



# MIDGARD LEGENDS

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Aberdus, First Mage-Lord of House Stross	
Wolfgang Baur	4
Achaz the Horned Khan Matt Hewson	6
The Azure Kings Andrew Christian	9
The Black Sorceress Ben McFarland	10
The Blackened Man Chad Middleton	12
Blood Mother Margase Christina Stiles	14
Calm-Tongue Morgan Boehringer	16
Daughters of Jannik Charles Carrier	18
Enkada Pishtuhk, Treachery's Rider	
Ben McFarland	20
Glatisant, the Questing Beast Brian Suskind	23
Gunnwyf and the Riphean Herd	
Chris Harris	25
Hune the Doorlord Brian Suskind	26

27
30
31
33
35
37
39
42
43
45
46





# PEOPLE NEED LEGENDS

Since antiquity, people have gathered around burning campfires—or glowing screens—to share legends. Legends furnish hope amid desperation. They provide shadowy villains and pristine ideals. They inspire courage and greatness. Legends create heroes.

Midgard is no different; this thriving world refuses to exist in a vacuum or as a disjointed collection of books. Rather, Midgard needs legends. It needs heroes who seek to find them, emulate them, or defeat them. This book fills just that need: it contains legends to inspire adventures and to spur rumors within new stories. Each legend is a pliable tool, able to integrate into adventurers' tales with ease. Each will help add greatness to heroes' deeds. Heroes become legends.

And so we've created an anthology of legends, complete with all their trappings. There are artifacts and haunts, organizations and monsters, magical riches and fabled abilities. The very stuff of adventure lies within these pages, waiting for your tales to bring them to life. Use these legends well—and go seek your fortunes.

Go become heroes!

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# ABDERUS, FIRST MAGE-LORD OF HOUSE STROSS

or hundreds of years before the Great Revolt, the Free City of Zobeck was not a stronghold of Rava the Gear Goddess. Rather, it was the fieldom of the great Stross family, an aristocratic clan that possessed a stunning command of the Sun God Khors' priesthood and a large and loyal following among merchants, dwarves, miners, and vintners. It was a different time.

The rise of House Stross in Zobeck began with the apprenticeship of Abderus Stross to the Exarch Salatis, who 600 years ago was master of the mages of Bemmea and a devout follower of Thoth-Hermes, an archmage of long years and deep mystic understanding. This apprenticeship was unprecedented; no merchant son of Zobeck had ever before cultivated close ties to the mages. These ties grew stronger when Abderus returned to Zobeck with a shadow fey courtesan he wished to marry. His father forbade the union, but Abderus, who'd sworn loyalty to the Queen of Night and Magic, goddess and ruler of the shadow fey, married her anyway.

Thus began a long struggle within and among the Stross family. Some members were scions of the shadow fey; others were loyal to Khors and the Order of Undying Light. Both sides seized power and took noble titles. Their wealth and power allowed them to appropriate new lands within the Margreve Forest—lands previously reserved as the shadow fey's hunting grounds.

The three generations of clan Stross were killed 80 years ago during the Great Revolt of Zobeck; their bodies were scattered on the field at the Battle of Oros Bridge or were hung from the ramparts of Castle Stross. Distant cousins and relatives by marriage occasionally turn up, but the family itself seems gone, its name a byword for cruelty and wise rule turned to decadence.

# THE DEVIL'S COMMANDERS

The arcanists of House Stross grew in number after Abderus Stross rose to lead the family. Soon, his children and grandchildren were students at the Arcane Collegium of Zobeck and the House of Wands in Runkelstad Their magical powers were great, but the line was prone to diabolism and to fits of crusading zeal. Both were tendencies the family kept in check, and, fortunately, an outright diabolist never ruled the house. However, the marshals, wizards, and magi of the house did develop spells of their own, Rumors abound that at least one of their number, the raven-haired Mistress Photina Stross, owned the legendary tome called *Caelmarothic Compendium*  of Devils and the Art of Retaining their Services—more commonly called the Vile Black Book (see Kobold Quarterly #23). Some also believe the Black Sorceress herself was a Stross by birth or marriage.

# **DEVIL'S COMMAND**

School enchantment (compulsion) [language-dependent] [mind affecting]; Level bard 4, sorcerer/wizard 4, cleric 5, witch 5

Casting Time 1 standard action Components V, M (blood) Range close Target 1 outsider creature Duration 1 round/level



#### Saving Throw Will negates; Spell Resistance yes

This spell allows the caster to command any planar creature as if it were dominated. Attempts to force suicidal or harmful actions other than combat grant an immediate additional saving throw each round they continue.

# **STROSS KEY**

School illusion (star & shadow); Level bard 3, geomancer 2, sorcerer/wizard 3

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, M

Range touch

**Targets** up to one touched creature/level **Duration** 1d4 hrs.

Saving Throw Will negates; Spell Resistance yes

To use the *Stross key* spell, you must be within line of sight of a shadow road or ley line node and in an area of dim light. You and any creature you touch are then transported onto the nearest shadow road. You can take more than one creature along with you (subject to your level limit), but all must be touching each other.

Once displaced, you move to the nearest door or gate out of the shadow road, which requires 1d4 hours to reach. You cannot stay longer than this time without attracting hostile attention.

Any creatures touched by you when *Stross key* is cast also make the transition to the shadow road. They may opt to follow you to the nearest gate, wander off through the plane, or return to the Material Plane (50% chance for either of the latter results if they are lost or abandoned by you). Creatures unwilling to accompany you on the shadow road receive a Will saving throw, negating the effect of the *Stross key* on them if successful.

The material component is a key made of black glass worth 100 gp, which is consumed in the casting.

# WORD OF SUDDEN BINDING

School enchantment (charm) [mind-affecting]; Level bard 5, sorcerer/wizard 5

Casting Time 1 standard action

**Components** V, S, M (500 gp pearl in glass cage) **Range** close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Target one outsider creature

Duration 1 year/level

Saving Throw Will negates; Spell Resistance yes

This charm makes an outsider creature willing to stand and serve you and your family, friends, and allies (treat the target's attitude as friendly). If the creature is being threatened or attacked by you or your allies, however, it receives a +5 bonus on its saving throw.

The spell functions only within the chamber or hall in which you cast it; if cast outdoors, it lasts only within 60 ft. of the caster's location when the spell was cast. The moment the creature leaves this chamber, hall, or circle, the spell ends. Thus, the first request the caster often makes is to stay within the area it occupies. As the creature is enchanted and friendly, this usually works to strengthen the spell. The caster must make an opposed Charisma check to get the creature to perform any action it would not normally do, and it functions in most ways similar to a *charm monster* spell, though of much greater duration and much more limited area.

# **TRUE LANCE OF KHORS**

Aura strong evocation [light]; CL 15th Slot none; Price 72,300 gp; Weight 10 lb.

#### Description

Shining and warm, this silvery lance brings the golden rays of the sun to even the darkest dungeons.

This +3 silver-tipped lance becomes a keen lance in the hands of a cavalier or paladin, and gains the ability to destroy shields and blind foes.

Whenever its wielder uses it to successfully strike an opponent carrying a shield, the opponent's shield takes the same damage as the opponent. If the wielder uses the lance to make a sunder attack against a shield, it bypasses the shield's hardness.

On any hit, the lance also inflicts a blindness attack (Fortitude DC 14 negates). If successful, the blindness is permanent unless removed by magic.

All attempts to turn or destroy undead while holding a True Lance of Khors gain a +1 bonus.

As a free action, the holder of the true lance of Khors can generate a *continual flame* at the tip of the lance, or extinguish it.

## Construction

Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *holy aura, continual flame,* creator must be lawful; Cost 36,150 gp

# FORMER HOLDINGS

The Stross family owned extensive holdings up and down the River Argent, from the navigable reaches of the Silbertal down to Runkelstad, as well as several fiefdoms in the southernmost reaches of the Grand Duchy of Dornig. In particular, the family owned the Black Fortress of Grisal and—at their height of their existence—the cities of Kariessen and Gybick.

All of these sites as well as the family's seat—Castle Stross, now the ruins of Castle Shadowcrag—were thought to be connected by shadow roads, for the nobles of the family seemingly traveled from one such keep to another as easily as the elfmarked did in the days before the Great Retreat. After the elves withdrew, the Stross family retained access to the shadow roads. Their alliance with the Grisal dwarves against the ghouls and vampires was a bulwark that protected Magdar and the Grand Duchy during a time of chaos.

Stross enemies now possess all these holdings, though the Stross symbol—a three-winged triskelion sometimes still hangs over gates or is carved into the stone of obscure chapels.

# THE STROSS LIBRARY AND VAULTS OF RUDDERMERE

In their day, the members of House Stross were obsessed with recovering the lore of the West. In particular, the family coveted the command of orichalcum and vril technology. The house sponsored adventures to recover such items from the Wastes and from expeditions to Lost Arbonesse, and they sought to master new tools and restore old ones. A half-sunken house in Maillon is still sometimes called the "Stross Laboratory."

The Library itself was always thought to be part of Castle Stross, though it could also be entered from the Arcane Collegium of Zobeck with the appropriate ritual or from the Scholar's Tower of Fandorin Keep.

After the Great Revolt, the doors to the library sealed permanently. It is widely thought that the much more heavily-warded door to the Vaults of Ruddermere—the Stross treasury and storehouse—also linked to the library. The entrance to that storehouse of wealth has been lost since the Great Revolt.

# ACHAZ THE HORNED KHAN

ore than a century ago, a legendary Khan united the Khazzaki into a martial force feared by every nation on the Rothenian Plain. The tribes still tell the tales of Achaz the Horned Khan; while some depict him as a great leader, most call him the worst blight to ever have befallen their people.

Born a fatherless slave in an outlying Reth-Saal settlement, Achaz learned the cruelties of bondage at an early age. At

12 years old, Achaz seized his chance to escape when he tore out his Rubeshi master's throat with his teeth. Fleeing with his mother, who tragically died along the way, Achaz managed to escape the Ruby Despotate.

Rejoining his ancestral people upon the Rothenian Plains, Achaz thrived in his newly discovered homeland though his early years had left deep scars. He grew tall and strong, but was consumed with the desires to enrich his people and to eradicate slavery.

When Achaz was 18, a slave raid claimed more than half his tribe, including their Khan. Enraged, Achaz rallied the survivors, inspiring them with his passion and wrath until they followed him after the raiders. Using a furious storm as cover, the Khazzaki, though outnumbered, attacked the slavers. The gods blessed Achaz that day; wherever he rode, the slavers scattered. With victory achieved, the tribe proclaimed Achaz their new leader. Four years later, the 22-year-old Achaz defeated the Khan of Khans to become ruler of all Khazzaki tribes.

Forceful and uncompromising, Achaz inspired the tribes with his visions of glory. As Khan, Achaz led the now-united Khazzaki toward two primary goals: hunting and executing slavers, and plundering wealth and resources from weaker realms.

After three years of battling Rubeshi slavers and raiding lands beyond the Plains, Achaz realized one place— Niemheim—practiced a particularly cruel form of slavery while possessing



strange and wonderful treasures. Achaz envisioned himself liberating Niemheim's gnomes; he assumed he'd later accept glittering rewards from the grateful folk. Whether this was Achaz's idea or more the result of some devil's influence Midgard may never know.

After invading Niemheim, despite a hard-fought campaign, Achaz's advance faltered at Holmgard's impregnable walls. The siege languished for years before the gnomish king's messengers reached Achaz. The Khan would earn the gnomes' fealty, the runners said, if he liberated them from their infernal overlords. And so Achaz stood before Holmgard's gates and challenged Gorthonak, Duke of Hell, to single combat. Gorthonak accepted.

