

Way of the Wicked

book one: knot of thorns

Player's Guide

by

Gary McBride, words

and

Michael Clarke, art

Special Thanks:

Carl and Shirley McBride, Mike and Teresa Hall, Jim Hall, Michelle McBride-Hall, Kimberly Knight.

Fire Mountain Games LLC
www.firemountaingames.com
18795 SW Marko Ln
Beaverton, OR 97007

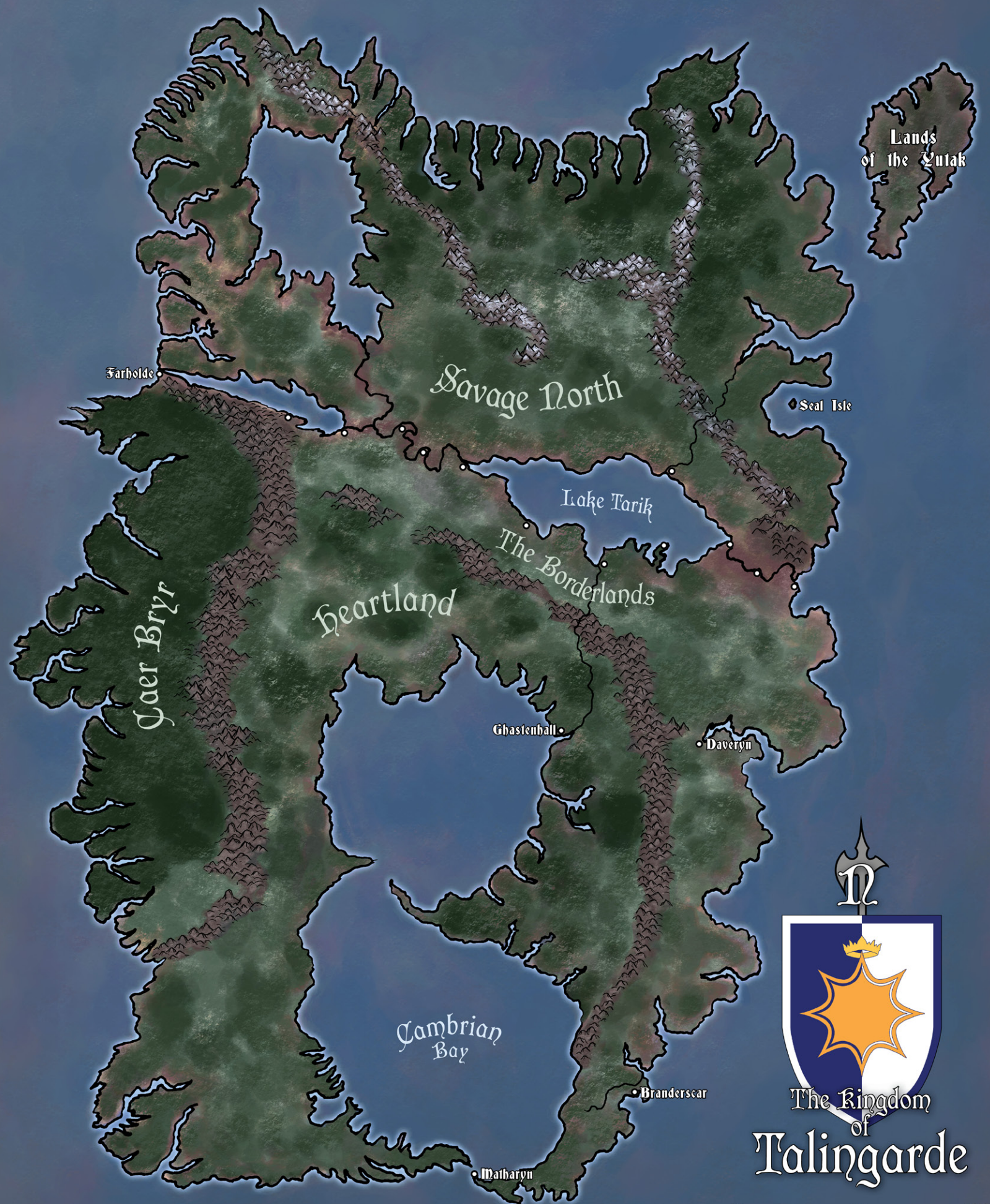
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Lands
of the Outak

