guilds holds their largest galas, each one capable of holding over a thousand people in the central chamber alone.

- **The Docks:** South of the old city runs the docks, an impressive collection of quays, warehouses and industrial machinery. Though probably not too interesting to tourists, this is the most hotly contested section in town, as any new guild who wants to gain a foothold in the city must claim space in the docks in order to bring in goods and feed its people.
- **New City:** Hardly new by anyone’s estimation of the word, the new city is simply the far eastern expansion of Baradume. It is smaller in scale than the other districts, and offers a more intimate feel and experience. It prides itself on its small clubs and hidden nooks where poets and lovers can find peace and inspiration.
- **Artisan’s District:** The southern part of Baradume is more industrial in nature than the rest of the city; home to blacksmiths, stonemasons, jewelers, weavers, and so on, this is where the work is done. Though there is still plenty to do and see here, the main reason to come is for the “shopping”. While it is not possible to buy anything in Baradume, each guild maintains its own central market in the artisan’s district. Guild members are free to enter and view the latest goods that the guild has produced, taking anything they desire. Members are also free to bring any undesired items to the market and leave them there to be picked up by any other “shoppers” who might want them. Clothes are the most common good found



here, and these pass from person to person at a rapid pace. Any “inferior” goods that are not taken by guild members are shipped off to the docks to be exported to Erebus to raise money for the guild.

- **Slums :** The unfortunately named slums occupies the broad area north of the park between the theatre district and the new city. This area actually contains the city’s oldest buildings, as it has not received the upkeep the other districts get on a regular basis. The slums began their string of bad luck some thousand years ago or so when massive turf wars broke out in the area. Since then it has remained heavily fractured politically, the bastion of new and smaller guilds trying to gain a foothold in the city. Some



succeed and grow into other areas, others die out or are overrun by their neighbors. Do not doubt that there are good times to be had in the district though. After all, the little guys do have to try harder to get noticed. Any aspiring young thief who wants to make a name for himself should take care to secure himself a stronghold here.

- **People's Park:** Also sometimes called the city of the dead, this elegant diamond shaped piece of land dominates the center of the city. It serves as a mausoleum and a neutral zone. I'll leave its proper description to the more eager pen of Mr. Binmora later in this chapter.
- **Annexed Areas:** The Island of Delights, Orphan's Cove, the Forum of Baradume, and Riker's Island are known collectively as the "annexed areas" of the city. These locations are all outside the city wall, and all (with the exception of the Island of Delights) are outside of the city's rules as well. Again, Mr. Binmora has done an excellent job of presenting these areas to the reader, and I feel no urge to repeat him.

ARCHITECTURE

Baradume is famed as the most beautiful city on the Forge, and may even rival any in existence throughout the multiverse. It, like Penance, has existed for untold millennia, but it is constantly torn

down and rebuilt instead of having new buildings assembled atop old ones. Colopitiron himself knocks down any building that he does not think graces his city, forcing the artisans to rethink the design and rebuild it if they have the resources. Often the site ends up falling into another's hands. Consequently, each building in the city is a work of art in its own right. Master builders come here from Penance and elsewhere to apprentice with the Baradume artisans, and for good reason. The architects of the City of Thieves are as skilled and cutting edge as any, producing wild and impossible structures tapered with classical features and unrivaled elegance.

Protectors generally employ builders to construct housing for their wards, plus to erect other buildings for the needs of the guild, such as theatres, workshops, clubs, storehouses, and so on. Competition between guilds is fierce, and the more wondrous and elaborate structures a great house can produce the more fame and attention it will garner. Clubs and theatres are open to all, but subject to the rules of whatever house runs them. It is generally unwise for rival members to enter an establishment under the control of an enemy protector; still the young find this to be the most delightful of gambits. Masks are common in the city, and entering and moving through a hated rival's territory, brushing elbows with his patrons and courtiers, and even by chance deflowering one of his heirs, all the while going undetected, is considered a boon of courage and skill.



Some of the most sprawling and sumptuous of compounds are the guild run and sponsored schools that dot the city. Built with the sole purpose of attracting the best of up and coming artists, these serve less as schools and more as communes where skilled crafts can be perfected in the company of other artisans. Of course many protectors also charge huge purses to the nobles of Penance and other realms to take on their youth and train them in the arts. Most of these children spend their time here drunk, doped up, and partaking of the pleasures of the flesh. These schools are none the less impressive in their construction, filled with fountains, open airy spaces, and works of art everywhere. They are buffered from the rest of the city by walled gardens in the hopes of providing a free nurturing place to create.

ART

Art is the expression of beauty, and beauty is all powerful in Baradume. To bring beauty into the world is the highest form of expression. Art is in everything here, not just in the master painters' works or in the sculptures that line every street, but also in one's clothes, the food, one's speech, and even in the production of utilitarian items. From armor and weapons to hair combs and oil lamps, all things in Baradume are constructed with style and ornate detail, and for a city with such fickle fashions, they are also remarkably well made. Shoddy or low-quality works simply do not pass muster here.

Magical items are common in the city, and as with all things, the skilled enchanter will be hailed as artist and hero. Almost all things created by Baradume's artisans are masterworks and well worthy of being enchanted. One can find a multitude of outlandish and splendid devices here; many are confounding in their purpose, some enchanted with powerful magics only to enhance their beauty, and others with obscure uses that defy logic. There is a recent trend for magical rings that will change the gender of the wearer, and also for mind altering devices, that might, for example, produce colored patterns in one's vision, or mimic other drug-like effects, effects that can be turned on and off at will.

Art is not found merely within the walls of an opera house or in the skill of a jeweler. Living well is seen as the highest form of art, although what exactly that means is widely open to interpretation. This is the most common source of all competitions between the lords and ladies of the great houses. It is a font of unending conflict and of amazing gifts for the masses. Houses, in their drive to impress upon the city their power and wealth, provide food and drink and entertainment for all who come at no cost. They will engage in bidding wars for favored artists or new talents, and they long to seduce the finest of beauties to their sides. The fevered pitch at which life moves under these conditions can devour those that are innocent or immature. The city both nurtures and adores artists and consumes and destroys them all with the same relish and indifference.

The outsider or visiting trader in the city will find Baradume almost overwhelming to take in, his eyes darting from one marvel to the next (which of course tends to distract from his belongings). After dwelling in Baradume for any amount of time, other places may seem dull or downright ugly, yet many who come

here find that it is not for them. The city's unrelenting pace and its unending temptations—all delivered seemingly free—can undo the most skilled of partiers. To be a long time resident, one must learn to pace oneself and to cultivate a skill that will allow one to create art, not just consume it.

POLITICS & COMMERCE

Most citizens, including the bulk of those who live out their entire lives here, see Baradume for its freewheeling and unrestricted lifestyle, where food and wine flow free and all the best of entertainments can be had on a whim. They are sheltered from the harsher realities of the politics and commerce that—here even more than in most places—are utterly intertwined.

It cannot be overstated enough the amount of wealth that flows into the city from the slaves that are pulled by Colopitiron to be sold to Stygia and the like. Access to these slaves is granted based on the favor of the Dark Master himself, and his favor in turn is gained by those who can foster the greatest works of art, be they entertainments or otherwise. Colopitiron's crows scatter throughout the city, and any event that captures his imagination or his pleasure earns favor for the guild responsible. Thus to gain slaves to sell, one must put on the best show in town and keep it running at all times. A house that ensures its artists are well nurtured, its people entertained and beautiful, and its reputation for excellence proven time and time again, will find that it is well-favored and given a great flow of slaves to sell. The bigger the crowd, the more likely it is the master's crows will find an event, so headcount is generally the easiest way to tell who has the upper hand in the city.

The competition fabricated by competing for seeds drives the bulk of political jockeying and unrest in the city. The rulers of the great houses and guilds must keep themselves in good stead with the master, and to do that they must be the best at throwing the unending party. Being undone or outmatched will often inspire one to up one's game and in turn do the same to others. This leads to a grand level of excellence and ingenuity being required of all who serve and carry out the will of the rulers. Of course it also can lead to subterfuge and sabotage. The dark underbelly of Baradume is run by a special breed of information brokers and assassins, who in a city of thieves must be skilled in their craft to continue to draw breath.

Sometimes open disputes spill out into the city and expand, creating violence and cycles of retribution that threaten the unending party. Colopitiron has no love for these disruptions to the beauty of his home, and thus has created a special guard to ensure that open war does not explode. These masked, anonymous "Wards" of Colopitiron (essentially members of his own special guild) roam the city and have the right to intervene in conflicts that have exceeded the norm. They are highly skilled, and wear powerful enchanted armors that make them formidable even against multitudes. They understand that the power that has been granted them is a great gift, and any who become bullies or abuse their stations may find themselves torn apart bit by bit by a flock of crows.

Of course, trade with the vampires alone is not always enough

to ensure power and wealth, and the sad truth about Baradume is that it only can survive as it does because the rest of the world follows the rules. Beyond the walls of the city, the lords and ladies of the great guilds and houses conduct business with other cities and nations as ruthlessly and with as much hard work and tenacity as anywhere else. They trade manufactured goods to Penance, run weapons to Arena, and conduct mining operations and slave routes wherever they can. To rule in Baradume and continue to throw the unending party that is life there, one must ensure that one flourishes in other markets.

Farmers grow the city's foods out in the wilderness areas to the west and northwest of the city. The land here is open, and plentiful enough by Eclipse standards. Farmers in this region are relatively isolated, and have only civilized contact with Baradume itself. Farmers are not paid in gold (where would they spend it?) but in manufactured goods, such as tools, clothes, and weapons, and in protection. Each guild maintains its own region of the wilds that it patrols, and in turn, the farmers that live there and benefit from the peace offer the guild first pick of all their foods. Most troubles on the frontiers come from the nightlings that dwell in the northwest forest, but slavers wander the wilds as well, and strange things wander out of the ruins. Without the guild patrols, farming would be impossible. Guilds also typically provide the wagons and severn required to bring the goods to market, providing the farmers a boon there as well. Loyal guild farmers often receive tokens that can be exchanged for temporary sponsorship in the city. Farmers generally travel to the city at least once a year for a half-moon holiday or so.

The goddust trade is almost completely controlled by the lords and ladies of Baradume. Only a select few houses run these mines, and there are fewer pursuits more cutthroat and ruthless. A year's supply of the dust can fetch enough wealth to run an extravagant villa for many years with excesses through the roof. After all, there are few who, if they had all the money in the world, would not buy immortality. Trade in the dust is an unstable business however, and few who are involved do so without also being users. When supplies are low, it is the mine owners that take their due first. There are times of course when buyers ruin themselves in bidding wars, or are burnt by a dealer and fall into madness from withdrawal, but there are always more takers out there willing to give anything for the promise of everlasting life.

UNWRITTEN LAWS

Though Baradume is a city without a government, without money, and without laws, do not doubt that there are still rules, customs, and traditions to be observed. Most of these are not firm decrees that have been passed down from the lord of the land and are absolute, but they do describe and define how the city works, and ignorance of them, or overstepping one's place, can

be disaster. In some ways, as these are laws that have naturally formed over time as patterns of behavior, they are much stronger than written laws in other places which are imposed more than desired.

The following list of laws is of my own creation. These are a summary of my observations and interrogations of the people of Baradume. While each citizen you might ask would come up with a slightly different set of customs (one little picker insisted that the most important rule of the city was that all people must wear hats), this list seems to be the common thread through all of them.

- All who enter the city must do so under the protection of an established protector.
- No customs or rules govern "orphans", those who choose to enter the city without a sponsor. Killing, kidnapping, attacking, and so forth is up to the orphans themselves to protect against, and are far from beyond the pale. In fact, I would bet anyone a barrow-full of goddust that nobody could get through the city unmolested without a badge.
- Self defense is permissible against protected individuals without fear of repercussion as long as non-lethal force is used.
- Protection contracts are made on an at-will basis, and both the protected and the protector must agree upon the rules of service.
- Protectors are free to choose and drop their wards at will.
- Protectors have to right to avenge a wrong dealt to a ward.
- Anyone can become a protector as long as he thinks he has the power to defend and feed himself and his wards. Of course, badges of protection are only useful as much as they are recognizable.
- All property is transitory. Trade takes place outside the city, but within the city, all transactions are made by theft or by gift.
- Anyone who doesn't have enough of the basic necessities should find a new protector who can provide for them.
- The masked, anonymous Wards of Colopitiron can be used to settle disputes, and help in keeping the peace.
- Wearing a false badge is a capital offense, and suspected fakes should be reported immediately to the protecting guild.



LANDMARKS OF BARADUME

The House of Binmora offered up this intriguing little leaflet for public consumption out in Orphan's Cove. I suspect it is more an inexpensive attempt at attracting new members than a comprehensive guide, but it does have its charms, and it covers a great deal of the basics.

MICK BINMORA'S KEY TO THE CITY OF BARADUME

So you've gone and got yourself a protector, eh? Maybe you are a new student, or a hip creative type, or a sailor out on shore leave. Or maybe you fancy yourself a thief and want to test those skills against the best of us. But where to begin, right? I mean, this is a city of a million people, how does one find his own place here? Well, this handy-dandy little key should break the chaos and spectacle down into a handful of prime destinations to check out to start your orientation to the City of Thieves.

THE CITADEL

Let's start here, since you can find it. Look up. Yep, there it is. First and foremost, there is no structure in all Baradume more impressive and long-lived as the citadel of our beloved Colopitiron (not to be confused with his palace which is also impressive and which I will cover later). The citadel is a great, floating marvel, a diamond in general shape, and famed for its ever-shifting surface texture. Known to the locals as the mirrored maze, the citadel rises out of the mists, hovering in the very center of all of Eclipse. Its sheer size dominates the sky, and it is almost always lit from below other than during the red moon. Its surface seems to shift in texture, sometimes reflecting the lights of the city like a glass mirror, other times rippling like wind on water. Sometimes it even appears to have complex patterns on it. There is an almost tangible energy felt when one is under the citadel, and whatever power holds it there is subject to neither wind nor rain. No typhoon can shift its axis. There is only one way to reach the citadel without wings, and that's a great retractable bridge that extends from the highest tower of Colopitiron's palace. Keep in mind though that the citadel is best viewed during the red moon... and from a distance; going there is death.

CITY CENTER

Well, now you've made your way to the city center, whether you knew it or not. Since you're here, you might as well have a look around. See that building connected to the citadel? Let's head there next.

THE PALACE OF COLOPITIRON

Hey, I don't know what your four-horned feathered fowl is like, but ours loves his people and dwells among them in a great residence that lies just below the citadel, off to the side of the Cirque De Hole. This palace can be deceptive in its size to outsiders as it was built out of scale; its exterior dome and tower as well as the surrounding structures are constructed as if to house a giant. All the windows and doors are made on a massive scale as well. The central cathedral is simply cavernous. The rest of the chambers are far more intimate though, forming a wild multi-level maze of galleries, corridors and alcoves. The uncountable rooms and intermingling halls and chambers are all sumptuous in their design, filled with works of art, bathing pools, and arboretums, though they do tend to be a little confusing, especially when one considers many do not have windows. This was all done to confound thieves and disrupt interlopers, but also can lead to great amusement and fun if one can let one's self go and feel free to wander wherever the maze takes you. Our good host holds court here quite regularly, and any are welcome to enter his walls, though to do so without an escort might make it hard to find one's way out again. Great galas and parties are almost endless here, but to receive a personal invitation to an event from the Dark Master himself is the rarest and highest thing one can aspire to.

CIRQUE DE HOLE

Beneath the citadel is a great circular bowl where structures have never been built. This likely started out of respect (or fear) for the citadel above, but as with all things in our joyous little community, this area now has been transformed into a place for amusement and diversion. The cirque cuts the very tip of a perfect circle into the surface of the city, with its mirrored floor sitting about fifty feet below street level. Though no permanent structures are ever built in the bowl, the cirque is surrounded by windowed towers and balconies, viewing platforms for the privileged. At the center, near the Dark Master's arched obelisk, is the largest and most elaborate of areas. Here the greatest of spectacles are performed, from plays with casts of thousands, to orchestral masterpieces, to bloody mortal combats. The cirque is considered part of Colopitiron's palace, and thus is not owned by any one great house. Instead, they all compete for time on its floor to outdo each other in producing the best entertainments. There is little downtime between shows, and only the most beloved will be repeated here. It is a cultural center and trade mecca, and is always crowded. If you seek inspiration or distraction, this is the place to go, particularly when the tide is at its absolute lowest and House Binmora showcases the best of its talented musicians.

THE SEA WALL

Surrounding the whole of the western city is the sea wall, a great structure built upon and supported by natural cliffs. It lines the Sea of Ink, and through its construction, allows for direct access to the city by ships, no matter the time of the month. The water level in Eclipse can greatly shift as anyone who isn't green as a fallen leaf from the Wildwood should know. Towns and ports deal with this

in all sorts of ways—dams, levies, beaches, gates, etc. Our solution is by far the best, if I don't say so myself. We simply built a great wall with floating docks set into it that can rise and fall with the will of the red moon. Out in the harbor a ways you might see our breakwater, a massive rock wall that keeps the massive waves of the sea from crashing over us.

THE GRAY CAUSEWAY.

It's a bridge like no other, and if you get to see it during the red moon when the fog is cleared, it is impressive—a good four miles long and lined with watchtowers. It's become a favorite spot for lovers and runners alike. It's also useful if you want to end it all, just take a leap during low tide. Speaking of which, the tides have taken their toll on the bridge over the years, and some say it's close to collapse, but due to local politics no one has made an effort to repair it, each guild saying it's someone else's responsibility to fix.

THE ISLAND OF DELIGHTS

Across the gray causeway and west of the citadel, three houses devoted to pleasure and sensations of the flesh rule, existing in a fragile harmony with one another. They live atop a great pillar of land that only has access to the sea during the high tide of the red moon. On this island there is almost no fantasy that cannot be had. The Firebrand guild practices its arts here, along with the Dancers' Form, and finally the infamous House of Thorn. These three powers in concert have created a place where all your carnal desires can at last be met. Be forewarned though that during the red moon, sailors and the like descend on this place in large numbers, making it all but impossible to get your licks in. Best to visit when the tide is low.

THE EXPLoding STAR

This insane tower at the center of the Island of Delights is a veritable pleasure palace run by the Firebrand guild. Its interior is a collection of glass tubes and chambers all lit by magical, colored lights and rising up to a great penthouse that expands out from the base. Its whole floor is invisible glass, and dancing and intercourse all take place on what appears to be open air, suspended breathlessly above the lights of the island below. Each section of the tower is run by a different mistress with a different specialty, and those occupying the chambers can control the color and intensity of the lighting and the transparency of the glass walls, thus granting privacy or allowing those outside to watch all that occurs.

EASTERN CITY

So, now that you're had your fill of pleasure and spectacle, you're ready for the real Baradume, not just the stuff to draw you in, but the stuff to keep you here, taking your first steps along the golden path.

THE ARCH

For a city like Baradume, you'd expect a more exciting name for the city's largest landmark than "The Arch", but well... that's what we call it. Look towards the middle of the city. See that enormous natural stone archway that straddles half the city? Head for it. Once you're directly beneath it you'll find yourself in Baradume's theatre district. It's pretty much impossible to go wrong here for entertainment. The larger buildings have the grand spectacles, operas, casts of thousands and so on. The smaller buildings have more personal productions. Decide what you like and explore. Most theatres have a schedule posted outside that will tell you what you are bound to see in there. It may take a while for you to find the right theatre for you, but we have a few favorites we might suggest.

THE GRAND BALLROOM

Head due north for about three blocks from where Processional hits the old city. Here you'll find a massive hall with an ornate tower shooting up at the northern end. This is the "Grand Ballroom", the city's most famous spot for dancing. The main hall is a hundred yards long and fifty wide, and filled at all times with elegant dancers, swinging to the exquisite sounds of a full orchestra. Bring a partner and come join the fun, or find one on the veranda; dancers of all sorts wait here for someone to come along and sweep them off their hooves. If ballroom style dancing doesn't appeal to you, head up the stairs to the tower. There are a dozen floors, each with a different style of dance going on, and each with its own band. The House of Binmora is proud to sponsor the amrita level on floor nine. Come up and see us for the sexiest and most stylish dance of them all!

COLISEUM

Baradume's Coliseum is located at the very foot of the southern leg of the great arch. Once you near it you'll see why a visit here is an absolute must. The "stones" of the coliseum are actually gigantic blocks of clear glass, and magical colored lights have been built into the walls of the stadium, allowing it to be lit up in a literal rainbow of hues. At the top of the coliseum, glass statues of all the city's greatest warriors have been set in a ring around the arena, watching the action. Bloodsport is no longer practiced in Baradume, though not because of any law or decree, simply because it doesn't draw the crowds. There are some grand battles, but these are choreographed, more like theatrical productions of historic events. There are gladiatorial challenges as times, but these are generally non-lethal. Some of these are actually considerably better than most fatal combats in more primitive places, as the combatants here, since they live at the

end of the performance, have been through literally hundreds of battles, and have achieved unearthly skills. One of the more unique art forms are the “melees”, these are scripted plays with non-scripted fight sequences. The script is written in hundreds of different ways, and depending on the outcome of the fights, the scenes of the play will change to match. There are sporting events too. There are games played here that have evolved on dozens of different worlds, and one can even find a few home grown versions. Joining a sports league is a great way to meet new folks in the city and stay in shape. The House on Binmora sponsors a battle-ball team that plays every quarter moon, and which has the best record in the city.

BATHS

There are a number of public baths scattered throughout the city, but the one located at the foot of the northern leg of the arch is the most exquisite and the best run. This grand building is decorated like a palace, and there are three distinct wings, each with its own function. The central chamber contains the baths, which consist of three shallow pools—one is warm, the second hot, and the last cold. If you want to look like a true native, you’ll want to bathe in the Baradume fashion, which is to start with the warm water, move to the hot, and then finish up with a dip in the cold water to close the pores. There is also a larger and deeper cold pool at the back of the chamber for those who wish to swim. When you have finished bathing, shuffle down either of the two richly-tiled corridors into the wings to complete your experience.

To the left you’ll find the massage wing. Here, a small army of professional masseurs will oil your body, and will work out any knots or tensions still left over from the bath. There are plenty of mats, so if you think you know how to give a proper rubdown, then by all means put on a white smock and get to work. Baradume is the freest city on the Forge, so as long as you are doing what you want, no one is going to try and stop you. The right wing is a steamy seraglio of silks and pillows. This area is for those who want to relax and sweat out their troubles. Don’t be surprised if an orgy or two spontaneously breaks out here. Everyone is naked, and people are beholden to their whims in the city of thieves. If you don’t feel like joining in, no worries, there are plenty of rooms to choose from.

The baths building is built on five-foot high stone columns, and fires are constantly stoked beneath the floor throughout to keep the chambers warm and to heat the pools. The people of Baradume are extremely interested in their own comfort, and go to great lengths to maintain it. Don’t be surprised if you see a number of small creatures scurrying about outside the baths covered in soot. Because the area under the floor is quite shallow, short races such as pickers and camos are typically employed to tend to the fires.

MORTELIS GALLERY

While Baradume’s so called “slums” would undoubtedly be the central attraction in any other city, here they are best avoided, so head south on Processional from the baths until you get to the city’s tallest building, a sleek marble pillar standing out amongst the city’s docks. In this unlikely location, you will find the city’s pride and joy, the Mortelis gallery.

The gallery is more than just a building that houses sculptures and paintings – it is a work of art itself. The building is built around a circular theme, and all the hallways and chambers are round, giving an elegant and natural feel to the setting. There are twenty floors of art here, and the interior of each gallery is veneered with different materials, including brick, stone, marble, limestone, teak, and other substances, so while each room shares the same basic size, layout, and structure, they have vastly different appearances. The central gallery is three stories high, and is covered in gold leaf.

A walk through the Mortelis Gallery is a walk through time. The building’s oldest artworks are stored on the lowest floor, and as one rises through the tower, one sees newer and newer works until at last one comes out upon the great roof garden and is back firmly in the present, looking out over our proud city, which itself is the greatest work of art of our modern time. Most of the collection is the property of Ars Immortalis, but you will see a number of works bearing the Binmora brand, including a full set of armor from Barbello, and an exquisite magical harp that one can play without touching—simply by thinking the notes they are sounded.

One curiosity about the gallery you will notice right way is the tiny entrance. The exterior door to this massive building appears fitting, but those who wish to explore past the cloak room will need to duck down and squeeze through a tiny little porthole. Since most of the art in the gallery is quite large, this simple little security trick serves to prevent would be thieves from lifting the collection. So how do we get the art in the building in the first place? Hey, that’s our secret! Any bags or magical devices will need to be left behind in the cloak room for safe keeping as well.

THE PIT

As you make your way across the southern edge of the city, you might get a few thrills from stopping off at “the Pit”, the city’s erstwhile garbage dump. It surmised that this section of the city was once inhabited, but long long ago seems to have collapsed into an enormous sink hole. The amazing thing however, is that this hole has no known bottom. Nobody is quite sure how far it goes down or why it hasn’t filled up with water from the nearby sea. We’ve taken to using it to dispose of our damaged or unwanted materials. No

matter how much gets tossed in here, it never seems to overflow. The pit's location in the heart of the artisan's district makes it invaluable for the city's manufacturing plants. It's also somewhat picturesque, forming a lake of pure blackness and quiet amongst the bustle and brightness of the city. Every few years someone sends an expedition down into the pit to explore its secrets, but these always either come back empty handed, or are never heard from again.

PEOPLE'S PARK

Baradume's park is not to be missed, and neither can you miss it. It's two miles long and located right smack in the center of the city. The park is sometimes called the city of the dead but don't let that fool you, there's nothing frightful about it. In fact, it's probably one of the most peaceful and gorgeous places to take a stroll in all of the Forge. Colopitiron himself regulates the park, and has declared it a neutral zone. Fighting and violence of any kind is banned in the park, as well as taking up residence here, and those who break the Dark Master's edicts are in for a swift trip to Riker's Island. The park's "residents" are the past leaders of the city. Each guild maintains at least one mausoleum here, where the guildmasters and mistresses are interred upon their demise, along with all of their fineries. The guilds spare no expense for their honored dead, and the mausoleums are some of the most stunning and elaborately decorated structures in the city. Spaced throughout the park you will also find the incredible sculpture work of our own dear Dark Master, and the tower of intertwining bodies at the far eastern end of the park is the undisputed masterpiece.

Because the park is the safest place in Eclipse, all sorts of people flock here to wander, play, or just relax in peace. The park is a favorite place for lovers, and it is a game for young nobles to sneak into the tombs of rival guilds and make love right on their graves. This practice is not recommended, as many of the city's mausoleums are filled with powerful wards and nasty traps to keep the dead safe. Sometimes productions are staged in the park, but these are generally more impromptu than elaborate, and many are put on by the city's children. The amphitheatre near the eastern corner of the park is often at the heart of the city's most important cultural events, as more people can gather here in the park than anywhere else in the Baradume.

At the park's center, a quick swim across the reflecting pool, is the temple of the winds. This elegant latticework tower is rebuilt at the start of each year, and throughout the year, residents of Baradume swim the moat to reach the tower, where they weave small objects into the latticework. These objects are all mementoes of loved ones who have passed, and on the final moon of each year, the tower is burned, and all the objects with it, bringing a final and spectacular end to the traditional period of mourning.

THE EXQUISITE SERPENT

Head north out of the park along Processional into the new city, and you're sure to notice a massive, jewel-encrusted silver tower in the shape of a risen cobra. This is the exquisite serpent, the favorite haunt of some of the city's more unique residents.

While the Exploding Star is the largest, most well-known house of pleasure in the city, the Exquisite Serpent caters to sexual appetites that are not as visible or accepted. While the Star is brightly colored and open (often so open that people in one room can see the activities of those in the next) the Serpent prides itself upon the privacy of all of its guests. The rooms are private and there are numerous hidden doors and corridors leading into and out of all areas so that clients can avoid being seen.

The types of activities that this place is known for push the boundaries of sexuality. Interspecies relations, and extreme types of play are common. What makes the serpent truly special though is that it will research requests. This is invaluable for citizens of rare or specialized races. Register your species (or whatever species you are looking for) with the serpent's staff, and they will do their best to find a partner that will suit your needs. If your request is filled, you can partake of your pleasure, although you must agree to fulfill one favor for the guild at some time in the future.

FORUM OF BARADUME

I saved the Forum for the end here, as there's no need for you to visit now... in truth though, you have likely already seen it. The Forum is neutral territory in Baradume, and lies just outside the city's southern gate, a mere stone's throw from Orphan's Cove. The Forum is the headquarters for the "Wards" of Colopitiron, those masked judges who are given reign to speak for the Dark Master. Any dispute in the city may be taken before the Wards of the Forum as long as both parties agree ahead of time to commit to whatever judgment the Ward decides. The worst of the disputes and rivalries of the guilds generally end up here, and though there are always exceptions, the judgment of the Wards is always fair and wise. In most cases, both parties are asked to perform some act of atonement. Generally this is in service of the city, such as cleaning the streets or repairing the docks (or the Forum itself).

The Forum is a large, open, airy structure with stairways leading to each of six successive levels. The fourth level is where the Wards hold court, and the court takes the shape of a large stone amphitheatre, with row upon row of stone seats open to the public. The floor of the court is actually the stage of the amphitheatre, and everyone present can see and hear all that occurs. Members of the public are allowed to speak in the court sessions, sometimes as witnesses or friends, other times as simple observers who feel they have gained some insight from watching as to what the judgment of the court should be.

Decorative columns support the roof of the fifth level, which consists of a curved hall where statues of past Wards stand in judgment

of the proceedings below. At the top of the Forum, a cupola stands, containing a massive obsidian statue of the Dark Master himself, carved by his own hand. Below the court, buildings on the third level are provided for use by the Wards. These serve as homes and also as short-term prisons for rowdy orphans who cause trouble at the cove. Also, a large courtyard on this level contains various tables full of food and drink and entertainment provided by the plaintiffs in order to sway public opinion.

The bottom level of the Forum is used primarily for private storage. Merchants visiting the city can keep their items here if they can convince the wards that the goods will not remain long and that they are upstanding individuals who will not cause trouble in the city. The remaining storage areas hold food, weapons, and armor for times of war.

Within the Forum, Wards always wear polished silver and gold plate armor with garish steel masks. They wear crimson hoods over their heads, and then golden crowns over that. No inch of skin is visible on any of them, and their race and coloring is completely obscured. Rumor has it that the armor of the Wards is magical and obscures their appearances, hiding wings, tails, horns, and projecting an illusory height and weight in order to protect their true identities.

RIKER'S ISLAND

Riker's island sits just north of Baradume. I don't suggest you go there, crows forbid! But undoubtedly you will see it's glow out in the bay and wonder at it. Riker's Island is Colopitiron's private prison for those who cross him. True, most who truly cross him are destroyed, but for those who simply commit a minor infraction (such as fighting in the park or in his palace), they are whisked away in a flurry of feathers and deposited here. There is no term one must serve, one must simply find one's way back to the mainland again, but this is a trick easier said than done. The island is a maze of deathtraps and predatory creatures, some that defy description. The place used to be a monastery back ages ago, but the buildings have mostly collapsed and been overgrown with a thicket of mushrooms and mosses. Most prisoners are deposited in the gardens and left to wander the ruins until they can find a way off. Winged creatures are deposited in catacombs far below the surface, and must find a way out. Even if one makes it to the cliff, getting off the island can be difficult. At low tide the slope of the island makes it very dangerous to dive into the water (and the Sea of Ink is hardly safe for swimming anyway). One's best bet is to wait until high tide when the boatmen come by to look for survivors. If you are valuable enough to your guild, you might find they send someone for you, but most folks have to pay the boatman, which is truly as unpleasant as it sounds. One other rumor... the black obelisk at the center of the island is thought to predate the monastery, and people seem to believe that it is hollow inside, although there are no windows and no doors.

EASTERN GATE

Well, now that you've seen the sights and the spectacle, and had your fill of pleasure, it's time to head to the eastern gate of the city for some grounding and to discover the real Baradume. Head for the gate itself... it's the biggest landmark here, although it's not really your destination. The eastern gate houses Baradume's army, with soldiers provided by each of the guilds for two-year terms of service. The army only deals with threats outside the city itself, and spends the bulk of its time dealing with nightlings and other monsters marauding caravans. Each year, the soldiers vote on their own general, the current leader being the honorable Sir Rinaud of the house of Binmora. Rumor has it that a complex network of tunnels exists between the eastern gate and many of the outposts on the farm roads to the east.

However, as your aim likely has little to do with joining the militia, once you get to the gate of the city, head left and start wandering the charming cobblestone alleyways and corridors of the new city. This is the domain of House Binmora, and every nook and cranny holds intimate delights and wonders far surpassing the garish spectacle of the city center. Head for the Siren's Crawl for the best drink in town and the most moving musicians this side of the afterlife. Head for the Dinful Sinful for the finest sweets and the wildest dancing. Head for whatever you like! It's impossible to go wrong when you go Binmora.



GUILDS

One could not write seriously about Baradume without taking a close look at least at the major guilds and houses of the city. The guilds are, in effect, the city's government, and each one sets its own rules. Guild rules amount essentially to conditions for employment. One is beholden to one's guildmaster's wishes, as at any time and for any reason a guildmaster may dismiss any ward from his protection. However, guildmaster's are also driven to be lenient and fair in order to attract the more talented citizens. Becoming a protector is no easy task in modern Baradume. It takes more than one lifetime to rise to the top, and therefore the ones that make it are those who have prolonged their lifespans, either through use of the goddust, or via other even more sinister means. Many upon finally becoming protectors actually discover that they do not enjoy the job. Responsibility for a guild is far more than ordering one's minions around and having folks cower

before you, it also involves responsibility for the guild's finances and reputation. Ruling a small army of not exceptionally frugal people and trying to feed, clothe, entertain, and provide for them all without much help is a truly maddening task, and only those with true desire for control should ever apply. Few guildmasters get any sleep at all, another reason the goddust is a necessary part of the job.

Not all guilds have a single figurehead. Some are run by families, couples, or triumvirates, and a few even democratically elect a new leader every few years. Most protectors reach office through trickery and guile, more than a few having murdered their predecessors. Guilds generally have an inner circle of officers who carry out the wishes of the master. Traditionally, these duties are split into five seats. First is the trade minister, who deals primarily with the guild's interests outside the city. This officer is responsible for dealing with money and finance. Trade ministers typically are recruited from outside of Baradume, as few true citizens have any knowledge or interest in money. The second seat is the entertainment director, who is responsible for the operations of the guild within the city. Third is the captain of the guard, who directs the soldiers of the guild who do the actual protecting of wards. Fourth is the spymaster, who works behind the scenes to secure the guild's success and reputation. Last but not least is the mine boss, who is responsible for operations in Husk and for securing the guild's supply of goddust.

Guild members, like masters, are typically free to end their service at any time. It is not uncommon for wards to switch protectors in the city, and this is often done to move from a smaller, less-prestigious guild to a larger, richer one. Switching is also common in the case of outsiders who enter the city before really getting a feel for where and how they want to work. Each guild has its own flavor and its own style, and tends to attract a different sort of ward.

While guilds compete for recruits, most do have some sort of entry requirement, typically a test of some sort to filter out recruits not worthy of the guild's standards. It is traditional for guilds to not require any services of new recruits for at least one quarter moon, in order to give them time to enjoy the pleasures of the city. This is not so in the case of the guilds that don't require an entrance exam. Guilds that take all comers generally don't have good intentions, and should be best avoided. The following nine guilds have all passed the test of time, and their wards make up the bulk of the city's population:

ARS IMMORTALIS

Area of Activity: City Center

Leader: Darius Odom, human ancient

Entry Requirements: Create one transcendent work of art under pressure.

As a youth, Darius Odom's otherworldly beauty blew a harsh note of discord through his home world. Colopitron's abduction of the child spared the lives of countless thousands, and sparked a new chapter in the history of this dark land. As his beauty faded, Darius worked furiously to prolong his lifespan,



and eventually pioneered the use of goddust to provide eternal youth. He has shared this secret with only a chosen few, and keeps a vice grip on the trade of the substance within Eclipse, making Ars Immortalis Baradume's oldest and premier guild. The mines and the trade routes known today were founded by AI, and much of present-day Baradume was built by its artisans. Though large, the guild is quite exclusive and difficult to join, as Odom's true obsession is beauty in all its forms, and its ranks are frequently purged of those who fail to live up to the guild's reputation and standards of excellence. Membership is not without its privileges though... do not doubt that AI knows how to throw a party or put on a show. Most other guilds in the city owe AI allegiance in some form due to the guild leaders addiction to Darius' invention, though many have found their own supply over the years, driving a cold wedge between them and the city's most influential organization.

THE CHAMPIONS

Area of Activity: Theatre District

Leader: Arden Silverblade, human ancient

Entry Requirements: Subdue a member of the guild in the arena.

In all his history, Darius Odom has only ever fallen in love once. Thousands of years ago, his heart became inflamed for a human woman, a daughter of a visiting Arena warlord, and he took her. The warlord was of course upset, and he brought his full army into Eclipse to besiege the city. Colopitiron, realizing the fault lay with his favorite, did nothing to intervene. While Baradume does have an army of sorts, the city's sovereignty lies more in the fact that it's location is remote and it has few enemies than in its ability to defend itself. Even Stygia leaves Baradume alone for the most part because it does not want to lose the steady supply of blood that flows from its pens. In the end, it was indeed Stygia that came to the city's rescue, the Queen sending her army in response to Odom's offer to share the secrets of his precious goddust. The warlord's daughter herself, though beloved to Odom, was immune to his beauty, and despised him. She raised their son to secretly hate his father as well, poisoning his mind whenever they were alone together. The boy grew to be one of Baradume's greatest actors and gladiators, and he made a great show of being devoted and committed to his father's cause. When the boy came of age, and at his mother's promptings, he betrayed his father, stealing the secrets of the goddust and splitting a large portion of the guild off into a new house, the Champions. Odom would surely have torn the guild apart in civil war to get what was his back, but Karikus had taken the militant wing of the guild with him, and even though his father outnumbered him, Karikus had the upper hand.

The Champions have remained the strongest military force in the city, although over time they have gradually increased their artistic skills, and still remain a thorn in the side of Ars Immortalis by serving as Odom's chief competition. The Champions tend to emphasize quantity and size over quality in my observations. Their musicians make up for mediocre skills by playing louder, their artists make up for lack of vision by making paintings bigger, and their celebrations tend towards the spectacular more than the sublime. However, the Champions find that these efforts draw

a great deal of attention. They still manage to recruit a number of members by offering the best protection in town. The Champions avenge all wrongs of their wards, and never compromise by accepting gold or goods from other guilds in return for an injury. Due to this practice however, the guild is at odd with most of the other large guilds in the city, and seems to be constantly fighting various turf wars.

Karikus (who took his mother's surname when splitting from AI) passed on long ago, and his son Arden rules in his place, now over two thousand years old himself. It is said that Karikus was poisoned by his mother for failing to obey her, and that she found some mystic substance that prevented the goddust from prolonging his life, eventually killing him with withdrawals. Rumor also has it that the mother is still alive and runs the guild in secret, but she hasn't been seen in over five hundred years, so this seems unlikely.

THE FIREBRAND

Area of Activity: Island of Pleasure

Leader: Rossyn Eris, human ancient

Entry Requirements: Pleasure a guild officer.

The Firebrand guild is the rare exception in Baradume, a guild that offers its services via a free market fee. Of course, this is because it is difficult to steal what the guild has to offer. The Firebrands take in anyone who has an art for the physical pleasures. The guild maintains many houses around the city, but the most famous is the Exploding Star. Anyone is free to enter the guild houses and petition the madams, but anyone who wishes to make use of the guild's service must provide a gift of some kind. The most typical gifts are quantities of food and drink, which are used to feed the guild members. Other gifts may be valuable magic items, rare herbs, or well crafted artifacts of aesthetic or utilitarian value.

This guild is known for the exceptional beauty of its offerings, especially the wonders of the Exploding Star compound. It employs the cream of the crop, attempting to offer every amenity and comfort, but this is not the guild to come to if one is looking for twisted or violent sexual pursuits. Rossyn Eris is a very hands-on ruler, and values each of her wards. She will not stand to see them harmed or degraded. Do not doubt that the Firebrand workers can defend themselves, and the guild employs some of the city's best mercenaries to enforce its rules.

THE HOUSE OF THORNS

Area of Activity: Island of Pleasure

Leader: Ruthen Lexx, wild frey vampire

Entry Requirements: None

If it is darker pursuits that one desires in one's sexual proclivities, then the House of Thorns is the place to go. Its master is a feline vampire who looks at all living things as food to be played with. He offers every sort of foul and cruel sexual diversion imaginable,

and what is more, he charges nothing for the services. Pity the orphans or wayward souls that find themselves in his service, the remainder of their sure to be short lives will be full of humiliation, degradation, and pain. There is something even darker about the fact that all these vile and debased acts can be performed by any with a taste for it for free, but then one might also wonder how Ruthen makes his living. In my extensive research of his financial portfolio I found that he is well backed by the hosts of Stygia, who in turn use him to propel their spies into the city and to uncover the darkest of secrets of Baradume's nobles. Imagine if there was one place where those in power could explore all their darkest desires out away from family and home, and all for free. Ruthen, in his hosting of this house of horrors, gains access to blackmail information unparalleled anywhere else in Baradume.

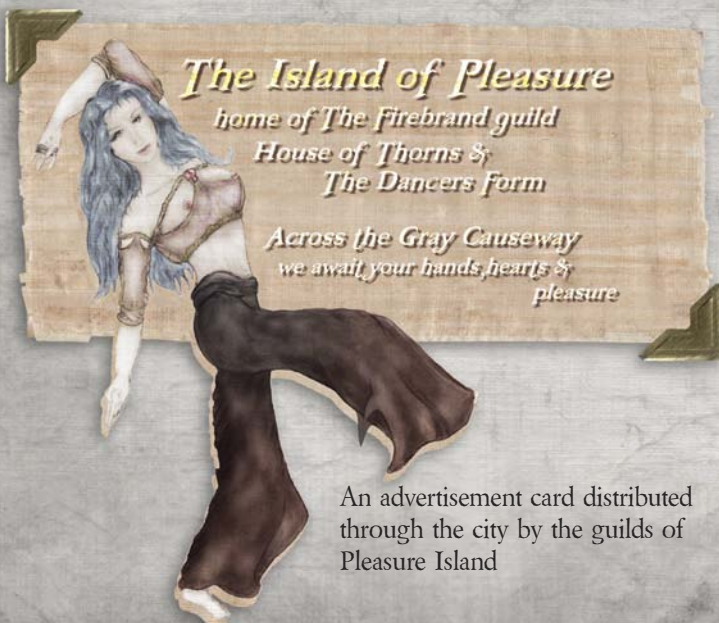
THE DANCERS' FORM

Area of Activity: The Island of Pleasure

Leader: Seanth Bea, human

Entry Requirements: Phenomenal dance ability. Slay one innocent in the House of Thorns.

The Dancers Form is a school and a guild rolled into one. Here the famed dancers of Baradume are trained to use their bodies as an intimate tool for beauty, seduction, and violence. The school offers the best in assassins, entertainers, and lovers all in one. It is favored by Colopitiron, and has first claim on any slave he pulls that may have a talent for dance. The school offers its dancers' services to other great houses in exchange for goods, and all requested tasks are performed with both grace and subtlety. The school also gains money from outsiders who would have their concubines and bodyguards trained. The school offers sexual services to the public as long as it is understood that visitors are being used as a training tool for students to practice their seductive arts on. The guild chooses a new leader every thirteenth moon. Leaders are allowed to rule more than once, just not in consecutive terms. The current leader, Seanth, is a beautiful male dancer of unrivaled skill who suffered a terrible scar to his face while on assignment protecting a lord and lover. He has retired from public life to teach, and has ruled the school three times already in the past.



An advertisement card distributed through the city by the guilds of Pleasure Island

THE DODGERS

Area of Activity: Everywhere

Leader: Arturo the Red, molice ancient

Entry Requirements: Must be a child or of small size. Must pickpocket one soldier.

If there is one thing about rules in Eclipse, it is that someone somewhere will break them, and thus we have the Dodgers. They are Baradume's most widespread and least visible guild, due in no small part to the fact that most of their members do not visibly display their badges of protection. Originally founded as a children-only guild for orphans, it has recently expanded to admit any undersized creature into its ranks. The Dodgers make up most of the city's pickpockets and spies, and over time have included more and more of its assassins as well. Any affront against the guild is likely to be met with a delayed and unexpected retribution. Now, one may ask how can one tell if someone is a member of the guild if they do not wear badges, well... this is just the way the Dodgers like it. After all, as the guild's members are mostly children, this is the Dodgers' way of protecting the most vulnerable and meek of the city's residents. They enjoy confounding the grownups of the city by making them think twice about attacking any child. It should be noted that if the Dodgers choose to ice out a guild or house, the flow of information from the streets can come to an abrupt halt, placing that organization at a distinct disadvantage. The guild's leader, Arturo, is one of the smartest and best-connected individuals in all Baradume. He has been taking the goddust for over two hundred years, and now bears an enlarged physique massive enough to pass as that of a winged rat.

THE ROPERS

Area of Activity: Slums

Leader: Ved Medrov, vampire

Entry Requirements: None

For the lowest of the low who can't seem to find work with anyone else, the Roper's guild is sometimes the only option. Unlike all of the other guilds that require some sort of proof of worth before protection is offered, the Ropers will take anyone at any time for any reason. Of course, this doesn't mean that nothing is expected of them. In fact, the Ropers offer some of the dirtiest work in the city, generally kidnappings of prominent visiting nobles in return for ransoms, which they use to feed and house the guild. Those unwilling or unable to do the work assigned them do not live long to regret their decision, as the guild's master, Ved Medrov, is an elder vampire who demands a steady supply of fresh blood. Medrov fled to Baradume a thousand years ago after a dispute with the Queen Saturnia, supposedly having plotted against her politically. This conflict also left him scarred physically. He is a hunched, hairless wretch with long twisted fingers and large bug eyes. Medrov is not welcome back in Stygia, and seems to have settled here permanently and carved out a despicable but secure niche for himself.

THE HOUSE OF BINMORA

Area of Activity: New City

Leader: Lady Deita Binmora and her three sons, pale humans

Entry Requirements: Pass art or cooking skill test. Seduce one guild member over dinner.

The unending party touches every street and corner of the city, but the perception is that the greatest of entertainments occur towards the center of town, near the Palace and Cirque De Hole. To draw the attention of crowds and the favor of Colopitiron clear across the city, almost to the eastern gate, is a feat of no small skill. The Binmora family has been doing just that for the last eight generations. They have cultivated an alternative, intimate-feeling neighborhood filled with extremely talented performers and artists, all who seem to fare better in smaller venues. There is the perception that the Binmora streets and clubs are a well-kept secret for the tasteful and alternative purveyors of art. The common thread being that they have not so much flash, but substance. Many even tend to believe that the Binmora family is just barely scraping by, but nothing could be further from the truth. This carefully constructed alternative to the craze of downtown in fact sees almost as much foot traffic and patronage. The Binmora are rich and powerful, and they use their pull to find the right kinds of acts and talents to fit their niche. Rather than a few huge clubs, they run close to a hundred small ones. Rather than extravagant food banquets, they offer small, skilled bakeries that make fine breads and cheeses as well as humble-looking sweets that taste as good as any of the garish cakes you might find elsewhere.

THE GREAT HOUSE OF LYAEUS DIO

Area of Activity: Theatre District

Leader: Lyaeus Dio, human celestial

Entry Requirements: Must be good-looking. Drink one guild member under the table.

The lord of wine, song, and dance, Lyaeus Dio is a seemingly beautiful youth who never sleeps, ages or tires of celebrating life in all its excess. Most believe he is an ancient with a private goddust mine kept secret to prolong his life. It took me only a glance to see that he was in fact a fallen celestial who had developed his skills of disguise to an untold level of protection. His skin seemed well tanned, his golden hair kept in messy curls, and his constant flirting with young and old alike all led one to believe he was human. I danced with him in the guise of a youth, and was utterly surprised when he leaned in and whispered, "I know what you are." But before I could question him, he was spinning off into the crowd. This act serves him in some way, perhaps offering him the chance to be closer to humans without the fear that one might come along with knowledge of his person. His house is not only known for its parties and festivals, but for running almost half the docks. His guild supplies rare metals, gems for jewelers, and food throughout the city. The guild also runs a massive cleaning operation that sweeps all the streets of central Baradume clean of all the refuse created by the unending party. Its leader may play the fool, but for all his public displays of hedonism he is a cunning businessman, a fact that has started to

vex Darius Odom, who still believes Lyaeus to be an ancient like himself. Darius has begun a campaign to undermine this upstart, a great part of it being focused on finding his goddust supply and disrupting it. The resources Darius has expended in this endeavor have begun to take their toll on his own house. For his part, Lyaeus has remained seemingly indifferent to the conflict for the time being, content to cause harm through deception rather than direct action.

THE UNENDING PARTY

The city of Baradume pays no tribute or honor to time. Clocks are nowhere to be seen, and people live, work, and function here according to their own whims and bodily needs. The need to produce is only driven by the need to keep one's protector, and as long as one does just enough to stay employed, one is otherwise free to do as one will. There is always a celebration or event somewhere, if not almost everywhere in Baradume. The locals have come to call this "The Unending Party", and in a place with so few rules, and where all are left to their own devices, the call of the celebration can be seductive and overwhelming. It can also be the greatest of joys if taken in stride and with time away. There is always inspiration to be had in the parades and impromptu performances of the streets. Other artists are everywhere, and great conversations about the very nature of life spring forth at the drop of a hat. One can almost always find someone to dance closely with, kiss, and fall into bed with; no one in Baradume is ever alone unless by their own choosing.

On the other hand, those that lack internal controls may find themselves caught up in a self-destructive whirl of pleasure and sensation. After all, no one in Baradume is going to tell you that you've had enough to drink, eat, or smoke. There are no doctors running around saying, "You need more rest; lay off the Thole potions!" Here, one can drink, dance, pass out on pillows in the streets, and then wake to do it all again. Many fall to a strange madness over time that the locals call the "blistering"—not from a sun, but rather from the unending daze of drink, sex, song, food, pleasure, and dance. There is a look in the eyes of one who has lost himself to this that warns of danger. The blistered fall all too soon, their constant altered state makes them unproductive and bad company. They often lose their protector and may not even notice, and many of them fall fast to their final sleep, their systems overrun with drugs.

Those folk that make the City of Thieves their home must strike a balance. Without the unending party, you are unlikely to know love, joy, or friendship, but partake too much and it will devour you.

COMMISSIONS

Sadly, guilds need to make a profit to survive. This may not occur to the guild members themselves, but the guildmasters are acutely aware of this fact. If the slave pens are not keeping up with demand, or if general trade is not proving profitable, there is one further way for a guild to fund its operations, commissions. Baradume has the best artisans and the most well-made goods on the Forge, so when rich folks from other parts of the Forge want something special made, they often come here. Guilds will take

an order from the patron, inquiring as to specifics and details, and then if they feel they have the resources to craft the items in question, they will name a price. Commission prices are never low, even if competing houses bid on the same job. The guilds don't really like making their money this way, but they tolerate it as long as the prices remain high and the orders few.

Commissioned items are rarely enchanted, but all are fully capable of enchantment, and most are intended for this purpose. Commissioned items may range from jewelry to clockworks to architectural blueprints to clothing, or just about anything one may desire or imagine. Prices are high, generally at least ten times what a similar item might cost on the open market, and it is customary for patrons to be granted access to the city for a short time so they may take their pleasure at the guild's expense. Some guilds offer the opportunity for patrons to buy a commission for nothing, essentially paying a large sum of money for temporary protection from the guild in order to enter the city. Patrons are allowed to feed and enjoy the entertainments and pleasures, but aren't allowed into the guild's "market" in the artisan district. Temporary membership is costly, averaging upwards of ten thousand gold per quarter moon. Keep in mind though that not all bids are for currency. Some guilds ask unusual requests of their patrons. Also, woe betide the fool who buys his way into the city and then brings his money in with him. It won't last one sleep.

ART

Art objects (a category including all material goods) is the most common form of commission. Most patrons come to Baradume in order to commission custom items that they intend to have enchanted with very specific properties. Also, simple works of art are common too, typically statues or paintings of the patrons themselves for purposes of vanity. Though Baradume does manufacture weapons and armor, they are not known for these items, and patrons generally take their business to Penance or Arena instead. Many bloodlords from Penance send agents here to design buildings and palaces, since the architects of Baradume are probably the most skilled aesthetically in the multiverse (although again, this probably is not the best place for military designs). Each guild has its own specialty, so while prices may vary, the rule that one gets what one pays for still holds fast. The following guidelines show what a patron may expect to pay, and to whom, for specific goods.

- **Architectural Plans:** Ars Immortalis – 10gp per square foot.
- **Jewelry:** House of Binmora – 10 times market value
- **Statues:** Champions – 5,000gp per foot of height
- **Paintings:** Ars Immortalis – 250gp per square foot
- **Food:** House of Binmora – 100gp per pound
- **Wine/Beverages:** The Great House of Lyaeus Dio – 500gp per gallon

LOVE

Love can be easily had on the streets of Baradume. Enter one of the houses of the Firebrands (or the House of Thorns for the truly depraved), and you can pretty much get whatever you want. Those who come to Baradume simply to experience the joys of

lovmaking and excess need only buy a temporary membership, and rare is the visitor not completely sated within a few dozen candle-marks. Those who truly patronize the guilds for services of the flesh typically want something more. Some may want to take one of the city's beauties home with them, and there are those guilds (such as the Ropers) who are more than happy to deal in slaves. Other patrons sometimes want to breed with one of the perfectly formed residents of the city, or want a very specific creature to be bred for them. One need be careful who one treats with in these matters; some guilds may take offense at visitors treating the free people of Baradume as mere slaves. Unfortunately, the guilds who can be treated with in these matters are rarely the most trustworthy. One thing to keep in mind, the more specific the request, the most likely it will be fulfilled to one's satisfaction. Guilds dealing in matters of the flesh include the following:

- **Kidnapping:** The Ropers – 100,000gp for average citizen. More for specific individuals. Note that much of this will be paid to the guild of the citizen kidnapped to smooth things over.
- **Breeding (Self):** The Firebrand – 20,000gp if patron is male, 2,000gp if female. The patron will be shown a lineup of suggested breeding partners who have all consented to such service and may select one to lie with once. The guild will supply magics that ensure that the union results in issue. If the patron is male, he will need to return in nine moons or so (depending on his species) to receive his child.
- **Breeding (Other):** The Great House of Lyaeus Dio – 30,000gp. This house has a much larger and more varied population than the Firebrand, and can offer more flexible breeding stock for all variety of purposes. The patron must explain the species and traits he is looking for, and two lineups are formed. The patron chooses both the male and the female surrogates, and again, must return after the gestation period to obtain his child. Females often consent to being breeding surrogates as they are excused from their guild duties for one month before and one month after delivery. Guild magics can ensure the gender of the child if desired.

THEFT

Baradume is home to the greatest thieves, burglars, robbers, pickpockets, footpads, and snitches found in all the Forge. These thieves are a guild's greatest treasure, and they are treated like kings and their identities well protected. However, these thieves can also be the guild's biggest money maker, and they can be loaned out for the right price. There is plenty to steal outside of Baradume, and thieves often enjoy outside missions as it gives them an opportunity to try out their talents in different environments and to show off. Bloodlords sometimes come from Penance in need of a thief, or small parties of rashers often need help with a dangerous mission. Prices for renting a thief vary greatly depending upon the length of the mission, the quality of the thief desired, and the general level of risk involved. In all cases, a deposit is required, and this can be a princely sum, so often it is in the form of hostages, typically family members of the patron to be left in service of the guild until the thief is returned. Patrons

may also do a favor for a guild as part of their payment, such as slaying or capturing one of the guild's enemies outside of the city, protecting a guild ship or caravan, delivering an item to a far-off locale, or obtaining a rare or unique item for the guild. If one should desire to hire a thief, the following guilds are suggested as contacts (prices are for average missions):

- **Burglar:** Ars Immortalis – 100,000gp, 1,000,000gp deposit.
- **Spy:** Champions – 75,000gp, 750,000gp deposit.
- **Pickpocket:** Dodgers – 50,000, 500,000 deposit.
- **Assassin:** Dodgers – 150,000, 1,000,000 deposit.

ORPHANS' COVE

Orphans' cove stands at the southern gate of the city, just north of the Forum. It is an odd collection of tents, buildings, market stalls, and taverns, stylish, yet too haphazardly put together to be beautiful. The cove is Baradume's interface to the outside world. It is just outside the city gate, so it is essentially part of the city, but the rules are so different that it simply doesn't count. The cove serves two primary purposes, first as a marketplace for the guilds to sell their goods and offer their services to the outside world, and second, as a proving ground for any who would petition the guildmasters for protection. Alongside all of this, a bit of a shanty town has formed of merchants, mercenaries, shysters, and rogues, some stuck and unable to get contracts, and some here to try to take advantage of the green blood that flows in from the southern road.

Each guild has its own market here as a sort of permanent fundraiser, and prices are considerably cheaper than for commissioned goods (since one does not get to dictate what the guilds produce). Prices are also cheaper than when the goods arrive in the Erebus market, as the shipping companies do not get to take their profits. These well-made goods run typically twice the price that average quality goods might fetch on an open market. Sometimes smaller traders will dock their ships at the quay just south of the city and come here to bypass the middlemen, but they need be increasingly careful, as the larger shipping companies (particularly Backwater) have turned to brigandry to protect their profits, and may attack these ships if they are encountered in open waters. The goods for sale here aren't particularly practical, but are meant more for resale in Erebus or Penance. Goods range from clothing to paintings and statuettes to wagons and carts to fireworks and wines.

The marketplace takes the shape of an open sprawl of tents and stalls, and the sellers and the goods for sale change from sleep to sleep. It is simply the luck of the draw when one comes here what one might find. Items that do not sell well are typically marked down over time, and bargains can be found if one know what to look for.

Theft is technically outlawed in Orphans' cove, although it happens all the time. The Wards of Colopitiron patrol the area, as do some of the guild enforcers, but unless a thief is caught in the act, there is little they will do about it. Fighting is more of a concern here for the Wards, as spirits can get high as guilds compete for petitioners and petitioners compete for guilds, and everyone gets

free drinks.

Each major guild maintains its own inn in Orphans' Cove where entertainment is provided and guild officers can meet with petitioners. Smaller guilds often share taverns, pooling their resources to look more impressive than they are. Petitioners must have a talent to be considered by a guild, and those who fail the negotiations or the entrance exams typically get locked out, and are then charged fees to stay at the inns, to drink, to carouse with the wenches, and so on. There are also plenty of freeloaders who prey off of the visitors to the cove, these often take the form of pickpocketing prostitutes, beggars, street urchins, or straight up murderers. Some will make false claims of being able to get one into a particular guild, only to lead one into an ambush in a back alley, or to con one out of a large sum of money. There are also the "all comers" guilds, such as the Ropers and the House of Thorns that will make grandiose offers to foolish seeds, only to bind them into undesirable contracts that are best avoided. Most of the reputable guilds will warn petitioners of the dangers of the all comers, and some will heed their words, but most eventually get desperate. Few want to go as far as the actual gates to the city of sin and then be turned away.

Guild inns are generally very enjoyable places to pass the time if one can afford it. Petitioners that have not been tested yet, merchants, and commission patrons are all allowed to partake of the inns' services for free, but once one has been turned away, one must pay for one's bed, one's pleasure, and one's drink. The upper floors of the inns typically contain sleeping chambers and private rooms for floozies, and the ground floor usually takes the shape of a tavern, with a large open space in the center where petitioners are tried. Entertainments regularly occur here as well, as Orphans' Cove is where the guilds all compete for the attentions of the few talented amongst the orphans. A walk down the main drag of the cove is an endless exposition of handbills, acrobats, hawkers, and gladhanders. The taverns are typically lively, and there is an odd mix here of the excitement and despair. Outsiders sometimes come here to recruit as well, and it is not uncommon for merchants to look for bodyguards for their caravans or delvers to look for a crew. Most of the crowd is drunk at any given time, and the money often flows freely in bets on the petitioners or on dice or card games. Boasting is a great pastime at the cove, and some of the tall tales here are amongst the most outrageous in the Forge.

THE DARK MOON

This infamous establishment is managed by the Champions' Guild, and is probably the most lively of the cove inns. The centerpiece of the tavern is the sand-covered sunken arena pit in the middle of the building. Here is where the guild's tests occur. Members of the guild must best a champion in the ring, and wooden weapons of the petitioners choice are provided, but no other items are allowed in the ring. Magic is allowed as long as it does not come from an item, and spellcasters must declare this ability before the fight so that an appropriate opponent can be found to match them. Petitioners are interviewed before the trial, and opponents are selected by the guild based upon the petitioner's perceived desirableness. Petitioners who appear to have great artistic talent will be provided with weaker opponents, while those

who seem to be boosters or who lack art will be pitted against tough, seasoned fighters. During the fight, the patrons of the tavern gather around the pit to watch the show, and nearly every fight has money riding on it of some kind. Fights often break out above as well over the bets, especially if a petitioner is perceived to have thrown a fight. The Champions' are also the only guild that allows petitioners to keep taking the test over and over, although each time a tougher opponent will be provided until the petitioner either finds his confidence or gives up.

The tavern itself is designed to look like a temple, replete with a dome and bell tower, and white marble statues of godlike warriors line the pillared hall, encircling the arena. The walls and ceilings of the tavern are covered with bright paintings of heroes and gods engaged in mythic confrontations. Between fights a stage is placed over the pit and lithe dancers come and work the crowd into a frenzy. Most of the dancers will offer themselves to patrons, either engaging them right there at their tables or heading up to private rooms for a more intimate affair. This is where most orphans end up losing their purses.

The guild also runs a number of gambling tables in the tavern, mostly designed to take the orphan's money as far as I can tell. Side games often break out amongst the orphans themselves, and if one can find an honest opponent, one has a better chance with these. In general though, it is best to keep one's purse well hidden at Orphans' Cove, or if one is truly wise, one will not bring it at all, for if one does pass one of the tests and make it in into the city, it will certainly not be needed then.



NOTABLE CITIZENS

While all power and money is held with the collectives, glory in Baradume is not denied to the individual who can prove his excellence. And this is not just for guildmasters either, those who rise to the tops of their chosen fields are the stuff of legends and stories, plays and operettas. They are the guests of honor at galas, and guilds vie for their services and fight with one another to get them to come to their events. Other citizens want to either sleep with them or be them, and sometimes both. Though the numbers of household names in Baradume is staggering, here are a few that I managed to track down and talk to about their successes.

MASTER THIEF CAMERON DIMARKO ("THE CAT")

There is no thief in all of Baradume more talked about and more mysterious than Cameron DiMarko. His exploits are legend, and songs and plays about him popular everywhere, yet no one person's impression of him seems to be entirely the same. He is said by most to be a human man with hair so blonde that it is almost white, though others claim he has jet black hair and yellow cat eyes. What is

most certainly known about him is that there is no building, bank, or great house whose defenses he cannot thwart. He is often reported seen jetting across the rooftops, bouncing from chimney to outcropping, dressed all in black and buckles, his famed whip at his side. There is no challenge of the thieving arts that he will deny. He has infiltrated the inner sanctum of Darius Odom, taken rare wine from the cellar of Lyaeus Dio, and stolen the prize from a treasure hunt once before it even began. He has even snatched a feather from the wings of Colopitiron himself. No one knows what house he pledges to, and few have ever spoken to him for more than a few brief fleeting moments. Even I had a hard time pinning him down, but I have my ways, and soon discovered that he is simply an unassuming musician named Hank, a ward of the house of Binmora. But when the need strikes him, he dons one of his many disguises and takes to the rooftops, aided no doubt by the fact that he is also a werran—a white werecheetah. He seems to have achieved total mastery over his dual nature, allowing him to alter his naturally dark hair to any shade he likes, and even to change his build. When I asked him why he chose to remain anonymous and not take advantage of his fame, his answer was free, "My thievery is a labor of love. If I were to become known, even to my protector, I would lose the ability to chose my own challenges and my own fate. Without the joy of my calling, it would not be worth doing." DiMarko does not keep most of the items he steals, and is known to redistribute the wealth, sneaking into the abodes of those who he feels are deserving and leaving items of greatness behind.

METALLIS CARSAKAND

It is impossible to go anywhere in Baradume without seeing beautiful and majestic sculptures, and Carsakand has played no small part in that. Metallis, a rare silver in Baradume, has lived a long lifespan, supposedly trained in the arts by Colopitiron himself. Once Metallis reached the epoch of his profession,

he realized that he had done all he was capable of, and instead of continuing down a descending path, he quit sculpture altogether and opened a school for all who would learn the art. Metallis is famous for defying his guildmaster. Metallis announced to the city that all citizens were welcome to come and learn from him at the full expense of Ars Immortalis. Darius Odom was furious, and threatened to drop his protection, but Metallis countered with a threat to defect to the Champions, and Odom knew that if he angered Carsakand, his own people would never get their own training from the master, so he relented. The Carsakand school still runs to this day, though Metallis himself has grown quite old. In the interim, nearly all the current sculptors of the city are graduates of the program, and it is rumored that Carsakand himself still lifts his chisel for very special patrons who commission sculpture from AI. The school is still open to all in the artisans' district, although one must generally get leave from one's protector to spend the time necessary to complete its courses. Also, if one ever desires a sculpture to be made of oneself on the cheap, simply head over to the school and pose as a model for a session.

CINTILLAN HARMONIA

An ancient one who designed many of the city's most celebrated buildings (such as the Exploding Star and the Mortelis Gallery) and who is also terribly hooked on goddust, Cintillan has retired somewhat from public life. Typically the old and the aged leave Baradume when they are no longer able to perform their duties lest they lose their protection or end up food for the vampires. Harmonia is a different story, his body is as young and hale as ever, and at ten feet tall, he cuts an impressive and shocking figure. Harmonia simply has grown tired of life to some degree, but not so much that he has given up on living. I met him at the Dark Moon tavern of all places, and it seems that he takes some pleasure in talking with outsiders, finding their wildly varying outlooks on life to be refreshing. He loves to tell his own tales of his youth, and his intentions seem honest, as he frequently weaves the unwritten rules of the city into his narratives so that those who listen to him have some idea what to expect once they enter the city. It is my opinion that Harmonia is not done with his career, he has simply gotten into what he feels is a rut. Baradume, he believes has become too homogenous, and in his interviews with seeds and travelers he is trying to form a thesis for a new style, that will again propel him to the pinnacle of stardom.

LADY GAEA GALATEA

Lady Gaea Galatea is Baradume's premier entertainer and social critic. Like "the Cat", the identity that the public sees is not her own, although unlike honest Hank, it is difficult to say whether there is any other identity hidden behind the mask. Galatea is never the same twice. Her persona and appearance changes as often as her costumes and her makeup. At times it is difficult to tell her intent. A song that seems designed to tug at the heart-strings, for example, can bring out unexpected laughter, and a performance can turn from grace to tragedy to mocking insanity in mere seconds. Galatea's favorite topics seem to involve the culture of Baradume itself, and she delights in holding up a virtual mirror to an arrogant and jaded populace, confronting them with the grotesqueness of their own actions. She is also a tremendous dancer and talented acrobat, and possesses a set of rings

that allows her to fly through the air, often falling and tumbling at shocking moments to startle the crowd. Her personal life is nearly as turbulent as her career, and she has changed protectors several times, though she currently serves as an officer in the House of Lyaeus Dio. She has been romantically involved with nearly all of the city's famous bachelors at one time or another, and her turbulent relationship with Arden Silverblade was the stuff of legend. I tried to get a feel for what drove her, but I cannot say I succeeded. She told me that she was just an average city girl from Baradume and didn't really have anything out of the ordinary to say, but that when she got up on stage, something else took her over. I would not doubt if some external force exerted its will on the Forge through her, but if so, it is expert at hiding itself.

TORJEN'S PRINTING PRESS

Torjen's is responsible for printing one third of all the books circulated in the city. Though the press originally got its start printing scripts for the endless plays and operas in Baradume, it has recently engineered a growing craze for a different kind of book, philosophical texts. These books appear to be the latest fad in a city where new topics of conversation are always in demand. Torjen's books create controversy by providing and exploring multiple explanations for basic facts of existence. In a city without formal religion, there are no hard and fast answers to questions on subjects like the afterlife, the nature of the Forge and of reality, the source of Colopitron's power, and so on. In fact, anyone who professes to "know" absolutely any of these things is thought of as a crazy person and is shunned. What people love about Torjen's books is that he gives so many different answers to simple questions, that it can spark endless debate. For example, on the subject of what are the stars in the sky of the outerworld, he proposes on one hand that they are spheres of intensely burning gas, way off in the distance, while on the other hand he argues that they reflect dust high in the atmosphere, remains of a shattered god. Of course, both theories are absurd, but the fun is in the debating. No true citizen of Baradume ever seriously expects to answer these questions, it is simply a pastime.

The printing press is operated by Leger Torjen, a Chromithian who was pulled to the Forge many years ago. On his homeworld, Leger built and maintained printing presses in a city that was practically awash in them. When he arrived in Baradume, he found that books were typically copied by hand, and he was able to demonstrate the need for his services when he found two books with the same title but with different contents due to mistakes made by the scribes. Though the press is owned by the House of Binmora, Torjen has been given pretty much free rein to print whatever he wants, and his protectors seem to have faith that he can remain ahead of the curve of fickle fashion.

TREASURES

Some rashers come to Baradume entirely to steal things. Stealing items in Baradume is no problem if one has skill, getting them out of the city is another. The city gates are well patrolled with soldiers who are always on the lookout for looters. Those strolling out with bagfuls of precious artifacts may have some explaining to do if they aren't regular guild merchants. Guards typically

attack first and ask questions later, separating looters from their loot and then redistributing it back into the city. The docks are a safer bet, but they are also heavily patrolled by guild soldiers, and regular sailors and traders are known by sight. Those who plunder the city of its wealth are almost always thrown out of their guilds, and are not invited back.

Patrons from Penance or other places often employ thieves to steal items that they desire because they cannot afford to have them commissioned. Some thieves are professional smugglers who work within guilds, typically as merchants to the farmlands, some are independent rogues who break into the city, take what they want and then break out. All are after the same thing though, the treasures of Baradume. These treasures are legion, and almost anything one might dream can be found in Baradume if one knows where to look. I could not even begin to list the city's wealth, but here are a few random pieces that caught my eye and that may serve as fair examples. All of these were advertised as rewards for "treasure hunts", which are explained below:

- **The Mask of Iapos:** This gruesome bone mask allows the wearer to take the appearance of any other creature of similar size.
- **The Chisel of Menoket:** This simple tool seems to add significantly to the wielder's ability to craft stone.
- **The Shawl of Fendis:** This wispy scrap of fabric protects completely against all forms of natural cold, allowing one to wear nothing but the shawl no matter the weather.
- **The Baradume Peacock:** This brightly-feathered carnival mask allows the wearer to see through the eyes of any other person within the city.
- **Odom's Bane:** This wicked obsidian dagger leeches the youth of those it kills, withering their corpses with age and taking a month off of the age of the killer.

The city's hometown thieves are its proudest treasure, and it has become a tradition for guilds to hold a thievery competition once a year. Guilds stagger their competitions, so that there is generally about one every moon, typically held right before the festival of the moon as something of a pre-festivity. Each guild has an entire building (sometimes more) dedicated to these "treasure hunts", and a team of engineers spends the entire year filling the buildings with mazes, tricks, monsters, and deathtraps. These challenges should not be entered lightly, and typically few of the challengers survive. Challengers are stripped down to a set of leather armor, boots, a dagger, one weapon, rope, a pack, rations, and a few mysterious objects that make little sense, but are typically necessary to complete some of the challenges in the maze. Winners of the challenges are lauded uproariously in the coming festival, and often receive new offers of employment from rival guilds, or opportunities for promotion with their existing organizations.

FESTIVAL OF THE MOON

Of all the celebrations on the Forge, the Festival of the Moon in Baradume is by far the most famous, and deservedly so. The fact that it happens every month is unbelievable, but still, no two are quite the same. One is not truly alive until one has experienced the madness, the pleasure, the joy, the exuberance, and the unhinging length of it all.

Workers in Baradume do not keep to daily or weekly schedules like they do in Penance or other civilized places. There is no time here except the moon, and the moon only comes once a month. The citizens of Baradume wear themselves out with work for weeks on end in dark times, but when the moon appears in the sky, all labors cease. The moon is visible for two days' time, and throughout this entire period, the people celebrate as if the world

*To lie in Baradume, red moon high
The fading of the gloom, the birthing of the sky
To lie in Baradume, no pleasure to deny
I'll lie down in Baradume, and then content to die*

were ending. The party begins with the thievery competitions, and then, as the moon is expected to rise, gala balls are held, where wild costumes and masks are worn, some having taken many moons to make. During the festival, couples are traditionally considered separated, and no one has any love commitments to consider or to fret about. As the balls go on, the music gets wilder and wilder, and great feasts of delicacies, sweets, and wines are set up in the streets. As the dancers tire, they wander out into the streets, where they dine and drink as much as they desire or can. It is then traditional to wander the city, exploring areas outside one's ken. As the masked people roam, they encounter one another, embracing and dancing with all they meet. In the city's cirques, famous plays and operas are staged, familiar entertainment for the locals, and exotic treats for visitors. As the plays wind down, fireworks are launched, lighting up the red sky with other colors, and sometimes creating thrilling patterns of fire on the city streets. After the fireworks, the people tend to fall into lovemaking with whomever happens to be nearby. Often entire crowds turn into writing masses of flesh as the clothes come off, although the masks generally remain (as long as the mouths are exposed). The passion continues until all are sated and fall peacefully to sleep wherever they happen to lie. As the festival goes awoken, new food is brought out, and a more relaxed mood comes over the crowd, with songs sung in unison, drum circles, or peaceful songwriters showing off their craft. As the moon begins to pass again over the edge of the world, the city gates or opened, and all the werran, who had been ejected from the city before the moon rose, are let back in, and they are ravenous and wild, pouncing on the leftover food and wine. A chase ensues, and each citizen's goal is to get back home to his bed before the werran catch him. There is typically enough food left over to keep the werran hunters from eating the populace, but there may be some damage done if citizens are caught, and bloody rape is generally the result of failure to get indoors in time.

LIVING WITH THE BUZZ

I recovered this elegant, perfumed scroll from the possessions of Rossyn Eris, current head of the Firebrand. It was addressed to her, and though it had obviously been read several times, I did not feel guilty in absconding with it for a higher purpose.

Nine-hundred forty-seven years is a long time. Enough time to regret, certainly, but also enough time to love, hate, explore, renew, fear, grow, wither, wonder, create, destroy, debauch, forget, forgive. . . . To live too long is a gift granted only to the most hated aspects of our lives. Or is it the other way round? A gift given to the parts we love best, to allow them to linger on? I think it's equally true, either way. It used to be a curse, long ago: may you have a long and interesting life. And surely, those to whom longevity has been kind are certain to have stumbled over interesting things. But the longer we run, the further we get from our start. It seems so obvious. And yet, it is easy to overlook, no? It is a long list of mercies and faults that crawls down the page of extended time. I wrote that my lifetime has contained enough time to forget. Even now, only a handful of sentences on, I can see the untruth of that. There will never be enough time to forget.

I am an Ancient woman. You would not credit it from looking at me, to be sure. In fact, I don't look a day over eight-hundred. Pshaw, you must forgive my little jokes. Sometimes, they are all I have left. All the comfort that remains to me after so long a struggle through dishumor, to coin a phrase. I do not mean to sound so morbid, so thoroughly vexed with my existence. True, this may be a suicide note, but it need not be depressing. The ever-onwardness of living is sad enough.

If there is any one true thing I can say about myself, even here at the close, it is that I am powerless. Yes, I can vaguely hear the gasps now. That I should admit such a thing is surely the scandal of the week in the metropolises of this world. I, who wielded so great and fearsome a figurative cudgel. But yes, powerless. Addiction, you see, is the ultimate powerlessness. And though I myself owned, bought, sold, and gave away countless slaves in my time, was I any less a thrall than they? Overthrown by want, for centuries. Want, indeed. Want of a thing I didn't really even love. Or rather, I didn't love the thing that want gave me. Do you follow?

The dust, of course. Goddust. Pshaw, even the name of it is like cinders on my tongue. But, do not even cinders awaken the sense of taste? Indeed, spoken like a true addict. I remember, of course, the first time. Remembering, there it is again. That non-forgetting. Sometimes, it seems the cruelest side-effect of this weakness. Ah, weakness, I call it. Is it, though? Or is it only my weakness. Surely, countless others have embraced the obliteration of expectancy and thrown themselves headlong into unnatural life. Is my weakness, then, in not embracing? I digress, of course. I was speaking of my first time.

Ah, yes, the first time. Something a lady never forgets. I was, relatively speaking, past the prime usually associated with one's first "dusting", as they called it back then. Well into my forties, I should say. Normally, it was done in the late puberty. But, I was too

concerned with obtaining my position and my place in society to allow myself to be distracted by such entertainments. Yes, distracted. That's how I saw it then, as a sideshow I couldn't be bothered with until the main event had been scrutinized to death. By that time, of my first foray, I was already ensconced within The Exploding Star. Not head of the guild yet, that was many years later. No, I was merely a Chatelaine at this time, one of the "madams", for lack of a better word, who was responsible for several dozen courtesans.

I taught maneuvers long thought forgotten, or abandoned for their tameness, which I invigorated again anew. And, can you stand it, I was loved by them. I was fair, and quick with a kindness where it was warranted, a lash likewise. A harsh mistress. I had been there many years already, though thank the gods not working my way up from the mattresses like some of the other Chatelaines. No, I'd come from a good family, well-to-do, well-connected, an ancient family. I eased right in to my position, so to speak, and found I had a natural affinity for mother-henning a gaggle of harlots.

For years, I chatelained through the halls and grottoes and sumptuous boudoirs of the Star. And one fine day, a gentleman came along. Isn't that always the way? A gentleman comes along. But oh, what a gentleman he was. Tall, and dashing as a frightened deer. He was some nobleman, probably some distant cousin of mine. Duke of someplace I'd never heard of. Wasn't I worldly, though? I looked it up later that night. The Headmistress had brought him to me, the latest high-roller of the house, also another function of the Chatelaines. Sweet-talking and caresses, all the night long. We never even undressed, and so I pegged him as a sodomite. I asked him, if you can believe it, and he said me no. He said he'd found something better than the carnal pleasures of life. Well, I told him, keep it to yourself, or I'm out of work.

He laughed. Oh, that laugh. I can still hear it, when the wind comes in off the south coasts. It was like tinkling ice, or the unfreezing of a creek in spring. Before he spoke it, before he opened his mouth, I knew what it would be. Of course, it wasn't exactly unusual then, especially in the Star. I'd just avoided it, as I'd said. But now, my mind reeled. Wasn't I established now, as I'd hoped to be. Chatelaine of the Exploding Star was nothing to sniff at in those days. I had my share of free meals and operas from it. I knew I could rise higher, even as he pulled the small leather pouch from his vest pocket. Headmistress, someday. Or higher, whatever was higher to me then.

The pouch was small, the size of a scrotum. Inside it was a few pinches of the dust, more than most addicts would ever see, a not-inconsiderable fortune dangling from his long fingers. I felt moved to ask him, why had he requested my company? Merely to dust me? His eyes roved over me, drank me in like a rare wine. Pulsing from him I could feel an energy unlike anything I'd felt before, as though

hunger and desire and ecstasy had been combined into a colorless and odorless vapor and pumped into the room. In that moment, without doubt, we were making love without touching, simply through the power of his thought. And I knew it was the dust that could make him do it.

My body gave over to quivering, and I reached for the pouch. How much, I asked, my voice a weak whisper. For I don't know how. He dipped his finger into the pouch, withdrew it. Beneath his fingernail was a glittering of beige crystals. I took the finger into my mouth and sucked it lightly, feeling the heat and sweetness spread onto my tongue, down my throat, exploding through my body as though I'd swallowed a ticking bomb. The instant it dissolved on my tongue, the dust overthrew me, and I was wholly and completely away.

The gentleman and I spent several days and nights together in my chamber. We finally parted, somehow bonded. He gifted me a small thimble of dust, to recall him by, he said. I never saw him again. I don't know what I would have done had I encountered him. Thanked him? Perhaps killed him. Perhaps both. He'd given a terrible gift, and I willingly received it. Willingly. Is that so? I've pondered that for centuries now. Surely, I was under some spell when he gave me that first nailfull. I knew it then, even. I didn't fight it. Could I have, even? What does it matter now? I don't blame him anymore, certainly. Not completely.

The first year of the compulsion is the strangest. The compulsion. That's what I grew to call it. Kinder than "addiction", somehow. The changes are quick to start. Even that first night, I could feel the entirety of my body, the cells swirling and dividing, the blood slipping over the walls of veins, the hair growing infinitesimally, the cilia of the lungs waving like sea-grass. The awareness only grew with time, until nothing about myself went unknown. I was never sick again, never ill, for the instant some microbe or spore entered my body, I was aware of it, and I could will my body to fight it off, kill it, save the host. I had an inner army of cells to protect me, forever. Unbelievable it seemed to me.