Resplendent in his mighty armor, his bow Heartbane in hand, Achaz rode to meet the evil duke. From dawn until dusk, the pair traded grievous wounds. Finally, roaring with pain and fury, Gorthonak fled the field and returned to Hell.

Afterward, the gnomes celebrated their liberation with a weeklong feast, where they presented Achaz with their magical Horned Crown as a symbol of his majesty and their loyalty. When the treasure-laden Khazzaki departed from Niemheim, the gnomes smiled and waved farewell; meanwhile, in his infernal palace, Gorthonak laughed with delight—for the Khan of Khans now wore the Horned Crown just as the dark duke had planned all along.

Using the crown's divinatory powers, Achaz found his desires for wealth and freedom easily realized. With its guidance, he repelled a major Rubeshi offensive, wiped out much of their armed forces, and later relieved the Rubeshi of their slaves and wealth. All was going delightfully well for the Khan of Khans—except that the sentient Horned Crown began demanding human sacrifices for the martial and mental gifts it bestowed.

To appease the crown, Achaz began ordering the execution of captured slavers, Khazzaki enemies, and traitors. As the crown demanded, before their deaths Achaz burned the item's signet into the condemned's faces. While Achaz's victories increased, so did the number who died to please the crown.

Unknown to Achaz, each marked sacrifice sent another soul into the waiting hands of Niemheim's infernal patrons. The more Achaz gave into its wishes, the more the crown corrupted his mind. It turned his attention away from his people's needs and toward the slaying of those he deemed unrighteous.

Slowly, like an incessant whisper, the crown used the Khan of Khans' deep-seated fears of subjugation and poverty to compel him to commit to increasingly evil acts. The more he listened to the crown, the more Achaz's heart hardened and his wisdom faltered. Khazzaki raids decreased and were replaced with searches for hidden treasures in the barrows of Rhos Khurgan, an ancient place once held sacred.

Years passed. With fewer slavers and foreigners to sate the Crown's bloodlust, it began pushing Achaz to sacrifice his own people. He eventually declared that even the most trivial crimes would be punishable by death. To enforce his tyranny, at the crown's suggestion Achaz formed the Bloodriders—an elite, fiercely loyal force of power-hungry warriors and sorcerers. He allowed them to execute anyone they saw fit.

When Achaz demanded the execution of all children born out of wedlock, the enraged tribal Khans objected but were killed as traitors. Achaz then installed his most powerful and loyal Bloodriders as leaders of those tribes. These new Khans ruled as iron-fisted tyrants; they evoked nearly universal hatred among the people.

Soon, small rebellions began surfacing. The unrest grew until, eight years after Niemheim's liberation, the proud Khazzaki could endure no more. Siemev the Old, the Plains' most powerful oracle, gathered the bravest Khazzaki heroes and united them in a vow to kill Achaz and destroy the Horned Crown that had so corrupted him.

Gathering stealthily in Misto Kolis, these heroes struck swiftly and brutally. The city was nearly leveled in the ensuing battle, but on its final day Achaz fell and his Bloodriders scattered. Once a new Khan of Khans was named—Rezim Thikkur—Siemev locked the Horned Crown in an iron chest. He originally intended to destroy the artifact.In the end, though, Siemev hid the crown and layered its resting place with cunning spells and traps.

Upon his defeat, a few of Achaz's Bloodriders escaped with his body and spirited it away to a secret place. There, they attempted to mummify him—though none present could perform the ritual—and they enchanted his tomb in hopes the corpse would someday rise again.

Today, the Bloodriders exist but remain hidden. Organized into small cells, they dream of the day Achaz might return to restore the Khazzaki to glory. The Bloodriders' clandestine leader is Rhorak Zenody, the current Khan of Khans' second-eldest son. Secretly, the Bloodriders search for their beloved leader's Horned Crown—and for someone with the power to raise Achaz.

# THE HORNED CROWN (INTELLIGENT ITEM)

Aura strong divination and enchantment; CL 11th Slot head; Weight 3 lb.

AL LE; Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 16

**Communication** telepathy (Gnomish, Infernal, Khazzaki, Trade)

**Purpose** provide the diabolical lords of Niemheim with souls **Special** *divination* 1/day, Bluff 10 ranks (+13), Knowledge (History) 10 ranks (+13)

Dedicated Power geas/quest at will Ego 25

#### Description

Made of solid gold, this heavy crown features two large curling horns that are reminiscent of a bison's. The crown grants you a +2 morale bonus on attack rolls, saves, and skill checks. It grants immunity to fear effects and 11 temporary hp.

The crown is an intelligent magical item with its own agenda. It exists to find and sacrifice souls to the infernal lords that oppress Niemheim; it also seeks to corrupt powerful individuals of other alignments to its purpose. The crown searches for your desires; it is particularly delighted if those desires involve greed or power. It then uses divination and the knowledge it has gathered to help you fulfill those desires no matter the consequence.

Once you consider its power indispensible, the crown attempts to persuade you to mark humanoids with its symbol—which resembles a dash inside two vertically oriented semicircles—and kill them. The souls of individuals sacrificed in this manner are sent to the crown's devilish masters. If its persuasive efforts fail, the crown will challenge you for dominance (see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*). If you resist this, the crown will consider using *geas/quest* to get its way.

## Destruction

The Horned Crown is powered by archdevil's malice. As such, it is impervious to physical harm. It can be destroyed, but the crown's creators have kept that secret well hidden.

The combined magic of three powerful spellcasters can separate the crown's infernal intelligence from its physical aspect, although a mix of arcane and divine magic must be involved. To do this requires a four-hour ritual that involves the simultaneous casting of *wish* or *miracle* to weaken the crown's metaphysical cohesion, *banishment* to reject its infernal intelligence, and *destruction* or *disintegrate* to destroy its physical form.

Alternatively, the blood of a dying or dead lawful evil creature whose last act involved self-sacrifice for a good or chaotic cause can unravel the crown, causing its destruction.

# THE AZURE KINGS

umors regarding the ancestry of the Azure Kings' line include inbreeding and frost giant heritage. However, the truth rings more tragic. During the Great Mage War, an arch geomancer of Vael Turog named Myllenka Strojtovka seized the power of the mountains to the north and east. Wielding fell sorceries, she successfully bonded with a major ley line—but its reverberations caused her to lose control of this power. Refusing to release her bond, she self-immolated with volcanic fury; the ley line snapped like an over-taught rope. Following this event, an amalgamation of ley power and fell sorceries pooled at the heart of Eldre Nojstrom, the largest peak in the Riphean Mountains.

Within this pool, a piece of Myllenka's soul became trapped, poisoning the mountain. Believing these circumstances to be fortuitous, a pleased Boreas enhanced the power of this haunt. Indeed, glaciers, ice-melt runoff, fresh water springs, and mined resources carried the taint of twisted, sorcerous hatred. Most notably, a tribe of proud and honorable barbarians known as the Ice Lions became twisted with fell fury; their skin were tinged blue and their bodies became enormous and intimidating.

# Mountainous Rage

#### CR 20

# XP 307,200

CE haunt (20-mile radius) **Caster Level** 20th **Notice** Perception DC 45 (azure frost begins to supernaturally coat everything) **hp** 100; **Trigger** the third Wolfsday of every twentieth Mustering; **Reset** 20 years

#### EFFECT

When this haunt triggers, an azure miasma of hate-tinged rime descends across an area covering a 20-mile radius from Eldre Nojstrom. All creatures within the area are targeted by a *symbol of strife* (Will save DC 32) as a compulsion effect that is not mind-affecting. The twisted nature of this haunt requires anyone affected to first attack humans. Creatures with the azure heritage trait will not, however, attack another possessing this trait, but will automatically fail the save.

## DESTRUCTION

The ley line that Myllenka destroyed must be restored. Once this is done, her soul will be freed.

# ICE LIONS

Traditionally, before the azure rime of the mountainous rage descended upon them, the Ice Lions lived a nomadic life among the peaks and valleys of the Riphean Mountains. They were neither kind nor evil people, and instead operated according to strict tribal codes revolving around honor, respect, and strength. A patriarchal meritocracy, the tribe remained insular; they warred with any mountain tribes that intruded into their territory. Occasionally, when they exhausted their seasonal hunting or foraging grounds, they would push into the Rothenian Plains to find food and resources.

Once they were forever mutated by Myllenka Strojtovka's failed spell, however, the Ice Lions began periodically abandoning their honor. In the past, they did not war, kill, or plunder without purpose or reason, and they never raped. Since Myllenka's demise, however, they have adopted a tradition of raiding and ravaging on two specific occasions: the generational anniversary of Myllenka's failure and exactly one year afterward, when they collect any resulting progeny. They believe their honor-bound duty requires them to remove any vestiges of their shameful deeds from the plains.



# **RECENT HISTORY**

Life as a nomad in mountainous territory can be grueling and difficult. However, in contrast with most mountain people, whose lives are typically short, Boreas fathered a line of long-lived kings to grant his blunt tool of chaos and destruction a sharper edge. One hundred years ago, the first Azure King, Ulf Magnushedin, was born; eventually, he would lead his tribe on the most brutal of raids in Ice Lion history. Ulf's dream was to find a cure for his tribe and their progeny. However, when he sought the help of the Winter Prince and Snow Princess of the Silver Mountain Kingdom of Domovogrod, and of Vidim, the Kingdom of Ravens, he was rudely rebuffed. Disheartened, Ulf realized he would need to solve this problem alone.

Soon, Ulf's only recourse became clear-he needed to band together the tribes of the mountains, including giants, trolls, and ogres. No one is sure whether this plan was truly altruistic or if it was the result of Boreas and Loki's manipulation-after all, the gods are notorious for inserting themselves into mortal affairs for their mysterious purposes. Either way, Ulf believed he must invade, impose his leadership, and reallocate the resources of the plains to remove his tribe's curse. To help achieve his goals, Ulf conscripted his greatest shamans to craft him a terrifying weapon made of Riphean glacial ice taken from the peak of Eldre Nojstrom. The shamans dubbed this hafted axe Menneskelig-død, or Human-Slayer. About 60 years ago, Ulf's war of unification ended on the Plains of Rhos Khurgan, when the combined armies of Vidim and Domovogrod annihilated the king and his forces.

The Tsar of Vidim initially claimed Ulf's weapon. However, Loki stole Menneskelig-død from the Tsar's palace and hid it in the trapped maze of corridors within the entrance to Tanserhall. Sixty years later, the rumblings of a new Azure King, Fjolmod Ulfhedin, son of Ulf, trickle across the Rothenian Plains. Fjolmod and his band of trusted adventurers seek out Ulf's lost weapon. Once he is successful, Fjolmod plans to continue his father's crusade to brutally unite the plains—at any cost.

# TRAITS

# Azure Heritage (regional, Rothenian Plains)

Your skin is tinged a deep azure, belying your ties to the ancient, legendary lineage of the Azure King. **Benefit:** You add six inches to your height and 60 lb. to your weight. Additionally, you gain a +2 trait bonus to all Strength checks.

# **Enormous Limbs (racial, any)**

One of your parents was a soldier in the Azure King's army. You have the blood of the blue-skinned barbarians from the Riphean Mountains raging through your veins.

**Benefit:** You may use weapons sized for a creature one size larger than you without penalty and you may treat appropriately sized, one-handed weapons as though they are light weapons.

# **Enormous Torso (racial, any)**

One of your parents was a soldier in the Azure King's army. You have the blood of the blue-skinned barbarians from

the Riphean Mountains raging through your veins.
Benefit: When figuring out your carrying capacity, you gain a +2 bonus to your Strength score.

# FEATS

# **Enormous Size**

Your immense stature and skill in battle grants you some of the benefits of Large size.

> Prerequisites: Base attack bonus +7, Azure Heritage trait and Enormous Torso trait or Enormous Limbs trait.