Farholde

Savage North

Seal Isle

Lake Tarik

Heartland

The Borderlands

Caer Bryr

Ghastenhall

Davern

Cambrian
Bay

Branderscar

Matharyn



The Kingdom
of
Talingarde

0 50 100
Miles

HERALDRY OF TALINGARDE

HOUSE DARIUS



KNIGHTS OF THE ALERION



BRANDERSCAR PRISON



PRINCESS BELLINDA



HOUSE BARCA



HOUSE HAVELYN



PATHS TO WICKEDNESS: HOW TO MAKE A VILLAIN

This section is intended for players. So feel free to make a copy for personal use and distribute it.

INTRODUCTION

Guilty. You are a lawbreaker – the worst of the worst. Too dangerous to live amongst the good people of Talingarde, they dragged you in chains before a magistrate and condemned you. They sent you to the worst prison in the land and there they forever marked you. They held you down and branded you with a runic F. You are forsaken. You won't be at Branderscar Prison for long. Branderscar is only a holding pen. In three days – justice comes. In three days – everything ends.

What a pity. If only there was a way out of this stinking rat-hole. If only there was a way to escape. If only...

No. No one has ever escaped from Branderscar Prison. This is where your story ends.

WHAT IS TALINGARDE?

Talingarde is the most virtuous, peaceful, noble nation in the world today. This land is ruled by King Markadian V called the Brave of House Darius. He has only one heir – the beautiful princess Bellinda. This benevolent monarchy is heavily intertwined with the Church of Mitra, the Shining Lord. You are from Talingarde. This is your home. You have lived here your entire life. And if they gave you half a chance, you would have your revenge on all of them.

WHO IS MITRA?

Mitra, the so-called Shining Lord, is the god of the sun, bravery, honor, justice, charity and other such pusillanimous rubbish. The Church of Mitra is the preeminent religion of Talingarde these days. The Knights of the Alerion, the elite warriors of Talingarde, are a Mitran order. The monks of St. Macarius, who travel the land healing the sick and the helping the needy, are also a Mitran order. The House of Darius, the royal family of Talingarde, are devout followers of Mitra.

It wasn't always this way. Before the Darians took over, Talingarde worshipped an entire pantheon of deities. Preeminent among those deities was Asmodeus, Prince of Hell, Lord of Ambition and Order. Now it is forbidden to worship Asmodeus. To do so is to be condemned. The Mitrans destroyed all the Asmodean temples and burned his books and priests. There are no followers of Asmodeus anymore in Talingarde – at least none you know of. Devout Mitrans will not say the name Asmodeus. He is simply "The Fallen" or "The Enemy".

HOW DID THEY CATCH ME?

You tell us. You must pick a crime (there is a list provided below) that you were condemned for. They are only two requirements – you got caught and you really did it.

It's not surprising that the Talireans (the people of Talingarde) caught you, though. Talingarde is a fiercely lawful and good society. Crime (especially heinous crime like yours) is not tolerated.



SYSTEM

Making a character for the "Way of the Wicked" Campaign is similar to making characters for any campaign using The Pathfinder Roleplaying Game with just a few modifications.

STEP 1 -- DETERMINE ABILITY SCORES

Any method will do, but we present here an alternate method appropriate to this adventure path called 'Focus and Foible'. Besides that one, the 25 point buy method is also recommended. It's challenging being a villain with the whole world against you.

FOCUS AND FOIBLE

Choose a Focus, an ability score at which you excel. You receive an 18 in that score.

Choose a Foible, an ability score that is your weakness. You receive an 8 in that score.

The other four, roll 1d10+7 four times in order. There are no rerolls or moving of ability scores. Those are your other four scores.

WHY THIS METHOD?

This method makes slightly more powerful characters on average. A 'Focus and Foible'-built character costs 25 build points to make on average but more powerful characters are not uncommon. It compensates for the potential increase in power by making characters slightly random. Randomness never completely hampers a character though (the lowest total you can roll is '8' after all) and never gives them an ability score higher than their focus.

Therefore your wizard might have a high dexterity and charisma as well as having a high intelligence and a low strength. The writer finds this tends to create slightly more interesting, unusual and diverse characters. If the randomness and potential for character inequity bothers you, you can always use point buy instead.