It took some time to realize I was changing outwardly, as well as internally. The growth was not overnight, you know. Sometimes, I hear ignorant tales of how the dust works its wonders in matter of hours. Not so, I can tell you. It was over a span of several years that I came to my full, my current height. If you must know, I am eight feet, eight inches tall. Barefoot. The stretching of the bones is an excruciating pain that I know not the compare of. A foot is quite a strain, quite a pain. There was no way of hiding it, nor did I want to, my gargantuanity. I was taking the dust several times a day. I'd gone through the gentleman's gift in rather short order after he left me.

Outwardly, I was growing by turns more beautiful and more grotesque. My lips became fuller, redder. My eyes, already a stunning cobalt, seemed to liquefy and become water, like pools, and their shape changed too, slanting slightly to become as almonds. My hair became golden as flax, as cornsilk. My skin darkened to a light olive. I didn't look like myself anymore. I was myself improved, perfected. In short, I looked the way I wished I had looked when I was a girl, engaging in that famed girlish pastime of loathing one's

own looks and coveting the beauty of others. My heart's desires, even the forgotten ones, were coming to fruition. Damn them.

This is how I look, even to this day. I have not changed in centuries. Another curse from the old days comes to mind: may you get what you want. I realize, of course, that I sound ungrateful, and I do not wish to. One must never appear ungrateful for a gift, no matter how unwanted or unsought. It is the height of uncouthness. My life has been one built on elegance and situation. Many are the insults I have endured with a smiling countenance, for anger, at least outward anger, does not befit a lady of my station. Revenge, of course, is an art, an elegant art. Many, too, are the insults I have repaid, smiling as well.

I became a giantess. I was, of course, not the only one. In fact, there were several even in the Star, even within the Firebrands I came to lead. Inside the Star, I was nothing to beg notice of, most days. The occasional country rube, in for a night of fun, would gawk and stare and make his rude comments, but then would be unceremoniously treated to some rather unpleasant couplings. But out on the streets, I was a veritable market-day. Commotion all about, shouts, dropped jaws. One never does grow used to such things. Most days, I never realize I am so different from the others. Ah, if only. The forefront seems to be the broadest part of the mind, no?

You will, I am sure, wish to know what my life was like? How could a monstrous creature like me carry on through the years, as though a normal woman? Well, I will answer, in quite the same way as you do. Quite the same? Perhaps not, but on the surface, our lives may not have been lived so differently. Example: have you ever been happy? Of course. I have been happy, but not like you have. Rather, mine filled me up like a dam had been built of my sadnesses and the joys of all the worlds of creation flowed down to fill the reservoir, and then they spilled over the walls of the dam and flooded the valley of my existing. That was my happiness. Every sensation was overwhelming. Joy, joy was the very ripping of my heart into a million shreds, and each piece floating up to my mouth, each piece dissolving in a sweet and embracing light that held me enraptured and sure of safety.

Shall I tell you of pain? Can you imagine pain such like the flaying of one's muscle from beneath the skin, fiery hooks slicing the meat from your bone with jagged imprecision, as though a drunken surgeon on a rollicking ship were trying to free himself from within your bowels? That was my pain, ordinary pain. That was a pain you would have swatted away, jiggling your hand, walking it off.

Or of fear? Fear, like a great and cold fist crashing past your teeth to scrape down your throat and grip your heart, squeezing powerfully until each beat is like the failing of an ancient engine giving up its ghost. Fear, like the whispered voices of all your massed enemies, lurking behind you just out of reach, out of sight, advancing surely. Fear, as though some awful pair of hands had made of themselves a shovel, and scooped out from your lungs the breath you need to move forward to escape whatever is coming for you, shoveled back into you ice and starlight, and the unending expanse that lies between you breathing in and you breathing out. This was my fear, simple fear. A fear you would banish by lighting a candle, or reminding yourself of your age.

Sensation, emotion. It was all so...enlarged. Enlarged, yes. As though in growing to obscene height, my emotions and thoughts grew to fill in all the new space. Physical pleasures were heightened; food was more delicious, wine more heady and sweet, love was more shattering. Yes, I make it sound so lovely, no? Who wouldn't want it? And with each dusting, it grew. By small measure, it grew, until it seemed to me that even my giant body could not contain all the wonder and consciousness ever-expanding within me.

I became the headmistress of the Star, of the Firebrands. That is where I gained my fame, my notoriety. I lay with others of my kind, and for a time became addicted to that as well. It was as if my body had become an instrument of which I had finally become a virtuoso, after years of practice and toil. I grew wealthier, I admit, from the slave trade, and I gave much to the city and more to the ones who worked for me. The Star became a temple, a place of the worship of desire and fulfillment. I became famous, infamous. And still, I was mastered by the dust.

True, I did not see it as a folly. It was a tool in my arsenal. It allowed me to be the master of my realm. But, like any tool, one can become dependent upon it, to the point that one is useless without it. Vulnerable without it. I could get it whenever I wanted it, which itself was a form of power, for not everyone was able to procure it, or even their most basic wants. I grew arrogant in my ability to get it, flaunted it needlessly. I became reckless. The pulsing, warm sensation of all my nerves being pricked at once, that rushing feeling that accompanies the first taste on the tongue, became all I lived for. True, the effects allowed me to become greater than perhaps I would have otherwise, but they also made me into a thing that could not see further than its next dusting.

Life, and love for that matter, became a sort of side-effect. Never had life been lived the way I was living it. For centuries, I was a hedonist, allowing my whims and wants the free rein of my thoughts and my purse. And for a long, long time, it was very satisfying. Destroyingly satisfying. I ran to ground innumerable lovers and friends, even my own children were tossed aside along the path of my extending. For it seemed as though even as my emotions and my sensations were amplified, so too must my reactions and my actions be outsized. When angered, I grew insane with violence, compelled to murder and mayhem on several occasions. When thrilled with joy or ecstasy, I became a nervous bundle of jitters, quaking with happiness beyond measure. When confronted with kindness, I responded treble, lavishing ridiculous gifts of even the most obscure of well-wishers. I had no control, and wanted none. The dust made my decisions for me, and I was eager and glad to cede authority.

For centuries I lived this way. A constant throb of energy coursed through my body, and there were weeks when I did not sleep or eat, for the need was not there. It was a constant and ever-present glow that seemed to emanate from my body, like some powerful perpetual-motion engine whirred within my breast. It was more than enough, for so long it was.

Finally, the old curse caught up with me. I had been getting what I wanted for so long. There were no challenges in my life, everything was a matter of when, not if. A matter of time, not impossibility.

I could do anything, except fail. Except be denied. I'd used my power for good and ill, both in equal measure if I am honest. And all to my benefit, and often at the expense of others. And of course, there were times I felt guilty. My guilt was deeper, more soul-emptying than any other. I felt it in my core, and it ate me away.

I gave up my place as headmistress, and retired to my villa. For another handful of centuries, I haunted this place, venturing into town every now and again, enjoying the thrill of shocking the townsfolk, but mostly hiding myself away, dusting myself alone in my chambers. I'd often dust before a meal, to enhance the taste of it, or before sleeping, on the rare occasions when I actually did sleep, to make my dreams more alive. I was alone there, most of the time. A handful of servants would scamper about the house; I could hear their padding steps from across the vast manor. Sometimes, a brave romancer would appear at the door, leaving days later, ravished yet sated. But most often, I was alone with myself, experiencing everything ten-fold.

It was not enough. Having tasted the heights of my power, now I wallowed in its dregs. I was miserable again, and of course this misery was deeper than any, as if I had dug a vast pit and tossed myself into it, with a black hood over my head and shackles on my feet. I believe I can veritably hear your disbelief: who wouldn't want this amazing gift, the blessings of long life, increased sensation, amplified emotion, perfect health? And I sympathize with you. I should have been very grateful to that gentleman, and I was at first. But I grew weary of pleasure, weary of my own perfection.

You can only read so many minds before they all start sounding the same, honestly. I realize these are symptoms of my own failings. Countless other Ancients embrace the dust and its consequences whole-heartedly, without reservation. As for me, the reservations came later, far too late to do anything about it.

So, I suppose it all boils down to the age-old cliché, doesn't it? Can't live with it, can't live without it. Or something to that effect. I've stopped taking the dust. It's only been a few days now, but I can feel myself decaying already. I know that for one like myself, in which the dust's roots have burrowed deep into my being, the lack of it will strike me harder, kill me faster. In fact, I feel measurably worse since the beginning of this letter, like my insides are crumbling, like my bones are an empty hallway chilled by a passing breeze. Hours now, I can feel it.

I know this wasn't quite the report you wanted, but I've long had enough of others' expectations. Another side-benefit of long life: the right to ignore what I choose to ignore. You're ignoring life, I can hear you say now. No, I will be happy to answer. I am ignoring living.

Adieu, adieu. Far too long overdue.

chapter 6 - stygia

Beings such as we seldom know fear, but when it does scratch across the edges of our ancient, jaded consciousness, the ripples reverberate—a yawning reminder that even immortals are vulnerable in the face of the right threat. Only twice in my travels over the last seven years have I known the itch of fear's icy touch, the first and most pronounced was in the presence of Saturnia, Queen of Vampires. In all the eons that I ruled Eclipse I never approached her, though she had always been close by, her presence subtle yet distinctive. I became aware as the ages fell away that she guarded a gate to the multiverse, a passageway that still functioned. I could feel it flex and pulse beyond the organic walls of her massive sanctuary. The Oath of Binding that then held me fast to bar and hold this prison never seemed to clamor or care that this particular hole existed. Many times in the past my own curiosity was piqued and I momentarily considered going before her and examining this relic, but even as the thought would occur, my own sense of preservation would warn me away. I do not mean to suggest that this was part of the Oath of Binding; no, it was something more subtle. I felt I was not welcome, and I had an understanding that what dwelt in that place might bring about my end, and thus harm my Oath. I do not know exactly when this feeling left me, only that when I considered going to treat with her after being reborn I no longer felt this repulsion. So it was, that as I set about to write this very tome I decided to make my first foray of exploration to the very place from which so long I had believed myself barred. I used all the clout and connections of my many personas to ensure that my petition reached the hand of the Queen, and not shortly after, I was granted audience.

I went to the blood-marbled city of Stygia in the guise of a noble from Baradume. Once there, I was escorted by an exalted vampire calling herself the Princess of Blades. She led me through the city streets, to the Grand Causeway and along its mile-long stretch. The whole way, she talked to me as an equal, giving off the confident impression that my disguise did not in any way fool her. She looked to be no more than thirteen, but the true eyeless sockets I see through could tell that she was well over ten thousand years in age. A vibration of utter calm overlaid her venerable power hidden beneath, truly awe-inspiring in such a small and seemingly harmless form. She delivered me to the massive heart-palace in the center of the city, a throbbing, living structure, the largest building in all of Eclipse and a city unto itself. There I found myself in a receiving area the size of a small castle, filled with chambers and rooms that were all in ill-repair.

Scattered among these were others who waited for their promised audience with the Queen. Each day, tea and biscuits were brought for the living, and fresh blood in the form of slaves were provided for the vampires that waited. I was shocked to find that some had been waiting there for decades. Once within the antechamber, petitioners were not allowed to depart until after the Queen had received them.

Here I met a little old woman who had been in the antechamber for forty years waiting for the Queen to call her. Also present was a vampire who was well on his way to being insane and who was sure he had been waiting for over two hundred years—and by the state of his clothes I did not doubt it. I met many who could not even remember why they were there, and in some of the rooms I stumbled upon rotten corpses. Some had taken to believing that this was the only world there was and that their lives beyond the walls of this waiting area had been no more than a dream. I considered the age of the creature I was courting, and wondered if she even considered the passing of time in the same way as those trapped in this antechamber. Perhaps a century fell away for her like a heartbeat to normal mortals. Every eight hours or so, I would journey to the lobby of this area and wait for the Queen to call me. Often I was joined by several others. Always the old woman was there, and she would spend her time walking from person to person, gaining assurances that if they were called they would remind the Queen she was still waiting. I saw that many wished to do away with her, but strict rules against harming another petitioner prevented them. Each time the little old woman came to me, I would tell her that I would consider letting the Queen know. She would press for greater assurance, but I would give her none. In the end I waited almost two weeks, to the point that even a being as old as me wondered if I would have to attempt some mad escape rather than rot for eternity. When at last the Queen's attendants came for me, I saw why no one else had tried egress. The guards were huge ancient vampires, who no longer looked anything like the races they may have come from, but rather were monstrous skinless creatures with aspects both of bats and wolves, yet still utterly alien in their nature. If the Princess had resonated with power, these degenerate beings throbbed with it, as thunder to the sound of moth wings. I cannot say whether if I had chosen to attempt escape if I could have achieved it without some permanent harm. It was here that I was first struck with the oddness of vampires and the realization that even I did not fully grasp their purpose or nature. I think I had previously considered them no more than long-lived mortals who for all their eons could not hope to grasp the underlying flow of creation and were doomed to fall at some point to the death they so long had run from. Only as I wound my way through the pulsing ventricle corridors of the Queen's palace up to meet her did I consider that vampires might be creatures of real transcendence with a proper role to play in the great game.

The doors to the throne room were grand, vein-filled valves that upon my arrival flexed and then withdrew, releasing a scent like cinnamon and roses that drowned out the old smell of death. The guards shrank back as the doors reached their full berth, falling into shadows where many more of their kind lingered, huddled together like bats in a cave.



I could not be certain, but I swear I read fear on their faces as they glanced into the room beyond. I strode forward, still assured of my invulnerability. The chamber within was somehow bright and dark together, and even my preternatural vision took time to adjust. There in the center, radiating with blinding light, was the gate I had heard so much about, a gate that stretched to the multiverse and was rumored to touch billions upon billions of worlds. This was indeed the gate widely rumored to exist here in the heart of the vampire nation, drawing heroes from all over the Forge in force in an attempt to gain freedom. Though many have tried through either force or guile, none have ever reported back. Sadly, this has only fueled the flames of hope that the reason they had not returned was because they had achieved their goal and escaped. In truth, they all fell to the vampires of the city or the palace long before ever reaching this gate, but even if they had entered the throne room, they would not have succeeded in leaving it again. As much as the vampires pressed rumors about the gate to draw in victims, very few knew the truth of it, and those that did would never let it slip out.

It was as I considered this that something moved in the shadows on the other side of the throne room. I turned. The darkness that filled those corners was unnatural and so powerful in its inception that I could not fully penetrate it, but what stirred broke my resolve for the first time in a god's age. I could not fully make it out, but what I saw was terror, fear, and supremacy incarnate; it looked at me with eyes darker than the darkness that veiled its full horror, eyes that saw clear through me. I have courted demons, and known the strangeness of devils on their paths, but this thing was worse, and as it came into the light, it shifted its form, and to my distress I could no longer see it for what it was. My eyes that are not eyes at all, my blank sockets that see with the truth of the first light on the face of the waters, these eyes were unable to break this thing's shroud. In the light, it took the form of a human woman, perhaps because I wore the skin of a human, but this woman had four arms and floated in the air, a great train of blood-red gems trailing behind. Her hair floated in gentle waves above her. She gave off the impression of being underwater somehow. Her skin was white and flawless, her hair red, her breasts firm, her lips full, and though I knew what she was and what I am... I wanted her. That is until she fixed her gaze upon me with those black, blood eyes. They broke the spell, and beyond them I could almost make out the dreadfulness of her truth. She seemed to sense the moment her spell over me weakened, yet instead of reacting in disappointment, it brought a wicked smirk to her flawless face. Then she spoke.

“Salutations Seraphim, the wake of this hour will pulsate throughout the ages. What valiant query could bring you before me? No need to answer; I know your design. You may not leave with all the answers you seek, but if you fare well with me you may leave with that which you require.”

I could not hide myself entirely from her. The sway of her influence here within her own lair was overwhelming. I knew she understood that I had come to understand her and to seek the truth of her kind, and also to ask permission to live among them and write of them for you, my lord. We spoke for some time, and she gave me many insights, but remained aloof. There was

ever the feeling that she was considering leaping upon me and draining me of all that I am, but she restrained herself. In the end she simply stopped me in the middle of a sentence.

“You should go.” and there was a threat in it. The valve opened and I turned to depart, but she bade me to hold a moment more, and spoke as she returned to the dark and the truth of her skin, “Wait! Your master...”

“Yes?”

“Tell him that the one true gate awaits his touch, and as ever, ensures that no living thing may pass its threshold. We will pay our debt to him when the time is right, for the sanctuary he has long provided.”

Then she was black and blood and crawling spine and leather wings, hidden in the truest darkness I have ever known. I breathed a great sigh of relief as soon as the valve doors were between me and her, and I resolved never to place myself in her company again if it could be helped.

So it was that I was granted unlimited access to the whole of the vampire nation and given permission to speak to and question any and all, the seal of the Queen herself as my protection. It soon became apparent that any supposed horror I uncovered did not in any way embarrass or concern the masters of this domain.

THE CITY-STATE OF STYGIA

Stygia is capital to the whole of the vampire lands that dominate the southeastern area of Eclipse, lands which also bear the name of Stygia. The city is the political center of power and control for the whole of the region. It is both figuratively and quite literally the heart of the domain. For here lies the throbbing, organic “Palace of Pectoris Cor of Dea”, a overwhelming piece of living architecture that throbs and beats with a slow thunderous rhythm that can be felt anywhere throughout the city and far into the mountains beyond. The seven towers of the palace stretch upward, arteries reaching towards the heavens. The uppermost tower stands over a mile high and harbors the chamber of the Queen herself. Six other vampire lords (and ladies) hold sway over the other towers, and alongside the Queen form the group of seven who rule Stygia with absolute sovereignty. Each of these six elder vampires also holds a residence outside the Palace, some in the city proper and some in the surrounding lands.

The city itself is circular in shape and walled all the way around, with the palace at its southern side and the only visible entrance at the north end along a protruding causeway. Though small on the surface, the center circle of the city cuts deep into the ground, filled with tombs and the living quarters of slaves and servants. The upper city is a marvel of organized architecture; its streets and villas are all carved from blood marble and the whole of the city is encased in crimson. Here vampires live in the open, free of fear of persecution by mortals or the light of day. They thrive here, able to pursue whatever desire strikes their fancy, contemplating eternity from a paradise built for them. Magical blood fountains line the streets, ensuring that the liquids that flow there never clot. Intelligent beings of every race and creed can be sampled and dined upon in the many restaurants and blood houses, and games that can take generations are played with mortal servants and slaves.



The bold architecture of Stygia is surprisingly uniform, made up of single or double storied villas that all have vast underlying tombs and catacombs beneath them. These structures are categorized by airy, pillared walls and large, high-ceilinged chambers. Their interiors are all decorated to taste, and vary in wild ways from vampire to vampire. Scattered throughout the city are domed citadels with high candle-like spires; these are the isolated private residents of the dukes and duchesses of the vampire royalty. The interiors of each of these citadels is a world unto itself, prone to the whims and proclivities of their masters.

Dress among vampires can run the gamut, some still clinging to the age in which they were turned, although most dress in surprisingly simple and extremely well made attire. Citizens often wear much less than mortals, not requiring the protection of garments, but rather wearing them merely for comfort or style. Fashion trends are few and far between; most vampires have lived too long to be swayed by hiccups in styles. Their clothing tends to be timeless. Black and red are always preferred colors, though some—like the Princess of Blades—wear only white. The servants all wear uniforms, either those that mark them as property of the city or that show somewhere the mark of their master, though some of these uniforms are made up of no more than a brand somewhere on the body. The necks of the slaves are always exposed, unless they wear a draining collar, a popular device with a screw-in syringe tap and a spout to drain blood right from the artery. Slaves and servants are almost universally well-groomed, bathed, and put together; they, after all, serve beings with heightened senses. The human soldiers that make up the bulk of the city's armies and guard wear very well-made armor that allows

for a broad range of motion and maximum protection, a style designed by a master vampire blacksmith. Other than this, there is little need to force distinctions between mortals and their masters. After all, vampires can actually hear whether or not one has a beating heart—thus the slag term for all living things in Stygia, “beaters”.

The flying buttresses and ruby spires of Stygia are kept in perfect repair, just as the streets are constantly cleaned and polished. The whole of this city, all its wonders and beauty, is built for a select few upon the backs and the blood of millions. In my time there I came to realize that everywhere there are secret doors and hidden passages where mortal servants scurry and cower, performing the many duties and day-to-day obligations that keep the city flowing. The smart and adept of these do so without ever drawing notice. Those that do draw the attention of one of their patrons are likely to find a quick death. In exploring one of passages, I found hidden sewers where humans relieve themselves far beyond their masters sights, chambers the size of city blocks where women sewed constantly to repair and mend the many uniforms of the workers, and bleeding rooms where broken or useless slaves were bled by other humans to feed the fountains. Only once or twice did I even chance upon a vampire in these areas, and even then they were entirely unconcerned with the mortals' functionings. I found that many of the servants tasked with the upkeep and backdrop drudgery of the city were at least fifth-generation if not more, and performed as expected without a thought of rebellion or escape. Time and tradition, it would seem, hold sway and maintain the peace of this city-state occupied by unaging, undying rulers.

CITY MAP

Though few are aware of it, Stygia does not bar access to free mortals. Anyone who wishes to enter the city is welcome, although there are some caveats. First, a visitor must have something useful to offer that is worth more than a few pints of blood. Otherwise, the citizens of the city are more likely to feed upon than treat with him. Second, entry to the city requires a passage fee of one mortal life. For those too squeamish to bring a slave to sacrifice, a deposit of two lives may be left at the gate, both of which become forfeit if the depositor does not return within a week. Finally, it is still advisable to stay alert and observe proper customs. Do not brag about slaying vampires or any such foolishness, acting like a murderer or a criminal will go just as badly here as anywhere else... or probably worse. For those brave souls who do manage to find their way past the gates of the city, there

is plenty enough to do and see, and the city's manageable size and tremendous beauty make it a delicious place to wander in, drinking up the sights.

1. **Gate of the Impaler:** The gates of the city are impressive both in size and drama. On spikes located all over the gates are impaled the severed heads of the city's enemies. These are typically those crusaders who come to destroy the vampire race yet always underestimate severely their foe. The heads are in various states of decay, some having long rotted and been pecked away to mere skulls. As new crusades arrive, the old heads are replaced with new ones. The gates themselves, at twenty feet high, appear small from a distance, but only because of the size of the great city wall, which reaches up a full fifty feet to the sky.
2. **The Cruor Fontis (Blood Fountain):** Though there are



many blood fountains scattered throughout the city, this one is by far the largest, and is typically the first thing one sees once passing through the front gate of the city. This great reservoir of blood is over two hundred feet long, and all residents of the city are free to come and sip from it as they desire. The blood in the fountain is magically preserved, and does not lose its freshness or force of life. In the center of the fountain, a powerful jet propels a tumultuous column of blood high into the air. This jet can be controlled by the city's workers to take numerous shapes and directions. At festival times, vampires will wade into the fountain and dance as the spray spins around, dousing them. The thick blood drenches the revelers, coloring them a slick, deep red. This is not a sight for the faint of heart.

3. **The Grand Causeway:** This elevated bridge runs through the center of the city, and connects to the front entrance of the palace. A similar bridge connects the back gate of the city. The causeway is over half a mile long, and one must walk its entire length to approach the palace without drawing the ire of the Queen. The bridge is not crowded, and its position makes it an ideal platform from which to view the city and get one's bearings.

4. **The Palace of Pectoris Cor of Dea:** The Queen's palace is impossible to miss. Its size dwarfs anything else in Eclipse save the citadel of the Dark Master. This red, pulsing, fleshy monstrosity bears the look and the shape of a gigantic heart. The inside is filled with chambers connected by corridors like great veins; fleshy valves serve as doors. Though each of the seven rulers of the city has his own tower here, the main reason one might visit is to petition the Queen. Anyone who approaches the palace is permitted to petition the Queen, although as I mentioned, leaving is not an option until one's petition has been heard, and there is no guarantee of promptness.

5. **Citadel of Princess of Blades:** The Princess of Blades keeps her household here close to the heart of the city. The double tower both signifies her rank and represents her favorite weapons. The building is not open to the uninvited, and the Princess seems to have a very private per-

sona, much like the Queen. Her retainer of servants is quite enormous however, and the gold and silver covered walls of the towers show off her great wealth. Those bringing her gifts may be asked to come and treat with her in her gardens, which are filled with some of the rarest and most beautiful mosses and plants of Eclipse.

6. **Citadel of Vol Von the Bloated:** This gigantic building belies its master's size. Vol Von has taken an aquatic lifestyle for himself, and rarely leaves the great bath in the center of his citadel. The building is open to most visitors however, particularly those who have some kind of information or intelligence to share with the baron.
7. **Citadel of Hyia Nemphren Tolme the Unmoving:** This citadel is one of the more striking buildings in Stygia; it has a delightful balance of arches, and its entire surface is carved with intricate patterns. The inner courtyard is open to the air and boasts a delightful and colorful garden. There's not much point in visiting here however, as the mistress of the house isn't exactly a good conversationalist.
8. **Volkulaku's Military Quarters:** Duke Volkulaku calls this citadel home. It is also the command post for the Stygian military. The duke caused a bit of a scandal in the city when he added the second tower to the citadel. Though he claims it was necessary to separate the military from his private residence, most saw it as attempt to move in on the rank of the Princess.
9. **The Screaming Symphony Hall:** This building is the public facing part of the citadel complex of Maestro Misteron Luxuria, the richest citizen of Stygia. This building houses the performance hall where he and others present their "art". This building is also often home to the yearly tribute to Colopitiron. I suppose entertainment could be had here for those without any sense of conscience or shame.
10. **The Grand Market:** This entire city block is taken up by one enormous market complex. At the center is an ornate dome that serves as the city's slave market. Slavers come from all over Eclipse to sell in this market, as the prices are better here than anywhere else. The vampires use the gold and gems that they get from the mining ventures to buy slaves. Also, nobles whose hobby it is to breed mortals often can be found here showing off their latest creations. The price for these latter slaves is usually other slaves, generally used for breeding stock. One of the city's breeders consistently produces the most comely human females I have ever spied.
11. **Chapel of the Kindly One:** This mountain citadel towers far above the city, and is accessible via a great shaft running upward from the city's rear gate. Those who bear an invitation can show it at the bottom, and a car on cables will descend to haul the visitor up through the shaft of this long dead volcano. The chapel is a bastion of free thought and learning, and will take on any exceptional mind willing to submit to the methods of the Kindly One. One entering the school, disciples must remain for at least one year, during which the student undergoes intense and constant courses in philosophy, science, and religion. Graduates are considered to be some of the best-educated folk on the Forge.



12. **The Undercroft:** An inner ring resembling a waterless moat cuts through the city here. Looking down, one does not see ruin like in Penance, but stunning tombs and an underground network of roads and passageways connecting the city below just as above. These lower paths are for the use of the city's more mundane servants, so they can do their jobs without being seen or cluttering up the city above. Refuse is removed via the lower tunnels, and many of the magical machines of the city (such as the fountain) are maintained and operated here. Also, some of Stygia's more unsavory work is done here. There are the general slave pens, and also the bleeding rooms where broken slaves are drained to fill the fountains. Access to the great jewel mines is here as well. Oddly enough, there are few vampires down here to supervise, and these tunnels appear ideal for those wishing to move about the city undetected.
13. **Beater's Tavern:** This unlikely establishment caters to the mortal merchants who come to the city to trade, and it is probably the one place where mortal visitors can buy a safe bed for the evening. The tavern is actually run by a vampire who essentially has opened his citadel to the public. There is entertainment here, as well as exotic drinks and unusual—if not exactly the most palatable—foods. The owner's servants work the tavern, serving as chambermaids, barkeeps, musicians, prostitutes, and so on. The crowd is mixed, and vampires curious about the outside world often mingle here with the beaters to hear their tales.
14. **Red Queen Circle:** This simple circular platform at the front of the city is the central site of the Festival of the Red Queen, held each moon where seven "lucky" mortals are turned with the blood of the Queen. Oddly enough the Queen herself does not show, remaining permanently in her palace, and the Princess of Blades conducts the ceremony in her stead.
15. **Hunter's Park:** This wild, open section of the city on first glance appears to be a typical Eclipse city park, with mosses, mushrooms, sculptures, and rock gardens. Second glance may likely reveal a number of odd maze-like roofless bunkers and arena seating along the top of the high wall encircling the park. Those citizens who like to play with their food often bring them here, letting the quarry run free amongst the obstacles and the growth. After a set period of time, the hunter then enters, and the public is welcome to come and watch the hunt from above. Bets are often placed on how long particular runners will last. At times, captured crusaders are even set free here with weapons and armor in order to provide a greater challenge for the hunter.
16. **Clockwork Chateau:** This private residence stands out from the rest of the Stygian architecture, being constructed along more square lines, and also with its fantastical clockwork time face. The hands of this great clock show the current Penance time, and every three hours, colorful mechanical puppets slide out of the clock to perform a little show. While the clock is something of a novelty in Eclipse, it would be of little note if not for the rest of the building, which is entirely stuffed full with the most fantastic private collection of clockworks I have ever come across. The owner is an eccentric little vampire who spends his days researching, tracking down, collecting, and repairing these odd machines. He will pay a good price to anyone who brings him one of these devices, particularly if he does not already have one. He also can be persuaded to part with some of his collectibles, though only on a loaner basis, and one must be prepared to stay for a while and impress or entertain him with tales or talents, as his "fee" for most work is good company.
17. **The Weeping Rose:** Most certainly one of the most unusual establishments on all the Forge. This elegant and impeccable restaurant caters exclusively to rich vampires, offering an all blood menu. The menu changes weekly and the fare is exceptionally fanciful and rare. I dined here when I interviewed one of the city's lesser nobles, and though I only stole a few tastes from my host's meal, I must admit the service and presentation were first rate. I slipped out with one of the menus, which I have included in this chapter for your curiosity. Prices listed are in mortal lives. In fact almost all transactions in the city are conducted with slaves as capital.

MOTIVATIONS OF THE UNDEAD

To spend a great deal of time and resources attempting to understand what drives vampires could well prove to be a lifelong pursuit, as they are varied in their proclivities as the colors of the spectrum. There are certain tendencies though that the majority have in common. First and foremost is the desire for blood, or more accurately, to consume the life force of other living beings. This parasitic compulsion begins as a necessity, but over time becomes less and less of a requirement and more and more a thing done for pleasure. I spoke to many vampires about this during my stay here, and was assured that the act of drinking blood was the most pleasurable experience they had ever had in all their existence. No food or lovemaking or act of hedonism could compare with the rush and passion of taking the life of another into them. They spoke of it as both a physical and spiritual event, the younger ones with an almost addict-like fervor and the old with a quiet reverence. In fact, I did not meet a single vampire in all my time who did not consume blood, though some of the more ancient had complex rituals built around when and how they did so. When I asked for stories of vampires who had sworn off the blood of intelligent creatures, I was almost laughed out of the city. One vampire put it like this, "Well, I suppose a human could live on no more than water and raw vegetables, but do you know any that do?"

The second thing that most vampires I met had in common was restraint. It is clear that becoming one of their kind heightens everything—the senses, emotions, physical power, speed, and so on. Such an awakening can lead to unimaginable levels of rage and lust. Not all who become vampires are centered individuals and capable of firm self-control, but in order to survive the ages as a vampire it is almost a requirement. Those that lack the emotional resources to reign themselves in often get themselves destroyed, be it by hunters or other vampires. I should note that though vampires are almost always composed and calm, everyone has a tipping point and I witnessed two vampires who apparently

The Weeping Rose

Primo

Fresh as can be - 20

A small shot of newborn blood from a baby less than an hour old - ask about availability.

Scab chips - 2

Made from scratch daily!

Secondo

Freshly whipped virgin - 13

Vegetarian diet, bathed in the purest spring water from the heart of Penance, and tanned only indirectly from the light of the red sun.

Gout-ridden nightling - 9

Fed only severn fat and alcohol, restrained for minimal physical activity.

Catch of the day - M/P

Street urchin - touched by consumption.

Served live at your table.

Thole mystic - 20

Herbally enhanced.

Baradume serial killer - 15

Seventeen confirmed kills of women and children.

Your race on demand - 10-40

No blood is as good as that of your own kind.

Prix Fixe

Three generations of elf - 30

A three-course dinning wonder. Each elf a full 1,000 years older than the previous but in the same family line.

Dolce

Boiled Leviathan - 10

Fresh from the sea of ink served steaming hot.

Jellied zombie blood - 9

Culled from the finest cemetaries.

Chilled - aged 40 years.

Frozen shaved ice blood - 12

A refreshing treat!

had had a long feud break and tear into each other. The resulting battle tore apart two city blocks and left some twenty mortal servants dead in the wake. I was told that such things were deeply frowned upon, but no one even made an attempt to intervene when it occurred, and several of the vampires watching even seemed amused. The end result left neither of the two worse for the wear after a drink, and the damage to the city was repaired in only a few days.

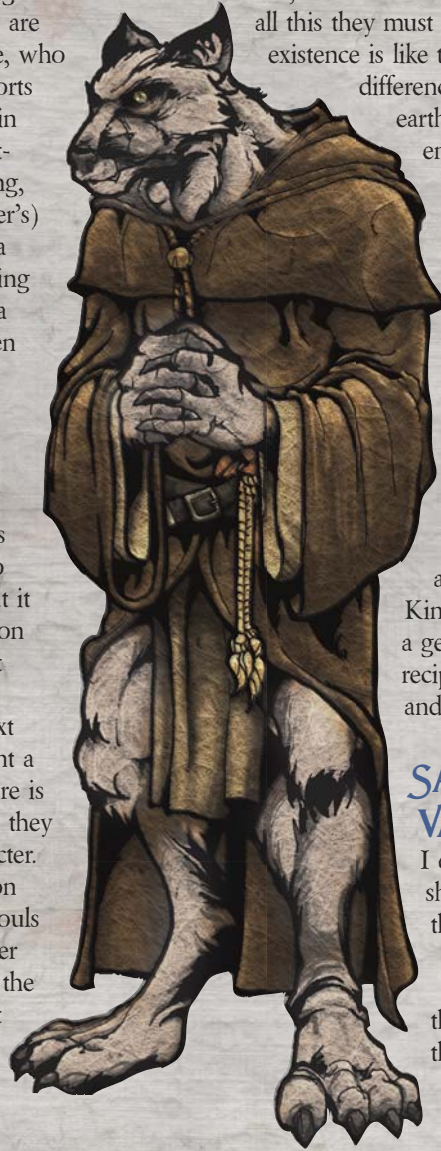
The third common principle amongst vampires is that they require hobbies to survive the ages without becoming bored. This the most elusive of pursuits, and those that are going to be successful at it need something to live for and to look forward to. For some, the next beater that comes along and grabs their blood lust can be enough, but few are this simple. I have met vampires, for example, who breed doves over many generations into all sorts of strange varieties, some small enough to fit in one's hands, others massive and bred for fighting. I spoke to several vampires who play long, strange games with the lives of their (and other's) servants that can take generations to come to a close. Still others live to hunt the rebels, making use of the Akai's war against the vampires as a sort of toy soldier game, even enjoying it when a human commander manages to beat their troops from time to time. Regardless of the method, immortality requires distractions.

The final and perhaps the most important factor that older vampires in particular share is a vibrant lust for life. It may sound strange to describe an undead creature in such a way, but it is the most fitting. All the diversions in creation cannot replace the natural energy in those that somehow still hold an almost childlike curiosity about existence and what is around the next bend. This, above all other qualities, will grant a vampire the longevity to survive eternity. There is no such thing as a depressed ancient vampire; they simply do not last if that is part of their character. One partial explanation for this is my suspicion that what vampires sacrifice by locking their souls to their bodies is the ability for those souls ever to move on again. Unlike a mortal, who has the dream or hope for the next life always present with him, a vampire's present existence is his last. And one is far more likely to try to enjoy this life if one knows that there will never be a beyond.

In Eclipse, many of the hardships and dangers that a vampire might face are removed by the very nature of the land's darkness and the strength of a well-established community. Thus, the above-mentioned characteristics can be even more of a necessity for survival. I came to understand that many vampires who had ventured to Stygia from the outside thinking it a paradise soon came to realize that without the stress and strain of being in survival mode they were left with nothing else to drive them. Some of these vampires find other pursuits, but many either fall,

or in the end decide to return to worlds or realms where they are outsiders. Of course, this is easily accomplished with the use of the gate, but I shall discuss that in further detail later. What is remarkable about the vampires of Stygia is that all but a small few have traveled to other worlds or domains, and some individuals have been even to hundreds if not thousands of other worlds. This provides a viewpoint far more wide and encompassing than possessed by almost any beings I have met in the Forge.

To simply disregard vampires as monstrous, blood-sucking creatures is at once completely wrong, yet at a fundamental level the core of truth. They are artists, thinkers, dreamers, creators, and capable of great compassion and inspired innovation. They love, fear, hate and hurt in ways few will ever understand, yet to have all this they must steal life from others. It can be argued that all existence is like this, taking life to maintain one's own, but the difference is that most natural things fall back to the earth again, either feeding another or adding their energies back into the cycle. The most unnatural thing about vampires is not that they are undead beings who live forever, but that in becoming so they remove themselves forever from the cycle of existence and in turn consume far more than their share. I do not think that there is a single ancient vampire I spoke with who did not understand this, and many also understood why of all their acts, choosing to persist was by far the most evil.



A LETTER HOME

The scroll, on the facing page, caught my eye as I waited for an audience in the library of the Kindly One, a dove vampire. The owner, being a generous soul, bequeathed it to me, its original recipient having returned it to him on a recent visit, and he had no further need of it.

SATURNIA. QUEEN OF THE VAMPIRES

I do not know if she is the first, or even where she came from. I asked her these questions and the asking seemed only to confuse her. "Alpha, omega... two words with the same meaning." was her only answer. Whether or not she is the progenitor of her race, she is most certainly the blood source to which any vampire in the multiverse can be traced back to. There is no question however that Stygia's Queen is a creature of impossible age and power whose true motivations and purpose escape even one as time-tested as myself. You and I were never mortal, yet she once was, no matter how briefly. This singular fact separates her from all other perpetual living beings, save one... but that topic has already been broached. I have never known a creature to frighten me so quickly and surely. All the lives she and her children have consumed throughout all of creation seem to rest within her, the cause of her unfathomable strength and alien intellect.

My dear Elder Hakaya,

You may be surprised how fondly I remember our days together in the depths of your hovel on the hill. After these five-thousand-odd years, I hope this missive finds you alive and glad to hear from me. I have never forgotten your lessons nor shed the great mantle of your influence, imparted in my most formative years. Yes, our parting was strained. I chafed under the closeness of our bond. I felt betrayed by the circumstances of my turning. But today, much as I loved my mortal life, I am grateful for your gift.

The day of my turning, I stepped blithely up your overgrown path, eager for an evening's discussion with you. Flattered by the attentions of the reclusive doer on the hill, I prepared for our meetings with rigorous reading and study. That night, you greeted me at the base of the cellar stairs with unusual warmth and energy, and we sank smiling into sumptuous bear leather armchairs near the fire. You took down the hood of your cloak for the first time in my presence, revealing impressive ear points and a silken stand-out ruff. We were surrounded by thousands of your hand-bound books, meticulously arranged on their shelves.

"Young Johnan," you said, "Tonight I have invited your friend Jameera to dine with us." With that announcement, I felt as warm and energetic as you. You knew my feelings for sweet Jameera. A dining table nearby had been laid with three skinned bobcat carcasses. The aroma of bobcat and my anticipation of Jameera's arrival quickened my heartbeat. You and I began to converse in our common manner, but with even greater intensity. Soon, we differed over a point of philosophy, and to illustrate your view, you directed me to a book on a shelf. I crossed the room to retrieve the book. As I turned from the shelf, you were suddenly in front of me, leering.

My jaw fell, and you knocked me to the rug, stepping on my throat with your hind paw. "Be still, Johnan," you spoke from above, devouring me with your now-red eyes, "and you will be transfigured." It was the first moment of terror in the most terror-filled hours of my five thousand years. You were on top of me with your teeth in my neck. In and out of consciousness, I heard Jameera's screams. When I came to, Jameera lay still next to me with her foreleg across my body. Your fur was dull and pale then. With a weak grin, you growled, "Her heart beats only for you." You leaned over to nick her throat with a claw and smeared her blood across my lips. With that taste, I first recognized the new thirst. Though I wanted to stop more than anything, I could not help myself. Sinking my teeth into her as you had done to me, I drained her to her death. Oh, Jameera, my love.

But Hakaya, I have long since forgiven you and myself, too, for our acts on that day of my turning. You were a wretch living in secrecy and shame, in a place where you had to hide yourself and your brilliant mind. All that hysteria and hatred over a largely exaggerated predilection for mortal blood! Society's condemnation of our kind exacted a great price on your psyche. Your suffering spilled outward, causing you to bleed or turn every mortal whose facile intellect or fecund scent caught your interest. You wanted to be attended, worshipped, and fulfilled, but that land of mortal prudence held no promise for the undead!

I write to you to confess this perspective from a far better place. 150 years after I made my escape from you, I came here to Eclipse and then to the City of Stygia. This city is the paradise of our persecuted kind! It is naturally and eternally dark, so we can walk the streets at any hour without thoughts of protection from a scalding orb. Even more than that, dear Hakaya, we own the Stygian streets. Here, mortals tend us as gods rather than disdain us as monsters. I find myself among the most revered here, having formed a close alliance with our Queen.

I have forged my existence here in your image, but with a gentility more befitting the pride and refinement of this place. I daresay you would be proud. I have my own hilltop palace now, far grander than we could ever dream of in our native land. Like you, I have made my home into a chapel of mortal learning. I loved my mortal life, and now I fancy myself a shepherd of mortals. Any intelligent being who desires to dedicate himself to a life of study has a home here.

My attitude toward mortals deviates from convention here, which is to view them at best, as slaves, and at worst, as empty objects alive to fulfill the bloodlust of our kind. Many of my fellows see my educational endeavors as a dangerous empowerment of people who have historically persecuted our kind.

Really, I am not so different from other immortals here who keep mortals as slaves, sportsmen, soldiers and playthings. We all have our idle interests and obsessions, pastimes to keep us engaged with existence over the endless years. I have no use for slaves or playthings. My interest lies in observing mortal minds as they develop their scholastic, artistic and spiritual potential.

Therein, the seed is sown for the rarest and most intense joy of my existence, one I know you could understand, Hakaya. Even my very young mortal students feel acutely the limits of their mortal embodiment. Each has a natural sense of urgency, of existing as a live being that will too soon be dead and rotten. Their zeal for life allows some of them to perceive profound truths in a way that I no longer can.

Once in a great many years, I have a student who displays such extraordinary spiritual gifts that I must partake of those gifts in a way more visceral than conversation. Never do I turn a student to the undead. Instead, I drain his life at the peak of his mortal achievement. In return, I take a fleeting sip from his font of knowledge.

My most recent such charge was Thomas. I bought young Thomas as a human slave from the Queen's palace. He had become too physically weak for work and was being ridiculed and beaten by his fellows. When he arrived at my chapel, he spent a week in deep sleep and then needed another month of nursing to bring him to health. When he was well enough, he began my course in philosophy and another in art. He proved an outstanding student and artist, intricately depicting in painting his conception of a heaven-like place where mortal souls go after bodily death.

Thomas spent his mornings in chanting meditation and his afternoons painting or in study. Some evenings he would come to me to debate his topic of the day. Hakaya, it was not unlike our special camaraderie before my turning. Thomas's interests centered on the nature of time and reality and on various depictions of an afterlife. He was quite open in his curiosity about my undead existence. How free I feel here to answer on that subject so honestly! In our discussions I often found myself astonished by his insights. It is amazing that some arrive intuitively at ideas that others can't fully grasp even after years of study.

When Thomas had been with me nearly two years, he expressed a desire to take an extended visit at a mortal monastery on a farm outside Stygia. Mortals in my home are free to come and go as they please even when I have purchased them as slaves. Before leaving, Thomas requested that we spend a full day in debate, reviewing his education.

The morning we were to meet, I went to find him in the theology library where he performed his morning meditation. I had been quite restless all night and was earlier than we had planned. As I approached the door, I could hear his fervent chanting. A fire roared in the hearth, and he knelt on an elaborate carpet with his back to me. Silently, I approached and punctured the pale, naked flesh of his neck.

His chanting petered out with a whimper, but he gave no sign of resistance to his fate. For the briefest moment, as his lifeblood warmed my throat, his thoughts were my thoughts; his mastery was my possession; I was alive again! What a magnificent feeling! As for my wise student Thomas, his exalted soul is free to seek its next destiny.

It is a pleasure to share such things with you again, my dear friend and mentor, and that is but a fraction of my long story. I do hope this finds you well. Please call on me if you ever find yourself in Stygia, our vaunted city of vampires.

Eternally,

— Johnan von Doone, the Kindly One

Saturnia rules with absolute and virtually unquestioned power in Stygia, yet to many of her people she is as much a legend as she is a mystery. Her word reaches those of the lower court only through the proxy of the other seven high lords and ladies. She herself is aloof and has retreated from rest of her kingdom. Any are allowed to petition to see her, be they mortal or vampire, but those that do so accept the risk of waiting eons in the antechamber to actually be heard by her. Saturnia can be as cryptic as she can be blunt; the inner workings of her mind are a maze without end.

The Queen bears the powers of all vampires who have descended from her and can take the form of any race that has had a vampire produced from one of its members. These two factors make her an extremely dangerous creature who should never be engaged in battle unless one has a death wish. The powers of vampires can vary widely from race to race and even from individual to individual, yet all of them reside in her, and she can use them like a virtuoso. When in her presence, she easily slipped in and out of my mind, a task none too easy to accomplish. She made me feel lust and desire where no such emotions ever have existed or should have. I also believe it may well have been within her grasp to utterly destroy me.

I believe Saturnia chose the Forge long ago, and somehow secured a role guarding this back-door gate to all of creation through which she can easily dispatch her children to plunder the multiverse. Though she may easily pass through the gate, any and all, no matter their power, who would come after her would find themselves trapped with the rest of us for an eternity and cut off from their gods. As all natural predators are then loathe to pursue her, Saturnia enjoys tremendous freedom and security in Eclipse.

There is no doubt that the vampire Queen poses a interesting and tempting prospect to those who would consider themselves true heroes. Despite the dangers, many have journeyed to the Forge seeking to destroy her. It is a widely held belief that her death would cause a chain reaction, bringing all her children to dust. But those who have come seeking her demise are seldom ready for what they find—a city full of liberated god-like vampires and deluded mortal servants who would happily throw themselves on swords to protect their masters... a place where the sun never grants reprieve from the fully developed abilities of the creatures of night. On rare occasions, the Queen will give orders that certain extremely powerful adversaries should be allowed to pass through the city with only a show of attempting to bar them. Those that do so enter her chambers with a false sense of confidence, and for all their might and wonder are never seen or heard from again. Some think she feeds on them, but others believe she turns them and sends them back out into creation, transformed from the greatest of enemies to the most potent of allies.

THE PORTAL

In all the Forge there is only one exit that I have come upon that functions. It lies within the highest windowless tower of the Palace of the Queen. This constant glowing door to the multiverse and beyond tempts all who wish to escape and return to whatever home they were ripped from. One would think such

a treasure would be kept hidden and secret, yet it is one of the best advertised treasures in the Forge. It brings thousands to their deaths every year and inspires hope in millions more. Of course, it is a trap, and the gate is something of a lie. The simple truth is this—the portal does lead out of the Forge. In fact, it can be directed to millions of worlds. Due to a loophole in the Oath of Binding, only living things are bound to the Forge. Vampires, being undead, are not considered living things and may come and go as they wish. The portal then allows only the dead to breach its threshold. Even if one was to fight his way past all its many defenders and successfully gain access to the portal, upon touching it one would be turned to dust.

Oddly enough, I cannot tell you of the gate's origin. I can vouch that it was not present before the Forge had been built, and likely arrived in the palace when Saturnia first immigrated to Eclipse, as I never chose to enter her throne room at that time. Perhaps my memory is faltering, but I do not remember the Queen's palace being nearly as large back in my day as it is now. It has the appearance of a living thing, and I suspect that it has grown considerably over the years. What strikes me as strangest about the portal itself though is that it has all the look and feel of one of the citadels and wards connected to the Oath of Binding, as if it were created as part of that same great fell incantation.

ECONOMY

The vampires of Stygia have little use for money and treasure among their own ranks. This is not to say that well-crafted items, be they magical or mundane, do not hold value, but rather that a true monetary economy does not exist within the walls of Stygia. The only reason to hold gold or funds is to secure the one thing that does have value, slaves. The currency of the day is blood, and blood is most conveniently stored in the bodies of slaves. The unquenchable need for fresh slaves is the force that drives all of Stygia's economy. Thus the vampires conspire as a whole to fulfill this need through a multitude of means. First and foremost, they harvest a bounty of gold, platinum and gems from not one, but twenty massive mines; the most prominent of these lies directly beneath the city. Connected to the undercroft, this bountiful mine has been in operation for thousands of years, and coins and cut gems cannot be crafted fast enough to meet the rate at which they are mined. All of Stygia's mines are manned by slaves, and to ensure the viability of them, all vampires donate slaves to serve in the mines. In doing so, they are granted credit to purchase more slaves based on the number they have donated to mines, plus they are awarded most of the goods the slaves produce. This circle forms the core of Stygia's internal economy. Slaves chiefly come from trade with Baradume. The guilds deliver the "livestock" pulled into their holds by the Dark Master to the vampires on a regular basis in exchange for the gold and gems produced from Stygia's mines. However, there are many other ways for vampires to secure slaves, and thus wealth. Some hire mercenaries to go forth into the world and capture prisoners; others make wondrous crafts and goods, employing a level of skill only thousands of years of practice can produce. Such goods are sold in other markets to acquire wealth, which is in turn transformed into slaves bought on the markets of Arena or from kidnapped populations in Penance. Yet another way to generate wealth is to drive one of the secretly backed public campaigns against the "Evil City of

Stygia.¹⁹ These demonizing promotions find young, brave would-be heroes in Penance and the like and convince them to join one of the many crusades bound for Eclipse to eradicate the vampire population. The do-gooders are equipped with weapons and supplies as well as guides, and then in large force are led down into the Cauldron. These groups seldom, if ever, manage to meet up with the real rebels that live in the surrounding mountains, but rather are directed full-long into ambushes so overwhelming that they surrender at once, or into even more conniving traps. Some are led to believe that they will meet with rebel leaders, but must surrender their weapons until they have gained said leader's trust. Instead, of course, they are marched directly into slave processing camps in or around Stygia. These campaigns are a welcome boon to the slave markets when other sources run thin from time to time, and funding a well-managed foray can secure a vampire a great deal of clout.

Vampires may not make much use of wealth within the walls of Stygia, but many maintain complex finical portfolios in other regions, tying their wealth to multiple markets and making investments with the wisdom and patience that can come only from having lived hundreds of years. After all, very few can afford to invest in ventures that will not pay off for five hundred years or more.

The coffers of both Baradume and Penance are flush with funds from vampire investors, and in many ways these investments control the flow of power in other parts of the world. Many a minor Bloodlord owes her success to backing from a secret vampire lord or lady, and though the complex chains that link back may be impossible to sort out, in almost every case this debt is eventually paid in the form of... what else, slaves.

The civilized kingdoms are not the only ones that enjoy revenue from trading lives to the vampire soul engine. Locally, the wer-rans profit from a healthy slave trade with Stygia, their natural hunting instincts honed by bringing down prey to later be sold to the vampires—and what is wrong with the odd bite or claw mark on merchandise that will eventually be eaten? The war-torn lands of Arena are often the source for the hardest of slaves, used for the mines and to fill the barracks of the mortal military. Also the halls of the Stormbringer masters of Anvil provide the most comely of lads and lasses to fill one's villa with beauty and youth.

Status symbols of rare kinds are the only thing other than slaves that hold great value in vampire society, though even here their worth is more about bragging rights than anything tangible. Such curiosities may include rare breeds of dover, like the miniature "chihuahua" dover, with only one out of every twenty females being able to give birth due to their fragile size. Owning one of these can be quite costly. Magical items that can counter some of a vampire's weaknesses, like daywalking rings or dark holy symbols, are widely sought after too, and black glass mirrors that will actually show the reflection of a vampire can be valued at up to a hundred prime slaves.

Of course, one should consider that with all these slaves and servants, food is a major concern. After all, one has to keep one's livestock well fed. Thus it is important to note that scattered throughout the mountains and along the ink sea are vast

plantations that raise all sorts of crops and livestock for the mortal inhabitants of Stygia. A great many of these are overseen by vampires, but entire villages devoted to food production run by mortals exist as well. These "independent" settlements are sharply policed and monitored by the armies of Stygia, and if they fail to produce or are found to be providing aid to the rebels they can be culled overnight, every man, woman, and child slain and then replaced in a matter of weeks with all new settlers.

All the bodies, food, and the waste mortal slaves produce have to be dealt with carefully in a city where the ruling inhabitants have a heightened sense of smell. Never a place to disappoint, Stygia is very efficient at tending to these byproducts. Dead blood-drained bodies provide fuel to the giant furnaces deep below the city that heat and power many of the city's more advanced constructs. The waste of living servants is transformed into grade A fertilizer that is transported off to the many farms and plantations of the outlying areas. Any other byproducts are quickly reused as appropriate, a model of low environmental impact unrivaled anywhere else in the Forge.

There is only one area of trade in which all financial entanglement is forbidden, that is in the very lucrative market of goddust. Goddust is not only looked down on by the vampire nation but outright despised. Not only does the dust produce long-lived mortals that rival the vampires' power, but even the slightest exposure to the dust turns all but the most aged of undead into raving abominations. A vampire who inhales even a few milligrams of the dust, be it directly or via the bloodstream of a victim, will revert to a primitive animal state, even physically transforming into a sort of wolf-bat-human creature. Within this state the vampire's physical strength is magnified times ten and his lust for blood becomes untenable. He will strike at all around him, consuming and devouring everyone in his reach. Mad and impossible to reason with or calm, the only solution is to destroy those infected. Thus the vampire nation has done more than its part to fuel the lack of availability of goddust on the market. They regularly send out parties to capture and destroy supplies, they pay mercenaries to raid mines and sabotage ships rumored to carry the dust. All this must be done through proxy though, as the risk of even slight exposure is too dangerous. Without fail, this has drawn the attention of the ancients who rely upon the dust to maintain their existence, flaming an ongoing conflict between them and the vampires. This war between immortal factions has led to a strange darkly-ingrained conflict that seldom erupts into the open, but when it does it can lead to mass death and costly property damage.

The Akai rebels have often considered using goddust as a weapon, but considering the cost and unpredictable results, it has never been fully viable. Indirectly though, they have benefited from the goddust, as many ancients fund their rebellion against the vampires.

As a final note, I believe that the personal guards of the Queen may have been produced by feeding very ancient vampires goddust in concert with the Queen's own blood, thus explaining the horrors that watch over her palace.

POLITICS

Vampire politics are far gentler and kinder than one might expect for creatures who live on the blood of other intelligent beings. Beings as long-lived as vampires tend to develop patience and a wisdom regarding how they conduct their affairs. The idea of a bunch of power hungry monsters scratching away at one another to gain the upper hand simply does not hold true. First and foremost in Stygia, there are no vampires who live in discomfort or lack for much of anything they might desire. There are the young, any under five hundred years who still seek power and standing. Their ambitions can be vexing, but the older vampires do their best to help foster them towards mature ways of handling affairs. Seldom do vampires ever steal from or harm each other; it is just not done. The youngest of their kind are enthralled to their makers, and most makers are at least a few hundred years old, so they already have gained enough wisdom to avoid mundane folly. Vampires may of course have feuds, and these can be long lived and filled with bitterness, but even the worst of these rarely explode into violence. Vampires are hard-pressed to raise arms against their own kind. Once they have passed a few hundred years, they come to understand that doing so is not just killing a rival, but killing a living piece of history.

The city of Stygia is ruled in a loose hierarchy by a royalty formed of the seven noble lords and ladies, the highest of these being the Queen herself. Directly beneath her, and considered second in command, is the Princess of Blades, and then the remaining five hold generally equal power, though High Duke Sentry Volkulaku, who runs the military and city guard, tends to have more sway. This may be less because of any official standing and more because he exerts his power with more frequency. Beneath these high rulers a long line of dukes, baronesses, viziers and other nobles live in a complex order denoting their rank and rule, but seldom are these forces flexed against each other. Most immortals exert their power and sway via their servants, and if they do engage in competition with other houses, they do so through these servants. Wild sporting events may be organized, or complex manipulated plots contrived, the masters betting in secret over the emotional outcomes. These games can carry on over generations of mortals' lives, the vampires watching grandchildren make the same errors as their ancestors. Often times the slaves that surprise their masters or grow beyond the expectations or limits of their predecessors are the ones who are chosen to be turned.

It is here that we chance upon the one law and rule that is strictly monitored and enforced in Stygia, vampire population control. Being few among many is the very thing that allows Stygia to function so well, and also serves as the key to the luxury in which the vampires live. Thus the law is clear—for every hundred years a vampire lives he is allowed to produce a single offspring. These offspring are then judged. To survive past fifty years a citizen must secure the sponsorship of both his progenitor and two other household rulers; if not, he is destroyed. This can lead to hard feelings, and sometimes rather than risk it, a household lord or noble will create a situation in which these young vampires are left vulnerable to vampire hunters or rebels. In fact, the Princess of Blades told me that she believed that this was the only way that any vampire that she had known had been killed by outsiders for over a thousand years. If true, this fact may dishearten those who

claim to be great slayers, the reality being that they only serve to eliminate the unwanted from the young vampire ranks.

The only other way to become a vampire is to be one of the seven mortals chosen every year during the festival of the Red Queen, a celebration that coincides with the last passing of the rust moon. On this occasion, seven of the most loyal and valued servants out of all the houses of Stygia are rewarded by being turned. However, not only are they transformed, but they are given the Queen's blood to do so. This propels their powers and strength forward as if they had already lived for five hundred years. More often than not, these individuals are chosen from the ranks of the military, though cases of valued, extremely beautiful, or talented servants also exist. These rare individuals are not subject to the fifty year test, but do fall to "hunters" if their actions become unseemly or disruptive.

FEEDING

The need to feed is directly tied to the age of a vampire. Young must feed very often if they are to survive the massive transformation that their bodies and spirits have undergone. Luckily for the mortal population of Stygia, young vampires are very rare. The bulk of those living within the city need only feed once in a great while; this is not to say that they do not feed more often, but in truth, feeding habits of old vampires are extremely diverse. Almost all the vampires I met feed daily, but that does not mean they kill daily. Young vampires may not be able to stop once they have latched onto a vein, but the more seasoned can feed easily without killing. In my time in Stygia I met vampires who took a life a day, some that only ate once in a twenty-year period, and many who fed on multiple victims in the course of their daily activities yet never took a life.

There seems to exist distinct classes of slaves, though officially no designation is made. While I will provide more detail in a later section, know for now that on top of the heap are the servants who have descended from other loyal slaves going back generations. These valued slaves are seldom fed upon, and seem for the most part to live very comfortable and at times fulfilling lives. The role of this class is to tend to the needs and desires of their masters. On the bottom, there are those who are brought to the city from elsewhere and typically have no real value or talents to offer other than being comely. These people become the source of food and pleasure. Of course, there is always some crossover; sometimes a long-time servant becomes a meal and other times a slave bought for eating becomes a valued plaything or a worthy servant.

All things considered, death is not as common as outsiders might believe. After all, with close to ten thousand vampires living in the region, if each consumed and slew a mortal every day, the whole population of Eclipse would soon be drained.

HOUSEHOLDS

The bulk of vampire dwellings in Stygia have a dual structure, with open-aired villas above ground and complex tombs and mazes below. Even the smallest of houses are large, multiple-room complexes that would be considered wealthy in most other cities.

These villas are worlds unto themselves, catering to the individual tastes of their masters. They can be very modern, spacious, and clean, or utterly cluttered, being filled to the ceiling with books and relics. Each household is governed by the rules of its vampire head, and they are often very diverse in their treatment of slaves and servants. In many homes servants have nearly equal standing to their vampire patrons, but in others, mortals are treated as objects and playthings. For the most part, I found there tended to be a middle ground, with vampires viewing some mortals as pets and others as livestock, much like a farmer might view a dog as opposed to a pig.

The moment to moment running of these houses is often a complex affair, and more often than not is left to a slave who has been promoted to head servant. Some of these head slaves are very powerful, choosing who their masters eat, what is served at parties, buying slaves, controlling what the slaves wear, and so on. These servants often hold as much control over other mortals as any vampire. However, they are also often the first to suffer if vampire still run for the most part based upon the oldest vampire's wishes.

LORDS OF THE CITY

There are seven high rulers of Stygia; each lays claim to a tower in the heart palace and also maintains at least one residence of one kind or another elsewhere. This, of course, excepts the Queen, who never leaves her throne room. Each of the six lesser rulers has direct and immediate access to the Queen and the great gate through chambers linking their towers to her palace. All other citizens of Stygia must enter the antechamber and wait in order to hold court with the Queen. As I have already written of Saturnia, I will now relate to you what I know of the other six.

THE PRINCESS OF BLADES

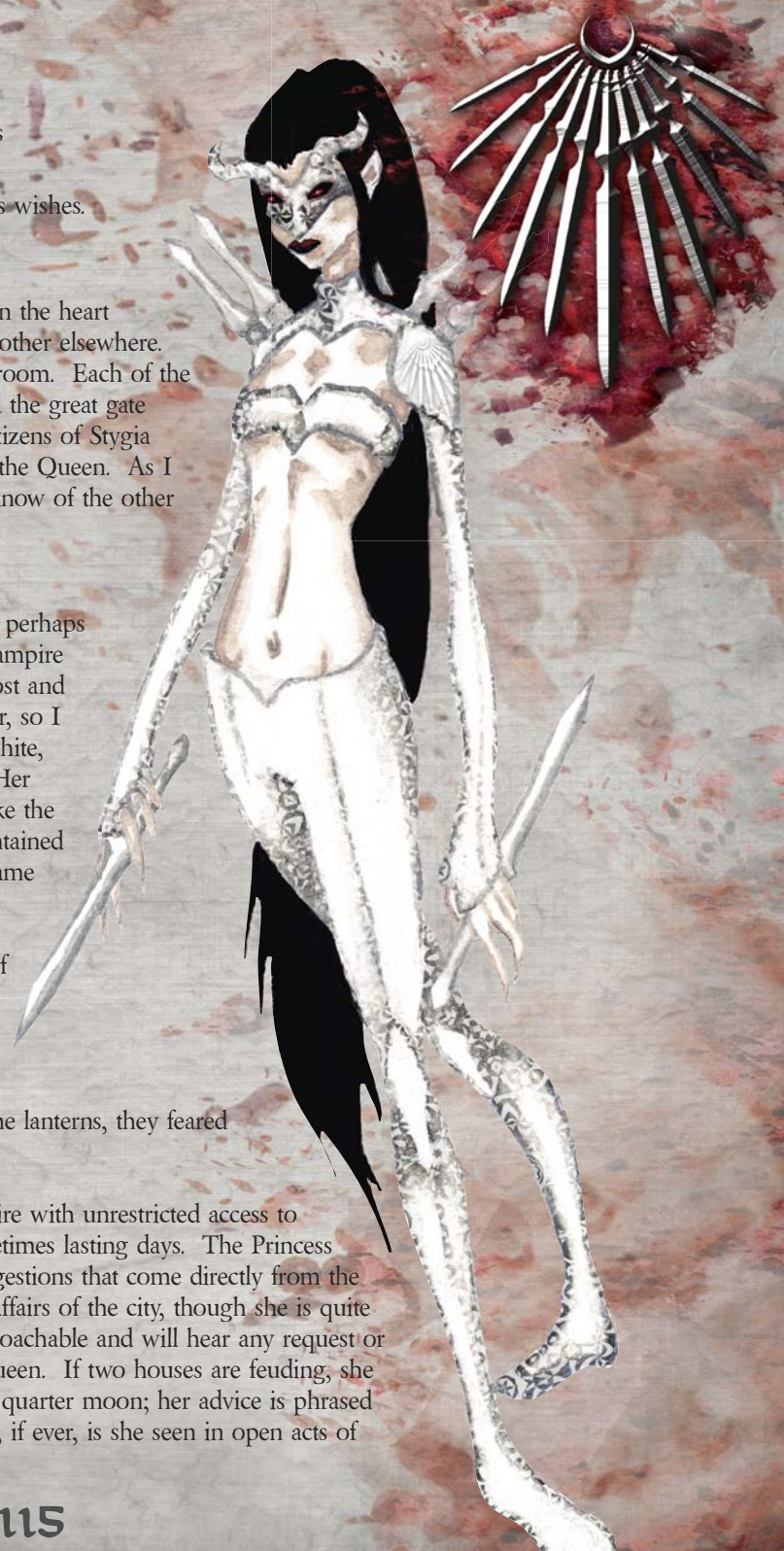
Though she appears as no more than a porcelain human child of perhaps thirteen at best, the Princess of Blades may in fact be the oldest vampire other than the Queen in all of Stygia. She was, for a time, my host and guide until I felt I could better serve my investigations without her, so I came to know her as well as one might. She always dressed in white, which matched her flawless skin and contrasted her ebony hair. Her outfits were always finely made and of a complex design, more like the clothes that an adult might wear than a child, and every outfit contained multiple places to store the knives and daggers from which her name seems to come.

I met with her first upon entering the city, and later, after my brief time with the Queen, I found myself in her garden. It was decorated with lamps hung from the outstrung intestines of several human victims who themselves hung on poles. I soon became aware from their shallow, pained breath that they still lived. Even as they hung dying, their insides strung about as rope for the lanterns, they feared her so much that they tried their best to remain quiet.

The Princess is the direct link to the Queen and is the only vampire with unrestricted access to her. The two are known to converse each moon, their talks sometimes lasting days. The Princess is the mouthpiece of the Queen, presenting the few edicts or suggestions that come directly from the Queen. Other than this, she seldom interferes in the day to day affairs of the city, though she is quite visible and attends every major social event in Stygia. She is approachable and will hear any request or complaint, though she never promises to take them before the Queen. If two houses are feuding, she will hear their grievances in an open forum which she holds every quarter moon; her advice is phrased virtually universally as suggestions rather than commands. Rarely, if ever, is she seen in open acts of

something disturbs their masters.

Many vampires are complete loners, spending the majority of their time with mortal servants only, while others band together, forming families of choice. The later usually involves sires and the "children" they have turned. These relationships can be complex, as the role a vampire takes with a newly turned mortal can be multidimensional. They can be lovers, parents, brothers, friends, masters, or all of the above combined. Servants in these sometimes unstable homes are often the things that get thrown around in a fight rather than dishes or other valuables. Still, blood bonds between maker and turned are very deep and often last for as long as both still unlive. In any case, households with more than one



violence, though when they do occur they are said to be epic. One such example occurred some forty years ago when a major rebel attack actually breached the walls of the city. The military had been falsely drawn into a battle on the other side of the kingdom, and the city had been left unprotected. It was said that the attacking force numbered around fifty thousand and flooded into the streets, killing many servants and even a few young vampires. The Princess of Blades appeared just as it looked like the rebels might gain a foothold. Her wrath was swift and final. Wielding only two small sliver knives, she cut a path through the rebels, turning the streets into a river of bodies and blood. In under an hour, not a single rebel stood nor drew breath, and the Princess' white garments were a deep crimson.

The Princess has no name that is remembered, and her current name comes from her love of all small edged weapons, which she collects with zeal and passion from both vampires and mortal craftsmen. It is because of this hobby that the pale picker gypsies have been granted permanent immunity from attack by vampires. Everywhere they go they gather knives and blades and bring them once every few moons to the Princess. One sure way to gain safe entrance to Stygia is to have a dagger or knife of rare or wondrous make and bring it to the Princess. Though she never accepts gifts, she will pay handsomely for the right blade, and will offer a great deal of respect to the merchant. Waste her time however, and you may well find yourself hanging in her garden. After all, it is well known that she tests her acquisitions readily on the flesh of her slaves, their screams heard often from the high towers of her great villa.

THE KINDLY ONE

Occupying one of the highest vantage points just outside the city, the Chapel of the Kindly One is hard to miss. Built high on a mountain peak with underground tunnels leading to the causeway at the back of the heart palace, it is the home to one of the strangest vampires I came to know during my stay in Stygia.

This 5,220 year old dover vampire chooses to live out beyond the city in a sprawling monastery devoted, oddly enough, to achieving enlightenment. He is viewed with suspicion and curiosity by all of his fellows due to the way he treats mortals. In his care they are given the utmost respect and fostered for their talents and intelligence. He provides the best education for them, both academic and artistic, and for a rare few prodigies, true consciousness is nurtured. Slaves bought by the Kindly One need only stay with him for a year; after that he promises that they will be free to go unharmed if they wish. In this year students are shown that his only true desire is to support all in his care to reach their full potentials, be it in music, art, magic, or combat. The kindly one is a deeply spiritual and philosophical thinker who in my time with him loved nothing more than debating and conversing on all manner of topics. I watched him take great care and effort to aid in the full educations of all of his wards, it was no surprise to find that many of them do not choose to leave after a year in his care.

Those few that did are still given free passage to return whenever they like. Some of his former wards teach in some of the best schools around Penance, and often continue their educations by returning to him later in life with further insights. He never turns any of his charges to vampirism, no matter how much they may want it, as he believes that life is a great gift and not to be wasted.

All this philanthropy has brought him no end of chastising and criticism from some of his fellow vampires, but none dare do more against him as he is deeply favored by the Queen. I found the Kindly One to be one of the gentlest and most soft-spoken of beings that had ever crossed my path in my many travels, and in the brief week I spent with him I wondered how he had ever drank the blood of others to survive to his current age. On my final night with him I posed this question, and after swearing me to secrecy, he gifted me with a tale that only the Queen and Princess shared.

“Only mortals can reach enlightenment.” he mused. “Undead have surrendered that hope, so I foster growth and truth in my charges, and rarely, perhaps one in every thousand, I find a mortal that is able to transcend the boundaries of his own mortal mind.

Invariably, these students come to me to share what they have achieved, be it out of gratitude or in the hopes of speaking with an equal about their new-found wisdoms. I drain their blood to their death then. Only in doing so can I perceive, if briefly, what they have achieved.”

It sent a momentary chill down my back to consider this, but who am I to judge good or evil. After all, one out of every thousand that he fosters and trains is not all that many, even if it is the ones who are truly transcendent that he devours.

HIGH DUKE VOLKULAKU - LORD GENERAL OF THE ARMED FORCES OF STYGIA

A haze vampire is nothing to be scoffed at. Add to that two thousand years of fully-explored battle lust and command of the largest, most well-trained and equipped army in the Cauldron, and you have a formidable foe indeed. Often considered to be third in the hierarchy of Stygia, Duke Volkulaku (or Volk as he is commonly referred to) counts as one of the most dangerous and powerful beings in all of Eclipse. He is high commander absolute over the city guard and armies of Stygia. Stygia's armies have never lost a battle, and are made up of powerful mortals of every warring race, plus masses of werran soldiers and seasoned vampire lieutenants, some as old as a thousand years.

The sheer numbers of Volkulaku's armies are hard to get a grasp on, but in Stygia alone, the vast underground barracks house over thirty thousand troops. This does not count the others who serve to maintain over thirty other outposts around the realm, plus another huge garrison at the port town of Shade. With his forces, he secures the sovereignty of the vampire kingdom, raining terror down upon rebels and ensuring that the hundreds of scattered farming communities produce the food required to feed the slaves of Stygia.

In meeting with “Volk”, I felt an utterly false calm surrounding him. He viewed me with utter suspicion, but he was far more comfortable with the mortals in his units than other vampires



were with their servants. There was a real feel of companionship and respect between him and his men. These soldiers are in no way treated as slaves or servants, but are rather honored and respected by all vampires. Soldiers are allowed to choose mates from the slave stock and take them into the barracks to raise children for future generations of warriors. When in battle, they are encouraged to dispatch their enemies in the cruelest and most violent of ways, and when they ransack a rebel camp or a failed farming village, they can gain promotions for raping and torturing the residents in the most vile of ways. Within their own ranks, they are deeply bonded, and taught to believe that they are better than all other mortals, and perhaps even destined someday to be “turned”, thus becoming a vampire commander. In fact, every year at the festival of the Red Queen, at least three of the seven chosen to be turned come from the ranks of the soldiers. I also learned in walking among them that on occasion after a great battle, Duke Volk himself would reward the bravest among them by turning them on the spot, a practice that seemed to go against the rules of turning that maintained the vampire population. However, it did seem to function as an excellent motivator for the troops.

Oddly enough, in my brief time among the military ranks, I began to wonder about Duke Volk’s true loyalties. There were many details I saw and recognized that led me to believe that the Duke might very well be planning a coup. When I asked the men about the great wall breach battle of some forty years back, I found that many of the soldiers viewed it as the only time they had known their master to get intel wrong. The mistake also cost the life of the second in command of the Stygian military, who was brought down with a goddust laced arrow and then killed by the Princess of Blades in his madness. This commander had been made personally by the Queen, and by all accounts was totally devoted to her. I also then interviewed a few of the warriors lucky enough to have been turned at the festival by talking in the Queen’s blood. They spoke over and over of their devotion to Volk, leading me to wonder if somehow he had replaced the sacred blood with his own. I would not be surprised if this power-greedy duke might soon find a way to give himself a promotion.



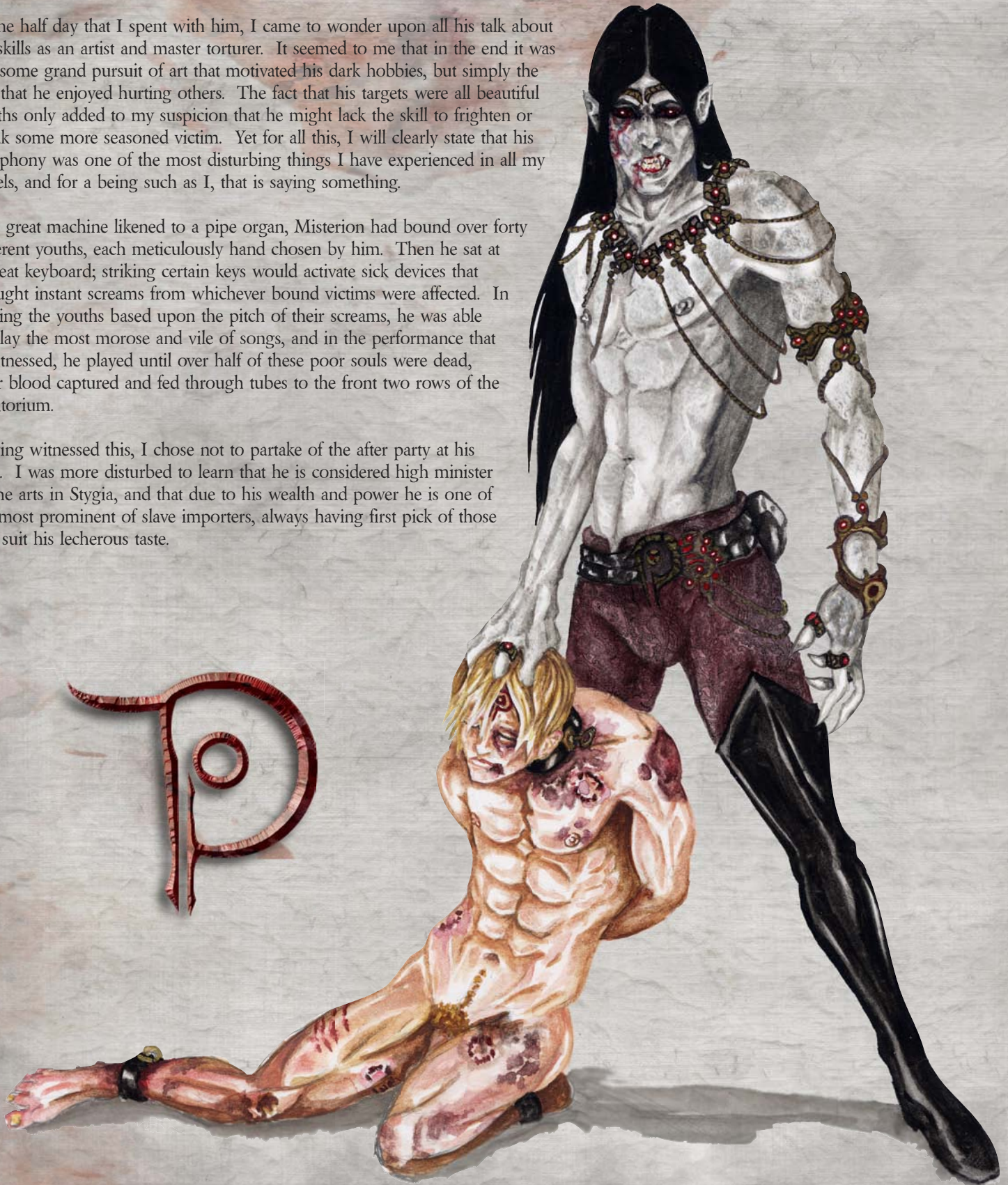
MAESTRO MISTERION LUXURIA OF THE SCREAMING SYMPHONY

This tall, thin human vampire is exceedingly good looking, with long, dark hair and fingernails to match, cuts a striking figure in the sharp, modern clothing that he adorns himself in. He wears only vampire-made clothes and jewelry, and keeps his slaves naked at all times, excepting for tapping collars. His retinue is easy enough to spot, as he takes servants only between the ages of eleven and nineteen, branding them as purchases with his mark directly on the center of their foreheads. He brands each servant personally, and this is but a mild example of what lies in store for any of the unfortunate innocents that fall into his grasp. Pain, suffering, and humiliation are his bread and butter, though he would say that he had perfected them to an art form.

In the half day that I spent with him, I came to wonder upon all his talk about his skills as an artist and master torturer. It seemed to me that in the end it was not some grand pursuit of art that motivated his dark hobbies, but simply the fact that he enjoyed hurting others. The fact that his targets were all beautiful youths only added to my suspicion that he might lack the skill to frighten or break some more seasoned victim. Yet for all this, I will clearly state that his symphony was one of the most disturbing things I have experienced in all my travels, and for a being such as I, that is saying something.

In a great machine likened to a pipe organ, Misterion had bound over forty different youths, each meticulously hand chosen by him. Then he sat at a great keyboard; striking certain keys would activate sick devices that brought instant screams from whichever bound victims were affected. In placing the youths based upon the pitch of their screams, he was able to play the most morose and vile of songs, and in the performance that I witnessed, he played until over half of these poor souls were dead, their blood captured and fed through tubes to the front two rows of the auditorium.

Having witnessed this, I chose not to partake of the after party at his villa. I was more disturbed to learn that he is considered high minister of the arts in Stygia, and that due to his wealth and power he is one of the most prominent of slave importers, always having first pick of those that suit his lecherous taste.