Benefit: You gain a +1 bonus to CMB and CMD and double your carrying capacity. You may use a Large-sized weapon without incurring penalties. Additionally, this feat provides natural armor for the purposes of gaining access to the Improved Natural Armor feat.

# **Enormous Reach**

Your enormous size and skill in combat allows you to effectively employ the limited reach of a Large creature.

- **Prerequisites:** Base attack bonus +11, Enormous size.
  - **Benefit:** During your turn, you may extend your reach by 5 ft. Once per day, as an immediate action, you may extend your reach by 5 ft.

# **MENNESKELIG-DØD**

Aura strong conjuration, evocation, necromancy, and transmutation; CL 18th

Slot none; Price 200,000 gp; Weight 32 lb.

# Description

Carved from magical Riphean glacial ice, this Huge, hafted axe-like weapon does 3d8 slashing damage with a 4x critical modifier. *Menneskelig-død* functions as a +2 human-bane Huge improvised weapon in the hands of most users. However, for those who possess the Azure Heritage trait, this weapon grants proficiency, is no longer considered improvised, and is treated as a Large, one-handed weapon. Additionally, for those who possess the Azure Heritage trait and use this weapon to slay a human, *Menneskeligdød* bonds with you. While this bond exists, the weapon becomes a +4 human-bane vorpal weapon whenever it succeeds at a critical killing blow against a human.

Finally, when *Menneskelig-død* bonds with you, it grants the ability to enlarge once per day for the duration of a single encounter. This ability works otherwise as *enlarge person* but does not affect the size and damage of the weapon.

Wielders of *Menneskelig-død* also are cursed with the unyielding urge to slay humans who do not possess the Azure Heritage trait. Upon each encounter with such a human, while wielding *Menneskelig-død* you must make a DC 15 Will save or be compelled to attack the human with the weapon until the target is dead. For each day you resist this compulsion, you must make an additional Will save with a cumulative +2 to the DC.

## **Construction Requirements**

Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *circle of death, enlarge person, keen edge, summon monster I*; **Cost** 100,000 gp.

# THE **BLACK** SORCERESS

he origin of the Black Sorceress and her First Great Revolt lies in the corruption of the shadow fey. The shadow fey, originally the Moonlit Court of the Margreve, began their transformation 1,000 years ago—200 years before the sorceress' actions. The Moonlit King bound the Stross family to guard Stross Castle and to govern the Crossroads region. The shadow fey wanted to bring the Crossroads into the shadow realm, using a process which continued with each generation of Stross devoted to shadow.

A puissant student of magic, Melathea Stross deciphered the truth regarding her family's agreement; she wanted her beloved home free from this plan, and thought shifting the clan's allegiances to the River Court might be the key. However, as a human and a servant of the Moonlit Court, she failed to penetrate the River Court's politics. Thwarted, she concluded all elves sought only to consume Midgard, fueling their expansion into other planes. This belief unified the justification-hungry Caelmarath and galvanized the rebellion.

The Society chafed under the Empire, believing the elves hid secrets from them while keeping them subjugated. Realizing the humans and tieflings lacked the power to defeat the empire alone, Melathea directed them to find unorthodox sources of power. Some communed with genius loci while others petitioned infernal powers. Stross sought out Baba Yaga, thinking an ancient Power of Midgard might offer her the best advantage.

Old Grandmother, insulted at the Moonlit Court's impertinence, offered Melathea the first incantations and True Names used to create the insurrection's otherworldly forces in exchange for another bargain, the details of which only Baba Yaga knows. Initially only capable of bringing demons or splinters of the Walkers into Midgard, this magic grew into rituals used to invoke even greater monstrosities.

Armed with this knowledge, Melathea took up the persona of the Black Sorceress and began her crusade under the cover of magical darkness. What became known as the Great Revolt raged for 20 winters. A brutal and merciless conflict, it shattered and corrupted the fey roads while allowing for the human demesnes of Vael Turog and Bemmea to be carved from the Empire. Melathea, in particular, used the fey roads to elude Imperial forces and wage a war soaked in demonic ichor and elvish blood.

Eventually, the Third Imperial Legion, the Bronze Lions, ambushed her on a fey causeway; all those upon the shadowy road were lost in a massive arcane firestorm as it plummeted into the space between realities. Her defeat and disappearance broke the spirit of the Revolt; it offered inconsistent resistance afterward. Although the elves ultimately crushed the rebellion, the hostilities left their roads broken and tainted by evil. Fragments no longer reliably followed original routes and demons, undead, and unspeakable horrors infested what remained.

Ever opportunists, the Moonlit Court used the Black Sorceress's actions to hide their bargain with the Queen of Night. They claimed Stross tricked them, held their sacred oak hostage, and forced the change upon the scaithsidhe. Whether the other courts believed the tale is unknown, but they accepted it in the aftermath. However, the unity of the Elvish Courts was broken. The dissolution of their empire and the exodus from Midgard happened in less than a quarter of an elvish generation, as elvenkind abandoned their halls and homes.



Later researchers would develop and expand upon the texts and weapons given to left by the Black Sorceress and her collaborators, creating the destructive magics which obliterated the Western Wastes.

# **TRUE NAMES**

True Names are detailed in *Ultimate Magic*. Discovering a creature's True Name requires a month of research and a successful Knowledge (planes) check (DC 10 + the creature's number of hit dice); Knowledge (planes) check; it should be considered worth at least 5,000 gp. Powerful or unique creatures may add a +2, +5, or +10 to this DC (add 1,000 gp times the modifier to the value of the True Name).

Failure by more than five provides a false name, which attracts the creature's attention and allows the creature an immediate Will save with a bonus equal to this modifier; success indicates it may pass through the summoner's portal and freely remain on the caster's plane of existence until it desires to return home. In this case, it is not bound or limited in any way.



# INCANTATION OF BINDING ICHOROUS SERVANTS

"We strike a bargain, creature. My bidding in exchange for..."
School conjuration; Effective Level 8th
Skill Check Knowledge (planes) DC 24, 4 successes;
Diplomacy DC 24, 4 successes
Casting Time 80 minutes
Components F, M, S, V
Focus—an entity's True Name
Material Components—a sacrifice for the summoned
creature equal to (2 HD of living creatures or 2,000gp)
per 1 HD of the creature summoned
Secondary Casters—none required, no more than six
Range close
Target creature to be summoned
Duration 15 days

Saving Throw Will negates (harmless); SR yes (harmless)

# Description

Invoking the target creature's True Name, the caster calls the entity to a portal opened at the spellcasting site to bargain for a task to be performed within the next 15 days. If the creature accepts the terms of the bargain (indicated by the success of the incantation), the creature obeys the

caster's directions during the time spent completing the task. When the spell ends, the creature

returns to its native plane.

# Backlash

After the incantation, performers are exhausted and suffer 4d6 hp damage.

## Failure

Failing two consecutive skill checks bungles the bargaining ceremony and inflicts the backlash. Failing one of the checks by more than 5 allows the creature a second Will save; success indicates it may pass through the portal and freely remain on the caster's plane of existence. In this case, it is not bound or limited in any way. For this reason, many casters place the portal's opening within a magic circle spell, focused inward.

# INCANTATION OF THE SPLINTERED MADNESS GIVEN FORM

"They will know the inexplicable shape of the beyond; know and perish..."

School conjuration; Effective Level 8th Skill Check Knowledge (planes) DC 24, 8 successes Casting Time 80 minutes Components F, S, V Focus— an entity's True Name Secondary Casters— none required, no more than six Range close Target creature summoned Duration 15 hours

# Saving Throw none; SR no

#### Description

Invoking the True Name of a Walker of the Wastes, the caster summons a fragment of its being, which rampages until slain or the duration expires (use statistics for a shoggoth, *Pathfinder Bestiary*). The summoners gain no control or direction over the creature, and it may kill those who remain nearby.

#### Backlash

After the incantation, the performers are exhausted and suffer 2d6 damage and 1d4 Wisdom damage.

# Failure

Failing two consecutive skill checks bungles the incantation and inflicts the backlash, but the Wisdom damage becomes Wisdom drain.

# **FEY WAYSTONE**

Aura strong conjuration; CL 11th Slot none; Price 47,500 gp; Weight 7 lbs.

# Description

A rough rectangular stone engraved with elvish script and topped with a pyramid of smoky quartz crystal, this small stele thrums gently. When activated, both the crystal and the appropriate script glows with a soft, white light. When the phrase for an appropriate destination is touched on a waystone and it is placed on the ground (a move action provoking attacks of opportunity), it opens a portal to a fey road, which remains open until one of three conditions is met:

- The activator wills the portal closed as a swift action which does not provoke attacks of opportunity.
- The activator reaches the destination and wills open the exit portal.
- The stone gains the broken condition.

Travel along the fey road occurs at a rate of 250 miles per hour, relative to the bearer's plane of origin, and otherwise acts as a *shadow walk* spell. Travelers already on the road when the portal closes continue to the designated destination.

If the origin portal was closed, the destination portal opens automatically when travelers arrive. A waystone's bearer may wait to open the destination portal until they desire or until either sunrise or sunset. A waystone's bearer may choose to hold the portal shut at sunrise or sunset with a successful DC 25 Will save. Fey roads exist whether or not a portal has been opened. After the Great Revolt, many host the lairs of infernal, undead, or extraplanar creatures.

An appropriate destination is created by performing a small ritual using a waystone and inscribing a corresponding mark in elvish script. As long as the mark remains at the destination, a fey road may be opened by the attuned waystone to the site. This ritual requires one hour. While such marks need not be permanent, they are often carved into stone or engraved into metal tablets to ensure they cannot easily be destroyed. Multiple waystones may be attuned to the same mark.

A fey waystone may be activated twice per day.

#### Construction

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, creator must have elven blood, *shadow walk*; Cost 23,750 gp.

# THE **BLACKENED** MAN

Walking through the smoke of the campfire, laughing gently, the Blackened Man appears.

"So," he says, "I hear from the whispers in the night that someone needs to pay."

escriptions of the Blackened Man vary, but all give similar generalities: He is tall somewhere between six and ten feet humanoid, long-limbed, and dressed neatly in the most current style. His skin, teeth, eyes, clothing, and doubtlessly his heart are pitch black.

No one is sure of the exact nature of his being. The Kariv describe him as a fey creature that torments mortals for his own amusement. The gnomes of Niemheim credit him along with themselves with negotiating the infernal pact that binds them to this day. Further, ancient elven texts claim the Blackened Man is one of the few remaining members of a race with which they warred in Midgard's dawn. Thus, many elves pity him as a cursed, broken soul.

The Blackened Man is a killer, a fixer, and a monster of untold age. He walks the world, satisfying the petty urges of the weak-willed and reveling in the suffering created by their shortsighted avarice. He is a patron to witches and cults the world over, though those foolish enough to worship him often vanish without a trace. He works with devils, hags, intelligent undead, and countless mortal agents of all stripes. He seems to have a particular fondness for kot bayun and sandmen, both found in the *Midgard Bestiary*. According to the stories, however, the Blackened Man loathes aberrations and gearforged, as their minds, souls, and sufferings are unpalatable payments for his services.

Openly seeking information about the Blackened Man is enough to draw his attention from anywhere in Midgard; interested parties can expect his presence at sundown within days. If attacked, the Blackened Man will give no quarter



and leaves no witnesses, not even for those who offer him a deal or who already possess his mark. At least one of the Ruby Despot's battalions and a wing of dragon-kin Mharoti soldiers have been lost in past attempts to kill this fiend.

# THE BLACK MARK

The Blackened Man most frequently appears before those in despair and offers them three options to ease their pain: a life for a soul, pain for pain, or a mercy for madness. When a bargainer chooses an option, regardless of its details, he bestows his black mark upon them. Resembling a black sun, this mark appears on the palm of the bargainer's hand, on the forehead, or as a coin the bargainer must deliver to an intended target. A damning symbol, the mark indicates that its bearer will imminently fall into darkness forever.