STEP 2 -- PICK YOUR RACE

This is unchanged. All races in The Pathfinder Role-playing Game are permitted.

There are certain races that will be more difficult to play in this campaign. Extremely unusual or monstrous races are likely to be troublesome. PCs of those races may find themselves uninvolved in certain parts of this campaign.

The PCs after all are on a secret mission to infiltrate and destroy Talingarde. It will be more difficult to infiltrate anything if you are travelling with a minotaur, goblin or serpent man for example. Tread carefully with these choices.

STEP 3 -- PICK YOUR CLASS

All classes are permitted except the Paladin. Paladins do not walk the Way of the Wicked. A few classes require some special consideration below.

The Anti-paladin from the Advanced Player's Guide is well suited thematically for this campaign. Alas, the class requires a chaotic evil alignment which is not permitted. Thus it is recommended that your GM allow the house rule "The anti-paladin may be of any evil alignment". Further, the anti-paladin may have cohorts, followers and henchmen who are of any evil alignment instead of the usual "chaotic evil" requirement. Also, a lawful evil anti-paladin may not use their fiendish boon to add the 'anarchic' property to a weapon. Instead, they may add the 'axiomatic' property.

Assassins are a great choice for this campaign. Subtle killing can potentially be useful again and again. Yes, this is a prestige class not a core class. But it's a great prestige class to be working towards at level one.

Barbarians can be a good choice, but since chaotic alignments are not allowed (see below), neutral evil or neutral are the only two possible alignment choices. Barbarians have the challenge of coming up with a good reason why a class as chaotic and rebellious as this one would cooperate with a group of lawful evil followers of Asmodeus. Perhaps a cleric of Asmodeus (another PC?) saved your life and now you owe that priest your service.

Cavaliers are a fine choice for a PC but must be careful about their Order selection. Orders that defend the common folk (The Order of the Shield) or pledge allegiance to the king of Talingarde (The Order of the Lion) are probably not appropriate. Self-serving orders (for example the Order of the Cockatrice) are very appropriate indeed.

Clerics and inquisitors are allowed but must worship a god who approves of the villainous path ahead of you. Worshipping the lawful evil god Asmodeus is strongly encouraged. At the GM's discretion it may be required for divine classes.

Druids are permitted though neutral good druids are not. Evil druids are a perfectly valid choice but you must decide why such a character would ever join an organization that honors a lawful evil god.

Gunslingers are permitted but this adventure path assumes by default that firearms do not exist. There are no guns found in the treasure or adversaries who use firearms. If you want to play a gunslinger, you should talk to the Game Master about this. If they approve this choice, then they will need to modify the campaign accordingly to accommodate your character.

Monks may not be lawful good and are recommended to be lawful evil. A lawful neutral monk is technically allowed but would be a difficult choice. Why would such a law abiding character seek to destroy Talingarde?

Ninja and Samurai are permitted but the campaign as written makes no special allowances for them. Thus there are no eastern weapons or armor in the treasure (katana, wakizashi or naginata, for example). Further you must explain how your villainous ninja or samurai ended up in the western nation of Talingarde. Much like the gunslinger above, talk to the Game Master and work out these special needs.

Rangers will find that Humanoid (Human) and Outsider (Good) are solid choices for their favored enemy.

Sorcerers of any bloodline are permitted. Infernal blooded sorcerers are a particularly good choice.

STEP 4 -- PICK SKILLS AND SELECT FEATS

This step is unchanged.

However, this campaign lends itself more than most to a house rule that gives everyone two more skill points per level. The PCs will be on their own for much of the campaign and will have difficulty relying on others for skills. This house rule will make them more self-reliant.

Besides, villains should more competent than the average man.

STEP 5 -- BUY EQUIPMENT

The characters begin with nothing. They have no money, no weapons or armor, no gear, no animal companions of any sort and no material possessions besides tattered, dirty prison clothes. Equipment will be acquired in game.

Alchemists begin without their formulae book, extracts, bombs or mutagens. They must have access to an alchemical lab or chemicals to have any of these abilities restored.

Bards begin without their instruments.

Cavaliers have lost their mount. Presumably their mount was slain or given to another during their capture. It can be presumed that their week of mourning is already in the past.

Clerics begin having chosen all their spells for the day. They do not have their holy symbol or any material components however.