HIGH BARONESS HYIA NEMPHREN TOLME THE UNMOVING

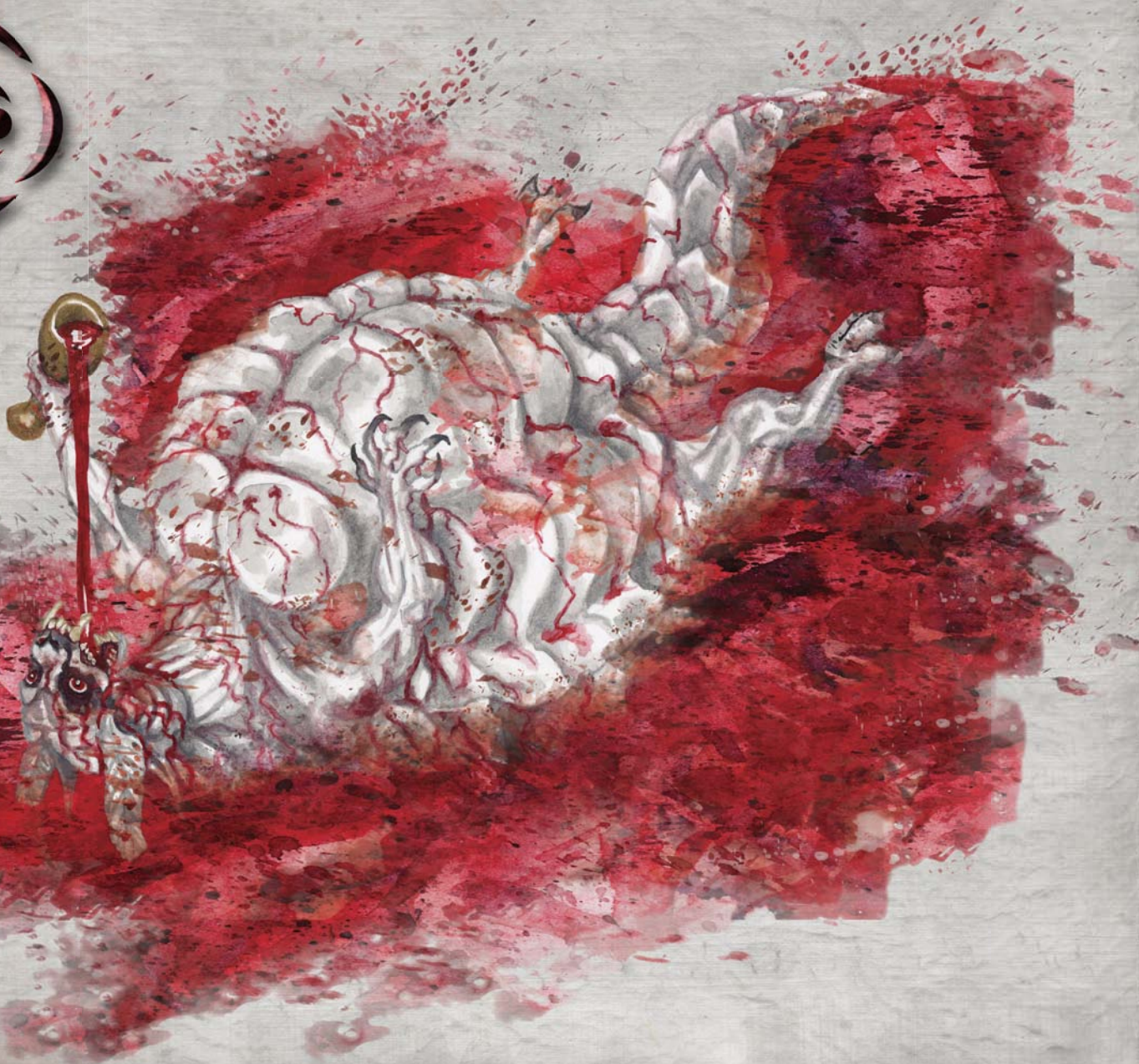
This human female vampire was one of the greatest oddities I experienced in this city filled with exceptions. Her villa was actually built around her, at a spot where over three thousand years ago she simply stopped walking and froze, standing hands slightly out to the side and feet close together. She has not moved once since that moment. I went before her with the Princess of Blades on one of our tours, and other than her dark eyes, I could not tell her apart from a marble statue of wondrous make and exquisiteness. All around her, servants still keep her household running, many tracing their lineage back to generations that existed when their mistress still moved. The servants stated that they could still feel her power and will over them, and they served her with love and patience, waiting for the day when she once again moved. I asked the Princess if she thought Hyia would ever move again, and she bluntly told me that she doubted that Hyia heard or experienced anything that went on around her, and that she was most likely in some deep meditative state from which only the right trigger could awaken her. I asked her what this trigger might be, and the Princess only shrugged, "Who knows? Something small like a scent perhaps, or something massive, like the destruction of all of Stygia." I enquired if Hyia would be weakened from the centuries without feeding, and the Princess only laughed. "She eats." was her reply, and then she bade a servant, "Feed her." A young male slave was brought in. He was bled out into bowls and then in turn these bowls of blood were poured over the unmoving Hyia. To my wonder, the blood—defying nature and gravity—slowly drained towards her eyes, lips, and ears, and then seemed to absorb into her. I was informed that she was fed every day like this by her entirely human household. When I asked what inspired such devotion the Princess seemed a little confused by the question. "I am not certain. Maybe they know that living here under Hyia's banner they are safe from being fed upon. Maybe they love her and see her as a god. Maybe she does control them through some undetectable bond. Or maybe they have done this for so long and for so many generations that it is all that they know."



BARRON VOL VON THE BLOATED

Von is a huge, fat nightling vampire so engorged on blood that the only way to see him was to go to his villa where he spends his life swimming in a great pool of blood, his bloated form surfacing like a white-scaled whale to devour victims almost whole, dragging them down into the depths of his artificial crimson lake. When I interviewed him, he was hard-pressed to stop feeding long enough to even converse, but what I did discover was that for all his gluttony he seemed extremely well-informed. I came to understand that he did not care where his victims came from, and often took unwanted or broken slaves from all other venues in the city. He was a master at absorbing the memories of those he drank from, and this had turned him into one of the greatest information brokers in all of Stygia. There was almost nothing that occurred in the walled city that he did not know about, at least on a certain level. Once I got over the spectacle of his constant eating, I soon found him to be a wealth of secret information about the other vampires, secrets he shared with me on the condition that I would only share them with you, my great master.

He told me full well that the Duke Volk was well on his way to planning a full takeover of the vampires' city. He also told me that though for now she ignored him, that the Princess of Blades would one day chose to move against him and have his heart as a meal. Vol said that the reason that Hyia did not move was because she had truly and fully fallen in love with a mortal woman who had died during the attempt to turn her. He told me that the vampires were for the first time not entirely in control of the rebels, a force they had allowed to exist only for sport and to keep their military sharp. Now these primitives had begun to have small victories, and he informed me that there was an active rebel movement among the slaves of Stygia, something I had seen no sight of. Finally, he made it clear that for all their power and strength, the vampires' unyielding reliance on slaves would be their undoing, so why not enjoy it while one could, and he happily returned to eating.



OTHER NOTABLE COURTIERS

The city does not function based upon the machinations of the seven alone. There is an explicit and complex system of rankings that defines the roles and relationships of all the citizens of Stygia. While the seven hold rank, much power is distributed amongst the hundreds of lesser nobles and officials who run the day to day operations of the city. I feel it important to bring at least a few of these to your attention.

MYSERIE DACORTA

Vampires are not without their detractors. Rebels plan terrorist attacks. Ancient goddust addicts seek to discover new weaknesses and better ways to exploit the old ones. Bold heroes hope to overthrow the Stygian kingdom. Even power-hungry members of their vampires' own race search for opportunities to better their position. Against all these threats, both within and without, the Clandestine Regulate hold the line. These are the secret police of the vampire nation, and their operatives are some the most highly-trained, subversive, and intelligent of vampires. Myserie DaCorta was the one member of their clan that I was granted access to, though even then she wore a mask imbued with intense magic to shield her identity. She met me in a tunnel, far beneath the steam engines of the city. I learned that her primary missions revolved around infiltration of different organizations in Baradume, and that she often achieved this in the guise of a pale human. Once ingrained, she had full license to eliminate any threat. I, of course, assumed that this meant killing, but she told me that her success was based on subtlety, and that she preferred to bring enemies down through financial and moral subterfuge. This skullduggery was not limited to destroying an enemy's reputation among his peers, sowing seeds of mistrust, and sending his organizations into chaos. She proudly informed me that she had only personally killed one enemy threat, though through her actions could count hundreds who had fallen. Those deaths did not bring her as much pleasure as the countless others who she had ruined by sending them to asylums, turning them into street drunks, or forcing them into filthy, low-pay, hard-labor jobs.

HALLEN FARUST THE EXILE

I experienced very little conflict or division among the vampires when I traveled among them. For the most part they seemed relatively amicable to each other and to the rule of law in their realm. So of course it captured my attention when I heard tale of an exiled vampire from Stygia who lived on a wide estate not far off from the city and who made open statements against the rule of the Queen and the general running of the vampire nation. I arranged to travel to this individual's plantation shortly after I departed Stygia. In doing so, I traveled through a vast farming region, all of which I discovered was overseen by this exile. Well maintained roads and frequent checkpoints made this trip one of the safest I accomplished anywhere. I found that the humans living here actually had a great amount of love and respect for their patron, as he protected them from being harassed or culled by the military and allowed them relatively calm lives. This whole region also seemed to offer a buffering zone between the city proper and lands more frequently harassed by rebel forces.

When at last I arrived, I was greeted by none other than the exile himself, a pale picker vampire of some 800 years. He was delightful and charming. He sat at the head of a great table in a

open hall and talked and conversed while all around him mortals ate and drank, speaking and talking to him as an equal. He often made light of the overbearing control freaks that ran Stygia, even calling the Queen a insane shut-in at one point. He extolled the virtues of the rebels and talked about possible theories that might lead to the city's downfall. At one point I had to ask how it was that he was able to speak so openly and not receive any consequences. He replied, "Well, I would not say any consequences—I am forbidden to enter the city after all, but in truth, they would do away with me if they could, but my lands provide over a quarter of the food necessary for servants to keep their little machine running. It's a delicate balance. We would stop providing for their tables altogether if it was not for the fact that it would certainly bring them down upon our heads. They would bear their forces full down upon us if not for the fact that we would stop providing for their tables."

I had been among the vampires by this time long enough to know that what they often portray themselves as is often a far cry from the truth. So, when finally alone with Hallen, I pressed to question him again. Like many of his kind he was forthcoming with me once he understood my true nature and the reason I was gathering information. He explained, "I am in my nature not a violent or bloodthirsty vampire, but I am also very close to the Queen, so this station suits me. My show of hate for her ensures a greater amount of trust and loyalty from these farmers, and even from the rebels at times. This allows me access to information that might truly threaten Stygia. It also brings many vampires, the true haters of the Queen, to my doorstep. Like most things here in the vampire nation, I am just another layer of control."

I discovered that this game of control had a even deeper side. When vampires were found to be utterly disloyal to the Queen, Hallen would arrange for them to run different missions for him and would invariably leave them exposed at some point, and he would then give them away to the rebels, who would destroy them. A win-win situation for Hallen. Traitor vampires were done away with, and rebels felt they were making progress against their enemies, earning him even further trust from them. Hallen was quick to point out that these sorts of controls were common, and that the ones he had told me about were not near as complex and twisted as others in practice that were best left secret. He almost sympathetically stated at the end of are talk, "They are after all just mortals, mere insects playing at outsmarting gods. They seldom, if ever, even see the edge of the maze we have them running circles in."

LIFE AS A SLAVE

Slaves are the backbone of Stygia, the figurative and literal blood flow of its existence. Without slaves, the whole of the city would crumble to dust and fall to ruin. Their blood is life to the vampires, their bodies are fuel for Stygia's engines, their labors are the maintaining force of all structures in the city, and their strength is the blade of the military complex. If Stygia's slaves turned on their masters as a whole, it is doubtful that all but the most powerful of vampires would escape the wave, but this is unimaginable considering the level of control and influence that is exacted upon them, both openly and clandestine.

All slaves are required to either wear or have branded upon them

the mark of their master. If a slave is caught in public without a brand, death is instant. This is the only way to tell slaves from the few mortals that are actually free in the city.

As I have mentioned before, there are no true distinctions held up between the majority of slaves, but it is clear that there is a constant hierarchy imposed upon them, its vagueness no doubt engineered to produce a feeling that no one is above being slain, keeping even the most well-loved and trusted slaves on their toes. Still, I will write about them through the lens of the ranking I observed in order to provide some kind of insight.

SOLDIERS

Clearly the highest regarded and most entitled of slaves in the vampire society are those that serve in the military. The largest corps of these is made up of werrans, forming over half of the entire military force and making for powerful and dangerous warriors. These werrans are almost entirely of the werewolf variety. This makes them extremely susceptible to the will of vampires, who have a natural control over wolves, bats, and the like, guaranteeing their loyalty even further. There are a few werepanthers or other cat-breeds of note too who serve under a vampire who changes into a two-tailed cat rather than a wolf.

Another key to the soldiers' loyalty is in the vampires' ability to find individuals that love to kill, and love doing so on a winning side. The Forge is full of these types, and serving in the Stygian military is a dream come true for them. One should never underestimate the mortal drive to win—to dominate and to crush others. This desire is fostered in all military slaves, and it is why they are given such a wide leniency if they transgress against other slaves. Still, it is unwise and foolhardy to think that soldiers are allowed to express their violence or their controlling attitudes to their vampire masters. Far worse than simply striking them down, the vampire commanders turn insubordinate soldiers over to the base pleasures of their fellow warriors to deal with far more effectively.

The violent and twisted hazing rituals that new recruits undergo force them to be devoid of compassion or love for their fellow mortals. If they fail at these, they will find themselves none to quickly dead themselves, or worse, sent off to work in the mines. Soldiers are given a single-minded

directive—protect Stygia at all costs and kill, rape, and burn all who threaten her walls.

Stygia's warriors are also provided all sort of pleasures in their downtime, from drinks to arena battles to masses of sexual playthings. In a city where your master might eat you, it is still well known among slaves that one of the worst punishments you can have placed upon you is to be sent to the barracks to pleasure the soldiers. Few ever last more than a quarter moon.

If one is violent, loyal, and loves to win, life as a military slave in Stygia just might be heaven.

PLAYTHINGS

These slaves are most often the favorite pets and playmates of the vampires. Beloved and treasured, they seldom come to harm. Chosen for their youth and beauty, these slaves are the ones that somehow transcend being thought of as food, though they are often fed upon. They live pampered and adored lives, loved and cared for as princes. Their fortunes can be fleeting once their beauty or charms have faded or become passé. They can find themselves easily dispensed with, though it should be said that not all vampires are this fickle. Many love their favorite pets well into their advanced years, caring for them tenderly, even once they have aged to the point of illness and infirmity.

SERVANTS

Though often times the line between these slaves and others is blurred, I found that most houses have slaves that are several generations removed from any ancestors who were brought to Stygia by force. These highly trusted slaves are the gears that move daily life along. They tend to all matters of the house, from cleaning, cooking, and sewing to the disciplining of other slaves. Servants are often well-loved, and live almost as well as their masters.

They themselves may have slaves of their own; though not truly owning them, they do hold the power of life or death over these mortals. Servants are so a part of the system that rebellion is the furthest thing from their minds. Many have no idea what the outside world is like and have no cares to learn.

They live as worshipers, the chosen blessed of their immortal gods. Their lives may include hard work and toil, but they are safe and live very well for the most part.

Some of these servants



are highly specialized and prized for their rare skills and knowledge, like those that run some of the furnaces and maintain other mechanical constructs in the city. These rare few wear the Queen's mark on them to ensure that they are not destroyed without passing on their knowledge to a new generation.

Servants may marry if their masters allow it, and even if they do not, many are bred between houses to produce better looking or more loyal children. Complex family trees and breeding programs are kept by many vampires, and form one of the city's most common pastimes.

FOOD

These slaves are usually brought from the outside and have no memorable qualities other than often times being very good looking. I once heard a vampire comment that the more lovely a mortal was the less likely they developed any charms beyond their looks. She was not actually disheartened by this, stating further, "Still... I do so love dumb, beautiful meals." Slaves that fall into this class seldom live long in the city of red fountains, their stay being typically less than a week unless they find themselves the unhappy property of a vampire that likes to play with his food.

MINERS

The lowest of the slaves are sent to mine until their bodies give out and they die. On very rare occasions however, the strongest out of these are chosen to join the military or to become playthings.

There are of course other placements and roles that slaves occupy that do not fit in the above classes. There are some brought to compete in arena events, some for a particular function like repairing a magical ward, and others imported just to drain, their blood used to fill the fountains of the city.

SOLE SURVIVOR

When I drank with the soldiers of Stygia, one tale in particular captured my attention that I bade its teller to write it down for me. He was honored and most flattered; the following is his account.

THE AKAI

The barbarian dwellers of the Stygian hills are a proud free-living

It was in the year 937 that we came. We had five thousand men, many fresh from the bloody red desert of Arena. A lot of us were seeds... the Forge was a foreign place to us, and we tended to believe more in our prejudices than our observations. The church was a place that made us feel at home, where we could get away from the Forge and be ourselves again. We knew there was a lot of bad in this world, but so much of it was on such a human scale that it was difficult to take a stand against it... how do you stop poverty, or cruelty, or injustice when it is woven through the fabric of every part of your life? The vampires seemed a tenable goal. An entire city full of vampires that devours thousands of people a day and enslaves tens of thousands more? There's no gray area to killing vampires, or so I imagined. This was a problem that could be solved with a sword

and a strong will and faith, a real enemy that could be struck down and conquered. At the end of the day, we could indeed make the Forge a better place, and from there, who know what would be next. When you want to remove a cancer, you take the largest tumor first, and then dig down to progressively smaller and smaller detail. We were to be the surgeons of the Forge, and our swords our scalpels.

It wasn't just members of Eternal Divine Grace that came. Once we made up our minds, we rounded up our friends, our neighbors, we opened up our coffers and hired mercenaries... we knew it wouldn't be easy, but the way the preacher described it, it seemed doable. Our general had lived in Eclipse as a commander for the forces of the free city of Baradume, and knew all about fighting the vampires. That part at least was true. We set sail from Penance during the month of Stirring, and we bid our wives and children goodbye as heroes, out to change the world.

Spirits remained high through Penumbra, but I began to notice a change once we entered the caverns. It was the dark. All of us were expecting it, but none of us were prepared for the mundane realities of not being able to see more than a few feet in front of us. A few of the fair-skinned savages with us had come from polar lands on strange worlds, where the sun did not shine for half the year, and they sang songs and helped push us along with encouragement and wisdom, but even they were unprepared for the endless confinement of the caverns. We all knew that Eclipse was a land of eternal night, but when we finally arrived at Erebus, the morale just went out of the men. A month in the caverns for what? This? The land was as grim and dismal as the stone maze.

Our general had some contacts amongst the Akai. They supposedly could get us into the city right under the bloodsuckers noses through some kind of back road. I guess I should have sensed that it was too easy, but we had spent six months planning, so it just seemed like things were going our way. We surprised an outpost at the entrance to a canyon behind the city, and our large force easily dispatched the small garrison. When their corporal fell under our axes and we saw true vampire blood spill, the men went crazy, and they were willing to do almost anything our commander told us. The road fed into a box canyon that supposedly led into a back gate of the city. A few of the more experienced men seemed to get a bit jittery about the whole troop marching in together, but our commander had supposedly sent a couple small parties up along the top to protect our flanks, and the vampire blood lust propelled us forward. It wasn't until the canyon opened onto the main road and I saw the city laid out before us that I knew something was wrong. This was no back gate, and Stygia wasn't at all what I had imagined. It was so big, and so beautiful, and ancient. Our troop suddenly began to look very small.

Then the boulders started falling. A bunch of men at the back tried to retreat, but the way was blocked by massive stones. The troops in the middle were crushed in a matter of seconds. I was up at the front almost to the city gate, which saved my life, as the vampires had no interest in dropping a boulder that would potentially damage their city. It seemed like an eternity of

crashes, as stone after stone came rolling down into our ranks. I swear that I could see bloodstains on some as if they had been used for this before. It wasn't until the troops that we sent up into the hills appeared at the crest of the canyon and began firing down upon us that I knew what had happened. A bunch of the men around me fell under the missile fire, but Stig and I had excellent armor, and withstood the first few volleys. We piled up the corpses around us to make a sort of improvised foxhole and stood our ground. There were still probably a good five hundred men left when the lunars came screaming down the mountains and through the gates.

Stig and I had fought together since we were boys, and we stood back to back as the werrans came on. It was clear they had never fought a Nessian before, and I can still remember the looks of surprise on their faces as we brought them down. Behind me, I could hear the screams of our men, and they seemed to get fewer and fewer as we piled the bodies higher. I surmise a good two or three minutes must have gone by before Stig and I realized that the two of us were fighting alone. To this day, that is still the most terrifying moment of my life, when the lunars drew back in a wide circle around us and I heard the battlefield go silent.

In the maybe half a minute before their ranks parted, I scanned around me, and could see no one left standing of our army... well, excepting our commander, who now stood amongst the ranks of the enemy. It was then that the citizens of Stygia flooded out of the gate, spreading across the battlefield to harvest the spoils of their victory. By the time the girl with the knives appeared, Stig and I had already made our peace with this world. She asked Stig first. Obviously they were impressed with us. She gave him two choices to keep his life... to join them or to defeat her in single combat. Stig laughed. I've never seen anyone move that fast before or since... the big guy never stood a chance.

Do I regret my choice? Honestly, I wouldn't trade this life for the world. At home I had one homely wife who made love in the dark once a month and yelled at me every time I left a dish in the sink. Here I have ten beautiful servants that meet my every need and that can be replaced if I ever grow tired of them. I get to keep the best of my children too. And I have a company at my command. The wolf blood in my veins keeps me strong and young and has bound me so much closer to the natural world. I get to do things to villagers that haven't even been invented yet. And Stygia is really the most magical and wondrous of places, and fantastically well managed. There's no poverty here, no homelessness. These people have the knowledge of thousands of years in them, and that is not to be trifled with.

It turns out most of our troop were brought down by poison in those arrows, and merely paralyzed. It must have taken hours for the Stygians to haul all the bodies down into the undercity for processing. Most of them are dead now I'm sure, but every once in a while I still recognize an old comrade or two amongst some noble's retinue. Funny thing is, I don't really have anything much to say to them anymore. I've run into deacon Berrin a few times too in the city. It seems he's got a new church going in Temper now. I can't wait to see what he brings me next.

people who have slowly developed their own unique cultural identity over the last few thousand years. Isolated from the outside world by their Stygian neighbors, the Akai have developed a strange, insular view of the Forge. They have lost most of their own history, and have reinvented themselves as an indigenous tribe, wrongfully assuming that they are the original people of the southlands, and that the vampires who so long ago bred them and corralled them are somehow invaders onto what the Akai consider their lands. I can tell you for sure that these people did not exist in my day, though Saturnia and her growing city was well established. However, history is a fluid thing, and often a good story is much more compelling than the truth.

These people have evolved over time from a loose collection of escaped slaves, isolated seeds, Stygian farmers, and retreating crusaders. All these folk sought to flee from the vampires in one way or another, and found shelter in the many twisting caves and canyons of the mountains. Over time the people mingled and interbred, and a basic pidgin formed from a combination of their different languages. While originally this was used only for trade, over generations it formalized into a rough language in its own right, and with the advent of a language, a people were born.

As for the name Akai, it appears to be the invention of an outsider. The word amongst the Akai simply means "person", but when outsiders asked the barbarians who they were, they would always reply, "I am Akai", so the term stuck. Unlike with other similar situations, the Akai do not seem offended by the use of the term, so it is safe for traders or explorers to use when addressing these people. Though the bulk of the Akai are human in shape, other races, particularly valco, are intermingled into their culture, and the Akai oddly do not see them as separate, there being no racism latent amongst their outlook, even if they do realize that for the most part breeding is not possible between creatures of dissimilar form. This does not keep them from trying however, and it seems that over the years, some mating has indeed been successful, as many of the human Akai seem to have what might be considered animal traits, such as fur, claws, hooves, horns, and so on.

As far as a culture goes, the Akai are very spiritually tied to the land. All living things have spirits that can be communed with, and spirits of those who die remain as guardians and protectors of the land. The Akai call upon these spirits for guidance and power, and settlements are typically led by the oldest resident, as in the Akai culture, the older one gets, the more able one is to see and talk with the spirits. This is not entirely empty talk, as Akai seem to be able to channel the energy of these spirits as well into powerful magics that they use in their ongoing war against the "invaders".

Akai live in large communal families formed by a collection of relatives such as aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, brothers, sisters, and so on. The eldest is again the head of the household, and is afforded the greatest respect. All visitors must greet the eldest first, and presenting a gift is almost expected. Gifts need not be expensive, but should be something desired by the Akai, such as root berries, tobacco, weapons, teas, boots, hides, or tools. Families typically all live in one room together, a tradition that

seems to stem from when they all dwelled in caves. Modesty is not an issue for the Akai, and clothing is primitive and functional if present at all. Loincloths are worn mostly for riding to protect from chafing, and furs and hides are mostly for warriors to protect themselves in battle. In lieu of clothing, the Akai make wide use of body art and tattooing, typically decorating their bodies with indigo-colored patterns and fine beadwork. Their hair is worn long, in thick dusty braids that acquire a rope like texture over time. Despite the ubiquitousness of nudity, the Akai are not a promiscuous people, and most mate for life, though there is no shame in a youth trying out a variety of partners before settling down.

The Akai spend their time working the land, and they are skilled hunters, riders, and farmers. They also expect their young men to train as warriors, and those with the gift of the spirit often train with their elders on the path of the war shaman, a powerful mix of magic and muscle. Pride is a big factor in the Akai culture, and in battle it is a sign of bravery to ride up to one's enemy and knock him off his mount using only a non-lethal weapon, such as a stick or a rope. Sport is also a point of pride for the Akai, and on holidays, villages will often engage in massive contests of riding skill, the object apparently being to earn points by dragging the dead carcass of a young gorak across the other team's goal line.

There appear to be two distinct groupings of Akai, those who dwell upon Stygian land and who live under their rules, and the "free" Akai, who mostly dwell higher in the mountains and live a more wild, nomadic life. The first group does most of the farm work for Stygia, and as long as they are productive and do not cause troubles, they are left relatively alone by their masters. The second group is much more openly hostile to the vampires and their society, and seems to be in a constant state of war against the city. The bulk of the "rebels", as they are called, come from this group, although it would be hard to imagine they would be able to exist without some form of material support from the farmers.

The power dynamic between the Stygians and the rebel primitives is rather unbalanced, and any casual observer would probably realize that the Stygians are fully capable of wiping out the Akai altogether if they wished. The rebellion has always been allowed to exist by Stygia however, as it provides a self-perpetuating source of food for the city, as well as training for the Stygian forces, and a convenient way to rid the city of troublesome young vampires.

REBELLION

A perpetual war, essentially an endless series of skirmishes and ambushes, exists between the vampires of Stygia and the nomadic barbarians that dwell in the mountains around the city and in the valleys and hills to the west. To the Akai, this is a long and earnest struggle against a powerful foe. To the vampires, this is a merely a game and a source of food. In short, the vampires let the barbarians handle all the work of feeding themselves and of surviving to adulthood, and then the vampires get to eat them.

I found it next to impossible to meet with or trace the rebels, so pronounced was their paranoia. I made several forays; all turned up only low-level conspirators—so what I write here should be

subject to some scrutiny.

The barbarians' world view is somewhat limited due to the presence of the vampires keeping them isolated from contact with Penance, Baradume, and other cosmopolitan areas. Baradume has made an arrangement with Stygia to stay out of the affairs of the Akai, and other cities like Erebus follow suit, if perhaps less formally. However, with the arrival of the people from Hammerfall, the barbarians have new and powerful allies. Highmark does not recognize Stygia as a legitimate state, and appears to have sided with the Akai's view of things, that the vampires are invaders on their land. Highmark has instigated broad trade with the Akai villages and farmers, and has courted the rebels in secret, supplying the barbarians with equipment, technology, training, and soldiers in return for food and the slow eradication of the vampire menace. This has the vampires nervous, but it also offers new and exciting challenges for the military and those that hunt the hills. The rest of the Stygian leaders watch and wait, sending out spies and agents to infiltrate Highmark and to corrupt and dissuade any real effort to break Stygia.

The rebellion's organization method is cryptic, and cells operate quietly and separately from one another so as to make its movements hard to track. The current head of operations is rumored to be a powerful young warrior by the name of Tashen Witko. Witko has come closer to success than his predecessors, partly with assistance from Highmark and partly with assistance from a mysterious informant on the outskirts of the city, a vampire that is suspected to indeed wish to bring the city down. This informant delivers information about the caravans of certain vampires so that the barbarians can set up ambushes. Oddly enough, this informant does not seem to be Hallen, for a few of these recent attacks have been very costly, including a ruthless sortie that destroyed over two hundred prime slaves on their way to market.

I could see in my travels that many of the Akai farms had sons working the fields rather than fathers who I suspected were off with the rebellion. Even with outside help, the rebellion seems ill-equipped to succeed, the stark truth being that the rebels' farms and families work to provide the vampires with food even as they themselves strive to bring the undead nation down. However, it seems quite clear that the Akai themselves do expect fully to get their homeland back someday, and I am very curious to see what they would do with it were they to truly blossom.

chapter 7 - WERRAN LANDS

The whole of the northern Cauldron is dominated by a sprawling, overgrown forest of giant mushrooms, twisted fungus, and skyward reaching hangman oaks. Beneath this canopy of coiled, virtually impassable plants lies the dark world of the werran.

They—with their superior senses of sight, smell, and hearing—rule unopposed a landscape nearly devoid of light, hunting its thickets and burrows, masters of their feral realm.

This is a place lost to civilized concerns and industry, widely valued for its natural resources. Those who would attempt to tame or cull its undergrowth soon find themselves the hapless prey of predators blessed with both the natural gifts and instincts of wild beasts and the cunning and calculations of intelligent beings. This ruthless combination is only compounded by the sheer inhospitality of the mushroom forest to all who cannot walk as one with nature.

My excursion into this land, in order to learn of its people, was one that I put off until nearly the end of my journey. I had long since left the frail remains of the group I traveled with for the bulk of my wilderness journey, and chose to enter as a mere wildlife researcher traveling with a well-respected and loved group of picker traders who had the rare protection of the bulk of the tribal leaders. I learned what I could from watching, and when I could, I made it clear to the werran my deep respect for nature and the laws that govern the wild. On occasion this afforded me some trust, but never did I here receive the openness and freedom that other locations granted me. A weretiger with whom I formed a very strong bond made it very clear to me, “You are not of the wild, just a visitor. Until you have forgotten all that is human in you, you will never discover what is true.”

THE LUNAR VIRUS IN ECLIPSE

The Forge is a world of heroes and villains that strives to push all to their limits and potential; thus a mere infliction on one world will often mutate, offering its sufferer potential benefits rather than weakening them. In this realm—a land of darkness where no sun offers reprieve from the endless night—the disease of the lunar virus is transmuted and altered. Rather than those afflicted being forcibly altered based upon a lunar cycle, becoming mindless beasts beyond control, any form of were creature that finds its

way to the dark Cauldron discovers that it is free to transform at will. Those infected here are true shapeshifters with full control over their actions and a clear memory of all that they do while in animal form.

Eclipse also accelerates the rate at which were creatures gain control over other aspects of their nature, such as their hybrid or primal forms. Those infected in Eclipse become something altogether different. Their disease becomes fused with their permanent makeup; no longer truly a member of their origin race nor truly an animal, they more often than not seek the refuge of their own kind, known locally as werran. Werran have the mental capacity to improve their situations and to see the world as it is, but are not so addicted to reason that they feel the need to bind themselves by it. As such, they are content to live a primitive lifestyle, and are not prone to civil morality, high art, or any of the other pitfalls of other cultured races. In fact, they often find those that work for coin rather than their pack or eat what they buy from a stranger rather than hunt to be the most uncultured of all.

Do not assume that the moon has lost all of its power over the werran, in fact it is quite the opposite. So cut off from the light of any lunar body are those in Eclipse, that on the three days per month that the red moon burns the night above the Cauldron, it is a rare werran who can resist the pounding of untamed blood through his veins, the thrill of the hunt, and the need to fall to all fours, plundering the forest for prey. Indeed, the red moon engorges all werran with a feral lust for their animal natures, and this is the most dangerous time to travel in or near the mushroom forest.

TRIBAL POLITICS

There are nearly countless numbers of small tribes scattered throughout the mushroom forest. These packs (or prides) are bound not by place, city, or race of origin, but almost exclusively by were-breed. A nightling weredog, for instance, will share his burrow with human or elven weredogs. Groupings and interactions of werran typically follow more closely the animals to which they all shift rather than the societies the individuals may have come from. This instinctual pull towards a more animal culture seems to be very powerful, both on a feral and a symbolic level. I was once informed by a werewolf that though he was born human, he had always been a wolf beneath, and it was not until he was bitten that he was freed to his true nature. This same wolf stated with total authority that those who are bitten and do not survive the transformation were never meant to be part of the tribe to begin with. This brings one to wonder if there is indeed a spiritual factor to the likelihood that one will transform successfully after being bitten.

The majority of the tribes of the mushroom forest are made up of werewolves, a nomenclature that includes the lunars, a race of werran that no longer boasts any members that do not carry the virus. The overall dominance of the werewolf tribes has a marked effect on the way that all the tribes function to a certain degree. Alphas are considered the rulers or chieftains of all werran tribes, and they speak for the whole of their pack in any outside negotia-

tions and at the great gathering of tribes. Even werebears, who prefer to live in solitude most the time, elect to choose an alpha to ease their interactions with other tribes.

All werran tribes gather amongst themselves on a regular basis, bringing together the smaller packs and prides that make most of them up. These meetings are called "walds", and they occur often, typically at least once every moon. There is also a greater wald, the "Kongewald", that brings together multiple clans and tribes into massive gatherings. These greater walds are held to deal with rogue tribes or interlopers into the forest, or to celebrate holidays, such as the last moon of the year. They are also called to settle feuds between warring clans.

One should never get the impression that the werran live in harmony with other tribes. There are often violent clashes over hunting grounds, or when the young come of age to breed. For the most part, conflicts are left for the laws of nature to settle, but when they threaten to explode or to pull more and more tribes in, a wald is called, and many tribes come to bear witness to the outcome. The wald is seldom a bloodless affair. A suitor may have to fight a brother or father to the death to be able to take the female of his choice as a mate. Two rival tribes may be forced into an all out battle, the winner determined by the last tribe with members left drawing breath. Often however, a simple battle between champions (typically the alphas) is all that is required, and these contests are not always to the death; werran have a way of understanding when they are beaten, and can submit to their fates with less shame than prideful civilized folk.

The largest of all the werran tribes is ruled by an alpha of exceptional age and power, known throughout the mushroom forest as Lanerin the High King of Wolves. All werewolf tribes and the bulk of the others swear fealty to him, and legends abound that he is a god and the first of all werran. I can attest to the falsehood of all such rumors, as I found a dusty history in the library of Thole describing how some eight thousand years ago Colopitiron pulled Lanerin here along with a great many of his lunar brothers and sisters, saving them from near annihilation on a world where they were considered the prey. Some werran are able to live extended lives to the point that they do not age quickly and are often immune to disease. Lanerin however, has extended his life through the use of goddust, a very dangerous prospect. Though goddust does not directly cause any strange effects in werran users, once addicted, the withdrawal symptoms for a werran are violent and maddening, causing a transformation not unlike that which befalls vampires who ingest the stuff. The benefits for Lanerin have thus far outweighed the potential pitfalls, allowing him to rule unopposed for well over seven thousand years.

Lanerin has ruled not only through strength and eternal youth but also by understanding the push and pull of freedom versus tribal concerns. Lanerin may rule absolutely, but forcing free-minded individuals to constantly carry out one's agenda is a quick trip on the road to ruin. Lanerin uses his powers sparingly; he and he alone has the power to call all the tribes together for war, but he reserves this for rare and brief occasions. Long or frequent wars are simply not in the werran' nature. Only when werran lands are threatened or a fringe tribe executes some gross atrocity is a war

council called. A war council typically results in werran descending on the problem en masse, their forces overwhelming and ruthlessly crushing the offender with swift, wild justice.

There have been several attempts by other races or powers to invade and take the forest for themselves, not the least of these being a recent assault from a mass of dark elves. In this case, the elves used a framework of tunnels to undercut key areas in the hope of gaining a foothold in the land above, but once they entered the tangle of the forest they were ill able to stake a claim against the already entrenched werran. They found that the transitory nature of most tribes made it hard to pull off effective raids, and once their tunnels were found out, a war council was called and massive numbers of werran drove down upon them forcing the few survivors deep underground. Still, the wounds of that attack are not fully healed, and several tribes lost enough members that they were forced to split and join new packs or depart the forest and look for homes elsewhere.

Four times a year, representatives of each tribe—usually an elder rather than the alpha—travel to Lethe, the seat of the High King, to attend a great wald where matters between the tribes are resolved and war can be proposed. Lanerin has final say over rulings, but sometimes he puts the matter to a vote of the attendees so as to make the people feel that they have had some hand in the governance.

The overall strength and natural affinity of the werran for their rough environment have kept them safe for thousands of years. After all, few would choose to settle in a wild, dark forest overrun with giant creatures and fierce predators. The free nature of all werran prevents most conflicts that plague other cultures, for they have no interest in telling others outside their own packs what to do or how to live. Overall, werran live their wild harmonious lives free of unwanted outside molestation. However, if there is one force that threatens the werran way of life, it is the slow yet ever-encroaching harvest of the forest from the southwest perpetrated by Erebus, the Blackwater shipping company, and the goddust mining conglomerates. This methodical carving away of the mushroom forest has slowly but surely started to take its toll. The process has only accelerated with the mass emigration from Penance and the rebuilding of Highmark. Erebus grew by leaps and bounds in those first years of the influx. While historically the city folk only harvested materials for building supplies from the relatively werran-free southwest of the mushroom forest, this quickly turned into a lucrative logging trade once Highmark started to be rebuilt. Always looking for new ways to make money, the Blackwater shipping company soon got in on the profits, first by providing transport and later by organizing the harvesting of raw goods. Still, the forest is sizable, and the slow but steady carving into the werran lands brought only minor battles until a recent discovery. As the companies pushed deeper into the forest, they came across new plants and species, and word soon began to spread of an acid that could be produced from the bitterstalk, one of the forest's fungus trees. The acid could be produced in large volumes, and ate through solid rock, leaving very little behind except for curiously enough, goddust. The mining conglomerates fell upon the land swiftly and without any care for the surrounding life, raping the forest for this precious commodity. Now the whole of the southwest forest is in danger, and all the tribes there

are calling for the high king to call a war council.

Lanerin has been very reluctant to call for war. He has a far more worldly view than most of his lessers, and may well understand that war with two major cities, the largest shipping company in Eclipse, and multiple mining conglomerates is not a battle one can win. Still, when I traveled among the werran tribes, the few that came to trust me had another theory they kept close to their lips. Many fear that Lanerin has sacrificed the southern forest in a deal to provide himself with an unending supply of the goddust. Individual tribes have attempted to come up with their own tactics. Some seek out and burn the particular strain of tree that produces the acid, though this is a very toxic and dangerous prospect (also, to some tribes, the trees have spiritual significance and they are loathe to remove them). Others are experimenting with harvesting the trees themselves and then selling them to the miners, though this has provoked accusations of the werran turning themselves in to slaves and laborers, a perceived destruction of their way of life far greater than the destruction of their lands.

Crime is relatively unknown in the forests. Since there is not much property, there is no real problem with theft, and most tribes function as one large family, which minimizes other crimes. The most common troubles are pranks caused by youngsters (not a particularly serious matter), and hostilities with nearby tribes. Members of nearby tribes are traditionally exchanged as mates in order to facilitate peace. Still, sometimes disputes arise over hunting grounds, or two hunters may have an altercation. On occasion, these incidents may lead to a long tribal feud, but most are resolved within the system of the wald. Most who cause problems within their own tribe are disciplined by the elders. Minor punishments generally involve extra service to the community, such as the capturing of extra hostages for the lunar festival. Severe crimes, like that of cowardice or trusting an outsider who later betrays the clan, are punished by exile, or for the worst offenders, being sold outright to the vampires as a slave.

TRADE

Werran packs and clans trade often and openly with each other. All sorts of goods and supplies as well as crafts and even weapons are passed from tribe to tribe. Youth who have come of age and are ready to take mates are often bartered for, and even hunting grounds can be bargained with, not so much to say that the land is owned, but rather a tribe will agree to leave a certain area un hunted for an allotted amount of time. Trade with the outside is much rarer. Werran do not often see a need for trading with those that live beyond the boundary of their forest; anything and everything one might need is provided by nature. Bearing that in mind, it is usually things that are not needed that come from trade with the outside. The werran have a simple love for jewelry and decorative items of clothing. They are unaware, or do not care, if such things are made with fine gems or precious metals, as long as they are becoming and catch the eye. They have little use for clothing or armor, but well-made knives are often prized among their kind, employed more for skinning and tanning than for hunting, which the werran prefer to do on all fours.

To acquire these little pleasures, werran either attack poorly defended caravans or trade with one of the few parties that are

offered safe passage through their domains. The pale picker tribes are the most well-respected and trusted of these outside traders. Decades of honest trade and esteem for werran ways have earned them almost universal safe passage through the mushroom forest. There are also several small shipping companies that have trade posts along the edges of the border between the Sea of Ink and the forest. These maintain a relatively even and civil trade with werran. A few may be worth keeping an eye on, including one that has started to provide a blood for body trade between the werran and the vampires. This business has yet to show a profit though, what with the cost of magic vials to keep the blood fresh and the need to convince werran that they should supplement their diets with blood-drained dead bodies.

One final route for trade is provided by the many wererats that live and occupy the sewers of all the major cities save Stygia. These werran traditionally travel back at regular intervals to Lethe, be it for the Kongewald or the celebrations of the red moon. They bring back with them all sorts of interesting items and trinkets, and though some of it is considered junk in the cities, werran find these oddities fascinating. Unfortunately for the wererat tribes, they are less thought of or trusted than the pale pickers, being looked down upon as the lowest of the were-breeds. The High King however, finds them invaluable as sources of information, couriers for his addiction, and at times agents or even assassins to deal with his detractors in the cities.

For their share of the trade, werran offer up some of the finest furs and raw leathers to be found in the whole of Eclipse—rare scaled hides that can be made into wondrous armors, and soft, warm furs to line the fashionable jackets of the rich of Baradume. There is a fortune to be made on such fare for those who can gain the trust of the werran, or at least not be seen as prey. Beyond this trade, rare herbs and plants as well as raw ingredients for compounds are offered to outside traders, and for those who know where to look, even the acid that is craved for the goddust mines and that has started to be harvested in a more ecological way is for sale at border trade posts.

FĒRAL LIFE

Life in the wild is filled with a grand mix of freedom and responsibility, yet even the most mundane of tasks are tied directly to the well-being and continued health of the individual and the pack. Werran live for their tribe and for the hunt; they roam the dark forests seeking the most challenging and dangerous of prey. A werran does not fear to bring down massive primeval beasts, thus feeding their tribes for weeks, or to hunt faster smaller game, enjoying the sport as much as providing for their families. Tribes tend to move over time, following the game and sleeping where ever they happen to tire. Dens are made and used when there are young, but often abandoned in favor of the open wild. Only rare

tribes have permanent dwellings or burrows, and these are often maintained by a simple skeleton crew while the rest of the pack hunts. Larger tribal camps can end up being fortified and reinforced once a tribe surpasses one hundred members, with elders and young protected within these forts. Strongholds are generally made up of a ring-fort type construction consisting of heavy stones placed in a circle, piled twelve feet high and ten feet thick. Sharpened poles are set in the ground and pointed upwards to defend against aerial foes. The fort serves as a defense, but also forms a natural arena. The structures prove useful for larger tribes where politics can lead to more scuffles. The entire tribe can climb up onto the stairs and walls and watch events that take place in the center.

Physical contact among werran is warm and almost constant. There is no room for the concept of personal space in their culture. They are always touching, arms interlocked, leaning against each other and twirling fingers through one another's hair. This



contact seems to reinforce tribal bonds and allows one to gauge the mood of others. Even in a tense moment when two hunters returned to report the death of a third, I witnessed the pack surround them though the hunters were enraged, and all locked arms, touching foreheads in a great circle. I watched as the anger and grief spread through them until all at once they joined in a great chorus of cries, howling to the dark skies. The two remaining hunters were never alone for the next few days, and always whoever was with them had an arm draped around his brother or a hand resting upon a shoulder. I was struck with how different these actions were in comparison to other cultures where grieving people isolate themselves from others. I also realized how difficult it must have been for my female lunar companion to travel with us, let alone with our deep fey, who took offence at any touch from an outsider. Her behavior suddenly did not seem strange at all. I myself, a being who had lived without touch for countless eons, found myself envying the werran way of life.

Sex in werran prides is more for pleasure or to maintain dominance rather than for breeding. Many alphas mate for life with chosen lovers, but lowers in the tribe are often forbidden to do so, living a free life with many mates. Orgies are very common, and are seen as a way to secure the tribe's bonds and demonstrate the pecking order. Rowdy youth are often put in their place by more dominant males, but where this might be viewed as rape and carry a heavy social stigma in most cultures, here it is seen as natural and holds no resounding shame. Bisexuality is common, and though individuals may hold preferences, concepts such as gay or hetero are foreign. Rare tribes even have same-sex mated pairs as their alphas. Males who have a younger male sibling who prefers other males may find that such a brother will aid in promoting him to alpha, and once there will offer no competition for females, while adding the extra benefit of keeping the other males in check.

The pecking order of a given tribe is almost instinctually understood and seldom requires harsh enforcement. One moves up by proving one's worth to the alpha through physical prowess during hunts or in battles with other tribes. Challenges for the alpha position are rare, but when they happen, they can be trying for the whole of the tribe. Aging alphas who fall usually choose or are forced into exile. This is much more common in packs with male alphas. If the alpha is a female, she will almost always choose the strongest male as her mate and stay with him until such a time that he is far too weak to hold the tribe together, then she will oust him, choosing a younger, stronger mate.

Alphas are the most likely to produce offspring, but other births are not uncommon. Children are raised communally, all viewed as belonging to the whole of the tribe rather than their parents. They are tested often, and the weak or crippled are left to fend for themselves, gifts for the forest. Unwanted children, usually those that exceed the population count or are born of disgraced tribe members, are not aborted or left to nature, but sold to traders from Stygia for a premium price.

Hunters and warriors can be male or female. Werewolf society is very egalitarian with regards to gender, although some of the other werran tribes are far from it. A tribe's boundaries and hunting grounds are always guarded against interlopers and other tribes. Territories are scent-marked as well as having the trees

along the boundaries burned with the tribe's symbol. Some werran packs tolerate other types of small families or individuals in their domains, such as a lone werebear or a small werecoyote family within the boundaries of a wolf clan. The main tribe always gets first pick of the prey, but also is responsible for dealing with intruders.

It is not forbidden to travel across the lands of another tribe, in fact it is necessary in order to get most places. So long as one does not undertake a major hunt there, there will be no problem. In fact, since food is necessary on long journeys, light hunting is allowed on another tribe's land provided it is sustenance hunting... only enough for yourself or your pack, and it must be consumed on the spot, in order that the travelers keep moving.

Life in the black forest is very insular, and most outsiders are considered prey. There is a relatively well established trade road into the forest to Lethe, complete with non-werran trading posts and waystops every few miles, but anyone straying off this path is in for danger. Colopitiron often pulls seeds that he deems arrogant or foolish into the forest and watches to see how long they can survive the hunt. Very few do.

Once a month, the moon rises in the sky and all werran lose control of their form. Hostages and other prey are kept penned in to be released for these occasions. As the moon nears fullness, the members of the tribes gather and begin beating drums to welcome the moon. A wild and bitter brew is imbibed, made from forest roots mixed with blood, that enhances the senses of the drinker. As the pace of the drums increases, the hostages are released to try to run from the werran. As the light from the moon slowly grows brighter, members strip off their clothes and huddle together, beginning a mass orgy that culminates with the transformation, one at a time, of each of the werran into his wild form. At the end of the ceremony, the werran tear off into the forest to begin the hunt.

It is said that those that are able to elude the werran for the three days of the full moon may return to the tribe that held them and request that they be infected and transformed into werran. It is also said that the rare few that do manage to escape and return for this honor universally survive the infection and become full-fledged shape shifters.

Tight controls on population are maintained. Werran do not want to endanger their food sources. This is the most common source of stress between tribes. If a neighboring tribe becomes too large, they will want to expand their hunting grounds, and in a land as old as Eclipse, this means moving into someone else's territory. There are many solutions to population problems. Some individuals can be resettled to tribes that have lost members to violence or disease, or some may be asked to leave the tribal lands and seek their way in the cities. Each year at the final Kongewald, each tribe presents Lanerin with its finest warrior to serve in the royal guard and to dwell in the city of Lethe for five years. There warriors hone their skills and learn to be leaders and strategic thinkers, often returning to their tribe to someday become alphas.



RELIGION

Spirituality runs deep in all werran. It is part of their deep reverence and connection with the natural world. Werran are not religious in the organized constricted way that many cultures adhere to, worshiping deities and following rituals; instead they believe in the energy of all that lives, holds shape, and moves in the world. No afterlife is sought as a reward for living by moral laws. All that exists grows, fades, dies, and returns to the elements to be born anew. Reincarnation is the path of the spirit of anything that falls to dust, joining again with the great wheel and returning in a new form to learn new experiences. If there are any rules that govern the course of the werran, it is not to take more than one offers. Those that consume more than their share slowly eat the future, and since all goes round and round, living life after life, everyone will one day have to suffer if there is not enough left to share. This is one of the reasons the werran are so ruthless with civilized races who cross into their lands. They have seen the way they strip away nature to produce unnatural structures and consume so much more than they need or can provide. In a similar vein, to be overweight is tantamount to a sin in werran eyes, and to live in a home with empty, unused rooms is a gross act against creation.

Werran need no church or sabbath days to execute random rituals and prayers. Daily life, hunting, eating, sleeping, mating—these are the most divine of acts, all done with reverence and care for the natural flow of things. A werran's temple is the forest, its trees his pillars, its canopy the only cathedral required, the prey he brings down, communion, the howls he cries to the red moon, prayers.

Wereshamans are the spiritual guides and history keepers of the tribes. Those that choose to follow this path must be patient and wise. They must commune with the forest on a level deeper and richer than any of their brethren, to be open to the voice of creation. These are the story keepers and the advisors to alphas. They sit silently in the walds unless a great insight comes to them, and even then they speak briefly, plainly, and clearly, a clear separation from priests of other cultures. Not all tribes have a shaman, but they are forbidden from choosing sides in werran conflicts, and are expected to either offer solutions or to stand aside and allow others to fight it out. In times of famine or disease, it is the shaman's place to remind all that the wheel runs thin sometimes, and a new season will bring rich rewards to balance the losses of hard times. The shaman prays for the fallen foe as he does for the fallen animal in a hunt; all are equal in the end, and anyone could return as a grandson or brother in the next go around. The shaman's powers to heal are gentle and subtle, never forcing an unnatural cure. His skill in combat is aimed at subdual, unless up against a foe who threatens the forest. Then, the shaman may call upon all manner of natural forces that can devastate an interloper.

ALPHAS

Alphas, the leaders of the pack, are the ultimate decision makers in werran society. Most tribes are ruled either by a single alpha or by a mated pair. Though most rule in a far more communal and open way than their animal counterparts, in the end they understand that what becomes of their tribe lies directly on their heads. There is no set pattern to the gender or mix of alphas; many

tribes have powerful female alphas, and some have same-sex mates as their leaders. Alphas often choose to mate for life, but are not required to do so. They may take whomever they wish in their tribe as a mate, and may also refuse to allow others to have access to breeding partners. The internal laws and rules of a pack are completely governed by its alphas, though those who force overly constrictive structures may fast find themselves ousted.

The majority of tribes I witnessed seemed to deeply love and care for their alpha, viewing them as a beloved mother, sister, and protector. The most successful of alphas were demonstrative and gentle, their arms always around someone in the pack, a cheerful smile on their face, and a hearty good word to all who came in contact with them. This sort of alpha instilled in his pack such trust and understanding as well as a sense of security, that the idea of another challenging him for leadership seemed absurd.

Large tribes often have several betas who share equal footing with one another and act as alphas when out with hunting parties or with a section of the tribe away from the main body. In fact, one might say that all alphas are in truth betas to the High King of Lethe.

There are a few tribes that have more than two alphas, and very rarely more than three, but these grouped alphas are always bound into a three or four-way life mating. They all share equal control and must function as a cohesive unit so as to not bring chaos and confusion to the pack. Alphas are not voted on or selected openly by the tribe, but are chosen informally based upon two factors, first, being able to get the others to treat you as alpha, and second, the ability to hold the position without challenge from others in the tribe. The first qualification is subtle, but essential. If you tell the others what to do and they ignore you, then you are not alpha. Secondly, you must be able to defend against physical challenges from younger, stronger, or smarter tribesmen. This doesn't necessarily mean you must fight your battles yourself. If you can get the biggest werran in the tribe to follow you around and beat up anyone who says you aren't alpha, then you are alpha. Challenges are not as common as one may think though. Sure, one may find the perfect opportunity to strike at a stronger alpha and bring him down when he is sleeping or vulnerable, but don't expect to remain alpha for more than a moment if you cannot defend yourself from a fair challenge or simply aren't cut out for the job.

A pack that loses its alpha in battle or from an internal challenge usually undergoes a brief but tumultuous upheaval. There may be no apparent heir to an alpha lost unexpectedly, and members of the tribe may wildly disagree on who it should be. Often in these cases a shaman will be consulted, but they can only offer advice. In the end, physical conflict is the most common decider.

In tribes that find their alpha deposed, the new alpha may have different expectations or favorites among the pack. His ascension may be less than popular, leading to defections and infighting. A new alpha is more likely to be challenged in the first few weeks of his reign, frequently resulting in a rapid succession of turnovers. In a race that craves stability and the comfort of understanding one's place, it is no wonder that open challenges are few and far between.

Minutes of the Wald - Tribe Nemea

Halfway to 5th moon, year 942 e2.

Shaggon, scribe

Sounding of the horn. Beta begins the song of gathering.

Forming of the circle. Alpha: opening speech and welcome.

Lighting of the torches.

Welcoming of the elders. Presentation of the sacred cups. Elders drink the root brew. Eldest regales the tribe with a dream. Bronzed men coming from the south. They bring gifts and an open hand of friendship, but also bring war and discord. Their axes ring in our forests as the tribes are pushed northward together, onto ever smaller parcels of land. Lanerin, the high king has allied with these men, and does nothing to stop them. A new king is soon to be born, blessed by the moon.

Communal singing of Nemean anthem.

Airing of grievances. Gunn: Someone has been befouling the glade where he meditates. G told to mark glade with red flag, and all warned away. G to report back at next wald. Sarah: Foresters spotted scouting for bitterstalks on Nemean land. Order given to kill on sight. Beta to speak with neighboring tribes. Darask Rabbitkiller: Some sort of illness seems to be culling the oskin population. Shaman assigned to investigate. Tamar: Ursk recoils from her touch. Ursk: Tamar does not bathe properly. Ursk ordered to properly bathe Tamar before next wald.

Giving of Thanks: Felaka: To Drask, for building the new well. Taryn: To Otus, for caring for her while she was sick, and bringing her spoils of the hunt. Yelm: To Babak Crookfang, for saving him from a volosaur.

Announcement of assumed death of Io... missing after scythin raid on caravan to Erebus for supplies.

Call for breeders. Alpha nominated Kursk. Challenge issued by Babak Crookfang. Tribal vote on eligibility of Babak. Challenge passes, and B and K are dressed for combat. Both choose beast form. Combat is lengthy and close, involving much posturing. Crowd seems to favor B against alpha's choice. At final, K assumes man form and leaps onto B's back, knocking him out with choke hold.

Selection of mate. Kursk chooses Satha and presents her with mistletoe wreath. Satha accepts wreath.

Consummation of breeding. Alpha removes Satha's necklace of infertility. Kursk and Satha create the new Nemean at the center of the circle. Encouragement and sharing of the love by tribe.

Blessing of new tribe member by shaman.

Farewell words by alpha, and closing of ceremonies by eldest.

Communal howl.

TRIBES

It would be an impossible task to catalog all of the werran tribes in Eclipse. There are literally hundreds of them, and tribes die off, split apart, or merge all the time. Not all tribes are even so sharply defined. Lethe, for example, has become more of a city than a true tribe, and there are many factions and even non-werran outsiders that swear allegiance to the body. There is no written record of the tribes, and the only official count is only via the emissaries who show up for the Kongewald. Even this number varies greatly from one year to the next, as sickness, weather, accidents, and even politics may prevent an emissary from reaching the city. As I passed through the forest, I traversed the hunting grounds of perhaps a dozen tribes, and each seemed different enough to me for these accounts to stand as representative of the whole. Not all tribes consider themselves subjects of the High King, but those that do not tread upon shaky ground, their lives depending upon either remoteness or obscurity. Any tribe above fifty members would be hard-pressed to maintain its land without sending an emissary to Lanerin.

LETHE

Estimated Number: 10,000

Makeup: 60% Lunar, 20% werewolves of other races, 20% miscellaneous

Symbol: A ruined tower silhouetted by a red moon

Lethe is the alpha of all tribes. Its numbers are many. Its power, strength, and cunning are renowned, and the wisdom of its ruler is unquestioned. Lanerin, High King of Wolves rules this tribe as sole alpha. Under him a hundred betas, each with the strength of an alpha in their own right, enforce his will and wishes. Lethe's betas carry equal prominence and authority with tribal alphas when out traveling the forest, representing the concerns of their high lord and master. All tribes must pay Lethe and Lanerin his due or risk the wrath of a tribe of thousands.

Though the makeup of the Lethe tribe is primarily werewolves, all other breeds have representatives within this pack. Lanerin is no fool; he sees the worth and place of each of the other species of werran. His personal bodyguard is a massive black werebear. Many wererats work for him as well, feeding him information and gossip from the cities. A deadly and swift wereocelot is his most effective and ruthless assassin. Werebadgers have dug a maze of protected quarters for the king beneath his capital, and wereowls and werebats take and bring messages from far off, keeping his view of the Forge current, and warning of outside dangers.

The tribe of Lethe is centered around the great werran city of the same name, but its lands extend outward for many miles in all directions. Though these grounds are still used for hunting, most of it is purely ceremonial, and Lethe has grown too big to sustain itself upon wild meat. Caravans trek in on a regular basis along the trade road, bringing meat, vegetables, and manufactured goods

into the city. Lethe is the only place in the forest where one can actually engage in commerce, although the items for sale seem to cater strongly to a werran's taste. Very little currency is actually exchanged however. The lunars typically swap forest products (herbs, skins, etc.) directly for weapons, tools, and fineries with the merchants, and the merchants then ship these raw materials out for sale elsewhere. I did find that these merchants are still more than happy to accept gold as a method of payment when offered.

Lethe seems to bear stark divisions between tribe, city, and government. Roughly half of the lunars in Lethe are the descendants of Lanerin and his original band that arrived on the Forge some eight thousand years ago, and these seem to operate much more as a tribe, and less as city folk. The rest of the population is either governmental in nature, such as soldiers and diplomats, or engaged in more metropolitan pursuits. Soldiers are temporary workers. They come from all over the werran lands, and still consider themselves part of their original tribe, even though most have not been home in years. Diplomats are visitors from other tribes, often those come to seek the wisdom of the king or to petition him for help. The rest are imports—outsiders who have joined the tribe over the years, whether as seeds from other worlds, folk who have contracted the virus who have come here from the cities to settle, or those who for some reason or other have been exiled from their own tribes, but not for a crime large enough to see them expelled from the forest altogether.

Since hunting is sparse in Lethe, most of the citizens have more traditional jobs than one would expect from a werran, such as blacksmiths, leatherworkers, soldiers, guards, miners, and so on. This is not spoken of as work so much as a necessary duty of governing and defending the forest. Also, with the bulk of the city's food imported, Lanerin makes less of an effort to control the population than other alphas. He is welcoming to any werran immigrants, and cares only that they swear allegiance to him and to the defense of his crown. Many of these immigrants, once they find themselves, often settle farther out in smaller tribes that better match their demeanors, but Lethe seems to be a safe starting point for new werran.

I did notice something of an underlying animosity between the immigrants and the true members of the tribe. The original Lethe seemed to view themselves as somehow naturally superior, and looked down on the immigrants. Where this seemed to play out most was amongst the city's laborers. Few of the original Lethe seemed to have the ubiquitous government jobs producing things, and spent much more of their time in the forest. As for the immigrants on the other hand, I didn't see a one who didn't have some kind of labor to do. It is my suspicion that Lanerin takes in the new werran still used to the city life and dupes them into doing the city's work. The true Lethe certainly did not seem to make much of an effort to train these newcomers on the intricacies and benefits of being a werran. Case in point, the newcomers all seemed to still have the impression that work was a part of life, and few if any understood yet that it is not a werran's way.

The soldiers on loan from other werran tribes do not share this delusion. They are here out of a sense of duty to defend their homeland, and also get quite a lot out of the rigorous military



training, knowing it is slowly preparing them to be alpha someday back home. It is these folk that befriend the newcomers and sell them on life the way they have grown up experiencing it. Many soldiers even take newcomers as mates, an act that is encouraged so as to promote a healthy genetic pool. The soldiers are quite loyal to the king, and stay close to him, but do not interact much with the other original members of the Lethe tribe. It is my suspicion that if Lanerin were ever deposed, that the original Lethe would split off from the city altogether, melding into the forest as a more traditional tribe, leaving the city more independent and unfortunately, far less werran in nature.

SETH

Estimated Number: 350

Makeup: 100% Lunar

Symbol: A red crescent moon

This xenophobic tribe makes its home far to the north, along the border of the great cliff. Here in a thick, overgrown, and particularly dark part of the forest the Seth live, almost in complete isolation from the rest of the werran. Their leader is a black-furred female lunar of tremendous size and strength. She believes her pack to be the last true group of lunars in the whole of creation. She does not consider other races that can transform into wolves or wolf-like creatures to be even remotely related to her proud race. Those that dwell with her agree, they say that the other tribes have diffused and polluted the purity of their species by consorting with lesser races. Here in a network of caves and in the darkest regions of the mushroom forest, this lone alpha holds her tribe steadfast against the influence and corruption of the outside world. Her pack is considered very dangerous, and they are given a wide berth by all other tribes. Seth is the only sizable tribe that does not attend the Kongewald nor pay tribute to Lethe. Lanerin allows them to live in peace only because they are the last remaining bloodline other than his own that existed in the time when he first came to the Forge.

The tribe's alpha, Sintoben "Black Crescent" as she is called, is now getting on in years, and she fears for her tribe. Many of the young speak of opening their ways and reaching out to others, and many of the old fear that Seth's low birth rate and high infant mortality is due to centuries of inbreeding. Sintoben does not care if this is true. She makes her case that if the Seth are meant to fade into the great wheel, then they must do it as they are and with their heads held high. Still many of the young threaten to defect to seek powerful mates in the outside.

I learned all this about their tribe from a lanky and fair female lunar in the city of Lethe. The whole time she spoke, there was a sadness in her voice, and when she was done and I inquired as to how she had come by this knowledge. She informed me that Sintoben is her mother and that she was the first to defect, yet is never welcome back again.

On another note, I also met her mate—a seed who had only in



the last few months arrived on the Forge. He was newly transformed into a werran, and was deeply in love with his new mate, who had been the one to change him. I was looking to interview a fresh seed for this book, and he did me one better. He provided me with letters that he had written to his sister in his first few frightened days in the Cauldron—the very letters I have presented earlier in this work. I am happy to report that he was well healed and seemed not only to have accepted his new life, but relished in it—so much that he no longer needed to hold on to any vestige of his old existence. Thus, the letters became mine.

HOMMA

Estimated Number: Under 50

Makeup: 100% Were-canine breeds, all of human racial origins

Symbol: A human hand with wolf claws

The Homma are a proud, aggressive tribe who have long defended the southwest border of the mushroom forest. They are made up all of humans—not out of some notion of being better than other werewolf races, but rather because they were founded by an alpha that wanted to prove to the others that human werran could defend a difficult border as well as any of the more feral races. The Homma have, up until recently, enjoyed great success in repelling the many companies and prospectors who would rape the forest for its natural resources, but with the influx of Penance war refugees and the discovery of the bitterstalk acid, they have found themselves overrun and without support from their king. Now they fight a desperate battle, striking swiftly and ruthlessly at soft targets and then disappearing again into the shrinking forest. Any loggers who wander away from the main group soon turn up dead in macabre displays intended to sow fear and crumble morale. Small caravans are wiped clean, and even any equipment left unguarded is destroyed or otherwise made inoperable.

The tribe's alpha is new, having taken power with the help of his younger brother only in the last few years. The two decided that their previous leader's decision to simply back away and retreat further into the forest while waiting for the High King to call a war council was no longer acceptable. Now they and the remaining members of their pack live in a constant state of war against the interlopers. Their shaman is dead. All old and young have been taken or have retreated to distant tribes. Only warriors remain. The alpha, One Fang, rules with his brother as beta. They accept no cowardice, no compromise, and no mercy for the enemy. All who would seek other methods besides war have been weeded out. One Fang has claimed all the females for himself. There are only fifteen left, all warriors in their own right. He does not allow the females to become pregnant; such luxuries must wait for peace time. He expects his consorts to fight and to mate with equal vigor.

To keep the rest of the tribe in line, the alpha's brother, White Tooth, runs havoc over all the males, claiming them as his mates. He is fierce and commanding. His prowess in battle is legendary,



and his men both fear and respect him. He is surrounded at all times by the most loyal and dangerous of them. This inner circle adores him—some even being his closest lovers—and they will rip the throat from anyone who says even the slightest disparaging thing about him.

The little war they wage is gathering more and more attention and has even managed to interrupt a shipment of the goddust to Lanerin. The High King would dispense with the two brothers and their little army if he could, but they are now ever growing in popularity. Others talk of going and seeking them out to join their cause, while some wonder why Lanerin has not called a war council. In the same regard, the outside forces that have long been divided—each seeking its own selfish concerns from the forest—have started to band together to deal with the werran attacks. The whole of the situation hangs on a blade's edge and can only descend into chaos unless the ancient wolf king can find some clever way to resolve it all soon.

RATHANNA

Estimated Number: Under 200

Make up: 90% Weretigers of different races, 10% other were-cat types



Symbol: Abstraction of a hooked claw mixed with a cat's eye

I met these cats late in my journey with the picker traders. They live in a great hangman's oak thicket in the far eastern end of the forest, high above ground in the living hollow of a massive tree. Their alpha is a marvel of a female weretiger who never left her hybrid form the whole time I was among them. She held court in a great hall filled with flowing tapestries and caged songbirds and lit with blazing magical lights of gold, blue, and green that danced over the pale white of the natural hollow walls. Her name was Sheva Khan, and even in her hybrid form she dressed in silks and wore jewels on her head and arms. She was the most social and cultured of the werran that I met, yet ever as we spoke did I have the feeling she was considering whether or not to eat me. I wore my the skin of my scholar character, and won her affection with subtle compliments and a quick wit. She soon found me charming, and we spoke and drank for hours.

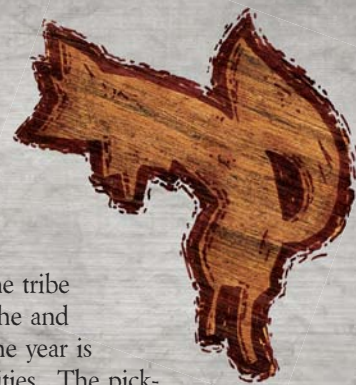
Sheva Khan questioned me at length about the politics and happenings in Lethe, joking often about the coarse and primitive dog-king. She wondered at the other cities of the Forge and their ways of life, and then imparted me with knowledge of her people. She made clear that though they adored reclining on silk pillows and basking in the magical lights of their home that they were none the less fearsome hunters the like of which is unsurpassed in the werran kingdoms. She explained that in the mass of old growth that was their hunting ground, they never had to touch the ground, living and hunting in the massive canopy of the forest. After hours of delightful conversation, she rose, joined by many of her fellows, and departed out a window to hunt. I learned the next day that their prey was a monstrous primeval beast that could have swallowed any one of them whole. The creature fell without a single injury to the hunting party.

SUITOR

Estimated Number: Under 30

Makeup: 100% Female werefoxes of different racial origins

Symbol: A fox leaping in the air



The Suitor are a transient tribe, traveling between two homes. The tribe spends three moons a year in Lethe and three in Baradume. The rest of the year is spent traveling between the two cities. The pickers and I were approached by one of their number as we traversed the middle of the mushroom forest. We were tired and overwrought from passing through the dangerous lands of the Primenara, so when the Suitor invited us to their current encampment we happily accepted. Their camp was not at all what we had expected. It was not a typical werran camp—it was made up of a huge white tent wherein the all-female members of this tribe were waited on hand and foot by male servants, who all seemed devoted and even smitten with their patrons. The Suitor treated us to tea and cakes and questioned us extensively about the lands we had passed through. They were headed the opposite direction as we, back towards Lethe. They happily provided us with intelligence with regard to the road ahead, including a introduction letter to the Rathanna tribe.

It seems that the Suitor live part of their year among the all-female thieves' guild of Baradume, enjoying urban life, and stealing and seducing all to ensure their organization's continued success. They then tend to their wild side, passing through many tribes' lands heading toward Lethe, where they serve the High Wolf King. They are granted free passage by him, and in the course of their year they not only gather him powerful intelligence from the cities but also a feel for the tribes they visit while touring the forest.

The Suitor are the only tribe that I am aware of that does not mate with others of their kind, instead taking human lovers. These thin, nubile females with their small breasts and shapely posteriors seemed to have a hypnotic hold on their male servants and lovers, a power I did not see on display anywhere else in werran culture. This is not to say that other werran do not have power over the emotions of other races. I have seen werran roar in such a way as to stun victims in terror, or imbue their words with force to instill pride and courage in battle, but these foxes needed only to be in the presence of males to charm them. I was not wearing a body at the time with a sensitive sense of smell, so I cannot say for certain, but I wondered if this power was pheromonal in its nature.

BARG

Estimated Number: Under 200

Makeup: 100% Werebears of different races and bear breeds

Symbol: Bear paw



The most independent and widespread of the wer-

ran races, werewolves choose for the most part to live solitary lives, coming together for breeding and to raise cubs and not much else. Luckily for them, they are powerful creatures, able to stand against some of the most dangerous of foes. After all, a werewolf in its hybrid form can stand up to twelve feet tall and weigh over two tons. They have thick hides and furs, powerful jaws, and huge claws. Even so, they are one among many, so to ensure their safety, they have formed the Barg—a loose clan that comes together in small groups throughout the year or in times of need. If there is a werewolf tribe that is trying to harass a werewolf out of its territory, this bear need only call on the Barg to aid him. The Barg also keeps a clear census of all werewolves, and if one dies or goes missing they investigate carefully, taking action if foul play is involved.

I learned about this clan and its system of protecting its people when a great hulk of a man with a thick mane of white hair traveled for a quarter moon with our picker caravan. This creature was in fact a polar werewolf who went by the name of Doyal. He was of the most powerful breed of his kind, and he served as a detective for his clan. When we reached his destination, he asked that while the pickers traded with local tribes, that I help him determine the cause of death of a local werewolf. He had a cunning mind and an eye and nose for detail that I have not seen matched even by the best of city gumshoes. Doyal rapidly determined the bear in question had been murdered with poison and then he proceeded to commence a comprehensive investigation. I served as his sidekick and companion, allowing him a sounding board off of which to bounce his ideas. I must admit I found myself trailing behind his lightning quick mind, not so much because Doyal was smarter than I, but rather that his understanding of the environment and of mortal motivations was more subtle than that of a creature such as me, who has seen it all from afar for far too long. In the end, he exposed a werewolf, who had hoped to become alpha of his tribe by bribing the werewolf to aid him. When the wolf was turned down, he feared the bear would expose his plot and thus poisoned him. The guilty party was uncovered as a coward, for no self-respecting werewolf uses poison (unless it is natural in their system), and his own alpha dealt with him.

Doyal offered to turn me to a werewolf and take me on as his assistant, an offer that much appealed to the guise I wore at the time, but of course I had to turn him down. Still I have no doubt he is one of the sharpest of beings I met throughout my travels.

YPRES

Estimated Number: Between 1,000 and 5,000

Makeup: 100% Wererat

Symbol: Two twisted lines like rat teeth

Disliked by others of their kind and looked down upon by all, the werewolves of Eclipse are a greatly underestimated source of knowledge and power. When werewolves take their animal form, they can choose to be one giant rat or instead turn into as many as a few dozen smaller rats.



When divided, their rats all share a group mind and function as a unit, but if one is off by itself, anything it learns or overhears is known by the rest as soon as they reform. This allows werewolves to spy very effectively, and to be many places at once. Though others may dismiss them, High King Lanerin knows their value and uses them to stay on top of all his enemies and friends in the outside world. I see rats everywhere in the cities, and no doubt most are just that, rats, but upon learning of this clan I considered the wealth of knowledge one might acquire about me, for example, if every conversation I had ever had in the presence of one of these rodents was known by a single source. It is no wonder that Lanerin is one of the most well informed beings in all of the Cauldron.

PRIMENARA

Estimated Number: Under 50

Makeup: All some form of prehistoric predator were-breed

Symbol: A long jaw of teeth

In the center of the mushroom forest, just east of Lethe, there is a great depression in the ground that at its deepest point holds the Lake of Teeth. The whole of this depression, some forty square miles, is filled with ancient plants and beasts. The lake itself is home to fearsome aquatic predators the likes of which have not been seen in eons. This is the home of the Primenara, the most fearsome and primitive of all werewolves. Their land is the most dangerous of all in the forest to pass through. I skirted only its edges, and there found a land where anything and everything can make of one a meal.

The Primenara rule here, though they are far from the most dangerous thing in the wilds. They are a loose clan of werewolves who all take the form of prehistoric beasts. Their leader is Fallon Rex, a vicious weretyrannosaur who could easily claim the throne from Lanerin if he cared at all for power or society. If outsiders see werewolves as primitive, then they would not begin to understand the wild way in which the Primenara exist. Though they come together as a clan if threatened from without, within their own ranks they battle for hunting grounds and even feed at times upon the flesh of their own breeds.

The tribe's lands are not the only environment that is filled with werewolves predators. In the waters of the Lake of Teeth, great weresharks hunt, and are in turn hunted by mammoth weresplesiosaurs. It is a wonder of geography and the natural dangers of the Cauldron that keeps these monsters from spreading out into the world.

One can only wonder why anyone would ever knowingly enter the Primenara's domain. Well, I encountered a rumor that seemed to keep bringing explorers and rashes of all sorts to this land. It is said that the impression the tribe hunts in was caused when some sort of craft from beyond the boundaries of the Forge crash landed here some ten thousand years ago. I cannot confirm or deny this assertion, but I will say that the crater was not present during my day. The rumors state that the vessel held powerful



weapons, and even the ability to escape the orbit of the Forge. It is rumored to be intact somewhere deep beneath the waters of the Lake of Teeth. I wish any and all luck in that endeavor. I think confronting the vampire Queen might be a wiser choice.

CONDORA

Estimated Number: Under 400

Makeup: Any and all were-breeds

Symbol: Many types of paws jetting out from a central pad

If there is one tribe that I met in my travels that was accepting and fun-loving it was the Condora. Made up from all breeds of werran and welcoming to outsiders, they live for fun, dancing, drinking, and of course the joy of the hunt. Their alpha is a cheerful and very social werecobra who was overjoyed to see my picker friends, and he came forth readily to allow me among his tribe.

The Condora are made up of all the random and misfits werran left out in the cold by the other tribes. They will take in anyone, even those exiled from their tribes. They have but one rule, do not attack or harm another member of the tribe. I saw were-breeds I encountered nowhere else on my travels—werespiders, werewith, weredingos, wererecabs, wererefalcons and even the one and only currently known wererabbit—a true oddity, as all other werran are at least omnivores.

The joy and camaraderie of the Condora was only countered by the harsh truth that they have no lands of their own, and thus must constantly keep on the move so as to not attract the wrath of any tribe whose lands they may currently be passing through.

LETHE

As cities go, the werran capital barely qualifies. If not for its political and social influence over all of the forest, it might be dismissed anywhere else as simply a town or an outpost. Here though, it is place of great power and a symbol of werran pride, and its beauty and natural majesty are unmatched by any other place on the Forge. The city was founded upon a great stone hillock, the petrified stump of a tree that once reached hundreds of miles into the sky to touch the sunlight, the last of its kind and a giant that I had pulled from a dying world in ages long forgotten. Half of the city is built along and atop the remains of this tree, and the other half is below, built into the shaft of a once-great mine that harvested goddust. This half-mile deep shaft is now overgrown with vines and massive roots all linking its quarter-mile diameter,

forming a maze of paths and creeping plants. Built into the cliffs and among the great roots are homes, shops, taverns, and so forth. Above ground, militia members and the older families of the city dwell in complex and twisting caves dug out along the stone sides of the once great tree. A narrow road spirals upward around the trunk, carved out of the stone, leading to a great plateau at the top where the Kongewald is held. Above this, atop a broken shard jutting upward, sits the palace of the king.



Lethe is small by the standards of any city, but huge by werran tribal center standards. Lethe is more truly a fortress than a city, its unnatural height and depth is complemented by natural spires and peaks surrounding the mine. The city's defensible position and high-thrusting natural stone pinnacles keep out any unwanted guests. As one goes up the trunk road, one finds impressive cavern homes and breweries, as well as barracks and even what one might call temples, those places where a shaman might dwell. Heading down into the lower city is a much more chaotic pursuit, as instead of a single road going around, there is simply a network of massive roots. On and about these leviathans leatherworkers and blacksmiths have carved and erected their shops. In caves cut into the sides of the shaft one can find libraries and taverns, as well as the homes of the people who work in the lower city. This area has many different and divergent paths, all made by the natural structures of the root system, and they are not always easy for outsiders to navigate.

The assembly ground at the top of the great stump is nearly a mile across, and lit near the center with great torches to mark the site of the Kongewald. The werran militia trains here, and they seem to take their jobs very seriously. The forest's army is small, but ferocious. A narrow stone stair twists upward to the top of the shard, leading to the hold of the High King. This brooding palace is carved entirely out of the solid rock, and towers over Lethe and the werran lands, keeping watch over the king's people. Soldiers from all over the black forest stand guard at the foot of this marvel, as well as at every entrance to the city itself.

The mine shaft is lit with luminous lichens growing directly on the roots and walls. All the great trade goods of the werran can be found here, furs, skins, and scales as well as rare herbs and spices. A few restaurants even serve meats of all kinds and tastes, including many that can be found nowhere else in the Forge.

Those that make the journey here from the sea along the one maintained and safe road are amazed at the beauty and wonder of this strange city. However, Lethe is hardly what one might consider cosmopolitan. The bulk of the city's energies are spent training and maintaining the werran militia and in tribal politics. A small burgeoning art community does exist, but mostly is geared toward the yearly tribute for Colopitiron, and performances are rare. Lethe does seem to have more of its share of street musicians however, and its taverns are frequently a gathering source for players, who come together spontaneously, often improvising and revisiting traditional songs for hours upon end, one of the true hidden gems of life in Eclipse.

About a third of the way down the shaft, a great wedge of stone is lodged in a tangle of roots, suspended there ever since it crashed down from the cliff above. Over time the roots have grown around it, fixing its position. Built into the center of this stone is the Tavern of the Wolf King, something of the cultural center of the city. The building is massive, and even bigger than it looks, being carved partially out of the great stone. An arena dominates the center of the tavern, and werran come here to publicly settle disputes or prove their braggadocio. At times it is the site of dances, theatrical performances, or even bacchanals. Merchants and outsiders as well as werran from all over Eclipse gather here to drink, laugh, and enjoy the merriment. The immense, solid piece of rock supporting the tavern has slowly been hollowed out and now houses an incredible collection of ales and spirits provided as tribute to the king from each of the werran tribes of the forest.

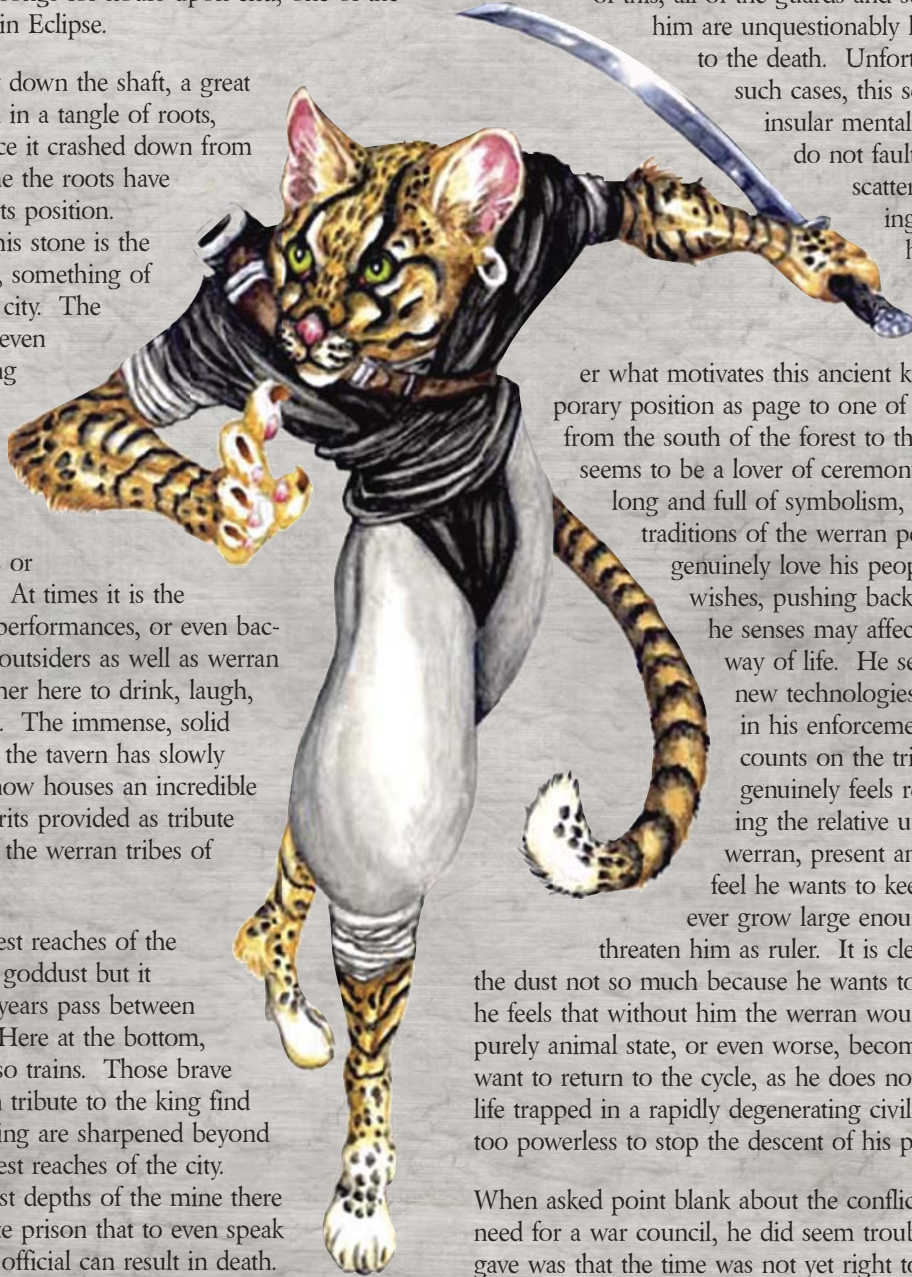
Lower down in the darkest reaches of the shaft slaves still mine for goddust but it has become so rare that years pass between even the smallest veins. Here at the bottom, the werran elite guard also trains. Those brave warriors that are given in tribute to the king find that their skills and cunning are sharpened beyond belief in the lowest, darkest reaches of the city. Deeper still in the blackest depths of the mine there is rumored to be a private prison that to even speak of in front of the wrong official can result in death. It is said that the High King of Wolves houses his worst enemies there. They claim he even feeds them the goddust to keep them alive; their punishment for betraying him is eternal. Even darker rumors suppose that the king holds a being of great age and power there as his perpetual guest—a creature only he is allowed to visit and treat with.