Many who accept the mark will reject it afterward and attempt to remove it. The mark is indelible, though; bearers remain marked even in death. For those with whom he has made a dark deal, sooner or later the Blackened Man will collect his due.

Obtaining a mark is similar to being granted a *wish* spell. The *wish*like ability may be used at any time after the mark has been bestowed. Its magic is fueled through the power the Blackened Man has accumulated during his lifetime from other deals, infernal compacts, mysterious treasures, staggeringly powerful artifacts, and his own personal magic. The mark is so life-altering that it should bestow a benefit that is particularly powerful and permanent. The Blackened Man often will extract his price from an individual immediately, but he may hold off on a PC, giving the character the opportunity to request yet another deal later.

What exactly the Blackened Man's terms mean—a life for a soul, pain for pain, or a mercy for madness—may fluctuate to serve game masters' stories. A few suggestions are:

# Life for a Soul

- The character loses his soul after wishing another dead or resurrected. He no longer can be raised, resurrected, or reincarnated.
- The character has no sense of self. She automatically fails all Charisma-based checks.
- The character suffers a massive penalty to all Will saves against spells from the enchantment school; he is easily bent to other's wills.

# **Pain for Pain**

- The character suffers in kind after cursing another.
- The character permanently gains one of the oracle class's curses, but not its benefits.
- The character suffers a massive penalty to saves against spells that fall under the grudge school of magic (see below).
- The character receives the minimum amount of healing from all spells and effects. Critical threats against her automatically are confirmed.

# A Mercy for Madness

- The character's mind breaks from trying to avoid the mark's negative effects.
- The character gains an insanity. See *Pathfinder GameMastery Guide* for more details on insanities.
- Any time the character fails a Wisdom-based check or save, it is confused for a number of rounds equal to its Wisdom modifier.
- The character is distracting in habit and speech to those around her. Anyone adjacent to her suffers a -4 penalty to AC, saves, and skill checks. Casters must make concentration checks with this penalty in effect to cast spells.

Simply having the mark is considered damning evidence to inquisitors, witch hunters, and agents of the divine that the bearer is in league with dark powers, even if those powers haven't been used. The Blackened Man's contractors have few options to rid themselves of this mark. The mark cannot be forced upon an unwilling person; attempting to do so may result in the perpetrator's alignment shifting. A *wish, miracle,* or *atonement* spell cast by a 15th-level or higher caster will fade the mark into an unidentifiable bruise. Its abilities, however, remain, and the mark will appear in its original form if its benefit is ever realized.

A rare few embrace the mark. If its power goes unused, these bearers receive the benefits of grudge magic—with the blessing of the Blackened Man.

# **Grudge Magic**

You create a mutual bond of hate between yourself and your target.

**Prerequisite**: Must have accepted the black mark of the Blackened Man.

**Benefit:** So long as you have a personal item or a physical piece of your target creature, you gain a +1 CL to the grudge magic spells (Northlands) and to any spells with the curse, disease, emotion, fear, pain, and poison spell descriptors used against it. Spells with these descriptors now also qualify as grudge magic. A creature successfully affected by one of your grudge spells also gains a +1 CL to cast grudge spells against you for 24 hours or until the spell affecting it ends, whichever comes first. Your target does not learn who cast the initial spell upon it if it hasn't the means to do so, but he or she does gain a sense that someone specific wishes it ill.

# **USING THIS LEGEND**

Here are some ways for GMs to incorporate the Blackened Man into their games:

• The Arcane Collegium in Zobeck is seeking brave individuals to contact the Blackened Man and query him on his historical knowledge. Few believe he really exists, but they have set up a reception for him in one of their halls and are planning to capture him for study if he does. Expect violence.

- The Blackened Man has given his mark to the younger giants of the Western Wastes and accepted their ancestor's spirits as payment. This has freed many of them from their haunting curse, and they have mobilized a small force dedicated to raiding caravans and pilgrims the young giants otherwise would have left alone. The older giants see this as a desecration of their ancestry. They need someone to stop their youth from turning to the Blackened Man—they also need to retrieve the bartered souls if possible.
- A murderer is targeting the downtrodden and desperate. Due to these circumstances, many thought the deaths were suicides—but the bodies bear signs of ritualistic mutilations. The killer is collecting black marks. Since he or she is willing to bear them, the marks are transferring easily; the death of their original owners makes the transfer permanent. The Blackened Man himself wants you to find this person. Who is collecting the marks? What do they intend to ask of the Blackened Man? How will they pay his price? More importantly, what will the Blackened Man give you to solve these mysteries?

# BLOOD MOTHER MARGASE

he red hag Margase was a mature blood druidess of 300 years when the cataclysm of the Caelmarath shook Midgard, changing its landscape forever. As she gathered blood slaves for Hecate along the Septime peninsula of Old Verrayne, outside of Friula, massive waves and a tremendous ley storm struck the ocean and coastline. The combination tore the island city of Talitheos—a marble miracle of beauty and vast stores of knowledge—sinking it and ripping parts of it from the ocean. When the waves crashed inland, they dashed Margase's accompanying Talithen sisters and their slaves against rocks and trees, killing them all instantly.

An instant before the waves rushed inward to also devastate the city of Friula, the great coral mass known as Tholeachrus rose up more than 70 feet tall, blocking the water's catastrophic path. Its actions saved both the city and Margase's life—but the creature expended great power in shielding the City of Secrets. Spent, Tholeachrus spread its bulk across the coastline in front of Friula and went into a deep slumber. Only its glow indicated that life yet remained in the ancient being.

This mage-caused cataclysm forever marked Margase. Her hatred for those meddling with arcane forces was born that day; her revulsion for destroyers of nature's bounty intensified and, finally, the loss of her ancestral home sent her in search of a new haven. From the Friulan ruins, Margase crawled out to the depleted Tholeachrus, which now appeared much like a glowing reef. She then cut her arm and dripped her lifeblood onto the great coral creature. This gruesome act was Margase's offering of gratitude; it also signified her promise to watch over the great being's sleeping form as long as she lived. Screaming out to Hecate, Margase made a second blood oath: She vowed to destroy the mages responsible for the destruction, and to destroy any whose dabbling would lead them to follow in the Caelmarath mages' footsteps.

Centuries have passed since the cataclysm, but still Margase remembers. She has since built a red hag home in the forests of Verrayne, and she safeguards its lands as a member of the druidical Oaken Ring. She also left several hags along the golden coastline to protect Tholeachrus and to search for Talitheos's remains. The local Friulans call the hags there "the reef tenders," since much knowledge has been lost about the red hags' existence in human years (see *Beyond the Ghostlight Reef* adventure). The hags feed blood offerings to the Ghostlight Reef on a daily basis.

Margase focuses on protecting Verrayne. She seeks a means to reverse the destruction wrought in the Wasted West, and she plans to ascend to godhood. As to the latter task, she has learned a means of apotheosis—one involving several items, including the former red hag Queen Arligathas' ruling staff. Her power has grown considerably in recent years, and she intends to ascend within a year or two. With her long lifespan, however, she is patient—if nothing else.

So far, Midgard's wheels turn with her machinations as planned.

# BLOOD MOTHER MARGASE, LEADER OF THE OAKEN RING

Margase appears as a comely, red-skinned woman in her late thirties. Her blue eyes shimmer with intelligence, and though her plain brown robes hide her status, an air of authority clings to her.



# **Blood Mother Margase**

CR 26

## **RED HAG BLOOD DRUID\* 20**

XP 2,048,000

NE Medium red hag Init +9; Senses all-around vision, blood sense 90 ft., darkvision 120 ft., Perception +33 Aura siphoning aura (30 ft, DC 28)

## DEFENSE

AC 29, touch 21, flat-footed 29 (+3 Dex, +8 natural, bracers of armor +8) hp 268 (7d10+20d8+135)

Fort +21, Ref +14, Will +30

DR 15/cold iron; Immune poison; SR 24

#### OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

- **Melee** 2 claws +26 (1d4+4 plus bleed and grab) or +3 quarterstaff of wounding +29/+24/+19/+14 (1d6+7+1 bleed)
- **Special Attacks** battle rage (+10 on touch attacks for 1 round, 14/day), bleed (1d6), blood drain (1d4 Con), wounding blade (give a weapon wounding quality for 10 rounds, 4/day)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 7th)

At will—summon monster I

3/day—charm monster, summon monster III

Red Hag Spells Prepared (CL 7th; Concentration +18)

4th—dispel magic, flame strike (DC 25), rusting grasp 3rd—call lightning (DC 24), cure moderate wounds, greater magic fang, protection from energy, wind wall

- 2nd—barkskin, bear's endurance, cat's grace, flaming sphere (DC 23), heat metal (DC 23), lesser restoration
- 1st (8/day)—charm animals (DC 21), cure light wounds, entangle (DC 21), faerie fire, obscuring mist, produce flame, speak with animals

0-create water, detect magic, mending, stabilize

Druid Spells Prepared (CL 20th; Concentration +31) Domain: Blood (<sup>+</sup> domain spell)

9th—antipathy, mass cure critical wounds (x2), elemental swarm, power word kill<sup>+</sup>, storm of vengeance (DC 30)

8th— bloody claws<sup>APG</sup>, finger of death (x2) (DC 29), power word stun+, reverse gravity, word of recall

- 7th—animate plants, changestaff, control weather, heal, inflict serious wounds (mass)<sup>+</sup>, summon nature's ally VII, true seeing
- 6th—antilife shell, bear's endurance (mass), blade barrier<sup>+</sup>(DC 26), cure light wounds (mass), fire seeds (DC 26), swarm skin<sup>APG</sup>, transport via plant
- 5th—awaken, call lightning storm, cure critical wounds, exsanguinating cloud<sup>KQ6</sup>, stoneskin (x2), wall of thorns<sup>+</sup>
- 4th—ball of lightning<sup>APG</sup>, bloody claws<sup>APG</sup>, dispel magic, divine power<sup>+</sup>, flame strike (DC 25), ice storm (DC 25), rusting grasp

3rd—blood biography<sup>APG</sup>, call lightning (DC 24), cure moderate wounds, plant growth, poison (DC 24), snare, spike growth (DC 24), vampiric touch<sup>+</sup> 2nd—aspect of the bear<sup>APG</sup>, blood lure<sup>KQ6</sup>, eagle eye<sup>APG</sup>, greater blood tide<sup>KQ6</sup>, owl's wisdom, spiritual weapon<sup>+</sup>, stone call<sup>APG</sup>, summon nature's ally II

1st—endure elements, magic weapon<sup>+</sup>, goodberry (x2), longstrider, magic stone, summon nature's ally I, weapon of blood<sup>KQ6</sup>

0— blood tide<sup>KQ6</sup>, flare, guidance, read magic

# STATISTICS

Str 19, Dex 16, Con 20, Int 24, Wis 33, Cha 25 Base Atk +22; CMB +26; CMD 39

Feats Alertness, Blind-Fight, Craft Rod, Craft Staff, Craft Wand, Great Fortitude, Improved Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Intimidating Prowess, Iron Will, Natural Spell, Quicken Spell, Silent Spell, Spell Penetration

Skills Bluff +6, Craft (alchemy) +25, Craft (carpentry) +30, Craft (cloth) +30, Craft (jewelry) +27, Craft (sculpturing) +12, Craft (traps) +30, Diplomacy +7, Handle Animal 30, Heal +34, Knowledge (arcana) +13, Knowledge (geography) +30, Knowledge (history) +12, Knowledge (nature) +31, Intimidate +13, Perception +33, Sense Motive +12,Spellcraft +33, Stealth +11, Survival +34, Swim +30; Racial Modifiers +8 Swim

Languages Aklo, Aquan, Common, Draconic, Druidic, Elven, Giant, Ignan, Sylvan, Terran

**SQ** amphibious, blood healing, nature sense, resist nature's lure, a thousand faces, timeless body, trackless step, wild empathy, wild shape (at will), woodland stride **Gear** bracers of armor +8, brooch of shielding, ring of water elemental control, robe of eyes, +3 quarterstaff of wounding

# TACTICS

## **BEFORE COMBAT**

Margase's servants attend to most problems, including martial threats. She only enters battle when the threats prove powerful indeed. She casts *stoneskin* and *bear's endurance* before combat.