Druids also begin having chosen all their spells for the day. They do not, however, have their animal companion with them. Presumably such a companion was slain during their capture or escaped and awaits them outside. Regardless, such beasts would never be allowed inside the prison. Only if they escape from Branderscar prison will they have a chance to reunite with their companion or conduct the ceremony to acquire another.

Inquisitors and Oracles lack their holy symbol if they need one.

Summoners begin the game with their Eidolon unsummoned. They begin the game shackled so they are unable to perform the necessary ritual until they are free.

Witches, Wizards and Magi do not have their spell books, material components, familiars or bonded objects. They do however begin with a full selection of memorized spells from before their incarceration.

STEP 6 -- FINISHING DETAILS

As normal except that good and chaotic alignments are not allowed. Every character must be lawful neutral, lawful evil, neutral or neutral evil. Of those four alignments, **lawful evil** is definitely the preferred choice. At the Game Master's discretion, lawful evil may be the required alignment.

Further, every character must choose a crime that landed in them in Branderscar. They were not wrongly imprisoned -- they are guilty of their charge. If you are using the trait system in the Advanced Player's Guide, choosing this crime counts as one of your traits.

There is a further requirement and it is something of an intangible quality. At some point in this adventure path every character is going to have the chance to join an evil organization and swear allegiance to the master of that organization and its patron -- the lawful evil god Asmodeus. The adventure path assumes you say yes to this chance. Therefore, you should make a character who can say yes.

THE PATH OF VENGEANCE

Perhaps right now, you may be experiencing a little cognitive dissonance.

This campaign is about breaking out of prison, joining an evil organization and then seeking revenge. Above, we recommend that characters be lawful evil. You may be asking yourself right now "how is breaking out of prison and getting revenge lawful?"

It isn't.

Lawful evil is the recommended alignment not because your character is obeying the laws of Talingarde but because your characters seek to impose a new order.

This is not the campaign for chaotic loners or free-spirited vagabonds. Those campaigns exist in abundance and if they are what you are looking for, perhaps you are in the wrong place. This is a campaign about joining an evil organization with a wicked agenda. Eventually, you may even come to control that evil organization.

"Way of the Wicked" is a chance to play an unusual sort of character. You will play a burgeoning dark lord -- someone who will rise from imprisonment and destitution to become one of the greatest villains of this age. At first, you will be a minion in service to a sinister plot. But eventually, you will be a minion no longer. You, if you can survive, will become the master.

And that is almost the definition of lawful evil.

CRIMES OF THE FORSAKEN

Each character chooses one heinous crime that has earned them a place in Branderscar Prison. Each crime grants a different benefit, similar to a trait. You may have committed many crimes during your lifetime, but this is the crime that finally got you branded and condemned.

This list of twenty crimes is not intended to be comprehensive. Feel free to invent your own crime, punishment and benefit (with the GM's approval of course).

Besides simply choosing a crime, you should also consider how the crime was done. Was this a well-planned criminal enterprise or a crime of passion? Did you do it alone or did you have accomplices? Was this the first time you did this crime or are you a repeat offender? Answering these questions will help flesh out your character's background.

This has been said before, but it bears repeating. Your character actually perpetrated this crime. You may have done it for what seemed like noble reasons. You may have gotten entangled in this criminal enterprise unwillingly. But there is no doubt that you are guilty. You have not been sentenced to the worse prison in Talingarde unjustly.

You are here because you deserve to be.

ARSON

You have willfully started a fire that destroyed property. To be sent to Branderscar, you didn't start just a minor little trash fire. Your act of arson threatened a major town, city, church or castle and likely cost someone their life. You'll be punished for your crime by facing the fire yourself.

Punishment: Death by burning

Benefit: Whenever you score a critical hit with a fire attack, you receive a +2 fire damage bonus to your damage roll. This bonus is a trait bonus.

ATTEMPTED MURDER

You tried to kill someone and botched the job. To be sent to Branderscar Prison, you did not try to kill just anyone. You likely assaulted someone of great importance and prominence.

Punishment: Death by beheading

Benefit: You gain a +2 trait bonus to Intimidate checks, and Intimidate is always a class skill for you.

BLASPHEMY

Either you have defamed the great god Mitra or you have been found guilty of worshipping one of the forbidden deities (who preeminent among them is Asmodeus).

Punishment: Death by burning

Benefit: +2 trait bonus to Knowledge (religion) and Knowledge (religion) is always a class skill for you.