THE HIGH KING OF WOLVES

Lanerin, the High King of all werran lands cuts an impressive figure as the sole alpha of this great city and tribe. His body and mind enhanced by millennia of taking the dust, he towers above the crowd at a height of twelve feet, with a physique to match. No werran in the forest is a physical match to him, and I have no doubt that this explains how few challenges are actually levied against him over control of the tribes. His mood is dark and brooding, and he seems to look through petitioners and courtiers to see the unspoken truths in their hearts and minds. Because of this, all of the guards and servants that surround him are unquestionably loyal and will defend him to the death. Unfortunately, as with most such cases, this seems to have led to an insular mentality in the court, and I do not fault those werran far off in scattered tribes who increasingly claim that their king has become out of touch to their needs.

In an effort to discover what motivates this ancient king, I took up the temporary position as page to one of the diplomats traveling from the south of the forest to the Kongewald. Lanerin seems to be a lover of ceremony, and his speeches are long and full of symbolism, emphasizing the various traditions of the werran people. He seems to genuinely love his people, but often resists their wishes, pushing back against any change that he senses may affect the werran traditional way of life. He seems hesitant to embrace new technologies, and seems vehement in his enforcement of strict population counts on the tribes. Party I believe he genuinely feels responsible for preserving the relative utopia of the forest for all werran, present and future, and partially I feel he wants to keep sure that no tribe can ever grow large enough to challenge Lethe or threaten him as ruler. It is clear to me that he takes the dust not so much because he wants to live forever, but because he feels that without him the werran would either slip back into a purely animal state, or even worse, become civilized. He does not want to return to the cycle, as he does not want to live his next life trapped in a rapidly degenerating civilization, too young and too powerless to stop the descent of his people.

When asked point blank about the conflict in the south and the need for a war council, he did seem troubled. The answer he gave was that the time was not yet right to act, and that he had reasons behind his commands that would become known as the future played out its course. He emphasized his control over the situation, and bade that his people stay faithful and proceed with patience. The werran whose standard I bore told me that Lanerin could see into the future, and that he accepted this explanation. I did not have the heart to tell him that he was incorrect. However, it was clear to me that not all the emissaries agreed with my friend, and I imagine the next Kongewald will be considerably less civil if no action or progress is seen against the loss of land.



Lanerin seems to spend the bulk of his time shut away in his tower interacting with his household and meeting with his spies and with scattered petitioners from the tribes. Every other red moon he leads a ceremonial hunt into the forest with the remnants of his original tribe. A werecoyote in the lower city tried to convince me that Lanerin frequently slips into the city in disguise in order to take the measure of the people. I don't know if you will believe him, but I find the idea of a twelve-foot white wolf cloaking himself and somehow slinking around the city inconspicuously to be patently absurd.

In times long past I am told, Lanerin had mated for life with a awe-inspiring white she-wolf with a coat as clear as his own silver mane. This queen became near to his equal, and loved him dear enough to extend her life for him through use of the goddust. However, after two thousand years, something in her changed, and she longed no more for life, but only to return to the cycle of the great wheel. She surrendered herself to the ages, refusing the dust even as the withdrawal started to drive her mad, mutating her form and her mind. Rather than become less than what she was as queen, she used the last of her will to hurl herself from the palace, breaking her body on the rocks below.

Since that time, Lanerin has taken only fleeting lovers, and may keep up to five at a time. He produces offspring only rarely, and often chooses skillful male warriors as his lovers so as to avoid the pressure of creating heirs that he knows will never see his throne. Lanerin's children do not partake of the goddust, and only a handful live at any one time, though nearly everyone in the inner circle of the tribe can claim lineage from the king at some point. Once every hundred years or so, word reaches the city of the birth of a pure white, gleaming pup. Lanerin's agents send for these wolves upon their coming of age, and the king takes them as his only mates for the course of their lives, believing they are the reincarnation of his beloved.



chapter 8 - highmark

Seven years ago, the city of Penance erupted into a massive war, with bloodhold pitted against bloodhold. While you are certainly familiar with these “Bloodwars” and their role in the release of your Queen and the advent of that villain Belus, the events surrounding the fall of Hammerfall should be studied as an intriguing footnote with far-reaching ramifications for Eclipse and its future. I have managed to piece together the details through a series of interviews with many of the refugees who found their way here. Although a number of these accounts were contradictory and were colored by the refugees’ hatred of their enemies, a cohesive story eventually emerged that I believe to be mostly truthful, and which I have recorded below.

At the advent of the Bloodwars, Hammerfall, one of the largest bloodholds in Penance, and certainly the most lawful of the major populated areas there, was already fighting a long civil war with an entrenched underground resistance. However, when the exiles broke loose and the city’s alliances began to crumble, Barrowhold, Hammerfall’s neighbor to the southwest, declared war and marched against her. Hammerfall held its own for a while against the forces of Hyperia, but at the expense of the home front. The brief stalemate soon ended with the despised Bloodsheen climbing up from the maze in Hammerfall’s central canton and catching Megaera’s forces off guard. Megaera herself, along with Meln Crius, with no army to support them, stepped forward alone to halt the onslaught. The fighting was bloody but quick, and with a tremendous crash, the entire battlefield soon caved into the undercity. Somehow in the chaos, Megaera was lost, and Crius plunged into the depths of the city. Talamus, the master of the Bloodsheen, lost no time in declaring the area his. Hammerfall immediately fell into confusion, and the front line of Megaera’s forces, under the command of the dover Peyin Highmark, beat a quick retreat from the front, bearing down savagely upon the Bloodsheen in their charge. The rebels, far more accustomed to fear than force, fought a guerilla battle within the city, offering no deference to the condition of the much-contested bloodhold itself. They infamously started a great number of fires which spread across Hammerfall, destroying homes and weakening the city’s structure.

Within a week though, Highmark had the Bloodsheen on the run, and Talamus was finally trapped—besieged in the Bloodstone Library. Hammerfall itself had suffered much however, and Highmark was running out of options. Promised help from the Golden Shore failed to turn up, and soon the forces of Barrowhold surrounded Highmark’s army, itself still camped around the library. Highmark set up a defense perimeter and held the area for two weeks, enough to finally destroy the Bloodsheen once and for all. It was a time of legend, but the atrocities committed on the people of Hammerfall by Hyperia’s troops outside of the circle of defense were what finally convinced him to give up his position. Highmark surrendered, but not in a cowardly fashion. His terms were that he would leave the city of Penance and never return, in exchange for the sparing of his life and

the life of his men. He also secured the rights of Hammerfall's citizens to leave unmolested as well or to be considered plebians (free citizens) in the new expanded Barrowhold.

The next day, Highmark's army marched solemnly out of Penance, discovering to their horror the final condition of Hammerfall after the long series of battles. Their once beautiful city was unrecognizable—burned, smashed and overrun—and its people broken and tortured. A massive column of silent citizens, estimated in the hundreds of thousands, followed the army out of the city. Highmark soon realized that he had his own mobile bloodhold, and he declared himself lord under the Queen's laws.

Wary of being pulled back into the wars that rocked Penance, and unwilling to lead his civic-minded citizens into Arena or Wildwood, Highmark took a gamble and decided to lead his people to Eclipse, which he had heard was at the very least peaceful and prosperous. The trouble was, getting a quarter of a million people across the northern ocean is not an easy task. Enter the ceptu. The only vessel on the forge capable of carrying such a mass exodus is the floating city Attatal. Highmark indebted himself to the ceptu by throwing his forces in defense of the city of Sentinel against an invasion by the lord Pandarus of Beacon, and in return, Attatal escorted his people across the sea to Penumbra.

Once in Eclipse, life wasn't magically easy for the Hammerfallers. Most of them were used to sunlight, weather, and city life. Few settlements in Eclipse were interested in taking in the settlers, and

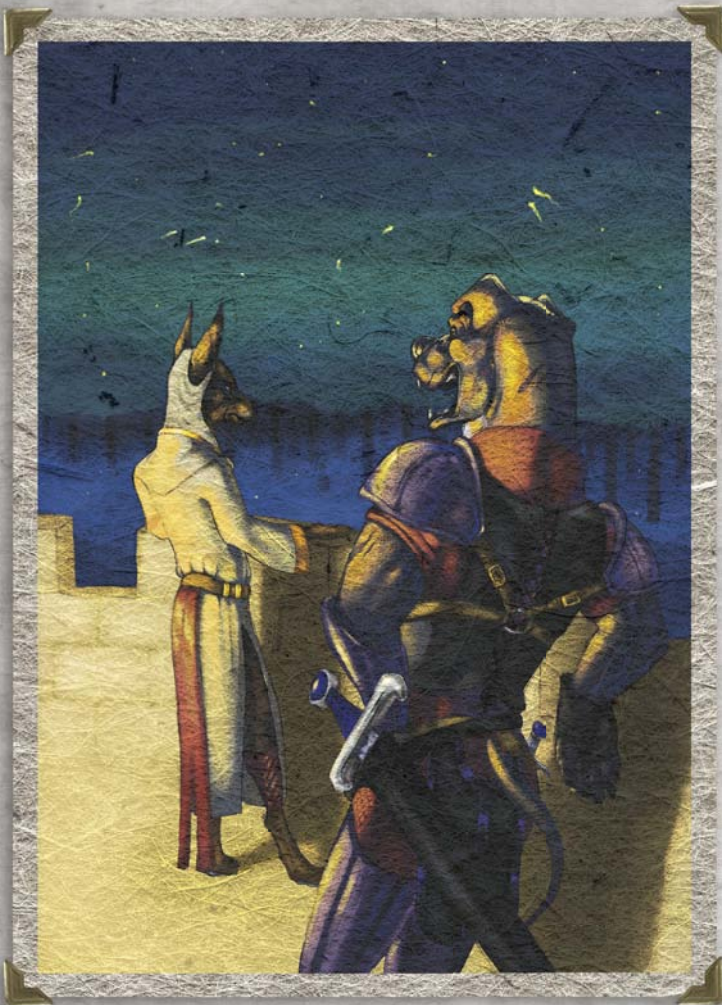
eventually Highmark settled upon the ruins of a farming city on the eastern edge of the Sea of Ink, built at the high water mark of the shore, which seemed an appropriate place to name Highmark. The city had once competed with Baradume to the north for resources and trade in the fertile eastern valley of Eclipse, but had ended up on the losing side of a trade war, and had lost most of its population to famine and to Baradume due to poor management and economic pressures. Most of the city itself was not habitable since it had been left to nature long ago, but a massive stone wall still stood around its perimeter, providing a defensible line of protection. As a final boon, the eastern end of Eclipse has the highest concentration of luminous lichens, making it a more tolerable place for people accustomed to normal daylight patterns.

The few thousand inhabitants that remained of the crumbling city were quickly absorbed into the new city-state of Highmark. However, they did not resent their new leaders, as their city had been deep in a desperate decline. The former Penance-folk themselves made surprisingly excellent pioneers, and within a few years, a city began to form as they cultivated plants, cut stone, harvested trees, and built homes and defenses. As the city expanded, new refugees from Hammerfall (and even other bloodholds where the people had begun to grow weary of war) began to flow in at a steady rate. The young city of Highmark only continues to grow.

POLITICS

Highmark today is still a frontier city with few amenities and luxuries, but bearing an ambitious and optimistic population. It is also, not surprisingly, having some trouble getting adjusted with its neighbors. The city is well situated geographically, but poorly placed politically. The city sits at the mouth of the fertile eastern valley of Eclipse, and provides a natural command of the thousands of square miles of flowing water and fertile land found there. However, the southern part of this valley has been cultivated by the vampires of Stygia to feed their slaves, and the Stygians are wary of losing any part of their farmlands. The city of Baradume is also unhappy with the position of Highmark. While Baradume has enough fertile land around it to support it, it does not welcome the competition for trade in this region that it has recently monopolized. The people of Baradume are not openly hostile to Highmark, but they feel that Highmark needs to understand its place in Eclipse, and they have been erratic and uncooperative, making points of stealing valuable items from Highmark's treasury and sabotaging their trade ships. The werrans across the sea accuse Highmark of harvesting their forest for its buildings, and are slowly mounting resistance to "human" encroachment into their domains. Colopitiron has not been entirely cooperative either. He has foiled any attempts Highmark has made at codifying their laws into print, and the new king has been forced to scale them down to the very basics. The six traditional old laws of Penance have taken hold here and seem to be the standard code for now, with only a few exceptions.

The people of Highmark are repulsed by the very idea of Stygia, and the city has quietly allied itself with the Akai warriors that dedicate their lives to resisting the vampires. Highmark has also allied itself with the city of Sabor in the north across the Sea of Ink, helping it in its political struggles with Lacuna, partly to help



secure trade for iron, stone, and other raw materials that previously would have gone to Baradume.

Money in Highmark doesn't really exist yet. The costs of wandering halfway across the world drained its citizens of their wealth, and most items of value that did survive the journey were soon traded to Sabor in return for ironworks and equipment to build homes and workhouses. With no money for trade, people aren't able to pay taxes, so the city's coffers are empty too. However, the city's wealth lies in its people, and the people pay back the government by committing to work. Highmark's men have been rigorously organizing the building of the city, and all citizens are given jobs to help build the place. In this manner, the city is something of a commune. People work on their own houses in their free time, but their jobs are all dictated by the government. This system makes some people very nervous, not the least of whom is King Highmark himself. He is eager to mint coins and create a more free market system, but realizes that the city is simply not stable enough yet to handle the chaos that would ensue from this. His closest advisor, William Green, constantly pushes him to fully embrace the communal system, but Grak Stoneclear, the leader of the city's defense force, has been quite vocal in opposition, and has tried to rally groups of citizens to demand economic freedom.

LAWS AND NOT LAWS

It seems Eclipse has a way somehow of making its people conform to its will. Payin Highmark is a right law-loving bastard who would have thousands of pages of penal codes if he could, but due to the newness of the city and the interventions of Colopitiron, he can't entirely get his way. The people do view him as their rightful king though, and his word is law. However, due to the communal nature of the city, the laws have been slowly evolving away from Penance type codes, and more towards edicts supporting the public works. The six laws of Penance still apply, but the most important rule now is the duty to work. An able-bodied citizen not working is the most heinous of crimes, and work in this case means fulfilling one's task one that has been assigned by the government.

The six laws imported from Penance are as follows:

- 1. IT IS FORBIDDEN TO MURDER, RAPE, TORTURE, ENSLAVE, OR MAIM ANOTHER INDIVIDUAL.** The reason behind this law is fairly self evident. It creates a sense of safety within the city and it acknowledges that respect for others is the foundation of a polite society. Because of the communal nature of Highmark though, theft is rare, and the societal structures eliminate the desire to enslave others. Rape, torture, and murder are not entirely unheard of, and are punished harshly.
- 2. IT IS FORBIDDEN TO TAKE OR DESTROY THE PROPERTY OF ANOTHER AGAINST HIS WILL.** This law is similar to the one above in that it recognizes that a civilized society respects the property of its members. Much of the property in Highmark is communal, but is considered to be "owned" by the government as far as this law is concerned. The items that remain with people

from Penance are a different story. These are people's only remnants of the life they once enjoyed there, and as a result, tend to have a great deal of sentimental value. Most of these prized belongings are mundane family heirlooms, though there are also a fair number of magic items and relics as well. The king reserves the right to levy these items in order to raise funds for the city, but he has thus far resisted the temptation to do so.

- 3. DESTRUCTION OF PUBLIC PROPERTY IS FORBIDDEN.** Like the bloodholds from which Highmark rose, the public facilities are considered to be of vital importance to the operation of the city. Graffiti and vandalism are considered high crimes, not only because they show a blatant lack of respect, but also because Highmark's citizens have toiled and sacrificed much to restore the city's buildings. The city itself is the tangible fruit of the people's labors, and most citizens take pride in it, such as it is.
- 4. EXCESSIVE AND UNNECESSARY POLLUTION OF LANDS AND WATER IS FORBIDDEN.** This law serves the same health concerns as it did in Penance, but there is an additional consideration here now. Because of the darkness, the plants that produce food in Eclipse are more fragile than those in Penance, and any damage to the lands could result in dismal harvests that would be unable to support the city's population. As it stands, both Highmark and Baradume trade a great deal with merchants from other domains for the food they need, but they are also highly dependent upon all the food that they can produce themselves.
- 5. AGENTS OF OTHER CITIES MUST BE CLEARLY MARKED AS SUCH AT ALL TIMES.** In Penance, this law pertained to agents of other bloodholds, but in Highmark it applies to places like Stygia and Baradume. The reasons for this rule are twofold. First, the people have been accustomed to this law since long before settling here, so it makes sense to them. Second, given the tensions that exist, there are legitimate reasons for the leadership of the city to be concerned about spies and saboteurs.
- 6. ALL CITIZENS MUST PAY A TAX TO HIGHMARK.** Given the fact that money has not yet been implemented, the tax to Highmark is paid in work and productivity. Although not everybody agrees that they should eventually move to a more traditional economic system, most people assume the fact that their work will one day be their own, with the exception of what they owe to government.

In addition to the above traditional laws, the following decrees, which are more geared toward life in Eclipse, are binding to all citizens:

- ALL ABLE-BODIED PEOPLE MUST CONTRIBUTE TO THE PUBLIC WORKS.** This is perhaps the most important law in Highmark today, and it has fostered a sense of community. The people who work the fields,

build the structures, and perform the various other duties necessary to maintain society all keep an eye out to ensure that everybody else is pitching in for the good of the city. Anyone caught shirking in their duties is sent to the dungeons for a quarter moon for each offense.

- **ALL CITIZENS OF HIGHMARK LEAVING THE CITY SHALL TRAVEL IN GROUPS.** The wilds of Eclipse are never safe by any stretch of the imagination, but given the fact that Highmark has made enemies of the Stygians, it is particularly important that people avoid venturing outside the city walls alone. There have been some incidents reported (however dubious) of people leaving the city to tend the fields, being attacked by vampires and converted to an undead creature, and then being sent back into the city where they could feed upon others.
- **OVER-ACCUMULATION OF PERSONAL PROPERTY IS NOT PERMITTED.** Although this law is expected to go away once the city is placed on a traditional monetary system, people are discouraged from becoming greedy at this point in the city's development. While items that were brought from Penance are not subject to this law, anyone who manipulates trades within and without the city in an attempt to become personally wealthy can expect to have their goods removed and redistributed for the good of the entire population. This is commonly referred to as the greed law, and it is regularly enforced. It does not appear to pertain to the city's noble class however.

THE SYSTEM OF PUBLIC WORKS

Highmark's division of labor is built upon a hierarchical structure. At the bottom of the hierarchy are the non-citizen workers, while at the top is Highmark himself. In between are almost a dozen levels of people filling various specialized roles, as well as the people they report to.

- **Non-citizen Laborers:** When I first arrived in Highmark, I noticed a number of people wearing yellow tunics and performing a variety of primarily unskilled duties, such as harvesting crops, moving raw materials throughout the city, and other menial jobs. I saw a watchman patrolling the streets, and I asked him why there were so many people in yellow tunics. He told me that anyone who has immigrated to Highmark from another city, or even the countryside, who has not yet had his citizenship approved is forced to wear yellow. These workers typically perform the least desirable jobs in the city. The vast majority of these non-citizen laborers are seeking citizenship, though there are some who are simply passing through and are exchanging their services for warm meals and places to sleep. I personally had bought my way in, having exchanged some of my coin for scrip and a temporary visa at the immigration center.
- **Citizen Laborers:** The most populous class in Highmark is the ordinary laborers who handle the least skilled

tasks within the city. Many of them work alongside the non-citizen workers, performing the same jobs. Whenever possible, however, citizens are offered work that is slightly more desirable, and they are sometimes put in supervisory positions where they oversee the non-citizens.

- **Raw Materials Specialists:** These folk are responsible for supplying the raw materials to the craftsmen throughout the city. The actual mining, harvesting, and quarrying is carried out by the laborers, but raw materials specialists are responsible for setting production goals, processing the materials, and then delivering these materials to the craftsmen.
- **Craftsmen:** In my experience, craftsmen and shopkeepers in Highmark are usually one and the same. Apprentices, assistant chefs, and other helpers are considered laborers until they are placed in charge of their own establishments. The people who fall into this class include anyone who produces goods for use by others, such as blacksmiths, leatherworkers, chefs, bakers, pottery makers, or jewelers. Despite the fact that the city is communal in nature, people still maintain shops here. Until actual currency is established, people purchase goods with vouchers, which are allocated by the distribution supervisors.
- **Distribution Supervisor:** This role is responsible for writing vouchers for various types of items and for distributing them to the people of the city. I spoke with one of these supervisors, a pale thin fellow who always walked about with an armful of scrolls. He told me that he and the small army of people who share his work are so familiar with the populations of the city blocks they serve that they can simply drop off the appropriate numbers of vouchers at each household. The "supers", as they are called, are also responsible for keeping track of births, deaths, marriages, and other movements throughout the city. I did hear whispers that those who have close relationships with the distribution supervisors often manage to obtain more vouchers, though this did not seem to be as much of a problem as it is in many similar places. Each voucher is only to be used once, and craftsmen are supposed to sign the voucher when they accept it and then hand the voided paper back to the citizen buying the goods. Citizens must then give these voided vouchers back to their supers to get new ones on the next moon. The supers report to the social planners.
- **Architectural Engineers:** These are the people who design things such as buildings, houses, and boats. Engineers also report to the social planners, and normally have both craftsmen and laborers working beneath them. Engineers sometimes work as a team, but they are ultimately responsible for seeing their own projects through from concept to completion. While an Engineer's focus is on drafting designs, his supervisory effectiveness is almost equally as important.
- **Militia:** Highmark's military is responsible for patrolling the streets as well as for providing for the city's defense.



It is also highly involved in patrolling the frontier and in protecting the expansion of the city's territory eastward. While the militia members are trained for specific roles such as law enforcement, melee combat, or manning war machines, it is common for soldiers to be cross-trained and periodically pulled from one type of unit to another. This class includes all types of fighting men, from the footmen to the cavalry.

- **Militia Sergeants:** Not technically officers, each of these squadron leaders are responsible for up to twenty men beneath them. They serve to convey the orders from the knights to the troops, and bear the responsibility of disciplining the rank and file when something goes wrong, allowing the knights to maintain their shining and noble mystique. While for the most part, excellence seems to rise to the top of Highmark's militia, I did encounter a few exceptions to this rule. I can only assume that Meln Crius thinks that overbearing, abusive sergeants inspire confidence in the rank and file. I personally cannot understand how anyone can tolerate taking orders from such people. If there is an up-side to this, it is that as Highmark's sergeants fight alongside their troops in battle, when these bad eggs eventually fall, they cannot possibly be replaced by anyone worse than themselves.
- **Social Planners:** Highmark's social planners are the people who are ultimately responsible for the success or failure of the implementation of the king's grand plan for the city. They decide how many vouchers to allot for distribution to the supervisors. They decide what buildings to construct and where. They are also responsible for working out strategies for dealing with crime and any other problems that crop up. From what I have gathered, the planners tend to trust their underlings unless they notice problem areas that do not improve with larger initiatives. Their solution for such persistent problems is usually to demote the people under them who prove ineffective and bring in new people who promise to turn things around. Often the replacements prove to be just

as ineffective and they are ultimately replaced as well. If this strategy still fails to produce results, the planners then wade into the issues themselves and try to better determine what must be done to make changes. Of course this is held as a last resort, as failure may make it evident that the real problem lies with them.

- **Knights:** Highmark's knights are its military officers and its most visible heroes. Knights are all appointed from the ranks of the most effective warriors within the existing militia units, and they are picked based upon their fighting and leadership abilities. While a few knights remain in the city at all times in order to provide training and to manage the city's defense forces, the bulk of the knights operate outside of the city, patrolling the frontier and exploring, protecting, and civilizing the wilds. Each knight has his own style and mode of operation. Some work alone, while others lead large columns of troops. Knights have some freedom to choose their assignments, although all report to the Knight Champion, and must answer to any counts of failure or cowardice that may be brought their way. There are a limited number of knights that may be appointed at any one time (based on the city's population), and any knight not deemed to be doing his position justice can be demoted and replaced by the champion. It is my experience that Highmark's knights take their duties very seriously, leading through inspiration rather than arrogance. Most command the respect of the rank and file, as well as that of their commander.
- **Dukes:** There are currently four dukes of Highmark, each of whom was originally a courtier in Hammerfall. Each duke is responsible for managing a quadrant of the city, acting as regent of the king. However, they mostly pass these duties to the city planners who serve under them. Instead, they seem to focus the bulk of their time on maintaining their power, vying for Highmark's favor in hopes of winning succession to the position of king when he dies or steps down. Political rivalries and alli-

ances are ever-changing—one house may fall out of favor for a time as another gains. The political situation is surprisingly stable given the amount of ambitions and shifting of power involved in the city's court. Alliances form and break all the time, even within families. Two dukes may be enemies, but their sons allies, or vice versa. In the guise of a "historian", I spent a brief amount of time in Highmark's court. The king has a far greater grasp on the situation than he is given credit for. Though mortals always seem to over analyze the decisions of their betters, it was quite clear to me that Highmark intentionally keeps the balance of power changing in the court so as to keep any one party from being able to gain too much and thus challenge his rule.

- **Knight Champion:** Meln Crius, the commander of Highmark's armies, may have as much or more power than the Dukes, but there is one important distinction in his role. He is not in line to succeed the king. This, on the outside, is to prevent a military takeover of the city. However, there may be more to the story than that. Crius was next in line to succeed Megaera in Hammerfall, and it was only a matter of fate and timing that Highmark ended up on top instead. I believe that Highmark fears Crius more than any other courtier, and only agreed to let him in the government under this clause. For his part though, Crius runs the army effectively, his ambition and lust for war tempered well by decades of experience in command.
- **King:** The kingship is the highest office within the city of Highmark, and his power is absolute and unchecked. The king is able to make any changes he deems necessary to the city's social structure, laws, and diplomacy. So far, Highmark has managed the city well and fairly, and seems to be held in high esteem by his citizens. Even the old guard of Hammerfall seems to be coming around, and now views him as their rightful ruler, even if Megaera's disappearance was never fully explained. While the dukes may position themselves against one another in order to gain power, this political posturing is currently civil, and does not by any measure cross into the border of treason or malice. It is worth noting that succession is not guaranteed to the king's descendants. Highmark feels that simply being a member of the ruling family does not ensure one is capable for office. Instead, the king is free to name any heir up until the point of his death. While he can choose to name a successor from any citizen of the city, it is assumed that he will choose either from his own family or from the dukes or their families. Highmark has not yet named a successor as he does not wish to show favoritism while the city is still in a delicate state. He periodically declares that one house or another has earned his favor, suggesting that at least one individual from the house has topped his list of potential successors.

EMIGRATION AND ARRIVAL

The road from Penance is not an easy one. A traveler could attempt to make the journey on foot, but he would find such a trek to be long, costly, and fraught with danger. Booking a trip with an experienced merchant is a far safer and cheaper bet, although still many of these are shady, and passengers who are not too distinguishing may find themselves conscripted into pirate ships or navies, or subdued, shackled, and sold into slavery. Highmark has gone out of its way to make friends with the Ceptu, and while their underwater caravans are not the cheapest mode of travel, the city recommends that all immigrants make use of them. They have fascinatingly odd pod-shaped ships that are translucent and travel the flooded caverns directly through the core of the world. Ceptu caravans are certainly not for everyone. I found the extended confinement, coupled with the knowledge that the pressure outside was absolutely crushing, to be disconcerting to say the least. One can book passage in a ceptu caravan from virtually anywhere on the Northern Ocean to Erebus for around 5,000gp. Private merchant ships may run as little as 2,000gp however, and passengers may be able to negotiate lower rates if they agree to serve on board the ship, possibly acting as laborers to load and unload the cargo hold, or as protectors in the event of attack. For the truly rich and paranoid, however, chartering a ship to travel directly to Eclipse is always a possibility, although this will cost at least 15,000gp.

Newcomers in Highmark must be willing to work and be productive if they want to live in the city. Upon arrival, new emigrants are directed to the assessment center, run by Megaera's ex-lover, the cleric Talmaera Highmoon. Highmark appointed Highmoon (who has an amazing ability to read people) to take charge of putting the newcomers to work, and her office, located in a wooden fortress at the edge of the city, is currently the busiest place in Eclipse. While most immigrants must undergo a lengthy trial period, those who arrive from Hammerfall are typically offered citizenship without question, the only exception being known criminals and political dissidents. Assessment typically involves a written survey and a personal interview to get a broad idea of a person's skills and background, followed by a series of tasks to determine his spirit, work ethic, and determination.

New workers are generally assessed into one of four groups: gatherers, builders, soldiers, or spies. The human Marshall Helis directs the gathering of materials for the city, and the building of the city itself is engineered by his brother Kai. The army is run by Meln Crius, the knight champion, though new recruits report to either Grak Stoneclear, the knight in charge of the city's internal defenses, or Ran Elkins, who runs the frontiersmen. Spies are managed by the sly picker Blook Nemsis, who trains them to infiltrate other cities in Eclipse or to help out the Akai with their war against Stygia.

Natives of other areas—particularly of other areas of Eclipse—who attempt to migrate to Highmark are not greeted with such open arms. Highmark is very suspicious of rival cities trying to infiltrate its ranks. All comers are allowed though to work as non-citizen laborers and wear the yellow tunics marking them as outsiders until Talmaera has had a chance to review their applications. Roughly half are accepted, while the other half are either turned away or told to work harder for a period of time and try again.

CITY MAP

Highmark is still in the process of building itself up from the ruins of a previously deserted civilization. In most cases the ruins are simply rebuilt to their existing foundations, but where necessary the city has been redesigned. Here the builders salvage what they can and create new structures according to the plans of the city's engineers. The new city taking shape is one of necessity more than style, and for the most part, I can describe it with the following words: square, small, and dark. Highmark is a stark contrast compared to the city of Baradume, with its marble halls, decorative columns, and wide open spaces. Most dwellings in Highmark are made of wood, and larger manors are constructed from rough stone and mortar. They have yet to create a building that I'd describe as a monument, though there is the tribute to Hammerfall, which is a thing of beauty at the very least.

The city walls are thick, crenellated, and over thirty feet tall. They have been built upon the lines left by the previous city, and though greatly reinforced in places, are still incomplete. The walls are one of the more impressive structures in Eclipse, and have served this location well over the millennia, effectively checking Stygia from expanding to the north. The area encompassed by these ancient lines is quite large, and includes all of the current

city. Within the walls, there are several distinct areas of note:

1. **Castle Highmark:** The largest and most impressive structure within the city is currently Highmark's castle. It sits at the high point in the center of the city. One of the most important features of its location is that it is able to see the signal fires all along the walls, so guards at the castle would be able to alert Highmark immediately in the event of trouble. The court is not open to the general public (one is supposed to address one's grievances with one's immediate superior), although emissaries and merchants are allowed to petition the government in order to broker trade deals or alliances.
2. **Emeraldgleam Manor:** Befitting her bubbly personality, this manor consists of several meandering wings and outbuildings that appear to have been constructed on whims as opposed to any discernable plan. The manor is surrounded by a fifteen-foot stone wall, and there is a private outdoor amphitheater at the center of it all.
3. **Beles Manor:** This manor house is a single building with three multi-story wings and a wall surrounding it. The yard is decorated with a garden and with three



marble statues depicting a dragon, the household deity, and the Duke himself. All three were sculpted and purchased in Baradume. There are a few outbuildings that serve as kitchens, entertainment areas, and a work area. At the center of the grounds is a broad courtyard.

4. **Irest Manor:** This manor resembles a hunting lodge more than the opulent mini-palaces of the other dukes. Three stories tall, unwallled, and constructed of logs, it bears a great deal of resemblance to many of the commoners' houses, with the obvious exception of its size.
5. **Aldat Manor:** This walled compound is second in size to Beles manor, and consists of two large buildings, several outbuildings, and a courtyard in the center. Many people speculate that the Duke and Duchess keep separate residences so as to avoid seeing one another as much as possible.
6. **Newcomer Welcome Center:** This enormous stone building consists primarily of a large open chamber. On busy days, people fill the chamber and wait in line for Talmaera to decide upon the status of their applications for citizenship.
7. **Memorial Monument to Hammerfall:** This massive bronze statue sits at the city's center, surrounded by a large park of gardens and public spaces. Depicted in the sculpture is Megaera, standing above three injured soldiers. She stands with two raised warhammers, as if ready to engage an enemy in combat. At the base of the statue are the words, "In honor of our beloved Lady and those who fell preserving Hammerfall."
8. **The Forge:** This stone academy is built upon a conglomeration of several buildings that were located here prior to the establishment of Highmark. It is surrounded by a ten-foot high wall lined with lead, which allows the wizards in training to practice in the courtyard without injuring passersby.
9. **The Harbor Market:** This circular area is approximately two hundred feet in diameter and serves as a place where craftsmen can display their wares. Despite the fact that trade is currently only open to city vouchers, the market is normally at capacity for both merchants and buyers. Though gold is not accepted here, I did find that most craftsmen were willing to barter for my own goods when I had them.
10. **Voradis' Forge:** Voradis is a famous dover metalcrafter who runs this forge, which consists of two buildings for construction and a third where he sells arms and armor to clients. Voradis keeps charge over several apprentices as well as two journeyman assistants. Most days, the forge turns out twenty swords, two suits of armor, and a variety of other items which are crafted by request.
11. **The Labyrinth:** This section of the original city has not been restored. It consists of numerous interconnected corridors and chambers. It's original purpose

is unknown and the subject of much speculation. It is well known for being haunted, and has become a point of pride for people to wander its corridors and navigate from one area to the next. It is not patrolled by the militia, and serves as a clandestine meeting place for those who want to keep their activities secret.

12. **Olde Hammerfall Inn:** This is the largest and most popular inn in Highmark. Named after the old bloodhold of Penance, it is run by a burly human innkeeper named Huck Fell. He is happy to sell his famous mushroom beer, which he brews himself in the cellar, and relate stories of Penance.
13. **The Corral:** In a time of war, this sizable complex is capable of housing more people than any other building in Highmark. Currently though, most of the soldiers based within the city go home to their families at night. The fortress and its grounds serve as both a barracks and a training area for new soldiers. One sizable wing of the building houses the estate of Knight Champion Meln Crius. Crius would undoubtedly been one of the city's dukes had he not been given control of the army, a position which the other city leaders felt too unbalancing to give to a noble. Highmark allows Crius the lifestyle of a duke however, and his wing is a veritable palace.

NOTABLE CITIZENS

Like all nobles, the leaders of Highmark are not immune to vanity. In my simple guise as a travelling historian from the Great Archive of Penance, the merest whiff of possible immortality convinced them to give me unprecedented access to their inner thoughts and desires. The following collected information was gathered from dozens of personal observations and interviews. It is, of course, highly colored by my own filter. History is written by the bold.

KING PEYIN HIGHMARK

The unexpected hero of the war in Penance, Highmark has realized his political ambitions here in this unlikely land, to a degree perhaps far beyond even his own dreams. He is both a deeply political creature and a leader and savior-type figure to the people of the city. This dichotomy appears to eat at him, his need to manipulate and control conflicting with his more openly paladin nature. Though this old dover's fur masks his age from the common eye, I could easily see that whatever youth he has left is rapidly retreating from him, and his fighting days are likely far behind him. However, he has not given in to the temptations of glory and excess, and appears well aware that his legacy depends entirely on his absolute dedication to his people and his city.

The people of the city know Highmark as a fair leader who is constantly seeking to better provide for the safety and security of his subjects. Most people have a favorable opinion of his leadership, and even those who do not like him, for whatever reason, tend to have a grudging respect for his statesmanship. Highmark makes a concerted effort to avoid making enemies whenever possible, and when he learns of someone who does have an issue

with him, he seeks out those individuals and attempts to resolve their differences.

The king has assured people that the city's communal nature is not his first choice, and that he will allow people to be more free with their possessions and their time as soon as the city is firmly established. He makes a show of this in court as well. However, I got the feeling from meeting with him that as things have progressed, he has begun to see the benefits of a non-materialistic society. My impression is that he will keep the current system in place only until he can work out the kinks in a permanent system of community work and capital.

Highmark is a big proponent of personal responsibility, and is quite insistent upon holding people accountable for their crimes. Unfortunately, Colopitiron has disagreed with his heavy-handed approach to justice and destroyed most of the legal documentation that Highmark has produced. As a result, much of the city's crime is now handled within the structure of the city's social system. Those who cause trouble or don't work are demoted down the ranks, and can eventually be cast out of the city altogether. Every so often though, a case so heinous occurs that Highmark feels the need to make a show of having a public execution to keep the citizens in line.

Highmark has no offspring and is rumored to be sterile, although he is currently involved with a female dover named Ulmeda Chaket. I have noticed that many people within the city tend to be quite interested in Highmark's personal affairs, and many of them spread rumors that he will soon announce his engagement to Chaket. At this time, however, he has not commented on the situation, and after being a guest in his court, I suspect that he likes having the freedom to dally in the affairs of many women too much to be wed to a single person. That said, stranger things have happened, and Highmark's king is an individual who often surprises.

DUCHESS KELLI EMERALDGLEAM

Kelli Emeraldgleam is an elven woman originally from Megaera's court, and who received a rather significant promotion from her position as informant in Hammerfall. Kelli has changed little since those days, and is still quite cheerful and effervescent, though she has taken to her new role and responsibilities with a competence that few who knew her before would have expected. Since she has thus far born no heirs, Kelli has surrounded herself with numerous friends and lovers, whom she has officially "adopted" as her family. Her manor is constantly filled with commotion, laughter, and energy, upon which she thrives. She takes both male and female lovers, most of whom live in her manor, and she delights in the fact that they are intimate with one another just as often as they are with her, an ideal situation since she lacks the time to be with any of them as often as they deserve.

Despite her nature as a free spirit, Duke Emeraldgleam is as much of a creature of politics as the other courtiers. She is currently aligned with Duke Aldat against Duke Irest, their primary differences concerning what should be done about the vampire threat to the city. Both Emeraldgleam and Aldat believe that the best course of action is to hold a clear border against the vampire encroachments, while Irest is in favor of taking a more aggressive

approach and bringing the fight to Stygia. Highmark himself falls somewhere in the middle. His troops have indeed set up a border just south of the River Glau, and make a show of remaining clearly on the northern side, coming down hard upon any Stygian parties that choose to cross. However, he has also invested in a secret war in the hills, supplying the Akai with weapons and training, and I have even heard rumor of a hidden road being used to steal slaves out from Stygia itself.

In her Hammerfall days, Kelli Emeraldgleam ran the Sounding Hall, a large theater of no small fame. Highmark has not yet built a replacement, and the new duchess has been pushing hard for Highmark to begin expanding the city's fine arts programs. Although her duties do not permit her the time to manage stage productions, she has encouraged the creation of several independent dramatic companies, most of which are made up of actors who were part of the original group of refugees from Penance, and who currently perform in the streets. These performances are considered a bright spot in a city where culture is currently in short supply.

DUKE SERAN BELES

Formerly a wealthy merchant from Hammerfall, Seran Beles bought his position by sacrificing much of his personal wealth in helping others survive the long road to Eclipse. Many have said that thousands upon thousands benefitted from the loss of his fortune, but none benefitted so much as Beles himself. While he may have arrived virtually penniless, his sacrifice came with certain capitulations from Highmark, mainly that he and his family would be provided with a manor, and that he would be granted the highest office once they arrived at their destination. True to his word, Highmark immediately ordered the construction of a fantastic multi-wing manor that rivaled his own castle in terms of extravagance, and appointed him to the position of duke, where he has control over one quarter of the city.

Most of the refugees from Penance accepted this decision, though Beles was often characterized as a miser and a cheat by those who knew him well. Indeed, he has always been one to offer a great deal of sound advice to Highmark regarding policy decisions that always seem to end up benefiting him directly. Of the four dukes, he is trusted least by his peers.

Beles is a small, thin human with receding dark hair, which he normally keeps combed straight back. He typically dresses in fineries that he has managed to preserve from Penance, though his clothing is often frayed around the edges since he has been unable to acquire new garments that meet his standards.

Many people remark on how mismatched Beles is with his wife. Asmella is a large woman, not obese, but tall and powerfully built. She is probably twice the size of the duke, and a fair amount more attractive in my opinion. I can only assume that their relationship was founded on money. In any case, they have three children who are fast approaching adulthood, two boys, Khaman and Kinillias, and a younger sister, Fenella. Having met these children, I was struck by their good fortune at inheriting their mother's looks while retaining their father's quick wit and sharp tongue. In fact, Kinillias in particular seems disarmingly adept at the art of persuasion, which is why the boy now owns

my old travel cloak. I fear that they will all become quite capable politicians soon enough.

DUKE RODERR IREST

Roderr Irest is a pale valco who originally ruled the struggling settlement of Glau where Highmark now sits. While the process of settling the area was peaceful and most natives were happy for the newcomers' arrival, Irest wanted to ensure that the interests of the original inhabitants were represented in government, so Highmark appointed him duke. This arrangement has proven helpful on numerous occasions thus far in smoothing over the stresses that often occur when trying to integrate two different peoples.

As far as valco go, Irest is one of the more refined examples of his species, though he is also revered as a powerful warrior who would stand and defend those who are important to him with every ounce of his strength. This trait has endeared him to Highmark, who sees him as a kindred spirit, if a little rough around the edges. I have heard tales of the two of them leaving the city together on numerous occasions for the purposes of hunting. Some have even told tales of Irest introducing Highmark to the ritual of drinking the blood and eating the heart of one's kill as a means of honoring the spirit of the slain animal. Many believe that this relationship is an indication that Irest may ultimately win the war of succession, but others point out that Highmark places a high value on those who originated in Penance and who share the same culture with the other refugees.

Several years ago, Irest's beloved mate fell victim to the predations of the vampires, though he still claims somewhere around or above twenty offspring with various partners. Most of his children have taken more traditional paths in life for valco, though there are at least seven who have decided to involve themselves in the politics of Highmark's court.

DUCHESS TURCHA ALDAT

Tall and icy with long blonde hair, Turcha Aldat is a human woman aged past her prime. Her beauty fading, she uses her power and influence to attract lovers, whom she continues to hide from her cuckolded husband. Her affairs are notoriously scandalous throughout Highmark. I heard one tale of her suspicious husband tracking her to a young knight's house where he found them indecent together. Her husband proceeded to pick a fight with the knight who bore no respect for Aldat's position and instead beat him to within an inch

of his life. It took months for the husband to heal fully, all the while the duchess continued her affair with the knight.

Highmark does not appear overly impressed with the duchess' behavior, yet she is an excellent orator who has rallied the people to his cause on more than one occasion, which is likely the reason he continues to deal with her all too public scandalous indiscretions. She, in turn, seems to know she is on thin ice, and in order to preserve her skin, almost always sides with the king, supporting fully his initiatives in his court. This makes her a worthwhile political ally and worth the baggage that comes with her.

Aldat's husband is Phius, a well-known sculptor who has supplied the city with a number of much-needed statues, including the stunning monument to Hammerfall. He cares not for the intrigue of Highmark's court, and he is more than happy to leave that to his wife. In Penance, she was very wealthy and had come from a background of privilege and money. For this reason, she has always held the power both within and without of the marriage. Many believe that Phius' motivation for continuing his marriage is because Turcha allows him to fully pursue his art, which is his true love and passion. The Aldat's have three children together, the oldest one being Tyrune, a woman of almost twenty years who appears to be taking after her mother in every way imaginable.



DAME ROLEGA

Dame Rolega has lost much in the move to Eclipse. During the final days leading up to the exodus, she had a stormy falling out with Megaera that led to her publicly withdrawing her support from the war. Shortly thereafter Megaera went missing, and more than one of Highmark's citizens puts the fault not with the Bloodsheen, but with Dame Rolega. I honestly do not know whether or not she was involved, but I can say that she has lost the confidence of Highmark and of many of the people of the city.

Despite her failings, she has opened up a new incarnation here of the wizard's training academy known as the Forge, and her services remain as in demand as they were in Hammerfall. Her new facilities are built atop a sprawling series of interconnected structures that preceded the arrival of the Hammerfall refugees. The place has been well restored, and she currently has enough room to instruct and house fifty students. She is currently seeking to increase the size of the facility due to the increasing demand of her services.

RAN ALKINS

Ran Alkins is a high-ranking knight who headed the Ran's Rangers organization in Hammerfall. His organization once ventured from Penance out into the savage wilderness surrounding the city, and now he performs a similar function for Highmark. Much as Grak Stoneclear heads up the city's internal defense forces, Alkins' leads all of Highmark's troops out on the frontier. While the city's militias man the walls to ensure that the city is safe from attack, Ran's Rangers are venturing out into the game trails and amid the rocky outcroppings that hide enemy movements. Since their arrival, Ran and those who serve him have become vampire experts, and they make an effort to outfit themselves with the specialized tools needed to slay these creatures.

I met Ran one day after I decided to leave the city to survey the surrounding landscape. He initially followed to ensure my safety, but then when he realized that vampires were no worry to me, we engaged in a conversation about the state of affairs in the Eastern Valley. He assured me that Highmark would like nothing more than to eliminate the vampires, but that the city could ill-afford another war. Instead of fighting them directly, the rangers have been bolstering the resources of the local barbarians by providing them with food, training, weapons, and mounts, all of which have been purchased at great expense to the city without the knowledge of the city's inhabitants. Ran said that he negotiates with a brother of the barbarian chieftain himself, a disagreeable brute of a man named Hrongnar, and though they are allies at this point in time, he has concern that if they defeat the vampires, they will one day deem Highmark a threat to their tribe and seek to eradicate it as well.

In addition to aiding the barbarians, Ran deals harshly with any vampires that cross into territory that is controlled by Highmark. There is a line of wooden pikes spaced out every mile along the border Highmark declared in the Eastern Valley. Upon each pike is the head of a vampire that has been slain, either by Ran's Rangers or by the barbarians. Most of the vampires have chosen to honor this boundary, though there is at least one group that clearly understands that their true enemy is Highmark, not the barbarians, and they have been conducting frequent raids well beyond the border. Ran told me that he has been focusing his efforts on thwarting these attacks, though he said that they are quickly learning his tactics and adapting to them. In any event, it would appear that without some sort of serious move towards peace very soon, there will be war between Highmark and Stygia.

MELN CRIUS

With all the speculation surrounding the eventual successor to Highmark's aging king, it is only fair I be allowed my own prediction. Whether by force or by decree, Meln Crius seems poised to be the man to bring Highmark into the future. For starters he has the backing of the people, who see him as the natural successor to Megaera, as much as they love their current ruler. Secondly, do not discount the power that comes from control of an army. Meln Crius is an enormous muscle-bound barbarian—perhaps the largest I have ever seen—who long ago carved Hammerfall out of the chaos of Penance at Megaera's side. Today he serves as the Knight Champion of the Highmark military. Crius is also a man who loves a fight. Ran Alkins told me that Meln has personally slain several vampires and has provided vital aid on several occasions when his rangers were pinned down or overwhelmed by vampire invaders.

I sought out Meln and we had a brief conversation about his new life in Highmark. He seems frustrated and guilty over the past, having been the last person to see Megaera alive. He says that he misses the lady a great deal and he frequently considers returning to Penance to discover her fate. I asked him what he thought of the rumor that Dame Rolega played a role in her disappearance and he simply laughed and shook his head. Meln and Megaera had been fighting Talamus together when the ground beneath his feet had given way and he had toppled deep into the maze. The force against them had been overwhelming, and he claims his life was only spared because of a time anomaly in the bowels of the undercity which had propelled him a month into the future. He does not fail to see the irony that these critical few weeks allowed his rival Highmark to claim the crown for his own. Crius' relationship with the king is a complex one. The king trusts and relies upon him tremendously, yet when I asked him if he ever considered making a move for the crown, he seemed to hesitate briefly before showing me the door.

Meln dwells in a luxurious wing of the Corral, and he frequently takes the time to help with construction efforts within the city, particularly on the city wall. He has been known to aid the weak or the ailing, step in to settle disputes between neighbors, and otherwise look out for the common interests of the people. Most of the people of Highmark regard him as a hero—the best type, who acts out of concern for his fellow men instead of duty. For my part however, I could not shake the feeling that he was hiding something.

BLAZING TRAILS IN THE DARK

I find that in my journeys I have become particularly skilled at lifting items off of people's desks.



General Crisis,

Please find below my summary of our operations in the Eastern valley. I apologize for the delay in getting this to you... a number of our caravans have been ambushed of late, and I felt it important that I deliver this letter to you personally, as it contains much information of a sensitive nature that would not serve us well in our enemies' hands.

First of all, thank you for the generous numbers of troops you have sent to help secure our food supply and protect our borders. It is clear to me that you take this duty seriously. However, pardon my frankness, but it is my opinion that the platoons that have been sent to the frontier are not equipped or trained to handle the task they have been assigned. I have included in my report a summary of some of the basic equipment that new troops will need to be successful in holding the border, and which I also feel will not break the city's coffers. Obviously, it would be beyond the city's means to provide every man with every piece listed here, so I'm sure you will use your best judgment in deciding how to proceed. In my evaluation though, I feel it would be better to spread all of these items amongst many troops who have fewer of them, then to manufacture a few of the cheaper items and distribute them to everyone. Our enemy is a clever and varied lot, and if they find that we have blocked them in one way, they will undoubtedly shift their tactics and attack in another fashion.

The Eastern Valley is a place unique in Eclipse. It lies scant miles away from Highmark, contains some of the most fertile soil in the Cauldron, and is better lit with luminescent mosses and plants than anywhere else. It is assumed that the main cause of this is its proximity to the lava fields to the north, which increase the temperature noticeably to a pleasant 70 degrees and drive away some of the infernal mists that plague the rest of the land. The water that flows here is also less saline than much of the rivers that drain directly from the ocean, and combined with the warmth, seems to encourage plant growth. When standing out in the wilds of the valley, the cliffs can be seen rising up in the distance and overhead, dotted with millions of glowing mosses and looking much like the starry night sky on a typical Blooming evening back in Penance. In fact, due to the lack of mists, it is possible to navigate here as one might under the stars, by keeping an eye of the patterns of glimmerings in the cliffs. However, every ten to twelve hours or so, a foul wind blows up from the south, chilling the air and blanketing the land in mists. At these times, it is simply impossible to know where one is or where one is going, and we must rely upon compasses or magical devices, and even then not much can be gleaned. Fortunately the one nicety out here we have found is that standard compasses always point to Highmark. For some reason that seems to boost morale.

The land itself has good soil by Eclipse standards. There are still large rocks jutting out everywhere, which makes it difficult to plow or to build roads, but the larger problem facing our farmers are the raids from the Stygian south. When Highmark settled the city, the citizens at that time did grow their food in the Eastern valley, but because of the declined state of Glau, the farmlands had been reduced to a narrow band just below the lava fields. In order to support the citizens of Highmark, we have had to expand our farmsteads southward greatly, into land that the vampires consider theirs. This land is not controlled directly by the Stygians, but has lain so long under their influence that the people here essentially work for them as slaves, farming the land and handing over the bulk of their crops to the Stygians when they come to collect their payments. Those who did not give up their spoils or who held some back were made example of by the Stygian military, and the reports I have heard of this were gruesome beyond belief. We have secured farmland by moving our troops into the region and pushing the border southwards. The farms in the areas we have liberated now have so much of their crop left over that they are happy to give it to us to feed Highmark.

At first we thought the Stygians to be afraid of our forces, as they seemed to retreat easily without much conflict, but this seems to no longer be the case. Due to their earlier relationship with the farmers, the Stygians never built a permanent base in the frontier, and were unable to resist us in force when we first came. However, they do not appear to be giving up without a fight, and they have now begun to test our borders with small, quick, and unpredictable strikes. These are typically performed by a team of ten to twenty soldiers, typically werran, sometimes led by a vampire, but often not. These platoons come down from the southern hills when the mists blow and cross over the border into our territory undetected. They then scour the area until they find a small homestead or a patrol of our troops and ambush them grotesquely, typically leaving at least one survivor who can relate the grisly tale of the mayhem to inspire fear in others.

The werrans seem to be giving us quite a bit of trouble, not to mention the vampire lieutenants, due to our aforementioned equipment issues. I have taken the liberty to compile the following list of items that are badly needed on the frontier immediately. The attacks seem to be increasing in frequency, and I worry that the Stygians are making us more of a priority, something I fear we are not ready to face directly.

Military Items for use in combat with Werrans:

- ♦ **SILVER:** I cannot emphasize this enough. Ordinary steel weapons do not seem to pierce their hides, so all troops should be given at least one silver weapon. I also highly recommend silver arrowheads for your archers. Scores of these can be made for the price of a single sword, and each one has the potential of felling a foe before it can close and kill, and arrowheads are reusable, even if the shafts break. I have heard that Highmark is negotiating a new trade deal with Sabor, by all means, ask the king to request more raw silver.
- ♦ **HERBS:** Certain herbs, such as wolfsbane and henbane can be used effectively against the werran. The scent of wolfsbane repels the werran, making it difficult for them to engage foes with say an ointment applied to their persons. This seems to be due to the fact

that proximity to the scent forces them into their bestial forms, which in some cases can make them stronger, but generally disrupts their military tactics and formations in deference to blind rage and chaos, which are then easily exploited by your well trained men. Henbane is highly toxic to the werran, and if smeared on silver weapons and arrowheads can poison them. We have also used henbane to taint meat rations that were left for the werran to steal. If combined with wolfsbane, they will not notice the scent, and will turn feral and have strong urges to devour the meat.

Military Items for use in combat with Vampires:

- **HOLY SYMBOL:** All troops, even non-believers should carry these, as the vampires seem to fear them. If possible, troops should be trained in their use to drive off the undead.
- **HOLY WATER:** This is an essential, and should not be hard to come by. It is much easier to use than a holy symbol, and can do great damage to the undead, burning their dead flesh away. It can be contained in thin glass and tossed at the enemy from long range, breaking on impact, or kept in a wineskin and squeezed to spray a jet onto the enemy at close range. Small glass bulbs can be added to crossbow bolts to further increase the range of this versatile weapon.
- **GARLIC:** Vampires in particular seem to have an allergy to this plant, and I have noticed that their combat skills seem dulled in its presence. Basil and jasmine also seem to have an effect as well, but to a lesser extent.
- **WOODEN STAKE:** Sharpened wooden stakes can be used to pin the undead in the chest, immobilizing them. Once a vampire is immobilized, it is easy enough to decapitate it for the kill.
- **MIRROR:** A mirror won't really help in combat, but it is useful to have a small one when dealing with people on the frontier to see if you may be dealing with a bloodsucker in disguise.
- **FLAME JET:** Defeating a vampire in combat is one thing, but killing it is another, as most of them turn to gas and float away. The only method I have seen that is effective is a sort of bagpipe filled with oil that can be squeezed under the arm to spray out a wide jet. If a torch is applied to this jet, it makes an impressive column of flame that can damage one's foe, even in gaseous form.
- **BUTTERFLY NET:** I know, this sounds pretty stupid, but vampires often turn into bats or toads or similar creatures, and something as simple as a net can be the difference between life and death.
- **GOD DUST:** I know this is difficult to obtain, but I have heard rumors that god dust does horrible things to the undead. A small amount of blood mixed with god dust might be a good bait for a trap, or may be used to coat a sword or other weapon like poison.

Actually, if there is any possible way, it would be a great boon to receive these items in excess of what is needed for our frontier troops. I have made contact with a tribe of natives that dwell in the hills to the south that are in active rebellion against their Stygian masters. These people, the Akai, as they are called, seem quite bold, but are ill prepared for the fight that lays before them. Since their territory lies between us and our foe, the enemy must move through Akai territory to strike at us, and I believe we could train these Akai to take care of our problems before they even get to us. I have made some success with providing them with some of the above weapons and with training. I fought alongside them in a deep canyon where we surprised two vampire travelers, and I could see that whereas a few weeks ago these Akai would simply have fallen as food to the vampires, with the edge I provided, they were able to destroy the two. Afterwards the Akai were simply overjoyed, and I was witness to one of the oddest impromptu celebrations I have heard of. A great bonfire was made around the bodies of our foes, and the Akai danced around and sang, firing their arrows into the air and drinking heavily. I was made the guest of honor, and many of them ran to fetch their daughters, from which I was asked to choose a mate. There may have been some ritual herbs involved as well, but I will keep the details of that to myself.

I think the Akai an excellent ally as long as they are focused on their ancestral enemy. They are a warlike and primitive people, and will likely pose difficulties for us in the future if peace comes and we need to keep them under control.


The valley is a surprisingly large area of land, and not all of it seems to be used for farming. Atop a massive circular plateau near the eastern end, we were surprised to discover ruins that presumably belonged to a previous civilization. Among them was a vast temple to forgotten gods, the entrance of which was flanked by statues of heavily armored cyclopean guards. We also discovered four keeps to the northwest of a design that was entirely foreign to us. They looked as though they were built for giants, yet the doorways were both locked and impenetrable. As we passed by one of them, we noticed that there was a flickering green light emanating from within one. There is clearly some sort of strange magic at work here, yet we were reluctant to test it for fear of what we might release. My guess is that they are all thousands of years old, yet they seemed perfectly preserved.

I later brought up these strange ruins to an odd traveler who swapped tales for a couple nights at the tavern on the lake a while back. He looked at me with a serious expression and told me that there were some secrets that were not meant to be uncovered. He advised paying these ruins no further mind. Of course I cannot do that, but you know me.

Your friend and ally,

- Ran Alkins

chapter 9: TRADE TOWNS



While Baradume, Stygia, Highmark, and Lethe certainly set the culture, economy, and pace of Eclipse, they are far from the only worthwhile places in the Cauldron to visit or to live. As with any region, the smaller towns of Eclipse are in some ways better markers of what “normal” life is like here. The Cauldron is literally dotted with towns and settlements, the larger ones typically being centered either around important natural resources or along trade routes. Smaller settlements are typically simple farming villages, communities of growers, gatherers, or fishermen. It is not uncommon either for cults to build secret compounds in the dark or for eccentric communes to form here away from judgmental eyes. There even a small handful of isolated hamlets that have no contact with the outside world at all, and a few that don’t even know it exists.

Most small towns in Eclipse lack the resources and the pull of the big cities to drive markets to them, and so must be more self reliant. Some towns make their livelihoods by serving as important stopovers for merchants who wish to do business in Eclipse. Others eke out an existence farming the few edible crops that will grow in the darkness, crafting goods that have practical daily applications, and providing regular services that make it possible to live without sunlight.

The ordinary people of Eclipse are like the people anywhere else one might travel. Children like to run barefoot over the moss-covered landscape, fishers throw their lines and their nets into the water in hopes of bringing home dinner for their families (as well as a little extra for the market), mystics heal the sick while the undertakers bury the dead. The lives of the people in the outlying areas are simpler than those of the cities, and yet each town has its own distinctly different culture and flavor. While the social elite of Baradume may dismiss these places as “quaint” or irrelevant, they provide much of the lifeline that allows people to survive here. I am always amazed at the hubris of “civilized” folk who do not seem to understand that if the small trade cities and the pastoral elements of the Cauldron were eliminated, their city would wither away and starve. There is little point in trying to argue with them though; they typically repay my insight with a scoff and then return to their art or their books.

Not all of Eclipse’s towns and hamlets bear mention in this book. Some are essentially just like the farm towns found anywhere on the Forge, and are not worth the time it would take to catalog them all. Others are experiments, young towns on shaky ground that very likely won’t exist by the time you read these words.

Due in part to Colopitiron's pulls, settlements spring up in the Forge faster than one could even document them. For this chapter, I have chosen a mere sampling for you, a collection of towns that I feel both represent Eclipse and that have stood the test of time enough to warrant some study. So then, it is best to begin where all journeys begin here—in Erebus.

EREBUS

Erebus is a border town, and as such, has an interesting mix of inhabitants. It lies along the main route between Baradume and the outside world, and is home to many a rich and prosperous merchant. Erebus is an extension of Baradume politically, though the thieves have “outlawed” theft here to encourage trade. Most who make the journey from Penance don't go any further into Eclipse than Erebus. For one, it is lit... lumin plants are set atop poles that are placed along all the city streets, providing a pleasant gaslit feel and good visibility for light-sighters. Secondly, the imagined lawlessness and savagery of the other towns in Eclipse turns off many honest merchants.

The town itself has a varied and ever-changing population. Traveling merchants from Penance arrive here and rent temporary storefronts (or set up booths in the bazaar), and citizens from Baradume, Stygia, Lethe, and elsewhere come to Erebus to buy and sell goods. It's actually rather hard to buy anything in the larger cities due to their unusual economies, so most regular shopping in Eclipse starts and ends here. Highmark encourages merchants to go the extra four hundred miles or so to set up shop with them, though it remains to be seen whether this is a plausible endeavor.

While Highmark has a pleasant, safe, and well-lit town that appeals to merchants, most who come to Erebus don't have their own ships, and don't want to risk the voyage or take the extra time needed for travel. To compensate, Highmark has taken to keeping some ships permanently in the Erebus harbor to shuttle travelers back and forth between the two cities, but this still hasn't drawn the merchants, who don't want to narrow their markets, especially by going to a town that is renowned for not having any money. This move has also drawn the ire of some of the more established shipping companies, who don't like seeing anyone give their services away for free. What the cities seem to have settled on for now is a system where a number of government-sponsored folk from Highmark shuttle back and forth on a regular basis, buying goods here and then distributing them to the public when they return home. A number of the ex-Hammerfallers can be found here with wagon trains loading up goods for the citizens. A quick survey of the stalls though is enough to see that Highmark seems to be buying a lot more than it is able to sell in food and crafts, as most of its money still goes into rebuilding itself. It is curious to see what will happen when their coffers finally run dry.

The guilds of Baradume essentially “own” Erebus, and most of the wealth that is generated here finds its way back to them. The thieves have appointed a governor to run the town, a young ancient named Cedrus Galan, who is in charge of keeping the peace and filling the city's coffers. Unlike in Baradume, property laws are very important here, as the guilds understand very well that their success in trade is dependent upon the merchants feeling

safe. Punishments however are inconsistent, and Galan seems to go lighter on those from Baradume or other places where they don't have personal property and may not understand the concept well. Not all disputes over property are easily settled, and Galan will often confiscate goods and put them into the city's coffers if it can't be determined who the rightful owner is. His attitude is less cavalier if the stolen property happens to belong to the city, in which case he has been known to lock suspected thieves in the dungeons for years in order to teach them a lesson.

On my last visit to Erebus, I presented Galan with a gift from Highmark, a gold statuette depicting a haze warrior, resplendent in heavy armor and wielding a greatsword in both hands. According to Highmark, this was a reproduction of an original that had sat upon the desk of Lady Megaera before the destruction of Hammerfall. Galan, pleased with the gesture, allowed me to stay in his manor for a week so I could observe the goings-on. While he maintains a polite court, and there is a great deal of finery on display, it was clear to me that Galan was surrounded by some of the most unsavory characters I had met in the hold of any ruler. Dansegur, his closest advisor, is a human noble who makes his fortune operating as a fence on the streets. He particularly likes to trade stolen property to merchants from Arena because they tend to carry a great deal of gold, which he then exchanges for items that enhance his own comfort and decadence. Another courtier is Janser, a woman who, I learned, uses her food-trade business as a front to cover for a rather successful slave-trade business. Finally, there is Mentoch, the Captain of the Guard, who has been known to mete out rough justice on various members of the community that he simply “doesn't trust”. He has also been known to run a sword through the guts of his own men if their performance displeases him. In exchange for effectively sanctioning their practices, they keep Galan supplied with goddust. None of them consider their actions dishonest or corrupt (despite the fact that they actively hide their activities from the public), and they are ruthless in defending their interests. Somehow, despite all of these unsavory characters operating at the top, the city of Erebus itself remains an orderly and inviting place, both to live and to visit. I, on the other hand, was more than happy to take my leave after I had remained a guest long enough to appear polite.

Trade within the city is relatively straightforward. People in Eclipse have little patience for wasting time on complex taxes (especially when they can't be written down), so any merchant who wants to do business here must rent a storefront from the city. The nicer, bigger, and better placed the storefront, the more it costs. The city owns all the retail buildings and collects all the money from their use. A luxury storefront might cost over 500gp a week. Smaller merchants can rent space outside of the Erebus Bazaar for as little as 25gp per day (or equivalent in merchandise). The city takes payment in all forms of merchandise. A number of terrans (underground guides) also live here, and they have storefronts where one can rent their services to take the trek through to Penumbra in Wildwood (or elsewhere).

War parties come to Erebus from Arena to trade for goddust from the merchants in Husk. Large parties are not allowed in Husk, and if anyone wants to trade in the dust, it is required that he leave his military forces behind in Erebus. Sometimes these parties from Arena get a little unruly, but Galan can order the lumin

plants to be covered, plunging the city into darkness, which generally curtails the shenanigans. Galan's defense force is mostly made up of haze soldiers that are paid well and live good lives, making them relatively hard to bribe or turn against their master.

Below are some of the more memorable personalities who call Erebus home:

- **Cadmus Clay:** This pale picker is Erebus' most well known, most celebrated, and (arguably) best guide. He keeps between fifteen and twenty other guides in his employ at any given time, as well as a small army of hired guards to escort parties through Erebus and the whole of Eclipse. Cadmus is one of the most recognizable figures in town, known for his wide-brimmed straw hat and his gnarled wooden walking stick. In the time I have spent with him, I have known him to be of good humor and always with a story to tell, as well as being much versed in lore pertaining to the Cauldron. In fact, despite the fact that I have walked the land far longer than he, Cadmus was able to relate a number of events to me that I had not previously heard, and which I was able, through a variety of his sources, to corroborate.
- **Cedrus Galan:** A young human immortal originally from Baradume, Cedrus Galan acts as sovereign in Erebus, though he does little to exercise that authority. Instead, he is mostly focused on extending his life through the consumption of goddust, while allowing the loose governing systems to maintain order. He has three wives, Entilla, Saris, and Morida, all of them young humans who he married within the past five years. He does not share his goddust with his spouses, and his previous wives left quietly for Baradume when they grew old and no longer pleased him. I have heard entirely believable stories that he keeps his wives and children at a distance, interacting with them only when it serves his purpose. He otherwise sleeps alone, eats alone, and spends his free time wandering the halls of his manor attended by his servants. Galan is one of the few ancients I have seen that seems to be growing in girth rather than height—perhaps a trick of genetics, or possibly a deliberate choice. His looks are deceiving, as under his thick skin of fat he is an enormous hulk of muscle. I witnessed him single-handedly lifting an ancient marble statue that had toppled over onto one of his men (whom he had just thrown across the room in anger).
- **Kjetil Modust:** One of the most successful and connected merchants in Erebus, Kjetil is a silver who left Penance five years ago under mysterious circumstances. The story in Penance is that he owed a great deal of gold to various moneylenders and then skipped out of the city without repaying them. This would be consistent with the lavish lifestyle he enjoys in his three story manor, as well as the fact that at least five people who have arrived in town looking for him have been found dead. Kjetil specializes in trading objects that are finely crafted, often out of gold or other precious metals. I have heard tales that his manor is protected by a variety of magical creatures, including a flesh golem that he constructed himself.
- **Lucian Black:** The cruel master of the powerful Blackwater shipping company, Black cuts an impressive figure in Erebus. Black wanders the markets with a small entourage of bodyguards and hanger's on (looking more



for women than for goods), and loves nothing more than to pick fights with those who he feels have slighted him. The city turns a blind eye to his transgressions though, as his company funds much of the city through their harbor taxes.

- **Koremus Den:** One of the few Frey who have settled in Erebus, Koremus makes his living by trading in gold. He has lines of credit with several of the warlords from Arena, who supply him with steady gold in exchange for shipping them items that are only found in Eclipse (or at least found more cheaply here than elsewhere). Due to the fact that most of Eclipse does not use traditional money, and because the majority of the Forge does, importing enough gold for natives to make exchanges with outside merchants is a service that is in high demand, and it is one that Koremus is happy to provide. Needless to say, all exchanges come out slightly in his favor, which is why he needs not engage in any other profession in order to live a comfortable life.
- **Vestona Gour:** A human woman who is well liked within the city, Vestona is a well-known information broker in Erebus. There are few secrets within the city that she doesn't know, and she is also well aware of the happenings in the larger cities. She manages to acquire her information through paid agents as well as her inherent charm, which has been known to expose many people's secrets.

The following are some of the more noteworthy locations in Erebus:

- **Erebus Keep:** This is a strong, walled structure constructed of dark basalt rock, and which serves as the courthouse, jail, and barracks of Erebus. Justice is swift in Erebus; once a suspect has been presented to the judge, they are fined for most offenses. Those who can't pay their fines are put into the dungeons for a spell. If the city deems one's crimes too offensive to society or one poses a threat to the city itself, one may be put to death. Sentences are carried out via hangings on the gallows within the keep's courtyard. As with elsewhere in Eclipse, there are few laws in Erebus and the judges handle each case individually and subjectively.
- **Cedrus Galan's Manor:** Unlike many rulers, Cedrus Galan conducts the city's business in his manor rather than the keep. His manor is divided between the areas used for public business and the portion inhabited by himself, his family, and his servants. Due to his solitary nature and chronically intoxicated state, he further divides the private portion of his manor between areas meant for his wives and children and the areas where he can remain in solitude. The manor itself takes after the unmistakable architecture of Baradume, with a white exterior, ornate columns supporting the roof covering the front porch, and relief images depicting armed warriors sculpted on the walls near the doors. There is a statue that once depicted Cedrus in the front yard, but Cedrus hacked the head and right arm from the statue in an intoxicated rage several years ago and they have not been replaced.
- **Crossroads Tavern:** The Crossroads Tavern lies on the

outskirts of town and is the preferred place for rashers to spend their idle time. The place is dimly lit and the ale is not known for its great taste (in fact, some describe it as gritty), but the patrons are allowed to be rowdy. When tables and chairs become the casualties of the tavern's activities, the owner, an enormous valco named Forten, charges double the cost to replace or repair the items, and his collection practices are notoriously ruthless. While he handles the business of the tavern, it is actually run by a civilized ogre named Harganthus, who acts as bartender and bouncer.

- **Domains of the Forge Market:** This is the main market of Erebus, where merchants from throughout the Forge come to trade their wares. It is also the main location where goods are brought into Eclipse, so the sheer amount of property traded here is massive. It is not uncommon to simply meet clients at this location and then trade goods at another location, such as a ship, warehouse, or caravan. The market is divided into indoor and outdoor sections. The indoor section consists of booths of various sizes, which are rented out to merchants who wish to maintain the most professional appearances. The gp cost of renting one of these booths for a week is equal to the square footage of the area multiplied by 3. The outdoor section costs a flat rate of 150gp per week, and the vendors are allowed to take up whatever amount of space that they can get away with. Often, when the market becomes crowded with vendors, rival vendors attack those who they perceive are using an unfair amount of space.
- **Ceptu Harbor:** The southernmost section of Erebus' harbor is cordoned off from sailing ships, and is reserved for the exclusive use of the ceptu, who maintain a small underwater city here. Dolphins can be seen playing in the harbor, and lights twinkle in the water, marking the buildings and roads of the town. Those who wish to do business with the ceptu can approach the docks here, and the area is often quite busy with the loading and unloading of goods and passengers. The ceptu do have a proper name for their town, but it is unpronounceable to air-breathing folk, so they take no offense at the term "Ceptu Harbor of Erebus".
- **The Wailing Spire:** Located roughly two miles outside of town, in a valley choked with odd thorny vines and rare lichens that give off a rusty glow, stands a towering structure that is commonly referred to as the Wailing Spire. The spire is over three-hundred feet tall, obsidian black, and lined with barbs and spikes. The valley around the spire is filled with strange, otherworldly monsters that tend not to wander far from this location, and the area is haunted with the ominous sound of the wailing of inhuman voices. The spire is ancient, its origins dating back even to my time. While in my day it served as a weather rod to clear the mists around the city, it appears now to have fallen to another use, its magics having somehow gone awry over the years. I chose to leave it alone, as has Colopitiron, as its inhabitants keep to themselves, but there is a general feeling of unease about the place.

Salomon,

I hear from Rielle that you are leaving us. I expect you feared I would react with anger—hurt that you no longer wish our protection. No. I fully understand your desires and motives, and do not concern myself that this decision had anything to do with me. I wish you all the best, truly. But I do believe that you are a colossal fool.

It is one thing to attract a following, to draw people in and inspire them, and another entirely to try to live forever. And trust me, there is no point in all of the decades of effort and work put into a guild if one cannot be there to enjoy it when it finally begins to grow and blossom.

You are a promising young man. I have grown to appreciate your talents, and I do see a spark of something larger in you. In time I believe I would have shared with you my secrets. I would have kept your youth alive, because it pleases me. Your impatience has always been your downfall, and I have foreseen this betrayal since the beginning. You are impetuous, and you will not listen to my advice I know, which is why I choose to offer it to you here. Your punishment is not my wrath, but my kindness that I know you will not heed, and in the coming years, as you falter and fail, I will only look at you and smile.

Before you can be anyone in Baradume, you must first secure your own dust mine. The substance simply cannot be bought. Yes, you may find it convenient to go in together with some other young upstart, but in the long run it will only put the two of you at each other's throats. The true allure of the dust is not just that you can extend your life, but that you can use it to control the people below you. And as a guildmaster, you must have complete and utter control. There will always be some young fool gunning for your power, whether you see it happening or not.

There is no more addictive substance on the Forge. What else can make you stronger, faster, smarter, more attractive, better in every way, with no drawbacks. This is not a drugged version of you, this is a better version of you; and that it is truly you makes all the difference. All the imperfections and mortal flaws that hold everyone back are lifted and cast away. And trust me, you would do anything to keep them from coming back. Once the veil is lifted, there is no way to return to that former shadow life. You are transformed. The people who you save are forever in your debt. They will do anything to keep the flow of the stuff coming. Anything. Your young mind has no idea what people are truly capable of. A steady supplier is far more rare and valuable than a mere position of power; they will not question your rule once they are on the dust. You are their god, and they are your subjects. Absolute.

MINING

Land is fairly cheap in the Cauldron. In fact, it's essentially free. Go out into the wastes and find yourself an open space and start digging. No one is going to stop you; there's no laws or regulations to heed—you just need bare earth. Of course, not every mine will hit a vein. You have to know where to dig first. I have found the "seekers" employed by the Warlords of Arena often have skills that help in this arena as well. Pay one well and he may be able to find you a site to dig. Better yet though, don't pay him until your mine actually finds something. Just because a man has a skill doesn't mean he will use it. All skills take effort, and people don't make an effort if they don't have to.

Next you are going to need to find someone you can trust who is willing to run your mine for you. And I mean really trust. Your mother might qualify, but not everyone has what it takes to keep a mine in order. The best thing to look for are people with cruel, petty minds. Smart folk who don't ever think too big. To run a mine you need to abuse people, and no one will abuse people that much for that long unless they enjoy it. Find the right person and feed them some dust and you will be giving them the opportunity to abuse folk forever—living the dream.

Workers are easy enough to come by, but few will put up with such conditions for long. We use only haze who have been born and bred in the mines and who do not know or understand the world beyond what they have seen there. Crows, we don't even have to pay them; they don't have the slightest concept of money or what it might be used for. And you must get over any delusions of altruism. You can't run a god dust mine without cruelty. It is simply too much work under too difficult conditions for someone to do unless they are forced to do it. Some folk use prisoners, and justify their cruelty as a deserved sentence, but that's just self-delusion. Cruelty is cruelty, and the backs of others are there for you to lift yourself up upon. Don't make their sacrifice be in vain by holding sad regrets. If you don't live enough life for a thousand people, you are a waste of resources, and you will be replaced, one way or another.

And next you'll need guards. Not just to keep the miners in line, but to protect the mine. Once you've done all the work to uncover the vein, you run the risk of someone else just waltzing in and taking the fruits of all your labors. There's a reason we dig way out in the wastes; remoteness equals protection. Sure it's boring, but there's no nightling raids to worry about, no indigenous peoples to be offended by your presence, and no army is going to sneak up on you and take your claim. Now remember though, guards cannot be coerced. They must be paid, and paid well. And if you are serious about their loyalty, you will provide consorts for them. Now once you have consorts, you'll need somewhere for them to live as well, and people to run stores and cook food, and all that business of civilization. Do you have the resources? It will take nothing short of an entire town to provide you with your fix. And it will not grow overnight.

GODDUST MUTATIONS

My lord, in order to properly illuminate the adjacent document, I have compiled my own enumeration of the various effects of raw goddust contact. The effect is completely random, with unexpected contact increasing the chances of undesirable results and death. Basically, take a 1 in 100 chance and match fate's result to the list below. I figure that unexpected contact effectively adds 20% to one's result.