#### **DURING COMBAT**

Two stout 12th-level barbarians protect her person at all times. Margase casts *storm of vengeance*, *power word kill*, *finger of death*, and *elemental swarm* first. She uses her blood healing to gain temporary hit points during melee, but she only uses her siphoning aura if her bodyguards go down.

#### Morale

Blood Mother Margase does not intend to die at anyone's hands, as she has a divine goal to meet. She escapes with her *word of recall* spell (which returns her to the Friulan coast) when odds turn in her opponents' favor. She sacrifices any allies in the heat of battle to secure her own safety.

## BACKGROUND

Blood Mother Margase holds much power in the Green Duchy of Verrayne, even though Duke Gareth Albrioc holds the actual title of leader. The duke rarely makes a move without consulting the Order of the Oaken Ring, however—which Blood Mother Margase does control. When not aiding the duke directly, Blood Mother Margase resides in a ziggurat temple to Hecate in the wilderness. Hecate's priestesses serve her as if she were already a deity. The Blood Mother's druidical order attacks both armies and intruders in the forest around the Green Duchy, as they are a suspicious lot.

# **MOTIVATIONS & GOALS**

Margase wants to clear out the Wasted West and to restore it to its former beauty, bringing it under the control of Verrayne. Margase believes ascending to godhood would allow her to regenerate the area.

The Blood Mother despises those working with arcane magic, especially those residing in the magocracies.

Whenever possible, she sends red hags or Hecate's followers to interfere with their blasphemous studies of magic. In Margase's mind, Hecate only approves of natural magic.

# **SCHEMES & PLOTS**

Blood Mother Margase plots her apotheosis and seeks a means to rejuvenate the Wasted Waste. She views the lands of Verrayne as her home now, and she does whatever is necessary to protect them, including making great sacrificial offerings of blood to Hecate to keep Verrayne safe. As a part of Verrayne's protection, she ensures that all arcane manipulators are sacrificed to Hecate, as she never wants to witness another such act of powerful, wanton destruction.

# CALM-TONGUE

Ithough gnoll savagery is well known throughout Midgard, the civilized gnolls of realms such as Ischadia, Mharoti, Nuria-Natal, and the Ruby Despotate challenge this stereotype. No single gnoll positively influenced his kin more than Calm-Tongue. A southern-dwelling gnoll who lived more than 200 years ago, Calm-Tongue—known to gnolls as Kuurvekh, or "Whispering Grandfather"—is renowned throughout Midgard as a peaceful teacher of customary law to his nearby kinsmen. That a male gnoll taught his vicious folk the modern ways of civilized society is legend enough for most gnolls, particularly because they live under considerable female domination.

Born weak and sickly, if preternaturally curious, Kuurvekh was saved from traditional sacrifice by a wise witch of the fading Bloodslake sept, located in far Khandiria. Raised as a Speaker—a primitive translator-turnedspokesman—Kuurvekh rose to oust the females of his tribe through a tacit alliance with other septs and through clever manipulation of the strongest, proudest males.

In time, Kuurvekh tired of his modest power and left to travel throughout the southlands and even into Mharoti. In such locales, he studied at the Dragon Courts and spread his vision of establishing a gnoll society that valued more than blood thirst and savagery. Kuurvekh's gift for languages helped spread his peaceful ideas not only among his people but also among the other peoples of Midgard. Kuuryekh's efforts helped some Midgardians come to accept gnolls as a civilized people with their own beliefs and attitudes.

While in Bjeornheim, Kuurvekh developed much of what would become the Tenets of Calm—a code of honor and loyalty applied to the gnolls' previously wild practices of ruthlessness and cunning. In keeping with his position as an envoy for his people, Kuurvekh taught the fierce northerners to respect the wild hyena-folk of the south; he also introduced to them gnoll words and concepts that survive in the north to this day. Drawing upon the fiercely matriarchal culture of the gnolls, Kuurvekh impressed upon the northerners the value of female warriors. These efforts were responsible for introducing new battle moves to the baresarks. Ironically, this focused approach to combat lives on as the peaceful Kuurvekh's greatest legacy.

Seeking to hone his mind and to prepare his people for great achievements, Kuurvekh travelled to the Wasted West, where he hoped to uncover lost secrets of the Great Old Ones. Kuurvekh's meditations at the foot of Ashkharak-Gorthoga kept the gnoll from developing an insatiable bloodlust, while his recitations of the Tenets of Calm allowed him to remain sane in the face of Uthul-Vangslagish's crazed screams. During his travels, though, tragedy struck Kuurvekh and his followers while they traversed the Mage Road toward Cassadega; it was then that dust goblins apparently massacred the party and slew Kuurvekh. Three of Kuurvekh's disciples managed to escape, and with them the Tenets of Calm survived, though in three distinct versions. Each disciple went on to teach and disseminate slightly different treatments of their teacher's oral discipline.

Today, only in the Ruby Despotate are Kuurvekh's teachings actively proscribed. Giving gnolls ideas about peace and harmony does not sit well with the Glittering King, particularly because his Grand Marshall Zaganos oversees specialized teams of female gnolls, the Slavering Mouths, who hunt down disciples of Calm-Tongue, destroy their works and execute their followers.

As a linguist, scholar, envoy, and champion of his reviled people, Calm-Tongue represents the face of modern Midgard—a polyglot land whose people respect honest oaths and wisdom just as much as they respect beauty and strength. Gnoll chieftains, war-band leaders, and mercenary captains may praise their various gods and pack-mothers, but all in some way credit Kuuryekh Calm-Tongue, their Whispering Grandfather, for their place in Midgard.

# **USING THIS LEGEND**

- Kuurvekh's skull is rumored to be an enchanted artifact that relays the original rendition of the Tenets of Calm. A gnoll historian from Ischadia seeks to recover the ancient relic to restore Kuurvekh's honor and to obtain the tenets in their purest form. Adventurers must travel to the Wasted West and ascertain if dust goblins or more sinister figures were the culprits of Kuurvekh's massacre.
- On five occasions, followers of the three versions of the Tenets of Calm have met to attempt to form a cohesive canon. The adventurers are hired to accompany one proponent to Khandiria to find the remnant of the Bloodslake sept in an attempt to fully understand Kuurvekh's legacy.

The Tenets of Calm spread as an oral tradition of contemplation and equality of mind and spirit. In time, this led to the emergence of new schools of focused combat. These focused-mind barbarians often are southern gnolls, but they also may be found among northerners of myriad races.

# FOCUSED COMBATANT

Focused combatants are trained in remote locations by dedicated practitioners of Kuurvekh's teachings of calm and inner peace. Drawing upon mental reserves and favoring control over abandonment, these barbarians belie the usual stereotype of dull-witted, wild warriors. The focused combatant barbarian has the following class features:

Learned (Ex): You gain the benefit of lore and education. Beginning at first level, each level gains you 1 extra skill point to spend on Diplomacy, Knowledge (any), Linguistics (any) or Sense Motive skills, as all these are considered class skills for the focused combatant. This ability replaces fast movement and the class skills Intimidate and Swim. Focus (Ex): You can call upon your reserves of inner strength and tranquility to grant yourself additional adroitness of action and mental acuity. Starting at 1st level, you can focus your mind during combat for a number of rounds per day equal to four plus your Wisdom modifier. At each level after 1st, you can focus your mind for two additional rounds. Temporary increases to Wisdom, such as those gained from focus and spells, do not increase the total number of rounds you can focus per day. You can focus your mind as a free action. The total number of rounds of focus per day is renewed after resting for eight hours, although these hours do not need to be consecutive.

While focused, you gain a +4 morale bonus to your Dexterity and Wisdom, as well as a +2 morale bonus on Will saves. The focus grants you 2 additional hp per hit die, but these disappear when the focus ends. Unlike temporary hp, these hp are not lost first when you take damage. In addition, you take a -2 penalty to Fortitude saves and to all Strength-based skill checks due to the physical strain of maintaining the focus. Unlike most barbarians, while focused in combat, you can use any Charisma-, Dexterity-, or Intelligencebased skills, including any ability that requires patience or concentration. Outside of combat, when you are attempting to focus on using skills, you can remain focused for minutes per day instead of rounds per day.

You may end your focus as a free action. You are fatigued after your focus for a number of rounds equal to twice the number of combat rounds or minutes spent outside of combat with your mind focused. You cannot refocus your mind while fatigued or exhausted; otherwise you can focus multiple times during a single encounter or combat. If you fall unconscious, your focus immediately ends. As a focused combatant, you qualify for rage feats as normal. The abilities greater

> rage, tireless rage, and mighty rage are transposed to the focus ability. This ability replaces rage.

> > 17

Serene Action (Ex): At 3rd level, you receive a +2 bonus to Diplomacy and Sense Motive checks. Additionally, you gain one of the following as a free feat: Alertness, Animal Affinity, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Nimble Moves or Quick Draw. At 9th and 15th level, you may choose again from this selection. This ability replaces trap sense.

**Focus Defense (Ex):** At 7th level, you become harder to hit, gaining a +1 morale bonus to AC. This improves by 1 at 10th, 13th, 16th and 19th level. This ability replaces damage reduction.

The following rage powers are not available to you: animal fury, increased damage reduction, intimidating glare,

moment of clarity, or raging- climber/leaper/swimmer. The following two focus abilities replace intimidating glare and roused anger.

**Wise Sight (Ex):** You can make a Sense Motive check against one adjacent foe as a move action. If successful, the foe affords a +1 circumstance bonus to your AC, CMB, and attack rolls. This effect lasts for 1d4+1 rounds, plus an additional round for every 5 points by which your check exceeds the DC.

**Refocus (Ex):** You may enter a focus even if fatigued. While focused after using this ability, you are immune to the fatigued condition. Once this focus ends, you are exhausted for 10 min. per round spent focused.

# DAUGHTERS OF JANNIK

ravelers in the Seven Cities region may, if they stray from the beaten path, find the secluded village of Speranza. The largely unremarkable town has one curious local custom. Certain women called Daughters of Jannik are granted extravagant privileges. They are allowed to do anything they please—anything except leave town.

If the travelers ask why, they are told this: Many years ago, a passing army demanded provisions. The people of Speranza gave the soldiers all they had, but it wasn't enough to satisfy the soldiers' greed. The army resolved to punish Speranza by razing the town.

After the destruction, soldiers dragged residents to the town square. Some were tortured; others were forced to watch their neighbors and loved ones suffer. One such townsman was Jannik Saarhauser. An orphan, Jannik had no family in Speranza—but he did love his neighbors. In particular, Jannik loved Bessaree Ossler, though he'd never had the courage to tell her. Bessaree, called Bess by her friends, was probably the only person in town unaware of Jannik's amorous feelings.

Soon enough, the ravening soldiers dragged Bess into the town square. Jannik silently endured his own mistreatment, but when he saw Bess, he put his head down and prayed. Those near him could not understand his whispered words, but before the cruel soldiers could make Bess their plaything, Jannik raised his head and shouted, "Enough!"

Jannik glowed with righteous fire. His bonds burned away. The soldiers attacked, but their blows were useless. After freeing Bess, Jannik went on to avenge the town by gruesomely slaughtering the entire army.