CONSORTING WITH THE DARK POWERS (WITCHCRAFT)

You have been found guilty of summoning an evil outsider. Likely you were captured by the famed witch hunter Sir Balin of Karfeld. The last thing he said to you was, "May Mitra have mercy upon your wretched, damned soul." If only you could get a chance at revenge!

Punishment: Death by burning

Benefit: You receive a +1 trait bonus to Knowledge (planes) and Knowledge (arcana) checks, and one of these skills (your choice) is always a class skill for you.



DESECRATION

You have violated one of the churches, cathedrals or holy shrines of the great god Mitra. To be sent to Branderscar this was no minor act of vandalism. Instead you have done something flagrant and spectacular to dishonor the Shining Lord.

Punishment: Death by burning

Benefit: You receive +1 trait bonus on all saving throws against divine spells.

DESERTION

You have deserted from the Talirean military and been recaptured. To get sent to Branderscar this was not some minor or routine dereliction of duty. Instead, you abandoned your post during a time of crisis -- perhaps battle or while defending the Watch Wall. Regardless of the exact circumstances, your laziness and cowardness must have caused loss of life.

Punishment: Death by hanging

Benefit: You receive one bonus skill point per level that must be spent on the Profession (Soldier) skill. Profession (Soldier) is always a class skill for you.

DUELING UNTO DEATH

You have engaged in a duel to the death and mortally wounded an opponent. The opponent was honorable enough to say nothing before he expired. Alas that his family or companions was nowhere near so honorable. Dueling was once common in Talingarde before the House of Darius came to power. The House of Barca all but encouraged duels of honor. Now, dueling of any sort is punished severely. Dueling to the death is a sure way to be sent to Branderscar Prison.

Punishment: Death by beheading

Benefit: You gain a +1 trait bonus to Fortitude saves

EXTORTION

You have defrauded money from someone by holding information of their wrongdoing over their heads. To end up in Branderscar, this was no minor act of merely threatening to expose someone. Instead you attempted extortion against someone of great prominence and for exorbitant stakes.

Punishment: Life at hard labor in the salt mines

Benefit: You receive a +2 trait bonus to Intimidate checks, and Intimidate is always a class skill for you.

FORGERY

You have forged documents issued either by the crown or by the Church of Mitra. Alas, that your forgery while competent was not entirely undetectable. To be sent to Branderscar, this was no minor finagling of paperwork. This forged document could have cost lives, undermined the reputation of the Church or endangered the security of the realm.

Punishment: Life at hard labor in the salt mines

Benefit: You gain a +3 trait bonus to Linguistics skill checks to commit forgery and Linguistics is always a class skill for you.

FRAUD

You tried to bilk someone out of their cash. To end up in Branderscar Prison, this was no petty con job or penny ante racket. Instead, you brazenly tried to defraud someone important of a huge sum of money. And it almost worked too!

Punishment: Life at hard labor in the salt mines

Benefit: You receive a +2 trait bonus to Bluff checks and Bluff is always a class skill for you.

GRAVE ROBBERY

It is forbidden by sacred law to dishonor a corpse after it is been sealed in its tomb by a clergy of the Mitran faith. Some may not honor this ban: necromancers, golem crafters, self-styled scientists, and alchemists delving into the forbidden secrets of life and death. These ghouls can expect no mercy from the Talirean Magistrates. And by sending you to Branderscar Prison, you have received none.

Punishment: Death by beheading

Benefit: You receive a +1 trait bonus to confirm critical hits

HERESY

You have denied the supremacy of Mitra and been condemned for it. For this to be a crime, you were not content to keep your heresy to yourself. You tried to sway others. Likely you were captured by the famed witch hunter Sir Balin of Karfeld. The last thing he said to you was: "Mitra may forgive you yet for your lies. Talingarde will not." If only you could get a chance at revenge!

Punishment: Death by burning.

Benefit: You receive a +1 trait bonus on all saving throws against divine spells.

HIGH THEFT

You had a foolproof plan to steal some great treasure. Alas, the scheme had a fatal flaw and went horribly awry. To be sent to Branderscar prison, this was no ordinary robbery attempt. You tried to steal something of great value or religious significance.

Punishment: Life at hard labor in the salt mines

Benefit: You receive a +1 trait bonus to Reflex saves.