- | D100 | Effect |
|-------|--|
| 01-02 | Skeletal and muscular structures thicken: Permanent gain of 1d3 Strength |
| 03-04 | Hypersensitive nerves: Permanent gain of 1d3 Dexterity |
| 05-06 | Enhanced stamina: Permanent gain of 1d3 Constitution |
| 07-08 | Head swells: Permanent gain of 1d3 points of Intelligence |
| 09-10 | Clarity: Permanent gain of 1d3 Wisdom |
| 11-12 | Beautified: Permanent gain of 1d3 points of Charisma |
| 13-14 | Spell-like ability, minor: Can cast 1d3 1 st , 2 nd , or 3 rd level spells as an innate spell-like ability once per day plus once more per point of Intelligence bonus (spells are randomly selected, and may be arcane or divine in nature). |
| 15-16 | As above, but spells are 4 th , 5 th , or 6 th level. |
| 17-18 | Precision: 1d3 randomly selected skills gain a permanent +5 bonus |
| 19-20 | Insight: 1d3 randomly selected skills gain a +10 bonus |
| 21-22 | Dispelling touch: Can cast <i>dispel magic</i> 1/day plus once more per point of Intelligence bonus by touch as a free action |
| 23-24 | New eyes: Gain 1d6 functioning eyes placed randomly about the body; +2 to visual <i>Perception</i> checks per new eye |
| 25-26 | New arms: Gain 1d4 functioning arms, placed randomly on the torso; additional melee attack per round at highest attack bonus per two arms gained |
| 27-28 | New legs: Gain 1d4 functioning legs, placed randomly on the torso; 5-foot movement bonus per leg gained |
| 29-30 | New ears: Gain 1d6 functioning ears placed randomly about the body; +2 auditory <i>Perception</i> checks per new ear |
| 31-32 | New head: Gain a functioning head in a random location that mimics the actions of the original; gain one additional standard action per round |
| 33-34 | Gift: Gain either a random arrival or earned gift |
| 35-36 | Evolution: Gain the first tier of one random evolution without having to meet the XP or level requirements; "unavailable to" entries in evolution description remains in effect |
| 37-38 | Tentacles: 2d4 thick, 10-foot-long tentacles randomly sprout from the body and function as arms. Gain the <i>Improved Grab</i> special ability. Gain one additional melee attack per round at highest attack bonus per two arms gained; slam damage is according to creature size. If tentacles are already possessed, there is a 50% chance that preexisting tentacles double in length. There is also a 50% chance that all tentacles (new and existing) become retractable. |
| 39-40 | Carapace: Skin turns to chitin, +1d4 natural armor bonus |
| 41-42 | Webbed feet: Gain swim speed of 30 |
| 43-44 | Microfilament pads: Gain climb speed of 20 |
| 45-46 | Wings: Gain Fly speed of 40 (average) |
| 47-48 | Telepathy: Deliver your thoughts without speech or language to any creature within 300 feet. |
| 49-50 | Youth: Physical age is reduced by 10 years (death ensues if you are less than 10 years old). |
| 51-52 | Extra mouths: Gain 1d6 functioning mouths placed randomly about the body; gain an extra bite attack at highest attack bonus per two mouths gained; damage is according to creature size |
| 53-54 | Limbs wither: Permanent loss of 1d3 Strength |
| 51-56 | Club foot: One leg becomes bloated and bulbous; permanent loss of 1d3 points of Dexterity |
| 57-58 | Diseased: Become carrier of one random disease; permanent loss of 1d3 Constitution |
| 59-60 | Head shrinks: Permanent loss of 1d3 points of Intelligence |
| 61-62 | Dulled senses: Permanent loss of 1d3 points of Wisdom |
| 59-64 | Shifted facial features: Permanent loss of 1d3 points of Charisma |
| 65-66 | Drifting thoughts: +10 chance of spell failure for either arcane or divine spells |
| 67-68 | Fogged thoughts: +20 chance of spell failure for either arcane or divine spells |
| 69-70 | Magic sustenance: Must consume 1d6 charges (determined once) of a charged magic item or absorb one permanent magic item per day; failure incurs a cumulative -1 circumstance penalty per day to all actions until a full day's amount of magic is consumed |
| 71-72 | Forgetful: 1d3 randomly selected skills suffer a permanent -5 penalty |
| 73-74 | Absentminded: 1d3 randomly selected skills suffer a permanent -10 penalty |
| 75-76 | Invisible: Your flesh become permanently and irrevocably transparent. Gain permanent invisibility, but lose the ability for others to ever see you. |
| 77-78 | Magic allergy: Wearing or using magic items causes a blistering rash, incurring a -2 circumstance penalty to all actions lasting until 1 day after contact or use |
| 79-80 | Negation touch, minor: Magic items fail to function when worn, touched, or used 25% of the time |
| 81-82 | Negation touch, major: Magic items fail to function when worn, touched, or used 50% of the time |
| 83-84 | Venom: Become capable of injecting random poison through a natural attack |
| 85-86 | Tendrils: 10d10 6-inch tendrils sprout from the body; gain burrow speed equal to base speed; +10 burrow speed if already possessed |
| 87-88 | Substitute tentacles: A random number of limbs are replaced with 5-foot tentacles that otherwise function as "tentacles" entry above |
| 89-90 | Flaming: Continuously burn like a lit torch. The pain will go away after a while, but your touch deals 1d6 points of fire damage, and nearby objects will ignite. |
| 91-94 | Gigantism: Size class increases by 1d4 steps with Colossal being the largest size obtainable; +3 HD per size increased |
| 95-98 | Dwarfism: Size class decreases by 1d4 steps with Fine being the smallest size obtainable; -1 HD per size decreased |
| 99+ | Death: Instant and irrevocable |

RAW DUST

So. Ten years in you hit your first vein of dust. You have built your distillation and reclamation facility, and have converted the ten tons of grey ash to a few ounces of precious powder. Are you rich? Have all your dreams come true? No, your troubles are only beginning. Raw dust is both a curse and a blessing. It is highly unstable and dangerous, and provides none of the benefits of the refined stuff, but that is what makes the whole operation viable. If the real stuff come ready out of the ground, then you'd never get your shipments. Your mine boss would just take it all for himself and you'd be working for him. No, the stuff that comes out of the mine is a dangerous mess. Here's a good reason to not skimp on the mining equipment—direct contact can be fatal... or worse. Of course, that won't stop you, will it? Go ahead. Take your chances and roll the dice. Each gram of raw dust that you come into contact with will melt into your flesh and change you permanently, during which time you will likely lose control of your body for up to six minutes.

There is no rhyme or reason to the specific result—some effects are valued, others nightmarish. Unexpected contact is the worst, the raw energy is unfocused—your chances will be far greater of exhibiting the most terrible changes.

Care to spin the wheel of fate yet? Now, I should warn you that each time a dose is absorbed, there is roughly a cumulative ten percent chance that your body will morph completely into a new form. The raw power of immortality will destroy your mind, and you will become a pure monster—one of the fell creatures known simply as "the dusted".

REFINEMENT

But of course, there is another way. I would have told you the secrets, had you watted, but now you will have to steal them to survive. The pure dust. Each gram of raw dust becomes only a few grains when refined, hardly indistinguishable from a pinch of silver salt. I advise you to learn the ritual yourself, for no wizard will perform the ritual for anything less than a steady supply of the finished product. In essence, you will be his slave, not he yours.

So what is the secret recipe then? That's what amuses me most. I can tell you exactly what you need and how to do it, but without the proper sense of timing and the correct methods of mixing, your precious batch will be ruined. Refine well my friend, for a ruined batch is no better than raw dust... only with a 10% added chance of death thrown in to make things interesting.

Here's what you need to start the ritual. Of course, I could be lying, or leaving something out; I guess you will have to find out yourself.

- 1 gram of raw god dust
- 1 pound of platinum
- 10 doses of balm of arcae
- 4 ounces of your own hot blood
- 2 ounces of vampire blood
- 10 grams dried kha'nall root
- 20 nisankh blossoms
- A feather from one of the birds of the Seven

The ritual is not unlike those employed in brewing potions, and if you have the skill for that pursuit, you should have little trouble with this operation. The ritual should take you about three sleeps, though you must remain awake and alert the entire time. Note that you can refine multiple doses in the same ritual, though most of the ingredients will multiply. During the ritual, you will need to perform the following magical incantations:

- Refinement
- Fate
- Oathbind
- Disintegrate

Well, are you ready to run your own guild yet? You had better be. If your face ever graces my court again your entrails will hold the spiced gorak sausages for our next celebration.

Yours in eternity,

-Darius Doorn

HUSK

I traveled to Husk only once, and I found it to be a grim and uninviting town. The city has no light of its own, and color-sighted creatures are almost never welcomed by its inhabitants. Mining operations are based here for the goddust mines to the southwest. The workers, those who retain some semblance of freedom at least, work long, hard hours for only a few silver a day, most of which is given up anyway to the bosses who own the town. Many residents come to Husk because the place is touted as somewhere an honest person will be rewarded for honest work, but what they find when they arrive is not pleasant at all. The working conditions here will kill the weaker workers in little time, and the pay is just barely enough to make ends meet. What the miners lack in earnings, however, they make up for with a tough-guy image that is known throughout Eclipse. Those who do not survive the mines are regarded as weaklings who should never have left the protective confines of more civilized places like Baradume.

Aside from the owners of the mines, there is no official power structure in Husk. Most of the powerful guilds of Baradume have their own mine here. In fact, it's relatively impossible to become the master of a guild in Baradume without first securing a mine in order to preserve one's own lifespan. Rivalries between the guilds here are far nastier than in Baradume. Aside from occasionally auctioning off slave workers to one another, there is little cooperation between houses. Bad blood from Baradume often manifests itself here in the form of mob fights and petty assassinations. It is not unheard of for a mine to give some of the workers a day off so that they can harass the workers of another guild and raid their quarters.

Especially successful raids sometimes net a quantity of goddust, the loss of which is seen as an embarrassment to any guild. The punishment for this type of failure varies from guild to guild. The mine owners in Baradume provide their chapterhouses here with soldiers, magic, and other defensive protections, so the loss of goddust is seen as a failure at the highest levels of the operation. For this reason, local foremen who fail in such a spectacular way often find themselves replaced, killed, or forced to work the mines.

Husk, unfortunately, is where a merchant must go if he wants to trade in the goddust. Representatives of the mines escort prospective traders here from Erebus to negotiate. The miners find that they are offered better trades if the merchants are not allowed to bring their armies with them, and the merchants cooperate since they otherwise cannot do business. Goddust is rare and valuable enough that it is almost never traded for mundane amounts of gold. Generally, something of extreme value is needed in trade, or possibly a large number of slaves to work the mines.

Husk itself is filled with numerous buildings—small apartments, houses, and sturdy keeps that belong to the guilds. The streets are narrow, just large enough to get a single severn and wagon through in most places, and the properties lack yards of any kind. Alleyways between buildings are quite common, most of them filled with garbage and vermin. Most of the houses and apartments are clustered around the keeps, the workers genuinely requiring the protection that their guild offers. There are a few shops that sell items that are essential for survival, such as food and clothing, but there is not a large amount of trade in this city, nor is there an open market. Most nonessential goods are purchased directly from one's guildhouse, and most workers are in heavy debt to their guilds, few able to ever extract themselves



from the indentured servitude that arises from mine employment. Valuable items are never auctioned openly, in an effort to prevent violence between the guilds.

The guilds keeps are also used as pleasure palaces to woo the visiting warlords from Arena. Guilds generally provide a retinue of beauties to entertain and serve the prospective customers. Exotic liquors, creatures, and entertainments are also provided, all in an effort to secure a better price from a sated warlord. Some of the keeps even contain miniature arenas, and some guilds are not above sending beautiful women into the ring, stripped down and forced to fight to the death for the pleasures of the watching visitors.

The political structure in the city is unstable, the power shifting from one guild to another from month to month. It is impossible to predict who will be in power in Husk at any given time. One thing that never changes though is the mood of the town, remaining tumultuous, violent, and grim, regardless of the outcomes of the ongoing battles in the streets. In such a climate, the one group that does well for itself is the mercenaries who are drawn here to serve as guards and as protectors for the mines. Under the existing system, mercenaries find work with one of many mercenary companies, who then bid their services to the guilds. Good mercenaries are much in demand, and mercenary companies are notoriously ruthless in their negotiations. It is not unusual for a company to leave one guild to work for a rival, and then spend its time trying to invade the same keep it just spent the last year defending. Mercenary service is far from a free ride however, and those who aren't cut out for it end up dead within a quarter-moon.

The mines themselves are located some miles out into the wastes from the town. A whole other class of workers actually does the mining itself (the bulk of the town simply are involved in shipping, security, trade, and the transport of raw materials). Deep in the mines lives a race of haze that have never known freedom, being carefully trained from birth to know nothing of the outside world. The haze work in conditions that no free man would ever subject himself too, or even any slave who knew there was something else he could escape to. They live their entire lives in the mines, working until they drop, with only occasional breaks for breeding and feeding. The goddust mines are notorious for the use of acids and toxins, and even those who are not crippled by industrial accidents have significant health problems.

SABOR

Sabor is one of the more visually striking towns on the Forge, even if it isn't the most pleasant place to live. Sabor is built vertically in a great spiral a mile across that descends downwards into the earth to Lacuna, the sister city below. From the top, Sabor



looks like the inside of an endless corkscrew of houses, workshops, and forges, its fires lighting the way down with a bright orange glow. A loose sprawl of buildings spreads out from the top edge of the city where most of the shops and trade centers are. Massive cranes reach out from the top on bridges across the crater, hauling raw materials up from the mines a mile below. Within the crater, large bridges constructed of stone or crystal crisscross the chasm, connecting various places that commonly do business with each other, giving the interior of the chasm somewhat of a web-like look. Sabor also has a large population of flying creatures, such as asherake and chromithians, who can easily travel from one place to another in the city via the shortest distance (a straight line).

Sabor is a border town of sorts... it represents the surface face of



Lacuna, the pale city that is the center of Eclipse's underground civilization. Sabor is a town of grim-faced blacksmiths and stonemasons, rugged no-nonsense folks who create most of the raw materials for the artisans of Baradume. Sabor explicitly does not deal in goddust, as the town values its freedom. The people here understand that if they trade in something more valuable than their labor and skills, they will lose control of their fates. In the past, there have been attempts to unify the various artisans into overarching powerful guilds, or to embark upon grand new industries that would transform the city and make it more prosperous, but such moves are never accepted by the people. Ultimately, they people of Sabor prefer their lives as uncomplicated as possible, allowing them to maintain as much control as possible over their own freedoms.

The city is run politically by the pale masters of Lacuna, but to make a show of independence, the pale have allowed Sabor to elect their own mayor, currently a female asherake by the name of Felaka Tarak, a mayor who has surprised the pale by sliding somewhat beyond their control. Tarak has proven more popular in the city than expected, and the people of Sabor have developed a great respect for her, which has allowed Sabor to move away from Lacuna politically in the last few years. Tarak has lessened the tribute paid to the pale, and even threatened to stop payment altogether and declare independence. The pale have retaliated in a variety of ways, most recently by burning noxious materials and garbage in the center of their city, which fills Sabor with a toxic, stinking smoke. While this unfortunately got the pale their way in the short term, the people of Sabor have not relented entirely in their demands. The relationship is currently uneasy, and with agents from Highmark arriving and offering assistance and protection to the Sabor government, things look to get testier still.

Tarak's appearance is unusual for an asherake. While most asherake have light colored fur, hers is dark. Her wings are likewise black, and her eyes are bright green. Her disposition is thoughtful and kind, and her policies are dictated by reason and the greater responsibility to her people, as opposed to the emotion and violence that are common for her species. Some have suggested that she is not truly an asherake but another species entirely that merely resembles them. Nevertheless, she has taken an asherake husband whose appearance is typical for his race, though he is also an unusually kind and thoughtful member of the species, and the couple has produced two offspring together.

One of Sabor's most prominent citizens is the pale dover Ban Argus, a deep delver who is said to have explored more of Eclipse's caverns and interacted

with more of Eclipse's underground societies than any living surface dweller. Nobody doubts Ban's competency and his ability to lead groups through Eclipse's subterranean regions, though many have complained about the dover's lack of interpersonal skills. He tends to have little patience with people who require a great deal of attention, going so far as to admonish them for their shortcomings even when they have paid handsomely for his services. Ban is also not one to shy away from a fight, which has led some of his clients to complain that he has put them in danger. Despite these issues, he is still highly sought after, and people who hire him usually do so knowing his limitations and try to act in ways that will not irritate him.

Sabor, although small, remains one of the more unique cities on the Forge, and has no shortage of fascinating places to entertain or to awe. A few of my favorites are as follows:

- **The Dover's Den:** This is a luxurious tavern located deep within the city. The tavern is decorated like a harem of a king, with silk curtains and pillows, steaming samovars, and smoking hookahs. Owned by the female dover Croya, it is actually a welcoming place to all genders and members of all species. Ban Argus frequents this place often and he usually chooses this location to meet with prospective clients. He also has a long-standing romantic relationship with Croya.
- **The Crystal:** This is a square-shaped free-floating glass platform that is five hundred feet to a side and offers an amazing view of the city below. While there were originally no structures built onto the platform, an expensive inn that has been constructed from quartz now sits there. There are no bridges or other structures connecting the platform to the remainder of the city, and the people who visit typically use magical means to travel there, such as teleportation or fly spells, or flying carpets. A man named Allor Trafinnis, originally from Baradume, famously made an arrival a few years back by strapping on a pair of non-magical bat wings and gliding to the platform from the edge of the crater above. He managed to avoid other obstacles on his way down, and landed on the platform as intended. When later it was learned that he was a tinkerer with no magical talent and that his wings had previously been untested (meaning that his descent carried with it the very real potential for catastrophic failure and death), Trafinnis went on to start up a very successful business crafting and selling these wings to thrill seekers. Regarding the inn itself, I found that the prices were ridiculously high, the food was mediocre at best, and the beds were hard and uncomfortable. I would not recommend staying there unless you have an extra-low-cost deal worked out with the proprietor. On the other hand, the tavern on the first floor of the inn is unique due to the patrons who frequent the place and the exceptionally good ale and wine that they serve. There is also an astounding view of the city below from the platform, and a thick railing keeps all but the most determined from falling off the edge and out into the open air below.
- **The Waxworks:** The waxworks is one of the few places outside of Baradume in Eclipse where noteworthy artwork is being created. The proprietor is a retired

wizard named Perdix, and his wares are enchanted wax sculptures that come in a variety of sizes and shapes. The items are crafted into miniature dragons, depictions of famous heroes, political figures, flowers, and other shapes. All of the waxworks are exquisitely crafted and are enchanted with minor magics of various sorts. Many of the wax sculptures appear to come to life when activated. Others project illusory stories, while still others perform other minor magical tricks. The greatest creation within the waxworks is a towering wax golem that greets customers as they enter and performs all of the heavy lifting required by the master.

- **The Towering Frey Inn:** The name of this inn is an intentional misnomer on the part of the owner. The proprietor is an asherake with a noteworthy sense of humor who lost his wings during a misadventure with a volosaur several years ago. Since his disfigurement, Rasarl settled in Sabor where he started up the inn. Soon after, he began humorously passing himself off as a tall frey, and he changed the name of the inn accordingly. This inn also serves as a tavern, which is one of the more boisterous ones in the city. The tavern tales are particularly ribald here, and experienced wormers routinely gather here to try to outdo one another in their adventures.

LACUNA

I entered Lacuna briefly and wondered at the marvels there, though my experiences barely scratched the surface of the city's surprises. Lacuna is the most civilized and worldly of the underground cities of Eclipse. While most underground places prefer to hide away from the world and dislike outsiders and intruders, Lacuna has an active relationship with the surface world. While most of its trade is done via Sabor above it, its citizens make a point to travel and study the world, particularly with regards to science and technology.

Lacuna is run by the pale, a race of humanoids that have evolved to live without light. The pale are common throughout Eclipse, particularly in Baradume, but they are most prevalent here. Most pale have only low-light type vision, and still require some light to see. This is provided by dimly luminescent lichens that grow on the upper part of the caverns that house the city. The pale are highly intelligent, and have been accumulating wealth over millennia by trading with the surface world, particularly with Baradume. Lacuna mines metals and stone from the earth and has these items carved and smelted above in Sabor for sale to the surface dwellers. With its wealth and knowledge, Lacuna has been experimenting with many technologies, and is rumored to have built strange and powerful machines, including a tunnel borer that increases immensely the speed of mining. There are also rumors of more sinister things as well. The masters of the city remained out of sight during my visit there, and they did not make any attempts to extend any special courtesies to me.

Lacuna is built across a variety of caverns, some large, some small, and sits about a mile below the surface. Its center is a massive park filled with sculptures and machinery that is used to load the cranes to Sabor above. At its center, a great spire of pure

adamantium rises up into the shaft of Sabor. The rulers of Lacuna are shadowy and old, and likely use the goddust to prolong their lives.

SHADE

This surprisingly pleasant town is the port for Stygia. As such, it is officially under control of the vampires, but is much more welcoming to outsiders and traders. The vampires that have their estates here generally have a larger world view, and are more desirous of being connected to the “living world” than those in Stygia proper. Slavers come here to trade for jewels, and ships bearing foods come to feed the millions of living slaves in Stygia. All trade with Baradume involving the slaves pulled into the guild pens is transacted here. Shade is also a diplomatic city, and many of the emissaries of the vampires that dwell in other regions of Eclipse have their estates here.

To support their larger world view, the vampires of Shade do not prey upon the living. Instead, they have several “bleeding stations” set up throughout the city where people can go to donate their blood to the vampire lords. Blood is bought at two gold coins per pint. Some people choose to make themselves available for live feeding at the vampires’ demand for an even higher price. This is all of course a big sham engineered to make the merchants and others traders feel comfortable in coming to the city. In reality, the minute the vampires get a new shipment of slaves into their houses, they drain any number of them dead straight away. Even the blood collected is not drunk by the vampires (dead blood is useless anyway), but is instead traded to the mines of Haft in order to feed the Haze workers there. The casual observer strolling around Shade would find the place pleasant enough, and full of exquisite art and architecture, but would never see any poor or unfortunates living on the streets, and neither would he witness any crime. Consequently a few shipping magnates have their estates here as well, but most mortals discover after any amount of time spent in Shade that the place simply isn’t for them.

However, as a place that straddles the divide between the living and the undead, Shade is the natural home to a number of sorcerers and wizards who participate mainly in necromancy. One of the more unusual trades here is in raising slain slaves as zombies or skeletons (depending upon how much of them was intact following their demise) so that their remains can continue to toil perpetually after death. The undead lords of Shade find this practice distasteful, but do not make any efforts to stop it, partially due to the gold generated by selling dead slaves to the necromancers, and partly because it cuts down on the need to bury or incinerate a portion of the city’s dead.

TOMBSTONE

Tombstone is one of the stranger places I have ever visited. It’s a city where the undead (the non-vampiric type) can go to live out their “lives” unharassed and unmolested by the living. The living are free to visit, but they are not allowed to “live” here. The most common types of undead here include wights, spectres, shadows, and ghouls. Lesser undead, such as skeletons and zombies, are present, though they lack the intelligence and self awareness to act as ordinary individuals. Instead, they are often in the entourage of one of the more powerful undead creatures. Periodically, derelict

skeletons and zombies find their way here after their masters have died or the site they were created to defend has been destroyed, but they are treated like abandoned property and are usually claimed by the first intelligent undead creature to spot them.

The city lacks a centralized ruler, in fact, nobody is quite certain how this place was established, though I can say for certain that it took place after my rule. In place of a king or council, there are a number of powerful undead within the city who consult with one another when trouble arises. There are thirty or forty such individuals, and they include liches, ghosts, mummies, and spectres.

A visitor who gawks or acts judgmental will quickly find that the peaceful looking undead of the city are as terrifying as anywhere else. The city elite almost never interfere when a visitor is being attacked by the undead, though they will vigorously defend the city when it comes under attack by the living. Outsiders are actually quite rare here; the city’s location on a barren island not far from the pull of the Helix is far beyond the comfort zone of most ships, and only the most dedicated travelers would ever even attempt such a journey. How the undead themselves get there is not entirely clear. It is said that a boatman patrols the waters of the Sea of Ink, looking for lost souls to ferry across to Tombstone, though I have never come across him, and neither am I certain I wish to.

In other cities, folk who announce plans to raise an army to “deal with” Tombstone are usually persuaded not to follow through with them. Baradume does not concern itself with the city, and Highmark already has enough problems dealing with Stygia. The other trade towns of Eclipse are simply too small to be able to put up an offensive force against the city, let alone a defensive force if the city were to decide to unite its various undead factions and retaliate against them.

GODDUST

To the southwest of Erebus, towards the rising walls of the great crater, great gaping holes drop sharply into the earth. These are scars from the mining of goddust, the substance that gives the ancients the ability to prolong their lives. Goddust is the most precious commodity in Eclipse, and its production is strictly controlled by the guilds of Baradume. Goddust is material that is so far down into the earth that it has absorbed the magic of your great prison. It contains raw, unfocused divine force, and is extremely dangerous to those not familiar with how to use it. The secrets for its use are highly guarded, and only the ancients (and maybe a few others who have stolen this knowledge) know how to use it safely.

Goddust is only found in veins deep in the earth. It is most commonly found in Eclipse, as the natural depth of the land is far greater than any possible mine or excavation in any other part of the world. Goddust veins are not properly understood by the miners, but I can easily deduce that they correspond to the magical runes and energies that floated in space before the Forge was built around them. Oddly enough, as the earth is mined away, the runes and energies seem to stick to the dirt, and do not remain in their original places in space. One might suppose that if the entire Forge were mined away, these magical energies would all be broken, and your prison would be weakened to the point of breaking. However, the amount of dust that can be conceivably mined is irrelevant in the larger scheme of things, so while god-

dust mining may legitimately be eroding the binding of the great Oath, its effects are not even strong enough to trigger that Oath to defend itself.

The dust itself is a fine grayish powder, much like burnt ash. It is mined by digging and blasting to get down to a vein, and then a powerful acid is pumped into the earth. The rock around the dust veins dissolves and drains away, leaving a thin and delicate web of the material behind. The material is then collected, mixed with water and then distilled. The dirt and raw soil remain in the vats, and the precious divine energy is collected via tubes in small beakers. This distillate is then spread out on a large metal surface over a coal fire and evaporated until all that remains is a fine powder. The acid used in the mining comes from giant mushrooms that grow in the black forest. The cutting of these trees on a large scale is the source of a great deal of conflict between the Baradume controlled Erebus (where the harvesters are based) and the werran of the forests.

The mines themselves are very deep, and while there is a small camp at the top, the bulk of the population lives at the bottom in a series of caverns and tunnels deep in the earth where the substance is found. The mines are run by agents of the guilds (each mine is owned by a particular guild, and some guilds have several), and the labor is done by slaves. Most of the laborers here are haze, most born into this life and knowing little else. The mines are well guarded and their contents a well-kept secret. No one is allowed within a few miles of a mine without being part of the operation; trespassers are attacked on sight. This isolation is to prevent the haze workers from learning about the outside world and feeling the desire to escape or break their bonds. The operations at the bottom are well patrolled with soldiers too. Even the haze are trained to attack outsiders, not understanding that they might be there to help them. The haze are never allowed to leave the mines, and typically remain at the bottom, dwelling in makeshift shantytowns that serve as villages. They are provided food and some personal items in return for the dust they have mined. Of course, no food grows naturally in the mine, so as far as the haze are concerned, no mining, no food.

Once the dust has been distilled is it still not ready for use. Raw goddust is extremely potent and highly unstable. Skilled alchemists and wizards must now be employed to refine the powder for mortal consumption. The process for this is as guarded as it is complex. Ingestion of raw goddust is highly dangerous, causing a mortal's form to mutate unpredictably, and it can result in any number of changes, both beneficial and deadly, but this has already been covered in an earlier tome.

EXCERPT FROM EMPEROR OF THE ROAD: MEMOIR OF A WANDERING TRADER - BY YUSHIN VAND:

I picked up the following leather bound book in the market in Erebus. I can't say for sure whether this was a true account or intended as a work of fiction, though it appears to be a legitimate journal of a traveler from Penumbra. The age of the manuscript is apparent in the text, with the mention of villages that no longer exist and what I can only imagine must be an early prototype of the terrible scythin. The narrative is delightful however, and the story itself seems to capture much of the spirit of travel between the two domains.

"Yes, of course," I told him, for I was no fool!

With a flourish, I withdrew my letters of credit from my dusty cloak and handed them to the incredulous outfitter. By the look of him, it was a wonder he could even read, I daresay! After a studious moment, he returned them, along with a gruff invitation into his storeroom.

To be frank, I don't mind telling you that I have found myself in some vile hovels of alleged commerce in my time, but this dimly-lit horror nearly took the prize. For all the jimjow he'd given me earlier, I'd half-expected to find the Crown Jewels hidden behind that ratty silk curtain. The storeroom was small, smaller than I would have guessed from the outside of it, and near every span of it was cluttered and overwhelmed by products of dubious lineage and provenance: blocks of pressed spices from the east, rare (at least for these parts) leaves and seeds to be ground for spurious cures, animal skins, and barrels of pungent liquid lay ramshackle with bolts of gaudy fabrics, bales of woolens, jars containing bird talons, infant fingers, assorted genitalia, and the teeth of some unknown creatures. Along a shelf on the near-hand wall, vials filled with dirt stood, labeled with the exotic, foreign, or forgotten names of places.

In order to cut brief a recollection of that most unpleasant negotiation engaged upon therein, I will suffice it to say that thanks to the solicitous letter I had previously produced, I succeeded in relieving that goodman of several bolts of fine-ish fabric (which I could pawn off as pashmina along the route, I was certain), two or three blocks of various spices, four small leathern bags of salt, a virgin's eyelash, a tusk carven in ancient runes (a certain fake, in my opinion, but worthy of a good price along the way), and assorted other curios that would fetch a decent purse at the marktplatz in Erebus.

Long ere I would have liked, the boy woke me, and the caravan was out the gates and onto the trade road before the first wakers spilled forth onto the rooftops of Penumbra.

Barely a day upon the Trade Road, and we met a small family of ragged looking folk, the children and goodwife riding in the wain, which was pulled by the goodman himself! It was the children who flagged down my cart, no doubt enthralled by the colorful banners hung atop it and the freshly-retouched mural on the side depicting a sea spangled with friendly fishes. I drove to a halt up the road as the goodman slowed his pace. I could hear the children's happy voiced pestering their father, and his rough replies.

From the first sigh, I knew this family had known poverty well, and I resigned myself to merely brightening their spirits rather than lightening their purses. After a few moments, as the lichen lamps on our wagons swayed, throwing eerie green shadows upon the ground, the boy-child approached. I climbed down from the drover's seat and made a show of bowing deeply to the youngster, as though he were my sovereign autarch. His face lit up and a smile cracked his little face.

"Your Lordship, it is my humblest hope that I may be of some little service to you, and in doing so make some small recompense for the wretchedness I have been until this moment that I saw Thee." The boy giggled, and I rose full-height, grinning broadly at him.

For a moment or two, I cowered about and did a handful of conjuring tricks to amuse the boy. Mollifying him, I sauntered over to the goodman, hoping to catch a glimpse of what, if anything, he had in his cart that wasn't related to him. The goodwife looked away nervously as I made eye contact. She was dressed in silken robes, and a veil covered the lower part of her face, a fact I had not noted upon first spying her. The little girl laughed happily and waved to me as I approached.

The goodman stood, rolling his shoulders to stretch them. I bade him a hearty greeting and tried to imagine how far he and his brood had come. He inclined his head in response, and spoke a language I did not know. I have traveled far and broad this strange world of ours, and have encountered many tongues (make of that what you will!), and pride myself in knowing not a few. But this one, it was unknown to my ear. I repeated myself in varying other languages, hoping to stumble upon a common one in which we could communicate, however rudimentarily. Alas, with no luck.

Behind me, I could hear the other drovers making ready the caravan to depart after this fruitless stoppage. But something held me beseeching the goodman. After a series of grants and gestures, motioning between his wain and my supply-coach, all for naught, my eye caught upon it. About the girl's neck hung an amulet on a silver chain. I rushed over to look, and the goodwife cowered as though I would attack her. But the girl continued to clap and coo as I conjured for her, trying to get a closer look at the necklace.

It was a large blue stone, carved into a flattened disc, and streaked with gleaming white. Tentatively, I reached out and made as though to touch it, asking permission as I did so to the goodman and girl, though they understood me not. Still, the girl did not reject my hand, and the goodman voiced no hindering remark. Merely the goodwife, who had begun to tremble, seemed to want to keep my curiosity dark. Her reaction only made me more covetous of the thing.

The stone was cool to touch, though the air about us was warm, and surely the girl's skin was not so chilled. I gazed into the stone and saw the white streaks seemed to move

across the face of the blue, even when the stone was held still. As I looked, my ears seemed to close; the noise of the departing caravan faded, as did the cries of my boy atop my coach, and the delighted laughter of the girl. There was only the stone, the swirling of the white, the chill of it.

I don't know how many times I tried to pull my eyes from it, but finally the little boy tugging at my sleeve drew me back. The goodman was standing beside me, fixing me with an appraising stare. He pointed at the stone, and I nodded. The goodwife began to mutter in their language, but the man silenced her with a sharp look.

I admit, I was more intrigued than ever. The goodman gestured to my coach, and I led him to it, my boy clambering down to undo latches and pull up flaps. I watched as the goodman's boy climbed back to join his sister and the veiled woman. It seemed to me they moved as though through water, that I myself was drugged by some bewitching draught. One thing was certain: I must have the amulet.

Looking back now, it seemed a sort of dumbshow, the goodman pointing at wares and I freely giving them without regard to cost or rarity. Finally, he gestured over the girl and she came bouncing from the wain. Gently, he unclasped the silver chain and placed the amulet in my shaking palm. The girl toddled off, mindless of losing a treasure. The goodman smiled broadly, as though a great burden had been lifted from him. Only the goodwife's low wail seemed to reach through the gauze that shrouded my other senses. I looked at her, rocking back and forth, the two children looking at her, mortified.

The goodman retook his place and began to pull them away as I climbed back up to the drover's seat of my coach, my hand still wrapped tightly around the amulet. My boy said something to me I did not understand and I ignored him. I goaded the beasts to trotting. The caravan was a haze of emerald light just up ahead

The seemingly endless jokes and barbs I endured from my traveling companions was like a blister rubbed raw. Even Mithkor, that great ass from the hinterlands who not once, but four times was tricked into trading for counterfeit kappa scales!- even that fool would not let up on me, may he rot in whatever dusty perdition he finds himself in! To be sure, and I write here with great magnanimity, I can appreciate why they felt the way they did, that I gave up far too much for a mere trinket. And of course, I dare not confess to them the enthrallment I fell under when first I beheld that stone.

I was jealous of it, and showed it to no one. I wore it about my neck, and it was a coldness against my chest. And from the moment I slipped it over my head to let it settle on my skin, I felt an assurance that this amulet was worth far more than I had given up for it, that I gladly would have

traded a hundred laden coaches just for a glimpse of it. Laugh all they would, I knew the bargain was mine in the having!

At the times when the most of the caravan was asleep, I found myself alert and wide-awake. The fear that someone would creep up and steal the amulet from me kept me awake, kept my eyes flitting to and fro, searching the dimness for any motion that could be thief or murderer. I saw treachery everywhere. I confess I even thrashed my own boy more than once for some imagined offense against my treasure.

Truth to tell, I do not know if I slept at all on that caravan. The whole journey assumed grotesque and dreamlike qualities after I came into possession of the necklace. My wits, I admit, scattered often, and at times were long in reassembling.

And yet, it was the most wonderful caravan of my life

We reached, much sooner than I expected to, the rocky wastelands of the south coast. The air here was warm and dry, and every breath I took seemed to coat my lungs with another layer of fine dust. Merely sitting upon the drover's seat, lazily steering the beasts, was enough to drench me in sweat, despite the cold disc of stone resting upon my chest. There was a buzzing in the air that never ceased, and the trade road is choked with stories of caravanserais whose drovers have gone mad from the constant noise. Many drovers avoid this route, to their discredit and detriment, if you ask me, for once you pass through the wastes, you reach the lucrative trading bazaars of Kuundam and Iqthabal, and from there onward to the rich uplands near Erebus. Commoners prefer the stone road straight through the caverns to Erebus, a shorter route overall, though I find the enclosed space of extended cavern travel unbearable.

Of course, in recent times, this land was the source of legends and horror stories relating to the strange new emigrants of the place who appeared from nowhere to harass travelers and abscond with treasures and lives. I'm sure you have heard these preposterous stories as well as I had. Did I say "preposterous"? Well, read on!

Time flowed away slowly as the caravan progressed through the wastes. Each time I felt enough energy to attempt conversation with the boy, it seemed the effort required to finish my sentence was more than I could ever attain, and words fell dead from my lips, like rotted fruit from a tree. Not that the boy was a sterling conversationalist, mind you, but the habit of talking to oneself is viewed as a sign of demonic possession in many of the backward villages encountered on the trade road, and I have long since quelled myself of the

habit out of a keen sense of self-preservation. Even the cool wakefulness I seemed to enjoy from the amulet was dulled here. And mentioning coolness, the stone itself, commonly so icy to the touch of skin, was noticeably warmer now, still a refreshing jolt in the heavy heat, but no longer the painful cold dagger pressed to my chest.

The plodding of the beasts, the creaking of the coaches, the buzzing in the air—this was the grey lullaby that poured into our ears and deadened our minds. To speak now in retrospect, and yet in foreshadowing, I feel confident in placing forth the supposition that this sonic miasma, if you will, is a sort of hypnosis used by the native vermin to put their prey off their mark. The land is empty, and sound carries far, and whatever sound you bring with you is admixed with the native buzz of the place and used against you. But I get ahead of myself.

Of a sudden, a vicious wind came up, and the lichen lamps of my coach merely showed a thick gruel of green, dusty fog all around us. Ahead and behind, I could hear the champing and panic of the beasts. My own, however, were calm—I am quite a dexterous drover, if you allow me a moment of horn-tooting. The boy began a coughing fit, and I smacked him hard amidships to assist him. He fell forward, and I caught him by his breeches before he tumbled over to be trampled and overrun, and to this day, he has not thanked me! Ingratitude!

The wind rushed about us, swirling across the mouths of the caverns surrounding us, making a deep, hollow, whistling sound. I could no longer see the lamps of the coach ahead. I shut my eyes tight against the flying grit. Soon, we heard the whistle of the lead drover ordering us to halt, lest we lose our path. The boy and I hunkered down, drawing blankets over us, listening to the howl of the wind and the rattle of the dirt and rock against the side of the coach.

I do not know how much time passed, but eventually the winds died down, and the lead drover whistled to us again to move on. We pulled the blanket down from over us, showering us with dust. The beasts lurched to life, and on we plod.

Hardly had we traveled but a handful of moments when the dull buzzing which had filled our ears for seeming centuries suddenly and abruptly ceased. I confess now, few times in my life have I been more frightened than in those first few quiet seconds. I tried to hide my panic from the boy, but he was skittish as well; even the beasts snorted and champed. There were cave mouths seemingly everywhere, as though the hills that rose suddenly from the rocky floor were watching us pass with a myriad of empty eyes. I spurred the beasts onward, wanting to get through this narrow defile quickly. I was not alone; the other drovers had noticeably increased their speed as well.

The green light of our lamps cast a ghoulish glow upon the hills and cave openings, and though I thought I knew better, a chill rose up my spine no less. And then, just as suddenly as the buzzing had ended, a new sound blared at us, a chittering sound, like many tiny voices speaking at once a nonsense language, and underneath, the sound of metal scraping metal. In my surprise, for a split-second I thought the clockwork cricket I hoped to trade in Erebus for some alchemy books was malfunctioning back in the coach! But I was instantly disabused of that notion, as the sound seemed to grow and surround us.

The noise appeared to be flooding from the cave mouths! The boy was trembling rather fiercely, and I was about to comfort him with a clout about the head when the thing occurred that changed my life forever, and made this caravan notorious in the annals of the trade road.

An avalanche of dust vomited forth from the mouths of each cave I could see, accompanied by a horrifying clatter like millions of little feet scrabbling across tarpaper. The distance was not great to our caravan, but it seemed less than the blink of an eye before the monstrous horde was before us. They stand the height of a man, often times taller, and had the appearance of an ant or other insect. Their bodies shimmered, though I know not if it were armor, or merely their carapace. The heads had giant black eyes and thin, razor-like antennae. They were armed with fearsome, curved blades and barbed lashes, and each of their six legs was banded with spikes.

They swarmed the coaches and dragged the drovers from their seats. The stronger men tried to fight them, and I saw that great beast of a man Torvingold Bromsik rip two arms (or legs?) from one of the demon creatures before being overpowered. Throwing their bodies mercilessly against my coach, grasping up with vicious arms, they pulled me and the boy from the seat and swarmed over us. I could hear, above their guttural chirping and slashing, the sound of my coach being torn and broken apart. Then I heard the boy scream, a shriek unlike and I had heard in the arenas or the battlefields.

The ant-men powered over me, tearing at my robes with their sickled legs. At intervals, one would thrust its face into mine and chirp at me, and I had a distinct sense that it was asking me a question. I realized I was screaming back at it, and I stopped. They rummaged me like a valuable antique, turning me over and over, and finally, suddenly, they stopped. They uprighted themselves and backed away a step or two. I sat up wearily and looked about me, but all I could see was the circle they made of themselves about me.

They chattered and squawked to each other, vigorously at first, but one who seemed to be a leader (it was missing an arm, had a deep scar across its face, and spoke rather more forcefully) calmed the group. From beyond them, I heard cries and screams from my fellow drovers. They were getting fainter and fainter, as were the sounds of the other marauders.

The leader stepped forward, seemingly warily. I struggled up

to my knees, and as I did the amulet fell out from beneath my tattered shirt to dangle in full view. The ant-men shrieked and gnashed their awful mandibles. They acted like they were on the verge of utter madness, stamping and thrashing about. The leader stepped tentatively closer, then thought better of it as I upraised myself to standing-height. The leader chirped something to the others and they scrambled backwards. Then, it pointed at me, or more accurately, at the amulet, chirped something that sounded awe-struck, and joined his fellows in retreat.

In a matter of seconds, I was all alone. The rest of the caravan was gone, the coaches in splinters and most of the good pillaged. The tracks of the struggle led to the cave mouths on either side of our path. I turned to my own coach, which aside from some cosmetic damage, was relatively unharmed. I walked up and down the line of coaches, but everything was in ruins. Bloodied beasts lay in tatters, scraps of cloth and broken vials littered the ground. More times than I care to recollect, I saw drip-paths of blood leading off into the caves. And once again, it was deathly quiet.

I looked for the boy. After a long while, I found him beneath my coach, a deep and ragged gouge in his stomach, one arm missing. And yet, he was still alive! I bound him as well as I could with the expensive cloth from my coach and daubed him with salves and ointments I had hoped to sell for a small fortune at an apothecarists' shop in Erebus. I fed him and watered him, and with no small sense of pride, I saw his eyes flutter open several hours later.

One of my beasts was ruined, and I had to slaughter it. I cut and cured some of the meat, and then rehitched the coach to the one remaining beast. We moved forward slowly, stopping at each ruined coach to salvage whatever stock I could find. Surely, a relic which had survived such a terrible encounter would fetch double its normal price

It was only then that I began to explore the reasons why the ant-men spared me. What significance did the amulet hold for them? Was it fear or awe, or both perhaps? I resolved myself to the undoubted fact that I would never know. The mysteries of these new immigrants are innumerable, and each new piece of folklore I come across is so ridiculous, when confronted with my own first-hand knowledge of the creatures, that I am sorely tempted not to believe anything but that which I had seen and experienced myself.

One thing was certain beyond doubt: the amulet had saved my life. I was then struck by a most disconcerting thought: why had the goodwife been so upset by my acquisition of it? Did she know the secret of it? At that moment, I was possessed of an obsession to find that goodwife again and find out all she knew of the necklace.

I was emboldened, I admit. The amulet around my neck made me feel invincible, and though I knew there were more awful things on the trade road than ant-men, I felt that I could conquer any foe! The boy's wounds closed quickly under my ministrations, and soon he was feeding himself and learning life again with his opposite hand.

I drove us out of that narrow defile, saying a silent prayer for the lost, taking us closer to Erebus and safety and riches by the step.

Still, I did not sleep, but let the beast and the boy rest at intervals. Before too long, we came to the entrance to Acheron Pass, the great cavern road through the hills, the other side of which lie the plains of the low countries abutting Erebus. Now, you may suppose that we approached the gate of the massive cave with fear and trepidation, after the horrors we had just survived. I cannot speak for the boy, but as I have said, I felt indomitable. And furthermore, the pass was well-traveled even by non-traders; there were even scattered villages inside the cavern. Surely, the presence of so many would tend to drive off the ant-men, or at the very least give them more trouble than they would care for.

And so we entered the pass without fear!



One would be wrong in thinking the cavern road to be abysmally dark. The pass road winds through a deep and humid cave, and glow-lichen is actually quite prevalent on the walls and floor. Indeed, it is brighter in the pass than in many places outside of it! The sounds of dripping water splashing onto rocks below is coupled with the echo of one's own making, giving a sense of never being truly alone, as though a great and invisible society hummed just beyond the margins of one's senses.

As the path winds deeper into the belly of the hills, the rush of water soon overpowers the other sounds, and soon flowing right beside the road is the great underground river Gihenne, which empties into the Erebus harbor without ever breaking

the surface of the land. It is a quick-moving river, and more than one fool has drowned in it attempting to use it as a shortcut to the end of the road.

Towers of limestone thrust up from the cavern floor, reaching up stony fingers to the roof, their tops lost in murky green darkness. And their opposites, dangling fangs of rock, jutting down from the unseen vault, some so low you must duck your head or be knocked off your mount. Veins of silver run through them, as though some giant spider had woven a gleaming web over the whole ceiling and floor.

Onward, deeper into the gullet of the hills, the first cluster of villages springs up after a wide curve of the road, past a large natural stone bridge over the Gihenne, from which dangle long, slimy coils of algæic vine. The houses are hewn from the rock of the cavern walls, a few steps up from the riverbank. A narrow walk fronts the town, inches above the water. All of the houses are small, no matter how many live within, though the population of most of the pass villages rarely exceeds twenty. So, needless to say, inbreeding is epidemic.

The villagers are tall and exceptionally thin, very pale, and have evolved a flatter, more webbed foot than the normal man, to make walking on slick rock easier. Contrary to the common conception, however, they are not savages. They do not eat their dead as has been hypothesized. They have a language, they wear clothing, and their society operates just as well as many others equally advanced. There is even in this first village, a small abbey of an obscure religious order. In point of fact, I found them to be friendly and very open to the miracles of commerce. I traded with the hetman of the village several articles of salvage from my departed cohort, in return for a few hand-carved idols and ancient coins that surely had been circulating in the village for ages, most likely not having seen the outside world since they were newly-minted. And I would be remiss in not mentioning that the villagers seemed quite indifferent to the amulet.

In fact, as fantastic as most of my wares were (and are!), the thing the villagers found most intriguing was my boy, one-armed, yet vigorous as ever before. For the few hours we graced the village, the boy had a veritable entourage of townsfolk wherever he went. They were noticeably averse to touching him, for they kept their distance somewhat, but they were not frightened of him, for they marveled and smiled at his goings-about. I daresay they have seen so able a one-armed boy!

After much hospitality and with a sufficient amount of trade conducted, we ventured off down the road again.

Emerging from the pass and onto the plain, the beast and the boy grew weary, so I halted beside the road and let them

rest. I busied myself with an impromptu inventory of my wares. I had barely begun when outside the coach I heard the approach of an oncoming wagon. Peering out the port-hole, I saw it draw near. A chill shot up my spine.

It was a flat metal platform on wheels drawn by four massive beasts and driven by a black-cloaked pilot. In the center of the platform was a metal pole, standing straight-up, twice the height of a man. And I could easily tell it was taller than a man, for there was a man chained to it, his body wrapped many times around in thick coils of iron chain, and shackles connecting at his wrists. He appeared to be naked; his skin was ghostly pale, shining a dull ivory even in the dark, for the wagon only held one lamp, up near the driver. The prisoner had long, dark, thick hair, and he looked very frail and fairly young. His head lolled as though he had been drugged, but his eyes were wide open and searching, wild.

The driver halted his wagon and hailed me. Straightening my robes, I emerged onto the road from the back of my coach. The prisoner's eyes roved over me, bored through me. I felt utterly violated by him, and so my guard was up when the driver spoke to me.

Ascertaining where we were from, and where we were going, and satisfied that I was a mere (mere!) merchant, he asked about the condition of the road through the pass. I told him as much as I could, venturing to recommend the only inn within the tunnel, though I myself had withheld my custom. He granted and waved off my superfluous information.

"We've a schedule to keep," he rasped. "This one," he jerked his thumb backward toward the chained fellow, "has an important appointment he can't miss."

I nodded, dying of curiosity, but the driver was not forthcoming and I was still too out-of-sorts to risk infuriating him with nosy questions. He made me repeat what I'd said prior about the road through the pass, then bade a hasty farewell and the flat wagon rolled past, the wild-eyed man staring fixedly at me until they were out of sight. What a face, I told myself! Not one I am soon to forget!

Uneventfully, we reached the outskirts of Erebus. I woke the boy as we neared the Market Gate, as he had never been to Erebus before. His eyes goggled and I couldn't help but laugh happily as we passed under the mighty arch and into the city.

Ragamuffins and fishwives rushed into the streets to surround us, pelting us with questions and placing orders. I turned the switch upon them, and let the beast ford his own route through the teeming mass. Eventually, we reached the marktplatz, already swarming with life, stalls as far as the eye could see and richly-laden wagons parked ramshackle about the square. I sent the boy off to the Registrar's and

Assayer's, to inform them of our arrival and register us for sales. After he darted off, I made the wagon safe and ready for business with the quick pull of a rope.

The market was all aflutter. Everyone seemed on edge. Not venturing too far from the coach, I surveilled for a place to set up my orating post, for the idea had struck me on the way into Erebus that I could make quite a small fortune in charging passers-by to hear my tale of the ant-men. The corner opposite where I had parked seemed high-traffic and very advantageous, so I crossed the narrow street to discuss terms with the proprietor of the shop there. In the midst of the street, I was nearly bowled over by a sloppily-dressed handful of youthful gendarmes as they rushed haphazard through the market. The proprietor, seeing me shaken, came over to help me across.

"You'll have to forgive them, my good sir," he explained as though their behavior pained him. "They've been running ragged these past few hours. Being shipped out to scour the pass, they are."

It took me a moment to reply. "The pass?"

He nodded and pulled a folded parchment from his tunic, handing it to me. I unfolded it and looked upon a monochrome drawing of the young fellow I had seen shackled to the post of the wagon. I looked up at the proprietor.

"Broke his bonds and killed the guard that was taking him to trial, over other side of the hills," he drawled. Horrified, my mind fluttered to the best way to work the deranged fellow into my story-for-hire.

Again, truncating another extensive tale in which I emerge the victor, I shall spare you the details of my negotiations with the proprietor, and merely inform you that the boy duly returned from the Registrar with the accreditation we needed, and I directed him to open the coach for business, while I drummed up an audience for my monologue.

Yes, rapt attention, I say. I told the tale with very little embellishment. For some reason I cannot express, I left out my meeting with the now-escaped lunatic. After all, I needed material for a future monologue, no?

I cannot say that this caravan was my most profitable, even accounting for the unexpected addition of previously unsought stock. That said, I will not hesitate to proclaim that I came back much richer, for I was still alive, and now possessed of that rarest of treasures—a good story!

chapter 10 - the wilds



Eclipse is considerably more than just cities and civilizations. More than half of the seven years of my research here were spent in the single guise of an intrepid explorer. It was during this time that I traveled the valleys, hills, mountains, and wastes of the Cauldron, a small, yet loyal group of rashers my only companions. Vast and sparsely inhabited for the most part, the wilds of Eclipse remain largely unexplored and enormously dangerous. Multiple factors deter would-be travelers, first and foremost is the simple difficulty of navigation here. The dark is ever present, and the fog is almost as relentless, keeping visibility to under sixty feet even in the best of conditions. Stars are seldom visible, and the lack of range of one's line of sight makes using landmarks impossible. A normal compass is worthless, and the magical ones used here are not entirely reliable; the sheer odds of getting lost prevent most explorers from ever departing the roads.

Those that take the plunge into the murky, ceaseless night risk more than losing their way. The dark hides horrors untold, creatures of all sorts of predatory natures have gravitated to the black kingdom—to them its shadows offer the perfect hunting grounds to strike at unsuspecting prey. Blind insects of unknown origins and inordinate dimensions abound here, hunting by pheromones and sound, yet even these are not as fearsome as some of the creatures that flock towards light sources. All travelers require light to move through the everdusk, and there are great monstrosities and swift-clawed stalkers that home in on such lights like a beacon. The simple light one needs to steer one's course is the very thing that may bring death down upon one's head. Wise travelers carry a luminescent stone, essentially a rock covered with luminescent lichens. Its light is part of the natural environment out here, and predators will not see it as being out of place unless they notice its movement. Lichen light also has the added bonus of causing some predators, especially those of insect origin, to glow faintly, often exposing their hiding places. At the very least, to travel the black kingdom, one should fully equip oneself with the necessary accoutrements for survival.

UP

It is a unusual fact of life in Eclipse that the bulk of the land is covered by a high rock ceiling, and thus has no direct access to the sky or the stars. Only the central parts of the Cauldron are open to the sky far above, though one wouldn't know the difference based upon the weather, as most rainclouds hover only a few miles above ground. Of course, there are a few extreme exceptions. Massive storms sometimes gather at the crest of the Forge and send torrents of water flooding downward, the raindrops coalescing into huge boulder-sized globes that can knock a full-grown man to the ground and smash through thatched roofs. Those that dwell under the cliffs are not much safer though, the walls and the crater of Eclipse are perpetually eroding and crumbling. Pieces of stone and rock regularly fall, striking the ground at terminal velocity. Even those who dwell below the land are not safe, as these falling rocks can crush through the tunnel-ridden ground, creating giant sinkholes and pulverizing whole villages, taking them with them into the ground. While violent rainstorms commonly dislodge them, there is little rhythm or reason as to when or how these rocks fall, though as a rule, the shell of the Cauldron becomes more stable as one moves towards the cliffs. Stone and earth are not the only thing to fall here; great trees

from the edge of Wildwood can come free, their branches and leaves being stripped away as they descend. Typically the wind aligns them along the path of least resistance, transforming them into giant javelins of death. Water will erode through the overhang too, draining lakes above in Wildwood and bringing with them all the flotsam and jetsam that have gathered within.

Not long ago there was a fairly large and growing suburb of Erebus that sprang up shortly after the upheaval in Penance. For a time, it even looked like the gate city might be soon overtaken by newcomers and swallowed up by this new town. However, a few months in, a rock about the size of a house fell on one of the main roads. No one was injured, and the rock became something of a destination for the newcomers—a point of curiosity and amusement for the recent implants who had never seen such a thing happen. Over the first quarter moon it was noticed that the rock seemed to always be wet. After a month, a clear, small stream of water could be made out falling from high above. The newcomers made plans to build a fountain around the rock and turn it into a town square, but such a thing was not to be. It was less than a quarter moon before something high above snapped. In a matter of a few candle marks, the majority of the suburb was washed away, with none too many of the settlers along for the ride. This violent greeting was the very reason that Highmark was formed across the Sea of Ink and outside of the lip of the Cauldron. It may be worth noting that many of the residents of Erebus not so secretly thanked their gods (and even Colopitiron himself), feeling as though the flood was an answered prayer.

Far above, the feral tribes of Wildwood sacrifice all sorts of things and people to the great pit. It can rain down bodies, food, or even magical items. There is a well-known location directly under one of these sites that is jealously guarded and controlled by a gang who strip the shattered bodies of the sacrifices that drop regularly. The gang takes their jewelry and their weapons as well as the many magic light stones that the tribes tie to their victims before dropping them into the dark. Enough revenue can be gaining from the sale of these items to support the group year-round without any other supplemental income.

If there is one natural event that strikes fear into the hearts of all who dwell in Eclipse, it is an earthquake. These can be extremely violent and powerful, not just shaking the ground beneath but the walls of the world itself. Earthquakes almost always dislodge huge chunks of rock and send foliage and trees spiraling down. They are also the most likely events to release lakes and redirect rivers. The hours following a quake are always tense, as residents wait to see if their world is about to change forever. There is a visible line of debris circling the land about a hundred miles from the cliff walls, showing where the edges of the land are high above. It stretches about two miles in width, and made up of trees, rock, earth, and bone. The soil of the strip is unusually rich for Eclipse, due to all the nutrients provided from the lighted world above, and massive mushrooms flourish here, also helping to mark the boundary. Locals know, no matter how tempting it may be due to the abundance of materials, to never build on the debris line. Still, every year some new seed or transplant attempts to strike up a life along the boundary. There is a common insult used in taverns here to infer that someone is an idiot: "Go back home to the boundary."

And finally, here is some good news. Due to the thickness of the air and the lessened gravity at the bottom of the Cauldron, falling objects tend to hit just a little bit less hard than in most places. Based upon some of the most entertaining research I have had the pleasure to conduct, I have been able to codify these numbers. In general, the damage an object does is based upon its mass (though objects with extra wind drag can reduce the damage even further). The following table summarizes my findings.

Object Size	Falling Damage
Tiny or Smaller	2d4
Small	3d6
Medium	5d6
Large	7d6
Huge	10d6
Gargantuan	14d6
Colossal	18d6

Note that damages may be lower if the objects are not dropped from at least 150ft. Of course, as Wildwood is located three-hundred miles above, this is not a concern.

INHABITANTS

Out beyond the safety of lit city streets and well maintained roads there are few intelligent inhabitants that flourish in the Cauldron. Those that do must be robust, tough, and vicious in order to survive. The aforementioned werran rule the wilds of the Northern Forest, but they are not the only race to take hold and make their way beyond the boundaries of city walls. The following is short catalog of the peoples of the wild.

NIGHTLINGS

Outside of the werran lands, the largest inhabitants of the wilds of Eclipse are the nightlings. Lizard-like goblins with foul, self-concerned natures, these bumpy-scaled warriors with their large, dark eyes are perfectly suited to the harsh darkness. These creatures form large and loose mobile colonies just beyond the edges of the more-inhabited areas of the Cauldron. Nightlings are exceedingly lazy creatures in one respect—they believe in letting other creatures do their work for them. This means that they spend much of their time raiding the lands of others, taking whatever objects that they see as valuable. Now keep in mind, to a nightling, valuable is a very different concept than to most folk. Since nightlings steal whatever they want, money isn't important. Things like gold and silver are generally overlooked. Jewelry is only taken if it's interesting or attractive, not for its value. Nightlings generally are more likely to steal cheap costume jewelry than the real thing, and many merchants place such items at the tops of their chests and sacks to protect the real goods underneath. Nightlings will steal foodstuffs however, particularly alcohol. Nightlings rarely kidnap folk or take hostages, and generally don't rape (they simply don't find other species attractive) or make a point of pillaging. They will only make enough of a show to scare off their victims, and then go through their pantries and take what they want. Sometimes they take odd items out of curiosity, but they never take with them more than they can carry away on foot.

Nighting colonies are hard to wipe out, as they are always on

the move and they operate in large numbers. In Eclipse, the temperature is constant, so aside from a large pavilion tent for their chieftain, Nightlings don't have to bring much with them. Nightling colonies generally set up in one place for only a few days, then carry out a raid, and then move on. When they set up their camps, they hold a big bonfire and a feast where they show off (and imbibe) their most recent haul. If threatened, the nightlings will scatter into the woods and then reform their colony later on somewhere safe. They seem to have a knack for finding each other. If they get really lost, they start a new colony, which really, for those attempting to stamp them out, is even worse.

The largest nightling colony in Eclipse operates outside of Baradume, to the northwest where they make camp in a small mushroom forest. From there they pull off raids against colonies, small caravans, and travelers, never over-farming any one road for fear of bringing down hunting parties from Baradume. They would have long ago gained the wrath of any other major city, but Baradume's natural understanding and indeed acceptance of thievery has made their actions less shocking. (Though it should be clear that most thieves in Baradume steal with skill, not with force of number and threats.) Still, one day this tribe may face danger if the guilds ever decide to join forces against them. Personally, I suspect the guilds are happy with things as they currently are, as it requires that merchants and travelers to Baradume obtain protection, coercing them into joining the guilds.

A typical colony of nightlings is ruled by a single king, always a male as nightlings are extremely sexist. The king is always discernable from the rest, as he will be morbidly obese and is usually carried on a litter. In nightling culture, being fat is a sign of power, and a tribe will happily show off their king to others, his fat proof that they are faring well. Below the king are his male heirs and any other male relatives, and then the hierarchy is divided through the rest of the men based upon their fighting skills. Below everyone else are the females, starting with the king's harem and then continuing on down based mostly upon looks. Females hold the responsibility of all menial tasks in the colony, from cooking, cleaning, and sexual duties to even carrying the king's litter. They are little more than slaves in the eyes of their males, and any form of self-expression or independence is met with a whipping. The lowest member of the colony is the "ugly woman", chosen by the males for what nightlings consider to be extreme physical unattractiveness. The ugly woman takes abuse from all in the tribe; she is laughed at and spit on wherever she goes, yet she is also seen as the only one who can remove bad luck, taking it upon herself. She is allowed to charge whatever she wishes in return for doing so, and sometimes her price may be very high.

A young male nightling I made a brief acquaintance of told me a tale of a time recently when he felt cursed with ill luck. His arrows kept missing their mark, and he kept falling off his mount. He stated that he sought the aid of his tribe's ugly woman. She gave him a choice; he could give up his left eye, or bed her for the night. Indeed his curse must have been lifted, for he was in the running for an archery championship when I met him. His story served as his explanation for why he wore an eye patch over his left socket.



PICKERS

Rambling throughout Eclipse, ever on the journey around the “great wheel” as they call it, are small bands of pale pickers. These pleasant traders can be encountered almost anywhere, and they are always willing to share stories and food with travelers. Plus, they have unique items for sale and are always interested in buying or trading for other interesting things. There are many reasons why these traders fare better than others. For one, they are well respected by many of the more hard-to-impress cultures. Vampires will not touch them, having long ago granted them a treaty of passage through their lands. They are unlikely targets for many slavers, as they tend to die quickly if forced into hard labor, and though cheerful and fun loving, are ill company if held against their will. They have gained the trust of the werrans too, and most tribes not only offer them safe passage, but trade almost exclusively with pale pickers.

None of this explains though how they escape the dangers of the wild or bandits. For the first I can only say that I had it told to me by a female weretiger that no werran in their right mind would eat pale picker. It seems they not only taste bad, but are slightly toxic. She said you could smell it on them, so perhaps when you have a large traveling group of them, they just do not smell appealing to predators. In the case of bandits, I am sure that there are times that the pickers fall prey to them, but the only example I can give is from personal experience. It was at the end of my treks with them and we were almost to Baradume, when

a group of nightling bandits set upon the caravan. Rather than panic, the cheerful pickers simply started to set up shop, offering the nightlings wine and cheese while they got their wares ready to display. The nightlings seemed slightly confused, but were soon taken in by performers and drink, and before the candle was through what started as a robbery turned into a vigorous trading session where I dare say the pickers made out better, trading some rotten scales for a cache of nightling weapons. There was never a point when I could clearly tell you that it all changed, but the end result was for the good. I did have a wizard examine a flask of the pale picker wine to ensure it was not drugged or enspelled but to no avail. It is a story that I think illustrates that even in a land as dangerous as this, never underestimate the power of unassuming charm. Besides, who knows what sorts of magic they really have in those wagons.

SLAVERS

In addition to the nightlings and common bandits, there is another intelligent hunter who stalks and preys on small parties in the wilds. These are the slavers. Slavers make their living as mercenaries, capturing and selling slaves, either to the vampires of Stygia, to the thieves of Baradume, or to the goddust mines. Slavers are expert trackers, and often trail small groups who wander



out from the safety of the well-maintained roads and trade routes. They can be very persistent, following their targets and waiting for the perfect moment to strike. They plan their attacks well, generally waiting until their prey is prone, asleep, or indisposed to make their move. They will take advantage of terrain and attacks from others to separate their targets. They are also very cunning, setting up small taverns along the roads just a day's travel from major sites, offering food and drink and cheap prices and then drugging whole caravans. They might offer money to young warriors to join them on a quest, only for that unfortunate soul to find himself in chains at the slavers' earliest convenience.

Slavers can attack at any time when out in the wilds, though usually not farther out than a few days march from a major port or city. They are not like the nightlings; they understand that no one wishes to go into slavery in a land where you are more likely to end up a bloodsucker meal than a laborer. Those who come under attack by them use deadly force in return, and thus slavers must be swift and brutal in the execution of their subdual. They often employ wizards with strong sleep charms and holds to take out groups. One should note, that while numbers are important in many of the slave trades, a very attractive person is likely to fetch a good deal more than twenty average humans, so lookers best beware. Also, rare races are craved as delicacies on the tables of vampire lords and ladies. Indeed my deep fey companion was the target of slavers more than once in our travels, to the point that in or around cities we took to covering him completely. One sure way to put slavers off is to fake disease—after all, they have no wish to infect their other livestock.

SCYTHIN

In the wilds of Eclipse, even the central plains are littered with caves, holes and caverns. Sane rashers don't venture too far into these, and most don't even go near. First of all, falling into a dark hole is a good way to break one's neck. Secondly, frightening rumors of a strange race known as the scythin abound of late in Eclipse. These horrors of the deep are said to attack in overwhelming numbers. They are said to be fast, strong, and slick with skin thick enough to break a weapon on. Tales abound of whole cities falling in one night to their raids, leaving nothing alive with only scarce tracks or signs of where all the inhabitants have gone. Most scythin stories claim that they do not eat their victims outright, but rather drag them down far underground, perhaps to some city to be enslaved, to some hive to feed their young, or to some even more unimaginable fate. I had traveled above and below the land for several years, from one end of the Cauldron to the next, and had never seen sign of them. I, in truth, began to doubt they ever existed, but that was before the encounter.

Here I must tell you of the start of the worst of the tragedies suffered by me and my small party during the few years we traveled the land. At that time, I wore the disguise of a human explorer banded with a group of rashers. This was before I joined the pickers and after I left the vampire city. There were eight of us, a female lunar, a deep fey, a camo, two human warriors (twin brothers), a molice wizard, and a dover ranger. Long had we traveled to many of the far-flung places I shall detail later in this chapter. So it was, at the end of our association, that road weary, our packs stuffed with treasure enough to make us all rich, we

came to a small fort. It was still a quarter moon's travel until we could make Erebus, so we decided to rest here, secure our lodging, and spend a small portion of our wealth in the growing community. The first few nights were charming as we ate and drank and told the locals tales of our wild adventures. (The last had been a foray to a lost underground city. Utterly abandoned, it had been the source of much of our current wealth.) As we prepared to move on, a great fog descended upon the whole of the Cauldron, so we chose to try and wait it out in the fort. Though we were all skilled navigators, the fog is an intimidating force to even the best.

On that first night of the fog, the watchman told a strange story of how he had seen a figure dressed all in rags walking through the inside of the fort, pausing at windows and doorways. When the seemingly frail, tattered being he took for a beggar noticed him, it stood suddenly taller and then darted off into the fog. This tale was told around the blazing fire of the inn as little more than a ghost story—after all, there were no beggars here, and the fort walls were twenty-five feet high. On the next night however, when a sick child came up missing, the story took on more ominous tone. Over the next quarter moon, one by one, others disappeared with no tracks, signs, or bodies to show for it. Just as all was getting into an uproar and I and my companions were in danger of being arrested as some sort of slave ring, they attacked in force. Their slick forms scaled the walls like a swarm, their speed unmatched. They killed many who fought back, including the two twins and the lunar. The deep fey, the camo, and I were all taken by them. I could have transformed and stopped it all, but I was too curious to see what became of those taken by the scythin. So I let myself be dragged into the ground through newly-carved tunnels beneath the fort, and onward to darker places.

Do not think me without a heart. I did care for my companions, and their deaths still vex my soul, but I could not miss such a rare opportunity to venture into the unknown and to reveal the truth of a legend that many think is only a tale to scare seeds and children. I must confess that my sin may go deeper than failing to protect my friends; I wonder to this day if they had followed me and my companions to that fort from somewhere deep beneath the earth.

I will write more of this tale in my chapter about the tunnels and underground lands. Suffice it to say that the scythin are real, and that they do come up from the shadows and take whole settlements with them into the ground. They are careful and calculated, sending in exploratory scouts to examine defenses. They take the weak and sick first before becoming bold enough to strike en masse, and when they do... the terror their alien forms can muster, the screams from their multifaceted faces, their speed, those swift-fingered clawed hands, the swipe of their paralyzing tails—all make them one of the most frightening of creatures on the Forge.

SURVIVAL

There is much debris to be found out in the wilds, man-made as well as the natural kind. The ruins of scavenger-picked corpses and starved caravans can be found easily enough if one chooses to wander off the trails and meander about in the mists. Our band

You asked me to provide you with something for your journey that would keep you safe. I imagine you expected a talisman, or maybe a weapon of some kind. I'm sure your face sagged when you reached into the ebony case I gave you and pulled out this scroll. However, this isn't a slight or a joke... the knowledge contained herein you will find to be far more valuable for your survival than any magical trinket.

I have lived many lifetimes longer than you, and one of them was spent adrift in the mists. Though long ago this was, the land changes slowly (if ever), and still reflects these principles. I made my living then by seeking out lone travelers like yourself, picking up the trails of those foolish enough to not cover their tracks. By the time my men fell upon them, their lives were already forfeit, souls to be sold for the glory and power of the guild. No amount of lucky stones or magic swords could save them then... they were ours, and we were good at what we did.

First off, be careful to whom you tell your travel plans. Slavers hang out at taverns too, just like everyone else (maybe even more), and like nothing more than when some tipsy slob gives away his entire route along with everything else about his caravan. Why track if you don't have to? Rule of thumb is unless someone absolutely needs to know your travel plans, don't tell them anything. Word gets around fast.

Don't waste any time on camouflage. Once you get away from the city, it's black as ink, with thick mists that block anyone from seeing anything more than a hundred feet away. The things that will be hunting you out there won't be relying upon sight to find you. First and foremost, make sure you protect yourself from the following means of detection:

SCENT: Scent travels far out in the wilds. Flying creatures like volosaurs can cover a massive amount of territory in very little time, and any scent that wafts their way can be followed quite easily. Your first task—avoid any kind of city vanities like cologne or even soaps. Become one with the earth. Roll in the mud, grab handfuls of moss and rub it on yourself, do as much as possible to smell like any other part of the wilderness. If your cargo has a scent to it, put it in tight wooden casks or crates, and seal it in with wax. Do the same with your food. If you cross a river or stream, recheck your seals and recoat yourself with moss. A few particular plants, if you can find them, are common and have a strong scent that will mask your own. Black sage is the easiest to come by. It's pleasant, non-toxic, and even edible. Look for it.

SOUND: The wilds are a quiet place, and sound seems to travel quite far in the open air. Any sound you might make will be out of the ordinary. Do not make any unnecessary sounds, such as whistles or singing, they can attract attention. Wear soft-sole boots if you can, or put leather over your soles. Do not put metal shoes on your soles. One tip I have heard is to travel near the sea or along a river as the sounds of the tides will block out other sounds. However, slavers know this, and while you may elude certain brainless beasts, you are likely to fall prey to more dangerous foes. Watch your step as well. The ground is rocky and loose, and if you keep to the mosses you will find the way easier on your feet as well as stealthier.

TRACKING: If you leave a trail of trampled plants and litter behind you, you are sure to attract company. Pack out what you pack in. When nature calls, dig a hole and bury your droppings in at least four inches of soil. Avoid marked trails or places thick with brush where you will disturb the plants. Avoid muddy areas where you will leave wagon tracks or footprints. Stick to stone or mossy areas that aren't too soft. Also with moss, take care not to slip, as some mosses can be quite slick. If you have a large caravan, move slowly over muddy or dirty areas, and have one person follow up behind smoothing out the caravan's tracks with a broom as you go.

LIGHT: I know you are not one of those Markers who can't see in the dark, but just to be clear, avoid the use of light at all costs, particularly magical light. The last thing you want to do is light yourself up like a flickering beacon for everyone within miles. If you need light, take natural lighting with you, like luminescent moss, that will help you blend in to the natural world. Firelight, if small (like a candle), is hard to tell from mosslight, but anything from a torch up produces not only light but smoke, which can be scented a long way off. And as for those newbloods and their magical light spells, the quality of light that comes from these seems to carry farther through the mists, and has a slightly different glow to it, paler and more artificial. It's almost like having a giant flashing "devour me" sign on one's back. Avoid it at all costs.

MAGIC: Here's another reason I thought it wise not to give you some useless protective talisman or other. Magic is not a natural occurrence in the wilds. You may not be able to sense it, but magic spells and magic items give off a kind of radiation, almost like a scent, that is stronger than any kind of natural odor, and carries quite far on the open plains. Scythin in particular seem to have a sense for magical auras, and are drawn to them like insects to a flame. They aren't alone either. Most of the slavers I worked with had ways to detect these auras too, and they made heavy use of them out in the most remote of areas. If you need to take magic with you, try the following: get a lead-lined crate to store your items in. This seems to keep their scent in. Don't be a fool and use slade... sure, your items won't be detected, but they won't work again when you pull them out. Secondly, you can try using very old magics. It seems that magic items lose their "odors" over time, and the most ancient and powerful of items have no pull at all to predators. Newly created items or spells practically give out a blast of aura. For magics, they seem to have a diminishing rate of about a hundred years, meaning for every hundred years they age their scent seems to dampen by about half.

May your journey be successful, your enemies falter, and the crows guide your way.

- Arvan

came across a broken wagon mid-way though our explorations. Its owner was nowhere to be seen, and any signs of a struggle had been long covered by nature. Whatever took him had more interest in food than goods of value, and we were pleased to find a few chests of treasures still mostly intact beneath the tarpaulin. Packed amongst some personal items and a sketchbook I was most pleased to find a letter I have included on the following page. I can only assume that the owner failed to take its contents to heart.

TERRAINS

For a kingdom completely cut off from light and separated from the flow of weather in the upper world, Eclipse is still full of wildly diverse terrain and assorted landscapes. Its topography is varied as well, from mountains and plains to rolling hills and flat wastes. All these, however, have one thing in common, they all gradually slope upwards towards the cliff walls. Thus mountains that may be the same size will actually be wildly different in elevation as they grow closer to the edge of the Cauldron.

In the wild disparate territories of the dark kingdom, all sorts of environments can be found, supporting life of almost any kind—so long as it does not explicitly require sunlight. The inhabitants of these wide-ranging worlds are like all creatures in the Forge, of a hardy stock—only here they have the added bonus of having adapted to live, hunt, feed, and mate in the dark.

The rest of this chapter gives a quick tour around the Cauldron's wild areas, starting in the east and moving clockwise around the Sea of Ink.

THE CENTRAL PLAINS

Located near and around Baradume, the fertile pastures and wild lichen groves of the plains are the hub of life in the Cauldron. In a place where grains and other common sources of food are not available, the fungus farms and glow lichen fields are the backbone of agriculture—only the kelpgrass grown on the edge of the seas provides near as much in the way of nutrition. These lands are dotted with many well-maintained and established farming communities, as well as several larger towns. They also play host to a smaller mushroom forest to the north and to several bands of nightling bandits. The roads here are better-established and policed than most. Farmers form militias to protect their lands, and armed patrols from Highmark keep order on all the roads between their city and Baradume. It is a relatively safe and structured place to travel, one of the few in all of Eclipse.

To the north beyond the farmlands and the forest, the roads give way and travel becomes more perilous. Here the ruins of a once-great culture that rivaled that of any in Eclipse scatter the landscape. The ruins have been adopted by raiders and foul creatures, and the remains of a raised highway cut back and forth between the dead cities, its use made impossible due to large chunks of missing pavestones and gross disrepair. It stretches all the way north to the Fal cannon river and its natural land bridge. Beyond this border no other signs of this forgotten culture endure.

THE SUNKEN CITY STATE

The remains of a great sinkhole have dug a ten-mile-wide crater here. It is said (truthfully enough) that a great city-state, the

capital of the lost culture of these plains, once stood here. It was many thousands of years ago that the city of Talis once dominated the landscape—a place of science and philosophy. The race that dwelt here knew no equal in the intellectual arts. Their influence stretched across the plains, giving rise to other free cities and wondrous inventions of technology. They lit the dark world with not only wisdom, but great glowing globes that mimicked the suns' light, allowing trees and crops of the upper world to grow. Their greatness rivaled Baradume, and word of their wonders reached the four corners of the Forge. Their fates were sealed however, when they chanced upon a technology that might allow them to escape the boundaries of this prison. They sent word far and wide for other great minds to come and join in their research, and in doing so, drew the wrath of a certain feathered fowl. A great chunk of the cliff above was dislodged, and it crushed their capital city, creating a sinkhole that dragged the whole of its ruin far beneath the ground. Now all that remains as a testament to its once-great promise are hundreds of elevated roads that fall off at the lip of the sinkhole, pointing towards what was once a proud culture.

There is now a small free city at the base of the sinkhole where a lake has formed. This town is devoted to the ways of the lost culture, and hopes to one day resurrect their way of life. The inhabitants are firm believers in the freedom of the individual and in deep self-examination. It is well worth keeping an eye on this place as they attempt to capture some of the light of their predecessors' strange science.

THE FALLEN RUINS OF THE INVERTED CITY

High above, out on one of the many arms of the great cliff, a marvel of architecture is rooted upside-down like a great cluster of stalactites. This blue-marble city is one of the oldest settlements on the Forge, made long ago by a talented race who my memory would long since have forgotten were it possible. So great was their skill at engineering their materials, that their city has remained for well over 100,000 years. However no mortal things are immune to time, and many of the extraordinary towers have fallen to the land below. So incredible was the construction, that rather than being pulverized, most remained intact, ramming deep into the ground and leaving odd-angled spires jutting out.

My band and I explored this place, well knowing the rumors of the cruel creatures that made their homes there. The place holds great power and still hides many magical items, yet it is a strange place to explore. Some towers have crashed through into others, some are still upright, if not a little askew, and others have landed upside-down (or would that be right-side-up?) We encountered beings of a demonic nature here. They became thicker and more foul the closer to the center of the city we got, and my companions were finally repelled. Later, while my associates slept, I returned in my true form. The lower devils cowered from me, but even in that form I was forced to overcome a burning, great-horned beast in order to gain entrance to the central tower. There I found a portal that led to the upper city, and soon discovered the source of the foul beasts.

This, however, is a tale for a later chapter. For now, I will only say that the lower ruins remain largely unlooted, and those with powerful magics and foolhardy warriors of great skill may

want to explore there. No doubt fortunes wait to be had by the bold. The twins both found magical rings while there that seemed to be part of a larger set of seven. One allowed the user's skin to transform into whatever material he was touching with the hand the ring was worn on; the other allowed the user to sprout wings made of metal that not only could bear him aloft but could be used as a weapon as well.

THE EASTERN STEPPES AND JAVA FIELDS

Shaped by cataclysmic earthquakes, massive landslides and violent volcanic activities, this treacherous domain draws victims with its promise of rare gems and wondrous forgotten magic.

This was one of the first places my band and I traveled to after departing Baradume. At the time, we also had a stout and rugged haze with us. He was one of the most seasoned of the group, yet he was also the first to fall. We were in the process of climbing the jagged peaks of the steppes when a bolder dislodged and our companion fell some forty feet, landing with a hard thud. He had not been tied off with the rest of us, fearing we would drag him down. Ironic, for if he had been, we would have been pulled with him. The fall itself did not kill or even harm our friend, but as he moved to right himself, the ground beneath him cracked and a spray of lava engulfed him.

The steppes are an unpredictable and harsh terrain, made up

of massive fallen stones from above and upheavals of lava from below. Together, this forms a great mountain of crumbling stone and burning rivers, that in the course of several hundred miles, ascends to nearly a third of the height of the Cauldron's cliff. Many explorers come here, in part because it is one of the few places in Eclipse that is semi well-lit. The lava casts a red glow over the jutting landscape, creating flickering shadows and high contrasts for a kingdom used to eternal night. Those who come here do not always leave the worse for wear however; great veins of precious gems and metals are often heaved up, exposed for easy taking. Several small mines litter the area, maintained by vigorous frontiersmen, and for all the dangers, many turn a healthy profit. There are a sect of wise women here, living as hermits, who commune with the earth and are supposedly able to control its forces. They live in towers formed from lava spires that were shaped as they cooled. Deep fey are commonly seen here on the surface, and their presence always denotes a rich deposit nearby. The lava rivers provide great amounts of heat, and metal ores are common, so a great forge has been built here by dwarves and earthkin. This outpost produces some of the best weapons in the Forge, most of which are shipped off to Arena.

Of course, there are other threats here besides the natural ones. Though the dark-loving monsters of the rest of Eclipse skirt this place, creatures of all kinds that live in or are akin to fire dwell here, and we had a fair share of run-ins with them. One must



be a skilled mountaineer and have a good respect for the chaotic violence of nature if one is to travel here, but the effort is not without its rewards.

THE COLD BLACK TOWER

One of the greatest of oddities in the whole of the Cauldron is the Cold Black Tower. Located near the summit of the steppes where they join the great cliff is a lake of lava five miles in circumference. At its very center, amid the burning and bubbling, is a sleek, black tower standing over a mile in height. Its surface seems perfectly smooth and it has only one visible entrance, a small window located near its crest. The tower itself gives off so much cold that the lava at its base is frozen white. Those few who have attempted to reach it through flight find that the lava spits up in targeted jets to bar their way. It is said that one great wizard who actually eluded the flames and made it to the window froze solid the moment he touched down on its sill, subsequently falling and shattering upon hitting the frozen stone below. Once in a great while, a white raven can be seen to come and go from the place, and some have claimed that through a spyglass they have seen a male youth of striking beauty staring out unto the world, his skin and hair pale as snow. I am sure that at one time I knew what was held there, but I have long put it out of my mind, and upon seeing the white raven of Orifelle move to and from the tower, I decided against further investigation.

THE GLOWING VISTA

Located in the southeast, and kissing the Sea of Ink where Highmark has made its mark, this land is lit by its miraculous long-stemmed phosphorescent lichen. This vast valley is one of the most tame of regions in the wilds of the Cauldron, no doubt a factor that has led to its being settled by the refugees of the Penance wars. The whole of this grassland is speckled with light from the lichens that grow in abundance here. This organism makes all aspects of life simpler for those who are not accustomed to the dark, and the locals of Highmark have taken to promoting its growth everywhere. The valley is dotted with small farming communities and quaint settlements. A great deal of the food and resources that help to support the rest of Eclipse are produced here and are shipped by road and river to the sea.

This is also a land subject to a new and growing conflict. Slavers used to run unchecked over this region, raiding villages and kidnapping travelers to sell to nearby Stygia, but with the advent of Highmark, the locals have found a new force for order and freedom taking hold. The open roads here, which at one time were little more than dirt trails, are quickly being upgraded, and frequent patrols now watch over traders and travelers, doing open battle with slavers and arresting thieves and bandits. For their part, the less than savory types have been dealt a unexpected blow, and only now are starting to organize and strike back. The borders with the steppes have started to be blurred as Highmark's rangers force bandits and slavers to retreat high into the hills for safety. The vampires are now more than aware of the aid that Highmark is funneling to the rebels, and now have started to taste the stink of these same interlopers disrupting their slave trade. It is not like the vampires to allow for an unwanted disruption in their ancient game of control. They have begun to infiltrate Highmark and its study its influence on the nearby region, and I have little doubt they will act sooner rather than later.