When the final invader was dead, Jannik's fire faded and his wounds began to bleed. As he slumped to the ground, only Bess had the courage to approach him. She tried to staunch his wounds, but they were too great. Jannik uttered his final words to Bess. "I will protect you and yours," he said. "Forever."

Since then, other armies have visited Speranza—some kindly, some not so much. But whenever any soldier has dared to harm a direct descendant of Jannik's love—a spiritual Daughter of Jannik— the result has never been good for the offender.

When friendly visitors arrive, the townspeople happily show off their most prized relic: a ragged banner of ageyellowed cloth thickly stained with ancient blood. "That," they declare with pride, "is the very cloth Bess used to aid the dying Jannik." Visitors also are taken to the cemetery, where a monument marks Jannik's final resting place.

Because Jannik's lingering spirit supposedly protects the women, the townspeople heap Daughters of Jannik with kindness so they'll stay in Sperenza. The idea is that, should an army ever threaten the entire town again, the daughters' presence would keep the population safe. In practice, the armies of the Seven Cities know that they must simply avoid harming the women of Sperenza; warfare continues in the usual fashion otherwise.

# **BESS' DESCENDANTS**

Speranzan tradition dictates that select descendants of Bess Ossler receive privileges and entitlements beyond those granted to most townspeople. Each generation, the first female, direct descendant of Bess Ossler receives the Daughter of Jannik title. Currently three Daughters of Jannik live in Speranza.

Kurra Hailstone is a cruel, arrogant old crone whose infirmities keep her bedridden most days. Most in the town agree no one will miss her when she dies.

Alora Horndancer is Kurra's niece. Alora was a wild child, but she learned from her elderly aunt's negative



example. She grew up a quiet, humble, decent adult.

Esbae Horndancer is Alora's daughter. Attracting the most attention of the three daughters, Esbae is the subject of constant adulation, which undermines her mother's efforts to raise her properly. The tension between Alora's rules and the town's subservience has caused a terrible rift between Esbae and her mother. Nearly an adult now, Esbae aches to become free from her mother's rules. Esbae is not deliberately cruel, but she remains unaware of her actions' effects on others.

# **JANNIK'S GRAVE**

As sometimes happens with notable people, Jannik's corpse has been moved several times in the years following his death. While growing up, Kurra Hailstone suspected Jannik's body might not reside in the town cemetery. To find the truth, she hounded elderly residents and researched town records, occasionally stealing documents that struck her fancy. Eventually, Kurra identified what she believes is Jannik's true resting place and recorded it in her diary. Kurra obscured many of her diary entries with riddles; her childhood diary and the town records she stole are stashed in her decaying manor.

# **SUMMONING JANNIK**

Since Jannik's spirit has not appeared in many generations, the Speranzan people simply know the legends. They say he manifests only to protect a Daughter of Jannik from serious harm, especially if an invading army is involved.

In reality, Jannik protects all of Bess' direct descendants from attack, but the vow he made that fateful day imposes certain requirements and restrictions on his aid:

- The attack must happen within one mile of Speranza.
- The attackers must be so powerful the victim has no hope of resisting.
- At least some of the attackers must be outsiders.
- Jannik must meet all opposition with deadly force.

Jannik's spirit manifests by possessing a living creature (DC 35 Will to resist), preferably one of the attackers. If one target resists, he simply tries another. He can make three attempts per round.

When Jannik possesses someone, he covers them in righteous fire, which takes the shape Jannik had in life. Jannik uses all of his host's powers and abilities in addition to his own powers.

Add the following statistics to Jannik's host. Use the host's statistics for anything not listed here.

# DEFENSE

AC +5

hp +10 hp per level (or CR) of the most powerful foe. Fort +14, Ref +11, Will +14

SR 40, DR 50/-

Defensive Abilities righteous fire, superb anchor Weaknesses delayed damage, continuous combat

# OFFENSE

Speed +10 ft.

Melee +15 Ranged +17 Special Attacks avenging attacks, fitting retribution

## TACTICS During Combat

Jannik frequently shows mercy to fleeing soldiers who have committed no atrocities.

# SPECIAL ABILITIES

**Righteous Fire (Su)** Acts like a simultaneous cold and hot *fire shield* spell, caster level 15th. This ability will sear through any restraints or obstacles, even stone or metal, at a rate of 15hp/round.

Superb Anchor (Su) This ability acts like an enhanced dimensional anchor spell. It prevents Jannik from being

removed from his host, and it prevents his host from being removed in any way from the battlefield.

Avenging Attacks (Su)

Each round, Jannik gets one additional attack for every attack made against him in the previous round. For example, if 25 archers shot two arrows each at him during a round, in the next round Jannik would receive all his normal attacks plus 50 extra attacks.

- **Fitting Retribution (Su)** Jannik can duplicate any damage-causing attack directed against him, even if he took no damage from it. For example, if a foe attacks him with a +3 greataxe while a another casts *fireball* at a caster level of 9th, Jannik receives a +3 greataxe and the *fireball* spell with a caster level of 9th as options for each of his attacks for the rest of the battle.
- **Delayed Damage (Su)** Damage Jannik defers through his damage reduction isn't lost. When the battle is over, that damage descends upon the host's body.
- **Continuous Combat (Su)** If denied combat for more than 1 minute, Jannik must leave his host.

# **USING THIS LEGEND**

In the following descriptions, army refers to anything from a legitimate army to an ordinary group of adventurers. Hooks involving the destruction or control of Jannik might focus on his relics—his bones or the town's bloody banner.

Here are some hooks to incorporate Jannik's legends into GMs' games:

- An army hostile to the PCs is coming. Can the PCs summon Jannik and compel him to destroy it?
- An army friendly to the PCs may threaten the Daughters of Jannik. Can the PCs save the army from Jannik?
- The PCs are part of a hostile army that invokes Jannik's wrath.
- Esbae wants to leave town. Will the PCs help her?
- Esbae is missing—and the town wants the PCs to help find and return her.
- To some, Jannik's legend sounds more like demonic possession than divine intervention. Demons must be destroyed.
- Some townspeople believe the tradition of spoiling Daughters of Jannik has gone too far. They want it stopped.
- A survivor from an army Jannik destroyed has returned for revenge.
- People of a neighboring town want to find a way for Jannik to protect them instead of Speranza.
- A rogue scholar believes Jannik was the last priest of a forgotten deity. They want to know where he came from and how he was able to summon such powerful aid.

# ENKADA PISHTUHK, TREACHERY'S RIDER

nce a respected member of the Fulgarate Society, Enkada Pishtuhk betrayed his comrades as they sought to preserve the magocracies. Using an incantation of horrific power, he warped the Lost Tower at right angles to reality, destroyed the Fulgarate Society and its Mercurial Guard, and then unleashed Pah'draguusthlai the Devourer upon the West—all, supposedly, because of a tangled love triangle within the society.

From the massive Walker's flank hangs Enkada's sanctuary, a blistered amalgam of stone and resin existing in several places simultaneously. Enkada has been seen entering it from no less than half a dozen locations within the Wastes and several beyond it, including a lonely door set into a cliff wall within the Ironcrags, a marble sarcophagus in a Barsellan tomb, and a trap door atop an abandoned Griffon Tower within the Margreve. Many strange spider-like creatures make their lair near the structure. They often skitter about the towering beast in search of prey. Enkada Pishtuhk remained in the Wastelands after the war's conclusion and into the centuries beyond. He is dedicated to recovering various objects lost over the course of hostilities. Often, these objects have some relation to the Lost Tower, and many are infused with strange, nonsensical magical effects. Known as Treachery's Rider, due to the immense monstrosity he calls home, Enkada scavenges through ruins, sometimes seeking an enchanted device, a hidden manuscript, or a former contemporary swallowed by the chaos. All the while, he pursues an agenda only he knows.

The skulls of three knights of Bourgund hang in netting from Enkada's belt, and he sometimes speaks with their trapped souls. He carries a length of the same poisoned webbing trailed by Pah'draguusthlai; he incorporates it into his castings and wields it as a weapon. Enkada discovered a procedure to graft a pair of magical spinnerets on his left arm exactly like the ones on the colossal monstrosity. He extrudes more poisoned silk whenever he desires. Few are certain of Enkada's homeland, his precise age, or even his real name— but it is an open secret that he enjoys the lyrical songs of elvish sagas. It's also known that he demands proper manners, even from his enemies on the field of battle. Once, he offered a momentary truce to honor an opponent's request for a drink of water, and he accepted a call for parlay because his foe offered him a blood orange.

He ferociously guards the details of his background. Those who investigate too vigorously often awake in their own bed, covered in venomous shrouds. Enkada may set his own shadow free, sending it into the world to do his bidding while the wizard pursues other interests. He most often dispatches it when someone in Midgard says his name aloud. His shadow then seeks out the foolhardy speaker and returns to Enkada, whispering secrets in his ear while leading him through umbral passages to his foes.

# **ENKADA'S SHADOW**

That was how we knew we were on the right track, when the blasted shadow appeared. It oozed from the space between the rocks and taunted us from the high ledge, shielded from our bows. If the Rider sought something from those ruins, then we knew we needed to find it first.

# Enkada's Shadow

# XP 4,800

CE Medium native outsider; (chaotic, demon, evil, incorporeal)

**CR 8** 

Init +8; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +20 DEFENSE

AC 19, touch 19, flat-footed 15 (+5 deflection, +4 Dex) hp 76 (9d10+26)

Fort +8, Ref +12, Will +8

Defensive Abilities incorporeal; **DR** 10/cold iron or good; **Immune** cold, electricity, poison; **Resist** acid 10, fire 10; **SR** 17

#### OFFENSE

Speed fly 40 ft. (perfect)

Melee 2 claws +13 touch (1d8 plus 1d6 cold), bite +13 touch (1d10 plus 1d6 cold)

Special Attacks pounce, sprint, shadow blend

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 12th)

At will—deeper darkness, fear (DC 18), greater teleport (self only), telekinesis (DC 19)

3/day—shadow conjuration (DC 18), shadow evocation (DC 19)

1/day—magic jar (DC 19)

## STATISTICS

Str —, Dex 18, Con 17, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 19 Base Atk +9; CMB +13; CMD 27 Feats Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Great Fortitude,

Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes



Skills Acrobatics +16, Bluff +16, Fly +24, Knowledge (local) +14, Knowledge (planes) +14, Perception +22, Sense Motive +12, Stealth +14; Racial Modifiers +8 Perception Languages Abyssal, Common; telepathy 100 ft.

#### SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Sprint (Ex)** Once per minute, Enkada's Shadow increases its fly speed to 240 ft. for 1 round.
- **Shadow Blend (Su)** In any conditions other than bright light, Enkada's shadow can disappear into the shadows as a move-equivalent action, effectively becoming invisible. *Artificial illumination* or *light* spells of 2nd level or lower do not negate this ability.
- **Sunlight Eviction (Su)** If Enkada's shadow possesses a creature using magic jar and that creature is struck by a *searing light, sunbeam,* or *sunburst* spell while possessed, Enkada's shadow is driven out of its host automatically.

Possessing a liquid silhouette and pupil-less eyes of yellowing ivory, Enkada's Shadow flutters through the air with a predatory malice. Though incorporeal, its claws and teeth tear flesh as if they were knives of obsidian. When it speaks, the warm, velvet-smooth baritone voice often surprises listeners. The creature seems to share Enkada's preference for etiquette and manners, but happily sheds such behavior if foes prove unwilling to return the courtesy.

The shadow has died multiple times, and it seems aware of each death, holding grudges against past slayers it later encounters. However, some instances of Enkada's shadow have been more or less powerful than others, implying that Treachery's Rider may have an incantation, spell or item allowing him to invest his shadow with a variable measure of power.

## **POISON STRAND**

Aura moderate transmutation; CL 7th Slot none; Price 15,000 gp; Weight 3 lb.