HIGH TREASON

You have willfully worked to bring down the current Monarch of Talingarde -- the beloved King Markadian V called the Brave of House Darius. To be successfully tried for High Treason you have done more than merely dislike the king, you did something tangible to undermine his rule. Alas, that you failed at your plot and are now headed to Branderscar Prison. Treason is the only crime that is still punished by the gruesome ritual of being drawn and quartered. Your stay at Branderscar will be brief.

Punishment: Death by drawing and quartering

Benefit: You receive a +1 trait bonus to Will saves.

KIDNAPPING

You have abducted someone perhaps to ransom them or do unspeakable things to them. Unfortunately, you were caught and your victim was rescued (if they weren't rescued -- you would be guilty of murder instead). To be sent to Branderscar Prison, you must have abducted someone of great importance or in a particularly gruesome manner.

Punishment: Death by beheading

Benefit: You receive a +1 trait bonus to both Disarm and Grapple attempts.

MURDER

You have killed without just cause and been condemned for it. To be sent to Branderscar Prison, this was no typical killing but a particularly savage and unforgiveable act. You may also have killed someone with powerful friends.

Note: You are not allowed to have killed someone in the royal family of Talingarde. You may have tried (his would instead be High Treason -- see above) but ultimately they are too well protected.

Punishment: Death by beheading

Benefit: You deal 1 additional point of damage when flanking a foe. This additional damage is a trait bonus.

PIRACY

You have been caught in the act of piracy on the high seas. This is a rare crime these days since Markadian I called the Victorious burned the last major pirate fleet to threaten these isles. Still the crime is punished harshly. Likely you are the sole survivor of your ship.

Punishment: Death by hanging

Benefit: You may select either Bluff or Intimidate. The selected skill receives a +2 trait bonus and is always a class skill for you.

SEDITION

You have attempted to covertly stir up rebellion against your rightful sovereign. This differs from high treason in that you attempted to convince others to make war against Talingarde instead of taking direct action yourself. A subtle difference to be sure. But it is the difference between receiving the swift justice of the axe instead of the slow suffering upon the rack.

Punishment: Death by beheading

Benefit: You receive a +1 trait bonus to Bluff checks and Bluff is always a class skill for you. Further if you ever take the Leadership feat, you gain a +1 trait bonus to your Leadership score.

SLAVE-TAKING

Slavery is illegal in Talingarde and a very rare crime. Still, once in a great while, slavers from the mainland will foolishly make an incursion into Talirean protected territories. When they are captured alive they are always made an example of.

Punishment: Death by beheading

Benefit: You receive a +1 trait bonus to both Disarm and Grapple attempts.

SLAVE TRADING

Slavery is legal in other parts of the world and it can be tempting to the most decadent of Talingarde's nobility to acquire a "souvenir" when traveling abroad or to purchase the object of their desire from a less reputable merchant. However you ended up trading slaves in Talingarde, you were caught red handed and now you will lose more than simply your freedom.

Punishment: Death by beheading

Benefit: You receive one bonus skill point per level that must be spent on the Appraise skill. The Appraise skill is always a class skill for you.

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Hail Asmodeus, God of Lawyers, Master of Contracts

"E'en hell hath its peculiar laws." -- Faust

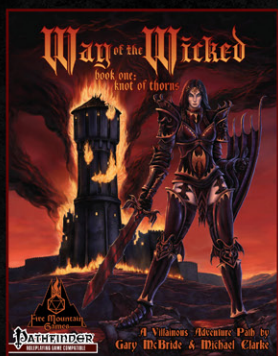
Way of the Wicked

book one:
knot of thorns

Be the Bad Guy

How many times have
you saved the world?

This time the world
needs saving
from you.



An Adventure Path featuring 20 levels
of Irredeemable Villainy

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Way of the Wicked

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The Kingdom of Talingarde is the most noble, virtuous, peaceful nation in the known world. This is the story of how you burned this insipid paradise to the ground. It's only fair. They burned you first.

They condemned you for your wicked deeds. They branded you. They shipped you to the worst prison in the kingdom. In three days, you die. In three days, the do-gooders pray they'll be rid of you.

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Welcome to the Player's Guide for the "Way of the Wicked" adventure path! Inside you'll find everything you need to make your very own villain!

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Isn't it time you walked the Way of the Wicked?



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