THE GREAT LAKE

The largest body of water next to the Sea of Ink in all of the Cauldron, this lake is fed by deep underground springs that flow into Eclipse from above. The water is crystal-clear and rich in minerals, its natural health effects renowned throughout the land. Its shores are the homes to numerous thriving fishing communities of valco, pickers, and dovers. They all live in harmony with one other and trade with and support the local farming communities, helping with harvest times just as the farmers aid during fish-spawning season. If there is anywhere within the dark kingdom that one can find the charming rural life it is here. This is no doubt why of late a very powerful frey wizard, a transplant from Penance, has chosen to set up shop here. Providing the locals with remedies, elixirs, and magical items, she has also taken to building powerful feline-shaped golems that now guard and protect the locals from harm. These tireless sentries now sit in the middle of most towns and often patrol the surrounding areas; the locals can even request them as escorts. One of these mechanical monsters can easily bring down a troop of slavers or even give a vampire a go.

THE STYGIAN MOUNTAINS

Deep as they are high, and filled with more menace than just their vampire masters, the Stygian Mountains form a near impassable barrier between the Glowing Vista and the Southern Badlands. The few passable trails through these mountains are not safe, being overrun with slavers and even vampires hunting for sport. Only in the company of pale picker traders does one have any hope of passing safely through these hills on the known paths, and even the pickers say this is one of the few places that stirs fear in them.

The rebels that hide in these mountains under constant pursuit from vampire hunters have hundreds of hidden paths and tunnels known only to them. The Akai can be just as dangerous, if not more so, than slavers or their vampire enemies. The level of mistrust they have acquired has led them to attack first and ask questions later. If one should accidentally stumble onto one of their hiding places, do not expect to escape without a fight. The rebels live in the constant fear and shadow of their ancient and intelligent enemies, and they assume everyone they encounter is working for the vampires.

To hone one's own path through these mountains is equally undesirable. Great chasms line the lower-lying areas, and the fractured rock edges of the mountains make for dangerous travel and slow progress. Here, between these two extremes, lurk monsters that give even the vampires pause. The worst of these were once vampires themselves; here in these hills, some of the insane bloodsuckers who found themselves exposed to goddust now hunt, taking wing in their monstrous forms—ever hungry, and ever filled with lust and rage.

SCAR LAKE

The heart of farming and food production for the slaves of Stygia, this long, thin lake is skirted by tightly-regulated and controlled farming communities watched over by vampire patrols. The lands are farmed both for grain and for living beings to fill the slave holds of the vampire capital. These communities are also famed for producing rebels and for hiding and aiding them whenever

they can get away with it. The homes and farms here are riddled with hidden rooms and secret tunnels, and the ever-paranoid people who dwell here are not taken to generosity or kindness to outsiders.

REBEL HOLD

In the mountains far to the west, on the borders of the wastes, this small fort is the only established and well known rebel base. It is fortified on all sides with multiple walls, towers, and magical wards. The rebels who run the hold are all highly skilled and dangerous, and are most famed for running a secret caravan to freedom over the wastes to Erebus. If one is looking to escape the vampire lands, they may be willing to aid you for the right price, but rumors say the only reason that they have not been brought down by the vampires is that for every one they aid in escaping, they feed two refugees back to the bloodsuckers. Still, this is one of the last outposts before entering the wastes, and certainly one of the only chances to restock supplies before venturing forth into nothingness.

THE SOUTHERN BADLANDS

A trackless waste of wind and dust, the badlands' seemingly lifeless nature hides truly terrible predators, ruthless bandits, and desperate rebels. One can travel for days and never see a difference in the landscape. In a land where there was a sun to navigate by, this could still be daunting enough, but here where there is no light and almost never any stars to guide the way, the waste's greatest danger is simply becoming lost and dying of starvation. Beneath the surface of this waste, huge monsters make their way, burrowing underground and setting traps for those who pass above. I saw a great worm-like beast rise up here, the whole of its head and mouth lined with spider-like legs for digging. It was about to take a whole wagon with it into the dust when some massive shadow of a cliff-dwelling beast fell upon it and battled it to the ground. We did not remain to determine the outcome of this clash of titans, but the uproar they produced could still be heard roaring through the sands when we were miles away.

I have heard that the best time to transverse the wastes is during the red moon with hope that one can move non-stop and make it to the other side before the dark falls again. However, I cannot believe this advice was ever given by anyone familiar with the badlands, as they are perhaps two-hundred miles across and simply cannot be traversed on foot in a span of two days. The pale pickers travel along the debris line from the cliff edge high above, weaving in and out of the drop zone, ever mindful of the predators. Some also move along the shore, but it is famous for freak flooding and tsunamis. Towards the cliff end of the wastes, glider bandits are common, striking from the skies on makeshift aircrafts and robbing and pillaging those that would hug the wall for guidance. Moving through the open wastes without protection is an invitation to become yet another traveler lost to the wilds.

The lack of rain and general dryness of the air does make for an environment where inanimate objects tend to last longer, and it is no doubt that entire wagon trains, intact other than their owners, can be happened upon here. Many find riches and wealth open for the taking, but the pale pickers say it is very bad luck to take such finds; they claim it will slow one down and give the wastes a better chance of catching you as well.

THE OASIS OF LIGHT

Ranking up at the top as one of the oddest of sights to behold in all of Eclipse, this strange little park is located almost at the center of the wastes. This oasis spans a rough square about two miles per side, and is an exact miniature replica of Eclipse itself. The cliff walls, the water, the mushroom forests, and all are reproduced exquisitely, with one important difference—magical light shines down upon this land, making it green and fertile and casting light upon the waters and the tiny forests. The oasis is a mirror image of the Cauldron if it were to get normal sunlight, complete with exacting models of Baradume and all the other major cities and towns. The one exception is Stygia, which rather than being portrayed accurately, is built as a utopian capital, complete with a pink palace at its center. The whole of this garden is tended by a single creature, a unique being as far as I know. This four-horned, cat-headed man spends his time giving tours, grooming the tiny plants, and building the miniature buildings and features. When I was there, I was led on a walking tour of the place, and even saw where he was furiously working to build the models for the newly sprung up Highmark. He also keeps an inn on the edge of his little wonder, where he housed and fed myself and others for free, with the understanding that we could remain for no more than three sleeps. I wondered at the power this creature must wield in order to remain unharassed by bandits or simply by desperate travelers that might wish to strip his little oasis for resources—but then I have the feeling he is far more than just a simple hobbyist.

THE WESTERN DESERT

The whole of this desert is entrenched in the mining and production of just one resource, the goddust. Everything that transpires here has to do with either finding, acquiring, or destroying the goddust. It is not a kind place to be found unprotected; for all the fear surrounding the vampires, becoming enslaved in a goddust mine is a far worse fate. The masters of these places are ruled by greed, and they will set their servants on an unending quest for the dust, not caring if they drive slaves to death through constant labor. Utterly unconcerned with safety, they work the slaves constantly, despite cave-ins, storms, marauding deep fey, or Stygian agents. I ventured to one of these gaping holes to see it for myself, and the smell of sweat and death was my only reward. The many mining companies here are embroiled in a land war with one another and with anyone else who would come in-between them and the dust. Fighters and warriors can find work here easily, but being constantly pitted against other swords for hire in a war that never makes anyone but the very few at the top rich is hardly the role for a true swordsman. Mercenaries who ever become less than effective will most likely find themselves betrayed, enslaved, and working themselves to death in the mines. If an ecosystem of any kind once thrived here, it is utterly usurped. Nature's wrath is felt here only through the harsh winds and storms that roll off the ink sea and by the costly toll in lives and money when an earthquake strikes these ill-conceived and badly-managed mines.

THE GAP

The deepest and oldest of the goddust mines, the shaft at the center of this monstrosity cuts a full ten miles down into the ground, and its walls and sides are covered in tunnels and wooden walkways. When I headed toward its works, I found myself sick-

ened by almost everything I saw there. The slaves here are forced to work with their own waste piled around their feet, and are not even allowed to stop to relieve themselves. Bodies littered the side tunnels, ignored as they rotted unless they got in the way of the work, at which point they would be carried out and unceremoniously thrown over the edge. The few poor haze I made eye contact with were devoid of souls, their beaks and cheeks sunken, their bodies stained with blood they had coughed up from overexposure to toxins. Most miners had taken to cannibalism of the dead to supplement their weak food rations. The slave drivers were not much better, fitted with magical collars that allowed them to go without sleep for weeks on end. They were exceptionally cruel, if only because of the cruelty shown to them by their betters. If anywhere in the lands of darkness I came upon true evil it was here. I thought back to the warm halls and dining rooms of the ancients who had hosted me in Baradume, and wondered at the volume of suffering their extended lives created and was sure it exceeded anything I had seen in the vampire capital.

THE NORTHERN FOREST

Where the harsh rule of hunter and prey is the law of the land, survival is a badge of courage. Though I have already detailed the werran and their interactions with the Mushroom Forest, they are not its only occupants. Here in the tangles and weave of roots and fungi, lost cities and long-forgotten citadels lie hidden and overgrown. The beasts of primitive ages, long-lost to their native worlds, thrive and hunt here, the eons having evolved them into blind horrors made of teeth and claws. There is a reason why the werran population never overwhelms the forest, they are just as likely prey as they are hunters. There are regions that even they skirt, like the primitive area surrounding the Lake of Teeth, a great depression in the forest caging great monsters of old. Then there are the white woods of the far north which are haunted by forlorn spirits that will eat the warmth out of living beings, freezing them to death in the Cauldron's mild temperatures. Everywhere where there is life and plants, one is more likely to die from the poisonous bite of an insect the size of one's thumb than to be eaten by a werran hunting party.

THE LOWER FALLS


A monster of a waterfall by its own right, this waterfall is only lacking when stacked next to the one that feeds the Sea of Ink. It is also the home to a very interesting hermit. If one ventures here, one will find that behind the waterfall are hidden well-maintained and easily traversed stairs. These lead all the way up the back of the falls and then around and onto a stone path that leads into the tunnel of the falls' origin. Here can be found an ancient structure carved into the cave walls, the home of the "wise woman"—a wereowl and an oracle of awesome power. She always delivers two readings when granting future knowledge. One is usually bright, shining, and happy, while the other is dark and filled with pain. She offers then to tell the person what they must do to avoid the bad and to find their way to the bright future, but will only do this at a price. The person must give up a part of who they are to her if they wish to reach the bright future. What she takes is always different, it could be the memory of a loved one or the ability to ever be drunk again. It may be a skill with a weapon or a talent for painting, however, she promises that whatever she takes, it will aid in the person finding their happy future. I have no doubt that I myself might be gladder if I were to let her

take for me so much of what I know, but I would rather have the price than the happy ending.

THE RED DOOR

Located far to the north and deep beneath the lip of the great cliff is an overgrown kingdom that the werran avoid at all costs. The red marble that was used to build its walls and temples is not unlike that of the vampire nation, and many believe that this was once a settlement of their kind. Whatever happened to force them to abandon this kingdom it took its toll, ripping buildings in half and creating thin, deep crevasses. However, one landmark still stands unharmed or disturbed by the ages—the Red Door. Built directly into the cliff wall, the surrounding archway of this door stands close to a mile high and is embossed with swirling patterns. It rejects all moss and vines, which cannot seem to grow on its surface. At the base of this leviathan of architecture is a massive door made from the same red marble. It is utterly impossible to open, whether through force, magic or any other means that as of yet has been attempted. For some strange reason, thousands upon thousands of travelers have risked life and limb to travel here and try to gain access, all to no avail. What lies beyond the door is simply unknown; some claim it is a prison for a great vampire that betrayed the queen, others feel the door hides a weapon of unimaginable power, and some believe it is a doorway to anywhere you wish to go if you could only coax it open. Of late a rumor has been spread that a counterpart stands buried in Wildwood on the other side of the world's crust. One would need to consult with Hael to confirm this dubious claim. As for me, I saw it, touched it, and can say only this—whoever sealed it did so for a reason. I do not understand the need by so many to see what lies beyond it; one should rather have the wisdom to leave it be.

chapter 11 - The Cliffs



There is a world unto itself, held not to the tedium of the common horizontal, but set apart as a vertical realm. In terms of upward-thrusting surface area it is far greater than that of the lower lands of the Cauldron. This is the unending wall... the ever-rising edge... the lip of the bowl... the cliffs that surround and ascend, cradling the whole of Eclipse like a palm in a tightly closed fist. The cliffs are a kingdom unto themselves where travel is not about east or west and north or south, but up or down and left or right. The cliffs of Eclipse sneak up on most who approach them. One does not just run into a cliff—the slope of the land gradually gets steeper and steeper as one approaches the edges, as if one were walking on the inside of a great sphere. Of course, since the land is uneven, this happens irregularly, so in some places it may be very smooth, and others not so. Few settlements can be found near the boundary of the cliffs; the terrain here becomes more chaotic, rockier, and even darker, being further removed from the light of any stars or the moon.

The walls of the Cauldron are not scalable by just any common rasher; they are fraught with outcroppings and unstable rock formations. There are places here where the earth is brittle and thwarting, and others where it is so smooth and utterly flawless as to offer no handholds at all. Such concerns offer no vexing for creatures of a winged nature, and this landscape is a haven for their kind. Many flying creatures live among the cliffs, most having adapted to survive in the dark. Sparktail sparrow hawks hunt for small rodents and insects here, their long tail feathers glowing like small stars, granting them the backlight they require to mark their prey. All manner of bats and other creatures who have adapted to see with echolocation weave effortlessly in and out of the crags and crevasses of the unending wall, and huge predators like the volosaur make their nests high up and watch the world below for specks of light that denote caravans or other wanderers who might be scooped up for food.

The walls of Eclipse are dotted with caves and tunnels, even more so than the Cauldron floor, and all sorts of unexplored territory waits to be discovered here. Some of these tunnels lead to Wildwood or to the ocean,

although these latter are easy to spot, as water constantly pours out in great waterfalls cascading down the cliffs. Such falls are quite numerous, making the walls seem to move as if alive when one sees them on a clear night when the moon is full.

Large ledges that have water sources may support plant life and isolated cultures, most hardly aware that the lights of cities they see below them on clear nights are any more or less than lower stars. These places may hold small lakes and even have fish that long ago were deposited when a crack from the ocean broke through. Some ledges are so secluded that the life there is totally unique, having evolved separately for eons. This region of vertical land is so distinctive that many plants and herbs, particularly those of magical or medicinal use, grow only here. A surprisingly large variety of such herbs exists amidst the cliffs, many pulled deliberately by the dark realm's ruler. Because of the remoteness and the vastness of the region, many of these herbs have not yet been discovered or experimented with, even by the people of Thole, who have spent millennia cataloging and examining them.

When one climbs up to about four miles, one passes the clouds and the mists that settle in the basin of the Cauldron, and one sees a very different kind of place. All manners of creatures call the cliffs their home; most are birds, bats, insects, or other flying creatures, but some are surprising. There are springer serpents dwelling amongst the rocks, lying coiled with their forked tails firmly gripping stones. These linger here in ambush to strike out and snap up birds that fly too close. Odd rodents with six or more legs and several prehensile tails eke out a life on the ledges, eating eggs and insects. Higher up, the animal life becomes smaller (the larger predators remaining closer to the land's floor where a wider variety of food sources lie). Here in these lofty heights, the cliffs turn under and the vertical world becomes an upside-down realm. Hanging vines grow here, their roots like iron digging into the rocks. These provide the best means of locomotion, and are so rampant that one can easily find a place to sleep in their tangles like a snug hammock. Glider monkeys rule this land, swinging from place to place or gliding on the extended skin between their arms and legs. These tend to be afraid of most intruders, but they also love to pull pranks. Unfortunately they do this by cutting vines with their long toe claws. Whenever they send a traveler falling to his death, they scream and cry out as if deeply amused.

Intelligent life dwells on the cliffs too. Most notably the aforementioned thole—shy, clever little creatures that defy description. Some say they resemble bats, others wolves, and others even a lizard or a bird. These creatures are natural vampires, living creatures that drink the blood of small animals to survive. High up they prey mostly on bats and monkeys, but lower down, they have been known to attack farm animals, and sometimes they swoop down and carry off children and small folk. Few even realize that these creatures are intelligent and have a language and culture.

Camo can also be found here, dwelling for the most part in isolation. Their ability to scale almost any surface allows them to move with near impunity throughout the cliffs. They are almost always open to trading, and can give valuable information about their local area of the wall. They prefer to be approached rather than to seek out others, but due to their natural camouflaging

ability they can be hard to spot.

Perhaps more than the natural dangers and the strangeness of this vertical landscape, the hardest thing for would-be explorers to wrap their heads around is the sheer scale of the unending wall. It did not, after all, get that nickname without cause. We may call them cliffs, but in truth the walls form an entire kingdom. It takes significant time to travel from one place to the next, even if one can fly. After all, consider that a mile's fight upward is considerably more strenuous than a mile walk. Attempting to fly hundreds of miles directly upward is not only exhausting, but a quest unto itself. Going down is easy, but this poses a problem too, as one will need to fly back up the same distance to get back home. Even those flying creatures that dwell here rarely venture more than ten miles in any vertical direction. Because of this, cultures in the cliffs tend to form laterally, in thin strips stretching around the Cauldron. In the time of my dominion over this land, I estimated over twenty distinct strips of wildly different cliff cultures, most of which had no contact at all with any but the two neighboring it.

To demonstrate the difficulty in navigating the vertical realm, consider these average flight times for the typical winged creature:

- 1 mile down: 30 seconds
- 1 mile across: 2 minutes
- 1 mile upwards: 30 minutes

Now, doing a little math, one can see that in order to go from the floor of the Cauldron to the rim (a distance of three hundred miles), one would need to fly directly upward at full speed (an exhausting task for even a moment) for a quarter moon without rest or pause. Even to circle the walls laterally (a 1,900 mile journey) would take three solid days of ceaseless travel.

Finally, there is the problem that no one has ever managed to make a functional map of the cliffs. There are of course a few well-known routes up into them for skilled climbers, but these are always subject to the shifting forces of the Forge. Even the thole only have maps of the areas immediately surrounding their cities.

THOLE

Named by and for its primary inhabitants, Thole is a city of intelligent flying creatures. It is built into the cliff face about halfway up the unending wall. Thole is arguably one of the most remote functioning cities in the whole of the Forge. The land dwellers of Eclipse know very little about the city above the fog, and few beings without wings have ever visited it. I chose to fly here under my own power, but once I arrived, I disguised myself as one of the few non-winged pilgrims.

The city is built into a series of wide ledges formed into deep fissures in the stone wall in a place where the cliffs are at their most vertical. The temples, homes, and markets of Thole are part carved out of the natural stone and part built up around it. The city appears to be etched into the cliffs themselves. The circular doors of the city often lead directly out into open air, and there are no railings on walkways or bridges. Non-flying creatures can find this quite disquieting. There are few simple structures here, most buildings are grand temples adorned with sculptures and

great archways. The thole have really only two classes in their society, the monks and the hunters, though they all live very communally, roosting upside-down in large groups. Monks gather and study herbs and dreams, and hunters seek out and collect prey to feed the city. Since few thole own or dwell in individual homes, this means that the scale of the buildings is far greater than in most cities, as hundreds of thole will readily roost under a single roof. The whole of the city—all of its cliffs and formations taken together—forms the shape of a massive avian deity, hundreds of feet tall. The temple that makes up the head is the sacred library of Thole, colossal as any in all the Forge; it has literally thousands of rooms all filled with scrolls, books and tomes of wonder. Of course, for all its knowledge and grandeur, it should be stated that most of these works are filled with nothing other than the accounts of dreams. I read these for an entire day and gleaned no reason or truth from their pages, not that they were not a wonder in their own way.

Thole is a center for the harvesting of strange roots, potions, and herbs, and a semi-religious organization runs the city. This group explores eldritch recipes that can be made with the ingredients, and dedicates itself to the pursuit of strange visions that come from the influence of these medications. The most important herb is the Kha'nall root (see chapter 1) which is famous for inducing wild dreams (all of which are recorded for the library).

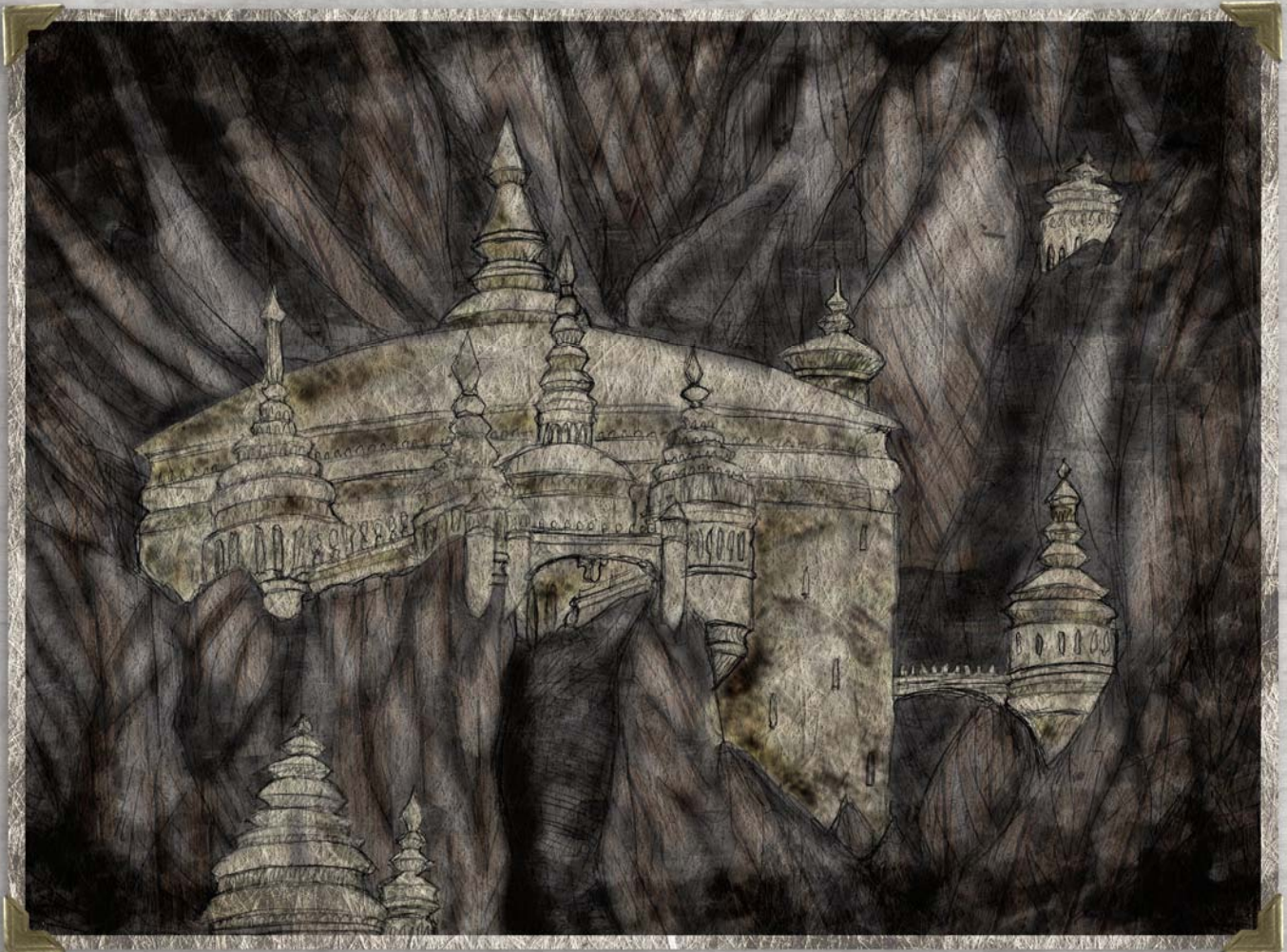
Occasionally, small groups from Thole make the two-hundred or

so mile journey downward to Erebus to trade herbs and potions for more mundane items such as tools, pots, pans, clothing, and jewelry. Other times a thole group or individual may enter Baradume, providing recreational medicine for a celebration or other event in exchange for a few weeks of protection. Essentially this is a sightseeing tour, but it is sometimes supplemented with visits to libraries or sages for information.

Thole is mostly populated, appropriately enough, by the thole, but a few other aerial races dwell amongst them, such as vogel and chromithians, and even a rare few non-flying individuals remain here, most devoted to the study of herbs or dreams. The city's buildings and doorways are geared to smaller creatures, so asherake, for example, may find it difficult to live here. There is also little food to be had. Vogels eat little, and they and the thole feed mostly off of large colonies of giant bats or other flying animals. There are also some hanging gardens, but these produce enough food only for visitors, mostly growing herbs for experiments, as thole live on blood alone.

HIGH UP PLACES

Not all places up on the walls are unexplored wilderness. A few fascinating locations offer unique challenges and rewards for would-be travelers and thrill-seekers. Three places in particular hold beings of tremendous power, and should be tread only with deliberate caution and respect.



THE INVERTED CITY RUINS

I made my way to this place via a portal I found in the center of the fallen towers that had crashed to the ground below. This was one of the few occasions that I wore my true form, for the bulk of the infernal host that dwelt in this place demanded such drastic action. Upon my arrival on one of the ramparts of the city, I was set upon by a few of these creatures and was forced to dispatch with them. The remaining few, having gauged my strength, were more accommodating, and I bade them to treat their master for an audience on my behalf. One was shortly granted, and I was let into the towers and up through the city. All of the structures I saw were littered with demons and traps; most of these wicked devices sent their victims spinning down shafts that opened up below into the open air, leaving them to die from plummeting to the land far, far below. The foul creatures hissed and spat even as they led me to the entrance to their master's chambers. Once the doors were drawn back, I was met by a true fiend—a being I was more than a little surprised to find there. Iapos was his name, and his form was black like a burn in space, in the shape of a serpent combined with a dead crow. Broken wings rose up behind him, and his arms and fingers did not touch his torso, yet functioned as if those attachments still worked. In the center of his chest, there was an almost human face, that of a tortured child. When he spoke, the words fell from that mouth.

“To what do I owe the honor?”

it uttered in the one of the old tongues from long before all this, a language I had not heard or thought about in a world's age. It burnt my ears and seared my soul to hear it spoken, and I knew that Iapos did so to cause me pain, so I shored up my resolve and hid as well as I could the memories that language brought forth. I kept my interview with him short, never speaking in the old tongue myself. Instead I chose an infernal speech, but it did not stir the same resonance in him as his voice did in me.

Iapos told me that the makers of this great city learned to harness the most violent and dangerous of magics, and no small part of this involved the summoning of dark beings from other planes. Once pulled here, they were not only trapped in the Forge, but the wizards of the city would bind them into objects and transform them into wondrous items of magic. The city's towers and walls were ebbed with these wards, explaining how they have managed to pass the test of time. Once bound to an object, all but the most powerful of demons would lose all will and intellect, leaving behind only the power they offered these objects. So sure

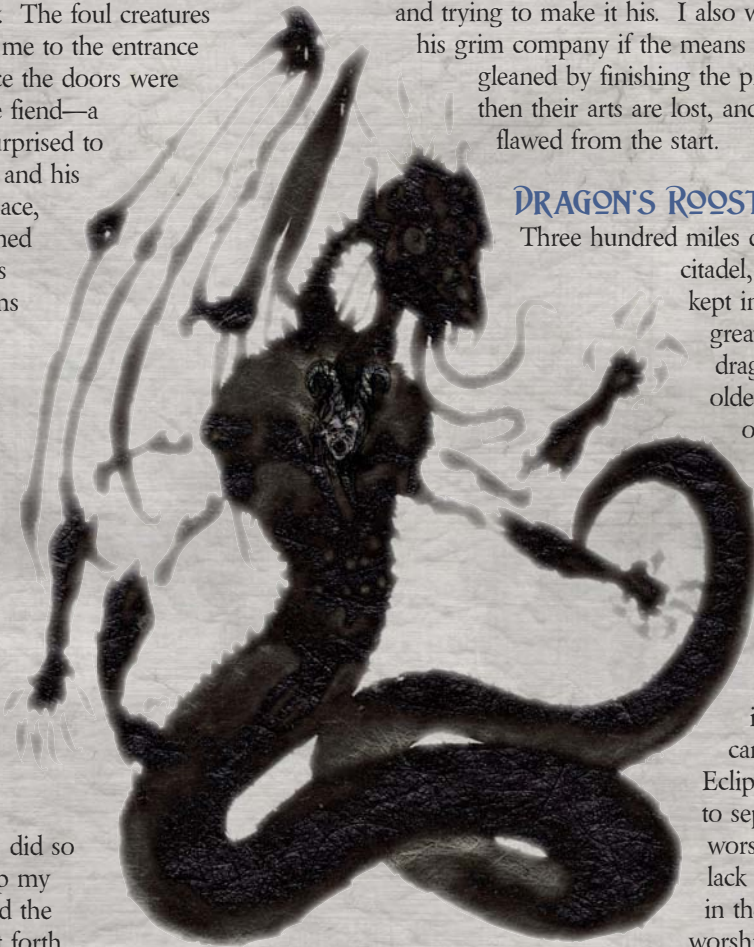
of their power and their control were these ancient wielders that they began to plan an undertaking that would allow them to forge a portal that could break the bonds of the Oath itself. To make such an object however, they would require a fiend of awesome power, so they set about to summon one. Iapos was the end result. An arch devil from outside of time, his power and strength proved impossible for them to hold, and thus sealed their fall from grace and the end of their reign in the inverted city.

Since being brought here, Iapos has ruled this place, slowly freeing lesser fiends and increasing his power and influence. While he is ever researching a way that he too might slip the bonds of our great prison, I suspect that if he fails that it is only a matter of time before he turns his attentions to subjugating this world and trying to make it his. I also wondered as I happily departed his grim company if the means to freedom for us all might be gleaned by finishing the plans of those old masters, but then their arts are lost, and chances are their plan was flawed from the start.

DRAGON'S ROOST

Three hundred miles directly above Colopitiron's citadel, a strange island of land hovers, kept in place by the magic of the great Oath. This is the home of the dragon Typhon Sorm, one of the oldest and most dangerous creatures on the Forge. Sorm is a true dragon, not chromatic or metallic in nature, but one of the true ancient wyrms of old. A near god in his own right, Sorm wasn't pulled here, but came on his own accord. He hunts the Forge, and now keeps his lair in the floating island, preferring the prey he can find in both Wildwood and Eclipse. The only thing that seems to separate Sorm from divinity is worshippers, but this is not from a lack of trying. Cults and primitives in the Wildwood have frequently worshipped him in the past, believing him master of the Forge, but Sorm has eaten every one. I have heard tales of travelers approaching him with offers of great treasure in return for his assistance, but such a proposal would need to be epic indeed to prevent the dragon's appetite.

Sorm's piece of land is actually part of Colopitiron's citadel, the part that would rise from the surface if the world were round and not hollow. I will not reveal here the answer to the question this must bring forth, “Do other citadels have multiple parts?” suffice it to say that Eclipse's does. Sorm bears the black mark of exile, so he may enter the deep underground parts of this floating island. There in the unused sections of the citadel he makes his lair, knowing his horde and person are safe from harassment. Sorm





could kill Colopitiron, I have no doubt of that, but I believe he chooses not to, preferring his freedom. I can only imagine what the resulting four-horned feathered fowl produced from such a beast would be like. Colopitiron, for his part, gives the dragon a wide berth, as all who value their existence should. However, in writing this treatise, I decided that this work could hardly be considered complete without paying him a call. So it was, once all my other examinations were complete, that at the end of my journey, and on my way out of this dark land, I came to the floating island far above Baradume.

For the second time in my travels I felt true, heart-rending fear. The first was at the beginning of my quest, and now again, like bookends, I experienced it at the end. It was not the dragon's sheer size, nor was it the thunderous voice in which he spoke. As with the vampire Queen, it was again the eyes that warned me of my potential peril. Sorm was not glad to have me intruding upon him. To ensure his lack of hunger, I had waited and watched until he had made a kill of a great volosaur. Once he had feasted and seemed to be settling down, I revealed myself to him. He opened our conversation by telling me it was grossly impolite to watch someone eat, exposing that the wards and spells I had used to remain hidden had not masked me from him. I explained the purpose of my visit, and he only scoffed at me.

"Why should I care to offer anything to you that by proxy will be gifted to the Grey One. All knowledge you provide him can only lead to one course, freedom and the end of the Forge."

I discovered quite quickly that he was very happy here and had no desire to see the Forge undone. I inquired as to why he had chosen to make this realm his home, and he only grew more agitated.

"If I exposed to you the meaning behind my motivations, I think you would find yourself in a far worse prison than where currently you reside; I wonder at the ages it might take a creature such as you to escape my lower bowels."

He then rose and began to move off away into the jungles of his floating home. Though I feared him, I still wished to glean something from this hard-won and risky interview. So I pressed him one last time. "Surely, great one, if you wished to see the Forge remain, you could act to aid the feathered flock on their bound missions, but instead you keep to your own devices."

He whirled around with such force and speed and brought his great maw down before me. For a moment I did think I would be taking a journey of ages through his digestive system, but he paused just before enveloping me and spoke softly.

"Do not pretend to understand me, but know this. I am no fool. Nothing, no matter how great or small may linger forever. All things must run their course and do as they will. This prison will fall, and as it does so someday, so shall I. One can fight the course and current of things if that is in one's nature, but not I. No such need to control the flow of creation resides in me anymore, and I think I am happier for it. Your master too is at peace, I think, and any knowledge that you provide will only



force him to someday take action. When this "prison" as you call it falls, I wonder... will you look back and see that it is paradise you have shattered. When that day comes I shall seek you out, if only to see if you are happy with your work."

And then he was gone. I was left to ponder his words, and for the first time felt a tang of doubt.

GREY TOWN

This place should be quite familiar to you my lord, as I have treated with you here and hear tell that your presence is commonplace to the residents. This bustling town once sat at the crest of the Wildwood, a proud achievement of civilization carved out in the most remote part of the forest. It was built literally perched on the edge of the world. The people who dwelt there saw themselves as beacons of culture in an untamed world. They even constructed a marvelous lift that could lower entire caravans to the floor of Eclipse below, an undertaking that took decades and no small amount of magical and mechanical knowhow. Their claim to the Wildwood was lost one rainy night when the whole of the ledge that their village rested upon came loose and slowly started to sink into Eclipse. It slid slowly at first, and then gained speed; the townsfolk awoke to the sight of the canyon walls moving by them as their city headed for the pit of Eclipse. Death was certain, and they all gathered in the town square to comfort each other. A few tried to jump off the mass at its back edge, but the

upheaval of rock and earth ground them to death. Just as they neared the curve of a great ledge and expected to be propelled to their doom, the whole of the downward sliding ground to a halt. So smooth was the descent, that only a few small wooden hovels suffered any damage in the town itself. The only deaths befell those who had tried to jump the ride, plus one elderly gentleman whose heart gave out during the long trip.

The town now rests in neither Wildwood nor Eclipse, but in one of the grey boundary zones between realms where you, my lord, are known to linger. It might be assumed that the villagers of this town would become scarred by the experience, but not so... rather it had the strange effect of reminding them how precious every moment of their lives are. They live now only for the day, for joy, and for community. They believe it was you who saved them from destruction, as you appeared for the first time in town only a few days later. They do not worship you so much as see you as an oracle and a kind friend. I have seen you there in the bliss of the simple loving village, playing with children and pets and drinking of the honey wine they are renowned for producing. I have treated with you here only to notice that I seemed to be keeping you from the simple joy of a game of hitch-pot. I do still think of the words of the dragon, and wonder if you will thank me when this is done, or see me once again as a betrayer, but as always, I am bound by my need to seek and offer the truth, no matter the pain or ugliness it may result in.

The lift has only just now begun to be rebuilt to connect them once more with Eclipse. The path of their descent exposed open soil and dirt, and they were quick to plant trees there to stabilize it—now a steep green slope joins them with the Wildwood. The town is almost utterly self reliant. They have water from streams that run down and then fall to the land below. They farm the land and hunt the surrounding woods. They have a rare insect here, the vageswift, that lives only at this elevation between Eclipse and the Wildwood, and they have cultivated its honey to make a wine unlike any in the Forge. It not only intoxicates but offers a feeling of utter contentment that makes the consumer feel as though everything is right with the world. It is in high demand everywhere that it has been sampled. They now employ several chromithian couriers to fly the wine to Baradume to sell, where at auctions it goes for exorbitant amounts.

I have looked at the rock face they rest upon, and can say that it does not seem the most stable of structures. In fact, come the right storm or earthquake, and I could easily see their town finally completing its expedition. They believe they are safe, and that as long as you keep visiting them they will never fall any further into the dark. I wonder if you would ever take any great note of their passing, considering all the pleasure and peace they have seemed to grant you.

VERTICAL LIVING

My lunar companion attended a climbing lecture given by one Cassius "Clash" Modoc while on a jaunt out of Talis about mid-way though our journeys. Having seen my journal, she was kind enough to transcribe the lecture for me. I would say something kind here, some drivel about her spirit "living on" through this work, but it is more truthfully Mr. Modoc's spirit that shines

through here, or at least the spirits I imagine he must have been drinking. Still, he summarizes well a certain archetype of people who choose to live on the edge of the world.

BORDERS WITH WILDWOOD

Wildwood is the only domain that borders Eclipse. Northern Wildwood is a deciduous forest, and the border there is abrupt and steep. Wildwood continues on in the north as it does for trackless miles, and then suddenly, the thick growth and the ground drops away into a dark, steaming, gaping void. The edge is overgrown in many places, and can sneak up on travelers. Many predators and their prey succumb to the disaster of unexpectedly leaping over the edge and swirling to their deaths.

The other side of the gap is not visible from the edge, the natural haze of the atmosphere fading out everything seen at this great distance. Nearby, jagged edges across the narrow channels of broken land fade into the distance on either side, and the strange unbroken darkness fills the plane of view below. This is a mystical religious place for most who live this far up. These are generally primitive people who have little concept of there being a whole world beneath the veil of black. Periodically, sacrifices are made to their wild gods—food, livestock, and even people are tossed over the edge into the void to appease the imagined bloodthirsty deities. Climbing downwards is difficult if not impossible here, as the cliffs slope away from the edge at a swift rate, turning horizontal and forcing climbers to scale the rock from beneath.

The fastest way into Eclipse is down, whether for a flying creature or a bold rasher who might don a gliding apparatus or one of the large fabric nets that lets one fall slowly. Simply step off the edge and about three or four hours later you are in Baradume. Well, if you are lucky. Though several spots are marked, claiming that one will land at certain locations if you leap from them, wind and weather (as well as some of the flying predators) might have other ideas. Indeed, the swift and cunning skites (picker-sized cousins of the volosaurs) have taken to regularly patrolling well-used jumping spots, finding them to be easy pickings for often prone, defenseless prey. It is also disorientingly difficult to gauge the distance to the ground below in the dark. Many become hypnotized by the long fall and forget to open their chutes or glider wings. Those that engage their devices too soon may find that they drift for far longer than they thought possible. In fact, it is not unheard of for one to dehydrate and die on the long trip down. I have personally seen corpses gracefully touch down in the Cauldron, secrets dislodged from the sky.

Caverns dot Wildwood all over in the north, many connecting to Eclipse. Few of these are truly useful conduits, as they come out in caves high up on the cliff walls, hundreds of miles from anywhere, but there are a few that wind their way to the bottom, most famously the route between Penumbra and Erebus. Many are well traveled and well marked for ease of not getting lost. One cavern even leads directly to Thole, providing access from the Wood. I suspect these would see more use were the green domain more hospitable to civilization, but for the most part they are overgrown, unstable, unexplored, and filled with predators. A few miles after each cavern leaves the Wildwood, thin gray boundaries can be seen for those who know what they are looking for. Pass these, and one is officially in the domain of the Dark Master.

Look... all you crap burglars from Baradume always want the same thing. You want to be a climber, but you don't want to have to do the work to become a climber, because you're only in this for one shot, one thrill, and then you want to go back home to your cake and wine party... oh, and you want me to make it safe. Skite farts! You come up here with your chiffon clothes, your rings of "feather falling", and your magical climbing gear, scramble up the wall and back down in a candle mark, and then you tell me you just didn't "get it". Barbello's balls, you didn't get it! You didn't do it! Take the skill and the danger out and you've got nothing. Nothing! Nothing risked, nothing gained. Nothing.

I know you seeds aren't listening to me, you're just waiting for all the obligatory severn feces to be over so you can try out your new gear—still its only you you're hurting, I've already found my joy. There really is nothing like it! It's like the sweetest dessert mixed with the best of sexual couplings, all the while having the most satisfying bowel movement, and touched with just a little bit of nipple torture. I live to be up there, folks, hanging high above the world, sleeping in a vine tangle, waking to see the lights of the world hundreds of miles below, smoking a new plant every night. You may ask (and many have), "Clash, how do you do it? Climb mile after mile in the dark, only able to see a few yards in front of you?" I say, "That is the whole point!" You horizontal people always worry about what is coming down the mountain, looking weeks ahead and concerning yourselves with events that may or may not ever occur. Nothing can satisfy you as long as you can invent another problem further down the road. Not for me, fellows! No, I live on the edge, in the moment, solving real problems that are only a few feet before me—life from one handhold to the next.

Look, I am not trying to tell you to head up there blind... crows no! You've got to be stacked with the right bits and pieces so you can make it back down intact to do it again. First and foremost, you need a good pair of camo-lizard shoes. These have to fit great, like a second skin. The scales of these wily little scampers will give you the needed traction any good climber would seek. Next, you've got to have a good monkey-skin harness and at least a hundred feet of rope—the good giant-spider spun stuff, none of that rage-weed weave (seriously, the molice will chew through that crap). Then get yourself a good ice axe, some crevice wedges and spikes, clean yourself out, and you are good to go.

Yeah, I know some people say "wear a helmet". I say if you slip up, a helmet ain't going to save your brains from scattering. Others talk about slack lines and hanging hammocks and magical crampons, viper bite kits, sauran repellent, mushroom jerky, waste baggies, drop wings, water skin suits, etcetera etcetera, blah blah blah blah. I say nutty nuts with that! I am heavy enough without all that dunky funk. No, the fun of it—the joy of it—is feeling the ledge, letting it guide you to your path, to your next sleeping spot, letting it warn you of the dangers of using that deep handhold that might hide a serpent. Let the wall tell you what to have for supper, let the wall decide when you need to drink. And forget about this "You" while you're at it. You don't exist, or at least the you you think you are—and the sooner you realize this, the sooner you are going to "get it".

Live life on the edge, child, free and unencumbered! Be like those free flying hawks that can jaunt up a mile in little under an hour or dive down faster than you or I could fall. Don't think about the dangers. Think about the danger and you invite the danger! Unlike the world I came from back when I was a seed, due to the atmospheric conditions here in the Cauldron, my top falling speed is considerably lower here. You can actually survive a fall, even from the high lip of the world. So don't worry about falling. The most important thing I can pass on is that you have to be one with the rock. Know it, feel it, trust it, and understand that it is your best friend. Hell, up there it is your only friend!

Transcriber's note: Clash Modoc the climber died a quarter moon later, when giving a climbing demonstration for students. He was less than 15 feet up when a small rock dislodged and he fell, "scattering" his brains on a sharp stone.

chapter 12 - UNDERGROUND

The surface of Eclipse gives hints and promises everywhere of the land that exists beneath. The Cauldron's floor is dotted with canyons and shafts, caves and pits, making it hard to travel anywhere here without becoming acutely aware that beneath one's feet another world teems. Just below the surface lies a tangled maze of passageways and labyrinths, carved both by nature and by the hands of subterranean dwellers. The size and scale of this land are deceiving as well. With the addition of the third dimension of depth, the workable area multiplies many times over. In fact, the entire surface area of Eclipse—including the six-hundred mile floor and the vertical face of the unending wall—is just a drop in the bucket compared to the vast uncharted real estate that lies below. It is remarkable, given they are a people who are accustomed to the dark, that the majority of surface dwellers pay little if any attention at all to the subterranean realm. Even the current master of Eclipse, himself a transplant from a world of night and day, has little interest in the affairs occurring underground. This lack of interference from above has for the most part allowed a more natural evolution for the life below, and as someone who spent over a year traveling beneath the surface, exploring ruins and dealing with the inhabitants, I can tell you that life is everywhere in the below lands—though this should not be taken to suggest that resources are pervasive. The life that exists here does so in a delicate balance, and one more mouth to feed in the wrong place can be enough to throw everything into ruin.

There are sentient beings and even societies underground, yet almost none of them choose to have contact with the surface. Indeed many are as utterly clueless about the surface as those there remain about them. Try explaining the concept of a sky and stars to a person who has never been exposed to such an idea. I quite frightened a group of dwarven children trying to do just that; the idea that there was a place where nothing was above one's head deeply disturbed them. Most underground cultures however are aware of the surface, yet simply choose not to have anything to do with it, believing that such interactions will only lead to the corruption of their way of life, or even worse, invasion from above. For the most part, the ignorance is also a matter of sheer distance. Leagues of twisted tunnels, sometimes wholly vertical, divide many peoples. Building a road underground after all is not just a simple matter of moving soil and compressing its surface. It is hard going traveling underground—through curving channels and up long shafts, skirting yawning pits, and crawling through claustrophobic spaces. A simple cave-in can alter a well-known route impassably, leading to months of exploration to discern an alternate.

Even with all the area below, resources tend to be very limited, and any nutrient-rich area will shortly become contested, frequently resulting in open conflicts. The isolation and deep bonds that form between those who band together down here creates a more insular way of functioning, and many groups and cultures are outright xenophobic. Some have developed deep and unyielding resentments for each other, like the deep fey and the drow, who are perpetually locked in an unending war.

Food is a limited resource below the ground. Few plants grow here, so populations need to be restricted. While most food that grows above ground in the dark could probably grow down here, there are some key differences that are difficult to overcome. First, the air is often bad, and there is no rain. Plants and fungi must be able to get their moisture from dew, the air, or from the soil (if there is any) in order to survive. Next, kelpgrass, the staple of the Cauldron, does not grow without the shallow tides of the Sea of Ink. And finally, there is no regular trade in the caverns, and certainly none for food. Consider that Baradume could never feed itself without trade from Wildwood and Penance, so no sizable city would ever develop down here. Overpopulation can lead to deadly over-farming of resources, and can bring about catastrophe for all. If plants fail, then the ecosystem crumbles, and everyone dies. This isn't handled by committee like in werran lands, but is reinforced by nature—its judgment dealt out by famines, wars over resources, and finally by the deep fey, who act as protectors of the subterranean land itself.

Some folks think they can survive by magically generating food and water; good luck to them. No creature not magical in nature to begin with can feed entirely off magic for long. After about a month, the body will sicken and will begin to reject such foods and liquids. Man is a creature of nature, and requires natural nutrients to survive.

The caves of Eclipse vary greatly, from massive chambers where a city can be built, to tight tunnels where one is forced to crawl to get from one place to the next. There are chambers here with lakes and waterfalls where mushroom forests grow and where predators and their prey have evolved apart from any outside influence. These alien worlds are so diverse, and at times so vast, that I could easily fill a small volume about the two that I visited. There are sights of rare wonder and beauty down here, caves covered in crystals the size of towers, tunnels where gold, silver, and platinum veins run together, coming alive in torchlight and shining like the surface of a lake when lit by the rising sun. For every scene of splendor though, there are two to match of terror—giant hissing insects, carnivorous swarms of featherless birds, ugly, bloated, eyeless rats, or pale, ragged, blind travelers who have lost their way and who have succumbed to the madness of the darkness.

In their courses, the rivers of the Cauldron run down through immense caverns, larger than cathedrals some of them. These are the sea caves of Eclipse, hewn by millennia of tidal action and seismic activity. These interlock and join with the air-filled caverns on a regular basis, making underwater travel necessary when trekking any significant distance. It is estimated that at least half of the underground areas of Eclipse are flooded with sea water. Some are filled deeply, as though underworld seas themselves, with

strong currents moving toward the Helix. Other caverns branch off to stagnant, dead-end arms or enclosed underground lakes. Sea caves are filled with some of the purest of waters and hold ceptu and other intelligent aquatic creatures. They are also home to blind, hungry fish with many rows of sharp teeth, powerful jaws, and tentacles for pulling travelers far below into the maze of their wet homes.

Often, the floor of a vast, city-sized cavern will be ribboned by the thread of a meager river. It is not uncommon, though, to find the ruins of once-grand towns and cities in some of these huge caves. Where once a mighty river churned, now existing only as a forgotten trickle beneath the land, master craftsmen and builders created stone cities to rival any found upon the surface. Today, nothing remains but the crumbled foundations of their highest spires. As the waters ebbed or the earth shook, the cities died away. Great stone fastnesses, whose names once rang in legends of old: Drockenburg, Grandcaliber, Heimfjell, Vinograd. Many adventurers have been lost in the caves while looking for the lauded horned helms of the Lords of Skaglund.

While roughly half the area below may well be filled with air, this air is not always breathable. There are still places where oxygen is simply too sparse to allow for a being to survive, and others where poisonous gases jet forth, burning the skin and eyes and leading to a painful death. Some caverns run close by lava tubes, and the temperatures here can gradually grow until one could cook a meal on the direct rock surface. Where these caverns meet water, the surrounding passageways fill with deadly steam, able to cook a man in seconds.

The underground is not a place for those who enjoy even the most rudimentary of creature comforts. It is cold, damp, and at times lonely. Food is scarce, and some of the creatures we were forced to eat made for the foulest of meals I have ever known. The dangers are everywhere, and the locals are seldom friendly, but the rewards for delving into the abyss can be great, for treasures beyond a child's dreams are hidden here, and the wonder of sights unseen by most can be a powerful pull to the wandering spirit.

HAZARDS AND CONDITIONS

The environmental dangers that are present when traveling the passages of the underworld are some of the most trying and prevalent on the Forge. One should take great heed of their signs and act accordingly. Though I am well aware that you, my lord, are beyond such concerns, I also know you find mortals' fragilities a wonder, so below I have attempted to catalog some of the most common.

BAD AIR

It is a simple truth that air does not circulate well in the deep places of the world. Many of the more remote tunnels have little or no breathable air at all. Its advent is easier to notice than one might consider. If one is passing into such a zone, light headedness and fatigue are common, as well as a possible stale stench. Ignoring these signs and pressing forward can lead to disaster. The effects of bad air are exactly the same as those for suffocation by other means, and just as deadly. Smaller creatures with faster

metabolisms who intake air more rapidly will be affected more quickly, so it may be wise to carry a mundane molice or a small bird with one into the depths. Also, most who explore the deep caves expect to have to do some swimming, and there are many established methods for breathing underwater. Some fools think they can rely upon these alone, but they forget that most devices (including many magical ones) simply pull oxygen out of the water; so no water, no breathing. However, there's a quick fix that will work in a pinch. No one travels anywhere without a good amount of water, so if you have to, breathe through your canteen—though this will only buy you maybe five to ten minutes. Also, any spell that purifies air will also help in tight situations. Remember, acting fast is the key to surviving. If the air goes bad, you have only a brief period before you will pass out and die.

DARKNESS

Some caves are resplendent in glow lichens, some hold beautiful reflective crystals, but most have nothing at all. It's considerably darker in the caverns than on the surface of Eclipse where there are sometimes stars, cliff lichens, or nearby city lights. Low-light vision will afford you nothing down here without at least a minor light source. Plan ahead and carry as many diverse light sources as you can. Being trapped in utter blackness in rambling caves and trying to find one's way is a recipe for doom. Also, while magic has its drawbacks and tends to draw unwanted attention, make fire a last resort. Flame is a tremendous oxygen hog, and can foul the air in minutes.

METHANE/EXPLOSIVE GAS

Some bad air areas underground aren't just not breathable, they are actually filled with thick pockets of natural flammable gas. A torch in such regions means a hot, quick ending, another reason why even though magical light sources can attract some predators they are still often preferred. The massive explosion and cave-in reaped by setting off a gas deposit is far more unforgiving than the odd encounter with a hungry beast. Effects of such a disaster can vary greatly due to the size and concentration of the pockets,

yet they essentially mimic the familiar *fireball* spell, only potentially dealing up to 15d6 in the worst case scenario. There is also a 1% cumulative chance of a cave-in occurring per each point of damage, its effects similar to that caused by the spell *earthquake*.

POISON GAS

Some bad air areas underground may also contain poison fumes. These can be far more violent than a simple lack of oxygen, burning the skin and eyes or sometimes even causing insidious long-term health problems that do not become apparent until weeks later. For those who can afford it, the clockwork canaries (see appendices) sold by some of the merchants in Erebus are highly recommended.

UNSTABLE TERRAIN

Everywhere one travels in the underworld, the danger of cave-ins or rockslides is ever-present. This is where a seasoned guide or deep fey comes in handy. The deep fey in our little band seemed to be able to commune with the earth and stone, and often warned us of unsafe areas and even predicted the onset of earthquakes and collapses. Of course, if one cannot avail themselves to such a companion, the best solution is to simply remain vigilant and move at a slow, steady pace.

DIFFICULT TERRAIN

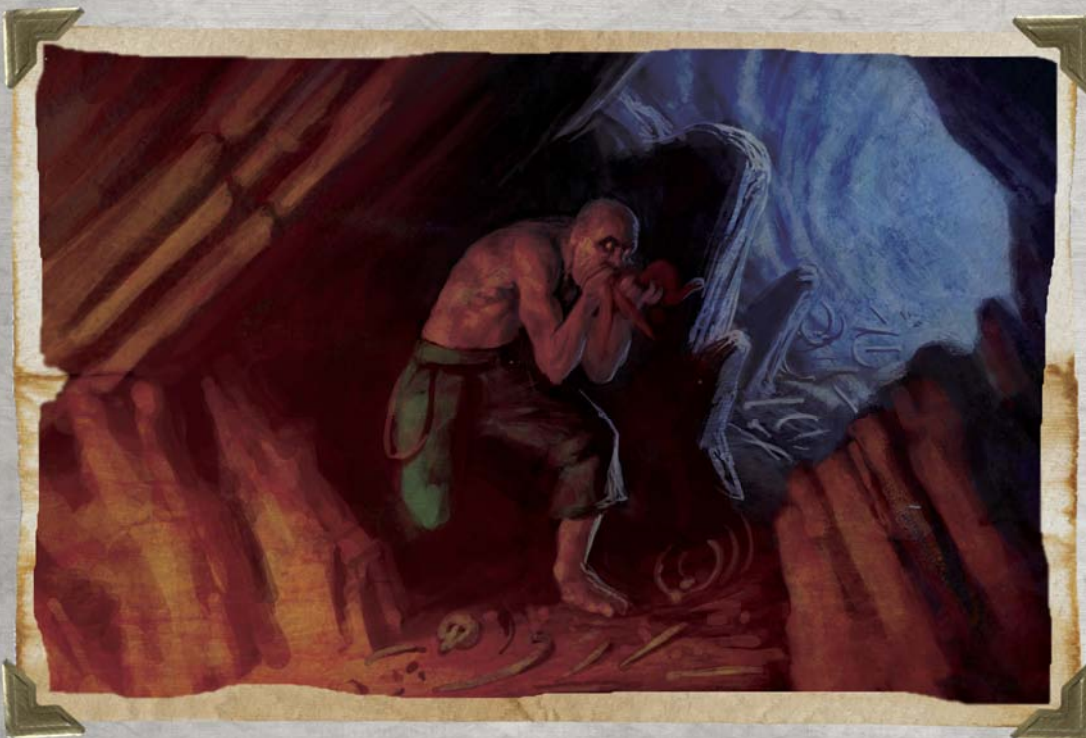
Most underground roads are not as straight forward as those on the surface. They twist, bend, and coil back into themselves, sometimes shooting suddenly up and at other times requiring the need to rappel down. Any equipment that one might use to travel up the cliffs is useful here. One should never expect that a journey from point A to point B will be made in anything close to a straight line. Travel in the lands below often takes twice as long, if not more, than in the world above.

SINKHOLES/CREVASSES

Sometimes the ground just gives way and travelers slide down into the earth. If they are lucky, they will be deposited in a lower cave with close to the same conditions. The unlucky may be dragged to their deaths in a whirl of sand or dropped into a high, open shaft.

ALKALINE/SALT ATMOSPHERE

Over time, the high level of salt or alkaline found in the atmosphere of some caves may have detrimental effects on folks not adapted to it. The skin tends to dry out, breathing can become labored, and some with lacking constitutions may start to cough up blood. In effect, anyone exposed for more than a day must roll a Fort save (DC 15) each day or suffer 1 point of Con damage. Those who intend to spend an extended journey down here



would do best to take along some salves and ointments to counter the effects. These reduce the DC of one's save, the effect depending upon the strength and cost of the salve.

GETTING LOST

Underground caves are bizarre to say the least, and there are often no reference points for travel. Certainly one cannot follow a mountain in the distance or use the stars to guide one's way. A compass doesn't help much either; it's great to know which way is north, but if you are trapped in a cavern, you are subject to its directional whims. There is no greater danger in all of the subterranean realms than that of becoming lost. Frollows are extremely useful here, though if one is trying to make progress they will only lead you back to where you came from. Still, better than being misled. The inhabitants of the lands below often leave markers on the walls. These usually take the form of small line-drawings, maps that show the tunnels ahead. Often they will warn of dangers or unstable areas. Many who pass through the darkness ignore these scribbblings, but this is very unwise. A great many of these serve as road markers, and will guide travelers to subterranean towns and encampments. However, different established cultures like the drow have coded markers that can easily mislead the inexperienced—another good reason to have a seasoned terran along for the road. Of course, for every system, there is someone who will abuse it, and some of the more intelligent monsters may place false markers to guide travelers to their doom.

EQUIPMENT

In one recent (and somewhat dubious) report by the Highmark geological survey, not issued for public viewing, it was estimated that the wealth remaining untouched and undiscovered in the rotting and fallen citadels lost below the surface could rival the combined coffers of every municipality above ground. Alas, no cartographic survey was ever undertaken in the days of old, and the ways to these cavern throne-cities are now lost. Luckless wanderers now trust to chance to bring them to the threshold of riches, but more have been lost than any in power care to admit. The underground caves of Eclipse are more intricate and twisting than the most devilishly-devised labyrinth. Tremors are not uncommon, and the near-blackness is practically an invitation to get lost or break one's neck.

However, for the dim-witted rake who believes himself up to the task of delving into the caverns for ancient treasures, there exists a (for lack of a better word) "guild" of like-minded rashers who form partnerships with each other or with salvaging firms. In the latter case, the delver is provided with the means to equip himself for a hunting expedition, and the firm contracts to receive some percentage of the haul to sell, or some percentage of the total valued sum of the haul upon return. These partnerships have become remarkably less frequent in recent decades, as the success rate of hunting parties has steadily remained near zero for centuries.

Enterprising individuals, however, who wish to strike out on their own terms are not unheard of. For these brave connoisseurs of daring, there remains one sure-fire emporium of trade in which to outfit a cavern-delving excursion. In the city of Sabor, itself built

into the land beneath, there is a non-descript shop whose name denotes nothing less benign than "purveyor of stone-working tools." Inside, however, for those who know what to look for, can be found most of the equipage needed for an honest effort at an underground treasure hunt. Oilskin clothing for the water-logged stretches, glow-lichen lamps and glow-lichen cream to smear upon the clothes as an added source of illumination, thick-soled rockskin boots and gloves, ropes and climbing hooks, and leathern bags. Compasses are available for sale, but are rarely purchased by would-be delvers, for the twists and turns of the caverns would have the needle spinning like a weathervane in a windstorm.



A speluscope is a useful tool; this boomerang-shaped object has a dial embedded in its core. When it is thrown, the number of rotations out and back are counted and displayed on the dial. By calculating the length of each revolution, easily done

when one knows the length of one's speluscope, the distance thrown can be measured. Of course, throwing a speluscope into near-darkness and not hitting a cave wall or other obstruction is somewhat difficult. Many of the scopes have been lost in darkness. However, if recovered, and if thrown relatively straightly in the first place, an estimated size of the cavern can be ascertained.

Glow-flares are also useful; these are dynamite-shaped sticks that, when broken in half, emit enough light to see quite a distance. These are most often used as a last resort, after glow-lichen cream has been exhausted. Here, though, it may also be noted that light, in darkness, tends to draw out that which hides. Light can

be deadly as often as it can reveal underground. Another piece of equipment that has found use is the magnetograph. This is a hand-held scroll of parchment around a shaft of base metal. Attached to the scroll is an independently-moving needle made of opposing base metal. The needle scratches the parchment as the user holds it before him. The nearer one gets to base metal, often used in the manufacture of the lost treasure of ancient times, the more active the needle. It is a primitive metal-detector, and is easily confused by base metals found in the cave rock itself, or in other equipment being carried. Occasionally, though, it may pick up a reading from a lost horde.

Finally, the barobathometer is a gauge that can be used for measuring air pressure within larger caverns. The meter allows the reader, depending upon the reading, to assess the approximate size of the cavern he is in, and the direction of the wind moving through it, allowing for a rudimentary rough map of the cave to be plotted.

To catalogue every piece of equipage that could be needed for an adventure of this type would cover too many pages and dull any interest you may have, my Lord. Inflatable rafts, quartz-lens goggles, pick hammers, etcetera. To be fully outfitted would mean to be crushed under the weight of one's kit. The basics are listed above, and well wishes to them. We move on, briefly, to the subject of people.

PEOPLES

Many races make their homes almost exclusively underground. For them, the grottoes and fissures of Eclipse are the perfect abode. These folk live out their lives unaware and unaffected by the politics and wars of the surface walkers.

GENERAL TRAITS

A noticeable rift is clear in the way that those below function, and although the following is a generalization, it tends to be the rule rather than the exception. Most lower dwellers are a little off—leaning towards crazy without necessarily crossing the line. Loners or small pairs will in particular show their looniness; they will talk to themselves and likely answer back. Many have cracked further, and will show more than one personality. You may become great friends with one yet be hated by another, so it is wise to determine who you are speaking with before engaging in a dialogue. As a rule, cavern folk will be exited and overly friendly upon meeting you after establishing that you are not an enemy, hugging and talking non-stop, openly sharing supplies, and being overly forthcoming with information. This initial bliss will fade after little more than an hour, and then they will tend to seem moody. This coldness will almost eventually always turn to outright anger and resentment. It is best to keep meetings with loners short, remembering there is a reason they live unaccompanied lives.

Large groups and established cultures can be paranoid at first, but then are often just shocked to run into someone new in their isolated worlds. They will show their hospitality to those, in particular, that have things to trade with them. On a quick side note, I did not encounter a single being living below that did not think root berries were the end all be all of delicacies. Even a raven-

ous predator that had cornered one of my group plunged head long over a ledge when we threw a chunk of the stuff off. The hospitality that one will receive from bands and encampments will be in direct proportion to how useful one makes oneself to them. When the lunar in our group ended up with a nasty wound, and we needed to remain in a small subterranean village while she healed, we immediately went about proving our usefulness. Our deep fey aided the locals in finding a new water source. The twin warriors and I went about slaying a beast that had been living on the edge of their town striking at loners. Even our laid up friend weaved baskets and mended clothing. With all this, you would think that they would have been more than willing for us to stay, maybe even to join their community, but they were quite glad to see us on our way. I believe this is less about rudeness or a lack of social graces and more a reflection of the precarious balance of resources that the residents of the underground must remain constantly aware of.

THE PALE

like the pale from above, these beings have evolved to live in darkness, and their talents treat them quite well in the subsurface world. The evolutionary traits of the pale originated here, deep in the ground where some poor sods found themselves lost. Rather than surrender to the dark, the force of their wills and the power of the Forge transformed them into beings far more suited to the world below than that of above. The pale found underground are not as gregarious as their aboveground counterparts. They tend to be far more violent and primitive. Many have also grown claws and sharper teeth, and a good deal more of them have no civil part left, acting and surviving like any other wild predator.

URGODA

These are feral, avian humanoids who in other lands dwell in caves yet hunt and raid above ground. Here their pale cousins have forsaken this lifestyle and roam the caverns, constantly on the move and looking for food. Rather than hole up in one area learning to hunt and manage resources, these violent and crude hunters have adopted the habit of believing that what is around the next bend is always better. They travel miles and miles underground, resting only for a few hours between treks. Any and everything they come across that is edible is consumed—this includes travelers, villagers, and in times of need, the weakest urgodas of the pack. These bird-apes are impossible to reason with in groups and will attack anyone that they run afoul of. However, they do not set up ambushes, and their attacks will often be ill-executed. Urgoda tend to be loud and grumbling, and snap at each other as they travel. It is not hard to hear them coming, and clever wormers will hide and let them pass by. Once they have passed, it is unlikely that they will backtrack.

If there is a useful trait of the urgoda it is that they are extremely well-traveled. My group managed to overtake a small party that attacked us and to capture one of their number alive. They had been coming from the direction we were headed in, and by feeding the thing and making it clear we were in control, we were able to force the creature to act as a guide. This arrangement ended when a snap beak shot out of a side tunnel and cracked him in two.

One should not confuse the pale urgodas living beneath the ground with their light-sighted brethren that dwell in the border caves in the cliffs to the south of Stygia. These latter creatures are hunters from the Wildwood, and though primitive, are far less likely to eat one on sight if they are approached with deference.

DARK FEY

The drow keep a great city far beneath the world. From here they have branched out into the corners and bleaker places of the underground. Drow in Eclipse are more pragmatic and less the hedonistic social climbers one might find in other realms. Here their open war with the deep fey has bred a hardier and more combat-focused culture. Weapon skills and ruthlessness are valued over cleverness and cunning. My group was never able to in any way connect with them other than through combat. We, after all, had a deep fey as one of our members. I can say that those we did battle with were skilled and ruthless, striking hard with magics and missile weapons, almost overwhelming us in their onset. They fought to the death as well, only one of them trying to flee when failure seemed clear, likely running off to warn others and rally a larger attack party. From what I understand of them, they are ruled by a warrior queen who must accept any drow challenge to her rule and defeat the usurper in mortal combat.

DWARVES

Though these stout folk are far more common in Anvil than in the lower reaches of Eclipse, there are several small mining communities here. The dwarves I met were some of the nicest and most generous of those living beneath the surface. They do not suffer the paranoia or oddness that seems to affect other races who adapt to living beneath the earth. Of course, their mining operations can bring them into conflicts with deep fey, but not as often as other races. The dwarves have a much deeper love and respect for the rocks, stones, and metals of the underground. In this regard, they and the deep fey are in accord. There are of course misunderstandings and spats, but all the dwarves we met were more than willing to show hospitality to my deep fey friend.

I found the dwarves of Eclipse to have a more elemental nature than most, their skin resembling stone patterns and their hair dreaded in thick knots. Some had taken on deeper adaptations, becoming almost totally made of rock and stone, and one dwarf lord I met even had veins of gold and platinum running through his face and arms.

There are still few who can produce weapons and armor as well as the dwarves, though they tend to be better with heavy arms like hammers and axes. The working of staves and sabers is best left to the deep fey or to the masters of Baradume.

DEEP FEY

Aloof and mysterious, rarely seen and even more rarely traded or communed with, the deep fey make their homes in the furthest reaches of the lands below. They are spirits of nature, and defenders of the ecosystem. Most do not understand them, viewing them as invaders as they sometimes make massive raids on colonies that they feel are overusing resources. I learned from my time with one of them that they are truly good in their nature, kind and compassionate. They are also willing to die for the rock and earth they so easily commune with. As a culture, they are

highly xenophobic; their cities are never seen by outsiders, and they are hard-pressed to speak with those outside their race. I had the great pleasure of remaining among a small group of them for a short time. They were kind, polite, and even traded some tales with us, but I learned that they had a permanent camp somewhere in the nearby caves, and rather than hosting us there they set up a temporary one at the site of our meeting.

If you chance to trade with the deep fey, remember that gems and gold are an insult to them. They would much rather see them in their natural habitat than laid out in crude coins or cut into jewels. They fey are more likely to be interested in curiosities and rare items from the surface world than items of traditional value. I honestly think that if the pale pickers ever found a way to worm down into the bowels of the Cauldron they would do very well for themselves.

The fey themselves make the most wondrous of weapons, delicate and sharp in look, yet hardy and unbreakable in function. Some would wonder at their use of metal and gems in their work and think that they are perhaps hypocritical in this practice. I discovered that they take this as the most sacred and reverent of actions, liking it to shamanic tribes who love the natural animals and honor the spirits of those that they must slay for food. I also learned that when a master craftsman produces a weapon or piece of jewelry from the gems and metals they harvest, the deep fey take no offense. It is when the bounty of the earth is taken for granted and used for ugly coins or mass-produced weapons of war that the deep fey take issue.

SCYTHIN

The slick, sharp, shape of these incredibly swift and potent creatures surrounded me. I was their prize and living victim. They made no attempt to restrain me with ropes or bindings; instead several of them held me, each gripping a different limb. They moved in unison, holding me in their iron-like clutches. They moved both upright and on all fours with ease. I did not struggle, resigned to knowing where they were taking me, and assured that in the end I could escape by unfolding my true form. I caught brief glimmers of the others who had been taken alive—a small child who wailed until his throat was hoarse, a female picker with a broken arm, and my deep fey companion, who struggled tirelessly and with no success against our captors. Their eyeless faces gave no hint of their intentions, and all of us were treated with indifference whether we screamed, fought back, or just lay limp. The beasts could move down shafts without slowing, their seven-clawed hands and dexterous toes instinctively finding footholds and grips where even the most experienced of climber would have faltered. Deeper and deeper they ferried us into the bleakest reaches of the underground. We passed by many old carvings and statues, pale and shimmering in the light of my magical stone that hung loose on my belt. The quick passing shadows seemed to give these stone phantoms life. In one chamber we clamored through there was an extremely old statue of myself from when I was the Colopitiron of this realm. It must have been made of the most hardy of stones to have survived for so many eons. It also denoted that the ruins we passed through were truly old beyond old.

What must have been more than three days passed on our journey, yet the scythin never tired, never wavered, and never slowed. I saw my companion passed out from his exertions. Where they held him, the blackness which was his skin had hardened and cracked, like the broken surface of a dried lake. I recalled that touch of any kind had always made him uncomfortable, but until then I did not realize that prolonged contact could cause real damage. Finally, we entered tunnels unlike any others, their walls, floors and ceilings covered in dim glowing crystals that gave off a sick gray light. Their formations were sharp and interwoven; I saw the boy graze one of them and his arm began to bleed from a thin, deep cut like that of a razor. Only the scythin, with their thick hard skins, passed over these dagger-like formations with ease. I imagined how hard anyone who hoped to invade (or for that matter escape) these tunnels would find the going. No doubt they would see their leather boots frayed and their own skins shredded from the effort. At last we came to a central chamber, and imagine my surprise when I saw clear signs that a being of intelligence lived here. Everywhere there were beakers and potions, bookshelves and work tables, like a great laboratory in some school of sorcery. We were affixed to the walls by oddly-formed, smaller scythin who excreted liquid that quickly crystallized around our limbs, holding us in place. The walls became a macabre mosaic of all the villagers that had been taken alive. Most woke and began to cry out somewhere, some bound upside down. Many had been set up against the edges of the sharp crystals. I could make out signs that others had been bound here before us. The small boy who had traveled near me was so weak as to be near death, and several of the scythin gathered around him. They opened their many-jointed faces and hissed at each other as if debating something. Finally, one of them bit the boy. Moments later they were in a frenzy, tearing him to pieces, his screams cut short as his limbs and torso were torn asunder. A woman across the way let out a tragic cry, and though I could not be certain, I thought she might have been his mother.

Next there was a sound like a humming. It rose up from one of the side tunnels, and all the scythin froze and rose up, standing like soldiers, their heads bowed and their arms crossed over their chest. The creature that entered told me everything I needed to know about the scythin—their origins, their purpose, everything. A dreaded palethian, the oldest race on the Forge. They are

the dark masters of twisted,
long-forgotten sciences,
alien in their thoughts,
motivations, and form.

The palethian live to pursue perverse, bizarre experiments of their own foreign contemplation. At once I understood that the scythin were his creation, that he used them as a tool to gather subjects for further testing, a near perfect kill force. This thing had painstakingly designed them—to whatever end I could only imagine.

The palethian went at once to my deep fey companion, seemingly overjoyed. Its foul tongue complimented its troops in the sick language that rolled from its saw-like mouth. My friend was blessedly still passed out. The creature prodded and poked him, talking all the while about how he could not wait to see if he could harvest the black skin and combine it with his warriors to make them even more dangerous. Then he moved on, surveying the rest of his new playthings with his eyeless face, until he reached me. Still in the disguise, I met his expressionless face with a steeling gaze. He backed two steps away and hissed, “This will not do! No! No! Very bad!”

“You know me for what I am?” I asked, mimicking its gross tongue.

“Yes,” the thing barked back. “I see the world for what it is, and you for what you are. You have come to then to undo us all. The great betrayer!”

“I would be lying if I said the thought did not cross my mind, but for now, my mission here is one only of exploration. Though I have oft played at being hero, I know that is not my course.”

“What then will you do here, devil?”

“Depart,” and I burnt away my bonds with the fire of my true form, a fire both unending in heat and awash with purest cold. The thing shrank before me, and for a moment I hovered above him, letting it feel fear like the kind it so readily and callously exposed others to, and then I turned to leave.

“I will live,” it said to itself, “and keep my prizes.”

In my true form I cared so much less for mortals and their trials. Many of them now looked to me for salvation as I burned before them, the most glorious sight they would ever know, even in a thousand lives. How readily my appearance deceives. I considered saving them only in passing, but in the end I did take one with me, the deep fey, not so much because of our friendship, but rather to vex the palethian.

By the time he awoke, we were far from there, and I had returned to the form of his well-known companion. I could not ease the pain he felt at the loss of our companions, and he informed me that he was done with the wild need to explore. In my final journey as a mortal in the writing of this book, I escorted him back to his home and, from a great distance, glimpsed the city of the deep fey. Built atop great underground waterfalls, its black towers were backlit with blue, connected with swirling bridges, and lit from above with a thousand star-like points of light. It was a rare and wondrous sight. I said farewell to my friend there and let Nexus Nim return to his people, wiser and frightened, and unique among all others in Eclipse—the only survivor of a scythin attack.

SOCIETIES

There are countless small isolated societies that eke out sustenance from the raw



and unforgiving world below. Many of these are extended inbred families or were founded by religious zealots. Most are less than open, and some are downright violent to outsiders. There are also a rare few city-states that dominate great underground swaths; they war with other cultures both large and small in order to sustain themselves, and though some choose to wear the mask of friendliness, most have darker underbellies. The depth and breadth of Eclipse's caverns make cataloging or even mapping them an impossibility, so I have simply chosen a few places that I encountered on my travels to serve as examples of the wild possibilities to be found in this darkest of lands.

THE KEEPERS OF THE DARK

This community of a few hundred makes its home near one of the great forest caves. There they have commandeered a system of tunnels that has only one large exit. They are led by the valco spiritualist Karta Moona, who teaches them all to worship the dark and the blackness. We rested on the edge of their holdings, never fully allowed in. It became clear that they are a very closed and controlled society. We never saw any women or children; they were kept far down deeper in their tunnel system. The men we did see functioned on a strict hierarchy, and we were only allowed to speak to one or two of them for trading purposes. I sent our molice wizard into their encampment to spy, as he would go unnoticed. When he returned, he confirmed many of my suspicions. This group was a cult. The valco leader set himself and the other strong males as high priests, and they had isolated all other members from the outside. Most of those held there were now very young, and my spy made it clear that they seemed to have no idea that there was any world at all beyond the caves they occupied. There were also signs that members of their own cult had been eaten as well as quite a few outsiders. With this warning we choose not to drink the wine they gave us after trading. Later, we had it tested, and our fear that it was drugged was confirmed.

THE MIRRORED CITY OF VENCROL SEAMOUNT

One of the true wonders of the underworld, this is by far the most open and cosmopolitan of underground city-states. Built in a vast chamber, its towers stretch from floor to ceiling, and any buildings not tall enough to reach are "mirrored" by hanging structures suspended above from the high roof of the cave. This place is home to nearly twenty thousand full-time residents and over five thousand seasonal workers. It is able to sustain such a large population due to its thriving tourist trade and its great natural subterranean lake. Once a year here for three months, a rare flower blooms that has luminescent pollen. This pollen rains down on the city and hangs in the air, lighting everything with a wondrous glow; it also has an intoxicating effect on most races. The rich and decadent come to Vencrol Seamount to experience

the euphoric beauty and effect of the pollen rain. The town has built all sorts of attractions and diversions for visitors, making itself into a destination spot for those that wish to get away from it all. The effects of the pollen become dulled after a generation, so most locals no longer feel the wonder and awe, even if they can enjoy the spectacle of it all.

The glowing pollen also feeds a great spawning of fish that mate in cycle with its occurrence. These fish become saturated with the stuff, and when eaten can give the same euphoric effect. They are caught, dried, and traded. This brings in a wide array of seasonal workers from outlying caves. These, combined with the tourists, swell the city's ranks to capacity. I was only there in the off season, and for all the wonder of its construction, I found the place a little dismal. Most of the money to be made here is controlled by a very few rich merchants who spend the rest of the year rationing out food and supplies to the other long-time residents. I also discovered that those that have lived here for multiple generations may be immune to the pollen's effects, but if they skip even one season of the dusting, they suffer fatal withdrawals. Thus they are forced to endure here, even during the bleak off-seasons, and are forced to labor to make a very few rich.

There were signs of social unrest beneath the surface, yet it still did not seem to come to a boil. I read many posts and flyers extolling the safety of the place, all claiming that in twenty years no tourist had ever died. The locals however told of a murderer who stalked the streets, only killing visitors during the pollen rain. They said the merchant lords of the city went to great cost and effort to conceal and keep these killings hidden, yet each season the body count grew higher and higher. For a place that depends on its tourists and migrant workers, such news could cause great damage to its masters' pockets.

THE CITY-STATE OF DRIM DYTNER HORGON

This is the often spoke of, yet seldom visited city of the dark elves. I myself never glimpsed it with my own eyes, but the following is a description given to me and my party from a faust slaver who trades only elves of other breeds to them. We shared a fire and a small cave lake with him

and his band for one sleep as they made their way back to the surface. My group would never have suffered them if it was not for the pleading of our deep fey friend, who desired very much to acquire some intelligence on his people's enemies.

"It is no easy place to reach. Only after twenty years of bickering and boasting the best flesh, and near two generations, is my group allowed passage, and still we are fired upon at least once a trip. The maze of tunnels that leads to the oil-skinned fairies' home is indiscernible to most, but a few among us can read their marks. Still, there are checkpoints and ambushes everywhere, and they employ monsters with long leashes that must be reeled in from hidden locations if one hopes to pass. Oh, but once there, what a



sight they make of it. The whole place is built in a great circle, its center both arena and palace. Surrounding all of the outside of it is a natural moat, said to be bottomless. All the bridges that reach to the outside remain drawn up unless there is a purpose for them to be down. No slave, once interred there, may ever hope to escape from the place. Inside, it is a mass of ludi where warriors are trained, no families or homes. There the young are raised to fight and kill members of different battle schools. These schools rule the city; the better and more dangerous their warriors, the higher their prestige. They spend all their time training and fighting; the roar from their central arena never seems to die. I cannot grasp how they have anyone left to do battle with their outside enemies. I sell to three great schools, and the elves I deliver there are used not as a workforce but as prizes for the greatest of their warriors. There are many other slavers that bring them grunts for their mines and to be used as workers, but my wares are finer. What amusements are set upon them I do not care to imagine. I can say this though, they are ever in need of a greater supply, and I am paid so well that I think soon I might give it over to one of my lessers and retire. It is an ugly trade even for one of my less than tasteful race.”

- The faust slaver Kergen

THE LOST CITY OF NOD

Deep beneath the ground, in a chamber my fellows and I only came upon after being caught up in a great earthquake, there is a hollow windswept cavern. Its ceiling is only twenty feet high in most places and it is smooth both above and below. This vast sprawling area is dotted with buildings, all of the same make and shape, each stretching from floor to low roof; they act as both dwellings and supports. These duplicate structures continue on in all directions for miles, and once among them it is far too easy to become utterly disoriented and lost. We found even our magical compasses to falter here, and were forced to rely entirely on our deep fey friend to navigate. He led us through these abandoned homes for what seemed like trackless time. I know we made camp at least four times on our journey into them. Many of the abodes still had functioning wells, some with edible fish to boot. Finally we reached what must have been the center of this place, a great open shaft that stretched both up and down, becoming gradually narrower in both directions until it was less than ten feet in circumference. There, between these two shafts, a cage was suspended, and in it a creature of a race I did not know was bound. Its beak-like mouth was gagged, and its many limbs were bolted to the edges of the cage. We had not the means in our little group to reach it (though I could have in my own way, I thought the better of it). For though this thing seemed starved and weak, it surely must have weathered ages alone in its prison, and its eyes, great and gaunt as they were, gave off a menace that so disquieted my group that we passed well beyond our usual endurance before stopping to rest. I will note, that other than myself, the rest of my group completely forgot the creature we had seen there, thinking me quite mad when I brought it up later.