#### Description

This gray, rubbery rope is made of braided, silky strands that are about 30 ft. long and affixed to a baton of carved bone or wood. Upon command, the strand lashes out 15 feet to entangle a victim with a successful touch attack (+7 to hit).

An entangled creature suffers 1d3 Constitution damage (Fortitude DC 16 negates) and can break free with a DC 20 Strength check or a DC 20 Escape Artist check. A proficient wielder can use it as a whip to either entangle normally or inflict 1 point of Constitution damage per successful attack (20 critical hit, x2). The strand cannot be commanded to lash out when used as a whip.

A *poison strand* has AC 20, 24 hp, hardness 10, and DR 5/slashing. The strand repairs damage to itself at a rate of 1 hp/minute, but if a *poison strand* is severed (all 24 hp lost to damage), it is destroyed.

#### Construction

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *animate rope*, *poison, web*, creator must have 5 ranks in Knowledge: Planes or 90 feet of webbing from Pah'draguusthlai; **Cost** 7,500 gp

# INCANTATION OF THE UTTERED COGNOMEN OVERHEARD

"No! Do not say his name; he will hear it. Never say his name, unless you want to draw his blasted shadow!"

School enchantment; Effective Level 8th

Skill Check Knowledge (arcana) (DC 30), 4 successes; Knowledge (geography) (DC 30), 2 successes; Knowledge

(planes) (DC 30), 2 successes

Casting Time 80 minutes

Components F, M, S, V

Focus—a map of the known world, the True Name of the caster

Material Components—a silver listening horn (worth 500 gp)

Secondary Casters— none required, no more than six Other— during the full moon

Range special

Target caster

Duration 30 days

Saving Throw none; SR no

#### DESCRIPTION

You attune your consciousness to the world represented by the map, gaining an awareness of any instance when your name is spoken. When your name is spoken, you gain a sudden vision of the person speaking, their immediate surroundings, and their approximate distance and direction. Obscuring magics like misdirection, veil, etc., force you to make a caster level check to learn more than the approximate distance and direction of the speaker (non-casters use their Intelligence bonus).

## BACKLASH

After casting, this extended perception inflicts 2 Wisdom drain (this drain cannot be healed while the incantation is in effect) and 1d4 Wisdom damage when the incantation is first cast and 1d2 -1 Wisdom damage (minimum 0) each day of the duration. Ability damage suffered as a result of this effect heals normally. While the effect is active, you gain a vulnerability to spells and effects with the sonic descriptor. Secondary casters only suffer the initial drain and damage, and may heal this normally. However, because secondary casters also learn the primary caster's True Name, most perform this incantation alone.

## FAILURE

Failing two consecutive skill checks, you and any secondary casters suffer the effects of backlash in addition to becoming exhausted and suffering 2d6 hp damage.



# GLATISANT, THE QUESTING BEAST

Go forth, brave knight, into the wilds and wastes to seek the beast. But be warned—the quest for Glatisant has claimed many before you. It will claim many after you're gone.

-Traditional Bourgundian farewell

hroughout the chivalric halls of Midgard's knightly orders, the desire to find and kill the mighty and elusive creature known as Glatisant echoes. Dismissed as a fool's errand by some, the search for the female beast has taken generations of knights, woodsmen, thrill-seekers, and bounty hunters everywhere north of the Middle Sea. It is said that the one who brings down the Questing Beast will be immortalized forever in Midgard's most hallowed annals.

As most know, Glatisant is a product of the Great Mage Wars. During this tumultuous time, the destruction of a forgotten wizard's laboratory fused together four captive creatures; the result was the Questing Beast, an abomination with the head and neck of a snake, the body of a leopard, haunches of a lion, and the feet of a deer. Created by odd, eldritch energies, she resists many forms of magic. Metal weapons seem to adhere to her hide. Glatisant's mournful, barking call renders those who hear it stunned, making these victims easy prey for her gnashing teeth and fell poison.

After her creation, witless with terror, Glatisant wandered into the Rothenian Plains and remained dormant for 100 years in a forgotten cave or hollow. During her slumber, she laid several clutches of eggs that were almost immediately absorbed into her body. When she awoke, though, the dense beast believed someone stole her eggs. Since that day, Glatisant has roamed the central areas of Midgard, between the Nieder Straits and the Middle Sea, searching for her eggs and crying out mournfully. Hunted for hundreds of years, Glatisant wanders Midgard's most isolated places. She eats practically anything she can catch and never stays in the same place for long.

As told in the epic poem Vancent and Glatisant, the Magdar knight Sir Vancent Tancelmond first encountered the beast about 300 years ago. After saving several farms from her ravenous hunger, Sir Vancent fought Glatisant to a near standstill—but perished after his sword Rovansohn lodged in the beast's hide and left him defenseless. Due to its popularity, the poem spread far and wide; it inspired generations of knights and fame seekers alike. Today, those who still hunt for Glatisant call themselves Questers. In general, they're mocked by the majority of knightly orders and are considered old-fashioned buffoons. Aside from the honor they'd gain from killing Glatisant, many seek to slay her so they can plunder the items embedded into her thick hide. With a successful strike, metal weapons stick to the beast. Afterward, they slowly dissolve into her hide, adding further toughness to her already-formidable scales. Glatisant cannot absorb magic weapons, though, so a literal horde of treasure studs her back. Besides Sir Vancent's blade, Rovansohn, many other powerful and famous items await whoever defeats the beast. These items include the Bloody Axe of Ulfred, Archmage Inro's Iron Staff, and even Baravon, the morningstar of Volund himself.

Besides her great powers, Glatisant possesses a unique and strange defense against those hunting her: her own death. Possessing regenerative powers stemming from the horde of eggs within her body, once killed the beast lives anew—but with no knowledge she ever perished. Each scrap of the old creature becomes a part of the new one. Indeed, even those who leave with trophies find themselves eventually holding nothing but piles of bloodtinged dust.

Frustrated by her fruitless searches for lost eggs, in recent years Glatisant has changed her tactics. She seems to be venturing closer to more populous lands, targeting the homes and workplaces of those who dabble in the magical arts. With virtually no stealth and complete ignorance of the harm she causes, Glatisant's rampages through villages, towns, and settlements pose grave risks to any who cross her path.

The discovery of long-forgotten records in the magocracy of Allain has taught arcane organizations such as the Shrouds, the Sanctioned Sigilists, and even Daiguianis, Exeltor of Mageholme, about the accidental fusion that created Glatisant. These records also revealed details about Archmage Mulban Tenric, a Mage Wars-era spellcaster who kept a secret cache of powerful magical relics and vril tech. Convinced that only Tenric himself can reveal the location of this untold treasure, these mages have commissioned expeditions in an effort to capture Glatisant and interrogate her about these treasures. While the mages might order mercy for the beast, that mercy would not extend to anyone who obstructs their quest.

# GLATISANT

This strange creature has the head and neck of a snake, the body of a leopard, the haunches of a lion, and the feet of a deer. As she eerily croons, her eyes burn with a terrifying glow.

# Glatisant

# CR 15

# XP 51,200

CN Gargantuan aberration

**Init** +2; **Senses** arcane sight, darkvision 60 ft., scent; Perception +25

## DEFENSE

AC 30, touch 4, flat-footed 30 (-2 Dex, +26 natural, -4 size) hp 230 (20d8+140)

Fort +15, Ref +4, Will +13

DR 15/adamantine; Immune poison, magic, Resist sonic 30; SR 26

# OFFENSE

**Speed** 20 ft. (plus gallop 1/day)

**Melee** bite +23 (4d6+12/19–20 plus poison), 2 hooves +18 (2d6+6), tail slap +18 (2d8+6)

Space 20 ft.; Reach 20 ft.

**Special Attacks** Glatisant's poison (Fort DC 20), mournful bark (Will DC 20), pounce

## TACTICS

# **BEFORE COMBAT**

Though unlikely to initiate combat, Glatisant possesses enough cunning to ambush her prey. Attracted to magical auras, Glatisant tends to target creatures or humanoids affected by ongoing magical spells or carrying large amounts of magical items.

#### **DURING COMBAT**

Glatisant uses her arcane sight to target the foe with the greatest magical aura first, using her speed and pounce ability to get in close for a first strike. Once among her prey she utters her mournful bark to disable as many as possible before feeding.

#### Morale

Despite her thirst for revenge, Glatisant is somewhat cowardly. If reduced to half her hp she will use her gallop ability to flee.

#### STATISTICS

Str 34, Dex 7, Con 24, Int 6, Wis 15, Cha 21

Base Atk +15; CMB +29 (+33 grapple); CMD 37 (can't be tripped)

**Feats** Cleave, Great Cleave, Great Fortitude, Improved Critical (bite), Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack, Power Attack, Snatch

Skills Acrobatics +30, Climb +33, Hide +20, Intimidate +28, Perception +25

Languages Common

# SPECIAL ABILITIES

24

Arcane Sight (Sp): Glatisant can see magical auras in a 100-foot radius, as per the arcane sight spell. Though this ability can be dispelled, she can reactivate it as a free action on her next turn.

Glatisant's Venom (Ex): Bite—injury; save Fort DC 20; frequency 1/round for 6 rounds; effect 1d4 Con; cure 2 saves. Save DC is Constitution-based.

- **Gallop (Ex):** Thanks to her leopard-like body, once per day Glatisant may triple her normal speed for one hour. She typically employs this ability to escape or evade capture.
- **Immunity to Magic (Ex):** Glatisant is immune to any spell or spell-like ability that allows spell resistance. In addition, certain spells and effects function differently against her. A magical attack that deals cold or fire damage slows Glatisant (as the *slow* spell) for 2d6 rounds (no save). A magical attack that deals electricity damage breaks any slow effect on Glatisant and heals 1 hp for every 3 hp of damage the attack would otherwise deal. If the healing would cause Glatisant to exceed her full normal hp, she gains any excess as temporary hp. Glatisant gets no saving throw against attacks that deal electricity damage.
- Mournful Bark (Su): Every other round as a standard action, Glatisant can utter a sorrowful barking cry. Living creatures within 80 ft. that hear this sound must make a DC 20 Will save or be stunned for 1 round. Those who succeed in this save are not immune to Glatisant's next mournful bark. This ability is a sonic effect that can be used a maximum of 10 times per day.

**Pounce (Ex):** Glatisant may make a full attack after a charge.

**Rebirth:** 1d4 hours after death, all parts of Glatisant's body rapidly decay into ash—even parts separated from

the main corpse. This ash reveals dozens of eggs within Glatisant's body. The moment these eggs touch open air, one vanishes and Glaitsant reforms around the others with no memory of having perished.

# ROVANSOHN

Aura strong abjuration; CL 18th; Slot none; Price 100,630 gp; Weight 4 lb.

#### Description

Called the Oathblade, this blade is a beautifully forged adamantine longsword with a golden hilt and a pommel set with a large yellow diamond. This +2 longsword becomes a +3 keen longsword that deals double damage in the hands of a fighter or knight who has sworn an oath of service to a noble lord and is acting on the lord's orders.

# **Construction Requirements**

Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *oath of justice, geas*; creator must be a vassal of a noble lord; **Cost** 50,630 gp



# **GUNNWYF** AND THE RIPHEAN HERD

here the plains of Rhos Kurgan give way to the cold foothills of the Riphean Mountains, there roams a herd of unearthly steeds said to be sacred to Wotan. These steeds always appear in random places at dusk. Like smoke they pour over hills and streams, rarely slowing until they vanish into the predawn fog. Legend has it that anyone who mounts these steeds can feel the eye of the All-Father upon them, spurring them to glory.

This tale occasionally seeds the valleys with the trampled corpses of would-be heroes whose ambition has outpaced their luck. However, this inspiring legend isn't the only tale related to the steeds.