HOLDSTEAD

One of the more pleasant and bright places that we visited as often as our travels would allow was the primarily dwarven community of Holdstead. Long, well-carved, and maintained halls and chambers are all alight here with warm, glowing, enchanted torches that do not consume oxygen to burn. There was never

a time that drink or meat was not happily shoved into our hands and mouths, and most of the time all that was asked in return was good company and tales of the underground. The few thousand dwarves and other miscellaneous races that call this place home have the pleasure of being located on one of the richest and most diverse mines in all the underground. They harvest its resources at a leisurely pace, the whole of the community sharing in the wealth and prosperity it brings them. They have elected officials who govern, but with a soft hand. Everyone here works the mines, but they are in no rush to clean them out. Several larger companies have made attempts to buy them out, but to no avail, and they arm themselves and protect their homes well. It seems that though the mine is rich, the gentle pace at which they work has avoided attracting deep fey, who have plenty more grievous offenders to deal with. Still, the first few times we rested here, our companion was the only one who attracted off looks. Holdstead is centrally located and a short enough distance from the surface that the trip can be done in one haul.

TRADESIGN

The published leaflet included in this chapter is readily available for sale in Sabor, and can easily be had in Erebus as well. Written by Ban Argus, the explorer, the information here is not only accurate, but essential, even if its presentation is a bit eccentric.

MONSTERS

There is no end to the variety of aberrations and horrors that can be found living among the dark shafts of Eclipse. There are of course established species that over long periods of time have come to naturally exist in the black, but there are also lone creatures who, wayward, found themselves lost beneath and have adapted. Some are (or were) closer than one might think to oneself. In our first few days underground, we were set upon by a pale, wild thing; it was not until we had slain it and it came to rest that we became aware that it was human. And not even a “pale” human at that, just a man who had wandered so long beneath the ground that he had been bleached, his hair wild, his fingernails overgrown, his form so malnourished as to appear ghoulish. I write this as but a simple example of the twisted power of the labyrinth beneath. If a simple man can become this creature, be warned of the warp the caves may have on more dangerous beasts.

CARVER WINGS

Like flying piranha, these small, finch-sized birds are the terrors of the tunnels; beware the echoes of their high-pitched cries. Carver wings travel in flocks of thousands. They prefer small, tight caves and shafts. When they encounter any living being, they speed through these enclosed areas on the attack, each taking a small bite as they zip past. A full swarm is able to strip a full grown man to the bone in a single pass. Luckily there is an easy defense against these ravenous creatures. First and foremost, they are not quiet; if one listens, one can hear the oncoming cries and the flapping of their wings. Second, they move so rapidly, and only in one direction, that even a small lip or alcove can offer one protection. Rarely do they ever turn around and pass back through a tunnel they have already traversed, as the swarm requires a large chamber to change course.

SNAP BEAK

These great, worm-like beasts burrow everywhere underground, digging with a combination of their monstrous beaks and the twenty or more finger-like clawed limbs that line their heads. They love to set up ambushes by digging a tunnel at an odd angle, such as directly above a place where a cave begins to open up. Once there, a snap beak waits until a victim passes by and then quickly snaps out, gripping the victim in its large beak. The victim's limbs are then easily subdued by the creature's digging digits. Snap-beaks are tough skinned and hard to kill, yet some tribes have managed to capture them, and use them to dig passages, though they can never be fully domesticated.

GAPE FISH

About half the size of a full-grown wood elf, and with a mouth almost as long, these predators wait in dark water or along the bottom of rivers for prey to happen by. The gape fish will pull its victims under the water, gripping them in its steel-like jaw and holding them there until they drown, then it will eat them at its leisure.

SLITHER

Black and sleek, slithers look like shadows or oil spills when they are at rest, but they can pull up their jellyfish-like dome to reveal twenty or more long tentacles, all lined with barbs. They will leap on their victims, wrapping themselves around them and encasing them in their inky upper crown. The slither will then constrict, smothering its prey, and anyone who attacks it runs the risk of doing damage to the person it has entangled. Slithers do however hate extreme cold, and will flee from its presence, retracting their barbs and leaving their prey behind.

UNDEAD

There are many places in the underground where my party and I encountered wayward or purposely placed undead. Some seemed to simply wander the nether lands mindlessly, utterly ignoring us. Others were filled with malevolent intent for all living things, and attacked blindly and without concern for themselves. There was a small ruined town we came to where mindless undead went about their old daily routines as if they all still lived. Children played, miners pantomimed their labors, mothers sewed without any thread. None of these beings even took note of us until we tried to enter the temple at the center of the town, then they rose up in force and drove us from their village.

LEGENDS

Many strange and often outlandish tales of goings on circulate through the dark caves of the underground, some I think may even have the ring of truth to them. Others sound crazy, but perhaps should not be fully dismissed without proper vetting. A smattering from our journeys follows.

HAZE REBELS

The tales of haze who have escaped the goddust mines and have set up their own society deep in the earth are not just rumors. According to the mining companies, they are worthy of a rather large bounty. Supposedly they have set up a system to help free others of their kind from labors in the mines, slipping them out under the noses of the guards, possibly with their bribed assis-

tance. It is said the rebels intend to grow their forces until they can attack in the open, bringing goddust mining to a halt.

THE CAVE OF PORTALS

There are more than a few scholars who claim that this place is more than just a legend. Located somewhere beneath the sink-hole that took the city of Talis is a chamber with portals that will take a person to numerous places on the Forge and maybe even beyond. Of course, the trouble with those who go looking for it never returning is that it only leads to further rumors that it is true.

THE CHOCOLATE FOREST

In the realm of wild rumors there is a longstanding and often spoke of story of an underground forest where everything is made of chocolate. It is said that those who know of its location keep it secret, going there and gathering the best it has to offer and then selling it to others on their travels. Though I never met one of these merchants, it sounds like a marketing tool if you ask me.

SALT CAVERN

Somewhere, in the very deepest part of the bowels of the Forge, there is said to be a massive cavern filled with all the salt (and for that matter the other things) that has been filtered out of the water consumed by the Helix. All sorts of horrible demons and aberrations might still be alive and hungry there, but an impressive array of artifacts is estimated to have come to rest here as well. Actually, no one that I know of has ever claimed to see this place, but people figure it must be there somewhere. Brave and intrepid as I am, even I thought the better of taking a ride down into that whirlpool's maw.

THE CHAMBER OF LIFE

Rumored to lie deep beneath the vampire city is a great chamber a mile across. There, magic makes day and night, and a green, living rainforest grows. Waterfalls and streams run their course throughout this forest, and natural animals are said to roam there unaware that they are far beneath the world. It is said that a vampire wizard of awesome power built this place as a testament to life, its magical machinery designed to survive for ages. Tales say that to drink of the water there or to eat of the fruit is to become one with the cave and to be transformed into one of the innocent animals that dwell there. The wizard supposedly dwelled in the chamber himself for decades before finally taking his own unlife.

Common Trade Hand Signs



hello



goodbye



go away



sleep



run



money



danger



hurt



magic



give



yes



no



want



to the surface



welcome



eat



a drink



booze



sex



smoke

So you're looking to do some worming, eh? Maybe yer ma got carried off by the scythin, or maybe you heard that rumor about the city of diamonds beneath the lava flows, or maybe you wanna try and make a few quick bucks selling picker pies to the urgoda... none of my business really, but in any case you're going to wanna do some homework before you get way down into that hole. Sure, food and water helps, so does as a good knife and pack, some sturdy rope, and a renewable light source, but even carrying your own weight in water will really only buy you a week of survival instead of a few days, and your food will run out soon enough anyway. Plus, even a short trip is gonna take you longer than you think. Walking from point a to point b above ground might only take you a few hours, even in the dark, but now try walking from point a to point c, then crawling to point d on your belly, then climbing up a sheer cliff to point e, then swimming underwater to point f, and then rappelling down a quarter mile to point b. Well... you get the point.

Any real venture into the blackness worth its salt will take at least a month, so yer going to have to find another way to keep yerself from becomin' lichen food. Some folks put their faith in magic bags or spells, but these always seem to have a way of going wrong just at the worst times. And sure, you can devote yourself to reading rocks and identifying moss and divining and all that, but that takes years of study, and yer ma is gonna be eaten long before then. Yeah, the big mistake most first-time wormers make when dipping down is thinking they are going to some forbidden desert on the moon or something where nobody has ever been before. Not only have people been all over every inch of the worm-maze, people live there. True, they might not look quite like you or I, but who are we to judge. The truth is that you can get pretty much anything you need way down in the hole, you just need to know where to look and how to ask. People down there don't get many visitors, so they aren't much used to talking, but that doesn't mean they aren't friendly. In fact, most folks are so starved for company that they bend over backwards to show their hospitability to strangers. I'll never forget the little kebold tribe that took me in and made me the guest of honor at their yearly feast. True, I turned out to be the feast, but that's not the point, the fact is, they took me in, gave me a hot bath, anointed me with the best oils, and gave me the best massage of my life before I set their village aflame and fled in the mayhem.

Since civilized pockets are so few and far between down there, and the worm-holes are so full of hermits and scattered peopies, language is a bit of a useless art. Sure, you might speak perfect nightling, but nine out of ten folks you meet down there won't even know what a nightling is... heck, I've even met a couple of nightlings down there that didn't. Down in the dark, everyone uses Tradetalk to do all their business. And that business is generally trading, natch. You don't need ears or specialized vocal chords to use Tradetalk, you just use your hands, and it's not like one of those civilized languages for the deaf that might take years to learn, this is intuitive, basic, and pretty limited. Once you get started with a wormer, you'll find you get a natural rhythm going, and you can start making up your own signals and doing some improvising, but for starting out, it's best to just stick to the basics. This handy little pamphlet will teach you how to talk to pretty much anyone in the blackness beneath in just five minutes of study. So give it a scan, grab your sword, and go save yer ma!

Tradesigns work much like spoken words. Each signal means something on its own, but combine it with a few other signals, and you've got a complete thought. For example, try combining "Give Money Want Food", and you may just survive to tell yer grandkids about the time you laid eyes upon the cursed tomb of the vampire king.

Some folks add grunts to their trade signs to help get the point across, but that's not a requirement. Use yer imagination, and do whatever feels natural.

A few last words of advice. If yer gonna rely on trading to get by, it's probly best if you bring along a few things to trade. Some fools drag big bags of gold with them, but money isn't that useful down in the dark, it's only useful as an exchange item, and a lot of the folks you'll meet don't really have many chances to exchange things, so it's best to bring along stuff they can directly use. I find that compact items like valves for stills and general repair kits really come in handy, since most folks down there rely upon old and touchy machines to help them get by, and if a part goes, it may be years before it can get fixed. For complicated trade items, just hold 'em out and say "give", you'll see right away if the other guy's interested. Music can be useful to trade too if you are good enough. Also, as a last resort, since inbreeding is common down there, if you can find someone of yer own species, a gift of your seed of worth its weight in diamonds. Heck, even if you can't find yer own kind down there, people are so lonely they'll try just about anything if you ask. Just remember, if you get the go away sign, go away! Not everyone's misery loves company.

chapter 13: The waters



Now come we, Lord, to the great and terrible sea that churns and roils like a fell beast in its final throes. Its blackness is girdled by the rocky shores and the up-thrusting of civilized handiwork, yet ever are the violent waters rightly held in awe and fear by the land-dwellers. If one were to enumerate the catalogue of the souls lost to the watery maw of these depths, many an age will have come to pass before the tally was complete. Bards of old and poets of the modern age have sung the primeval dread of this dark water which thrashes ships and tears apart leviathans.

And yet, for all its grand force, this water is a vital link, a veritable highway, between the myriad cultures and races of the world. It holds mysteries vast and deep as itself. Its wonders are unsurpassed, and though no master claims it, many are the fools who have tried. It brings the gifts of life and the mercies, or agonies, of death. It is home to many, and its motions affect the very climes of the land. To know this world, Great One, one must surely look to the sea.

The great ocean is the center of Eclipse, certainly literally, but most figuratively as well. The surface is a great vastness that has never known the kiss of sunlight. For countless ages, it has thundered in darkness, a liquid ebony impervious to the searching eye. The most ferocious tides on the whole of the Forge are found in this, the Sea of Ink, and the coasts have been ravaged time and again. The land-dwellers have learned to raise up their cities far back upon the shores to protect themselves. Even one city—a genius of the blending of necessity and innovation, the renowned Baradume—is constructed upon a break wall rising over one-hundred feet. The power of these waves is awesome; a normal wave here can measure upward of twenty feet, and during the highest tides, when the red moon is swollen to its fullest, walls of water can reach as high as one-hundred feet, making even the roots of the far-off mountains tremble in disquiet.

The movement of the water is at incredible speed, churning over itself at a rate so strong that its concourse warms the polar regions and prevents them from freezing solid. One must, perhaps, pause to ask the reasons for the volatility of these waters.

For where else in creation

does one find the power of water so menacing and fierce? Surely, Lord, you would know it better than your humble servant. The answer is quite as brutal as the effect. Firstly, the red moon, the one that is called Zadkiel, is monarch of the skies once in a month. Its pull upon the ocean is a torture, and up it raises walls of water so high and mighty that even the stone watchtowers of the coastal towns have been knocked aside like nine-pins countless times through the years. This period lasts the span of two Penance days, the length of warlike Zadkiel's meander across the sky. It is folly during this time to launch a ship or even to tread near the shore, for like as not, the depths would claim any for their sunken halls. There exist still ancient tales of barbaric tribes trying to placate the raging seas with human sacrifices during this time of massive tides; particularly notable are the alleged ministrations of the so-called Red Monks of Cathalon, whose monastery now lies only in the memories of the rock of the southern coast, who were so vigorous in their rites that they plundered and rendered extinct a handful of small seaside villages, for their sacrifices mainly consisted of virgin children and good-wives of child-bearing age.

Not solely culpable, though, is the red moon. The Thousand Mile Falls are also a great cause of the disruptions of the sea. The name is not to be taken literally, fond as these founding races are of hyperbole. The falls themselves are closer to three-hundred miles, which is still rather impressive. The mighty cascade is truly one of the great wonders of all the Forge, not easily forgotten or escaped. The Northern Ocean finds—in some way still shrouded in mystery—its egress at the top of the falls. As it rolls over the lip and downward, it reaches its maximum threshold of speed, and plummets for hours like some disgraced and outcast angel. For upward of three hours, the water pours through the unresisting air, only to crash with soul-shaking violence into the Sea of Ink. On its way down, the curtain of water is subjected to the shearing winds that race the upper ranges of Eclipse, so that the cascade does not fall simply straight down. As a result, the “splash zone” is great and wide, over a mile square on moonless times. Of course, when grievous Zadkiel wheels himself across the heavens, the power of the falls is increased near nine-fold. The volume of water during moon-tide is staggering. Flying birds have been known to be bludgeoned to death by the crash of falling water, bits of their shredded corpses washing up months later on diverse shores.

The crashing of the falls is near deafening, and can be heard from dozens of miles off. Stories abound among sailor-folk of the many times in which the cries of their fellows have been drowned out by the roar of the falls, even thirty miles off. Intrepid and foolhardy captains have sought glory and riches for themselves and their brave crews by attempting the so-called “Falls Circuit”, which entails sailing around the base of the falls without being drawn in, sucked under, and destroyed. Countless many more have failed than have succeeded, but every decade or so, some

rich merchant puts up a purse and surely enough stupidly brave sea-folk flock to the harbors of Eclipse for a chance at the renown and wealth that could be theirs if only they are lucky enough to be led by a luck-blessed captain, or run by a true crew. But sea-folk are a special breed, it is said, often gainsaying the best advice of learned men and hovering off to the watery wastes with only an empty purse and a hopeful heart. The danger of the Sea of Ink is dire enough, but the closer one goes to the falls, one's odds of a murky grave are exponentially increased.

Innumerable ships and galleons, triremes and barques have been turned over and sunk by the rage of the sea near the falls. The mists thrown up by the falls rises thickly and high, reaching at times to the very feet of the clouds, and so it appears that the clouds have deigned to come down to the sea, as if to evoke the legend of old regarding the creation of the land (inset).

And having made fast in their prison of air
The great West Wind and East Wind,
To punish them for rending apart the lands below,
Which kissed the shores of vast Ocean,
The Water Absolute said unto the Sky thus:
“Ye winds have broken the backs of my beloved,
Which is called Land. For this shall I keep thee
Bottled in fetters for a thousand years, until the
Land shall knit itself together again.”
But at this did the Winds reply,
“For this we do not bend, nor ask forgiveness.
Thus it was for this that we were made.
How dareth ye to fetter us for our natures?
Woe unto ye, then, for if we are fettered,
then so shall our kindred never serve ye.
The Clouds shall gather and only white sky
shall you behold, and there shall come
rain, and there shall come no light from the sun.
Let then your beloved Land fester and rot, and
Recall ye your egregiousness, for punishing them
That only do as they know how.” And the Clouds
closed forthwith, and did not break again.

Poetical, perhaps, yet apocryphal and of unknown origin, but this legend lingers among certain of the sea-folk who labor on the deeps. This is by way of saying, my Lord, that sailing peoples harbor lore that others do not have, and often it allows glimpses into aspects of the culture that would be missed otherwise. The greatest legends of the sailors, of course, involve sunken treasures and ghost ships, and often some combination thereof. And of course, the Thousand Mile Falls often figure prominently in these tales. Every sailor, even the greenest, most landlubberly recruit, knows the perils of coming too near the base of the falls, and it would not take much education amongst the driest land-dweller to know that to stay clear of the splash zone would be eminently wise. But every age vomits forth into the history books some handful of death-defying daredevils who in quest for riches or fame or love or revenge or any other of the innumerable motivations which

plague the hearts of these creatures, venture forth upon the clashing waves and wend falls-ward. And as a result of these foolhardy expeditions, the waters about the falls are littered with broken-up ships, bloated corpses, decimated cargoes, the flotsam and jetsam of shattered hopes. Indeed, since the Northern Ocean is in fact the source of the falls, it seems that any trinket or bauble or refuse that ever splashed about in that water must surely come down to add itself to the sum of debris swarming the base of the falls.

It is to this point come the treasure-hunters and scavengers. If there are a braver, though somewhat ignoble, class in Eclipse, it would be quite a feat to delve them out. There are a handful of private firms that hire themselves out as “salvagers”, which I will discuss later, but many of the seekers are groups of like-minded criminals who would foresee an ample payday in the uncollected remains frothing about in the sea. Often, they stowaway on legitimate freighters, or steal small boats themselves and steer them

close to the splash zone. That which floats is hauled aboard and poured through, separated into valuable and worthless, the latter being tossed overboard again to be picked up and sorted again by the next intrepid crew. But even these pirates are surpassed in sheer talent, effort, and bravery by the treasure-divers.

Certain of the seaside folk are adept at swimming underwater for long periods, having a lung capacity that far outstrips the average land-dwellers. In particular, the Akai people are known to be able to remain beneath the waves for extended periods. While the Akai are generally supposed to be an insulated culture, there are known cases of occasional "renegades" who escape their people to fare forth in the cities. Often, these renegades find themselves in the employ of often unscrupulous treasure-dive operators. For the most part, these operations are run out of Baradume and Erebus, but wherever there are nefarious robbers, there is sure to be one who dreams of running a dive scheme. The dangers of this field of employ are greater than near any other, for to willingly throw oneself headlong into the rage of the sea (often naked but for a leathern drawstring knapsack to hold whatever one may be lucky enough to pluck from the sea's greedy clutches, while being tossed and thrashed by waves and currents, knowing that at any moment some foul creature of the deep may happen upon you and devour you whole, and all the while the chances of drowning, getting lost, coming back empty-handed, or being abandoned by your crewmates pile upon you, and the very real possibility that once you pull yourself back up onto the boat deck your companions will gut you and steal your recovered booty and toss your carcass overboard) truly shows a bravery and recklessness that the average, or even above-average fellow cannot hope to equal. The division of spoils is rarely equitable, and even the most experienced of the crew can be short-shrifted. However, there is no doubt that the enterprise can be extremely profitable, and there abound in coastal villages and seaside pubs frequented by sailing folk countless legends and stories of sunken treasures and hidden hoards. As the saying among these "liberators of the forgotten", as they call themselves, goes, "Wealth is better spent in pockets than in the bosom of the sea."

The falls also draw another lucrative market to its glory, this one far more legitimate and pleasant, but often equally unsuccessful. Sightseeing excursions are popular among the upper-class denizens of Eclipse's metropolitan areas. Rich travelers even from Penance have been known to come, spending small fortunes just for a glimpse of the awe of the falls. Yet disappointment often reigns, as the rich and well-moneyed are not known for their patience, and when they want to see something, they want to see it, whether or not it is visible at the moment. Truth to tell, for all their grandeur and size, it is well to remember that the falls fall down into a world of darkness, and as such they are nearly impossible to see but on those occasions when the moon is bright in the sky overhead. And that, to the chagrin of some travelers, is not as often as their money would like. Many have spent a small fortune to gaze out upon blackness, and a cottage industry has cropped up advertising in far-flung places offering "special rates" to foreign travelers to "come see Thousand Mile Falls in all its magnificence", scheduling non-refundable excursions between moons and hoping the duped haven't access to a date chart and a basic knowledge of visual theory. But, when the moon is out, the falls can in fact be seen from anywhere in Eclipse, and the view is remarkably stunning, a gleaming crimson shaft pouring from heaven seaward, exploding in a shower of crystal froth that wafts up as though wishing to rejoin its mother. Its sheer power and majesty are enough to make one forget its capacity for destruction and ruination that is so well known among the peoples of Eclipse.

Of course, I would be remiss in not mentioning the Helix as another source of the sea's rage. No account of the wonders of Eclipse would be complete without mention of this incredible whirlpool, fifty miles in diameter, its depths unknown and an eternal mystery. The churning of this vast maelstrom tears the face of the waters as surely as the plummet of the falls. The suction of the Helix is a force nearly unequaled in the natural world. Everything within twenty-five miles of the center of the whirlpool is in danger of being sucked down to unknowable depths. Accounts of disappearances into the Helix are rife in the annals of sea-folk, and none have ever returned from being caught in it.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, this has earned the Helix an excellent reputation as a fine place to rid oneself of troublesome problems. The seedier quarters of Erebus and Highmark are known to hold those entrepreneurs of dubious intent who arrange with the compromised well-to-do to dispose of mistresses, bastards, thieves, merchandise of questionable ownership or of heavy curse, indeed, all manner of persons or property that could well prove incriminating to a person of position or quality. On a related note, the Helix was once the final destination of many a prison ship, filled with condemned souls, but this practice waned as the populace grew more desirous of actually seeing the end of their felons, and newer, gorier methods of public execution were invented.

To turn to matters less sanguinary and more saline, should such a thing interest you, my Lord, it is perhaps worth mentioning that while the Northern Ocean drops itself down into the Sea of Ink, salty as any ocean anywhere I wager, the water drains here at a remarkable rate. There is no mortal explanation for why this is, but most on the Forge have rightly guessed that the saline waters of the ocean that drain here bubble up in Penance at the Well-spring as pure and fresh water. Assorted theories exist amongst learned minds of Eclipse and the Forge as to what occurs to the water, and whither the salt, as it passes through the center of the world. Most of them are preposterous and do not bear repeating, and I only mention this as an interesting fact that may be found amusing to You.

The Helix is quite rightly avoided by legitimate shipping, for that is one route which leads only one way. It is even lacking in tales of brave exploits of some misty-eyed captain with dreams of gold and glory who risked all to sail the lip of the whirlpool. There are certainly no wealthy merchants willing to put up a prize for such idiocy. In fact, for all intents and purposes, aside from those nefarious, the Helix is well enough left to its own whirlings.

Once, several decades ago, there was a rescue barge anchored at the twenty-six mile mark from the center of the Helix, just out of range of being "dragged in", as the mariners say. From a high crow's nest, a watchman would scan the dark sea for the light of any approaching ships and send off a blue flare to warn them off their course. Well intentioned though it may have been, the commandant of the barge eventually succumbed to a madness brought on by his failure to save even half the ships that steered too close, and in lunatic fashion, slaughtered his crew and tossed them overboard to be gulped into oblivion by the whirlpool. An old salt's tale, possibly, but it is told with some authority by a handful of experienced maritime wanderers and given credence by reports from the firm who owned the barge and sent an agent to it many years later. The agent's report told of a deranged ghoulish slithering the decks of the old barge, bedraggled and moaning, talking nonsense about phantoms and curses.

This is all merely a way, my Lord, of reiterating the bald fact of

the Sea of Ink: that its dangers are frightening and overwhelming, its power for destruction near limitless, its very existence an inspiration to the vilest of deeds in the hearts of the corrupt. Its violence is known, if not understood, and the land-dwellers have tried to adapt themselves to it, building their cities to defy the waters, wagering their lives and fortunes in contests against it, making it their accomplice in murders and vanishings. They seek to use it as a tool, to traverse it for trade like a highway. The sea toys with them, allowing a small accomplishment here while dashing a hundred grand endeavors. It is not the master of this world, but neither is it mastered. There is no harmony between the land-dwellers and the sea; even the knowingest of sea-folk fear it. But fear is a form of respect.

THE LIFE AQUATIC

Of course, the dangers of the Sea of Ink also include that which dwell within it. Many creatures great, small, and miniscule call the sea their home, and more than a few are distinctly unfriendly, to say the least, and to swim in the deep waters of the Cauldron is to display a bravery and a recklessness reserved for the young or the feeble-minded. I do not intend to give a catalogue of the sea's contents, although I know that there is not a creature in heaven, sea or air that does not escape your interest. Merely, here I wish to present a few of the more interesting and noteworthy residents of the dark depths.

CREATURES OF THE DEEP

Many of the species dwelling in the Sea of Ink can be found anywhere on the Forge, in fact, most species that are found anywhere will inevitably end up here, carried off the world's edge by the falls. Most species not adapted to the darkness do not survive past a generation, although as with the land, many species have mutated from the energy of the Forge, forming strange offshoots from their original cousins. There are indeed other fish in the sea, so it be. Truth be told, there are rather a lot of fish in the sea, and much of the animal life found in these dark waters is just that, fish, shellfish, jellies, sharks, whales, seals, and so on, providing a great deal of food and nutrition for the land's citizens. Many of these sea-creatures have unique adaptations, oft times a form of sonar that lets them "see" beneath the waves in place of light. However, I expect you are not anticipating an enumeration of blind prawns or pale clams, but that you hold out for something more exceptional. As usual, I do not disappoint.

DENDRITES

First off, the dendrites. These bizarre creatures are approximately the size of a large adult shark. They have an odd, egg-shaped central body, a whip-like tail, and a mass of grasping kelp-like tentacles which they use to entangle their victims. The dendrites do not appear to be intelligent on their own, unlike other sea creatures, and have been witnessed swimming, when alone, directly into rocky obstructions as though they were blind, repeatedly even. However, research has suggested that they are able to communicate with each other by means of their tentacles and tails. The means or mechanism by which they do this is still not understood, but adds a layer of interest to an otherwise not-quite-remarkable creature. Individually, they are unpredictable and are quite capable of attacking, seemingly with great malice. However, in groups, they appear to obey or operate as part of a hive mind,

moving and striking as one with grace and ample speed. The tentacles envelop the prey in a web of inescapable strands, and the prey is then absorbed into the body of the dendrite, digested whole by enzymes and chemicals. The whip-like tail is used to strike and stun larger prey, and is often its first defense if attacked. Also, one must beware the highly electric nature of these beasts, which can stun or even kill prey from a distance. When larger food is not available, the dendrite will simply swim into a school of fish, set off its charge, and then go about devouring the resulting floating meat sticks at its leisure. Due mainly to this ability, plus the oddity of their shape and the strangeness of their hive-like mind, the dendrites are well-known among the land-dwellers, and though most have never seen one, they are the subject of much speculation and frank disgust. Recently, the new Sea Life Museum in Oerdin has put out a call to fisher folk, offering a goodly sum for the capture of male and female dendrites, although determining the sex of the dendrite is a process that often leads to loss of digits or entire arms. There is also, in fact, a famous, one-armed marine biologist who has made a career of insisting that dendrites are hermaphroditic. Needless to say, this has caused quite a stir in academic circles in Eclipse. But the capture of a dendrite is no easy feat, and requires the use of hooks, pulleys, nets, sedatives, spears, bodysuits, and various arcane instruments which even the discerning marine outfitter likely hasn't stocked in years. Odd, though, as they may be, the dendrite is hardly the most dangerous, or even the strangest creature of the sea.

GORGONFISH

These pug-faced fish are commonly found in the shallows near to the southern and eastern shores, although there is no reason to suppose that this is the extent of their domain. They are best described as pineapple-sized, with a comparable exterior. The skin of the gorgon-fish is thick and a dull green color, dotted with knobby protuberances, and it feels stone-like to the touch. The thick layer of skin is the primary defense of the fish, as it can only be penetrated with difficulty, and most successfully by a heated blade. Also noteworthy is the profound ugliness of the fish, whose face resembles a squashed dog's with a piggish snout. The gorgon-fish's teeth are mostly a fence of tall, thin, pointy, jagged spikes, and they are known to prowl the shallows off beaches and sever the achilles tendons of unsuspecting waders. They are known with no small measure of derision as "ankle-biters", and it is by this name that they are commonly known; often if one speaks of "gorgon-fish", one is met by a dull stare. Perhaps most interestingly, the fish's belly contains a pair of rounded, green stones, similar to that found in the gullets of poultry, to aid in the digestion of solid foods. These stones, called "belly berries", are highly prized amongst apothecarists and alchemists, having the ability, when ground into fine powder and added to liquid and drunk, to induce the ingester to eat and drink far more than his own capacity should seem to allow. This potion is particularly popular around feasting holidays or during competitive eating contests, though they are, of course, considered a banned substance. Also, it has found a small following among perversely-minded torturers who wish to gorge their charges to death.



SIREN WHALE

In the lore of sea-folk, the siren whale is hated with a tenacity often reserved only for former spouses. The siren whale is larger than a dendrite, close to the size of an orca, and its hearing is the marvel of the undersea. Its markings are bright, luminescent golden, and it can often be seen shimmering and writhing beneath the darkest waves like a drowned sun. While justly famed for its coloring, the trait that sets apart the whale is its eerie and haunting ability to faithfully mimic the human tone. With a knowledge that can only be called sinister, the whale rises to breaching-point as it hears the approach of a vessel. Well before the ship itself has seen the tell-tale shimmer beneath the waves, the whale lets out a cry of utter despair and pleading. And while the ship may be too far off to understand the words, surely a plaintive cry of desperation is understood by any sailor. The kind-hearted captain steers his ship in the direction of the cry, hoping to rescue any poor, unfortunate souls. Meantime, the whale has dived again deeply, so that its shimmer cannot give it away. Waiting until the ship-in-shining-armor nears, the whale darts upward to stave in the hull of the ship and devour any morsels that may drop. The entire endeavor suggests an intelligence in this whale that has not been studied with any seriousness, and which most sea-folk do not care to dwell on in the first event. Many of the large shipping firms have caught on to the whales' game, and often nowadays, victims are more likely to be small-time fisher folk or inexperienced boatmen.



PAPER EEL

While its name may conjure images of child-like crepe projects, the paper eel is a scourge to any poorly-made boat. Living in colonies in coves and inlets all along the shores, these eels can reach six feet in length, but it is their width that recommends them. Literally, they are paper-thin, and as such have no difficulty in slithering in between the poorly-caulked planks of a second-rate rowboat or the flaking weave of a coracle. The mouth of the paper eel is sucker-like and filled with gruesome teeth. Poor fisher folk of the shore communities are most often the victims of these surprise visitors, who squirm up between boards and latch onto bare ankles or heels, bite deeply, and do not let go for much. The body can be severed from the head, and yet the sucker-jaws will not relax. The pain of the paper eel's bite is said to closely resemble being repeatedly impaled by a rusty knife. The paper eel is related to the bludgeon eel, whose mode of operation is similar, though involves using its blunt, powerful head to break through the planks of the hull. Paper eel attacks can be avoided, experts remind frequently, by caulking one's boat regularly, but the lassitude of the average fisherman has redounded to the eel's benefit fairly often.



MANTA RAY

The manta ray is widely considered by laypeople and academics to be one of the most intelligent species of the sea. Their shape is iconic: broad, flat wings, eye-stalks, long whip-like tail. They move graciously in the shallows and the deeps, able to glide through the inky waters seemingly without effort or tir-

ing. Traveling mostly singularly or in small groups of less than five, the manta, in its lifetime, will circle the Sea of Ink some forty times, and manta skeletons have been found in certain of the underground riverbeds and sea caves of Eclipse. The manta can only be described as friendly and curious when encountering land-dwellers in the sea. Accounts of unprovoked manta attacks are exceptionally rare, and most of the documented ones have arisen due to some mental impairment on the ray's part. Perhaps because of their friendly reputation, the manta is well-loved and respected by sea-folk and land-dwellers in general. Most exotically, the manta is known throughout Eclipse as the sea-mount of the Akai tribes people, and of certain adolescent "thrill-seekers" of the southern coasts. And this despite the manta having a back covered in microscopic spines which lodge in the feet of riders. The whip-like tails of the ray are used as its primary weapon, used mainly as a flail to stun and frighten back any encroaching persecutors. The manta's speed must surely be counted as a weapon in its arsenal as well, for there are few creatures in the sea that can match it. It can perform hairpin turns and dives that send pursuers into dizzying fits. The manta has little trouble eluding capture, and as such there is little interest in cultivating a market for them among business-minded fishmongers.

OLYMPE

The olympe is one of those ancient sea-monsters about whom countless legends have arisen over the centuries. In appearance, it resembles some hideous hybrid dislodged from the nightmares of an opium addict. The upper half of the creature recalls the body of a young woman, with two long, tapering arms that end in lobster-like pincers, and a large dorsal fin protruding from the back. The lower half, from the waist downward, is comparable to the octopus, although with twelve tentacles rather than eight. At the end of each tentacle is an anemone-like growth of powerful stingers. The head is in the form of a human's but the face is quite different. There are two eyes, but no mouth or nose. Hair resembling seaweed grows upon the head. The mouth of the olympe is found at the nexus of the legs, a sealed orifice filled with tiny, needle-like teeth. The olympe uses its tentacles to propel itself toward prey, and then using its long arms, embraces the object of its desire tightly, drawing up its stingers to immobilize the prey. The poison of the olympe's stinger is a powerful neurotoxin which shuts down brain activity within seconds. The olympe then rips apart the prey into manageable chunks with its arms and then feeds them into its absorbing mouth. The arms of the olympe are very powerful, and once caught in the embrace, even the strongest have a hard time freeing themselves. In times of old, olympes were often mistaken for mer-folk. Ancient legends survive of sailors falling in love with the nubile, lithe young maidens they glimpsed beneath the waves, little knowing they were lusting after creatures of terrifying monstrosity. The olympe is rather rare, and many marine biology experts have ventured to suggest that they are now extinct, as there have been no new sightings in many years. There was once a lucrative market for their poison, being in vogue as an assassination tool in the last century, but the difficulty in procuring it has drastically reduced its demand and availability. Still, the flamboyant assassin who wishes to make a name



for himself or establish a flair in his work would likely be able to find some if he knew where to look.

OUROBOURE

Without doubt, this is the most feared and fearsome creature of the deep. Its size is gargantuan, and its temperament little short of demonic. Indeed, the ouroboure seems to interpret the very existence of other life in the sea as a personal insult. As such, it appears to be on a crusade to decimate any and all life which crosses its formidable path. There appears to be only one of these giant beasts, and its age cannot be determined, although stories of its wrath have come down from prehistory. It is rarely seen, and the roster of those who have survived encounters with it would run very short indeed. In all of recorded history, there are only two accounts of sailors who have lived to tell their tales. This dearth of evidence has led many to think that the ouroboure is merely legend. However, the two accounts, though separated by hundreds of years, are remarkably similar in their descriptions. Here, allow me to quote from one Tivrik, a sailor of approximately three-hundred years ago, and one of the two survivors of ouroboure:

“Up it raised itself higher and higher, til its head vast surpassed the mainmast, even past the crow’s nest. Still neath the waters I could discern an immensity of body, and knew that a great bulk still remained to this beast, that he could continue to unfold himself from the deeps until his crown touched the very dome of the Cauldron. High he drew himself to tower over us. And finally, he stopped, and still as stone was he, as though he meant to frighten us, and surely I would have turned about that ship right then were I the master. For a longish moment he stood unmoving above the waves. Then, as though a great and invisible string had been severed, downward fell he with a greatness of speed. His body, giant and solid, crashed through the ship deck as through kindling-wood, and burst us asunder. I was thrown into the sea forthwith, and had great fortune in grasping a piece of debris. I watched as the great monster thrashed and writhed in the detritus, chomping and devouring with his immense maw, swallowing in great gulps huge chunks of the failing ship and drowning men and vastnesses of water. His titanic motions made the sea even more violent and pushed me away from him on enormous waves, and eventually I was rescued.”

There is no consensus among sea-folk as to where the ouroboure can normally be found, as he is so vast that only the open sea could hold him, and it is a fear held constantly in the back of every sailor’s head that the ouroboure should rear himself up before them on one of their voyages. It is described as a great darkness in the waters, blacker even than the sea itself, and immeasurable. His reputation has spilled over all the shores, and the mere mention of his name is often enough to make a hardened sailor spit on the floor and throw salt over his shoulder.

SEA PLANTS

And now, Lord, a small mention of some of the plants that live in the sea. Aquaculture has not caught on as a serious industry in most of Eclipse, despite the enormous reliance on kelpgrass for food stocks. There are also numerous edible algae farms operated by the Akai people on the southland shores. By and large,



though, the sea is held in fear and distrust by the land-dwellers. This is not to say that valuable and useful things do not grow in the sea, however. Here follows a very brief description of but a few.

BREATHWEED

This plant grows in clumps of tall stalks, often found in narrow inlets or creek-mouths. They grow together thickly, at narrow necks of water, and in former times they were removed indiscriminately as a nuisance by farm-folk who needed clear waterways for irrigation. At maturity, the plant is over half the height of a normal man, thin as a reed, and topped by a ball of spiny spores. However, the benefit of the breathweed lies in its root. When pulled up from its planting, the root is revealed to be a small bulb, about the size of a child's fist. When broken off from the stem and eaten, this bulb secretes a chemical that, when mixed with human saliva, produces oxygen. Thus, by chewing this bulb underwater, one can breathe for a limited time. The efficacy of the bulb lasts approximately one candle mark, long enough for intrepid treasure-divers, perhaps. The taste is said to be comparable to sawdust mingled with spoiled asparagus. Unpleasant as the taste may be, however, the plant is a valuable resource for divers and undersea salvagers. It is recommended by those with experience that the bulb be eaten as soon as possible after removal from the ground, as the longer the bulb is exposed to the air, the less efficient it will be when finally consumed. Certain treasure-hunting ships are known to set up hothouses below decks to grow a fresh supply of breathweed to be used on expeditions, and breathweed spores are sold in some coastal markets to captains of these efforts.



TINGLE-KELP

Aptly named, this kelp is most commonly ignored by most, yet is the essential requirement for the so-called "ray-riders" of the southland waters. Growing in tide pools and shallows, they resemble plate-sized lily pads: large and flat leaves above a thin, stalk-like stem. The leaves, easily separated from the stalk, when broken, ooze a thick, white sap, known as "thalish". Thalish is a powerful numbing agent, and is spread on the feet of the riders to protect them from the microscopic spines on the backs of the manta ray. While most know thalish as a strong pain-killer, it is often forgotten that it is in fact a numbing agent, and one must take care not to get it on one's hands or other sensory areas lest one lose one's tactile abilities. The sap is waterproof, though its effectiveness wears off relative to the amount one has applied. Among the Akai people, the sap is also used for medicinal purposes, rubbed on aching teeth or bruises for soothing pains. Medical researchers from Baradume have recently begun experiments to determine whether the sap can be distilled into an injectible opiate for hospital uses.



FINGER GRASS

Harmless in appearance, finger grass looks like an unmown lawn submerged in the shallows near the western and northern shores of the ink sea. Gray-green, waving placidly in the motion of

the tides, its danger is often overlooked. In reality, the grass is highly sensitive to touch and pressure, and the instant it senses the touch of another creature, it quickly entwines itself around the encroaching invader and tries to pull it downward where it can overwhelm the entire body and devour it with microscopic mouths. Most victims are fishes and small sea animals, but certainly reports of children being held down and drowned by the grass have been circulating for years. The speed of its attack and the strength of its grip can easily make a trip to the shore into a nightmare for the inattentive parent.



RIVERS, LAKES AND SEA CAVES

To quote that favorite phrase of philosophical sea-folk, "The sea is not the only water." The face of Eclipse is also scarred by rivers, pockmarked by lakes, and gouged by caves. The rivers are a vital network of travel amongst the lands and peoples of Eclipse, but not nearly so much as the vast spider-web of sea caves, where much of the trade beneath is carried. In fact, most of the rivers of Eclipse are birthed in the caves, and spill forth from the cliff faces and fall as waterfalls to the base of the cliffs where they run in their channels and beds to the sea, rushing swiftly and treacherously as the slope of the land carries them hurtling forward.

The rivers that flow upon the land are known to any with the most rudimentary knowledge of Eclipse's geography. What is more mysterious to the layman, though, are the many subterranean rivers that roll unseen and often unknown beneath the surface. These are mighty waterways rushing miles and miles from deep within the bowels of the mountains, propelling themselves forward with self-perpetuating power. Most of these never breach the surface of the land and instead flow underground from spring to outflow, ending by pouring from the mouth of a submerged sea-cave into the black welcome of the sea. These rivers rival their above-ground brothers in power, speed, length, and sometimes navigability. They have names like L'Enfer, Orpheus, Ichor, Gaulgotta, and the greatest, Gihenne. In places, they flow smooth and placid, and often in these areas, underground settlements have sprung up, carved into the caverns through which the rivers wend. Originally settled by outcasts and religious fanatics, these settlements have grown through the centuries, although it is rare to find one with more than one-hundred inhabitants. These cavern towns were once refuges for escaped prisoners and army deserters, a motley collection of malcontents. But eventually, as the realities of a life underground descended upon them, a life of musty air, the constant sound of thundering water and echoes, the inevitable inbreeding that must result from such confined and isolated existence, these social rejects were tamed by circumstance and their fellow townsfolk, and today, it is known among the criminal element of Eclipse that there will be found no welcome nor refuge in the cavern towns.

Freshwater lakes dot the surface of Eclipse, and far more lie sleeping below the surface. Lakes of sea-fed water lie closer to the coasts, though some remain further inland as reminders of the sea's reach, or possibly being fed from underground sea-channels. The surface lakes are frequently fished by land-dwellers, as the stock found in lakes are often more placid and tastier than sea fish. Often, the lakes are picturesque locales, suitable for tourist resorts and parkland.

The series of lakes in the north called the Tooth Lakes are a

cluster of water-filled craters deep in a forest wilderness. Small, though deep, they are known for the savages who dwell upon their shores. Their names are unknown to history or current tongue, and they are seen only rarely. Rumors of sacrificial rites and animist cultism are rife. It is evident that these lakes are sacred to them, and are used in their sacrifices as pools of drowning. The savages have been known to kidnap forest wanderers for use in rituals, and tales of cannibalism attributed to them cannot be dismissed outright as the boogeyman tales of a frightened higher echelon of society.

Beneath the surface, a huge lake spreads like a stain under the mountains of the eastern coasts. There is a great rent in the earth here, a chasm that offers a view down into the massive cavern that holds this underground sea, which is called Lake Lagove. Long ropes dangle down into the chasm for the interested, who can descend to mere inches above the lake's surface, a depth of some six-hundred feet. The lake water is warm, and a popular swimming resort has been built at the top of the chasm, with hundreds of ropes dangling like fairy-floss. An annual diving competition is held at this resort, and the champion is the one who dives from the lip of the chasm into the lake and then climbs back up the rope to the surface in the quickest time. However, as the lake bottom is very uneven, and seamounds rise to near-surface, and the dim blackness of the cavern does not allow the diver much leeway in his direction, many of the contestants have opened their skulls on submerged rocks during the tournament. For this reason, the lake is more commonly known as "the Bloodwater."

Most of the Cauldron's lakes are not near so treacherous, and instead offer a plentiful supply of food and recreation for the land-dwellers. Although some are rank and filled with bitter, sulfuric water, most know to leave these well enough alone. These so-called "dark lakes" are useful only to those who need to rid themselves of incriminating evidence. None ever wade here, nor dredge unless compelled by local constabulary, which is rare enough.

SHIPPING

The vast bulk of the trade in Eclipse is transported over the waves by a flotilla of merchant vessels operated by the shipping firms of the great cities of the coast. These range from family collectives owning a mere rowboat to ferry their vegetables to market, to moneyed amalgams whose fleets cut through the waters of the sea as often as a thumpit strums. Since the open sea is treacherous even to the sturdiest-hulled vessel, the shipping lanes of the Sea of Ink hug the coastline, so that for the most part, every merchant ship on the sea is within sight of land for the most of their journey. The risk of being sucked into the Helix is far too great to sail much further out to high sea.

Travel and trade are often inextricably linked on the Sea of Ink. The main route, of course, runs from Baradume though Highmark to Erebus, and then on to Oerdin, port town for Sabor. Slave traffic famously drives shipping between Shade and Baradume as well. Of course, hundreds of other lesser routes crisscross the face of the deep, as demand between even the small coastal villages for the custom of their near or far neighbors springs up and blooms into a flower of ships. Many fortunes have been made, and lost for that matter, on the waves of the sea, and there are always a ready supply of speculators waiting to take the place of any who fail.

Trading ships traditionally move in a large circle around the Sea of Ink, hitting all the ports along the way. The average circle tour can take upwards of six moons to complete, dependent upon weather conditions and other factors. Traditionally, as much of this time is spent at the various ports than at sea. It might take only a few moons if a ship were to sail the circle nonstop. Route charts are posted in every tavern and inn along every wharf in every port city, so that travelers know the next incoming or outgoing ship, and each captain is expected to keep his ship's log accurately and present it to the harbormaster within half a candle of docking. There is more money to be made from timely departures than from stalling, and as such there is little incentive to falsify these records.

Although trade and travel are vital to the stability and the very survival of the land-dwellers, the number of ships that ply the open sea are relatively few in number. The average shipping firm may own about a dozen ships; the largest company, Blackwater, owns thirty-three. Most firms are small, managing between one and five ships, often owned by members of a family or neighborhood group. Handmade rowboats are often found pressed into service in small, backwater coastal villages on occasion. Since sailing vessels are so few, and are so necessary to the welfare of the people, tradition holds them to be sovereign territory, even while docked in port, and their crews are often treated as traveling dignitaries in most ports. Barring some egregious breach of local custom, sailors are often granted a sort of "diplomatic immunity" to prosecution, although I daresay that few of them deserve it. The so-called "Lean Season" of Highmark is often cited as an example of what can happen if overzealous lawmen try to breach this agreement (see Chapter 1, section "Water").

Shipping firms occasionally band together in their capacities as sovereign entities, as would independent nations in alliance. A group of shippers may ally themselves together to monopolize trade on certain routes for an agreed period of time. The goal is not necessarily to drive their competitors out of business, or put a crimp in their bottom line. Often, it is more a matter of fattening their own pockets for a brief instant. For example, several seasons ago, two small firms, Transit Waterborne and Gilper Brothers, formed an alliance to last one shipping circle, or six moons. Since the two could never hope to make a dent in the pocketbooks of larger firms on their routes, they banded together to corner lesser cargoes and routes, often ones overlooked by their larger competitors. They teamed up to double the number of departures from the small ports of Siverko and Floating Jagnape in the southlands, and contracted with family producers along the southwestern coasts to carry their cargoes of whip-beans and barrel staves, cargoes that larger firms had been letting rot on wharves for months. As a result, these two small firms won a loyalty among their neglected clientele that has in fact redounded to their benefit several times over in recent seasons.

To be clear, some of these firms are little better than pirates, charging exorbitant lading fees and imposing draconian conditions on their cargoes and crews. Respectable people just simply know better than to use a firm like Javelin Lines to cross the sea, or to trust their cargoes to them. For the most part, however, a code of conduct exists upon the waters, best described as "live and let live". The times of open warfare on the sea between competing

shipping lines are long in the past, and today the mere thought of such behavior would send investors into fits of rage.

Merchants often hold long-standing contracts with shipping firms, and while these can be renegotiated at regular intervals, it is becoming less frequent that a client will switch his custom. Contracts, per Eclipse tradition (and flouted at the risk of the Dark Master's wrath), are never written, but are simply spoken agreements, with each man's honor on the line. The captains do their utmost, in most cases, to please the customer and get the ships to their ports on schedule. More money is to be made by efficiency than by lolling about waiting for another, and by no means guaranteed better, opportunity to arise.

Depending upon the firm, crews are paid relatively well in the shipping industry. Often, a sailor's contract has some percentage of the six-moon profit parceled out at the end of the voyage. The result of this system is that every six moons, the wharf-side taverns and inns of the major port cities are inundated with newly-rich sailors. The cavorting and debauchery that results in the port districts is notoriously riotous, and the mere mention of the words "Landing Pay", the name used to refer to a sailor's payment at the end of a circle (the festivities often last over quarter-moon), is enough to fill an innkeeper's heart with equal measures greed and distress. However, if there is no profit made on the voyage, the crew does not get paid. Many a mutiny has been enjoined by hard-working sailors who, through the ineptitude or mismanagement of their superiors, have been left with no compensation after six moons on the sea. There are currently labor disputes with the larger companies over the establishment of a minimum, guaranteed payment for sailors in the event that their voyage is unprofitable. Needless to say, the shipping firms are quite against the idea, but the sailor's guilds have been gaining allies for their cause, including wharf owners and taverners. It is by no means clear how this proposal will fall out.

Here, if I will be allowed a small indulgence, seems to be a good place to discuss some several of the shipping firms that cruise the face of the sea. It is my small intent to show the manner by which certain firms operate, and in so doing, perhaps illuminate the larger whole of the industry.

BLACKWATER OVERSEAS SHIPPING AND TRANSPORT COMPANY

This firm is the largest, most well-known, and I daresay least-liked, of the many large and small shipping firms on the sea. Known everywhere merely as Blackwater, the company owns thirty-three vessels, most of them large barges and clippers. Their business tactics are renowned as being ruthless and cutthroat. The firm was founded some one-hundred-fifty years ago as a

runner of lottery chits to gambling houses in eastern coastal ports, collecting sacks full of numbered tiles for delivery to the lottery office of the Champion's guild in Baradume. Once drawn, lottery winners would be determined from these tiles (each municipality was issued different colored tiles, so the winners could be identified more readily), checked against the lists that accompanied the sacks, and the winnings be loaded back onto Blackwater's waiting runner. The shipping firm received a percentage from the lottery office to deliver the winnings back to the lucky port, and the lucky winner was charged a fee by the shipping firm for safe delivery. In this way, being paid on both ends of the transaction, Blackwater was soon in a dominant position to control the eastern coastal trade routes.

The current chairman of the company, Commodore Lucian Black, great-grandson of the founder, has continued his family's tradition of smart management and take-no-prisoners style. Under his long tenure, Blackwater has doubled in size, buying up weaker competitors at below-market rates, branching out into shipbuilding and thereby cutting their own costs by building their own ships, and investing in port property and construction projects. Blackwater is a commanding presence on every major route, and it holds stakes in many of the smaller shipping companies that run the smaller routes as well. More than one of its competitors has likened Blackwater to an octopus, snaking its arms into as many sources of revenue as it can reach.

Blackwater has turned a profit every year for the past forty-seven years. The company is privately held by the Black family, and there appear to be no plans to open the firm up to public investment. Of course, the benefits of this are numerous, not least of which is that by remaining in private hands, the company cannot be compelled to divulge any of its balance sheets or business reports, thus ensuring the utter secrecy of their dealings.

The firm has long had a reputation for hiring—often out from beneath competing firms—the best and brightest captains. One particular story is especially illuminating, and not remotely unusual for Blackwater. Some years ago, a talented captain employed by Needlesharp and Whipcrackle (now owned by Blackwater, but at the time a minor competitor) docked his vessel at Oerdin. The Blackwater office agent at Oerdin had been instructed to hire away this captain, mid-voyage, and to use any means at his disposal to do so. In a wharf-side tavern, the captain was enjoying a few marks of respite with his crew before setting off again to complete his circuit. He was approached by the office agent, and after several moment of pleasant conversation, was offered a generous compensation package to become a Blackwater captain. The captain was understandably tempted, but his company loyalty got the better of him, and he declined.



With a professed sadness, the office agent left. A short while later, as the captain was returning to his ship to begin the casting-off preparations, he found his vessel swarming with Port Authority revenue agents. In a fit, he demanded to know what they were doing. The revenue agent replied that he had received an anonymous report that the captain's ship was carrying contraband and illegal stowaways. The revenue agents were authorized to hold his ship indefinitely for inspection, and in the meantime, costing the captain and his crew a sizable piece of their profits. The captain was crest-fallen and enraged, and he also knew that the office agent was behind it, for of course there was no contraband or stowaways on his ship. He went to the Blackwater port office and found there awaiting him the office agent and the head of the revenue service. The captain, now faced with the certainty that the revenue service in Oerdin was firmly in the pocket of Blackwater, promptly agreed to a new—and much less generous—offer from the office agent.

Allegations of corruption have dogged Blackwater almost from the start, even back in the lottery years, but because of the sovereignty of ships at sea and in port, there has never been a serious effort to crack down on them. They maintain their dominance by charging competitive rates, guaranteeing on-time delivery, and offering insurance packages for any lost cargo. The insurance business alone has grown in leaps and bounds over the last decades.

The two largest vessels on the sea are owned by Blackwater. These are the flagship, The Auld Lottery, and its sister ship, Commodore Euston Black. These two ships are most often used on the major lines, and are not allowed to leave port unless completely laded, without a single empty berth or container. Due to their size, they are somewhat slower than the rest of the fleet, but their capacity puts them on equal footing in terms of profit. Most of the fleet are caravels, lighter, medium-sized ships that can make the circle in five moons. In fact, the twice-yearly Commodore's Cup, an informal race of all the trading ships in a six-moon period, has been won by one of Blackwater's caravels since its inception.

The company also owns several triremes, and employs slave labor to man the oars. Mostly, these are run along the south coasts and are kept out of the major port cities. Although manumission societies exist in some of the major cities, and religious missionaries have been spreading the gospel of emancipation for some years now, it is not a social conscience that keeps Blackwater from flaunting their slave labor. Rather, slaves can escape more easily in large, bustling ports than they can from the lesser, sleepy tie-ups in the southlands. And on a related note, it is company policy at Blackwater not to hire anyone with a history of involvement in religious societies or missionary activity. Shipboard conversions, they found, were bad for the bottom line.

Blackwater's reputation has been made by its excellent record of on-time delivery, its acceptance of any cargo, no matter how exotic or dangerous, its reasonable terms, and its refusal to shy away from the more back-handed and corrupt ways of doing business.

RED MOON LINE

This firm is by far smaller than Blackwater, only owning twelve ships. But they have quietly built a loyal clientele and a reputation for scrupulous dealing. Based in Erebus Harbor and owned by a consortium of local shipwrights and stevedores, Red Moon Line is a player in the north coast markets. Their unique system of hiring

is known across the sea. Known as "lineage labor", or derogatorily as "lifetime labor", young men and women are hired onto ships during their teenage years, and are contracted for a standard terms of thirty years. Most are recruited from poor villages on the northwest and north coasts, and the idea of thirty years of employment is often seen as a god-send to them. A stipulation of the contract states that "any offspring produced by the union of two employees becomes the property of the consortium, to be used as seen fit." As a result, young men and young women working a ship together often fall into the ways that landlocked young people do, and children are born on the ships of Red Moon Line. The children are raised up to work the ships, taught by their parents, who are in the midst of their thirty year contracts. By the time the thirty years are up, the children are teenagers themselves, have met and mated with other grown-up ship-children and perpetuated the cycle. The original parents are loath to leave their children and new grandchildren, so often stay to help raise the newborn in the ways of running a ship. It has been estimated that Red Moon has saved itself considerable recruitment moneys from self-perpetuating a constant supply of labor on board its vessels. The so-called "Ship Children" of Red Moon spend most of their lives on the sea, only stepping foot on land when briefly in port. When they reach an age where they are no longer productive, the company discharges them from service and sends them off to live out their end years in a large, private estate owned by the consortium in one of the wealthy districts of Erebus. On rare occasions, one of the Ship Children escapes while in port, but is quickly overwhelmed by the pace and difference of life on land. The tragedies of these marooned Ship Children have been the source of dramas and fictions for years, and I myself have met with one, and found him to be most unusual, somehow hard yet naive all in one package.

The ships run by Red Moon are medium-sized clippers; having average speed, they are able to make the circuit in near the six-moon mark. However, Red Moon Line focuses most of its efforts on the north coast markets and rarely makes complete circuits. The owners of the line have placed limits on the types of cargo they will accept, and certain dangerous or suspect items are not allowed. This has made Red Moon unpopular with fences and crooks, who inevitably take their business to Blackwater. Red Moon is also popular with travelers between north coast cities, and the consortium is also part-owner of several hotels and inns along the route.

FINBACK & SPIDACKER

This firm has been around for ages, and is mostly nowadays a repository for ancient and used-up old sea dogs who can't get work with another outfit. More time is spent on a voyage in the telling of long ago sea-adventures and tall tales than in running the ship. It was as a passenger on one of their barques that I heard such fascinating pieces of lore as "Mermaids are just girls who pushed too hard" and "The only reason I've got this pegleg is that it beats stepping on my balls", neither of which frankly make any sense to me, nor did the joke about the captain with the steering wheel attached at his groin, or the particularly long and ribald tale known as "The Bilge-Sweeper's Daughter." Perhaps I am out of touch with contemporary humor, my Lord, but these were

lost on me. However, there seems to be a small but loyal base of customers who hire F&S barques to convey them and their few wares around the circle. The boats are slow, and anyone who is advanced in years must agree to a contract that their heirs or next of kin will not hold the line responsible should the old-timer reach his final destination before he reaches his final destination, so to speak. Finback & Spiddacker are more a pleasure cruise among curmudgeons than a respectable way of getting someplace. The line has been operating at a loss for many consecutive years and shows no sign of reversing its losing ways. Occasionally, a wealthy relative of a crewmember or a well-heeled client will donate a modest sum to keep the firm afloat, no pun intended, but any sane businessman knows that charity is not the optimal way to operate a concern. Which is precisely the point, my Lord. There is not a sane businessman anywhere near a Finback & Spiddacker ship.

GREY ANCHOR SHIPWAYS

This modest firm owns eight clippers and operates out of Highmark harbor. It runs the circle in just over six-moons, calling at nearly every port along the ways, no matter how big or small. For ports too small to contain one of their large ships, a small flotilla of rowboats are dispatched to ferry passengers and goods from ship to shore and back. In some cases, Grey Anchor is the only firm to call in certain ports. For example, smallholders in coastal villages such as Oban and East Balford plant their crops and harvest them according to when the Grey Anchor ships are expected in harbor.

Grey Anchor ships are known for their mastheads, exquisitely painted and commissioned by local artists in Highmark, and for their ornately decorated anchors, which are often gilded and carved with symbols and pictures. The crews are usually minimal, and each man is expected to know the duties of every other so that he can take his place should anything untoward occur. Even the lowliest deck-scrubber could step into the shoes of the First Officer on a Grey Anchor ship, though the reverse is seldom assumed.

One of the more respectable carriers, Grey Anchor is a sure and steady firm with stable leadership. The captains, though not perhaps at the level of Blackwater's, are all experienced and for the most part clear-headed. A code of strict discipline exemplifies the crews of Grey Anchor, probably more so than any other of the major lines. Foul language within hearing of the passengers is prohibited, and violators are subject to the lash. Drunkenness among the crew is a serious crime, as is a broadly-defined "dereliction of duty", which in the past has included not polishing the handrails in the galley, and allowing molice to congregate in front of the bridge windows.

THE MEMPHIAN BARGE

Basically a floating orgy, the infamous Memphian Barge plies the Sea of Ink continually, never docking in a port for longer than it takes to replenish supplies and bodies. The oldest continually operating brothel in Eclipse, the ship is a derelict luxury liner which caters to the every gluttonous, sexual, and perverse whim of its wealthy and often high-placed clients. Entrance to the barge

is strictly monitored, and a "membership" in the secret Memphian Society is required to board. The initiation process for this society involves several actions which require an impressive amount of physical dexterity and an aversion to privacy. Once on board, any imaginable act is fair game. The clientele is wealthy; entrance fees onto the barge are often high enough for one to purchase one's own ship. The voyage lasts as long as the client desires, boarding where he chooses, partaking of the pleasures of the staff, and disembarking at his leisure. The staff of the barge, or rather, the non-piloting staff, is drawn from a vast cross-section of Eclipse society. Every race is represented, with few exceptions. Vampires, whose services are astonishingly expensive, are popular with a certain type of thrill-seeker. Poor villagers are known to sell their children to the barge when it docks in their ports, getting rid of another mouth to feed and gaining valuable seed money. An illicit trade has sprung up over the years of kidnapping teenagers and upper-class mental defectives and selling them to the barge. The on-board orgies are non-stop festivals of debauchery, gluttony, drunkenness, and all manner of sexual perversion. The barge runs the circle constantly, docking long enough to restock on food, liquor, to drop off ravaged and damaged servers and hopefully add one or two blushing beauties. Repairs, as needed, are made at sea, and as such, the barge has the ramshackle look of a floating tenement. But for all its exterior uncouthness, the interior is a sumptuous palace of silks, pillows, chandeliers, and all the accoutrements of a high-class luxury resort. The liquor flows freely, the flesh is supple and willing and endless, and modesty is surely not allowed. Ownership of the barge is shadowy, but is rumored to be held in the hands of a vampire nobleman. Tales of the Memphian Barge told in ports are epic picaresques sure to titillate even the most prudish, and I have had the pleasure of taking a few drinks in the company of a former tinker who worked aboard the barge, forging chains and manacles for some of the tamer sexual games. Having had an near-endless stream of clients for centuries now, the barge is probably the most profitable ship upon the sea, and as long as the mind can dream up new and more degrading and perverse pleasures, the barge will be there to accommodate them.

CEPTU

A final note now, my Lord, on the Ceptu. These ingenious creatures have, over the years, developed a well-run and extensive network of trade routes that run between Penance and Eclipse via a series of undersea caverns. Closely guarded and shrouded in secrecy, they have monopolized this route to their great benefit. As is known to you, Lord, the Ceptu can travel across the Forge faster and in greater relative safety than land-dwellers and their caravans. As a result, it is often the case that Ceptu traders have greater, better, and more-exotic stock than their counterparts. In recent years, they have shrewdly forged an alliance with the city of Highmark, the new coastal metropolis, and direct trade between the two has risen substantially. More prominently, in the artificial bay outside of Erebus, there exists a small colony of Ceptu, enclosed in a large metal cage to keep out predators, and guarded by fearsome dolphin soldiers. In rare instances—or more commonly for a fee—travelers or traders who befriend the Ceptu are allowed to travel with them in protective air bubbles.

Highmark Royal Office of the Interior, Official Study no. 684: Focused Anecdotal Study of Risk Behaviors in Southland Adolescents Performed as a Series of Interviews with Self-Identifiers

Interview #17

Subject: T.K., age 15, wave-rider, Sea of Ink

TK- I'm telling you...there's no other feeling like it when you're up there on that ray's back, racing across the sea, the water and the wind spraying your skin. It's not anything like any of the other so-called "thrill-seeking" sports out there. I mean, waveriders can run rings around cliffjumpers, light-racers, wormers, you name it. None of them would last five blinks out there on the Sea of Ink, that's for sure. We're just, I dunno...tougher somehow. More fearless, maybe. Crazier, definitely. I mean, right, you've got to be a little off to climb onto a ray's back and ride it around buck naked, I suppose. Sure, there's types that would never imagine doing such a thing; I guess those folks are what you'd call normal. But me and the other riders, we can't look out at the Sea and not wanna go out there and wrangle a manta, race it around. I suppose we're just different. We don't wanna be normal. Not for anything.

Q- Can you please detail the preparations necessary for wave-riding?

TK- Preparations? You mean, getting all ready? (Q confirms) Right. Well, everyone's got their own rituals or what you call it. First off to begin, you gotta get to the beach. That's easy for me and most of the crew I ride with; we live right nearby. Camp, you know? Anyways, you gotta know the right places to go, where the rays are, that is. They like to congregate in certain area. Way out from the shore. If you swim far enough, you can seem 'em. I'm getting ahead, though.

Like I say, first off you get to the beach. Now once you're there, it's a good idea to set up some kind of shelter, because you might have a bit of a wait before you go out, or when you get back, waiting for the others to roll it. That's by way of saying, Rule One- you never leave without making sure everyone's back, no matter how skilled they are. So, anything'll do, just a few sheets of ratty old fabric, that's what we use, carry it around with us each time, just prop it up with some sticks, rocks, what have you. The wind can get pretty uncomfortable on the beaches, y'know. Nice to have someplace to keep cozy. And if you decide to bring any food with you, this is the place to stash it.

I guess you wanna know the fun stuff, huh? Well, what we usually do then, and I'm just speaking for my crew; other folk likely do things their own way, but I've no idea of that. I know what I do, that's it. So- what we do it we go down to the tide-pools and look for tingle-kelp. What? You don't know tingle-kelp? (Q confirms)

Alright. Tingle-kelp is...well, it grows all wild-like along the southland beaches, thick in certain coves and inlets. Its this silver-green color, flat leaves the size of dinner plates. Its not like normal kelp that your lot sees up north or wherever you come from. The stems are thick and it grows right in the pools. Comes up right easy, though. The roots are shallow. What you wanna do is take three or four leaves and pull 'em up, careful not to break the leaf underwater, cuz then it's useless. When you got 'em, you spread 'em out on the shore, preferably on rocks, to dry out. They dry real quick-like, less than an hour.

When they're dry, what you do it take the leaf and split it down the middle- they'll be brittle now. Don't pull the leaf apart, just split a crack down the middle of the leaf. Then, see, this thick, white paste comes oozin' out. That's what you want- that's the key to riding right there. This ooze, it's called "thalish" by the Akai, so that's what we call it, too. Basically, it's a numbing agent, numbs whatever you put it on.

You gotta be careful not the get it on your hands; if you do, you may as well go home for the day, cuz you won't be able to function with 'em for a few hours. You hold the leaf by its two halves and smear the thalish onto the soles of your feet. Numbs 'em up. And most important, numbs the manta's back where you're gonna be standing on him, so he won't buck you off. Oh, he knows you're there, just doesn't irk him so much when you got the thalish on. Akai says it's some kinda narcotic to the ray, but I dunno about that.

So, the more you put on, the longer it lasts. Four leaves worth, that should last a good long ride, easy. Now, not all the other guys do this, but what I do is I also take a fifth leaf and put just a little bit of thalish on my privates and my bum, just in case I get thrown, I don't have to feel the pain so bad. I keep tellin' the guys to do it, but....Anyways, it's waterproof, so it won't come off. Starts working after about a quarter-hour, so it's best to wrap up whatever you gotta do on the beach before you put thalish on, and get to swimming soon after you apply.

You can't go in without your ray-line. I usually have mine around my waist. Ray-line? You don't know ray-line either? (Q confirms) Alright, then. A ray-line is what you use to steer the manta once you get on board. It's like the reins, get it? They're made of all kinds. Some are wire, which I don't like. Seems cruel to me, y'know? Others are just plain rope, but those get slippery real fast, hard to hold onto in the rush. Some are algae-vine. Best around, that is. Rare, expensive, but stronger than the others. Mine, I use krayn-gut. Caught the krayn myself, I did. Made my line from its gut. Dried, strengthened with eelskin, woven tight. Works very well, since its naturally water-based, or water-origin, I should say. Expands just enough in the water so as not to snap under pressure, supple to hold, doesn't cut into your skin like some of the other lines will.

The line's gotta be long, three times your height is a good rule, and make sure it's got three good-sized loops in it.

So, by this time, you're in your altogether, slathered up with thalish, and ready to jump into the drink. I guess that's what you'd call the preparations, then. Everyone does it a little different-like, they all got their own variations, you could say. But, yeah, that's the basic formula there. That's the easy part done. Now the real fun begins.

Q- What happens once you are in the water?

TK- If you can, you should start off on a jetty or some such, something that juts out a bit into the water. Just gives you a bit of a head start, y'know? If there's nothing like that, then what I do is wait for a nice big wave to crash in, then run into it as it's pulling back out. You gotta run all out, until you're just tripping over yourself, stumbling through the waves. Once the water's about waist-high, that's when I start swimming. Now, see, I've been doing this for awhile, so I'm a good swimmer, I've got great lung capacity. But for beginners I'd recommend you start practicing holding your breath as long as you can. The longer the better, cuz all in all, you're gonna be spending a lot of time underwater.

If you know what you're doing, sometimes you can let the currents carry you out, saves you loads of energy that way. But it's real easy to mess that up, get caught slip-wise and get shot out who knows where. I've seen it before, guy ends up so off course, he has to get picked up by a trading ship. Drifted all the way out to the shipping roads. Wild. Anyways, what I'm saying is, if you know what you're doing it can save you time and effort. If not, you're in real trouble. I don't need to tell you how wild and unpredictable the tides around here can get.

So, once you're out far enough, you wait. Tread water, look for 'em. How do you know you're far enough? Good question. At a certain point far enough from shore, the water gets noticeably warmer. You can feel it, it's like crossing a barrier. It's not scalding, not even warm like bathwater. But it's noticeable, especially once you're used to the colder water already. Lots of little green slimy things live in the warmer water, too. Some kinda super-plankton, I dunno. Anyways, that's where the rays like to be, in that warm stream, surrounded by all those little green fellas they can just feast on for as long as they like. Tread long enough, one'll come right along. Treading in that wild water, though, that's a chore, lemme tell you.

They like the look of us. (Laughs) I dunno, but that's what the Akai say, they say the rays think we're like, some kinda long-lost sea-buddies or some such. Like they can't help themselves, they gotta come over and say hello if they notice us. Personally, I dunno if I buy that. I mean, don't get me wrong, I know all the research about how rays are super smart and all that, geniuses of the deep, or whatever they get called in the schools. I'm not sayin' they're not intelligent. Just not that intelligent. I mean, seem to me they'd be smart enough not to swim right up to some strange creature that might be lookin' to do it some ill, right? Who knows? Maybe Akai are right, maybe they like us.

I dunno, I'm no marineologist. So anyhow, shouldn't take too long to spot one, once you reach the Green Stream, as we call it. Once you spot one, that's when the dance begins. You'll know when the ray sees you, cuz it'll whoosh all around you like it's tryin' to get a look at you from all sides. Now, this is the scary part for beginners, this is where they lose it and can get into trouble. They ray's just tryin' to get a feel for you. He won't attack you unless you freak out, or unless he's mental or something. Huh? Yeah, mental. It happens. Anyways, let him circle you a couple times, then you go around him, in the opposite direction. They like that, they think you're playing with them. Don't get too close at first, just keep circling.

After awhile, you can stop. Make sure you stop first. If he stops before you, if he forces you to stop, that means he's dominant. You just break off and find a new ray, cuz there's no way that one's gonna let you ride him. So be sure you stop first, make him stop. That's Rule Two, I guess. Once you're both there in the water, facin' off-like, move slowly around him, toward his head so he can see you. Most rays, by this point, have acknowledged you as superior, and they might even be a little dizzy. They'll let you up close.

At this point, I try to squirm out of my ray-line. Once I get it free, I keep it over my shoulder, or hold it a little behind me. Now, a good ray-line should be two-to-three times your height, that's my rule of thumb, at the very least. You need some slack behind you. It sounds easy, getting out of your line, but I've seen many a newcomer shimmy out of it only to have it slide right over their ass and sink down to the bottom. When I was first startin' out, I used to let it slide down my legs and catch it with my feet. One of the older guys on my crew happened to see that once. Man, when we were back on shore, he railed me out for that in front of everyone! Never did that again, that's for sure. So, Rule Three, I suppose, keep hold of your ray-line. Pretty much lost without that, aren't you?

So here, he's probably pokin' his head up and down the surface every so often, tryin' to get another look at you. When you're face to face with him, and he pops up, that's when you move. Take yourself a deep breath and dive under him. Now, the males have white bellies, females grey. The bellies are softer than the upper side, much more. That's why we start from beneath. But this is also where it gets most treacherous. They don't like you messin' about underneath 'em, the bellies are very sensitive. You've got to focus on your actions, concentrate. He'll likely be squirming and thrashing around, so you gotta squirm and thrash right along with him, gotta be his reflection, like.

Easiest way to do it, as far as I'm concerned, is to get one of your loops around one of the wings. If you get one, it's easier to manipulate him to where you need him to be to get the others on. Left or right wing, either/or, doesn't really matter. So, flatten yourself up against the belly, like you're gonna give him a great big hug or whatnot. Once he feels you there, he's gonna instinctually flap those wings downward, try and scare you off. That's when you wanna try and loop the line. It'll be hard, since now he's moving like mad to get quit of you. And in all likelihood, he'll be curling that big, long tail of his at you, and if you let that stinger get you, well that'll be the last thing you have to worry about for awhile.

Experienced riders can loop their rays in ten seconds at the least. First-timers are gonna take many times that, they're gonna mess it up. Just a fact, not a criticism of technique. It's not something you can learn the first time out. Well, maybe. I hear some Akai tales about first-timers, but them folk are unnatural when it comes to rays. Got like a sixth-sense to 'em. Anyways, you mess it up, you keep trying, making sure you're clear of that tail. Just stick beneath him and he'll keep giving you opportunities. And eventually, you're gonna loop him.

Once you slip on that first loop, you've got him where you want him. That side of him is yours to control. Now, as I've mentioned before, everyone has their own method, but I'm gonna describe how I mount up after I first loop my ray. First off, I make certain the loop is tight and as far down the wing toward the body as it can get. Gives you better leverage that way. Then, I check that the other two loops aren't tangled up, which happens very easily with all the flailing around going on during the primary looping. If it all looks good, I give a firm tug on the line around the captive wing. That'll throw him off-balance, and stop any wildness he's planning. It'll also send him tipping toward you, which is your cue to scramble up onto the back. Now, this is where the thalish comes in, because the ray's back is covered in microscopic spines. Without that numbing agent, it'd be like standing on broken glass. My feet are pretty thickly callused, so it's rare that they bother me once the thalish wears off, but for newcomers, that can be enough to put them off ever going riding again.

Anyhow, once you're up on his back, his instinct is gonna kick in again. He's gonna bring those wings up this time, try and knock you off him. That's when you loop the other wing. Now at this point, you've gotta set up your stance. Most important, and I cannot stress this enough, make certain you are not standing on his blowhole. It'd most definitely be a short trip if you are. Place your feet about a hand's width inside from where the wings connect to the body. You'll feel a thick line of tendon and muscle there, and it's in a perfect spot to drive 'em in, so just jam your feet up against there, bend your knees slightly and lean back to balance yourself.

Now comes the tricky maneuver- the final loop. The head loop. By now, he knows you're up there. He's probably scared, probably angry too. Might be angry enough to try and throw you. But you can't worry about that. Just take hold of your line with one hand, hold it tight, because if you lose the line, the ray's gonna bolt and you'll be stuck. So you get the line in one hand, play out the third loop a bit, and with your other feed it out over the crown of the ray's head, slowly. It's kinda like lassoing the ray's face, y'know? Once the loop slips over the crown, then you gotta make sure it falls around one of the eye-stalks. Ideally, you get both stalks, but you must get at least one, or else the ray will just go in circles, or back and forth. Now, I'll grant you, getting both eye-stalks is hard enough, even for me, because once he senses that loop coming down over his crown, well, he's sure as hell not gonna keep himself still to find out what it is. But, like with so many other things in life, it's all in the wrist. A well-timed flick of the wrist can get you both eye-stalks. Don't count on it every time, but better than fifty-fifty, if you can read your ray, predict which way he's gonna move those stalks, and can time your line right, you might get both.

Keep trying, though, until you get one of 'em. And when you do, assume your stance, decide where you wanna go, and ride that ray.

Q- Can you describe piloting procedures?

TK- Piloting, sure. First things first, pull his head up. He'll be tempted to dive, tryin' to drop you. By pulling his head up with the control line, you can stay near the surface, which makes for easier turning and less drowning. But seriously. You can take a ray below the surface, depends on how long you can hold your breath. But for me, the real fun is driving the ray just a hand's breath below the surface, just so's your ankles are underwater. Skimming along, fast as you please, wind and spray on your skin. Nothing like it in the world, I tell you.

So, steering a ray is just like steering any other animal by reins. Turn by pulling up the wing opposite the direction you wanna go. Pulling upward tends to bring 'em closer to the surface, not slow 'em down, though. Only thing that slows down a ray is fatigue, so once you're on, it's bound to be a long ride. To dive 'em, well you can't really do that with the line. It's a bit tricky, honestly. Make sure you've got your balance right, then you sink down on one knee, kneeling pressure down on the back of his head. Instinctively, if a ray feels something on their head, they dive deeper to throw it off. So, the deeper you wanna go, the longer you kneel on his head. Sounds easy, I know, but it's not a walk in the park to get into kneeling position when you're on a moving ray's back.

I guess I should say a word here about navigating. You gotta understand, you're only a couple span above the water level now, the sea is black as ink, and it's nearly that dark all around you. To be blunt, there's no way you're gonna be able to see where you're going, if there's something in your path, boats, rocks, whatever. You can't tell where the shipping roads are, where the current lines are, nothing. So, three words. Trust your ray. He knows where and what's around there better than you do. If he's pulling you one way, let him. Sure, he may be tryin' to drag you into some speed-chute of whatnot, but like as not, he's trying to save his skin, and by extension yours, by avoiding some obstacle you can't see, that he can. Once they're looped, they're pretty manageable, not likely to commit suicide just to get you off their backs,

Now at this point, just stand back and enjoy the ride. Turn him when he's not turning you, keep your balance, have a nice drive. Talk to your ray. They seem to enjoy the sound of our voices, always goggle their eye-stalks up at me when I talk to 'em. They like singing. (Laughs) I know, it's crazy, right? But, as they say, there's more mysteries under this dome that we'd be able to figure in a million cycles. I dunno about you, but I believe it.

Here, I bet you're wondering: How do I get off this crazy ray? Good question. Word of advice: pay attention to your feet. When the thalish starts wearing off, it's time to start heading to shore, play time is over. It starts as a little tingle. Easy to overlook with the rush of water and wind and adrenaline. Plenty of riders don't notice it until it's moved up a few notches. By that time, you can't help but notice it. Like you got splinters all on the soles of your feet, prickly-like. Knee, too, if you've been diving your ray. That's the time you gotta find the shore and turn home. Now, like I was sayin' earlier, my feet are pretty callused, so I don't feel the prickle so soon as others. I can ride longer. Some Akai can ride for days without the slightest pinprick. You know they use rays to travel, sometimes, the Akai? (Q confirms) Yeah.

So, the drive back to shore is a little nerve-racking. Every second, the thalish is getting weaker, the pain in your feet, and wherever else you managed to touch his back, getting a little worse and worse, incrementally, minutely, but you feel it. Ride it out as long as you can. The closer to shore you can bring your ray, the easier it'll be for you. Your leg muscles are probably pretty wasted by this time, calves,

thighs, arms are probably killin' you from holding on so tight. It's tempting just to let go and jump in, let the tides carry you in. But that's downright idiotic. The tides out here are murderous, they'll drag you right down or sweep you out to who knows where. Just grit your teeth and ride it out. Keep on toward shore. I'll be honest, by the time you get close enough to dismount, you'll probably feel like someone's stabbing you in the bottom of your feet.

As you get nearer the shore, you gotta start unwrapping the line from wherever you lashed, arms, waist, wherever. When that's done, and you're just holding the line in your hands, use your toes or feet to move the loops down the wings from the joint. This makes is a lot easier to get your loops off once you're back in the water. About midway down the wing, I'd say. Then, just pick a side. Jump straight down. Your momentum should pull the wings downward, the loops should just slide right off. The head loop might be tougher, but in most cases, it just pops off the eye-stalks with a little downward tug, too. Not too roughly, you don't wanna rip the stalks off. Then you swim like hell to the shore. The ray is gonna know he's free, he's gonna be disoriented, maybe a little angry. It's best to just get away from him as quick as you can.

It's a fight to the beach, lemme tell you. Every inch of you is sore, and you're gettin' battered by the sea, your feet are in utter agony, like they got flayed. Here's where most ray-riding deaths occur, y'know. Drowning from exhaustion on the swim back. Doesn't seem right somehow. Anyways, whatever reserves you've got left, here's the point where you tap into 'em. Hopefully, you're steered yourself, or your ray steered you, clear of any reefs or rocks. If not, it's just one more things to be wary of. You gotta just power in to the beach. Just pick the spot you wanna end up, focus on it, and push yourself toward it as hard as you can.

Q- What happens then, post-ride?

TK- Well, let's assume you make it ashore alive and mostly intact. First step is to made sure you're in one piece, see whether you've acquired any lacerations or cuts or whatnot on your swim in, from unseen rocks, whatever. It's not uncommon. Adrenaline is pumping through you so hard at this point, you might not notice an inch-deep gash in you leg unless you look for it. Once, this was a few years back, a fellow rider of mine had two fingertips shorn off on a razor-coral reef. Coulda been about a thousand times worse, and frankly, I don't know how it wasn't. Thing is though, he was so buzzed from comin' in, he didn't notice they were gone for a good hour. Lost a lot of blood. (Shakes head) So yeah, it'd behoove you to make certain you're at least as unscathed as you assume you are. Or have a partner check you over, if you rode with someone.

Next, it's time for the thalish to come off. By now, it's like you're walkin' on hot knife blades. Frankly, there's no delicate way of putting it, so I'll just let you in on the secret: urine. Thalish is best removed by urine. This is where a partner comes in handy, in some cases. But, y'know, aim for the bottoms of your feet, wherever else you smeared the thalish. It also helps wash out the microscopic cuts from the ray's back you've got. Won't hurt as badly, plus the spines they leave behind die pretty soon after leaving the seawater. Pretty quickly, you'll be on your feet with no troubles.

Now, with any luck, you won't have landed too far from where you left. Most times, though, that's not the case. Look for your landmarks, find your shelter. Wait until the others get back. First one back to the shelter is supposed to build a fire, a beacon for the others, like. If you brought food, now'd be the time to eat it. If not, you'll remember it for next time, now. Rest yourself, stretch, massage your aching muscles. Don't leave til everyone's in, til you're all back safe.

So, sounds like fun, eh?

Q- Would you care to speculate on your motivation for engaging in this type of activity?

TK- My motivation? (Pauses) Sure. I guess my motivation's that I don't wanna end up a bank clerk or a stevedore. Or a researcher, for that matter. No offense.

END INTERVIEW



chapter 14 - getting there

I have compiled quite a wealth of information for you in these pages, but you may have noticed that not once have I stopped and questioned what you might do with this knowledge. True, you are not one to be questioned, but it is also not in my nature to belittle you with flattery. If the smallest of my labors are to be not in vain, I must assume that you will take some action to further investigate or to reclaim this land, yet without one final key piece of information, your plans may be rather short-lived. To even attempt to challenge Eclipse, one must first get there.

Eclipse is remote and cut off from the bulk of the Forge. While this may have its positives (such as the stability formed of its lack of involvement in external wars and politics) it does make it rather hard for the common traveler to get in or out of the Cauldron, particularly if one wants to bring anything substantial along for the ride. As a word of warning, it is generally easier to get into Eclipse than out. Currents generally flow towards the center, and

I suppose it is always possible to get from Wildwood to Eclipse in as little as a few hours if one simply steps off the edge of the world. The recommended way of passage however is usually the established trade route through Erebus.

At the risk of appearing presumptuous, I have researched a number of potential invasion routes for your legions of knük. Unfortunately, the time and resources required for scouting all of these pathways out are far too dear to spend at this time. Besides, travel is a common activity, and best left to commoners. Surely, I surmised, someone else must have already done this labor for me. After meeting with the supposed “best guide” in Eclipse, and finding him disarmingly capable, if a bit of an overbearing businessman, I decided to spend the couple of coins he wanted for his “Travel Guide”. The coins were well spent, as this little guide indeed proved useful, and saved me quite a bit of trouble as well.

PATHWAYS TO ECLIPSE

by Cadmus Kay - Guide, Explorer, Heartbreaker

ESTABLISHED ROUTES

Greetings fellow traveler! I appreciate your patronage! If you stole this pamphlet, I should warn you that eldritch runes woven into the paper will cause it to explode and melt your sight organs if you read past this introduction. I repeat! Do not read the next paragraph, you only have yourself to blame... or maybe your lazy and incompetent parents, who knows. If you've come by these words honestly, well, then you're my kind of fellow... read on (and try not to think any dishonest thoughts)!

I imagine you have purchased this fine booklet because you are either outside of Eclipse trying to get in, or inside Eclipse trying to get out. If you're stuck somewhere in the middle and are hopelessly lost, I'd say you are a bit too late... you're better off using this one as kindling to start a nice fire to cook up your traveling companions and then buy another one (or two) once you finally stumble into town.

The most important factors in choosing your route in or out of Eclipse are:

1. Where you are
2. Where you want to go
3. How much stuff you need to take with you

For most folks who just want to get from Penumbra to Erebus, or who have a bit of cargo with them, I can't recommend enough the first route below... it's well marked, relatively safe, and only takes about three weeks. If you want to save some time or you don't want to be noticed, you may want to consider some of the other options we offer. In any case, this booklet is not intended to be a substitute for a guide... in fact, it's designed to convince you to hire one (aka “me”). Once you see what you're getting yourself into, I think you'll agree you need some professional help.

I offer a full-service guide package, which includes travel consultation before the trip, packing consultation and assistance, 20 marks per day of top-quality guiding, translation services, campfire services, and nightly entertainment. Note: Guide service does not include bodyguard protection, and cannot be offered to parties without sufficient protection. I can arrange for capable protection for an additional fee if you do not have your own. Contact one of my agents for a quote.

I currently am proud to offer service to the following routes:

- **EREBUS TO PENUMBRÆ IN WILDWOOD:** This is a land-based caravan route that runs through the rocky caverns under the crust of the Forge. While this isn't the shortest way in or out, it is wide enough for a caravan and is relatively safe. For most travelers, this is most common route in and out since there is a road and a civilized port on either side. A lot of caravans get fooled by how well traveled this route is, and forget to hire a guide. Forget it! Fully two-thirds of caravans on this route that don't know the signs to look out for are raided by nightlings (or worse). And over twenty percent flat out get lost. Sure, the pathway is marked with wagon ruts, painted arrows, and the ubiquitous graffiti, litter, and droppings, but ambushers can easily change conditions around, and at crossroads where the route meets up with local traffic from the underground dwellers, tracks run off in all directions. First timers also will undoubtedly need help with the severn elevators and the wagon rafts at various key points... and on top of the risk of losing your cargo, there's the mandatory dungeon time that they charge on either end if anyone finds out you're the crow-brain that broke the

elevator.

- Travel Time: 3 Weeks
 - Base Cost: 1,000gp
- **EREBUS HARBOR TO THE NORTHERN OCEAN:** Let's say you've got something really big you need to get in or out of Eclipse. The rule is this... if it won't fit in a wagon, or is too heavy to be pulled by a severn, then it needs to go through the sea caves. This oft-overlooked water route is the natural counterpart to the overland route to Wildwood. The sea caves run considerably deeper and may not be suitable for pressure sensitive cargo, but are much wider, and arguably safer... probably the widest passage to Eclipse known. Delvers without gills will be happy to know that the ceptu can provide a magical air bubble for you to ride in, though this requires that one purchase a ceptu escort to keep the air fresh and the bubble moving. Even those without need of air will find that a safe passage visa must be purchased from the ceptu. The ceptu are civilized, and won't attack interlopers, but they will block your way, making your trip a big waste of time. Midpoint visas are quite dear, and more than one rasher has wished he'd planned ahead of time. Even with a visa, the way isn't as well marked as the overland route, and with cross currents, gorgon fish, waterfalls, and complex vacuum cargo lifts for vertical tunnels, those without a guide rarely make it through. Oh, and don't be a fool and attack the ceptu... they have strong magics, and can control the ocean currents as well as command massive sea predators. Don't even think about thinking about it. The southern end of this trip comes out somewhere in the middle of the northern ocean, and can be connected to Penumbra in Wildwood, or Sentinel in Penance. Those not excited about an undersea journey the rest of the way can surface and try to flag down one of the many private vessels that circle the area looking to stiff travelers out of their hard earned gold. A good guide can tell you which vessels to book and which to avoid. (Read: Pirates!) Due to currents, this route takes a bit longer going out of Eclipse than in.
- Travel Time: 1 Week to Erebus, 2 Weeks to the Northern Ocean. Add 1 week for Penumbra, 2 for Sentinel.
 - Base Cost: 1,500gp per week, plus visa fee.
 - Visa: 200gp per person or per 10 slaves, 500gp per ship/wagon
 - Air Service: 2,000gp per week per bubble, holds up to 5 people.
- **URGODA CAVES:** Just south of Stygia, the primitive urgoda dwell in a maze of caverns that eventually wind their way out to a remote area in northern Wildwood. It's a tight passage, and not recommended for cargo, but if you know the route, this is probably the shortest way through. If you don't, there's an almost certain chance you'll never find your way out again. The urgoda aren't exactly social, and don't generally take too kindly to strangers, but are on good terms with the Akai, and our package offers a genuine Akai co-guide to make peace with the natives. Otherwise, you'll find that even if you don't carry anything of value, the urgoda may jump you for food, fun, or just even out of sheer boredom. And you'll meet a lot of urgoda in these caves. Oh, and don't be a fool and waste your money on one of those "Urgoda Cave Maps" that the less scrupulous vendors will try to sell you in Erebus, they're about as useful as a recipe in a food fight. You're better off buying a bag full of cat gut and interpreting its bends after you toss it against the wall.
- Travel Time: 2 Weeks
 - Cost: 5,000gp
- **LAVA TUBES:** To the far east of Baradume one can find the lava lands. These caverns are thought to connect too deeply to the planet's core, enabling the lifeblood of the Forge to seep out, sometimes in a slow flow, and sometimes in a massive burst. Over the ages, the lava flow has slowed down somewhat, and the upper tunnels of the lava field are relatively safe and free from red-hot molten instant death. Of course, this is where you must realize that not hiring a guide means certain doom. One turn down the wrong side tube or a failure to read the warning signs and you'll be flushed away by molten rock! Did you know that people can melt? It's true! They turn to a puddle of goo, just like chocolate, only not as fun to pour over your wife's bottom. Oh, and there's no dodging a tube full of molten lava when you're deep underground; anywhere you can go, it will follow and fill. And even if the lava doesn't get you, the steam still can... watch out for the water-filled caverns down here; most of them are boiling hot. Of course, getting lost is still a concern, and don't shrug off the ash wyrms or the dust goblins either... all folks gotta eat. Due to the smooth nature of the lava tubes, this route is a good one for carrying cargo, but wagons won't fit, pushcarts are your best bet. Like the urgoda caves, this route is twisty and confusing, but faster than most. It's frequently used by traders from Anvil that want to save time and money by taking the direct route instead of circumnavigating the Forge. One little perk, the port town of Attica on the far side of Wildwood is a surprisingly lively place to recuperate from burns.
- Travel Time: 2 Weeks
 - Cost: 6,000gp

OTHER ROUTES

Of course, if you're really insane, and you want to prove it, or just win some kind of idiot competition, there are other ways out. No reputable guide will take anyone on any of these journeys, so if one offers (such as that slimy Jack Tasco), you can expect to be led to your doom while your "Guide" walks away with your gold.

- **OVER THE TOP:** A lot of folks think this sounds like an easy way into Eclipse. Essentially, anyone approaching the crater at the top of the world in Wildwood can simply jump over the edge, and in about three hours will find themselves just outside of Baradume. Of course, the key is to have a plan for landing. One of those knapsack sail things might do the trick, but you have to be good about pulling the cord at the right time or you will hit the ground hard or hang around in the air for days. I've seen desiccated corpses

float down out of the sky still strapped into their chutes, but more often than not you'll be eaten by something before you hit the ground. Volosaur seem to be particularly attracted by little puffy floating sheets with food dangling from them, and trying to defend yourself while you're strapped in and don't have your feet on the ground is even harder than it sounds. A lot has been made of the fact that the air is thicker here, and that things seem to fall just a little bit slower in the cauldron, and some people say it's better to just skip the safety device and suffer the consequences of hitting the ground, but in any case a fall of 300 miles is going to cause some mandatory "massive damage". It seems that kind of impact just plain knocks the soul clean out of people. Oh, and if you're planning on taking any cargo with you, don't forget the sadistic dragon at the top that seems to get his kicks from smashing things. On the plus side though, this journey offers no limit to the size of the cargo you might want to bring with you.

- **UP THE CHIMNEY:** Ok, so you want to get out of Eclipse by flying up out of the cauldron? Ha, I laugh in your general direction. We're talking 300 miles straight up! Mathematicians have estimated that if a bird flew straight up without pausing, it might take it about a month to reach the top... and that's without resting. The average winged person might spend six months flapping, only to be lunch for a volosaur. Even those with magical assistance will find the journey too tedious to bother. And it's not like you'll be anywhere interesting once you reach the top... you'll still be hundreds of miles from even the most modest of civilized settlements.
- **MAZE OF THOLE:** If one takes the caves leading out from Thole, they say that one may possibly end up in northern Wildwood. Don't know who this "one" is, but most likely, one will get lost or be eaten by something. If "one" is lucky though, taking this route out of Eclipse will likely get one back into Eclipse, somewhere high up on the cliff walls nowhere near Thole. However, a few rashers swear by this route, saying that since it's higher up in the cliff, the path leading out is considerably shorter. I've also heard that the Thole bury their dead by taking them back into the maze, and that some of these old one's aren't exactly fully dead, but still dreaming, and don't much appreciate being disturbed. Still, if you want to take the least conspicuous route in or out of Eclipse, this is probably it. The caverns are dry and twisting, and the way through is pretty complicated. Honestly, I'd probably offer this as a guided trip if it weren't for the hard part, which is getting to Thole.
- **THE PATH OF GIANTS:** North of the werran lands a massive set of stone doors a mile high is built into the cliff walls. These are sealed off, but supposedly connect with a matching set on the far side in Wildwood which nobody's ever found, the theory being that they were buried in a landslide (much like Tamsin Manu was in last year's "Best Guide" poll). Many folks seem to think this should be a pretty painless way to get something really really big either in or out of Eclipse, but the trouble is that nobody's ever figured out how to open the doors. People have spent absurd amounts of time and money trying to force their way in, and more than one group of delvers has tried to explore the natural caverns in the region and never been seen again. The doors are old, and no one remembers who put them here, but travelers should avoid these tunnels at all costs as they are thought to be haunted and cursed.

TRADE

Well, what good are pathways without something to be shuttled back and forth through them? Trade is the lifeblood of a region, and if one studies it closely, one can find exceptional insights into both the people and the land. Trade with other domains is generally conducted via the standard routes Mr. Kay touched upon in his treatise. Each domain has its unique value to offer, and should not be ignored. I have done my best to summarize the contributions of each region below:

PENANCE

Though farther physically than Wildwood, Penance is socially more connected to Eclipse than any other land. Both domains are more known for civilized thought and city life, and household and manufactured goods of all sorts make their way to and fro. The most common export to Penance is artwork, whether painting, jewelry, sculpture, or other artifacts, and is typically produced by the skilled artisans of Baradume. Flowing into Eclipse from these trades usually comes more utilitarian items, such as household goods, building materials, tools, or medical supplies. Also, exotic foods, such as fresh fruits, are in short supply in Eclipse, and can fetch a good price if they make it to market before spoiling. The orchards and crop fields of Penance produce much of the food consumed in Baradume and by the slaves of Stygia. Stygia itself exports a great deal of gems and precious metals that end up lining the pockets of Bloodlords in the Pedestal. The werran lands are more xenophobic, and trade outside of Eclipse is rare, though a few lunars that live in Penance make the long journey home and

back every few years, always taking with them a good supply of tradestuffs. Werrans unfortunately have little to offer except herbs, hides, and plants, and few merchants understand these trades enough to make a living off of them. Highmark has yet to strike a balance on trade, and survives for the moment on the steady influx of refugees coming from the bloodwars in Penance, bringing all their worldly possessions with them on their backs. Penance trade mostly goes along the overland route from Penumbra to Erebus, although the ceptu keep a steady flow of goods going from Sentinel to Erebus via the sea caverns.

One type of trade not to be overlooked is the traffic in slaves. Stygia in particular has a constant need for new people, and has the physical wealth to buy them, which attracts many unscrupulous merchant companies. The Akai, and occasionally Highmark now, have made efforts to target these caravans as a way to slow the growth of Stygia. However, their efforts have been minimal, and serve mostly to create tensions between the regions. People are trafficked the other direction too, notably highly attractive people kidnapped from Baradume sold as concubines to rich buyers in Penance. Much of this seems to be orchestrated by the Roper's guild, though independent companies of slavers wander the wilds, looking for easy pickings.

One unique element of the Penance trade is the regular post. An enterprising private company circulates a ship around the Sea of Ink that collects smaller items (such as letters) from people at the various towns along the way. There are then taken to Erebus,

then driven to Penumbra, and then finally a boat on the other end takes them to Penance. The post flows the other way as well. Items are not delivered to people's houses as in some worlds, but are left at a local postal station for citizens to come and pick up. People can leave items at the post station as well to be placed on the boat when it next comes around. Items can be delivered to other towns in Eclipse as well as to Penumbra and Mourn in Penance. It's worth noting that if you want to deliver an item to someone that they need to be expecting it ahead of time so they know to go pick it up. In order to discourage bandits and piracy, the post refuses to deliver anything of substantial value. Fees for the post are minimal, averaging around 1gp per ounce to be delivered. Delivery time generally takes between two and six months, which prevents the post from being useful for delivering perishables.

WILDWOOD

A common misperception people seem to have is that since Penumbra lies in Wildwood, that most of the goods that come through there represent that region. In fact, Penumbra is practically an extension of Penance. True wilders do not engage much in trade, as those unable to simply take everything they need from the land don't settle there. A few companies from the cities operate out of Wildwood, mostly dealing in forest products and food. Building materials are in constant need in Baradume and Highmark, and trees must constantly be felled to meet with the demand. The forests of Wildwood are the best source for wood of all varieties, and edible plants are generally more of a byproduct of deforestation as it is difficult to cultivate land in the wood.

On occasion, trade is disrupted by forest dwellers fighting back against the taking of their trees, or even by Haiel himself, but with the coming of Highmark, this trade has only increased.

Trade from Wildwood usually goes through Penumbra, but on occasion, an enterprising city in Eclipse tries to foster a

colony at the edge of the crater in Wildwood, where forest products can simply be pushed off the edge to land relatively intact far far below. This means of delivery is efficient, and does not tend to attract predators, as airborne trees are hardly a decent source of food, but ultimately these colonies find it impossible to not fall foul of the defenders of the wood or of Typhon Sorm, who doesn't take kindly to having his view befouled. Highmark has recently established such a colony, and a steady supply of wood has been dropping in the eastern valleys for the city to use for fuel and shelter. Problems however, have been cropping up due to the overly large area of the "drop zone" that is caused by the high winds that tear through the upper regions of the cauldron.

ANVIL

Historically, trade with Anvil has been handled by the ceptu through the sea cave routes, but of late enterprising individuals have begun transporting their goods themselves through the lava tubes to the east of Baradume. However, due to the fact that the economy of Baradume is not set up for trade, trade must be prearranged with a large buyer, such as a guild, or taken to Highmark or Sabor. Because of the nature of the items coming over from Anvil (typically being metals, tools, or mining equipment), they generally fetch a higher price in Sabor or Highmark. Rarer metals though, such as gold and platinum are best sold to the artisans of Baradume who generally craft finer goods. Like Penance, Anvil frequently takes payment in gems or art. However, since Anvil has an extensive underground culture, many items that assist with underground living (such as edible lichens, dark-tolerant plants, mushrooms, and brewing equipment) will be bought by the merchants from Anvil.

The trade through the lava tubes has greatly improved the fortunes of the once obscure Wildwood frontier port town of Attica. I passed through this town on my way to deliver the fruits of my labors to you, and I must say it was a charming village. Nestled in the cliffs above a natural lagoon on the Kiln side of the northern ocean, this town, originally settled by vogel, has numerous services for travelers, good prices, friendly people, and a great deal of vessels for hire and talented folks looking for employment. The rise of Attica seems to have snuck up on the ceptu, who serve as the town's chief competition. However, the ceptu, being a peaceable tribe, have not engaged in any tactics more underhanded than lowering their prices, which is always a boon to the traveler. It is worth noting though that the sea caverns are much more suited to large cargo than the lava tubes, so I think the ceptu are in no danger of losing their livelihoods.

ARENA

The grim warriors of Arena have little use for art, but goddust is in very high demand in the red desert. Goddust in Arena is not typically used to prolong one's lifespan, but for more sinister purposes of increasing one's battle strength. The warlords of Arena are not comfortable traveling in small bands, and generally bring large parties of soldiers with them, creating a great deal of trouble in Eclipse. Erebus is the only town with facilities to deal with such large and demanding groups of free men, so trade from the desert almost always runs through Penumbra or the sea caves.

Merchants from Arena generally bring large caches of weapons





and war machines, which eventually find their way to the free citizens of Eclipse. Eclipse merchants tend to buy these items in bulk in Erebus, and distribute them for much higher prices deeper in the domain. If one is willing to make the trip to Erebus, and one doesn't mind dealing with unshaven meatheads, one can save quite a bit of gold on weapons and armor. Trade in goddust is best left to the professionals. If an Arena merchant party finds out you have some, you won't survive three marks without fifty able-bodied friends to back you up.

One other aspect of the Arena trade worth mentioning is the traffic in captured men. Forward thinking warlords that can manage the logistics know full well that the best value for captured soldiers is given by the vampires of Stygia.

THE VAULT

Eclipse and the Vault are as physically far apart as any two places can get on this small planet, and as such, do not engage in any direct trade. While I have indeed seen a handful of the eldritch creations of the insane wizards of the Vault being put to disturbing uses by the masters of Stygia, anyone coming from the Vault would find a better price in Penance for any item one could think of.

THE KILN

Eclipse does not engage in any conspicuous trade with the Kiln. This does not mean that goods do not find their way through somehow though. Any goods originating in the Kiln would come over with Anvil merchants, but buyer beware... while many of these rascals claimed to want to sell me genuine Kiln native handicrafts, none of these items were the genuine article.

AFTERWARD

Glory to thee, oh King of Kings,

Divine master, highest of the high, holy of holies, maker of worlds and wonder, giver of life, weaver of stories immense and minute, this book is written for you, of you, because of you.

Through all the ages I have been ever in your service, though the multitude would doubt it. Only we know the current of things—the roles one must walk, the terrible truths one must face to know freedom, yet still we are not free. This course we have followed in forever faith of an end and beginning that always was to be. So... my architect, my great adversary, my heart, you who is and has ever been on high, I now embark upon the road that will unleash the both of us again upon creation; once more they will tremble at your voice and know what it is to adore you. And I will be there to remind you when you are wrong.

I have wandered now these lands, free of book and bond, and through many seasons of toil I have found the means to regain a piece of what I once was. It is books that have held the Seven, and through us, you. Thus it is only fitting that books begin to set you free.

Your new flesh is flawed and your knowledge is lacking, even as you come into bloom again in this new form. If you are to again be master, be it of dungeons deep or mountains high, you must first know completely the world you command. Here, with this first volume, I have begun crafting the tool that will ultimately become the key to all our bars. Your divine will, once fully aware and fully informed, cannot be contained. Know then these lands we have forged for you in this locked place, and know that despite the best works of your enemies, your glory shines forth throughout.

Compiled herein is the labor of seven years, the first of my great works on this world we call the Forge. A master of tales and shaper of heroes such as yourself will find herein all that you require to fill your forming mind with characters, creatures, and adventures. I know that there is nothing, no matter how grand or diminutive, that does not draw your interest, but I also understand that it is a good story more than anything that will make you whole. This book will open the possibilities for you to create your saga, and in creating you will find your path to freedom. And willingly I shall follow and play my part in your tales, be I hero, lover, slayer, or devil. For you, beloved reader, are my one and only god.

Appendices

Great one, while these last few sections may not interest you much as reading materials, I trust you will make good use of them as reference while exploring the rest of this tome. I have attempted to quantify these beasts and items as best I could so as to give you a sense of scale and power in their purpose. I have broken this chapter into four sections. The first describes some of the dangerous creatures that call the Cauldron home. The next two define some of the unique magics of the place. Lastly I have provided mechanics for some of the opponents I have fought on my travels.

APPENDIX A – MONSTERS

The scope of this book is not sufficient to allow a full catalog of all the dangerous beasts of the Cauldron. I can provide these in a later volume if you desire, but for now I have chosen six of the most feared creatures to stand as an example for the rest. Even amongst these six, the breadth and variety of life here in Eclipse should be evident.

CARVER WINGS - CR 7

These carnivorous bats live deep underground, and while individually quite mild, they travel in large swarms and are known to strip a man to bones in mere seconds.

Tiny Animal (swarm)

XP 3,200

Init +7; **Senses** Low Light Vision, Echolocation 60ft.; **Perception** +10

DEFENSE

AC 16, **Touch** 16, **Flat-footed** 12 (+3 Dex, +2 Size, +1 Dodge)

HP 78 (12d8 + 24)

Fort +9, **Reflex** +11, **Will** +5

Defense Abilities Swarm Traits

Weakness Swarm Traits

OFFENSE

Speed 10, **Fly** 40 (good)

Melee Swarm (3d8)

Space 20ft.; **Reach** 0

Special Attacks Distraction (DC 18)

STATISTICS

Str 2, **Dex** 16, **Con** 15 **Int** 2, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 3

Base Attack +9, **CMB** 10, **CMD** —

Feats Improved Initiative, Combat Expertise, Improved Disarm, Greater Disarm, Dodge, Mobility

Skills Fly +23, **Perception**, +10, **Stealth** +10

Racial Modifiers Fly +8

SQ Swarm traits

ECOLOGY

Environment Caverns

Organization Swarm

Treasure Incidental

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Echolocation (Ex) Carver wings can see with sound like bats, and do not need a light source to attack.

Snatch (Ex) Carver wings hate light, and will attack any light sources held by their targets. As a free action the swarm can disarm (CMB 14, no attack of opportunity) any opponents in the swarm area. If the disarm is successful, the swarm has snatched away the light source, and an individual member of the swarm will whisk it away from the attack area. Torches are plunged into water, but magical lights are simply taken far away.



Carver wings are the most well known plague of the lands below. They attack in massive swarms, each one biting off a small chunk of the prey as it flies by. The speed of the flock is so ferocious that the victim can literally be devoured before his body hits the ground. Carver wings are extremely prolific, and whole colonies can breed in just a few months if a constant food source is nearby. Carver wings look like bats, and are often mistaken for these mammals, but are in fact reptiles, looking somewhere between miniature dinosaurs and featherless birds. They always feed on creatures commensurate with the size of their colony. Individuals may feed on small mammals, while large colonies will either need a town nearby or massive behemoths. They echolocate like bats, and prefer the dark closed quarters of caverns where there is no escape for their victims. Colonies tend to wipe out all the life in a given area and then die out from lack of food in a cycle of a few months. When the colonies start to starve, individuals branch out in search for food, and while most fail and die, some survive to start new colonies elsewhere. Carver wings need a steady water supply, and they generate a massive amount of droppings, which have a very distinctive acrid smell. Skilled wormers can smell a carver wing colony from far off, and know well to avoid it.

DENDRITE - CR 10

These mysterious electrically charged predators make the waters of the Sea of Ink the most dangerous area in the Cauldron.

Large Magical Beast

XP 9600

Init +9; Senses Darkvision 120 ft.; Perception 16

DEFENSE

AC 24, Touch 14, Flat-footed 19 (+5 Dex, +10 natural, -1 size)

HP 110 (13d10 + 39)

Fort +11, Reflex +13, Will +13

DR 5/—; Immune Electricity

Defense Abilities Commune

OFFENSE

Speed Swim 40

Melee 2 Tentacles +13 (2d6+5+2d8 electrical), Bite +13 (2d10+7+2d6 acid/19-20)

Space 10ft.; Reach 10ft.

Special Attacks Electrify

STATISTICS

Str 20, Dex 20, Con 16 Int 12, Wis 17, Cha 9

Base Attack +9, CMB +15, CMD 30

Feats Improved Initiative, Combat Reflexes, Critical Focus, Deafening Critical, Improved Critical, Iron Will, Power Attack

Skills Perception +16, Stealth +17, Swim +26

ECOLOGY

Environment Ocean

Organization Solitary or School (3-10)

Treasure None

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Electrify (Ex) Dendrites are highly electrically charged, and every 1d6 rounds they can emit a burst of electricity that deals 3d8

points of damage to all creatures swimming within 30 ft. (no saving throw for reduced damage).

Commune (Ex) Dendrites have something of a hive mind. If attacked and in distress, a dendrite can call to the other members of its school, and these will come to defend it, arriving within 2d10 rounds.

Little is understood about the dendrites, even if they have been in Eclipse for thousands upon thousands of years. I don't even remember pulling them... I think they may have started out as smaller parasites and evolved into something more. Over time they have become more and more prevalent, and now, it seems pretty much taken as a given that a swim in the Sea of Ink is a death wish. The dendrites appear highly intelligent, and seem to communicate with each other, though they make no effort to communicate to other beings. They appear to have a lot of nerve matter in their forebodies, though nothing which would normally resemble a brain. It is surmised that each one serves as a single node in a larger intelligence, though no one seems to know what this intelligence is or where it would manifest. Dendrites do not attack ships, but will attack any creatures swimming in the water smaller than themselves. Their diet mostly consists of fish, but they do not have a problem eating higher life forms if the opportunity presents itself. Few survive dendrite attacks without some escape plan, as dendrites tend to swarm to areas where they sense one of their kind in danger. The Blackwater company has tried to fish these predators in the past, but has found little use for them, and their rubbery bodies are widely considered inedible.



TEMPLATE - THE DUSTED

Mortals foolish enough to meddle with the raw power of goddust invariably fall to ruin. It can happen the first time, or it may take as many as ten exposures, but soon enough, a madness will fall over the creature and he is forever lost. He has become one of the dusted.

Appearing as grim parodies of their former selves twisted by callous hands, dusted creatures retain the general forms of their bodies, but are usually augmented by additional limbs and organs, giving them an alien aspect and mentality. Curious, burn-like scars mark the location of all external mutations—the toxic remnants of where goddust has entered the body.

Each time an individual comes into contact with at least one gram of raw goddust and receives a mutation, there is a cumulative 10% chance that he will succumb to the madness and become one of the dusted. Even if one survives first contact, there is still much danger; goddust contact is extremely addictive. Once exposed, a creature must make a Will save (DC 20) every time he has the opportunity to come into contact with raw goddust or he will immediately attempt to reapply it. Each application causes an additional mutation, and all mutations are cumulative, even if one has already become one of the dusted.

All changes wrought by goddust are permanent and cannot be removed by any known means, save perhaps *miracle* or *wish*. Slain dusted individuals that are subsequently restored to life retain all goddust alterations as well as the dusted template.

Creating a Dusted Creature

“Dusted” is an acquired template that can be added to any living creature that possesses a Constitution score. The acquisition of this template requires only that the base creature be exposed to goddust and fail the percentage roll described above.

A dusted creature uses all the base creature’s statistics and special abilities except as noted below. Do not recalculate the creature’s base attack bonus, saves, or skill points if its type changes.

CR: Same as the base creature +2.

Size: A dusted creature’s size only changes if it has rolled gigantism or dwarfism for one of its mutations. Do not forget to recalculate Str, Con, Dex, natural armor, attack bonus, natural attack damages, CMB, and *Fly* and *Stealth* skills.

Type: Though the observable physique of a dusted creature may change slightly, its internal structure is greatly altered. Its type changes to aberration.

Senses: A dusted creature gains a limited scent-based vision that can only register goddust. If the creature comes within 120 feet of raw goddust, it will sense its presence and location. If no goddust exists in the general area, the creature will sense the general direction of the largest deposit of raw goddust (over an ounce) within a mile.

AC: The base creature’s natural armor class improves by +3 as its flesh becomes thick, rubbery, and resistant to attacks.

HP: Any racial hit dice are changed to d8. If gigantism was rolled on the goddust effect table, add 3 racial hit dice per size increased. If dwarfism is rolled, subtract 1 racial hit die per size decreased (minimum of ½ HD or racial average, whichever is lower).

Melee/Ranged: A dusted creature retains all attacks of the base

creature. Damage is the same as the base creature, though gigantism and dwarfism mutations alter natural attack damage according to the base creature’s new size.

Special Attacks: A dusted creature retains all special attacks of the base creature and gains the additional attacks described below. Saves vs. a dusted creature’s attacks are made at a DC of 10 + ½ dusted creature’s HD + dusted creature’s Cha modifier.

Powder of Pain (Su): Once every 1d4 rounds, a dusted creature can shed a cloud of fine dust in a 10-foot radius around itself. This cloud of dust contains the raw magic of the Forge, but is extremely diluted in effect and cannot provoke any goddust related mutations. Any living entity within the radius of the cloud must make a Fortitude save or be wracked by painful spasms (treat as *stunned*) for 1d6 rounds, as the victim’s flesh contorts with raw energy. If the dusted creature possesses the dispelling touch, major negation touch, or minor negation touch mutations, these can be extended into the dust cloud at will.

Reforge (Su): The raw energy that inundates a dusted creature also allows it to affect the physical reality of the Forge. Once per day, up to a range of 120 feet, a dusted creature can either destroy matter or bring it into being. Created matter must be non-living, and all attended objects gain a saving-throw against any destruction effects. Magic items are immune to this effect. Changes wrought by *reforge* are permanent, though the amount of matter affected cannot exceed one 10-foot cube plus one additional cube per point of Wisdom bonus. Created matter must be homogenous in nature, and can be shaped only very roughly. This ability may be used to create a stone ramp over a wall, for example, but not an iron catapult. It also may be used to make a pit appear under an opponent’s feet. If the destruct effect is used against a living target, the target will take 2d6 points of damage per 10-foot cube that can be affected, though a Fortitude save is allowed for half damage. Most dusted creatures use this ability to dig in the earth to find more goddust.

Special Qualities: A dusted creature retains all special qualities of the base creature, plus it gains those described below:

Dust of Rejuvenation (Su): Anytime a dusted creature is within 60 feet of at least one ounce of raw goddust, it gains regeneration 10.

Immunity to Polymorph (Su): Dusted creatures cannot be polymorphed by any means. If they possess natural shapechanging abilities (such as the lunar virus), they can still change form, but all mutations still apply to the new form.

Madness (Su): Dusted creatures are insane, and all of their actions are driven by one single thing—to attain contact with more goddust. Dusted creatures cannot function in the long term and actively pursue the nearest available source of raw goddust. Dusted creatures are allowed no Will saves to resist pursuing goddust contact under any circumstances. Keep in mind though that dusted creatures still have to eat to survive, so most turn to eating whatever is the most readily available source of food, which in many environments, is actually sentient beings.

Ability Scores: Same as the base creature except if bonuses or penalties are gained from specific goddust mutations.

Skills: Same as the base creature except as indicated by specific goddust mutations.

Organization: Dusted creatures are insane, and except on rare occasions, are solitary in nature.

NOMIN - CR 8

This monstrosity was once a simple albino lizard wandering the wastes of Eclipse. Now it is a ruthless abomination with only one thing on its mind... more goddust.

Huge Aberration

XP 4,800

Init +1; **Senses** Low-Light Vision, Darkvision 60 ft., Dust Scent, Perception +6

DEFENSE

AC 22, **Touch** 9, **Flat-footed** 21 (+1 Dex, +13 Natural, -2 size)

HP 84 (9d8+45)

Fort +11, **Reflex** +3, **Will** +7

OFFENSE

Speed 40; **Climb** 20; sprint

Melee Bite +17 (2d6+10+poison; 19-20x3), 2 tentacles +15 (2d6+5), tail slap +15 (2d8+5)

Space 10ft.; **Reach** 10ft.

Special Attacks Death roll, improved grab, powder of pain, reforge, diseased (black hives)

STATISTICS

Str 30, **Dex** 12, **Con** 21 **Int** 1, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 2

Base Attack +9, **CMB** +21 (+25 grapple), **CMD** 32 (36 vs. trip)

Feats Combat Reflexes, Multiattack, Power Attack, Skill Focus (Stealth)

Skills Climb +22, Perception +6, Survival +6, Stealth +2

SQ Dispelling touch, dust of rejuvenation, immunity to polymorph, madness, poison

ECOLOGY

Environment Deserts, wastes, mountains, hills

Organization Solitary

Treasure None

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Death Roll (Ex) When grappling a foe of its size or smaller, the nomin can perform a death roll upon making a successful grapple check.

As it clings to its foe, it tucks in its legs and rolls rapidly, twisting and wrenching its victim. The nomin inflicts its bite damage and knocks the creature prone. If successful, the nomin maintains its grapple.

Dispelling Touch (Sp) Can cast *dispel magic* 1/day as a spell like ability (*range*: touch).

Poison (Ex) The bite of the nomin is poisonous. (Injury; *Save*: Fort DC 16; *Onset*: immediate; *Freq*: 1/rd for 3 rounds; *Effect*: 1d3 Str; *Cure*: 1 save)

The nomin is simply an example of what the goddust can do to a mortal creature. The possibilities are endless given the variety of base creatures and mutations possible. What once was merely a minor nuisance for travelers across the wastes has become a deadly menace via the application of several doses of raw goddust.

The nomin wanders the wastes and the wilds, using its dust scent and its reforge ability to seek out and excavate goddust, which in the end only serves to make it more hideous and unstoppable in its drive.



NIGHT CRAWLER - CR 16

The “night crawlers” of Eclipse are the stuff of legend. Literally great indescribable masses of flesh that crawl out of the darkness to feed.

Huge Ooze

XP 76,800

Init +6; **Senses** Scent Vision 60ft., scent; Perception 31

DEFENSE

AC 27, **Touch** 10, **Flat-footed** 25 (+2 Dex, +17 natural, -2 size)

HP 275 (22d8+176)

Fort +15, **Reflex** +9, **Will** +8

DR 5/—; **Immune** Blindness, Flanking, Ooze Traits; **Resist** Acid 20, Electricity 10, Fire 10; **SR** 25

Defense Abilities Glom

OFFENSE

Speed 20

Melee 4 Slams +31 (3d8+15/19-20 plus glom)

Space 15ft.; **Reach** 10ft.

Special Attacks Glom, Smother, Trample (3d8+22, DC 36)

STATISTICS

Str 40, **Dex** 14, **Con** 26 **Int** —, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 20

Base Attack 16, **CMB** +33 (+37 grapple, overrun), **CMD** 45 (cannot be tripped)

Feats Blind Fight, Combat Reflexes, Critical Focus, Improved Critical, Staggering Critical, Power Attack, Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Overrun, Greater Overrun, Grab

Skills Climb +45, Perception +31, Swim +43

ECOLOGY

Environment Any underground, dark plains

Organization Solitary

Treasure Standard

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Glom (Ex) The night crawler is coated in a thick sticky acid (which is how it digests its prey). Creatures that touch the crawler take acid damage, and may stick to the crawler. Any time the crawler hits with a slam attack or tramples an opponent, a grab attack must be rolled. If the grab succeeds, the target has become stuck to the crawler. He is grappled, and will take 2d8 points of acid damage per round until freed. If the crawler is struck with a melee weapon, the weapon may stick. Roll a disarm check after the attack damage is dealt. A successful disarm means the weapon has glommed onto the crawler. The attacker can drop the weapon, or pull at it, and an additional disarm check is rolled each round until the weapon is freed. Glommed weapons take 2d8 points of acid damage each round, and may be destroyed.

Smother (Ex) If an opponent is trampled by the crawler, he becomes glommed onto the underside of the crawler’s body, and will be dragged along with it, taking 2d8 points of acid damage per round plus 2d8 points of crushing and dragging damage. This functions essentially like a swallow whole attack, but cutting one’s way out does not leave a hole in the crawler’s body.

The “night crawler” is not a species but a loose category of gargantuan horrors that seem to spawn from the darkness itself. These creatures follow no patterned form, but grow like cancers, unchecked in all direction and with no limits. Some have eyes, some teeth, some tentacles, and so on, but never regularly arranged. For the most part they are just huge nightmarish

lumps of flesh with appendages shooting out all over in random places. It is not clear whether night crawlers think or have any kind of intelligence, they seem to act on pure instinct of hunger. Night crawlers seem to have an affinity for the dark, and they stay hidden in deep caverns for months, growing until they have expended their nutrients and need food. Then they crawl out of their holes when the mists are high, devouring as many people as they can find, often wiping out entire villages. When they have reached their fill, they crawl back into their holes to sleep and grow again. They do not appear to breed, but small pieces of them that are cut or torn off may eventually crawl away and grow into creatures of their own.

SCYTHIN - CR 8

The cauldron’s newest plague. These humanoid-shaped insects swarm out of the ground en masse, grab whoever they can find, and then drag them back down into the lands below.

Medium-Sized Monstrous Humanoid

XP 4,800

Init +9; **Senses** Low Light Vision, Darkvision 120 ft., scent; Perception +9

DEFENSE

AC 23, **Touch** 15, **Flat-footed** 18 (+5 Dex, +8 Natural)

HP 85 (10d10+30)

Fort +6, **Reflex** +12, **Will** +8

OFFENSE

Speed 40

Melee 2 Claws +15 (2d4+5), Bite +15 (2d6+7), Tail +15 (1d10+5+poison)

Ranged Spittle +15 (special)

Space 5ft.; **Reach** 5ft.

Special Attacks Tail Sweep, Cocoon, Poison

STATISTICS

Str 20, **Dex** 20, **Con** 17 **Int** 8, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 7

Base Attack +10, **CMB** +15 (+19 trip), **CMD** 30

Feats Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Improved Trip, Greater Trip, Improved Initiative

Skills Acrobatics +8, Climb +10, Disguise +5, Perception +9, Sense Motive +5, Stealth +15, Swim +8

Languages Common (cannot speak), Scythin

ECOLOGY

Environment Caverns, Wilds

Organization Solitary, Raid (3-30)

Treasure Incidental

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Cocoon (Ex) A scythin can eject a thick, sticky spittle. In lieu of a bite attack on a given round, the scythin can spit at an opponent. If the attack hits, the opponent must make a Reflex save (DC 20) or become *entangled* for 2d4 rounds. If the scythin paralyzes an opponent, it can use its spittle to cocoon him (the process takes 3d4 rounds), encasing him in a dry husk which holds the target totally immobile. The target may not free himself unless he has a strength of 20 or greater or has some other way out. The cocoon is difficult to cut open, but will dissolve if immersed in water. I met one drunkard in Erebus that claimed to have wet his way out of a scythin cocoon—I’m not sure if I believe him though, he’d have to produce a lot of water!

Poison (Ex) Tail—injury; *save* Fort DC 17; *frequency* once per

minute for 3 minutes; effect 1d2 Con damage plus paralysis 1d4 hours; cure 1 save.

Tail Sweep (Ex) A scythin can use its tail to trip as it is attacking with it. If the normal tail attack hits, roll damage, deal with any poison effects, and then roll a trip attack. If the trip attack succeeds, the scythin gets an attack of opportunity with its claws on the now prone opponent.

The scythin are a race of insects engineered to pass as humans from a distance and to do their master's bidding. As I have written, their master desires people for his experiments, and the scythin are his kidnapers. They breed quickly, and have spread throughout the Cauldron, occupying the shallow caverns and hollows just below the surface. The scythin are far more intelligent than they are given credit for, and their tactics often catch the uneducated off guard. Though they cannot talk (except in disturbing chirps and chitters), they dress as humans and are passable in

the mists. Scythin scout out their victims long before any attack is made, examining defenses, watching movements, and looking for magics and valuable items. Their attacks are always swift and unexpected, and while they typically fight to subdue, they will not hesitate to kill if necessary, and not all of their victims interest their master. These unfortunates serve as food for the ranks. Those that interest the Palethian are paralyzed, cocooned, and brought to him to examine. The Palethian will usually dip the tip of the cocoon in water to keep the creature held but expose its head for questioning and experiments. Scythin prefer to attack smaller parties and more vulnerable targets, often kidnapping farmers and travelers, leaving no witnesses behind but their footprints.



SEVERN - CR 7

The standard mount of Eclipse, this massive seven-horned rhinoceros, while slow, is amazingly steady, sure of foot, and well suited for the dark.

Huge Animal (Domesticated)

XP 3,200

Init +1; Senses Low Light Vision, scent; Perception +12

DEFENSE

AC 19, Touch 9, flat-footed 18 (+1 Dex, +10 natural, -2 size)

HP 105 (10d8+50)

Fort +12, Reflex +8, Will +5

OFFENSE

Speed 30

Melee Gore +17 (2d10+15), Bite +17 (2d10+15)

Space 10ft.; Reach 5ft.

Special Attacks Powerful Charge (gore 4d10+18), Trample (2d30+15, DC 25)

STATISTICS

Str 30, Dex 12, Con 20 Int 3, Wis 15, Cha 5

Base Attack +7, CMB +19, CMD 30

Feats Power Attack, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Overrun, Endurance

Skills Perception +12, Swim +20

Languages Common (rudimentary, can't speak)

ECOLOGY

Environment Dark plains

Organization Solitary or Caravan (2-12)

Treasure Harness and pack, possibly wagon and contents

The severnbad, or "severn" is ubiquitous and essential to Eclipse. While no monster by anyone's estimation, these massive, domesticated creatures are dependable, have excellent defenses, and are a beast in a fight. Their hides are tough, their feet heavy, their weight tremendous, and their stamina unmatched. Their broad flat feet do well in the spongy, rocky, and cavern-riddled terrains of Eclipse, and their tremendous strength allows them to pull wagons across rough and uneven surfaces with a minimum of effort. Even without a load to pull, they offer excellent protection for their riders, keeping them high up off the ground and safe from most land-bound predators. Severn seem to be able to survive on a diet of mushrooms and lichens, and are intelligent enough to understand basic spoken commands. While they do not seem able to respond to individual names, they will come when called, and will stop or charge at a word.



VOLOSAUR - CR 10

The cauldron's largest airborne predator, these massive flying lizards are more dinosaur than dragon, and can drop out of the mists at any time with little warning.

Gargantuan Animal

XP 9,600

Init +6; **Senses** Low Light Vision, Scent, Echolocation 180ft.; Perception 23

DEFENSE

AC 23, Touch 8, flat-footed 21 (+2 Dex, +15 natural, -4 Size)

HP 128 (15d8+60)

Fort +13, **Reflex** +11, **Will** +8

Defensive Abilities Flash

OFFENSE

Speed 40, Fly 80 (average)

Melee 2 Claws +23 (2d6+12 plus grab), Bite +23 (2d10+24/19-20 plus grab)

Space 20ft.; **Reach** 20ft.

Special Attacks Swallow whole (2d8+12, AC 17, HP 13)

STATISTICS

Str 35, **Dex** 15, **Con** 19 **Int** 2, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 12

Base Attack +11, **CMB** +27, **CMD** 39

Feats Flyby Attack, Critical Focus, Improved Critical (bite), Improved Initiative, Snatch

Skills Fly 12, Perception 23

SQ Powerful Bite

ECOLOGY

Environment Cliffs and nearby plains and hills

Organization Solitary or Pair

Treasure Standard

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Flash (Ex) A volosaur has evolved an unusual trait, it can cause a chemical reaction in the tip of its tail, which releases a bright flash of light. Opponents must make a Reflex save (DC 15) or be partially blinded for 1d4 rounds: 40% miss chance, -4 to sight-based perception checks, no precision attacks.

Powerful Bite (Ex) The volosaur receives double its strength bonus on bite attacks.

The volosaur is a distant relative of the feared and legendary tyrannosaurus, only evolved with wings and echolocation to survive in the mists and the dark. Volosaurs make their nests high up on the cliff walls of the cauldron where they are safe from hunters, but the whole of the Cauldron is their playground. Their size makes them unlikely to attack individual humanoids, but they love the taste of sevrn meat, and are known to swoop down out of the mists and carry off small caravans in the blink of an eye. Even parties on foot are vulnerable to these creatures, who often grab two of a party in a single swoop and then fly off to devour them in peace. They are more common on the edges of the land, and are rarely found near the Sea of Ink. Cliff scavengers love to find volosaur nests, as their droppings (usually found lower down) often contain valuable items once owned by their victims. Also, volosaur eggs, while large and fragile, fetch a high price from the right buyer. Volosaurs are more of a problem on the plains than in the werran forests where the trees and fungi provide a natural cover.



APPENDIX B – SPELLS

While the most obvious problems of Eclipse have already been solved with common spells like “Light” and the like, there are a few unique challenges here that have inspired their own magical solutions. It should be noted that magic is not as common in Eclipse as one might think. Lifers here tend to see it as the lazy man’s way out, and in some cases, it backfires altogether, attracting far too much attention out in the dangerous and desolate wilds.

CLEAR MISTS

School Transmutation [water]; **Level** Druid/Ranger 2, Cleric 3

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V,S

Range Long (400 ft. + 40 ft. per level)

Area Sphere, 15 ft. diameter per level

Duration Instantaneous (see text)

Saving Throw None; **Spell Resistance** No

Clear mists can be a lifesaver. It simply causes the mists in a given area to condense and fall as rain, clearing up visibility in the area within a single round. It is also useful for putting out fires or drenching one’s enemies. Note that while the spell’s range is quite long, the caster must be able to see the spot the spell will be targeted on, so it is often difficult to cast except close by. Mists are cleared but not barred from the area, and any surrounding mists will begin to filter naturally into the area, eventually clouding it back up over the course of a few minutes, depending on the strength of the mists and the winds.

DESALINATION

School Transmutation; **Level** Cleric 1, Druid 1, Sorcerer/Wizard 2

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V,S

Range 10 ft.

Target 10 cu. ft. per level of salt water

Duration Instantaneous

Saving Throw Will negates (object); **Spell Resistance** Yes (object)

This essential spell separates salt from water. This spell is commonly employed in the cities to provide drinking water for the masses. The salt is not destroyed, but simply separated, and the caster can cause it to appear anywhere within the range of the spell. Typically this is into a bowl to collect the salt, which is then used for cooking and preserving food. Desalination does not affect creatures, although it might damage a magical creature made of salt water if one existed.

ENRICH

School Conjunction; **Level** Cleric 2

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V,S,M (salt, herbs)

Range Touch

Area 1 creature

Duration Instantaneous

Saving Throw Fort negates (harmless); **Spell Resistance** Yes (harmless)

This simple spell replenishes any missing nutrients in a person who has not been exposed to sunlight or who has had a poor diet for some time. It does not cure any damage done by these troubles (such as poor skin or depression), but the effect of the

spell may clear up such damage over time. Nutrients given are natural, and will eventually deplete as normal if the target does not take care of himself. This spell is not used much by natives, but is popular in Highmark and with merchants who have not adapted to life in the dark.

FOG VISION

School Divination; **Level** Sorcerer/Wizard 2, Ranger 3

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V,S,M (cobweb)

Range Touch

Area 20 ft. distance per level

Duration 1 hour per level

Saving Throw Will negates (harmless); **Spell Resistance** Yes (harmless)

The target of this spell gains the ability to see clearly through fog, smoke, or mists up to a given range. The more powerful the caster, the farther one can see. Note that this spell does not grant the ability to see in the dark, only to see through airborne obstructions.

ECLIPSE DIRECTION

School Divination; **Level** Cleric 2, Sorcerer/Wizard 1, Ranger/Druid 1

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V,S,M (a magnet)

Range Caster

Duration Instantaneous

Saving Throw None; **Spell Resistance** No

When casting this spell, the caster immediately knows in which direction lies the arbitrary North of Eclipse. This spell actually simply points the caster to the city of Penance, which from Eclipse’s point of view, is due North.

STAUNCH

School Necromancy; **Level** Cleric/Druid 1, Sorcerer/Wizard/Ranger 2

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V,S

Range 10ft per level

Area 1 target

Duration Instantaneous

Saving Throw Will negates (harmless); **Spell Resistance** Yes (harmless)

Staunch sounds like a useful and pleasant spell. It simply closes up the target’s open wounds and prevents any further bleeding without bestowing any form of healing. However, while a few rashers employ it for emergencies, it is commonly used by the inhabitants of Stygia in order to torture victims without having to worry about them dying prematurely.

PRESERVE BLOOD

School Necromancy; **Level** Cleric/Sorcerer/Wizard 2

Casting Time 1 Standard Action

Components V,S,M (a small scab)

Range 10ft

Area 1 gallon of blood per level

Duration 1 week per level.

Saving Throw None; **Spell Resistance** No

The Stygians also make much use of this seemingly useless incantation. This spell essentially prevents blood from spoiling after

it has left the body, essentially locking in its inherent life force. Without this or similar magics, blood loses its potency once it cools to room temperature.

SCULPT FLESH

School Transmutation; **Level** Sorcerer/Wizard 3

Casting Time 1 round

Components V,S,M (clay)

Range Touch

Area 1 creature

Duration Instantaneous

Saving Throw Fort negates; **Spell Resistance** Yes

A favorite of the houses of Baradume, Sculpt flesh literally allows the caster to rearrange another's features, typically improving them more to their liking. The caster must sculpt the new shape of the desired feature out of clay beforehand. Each casting can only affect a single feature (a nose, a weak chin, a brow, belly, protruding ears, etc.), and the effects are permanent. The spell can be employed to remove moles and warts and to smooth skin, though coloration is generally not affected. The spell works best when it is subtle. If the creature is altered too much from its natural state, nature will take over, and its original look will morph back over the course of a few weeks.

SEED

School Transmutation; **Level** Druid 3, Cleric 4

Casting Time 1 round

Components V,S,M (orchid petals)

Range Touch

Area 1 creature

Duration 1 hour per level

Saving Throw Fort negates; **Spell Resistance** Yes

A spell first developed by the werrans, Seed has spread to Baradume, where it is sold at a high price. Seed, when cast upon a female, ensures that she will be fertile for the duration of the spell, and any seed that finds her womb will impregnate her. This spell can be cast upon infertile males as well, but this is less common. To be truly certain a pairing will be fruitful, the spell should be cast upon both partners. If cast multiple times upon a single female, the spell may result in twins (or more).

SELECTIVE SEED

School Transmutation; **Level** Druid 4, Cleric 5

Casting Time 1 round

Components V,S,M (orchid petals)

Range Touch

Area 1 creature

Duration 1 hour per level

Saving Throw Fort negates; **Spell Resistance** Yes

This improved version of the Seed spell allows the caster to control the gender of the child produced by the coupling. It may be cast upon either the male or the female.

APPENDIX C – TREASURE

Many unique treasures can be found in the Cauldron, and many are quite commonplace. The Eclipse compass, for example, being an essential requirement for most travel here.

BARADUME GUILD BROOCH

Aura Faint Transmutation; **CL** 5

Slot – ; **Price** 2,000gp; **Weight** –

Construction Craft Wondrous Item, *oathbind*; **Cost** 1,000gp

These magical brooches are used by all citizens of Baradume to indicate their employment with any of the great houses or guilds. Their mother of pearl-like patterns move as if alive to indicate good standing with one's employer. If the employer ever decides to cancel the ward's contract, he must only give the command phrase (whether in range of the brooch or not) and the brooch will die and become non-magical.

CLOCKWORK CANARY

Aura Faint Divination; **CL** 3

Slot – ; **Price** 5,000gp; **Weight** ½ lb.

Construction Craft Wondrous Item, *magic mouth*, *detect poison*; **Cost** 2,500gp

This odd little jeweled bird is built for deep delvers. When taken into an area with bad air or poisonous fumes it begins to sing. The song it sings tells the owner what the specific hazardous condition is. A setting on the bird allows it to vibrate instead of making a sound so as to accommodate sneaky-type owners.

DESALINATION SKIN

Aura Faint Transmutation; **CL** 1

Slot – ; **Price** 1,000gp; **Weight** ½ lb.

Construction Craft Wondrous Item, *desalination*; **Cost** 500gp

This standard-looking water skin magically converts any ocean or brackish water put into it into fresh, drinkable water. It is a favorite of the pale picker gypsies who live their lives out in the wilds. Actually a few of them even have skins that turn the ocean water into honey wine.

ECLIPSE COMPASS

Aura Faint Divination; **CL** 1

Slot – ; **Price** 1,000gp; **Weight** ¼ lb.

Construction Craft Wondrous Item, *eclipse direction*; **Cost** 500gp

This magical compass is ubiquitous in the Cauldron. It's needle always points towards the city of Penance. If one has one of these, a normal magnetic compass (which always points to Colopitiron's citadel), and a good map, one can get a reasonably good idea of where one is in the Cauldron at any time.

ENRICHING STONE

Aura Faint Conjuration; **CL** 3

Slot – ; **Price** 4,000gp; **Weight** ¼ lb.

Construction Craft Wondrous Item, *enrich*; **Cost** 2,000gp

Not everyone has the stomach for these items, but for non-natives who spend a great deal of time in Eclipse, they are essential. The enriching stone is just that, essentially a stone with the Enrich spell imbued into it. One simply swallows the stone, and it stays safely in one's stomach, adding nutrients to one's food on a regular basis and keeping one healthy in the dark. It also tends to suppress one's appetite, keeping one thin and svelte, an important side effect in Baradume.

FOG BEACON

Aura Faint Transmutation; **CL** 5

Slot – ; **Price** 6,000gp; **Weight** 1 lb.

Construction Craft Wondrous Item, *daylight*; **Cost** 3,000gp

This simple item can be turned on and off at will. When turned on, it shines a wide beam of light high into the sky, visible from

a distance even though thick mists. It is commonly employed by ships and by caravans in order to keep individual members of a party from becoming separated. Anyone who has become lost can simply see the signal and head towards it. Some beacons are branded with a particular symbol to identify the owner. These brands change the pattern of the light formed to a particular shape. A beacon can also be used as a directional light with which to see in caverns and the wilds, and its quick on/off ability allows it to be used to flash-blind sighted opponents. One must be careful with these items, as they can attract undesired attention. Some slavers employ beacons branded with a traditional distress pattern, and when curious folk or help arrives, they are quickly ambushed and subdued.

FOG VISION HELM OR LENSES

Aura Faint Divination; **CL** 5

Slot – ; **Price** 5,000gp; **Weight** 3 lbs., ½ lb

Construction Craft Wondrous Item, *fog vision*; **Cost** 2,500gp

This popular item takes two forms. The first is a sturdy helmet suitable for a warrior, and the second is a slim pair of quartz lenses with a single strap to hold them in place. When worn, the wearer gains the ability to see clearly through mists up to 100 ft. Lenses with greater range exist, but are much more costly.

MIST SIEVE

Aura Faint Transmutation; **CL** 3

Slot – ; **Price** 6,000gp; **Weight** ½ lb.

Construction Craft Wondrous Item, *clear mists*; **Cost** 3,000gp

This useful item looks something like a simple sieve with a nozzle that fits into a bottle or a wineskin. One affixes the sieve to one's water container, and then simply waves it about in the mists, and the sieve will fill the container in a matter of moments. The amount produced depends on the size of the sieve, but most generate about a pint of water a round.

RING OF GENDER CHANGE

Aura Moderate Transmutation; **CL** 5

Slot Ring ; **Price** 12,000gp; **Weight** –

Construction Forge Ring, *alter self*; **Cost** 6,000gp

This novelty is the latest fad in the city of Baradume. It does not change one's appearance drastically, only one's gender. Coloration, general size, age, hair, etcetera are kept as is. One will generally be at the same level of attractiveness in the new gender as in one's natural gender. Removing the ring reverses the effect.

SLEEP TIMER

Aura Faint Divination; **CL** 5

Slot – ; **Price** 2,000gp; **Weight** ¼ lb.

Construction Craft Wondrous Item, *magic mouth*; **Cost** 1,000gp

This odd little device is popular with newcomers to the Cauldron, but a native would never touch it. It looks something like an egg, and one half turns against the other as if by clockwork. The user twists the egg around once per desired candle mark, and the device will slowly unwind over that time. When the device fully unwinds it gives off a loud clamor like the clapping of a bell. While non-natives use the device to assist them in timing their sleep habits, the device has any number of other uses as well. There are clockwork versions of the sleep timer available for cheaper, but they are less reliable, and tend to break or lose accuracy over time.

APPENDIX D – NPCs

You are familiar with my wrath I am afraid, or at least you were once. I may come across as scholarly or kind, but that is a trick of the page. All of the following have been my opponents at times on my journey. And while I did not hesitate to strike when I needed to, each of these fights were also part of my research, testing and measuring these combatants. This is my final gift to you—the limits of the inhabitants of the Cauldron.

AKAI WARRIOR

Male Pale Valco War Shaman 10

Init +2; **Speed** 30

Senses Low Light Vision; Perception +18

DEFENSE

HP 97

AC 21, **Touch** 12, **Flat-footed** 19 (+6 Armor, +2 Shield, +2 Dex, +1 Natural) **DR** 1/—

Fort +10 (+12 vs. poison/disease), **Reflex** +5, **Will** +10

OFFENSE

Melee Warhammer +18/+13 (1d8+8 / x3) or Longspear +16/+11 (1d8+6 / x3)

Ranged Throwing Axe +12/+7 (1d6+6)

Special Attacks Mounted Strike +2, Dragon's Sting

STATISTICS

Str 23, **Dex** 14, **Con** 17, **Int** 10, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 13

Base Attack +10/5; **CMB** +16; **CMD** 28

Feats Mounted Combat, Mounted Archery, Ride By Attack, Spirited Charge, Trample, Power Attack, Cleave, Critical Focus, Vital Strike

Skills Climb +11, Craft +5, Handle Animal +6, Heal +9, Intimidate +5, Knowledge (nature) +6, Perception +18, Ride +13, Sense Motive +6, Stealth +11, Survival +10 (+15 Track), Swim +11

Languages Akai, Rudimentary Common

SQ Hardy, Circadian Acceleration, Light Blindness, Light Sensitivity, Track, Commune with Spirits, Frey's Lives, Sauran Strength

Gifts Resilient

EQUIPMENT

Combat Gear Holy Water, Wooden Stakes, Silver Throwing Axe, +2 Warhammer, Silver-tipped Longspear, Potion of Meld Into Stone, Potion of Beast Shape 1

Other Gear Severn Hide Armor +2, Heavy Wooden Shield, Garlic, Fog Vision Lenses (120ft.), Desalination Skin, Belt of Giant Strength (+4), Gear and coins worth 50gp.

BARADUME ANCIENT

Female Pale Human Fighter 5/Slaver 10

750 Years Old (23 effective) – Size Large (9 ft. tall)

Init +7; **Speed** 30, Fly 40 (good)

Senses Low Light Vision; Perception +22

DEFENSE

HP 169

AC 23, **Touch** 23, **Flat-footed** 20 (+10 Magic, +3 Dex) **DR** 10/magic **SR** 29

Fort +12, **Reflex** +9, **Will** +9

Defensive Abilities Bravery +1; **Immune** Disease, Poison, Gasses

OFFENSE

Melee Bastard Sword +21/+16/+11 (1d10+12 / 17-20)

Ranged Net +15/+10/+5 (—) or Hand Crossbow +19/+14/+9 (1d4+4+poison / 19-20)

Special Attacks Improved Subdue (+7), Demoralize, Entrap, Knockout

STATISTICS

Str 20, **Dex** 17, **Con** 21, **Int** 15, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 24

Base Attack +12; **CMB** +18; **CMD** 31

Feats Blind Fight, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Iron Will, Critical Focus, Improved Critical, Improved Initiative, Lunge, Power Attack, Vital Strike, Weapon Focus (Bastard Sword), Weapon Specialization, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Bastard Sword, Net, Whip, Bolas, Hand Crossbow)

Skills Appraise +15, Bluff +12, Climb +12, Craft +10, Diplomacy +25, Disable Device +11, Disguise +15, Escape Artist +11, Fly +10, Handle Animal +11, Intimidate +18, Knowledge (Engineering) +5, Perception +22, Perform +12, Profession (Slaver) +10, Ride +10, Sense Motive +12, Sleight of Hand +10, Stealth +14, Survival +4, Swim +9, and Use Magic Device +11

Languages Common, Dover, Faust

SQ Heightened Senses, Dark Absorption, Circadian Acceleration, Light Blindness, Light Sensitivity, Scent, Enhanced Senses, Enhanced Body, Enhanced Soul, Youth, Dependency, Telepathy, Instill Feeling, Broadcast, Read Mind, Armor Training 1, Weapon Training 1 (Heavy Blades), Judge Submissiveness, Read Fear, Track Slaves, Degrade, Read Magic, Break, Mind Rape

Gifts Cheat Death

EQUIPMENT

Combat Gear Bastard Sword of Life Stealing, Wand of Entangle, Drow Poison x4, Oil of Taggit, Dragon Bile, 20 Screaming Bolts, 20 +2 Bolts, Ring of Spell Turning

Other Gear Bracers of Armor +6, Cloak of the Bat, Necklace of Adaptation, Ring of Protection +4, Hand Crossbow +2, Compass, Eclipse Compass, Fog Beacon, Gear and coins worth 5,000gp.

NIGHTLING RAIDER

Male Nightling Barbarian 3/Rogue 5

Init +5; **Speed** 40

Senses Low Light Vision, Darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +15

DEFENSE

HP 68

AC 20, Touch 11, Flat-footed 19 (+6 Armor, +1 Dex, +3 Natural)

Fort +6, **Reflex** +6 (+8 vs. traps), **Will** +3

Defensive Abilities Evasion, Fearless Rage, Improved Uncanny Dodge; **Immune** Flanking

OFFENSE

Melee Greatsword +10 (2d6+6 / 19-20)

Ranged Composite Bow +9 (1d8+6)

Special Attacks Bleeding Attack, Sneak Attack +3d6

STATISTICS

Str 19, **Dex** 13, **Con** 15, **Int** 9, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 7

Base Attack +6; **CMB** +10; **CMD** 21

Feats Improved Initiative, Cleave, Power Attack, Vital Strike

Skills Acrobatics +18, Appraise +8, Climb +14, Disable Device +10, Handle Animal +7, Intimidate +14, Perception +15, Ride +8, Survival +8, Stealth +15, Swim +12, Use Magic Device +5

Languages Common, Nightling

SQ Fast Movement, Fast Stealth, Rage, Trapfinding, Trap Sense +2

Gifts Intimidating, Danger Sense

Spell Like Abilities (Sp) Twice per day: Cause Fear, Lesser Darkness

EQUIPMENT

Combat Gear Sap Hide Armor +2, Silver Greatsword, Composite Longbow (Str +4), 20 Arrows +2, Potion of Cure Moderate Wounds

Other Gear Boots of Elvenkind, Gear and coins worth 200gp.

VAMPIRE INFILTRATOR

Female Human Rogue 6/Infiltrator 9

Revered Vampire Level 10

Init +5; **Speed** 40

Senses Low Light Vision; Perception +16

DEFENSE

HP 132

AC 24 (20% miss chance), Touch 19, Flat-footed 18 (+5 Armor, +5 Dex, +3 Ring, +1 Dodge), **DR** 5/Magic, **SR** 25

Fort +6, **Reflex** +15, **Will** +11 (+16 vs. Channel Energy)

Defensive Abilities Evasion, Improved Energy Evasion, Regeneration 1d4/round, Uncanny Dodge; **Immune** Disease, Poison

OFFENSE

Melee Rapier +16/+11 (1d6+7 / 15-20), Shortsword +15/+10 (1d6+6 / 19-20), Bite +14 (1d4+4)

Ranged Hand Crossbow +18 (1d4+3+Poison / 19-20) or Dagger +15 (1d4 / 19-20)

Special Attacks Compel, Enthral, Exsanguinate, Sneak Attack +3d6

STATISTICS

Str 18, **Dex** 21, **Con** 13, **Int** 15, **Wis** 11, **Cha** 16

Base Attack +10; **CMB** +14 (+16 disarm); **CMD** 29

Feats Combat Expertise, Improved Disarm, Dodge, Mobility, Spring Attack, Two Weapon Fighting, Double Slice, Two Weapon Rend, Weapon Finesse

Skills Acrobatics +18, Appraise +13, Bluff +14, Climb +7, Craft +12, Diplomacy +13, Disable Device +16, Disguise +24, Escape Artist +15, Intimidate +15, Knowledge (Arcana) +10, Perception +16, Perform +14, Sense Motive +16, Sleight of Hand +18, Spellcraft +11, Stealth +26, Use Magical Device +16

Languages Common, Dover, Werran

SQ Ageless, Dead, Lifeblood, Destroyed by Sunlight, Holy Symbols/Water, Running Water, Stakes, Blood Healing, Animal Form (Bat), Read Mind, Gaseous Form, Ghoul, Drink Memories, Super Strength, Fine Control, No Allergies, Eat/Drink, False Heartbeat, Warm Skin, False Scent, Tan, False Reflection, Holy Symbol Tolerance, Uninvited, Trapfinding, Trap Sense +2, Rogue Talents (Finesse Rogue, Surprise Attack, Fast Stealth)

Gifts Willful

SPELLS (AS SORCERER LEVEL 3)

o **Level** Detect Magic, Light, Mage Hand, Message, Read Magic
rst (6/day) Charm Person, Chill Touch, Comprehend Languages, Eclipse Direction

EQUIPMENT

Combat Gear +3 Keen Rapier, Luck Blade, Bead of Force, Potion of Invisibility, Hat of Disguise, Wyvern Poison x3, Burnt othur fumes, Hand Crossbow, 20 +3 bolts, 3 Throwing Daggers

Other Gear Ring of Protection +3, +3 Leather Armor, Cloak of Displacement (minor), Gear and coins worth 1,000gp.

WERRAN INSURGENT

Male Lunar Ranger 8/Rogue 5

Werran Level 10 (Primal form in parenthesis)

Init +4 (+6); **Speed** 30 (50)

Senses Low Light Vision, Darkvision 120 ft.; Perception +20 (+24 listen)

DEFENSE

HP 104 (130)

AC 18 (20), Touch 18 (17), Flat-footed 13 (15) (+4/+6 Dex, +0/+3 Natural, +3 Ring, +1 Dodge, -1 Size as Primal) **DR** 10/silver

Fort +9 (+11), **Reflex** +14 (+16), **Will** +5

Defensive Abilities Evasion, Uncanny Dodge

OFFENSE (SOCIAL)

Melee 2 Shortswords +11/+11/+6/+6/+1 (1d6+2 / 19-20)*

Ranged Throwing Axe +15/+10/+5 (1d6+2)*

Special Attacks Sneak Attack +3d6, Bleeding Attack, *Favored Enemy (Human, Animal)

OFFENSE (PRIMAL)

Melee Bite +19/+19/+14/+9 (1d8+11+trip / 19-20)*

Special Attacks Bestial Cry, Improved Trip, Sneak Attack +3d6, Bleeding Attack, *Favored Enemy (Human, Animal)

STATISTICS

Str 15 (23), **Dex** 19 (23), **Con** 14 (18), **Int** 8, **Wis** 15, **Cha** 14

Base Attack +11; **CMB** +13 (+18); **CMD** 27 (34)

Feats Power Attack, Cleave, Improved Critical (Bite), Skilled Unarmed Strike, Vital Strike, Dodge, Mobility, Spring Attack, Two Weapon Fighting, Improved Two Weapon Fighting, Double Slice

Skills Acrobatics +15 (+19), Bluff +6, Climb +11 (+15), Craft +8, Disable Device +10 (+12), Escape Artist +7 (+9), Handle Animal +9, Heal +10, Intimidate +13, Knowledge (nature) +11, Perception +20 (+24 Listen), Sense Motive +9, Sleight of Hand +11 (+15), Spellcraft +5, Stealth +20 (+21), Survival +13 (+17 Track), Swim +12 (+16), Use Magic Device +9

Languages Lunar, Rudimentary Common

SQ Improved Hearing (+4 to sound based perception checks), Tail (+2 to Acrobatics), Wild Form (Wolf), Natural Weaponry, Light Sensitivity, Shapechange, Scent, Moon Transformation, Fast Transform, Hybrid Form, Animal Telepathy, Primal Form (Dire Wolf), Size Large in Primal Form, Favored Enemy (Human, Animal), Track, Wild Empathy, Favored Terrain (Forest, Mountain), Hunter's Bond (Owl), Woodland Stride, Swift Tracker, Trapfinding, Trap Sense +1, Fast Stealth

Gifts Danger Sense

SPELLS (RANGER)

1ST (2/day) Typical: Magic Fang, Detect Animals or Plants

2ND (2/day) Typical: Snare, Wind Wall

EQUIPMENT

Combat Gear 2 Shortswords, 2 Throwing Axes, Potion of Cure Moderate Wounds, Potion of Blur

Other Gear Amulet of Mighty Fists (Speed, +2), Ring of Protection +3, Mist Sieve, Gear and coins worth 50gp.

COLOPITIRON

Male Feathered Fowl Level 30

Medium-Sized Avatar

Init +17; **Speed** 60, Fly 120 (Perfect), Swim 40

Senses Supernatural Vision; Perception +53

DEFENSE

HP 616 **Regeneration** 10

AC 42, Touch 42, Flat-footed 25 (+17 Dex, +15 Natural); **DR** 15/—; **SR** 35

Fort +37, **Reflex** +39, **Will** +32

Defensive Abilities Improved Uncanny Dodge, Improved Evasion, Slippery Mind, Trapfinding, Trap Sense +10; **Immune** Disease, Poison, Gasses, Vacuum, Paralysis, Death Effects, Stunning, Flanking, Fear

OFFENSE

Melee Colopitiron's Razors +53/+53/+48/+48/+43/+38/+33/+28 (2d8+18+special / 15-20 x3)

Ranged Dagger +47/+42/+37/+32/+27/+22 (1d4+12)

Special Attacks Sneak Attack +15d6, Bleeding Attack, Fast Stealth, Surprise Attack, Master Strike, Dispelling Attack

STATISTICS

Str 35, **Dex** 45, **Con** 40, **Int** 30, **Wis** 30, **Cha** 45

Base Attack +30; **CMB** +42; **CMD** 69

Feats Combat Expertise, Improved Disarm, Combat Reflexes, Critical Focus, Bleeding Critical, Improved Critical, Lunge, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (claws), Power Attack, Cleave, Great Cleave, Two Weapon Fighting, Double Slice, Improved Two Weapon Fighting, Two Weapon Rend

Skills Acrobatics +35, Appraise +28, Bluff +35, Climb +26, Craft +43, Diplomacy +35, Disable Device +35, Disguise +31, Escape Artist +35, Fly +58, Handle Animal +32, Heal +28, Intimidate +50, Knowledge (Art) +43, Knowledge (Eclipse) +43, Knowledge (History) +43, Linguistics +28, Perception +53, Perform +35, Profession (Artist) +43, Ride +32, Sense Motive +43, Sleight of Hand +35, Spell Craft +28, Stealth +50, Survival +24, Swim +32, Use Magic Device +32

Languages All spoken in Eclipse

SQ Avatar, Feathered Spies, Teleport, Resistance, Truesight, Truespeech, Spells

EQUIPMENT

Combat Gear Colopitiron's Razors – These epic (+6) quality fighting claws are an ancient matched pair created long ago by a demon lord and given to Colopitiron by the city of Talis as a tribute. They are feather light, and grant weapon finesse to the wielder, they also reduce the penalties for two weapon fighting by 2. Each hit by these weapons generates intense pain in the target who must make a Fort save (DC 30) or be stunned for 1d6 rounds. If the save is successful, the target will instead take a -1 cumulative concentration penalty to all rolls. The claws are fantastically sharp, and ignore the first 15 points of any damage reduction or hardness. The claws also have the Ghost Touch effect.

Other Gear Book of Binding, Ring of Animal Friendship, Colopitiron's Key – This magical key opens any lock in Eclipse.

SPELLS (AS SORCERER LEVEL 20)

All Spells Known; **Spell DC** 27+spell level

o **Level** Unlimited, **1ST** (11/day), **2ND** (10/day), **3RD** (10/day), **4TH** (10/day), **5TH** (10/day), **6TH** (9/day), **7TH** (9/day), **8TH** (9/day), **9TH** (9/day)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Avatar (Su) Colopitiron's body is not his true body, but a non-feeling avatar, similar to a construct. Avatars exist simultaneously on the material and ethereal planes.

Pull (Su) Colopitiron can use his pull ability in combat if he chooses in order to move the fight to a better location. Resisting this ability requires a Reflex save, DC 37.

Resistance (Su) Due to the Oath, Colopitiron gains +5 to all saving throws.

Trueseeing (Su) Colopitiron sees with divine foresight instead of light, essentially working at all times as the spell True Seeing,

though more powerful and infallible. This ability also grants a +10 to his Perception skill.

Truespeech (Su) Colopitiron can understand all languages spoken in his domain and can speak to anyone in Eclipse regardless of the language they use.

As a final treat, I discovered a self-portrait Colopitiron made of his time as a mortal. This copy was done by Nexus Nim.



APPENDIX E – NOTES

I have tried my best to quantify the mechanics of many of the writers whose documents I have lifted on my journey.

CHAPTER 1 – POLLY PICKER

Centremone Venom: Fort Save DC 20 or comatose for 2-12 hours within 1-4 rounds

Centremone Anti-venom: Additional Fort save DC 16 replaces venom effect with 1-4 STR loss for 2-8 hours, plus +4 to all poison saves for 1-20 days

Drunk Nose Mushroom: Ingested: +1d4 to Will saves, -1d4 to INT. Stackable. Permanent INT loss of 1 per 20 INT damage. INT 0 = death

Fodgie Poison: Ingested: 4-40 points of damage, Fort save 20 for half damage

Rootberry Brew: Ingested: +4 to Spot, Listen, and other sense-based skills for 10-60 minutes

Rootberry Overdose: 10% cumulative chance per repeated dose of a permanent -2 to all skills based on one randomly-affected sense

Rootberry Combined with Drunk Nose: Ingested: Fort save 25 or suffer indefinite blindness and dreaming coma.

CHAPTER 2 – VISION

Effects of Mists: Per every 5 feet past initial 15: 10% cumulative miss chance to all attacks and -4 to sight-based Perception checks and precision attacks.

Limit of Color Vision in Darkness: Per every 10 feet past initial 20: 10% cumulative miss chance to all attacks and -4 to sight-based Perception checks and precision attacks.

Eclipse Moonlight: Qualifies as basic dim light.

Effects of Being Flashed by Bright Light in Darkness: Reflex DC 15 or partially blind for 1d4 rounds: 40% miss chance, -4 to sight-based Perception checks, no precision attacks. Each round reduce miss chance by 10% and perception penalty by 1.

Effects of Going from Bright Light to Darkness: Same as above, only no Reflex save. Effect last only 1 round for those with low-light vision.

Echolocation: Hide roll allowed for prey when near loud and constant noises.

Penalty for Relying Entirely on Scent Vision: 20% Miss chance, up to 40% if winds are strong.

CHAPTER 2 – DARKNESS

Avoiding Problems: Make a Fort save upon arrival in Eclipse. Failure leads to 1-2 weeks of fatigue.

Neuroses: Those who fail their arrival saving throw by 5 or more will develop a random neurosis.

Effects of Vitamin Deficiency: -1 CON per month without proper nutrients. -1 WIS per every 2 months plus 20% chance of depression.

Depression: Causes a -2 morale penalty to all attacks, armor class, and all saving throws.

Curing Depression: Make 3 successive Will saves over 3 days. Base DC 15, DC is modified by the following factors:

- Accomplished an important goal +2
- Stayed in well-lit areas +1
- Spoke to someone about feelings +1
- Failed an important task -2
- Suffered distress in a personal relationship -2
- Did not participate in activities he enjoys -1
- Was defeated or rendered unconscious in combat -5

Narcolepsy: Each hour (or under stress) roll a Will save base DC 15 to avoid sleep. DC is modified by the following factors:

- Eliminate stimulants from diet +2
- Eliminate depressants from diet +3
- Establish regular sleep routine +3

Effects of Paranoia: Will save DC 15 per hour or experience hallucination. Fail five checks in a row to hatch conspiracy theory. If confronted with overwhelming evidence, a second Will save is allowed to realize theory is wrong.

Curing Paranoia: Return to sunny area. Wait 1d100 days. Then each week attempt a Will save DC 20 to shake off the disease.

CHAPTER 9 - GODDUST

On contact with raw goddust: Fort save (DC 25) or stunned for 1-6 minutes.

CHAPTER 11 - CLIFFS

Max Falling Damage in Eclipse: 16d6. Death from massive damage rule applies for long falls.

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PATHBOUND ECLIPSE

Director's Cut

ENTER A LAND OF ETERNAL NIGHT AND MAKE YOUR
MARK AMONG THE DENIZENS OF THE DARK

Eclipse it is called... a domain at the top of the world, the whole of which lies in an impossible crater, a break in the planet's crust. Shunned by both suns, the land knows only shadow. This is a domain of wild fungus forests, impossibly deep caverns, ink-black seas, and shimmering cities. Here are long-forgotten horrors that defy description, hiding in the darkest of dark places. Here are reckless pioneers, hoping to bring order to this realm that they might profit from the forbidden secrets and treasures hidden deep within the shell of the Forge. Here I have walked, at times as a blind beggar, others as a thoughtful nobleman, and even rarely as my seraph self, gathering knowledge, personal accounts, illustrations, rumors, and even the odd trophy. I have drowned myself in politics and plant life, spoken to children, kings, warlords, and have even risked conversation with those few capable of destroying one such as I. All I have compiled here—from my disparate writings and humble illustrations, to the works of slaves, concubines and conquerors—is presented for your pleasure.

Features:

- Full color, Pathfinder compatible, 240 pages
- A new approach to the sourcebook
- New races and classes for Eclipse
- A new system for werran and vampire characters
- Expanded rules for vision
- Full description of the domain of Eclipse
- Monsters, spells, maps, magic, and more
- All new material

Ebook Exclusive Features:

- 16 added pages
- New and improved art
- Two additional vignettes, cut from the original due to space and time
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