Another legend claims that anyone bold, strong, and quick enough to mount the horse called Gunnwyf—the great black mare that leads the herd and is held to be the mate of Sleipnir—will become a great chieftain. This hero, the legend says, also will gain the ability to tame any horse, no matter how wild.

# **RIDING GUNNWYF**

The following is one method of resolving a ride atop Gunnwyf or a similar steed using a variation of the chase card system found in the *GameMastery Guide* and using a series of skill checks and saving throws. If the rider fails any of the described requirements, he or she falls and the ride is over.

# **MOUNT THE BEAST**

At first it seemed as though the beast does not mind your presence, but soon it begins crow-hopping and bucking, trying to throw you from its back. You must pass a DC 20 Ride check or DC 15 Strength check to avoid being thrown.

# **AVOID OBSTACLES**

The horse is no longer trying to buck you off, yet with only a grip on its mane to steady yourself you find you have very little control over the beast. You must make a DC 15 Reflex save to duck a low branch. In addition, one of the nearby horses is attempting to bite your leg. You must make a DC 15 Will save to keep from falling off your steed.

# HANG ON

The pace of the herd increases steadily, far beyond anything attainable by earthly horses.

Your steed heads straight up the side of the nearest mountain at a dead run. To hang on, pass a DC 25 Ride check. To spur your horse on, pass a DC 30 Ride check. Success on the latter grants a +10 bonus to the next required Ride check.

# SURVIVE THE IMPOSSIBLE

The herd swarms up the side of the mountain as if running on level ground. You race across the top of the mesa; your pace increases as the entire herd runs headlong toward a steep drop of what must be hundreds of feet. You must make a DC 16 Will save to swallow your fear. If successful, make a DC 30 Ride check.

# **DAWN APPROACHES**

You and your mount land painlessly. With frayed nerves and hands grown numb with cold and exertion, you

struggle to maintain your grip. Bleary eyed, you realize that the haze affecting your vision is the mist of the approaching dawn. Make a DC 17 Fort save. If successful, make a DC 25 Ride check.

# SURVIVE THE HERD'S VANISHING

Suddenly your brain feels as though it is boiling behind your eyes. Merciless judgment shakes you to your marrow. Make a DC 17 Will save. If successful, make a DC 20 Ride check.

Finally, you find yourself standing alone in the morning mist, watching the Riphean Herd fading to nothing in the increasing light of dawn. You are victorious!

# **Riphean Herd Rider**

Those rare adventurers who have ridden the infamous herd and survived are called Riphean Herd Riders. They are often renowned throughout Midgard as the greatest of riders—and the greatest of heroes.

**Prerequisite:** Ride the Riphean Herd from dusk until dawn. **Benefit:** You are immune to fear effects. Companions gain a +2 morale bonus vs. fear effects in your presence.

# HUNE THE **DOORLORD**

ages' tomes abound with tales of the enigmatic figure known as Hune the Doorlord. With his tattered gray greatcoat, tricorne hat, and gaunt face seemingly ravaged by time, Hune the Doorlord has played a part in some of history's most pivotal events. For instance, it was the Doorlord who provided the Cult of Chuul access to the inner palace. It was the Doorlord who allowed the Crimson Rider to speed across hundreds of miles to warn the Imperial Army. It was the Doorlord who gave passage to the ill-fated Marduke Expedition.

The Doorlord's true nature is elusive even among those

who know he exists. Known 10,000 years ago as Karakhune, god of portals, Hune is the manifestation of that dying deity. With no devoted worshippers remaining, and only a few sycophants available for sustenance, he has been reduced to his core function: the creation of portals.

The Doorlord has no real mind left; he simply seeks to fulfill his intended purpose. And so he wanders Midgard, hoping to provide his unique gift to anyone he meets. As a result, many merchant caravans have crossed whole continents in the blink of an eye. The Doorlord is not picky when it comes to his customers. Thieves, saints,



warlords, commoners—the Doorlord will create portals for all indiscriminately.

Those who meet Hune the Doorlord typically hear a harsh, whispering voice pose a single question:

"Door?"

Those who answer in the affirmative and pay the Doorlord's price—which varies wildly—may request passage to anywhere. The Doorlord's price for this service always involves something the requester has on hand, though the specifics vary from person to person. Sometimes, the Doorlord requires a precious magic item. Other times, he asks for rations or a pint of blood. No one knows the Doorlord's purposes for these items.

The portals the Doorlord creates only last as long as it takes the requester and his or her companions to enter. Passage is a one-way trip. Nothing restricts the Doorlord's portals—not locked rooms, forbidden fortresses, great distances, or magical defenses.

In addition to his historical role, the Doorlord continues to affect modern life in Midgard, and a number of scattered groups pay homage to him. In the Grand Duchies, members of the Cult of the Gaping Door believe that no mundane doors should be closed or secured; they take fanatical pride in invading wealthy residents' homes simply to unlock their doors, chests, and safes. In the Crossroads, the small Temple of Passage promotes magical transportation and offers teleportation services for astronomical fees. There is even a pirate in the Western Ocean named Captain Bartholomew Wayfen, whose ship, the Open Passage, sails under the flag of the unlocked door—a clear homage to the Doorlord. Hune the Doorlord can be encountered anywhere on Midgard. His appearances follow no pattern; he seems to operate under his own mysterious logic. Some say the Doorlord is drawn to those who desperately need passage to somewhere. Many of the stories surrounding the Doorlord concern those who greatly desired faster travel or access to the inaccessible.

Others believe that the Doorlord is searching for something to rekindle his godhood—some hidden artifact that, if found, could herald the rebirth of the god of portals.

# TAKING PASSAGE WITH HUNE THE DOORLORD

For those lucky enough to encounter the Doorlord, taking passage through his portals is not always easy. While the Doorlord is immortal, he is not as powerful as a fullfledged deity. Therefore, his transports sometimes go awry.

Refer to the following table for portal results:

d10	Portal Results
1	GM's decision
2-3	Arrive 5 miles away from intended destination
4-7	Arrive at intended destination
8-9	Arrive 50 miles away from intended destination
10	Arrive in another plane

# HRINGIDA, THE FIRST STORM

I shall find it, my lords, this elemental whirlwind that haunts the reaches of Midgard. I shall find it and study its center, which will teach me its mysteries and wonders alike!

- The last known words of Sir Enrich Strand

alled the first storm, Hringida roams the loneliest parts of Midgard as a whirling vortex formed of the four elements. Ancient and vast, Hringida towers over mountains and draws into its winds everything in its path. Its outer layers are formed from whirling air mixed with driving rains, which once were the ponds and lakes found along the storm's way. The storm's center is composed of fire and stone, which creates a whirling vortex of flames and rocky debris. Impossibly, a hulking keep, suspended and preserved through mighty enchantments, hangs above a gaping portal at Hringida's center.

A product of the boiling and melting at the center of Ginnungagap, Hringida is made of the same stuff as elementals—for some unknown reason, however, the storm never became one of those beasts. Instead, for centuries untold, it wandered Midgard, feeding itself on the detritus it drew up. With only a rudimentary intelligence, the storm nonetheless unconsciously avoided civilized areas, staying in the lonely parts of the world. While many are baffled by this behavior, Hringida may view its tortured existence as some sort of punishment for sins unknown, explaining why the storm avoids causing needless suffering on a large scale. Or there may be another explanation all together.

About 3,500 years ago, the Ankeshelian archmage Broendan Kaval lured Hringida to his keep, suspecting that the portal at the storm's heart was a doorway to the underside of Midgard. While he intended to study and eventually control the first storm, its ancient powers responded poorly to his offer. Hringida hurled itself onto the archmage's keep, utterly destroying the wizard but inadvertently lifting the stone building into its own heart, where it remains.

Maddened by the intrusion into its core, the first



storm raged across the length of the land, drawing up any creatures in its path and hurling them through its vortex into the unknown. As its anger abated over the centuries, however, Hringida found new thoughts encroaching upon its consciousness—thoughts uncomfortably akin to those of a mortal.

Though most who face Hringida perish immediately or fall into its portal to Midgard's underside, some creatures drawn into its vortex come to occupy Kaval's Keep. Their unconscious minds influence Hringida; their greatest needs become its needs. Whether it is food, weapons, medicine, or companionship, the storm seeks it out and draws it into the keep. Occupied by a strange assortment of races and peoples, the keep's inhabitants often compete for supplies needed to survive. Untouched by time, the last remnants of Midgard's past cultures live and more or less thrive within Kaval's Keep. In this way, the storm is a portal into Midgard's forgotten past.

In recent months, Hringida has crossed into the Wastes and appears to linger in the mountains Northeast of the Lost Tower. Whether by some occult sign or because of the storm's sudden, fixed position, two druidic groups currently are heading toward Hringida. The druids of Domovogrod made camp within sight of the storm. Although fanatical in the pursuit of their secret orders to reach Kaval's Keep and secure the ancient knowledge of the first elves, the druids' first attempt to pierce the storm resulted in nothing but failure.

The second druidic order pursuing the storm—Blood Mother Margase's Oaken Ring druids (see page 14), who have already alighted in pursuit of it—have a much different goal. Believing that the presence of Kaval's Keep has corrupted the last surviving primordial elemental, these druids seek to free Hringida by destroying the edifice and anyone or anything inside it.

# **KAVAL'S KEEP**

# CN small town (unique)

**Population**: 400 humans, 125 elves, 60 dwarves, 40 gnomes, 30 other

The keep itself is a colossal structure consisting of a main building several stories high, multiple towers, and various connected outbuildings. It is perched on a massive, cone-shaped rock suspended above a dark portal inside Hringida.

Fortified by its wizard creator and through its proximity to Hringida, the keep resembles a living creature. It slowly and continuously grows, and it can heal damage to itself. The inhabitants occupy only a fraction



# THE FACTIONS

Six competing—and sometimes warring—factions make up Kaval's Keep's population. Each controls a section of the keep. Apart from the strictly observed Marketday truce, these factions do not intermingle, although each is firmly aware of the others. The factions constantly struggle within the keep for resources, power, and bragging rights.

# **New Ankeshel**

In the keep's highest tower, members of the New Ankeshel faction seek to master the enchantments needed to gain power over Hringida itself. Said to be descendants of Ankesh, these inhabitants are united through their collective fascination with magic and vril tech. To members of New Ankeshel, life within the keep is a long game; they strive for resources and knowledge while keeping other factions from doing the same.

Cailr Maraleth, a wizardess said to possess strange and esoteric powers, is the faction's leader.

Her followers claim she has drawn up a centurieslong plan to eventually compel Hringida to serve her selfish purposes. Whether such a thing is even possible, or whether her claims are so much braggadocio, remains unknown.

# LOST GROVE

Formed from groups of the first elves, this fiercely xenophobic faction occupies the extensive gardens built into the keep's main hall roof. Having descended into a somewhat barbaric state, these elves believe in protecting their gardens from any and all interlopers. In the past, other factions regularly raided the gardens for food because the elves refused to distribute it. Now, though, thanks to the more reform-minded plans of the Grove's current chief, T'vin, the elves are willing to trade their food on Marketday—though they are not above making power deals and lopsided deals that heavily benefit themselves.

# **KAVAL'S APPRENTICES**

Universally despised by the other factions, members of Kaval's Apprentices seek to unlock the secrets of the keep for their own nefarious uses. Formed from arcane casters who were ejected from other groups, these mages possess no morals and respect no boundaries when it comes to studying magic. Led by the halfling sorcerer Fundor Bloodwand, who boasts a genius-level intellect, the faction often unleashes plagues of summoned monsters, spells, diseases, and worse to weaken their enemies. The apprentices' lack of decency might eliminate the other factions if it were not for their colossal corruption and incompetence.

#### **STONE FORGE**

Volar Forgemaster leads this community of pre-reaving dwarves. Located in the heart of the keep, the dwarves labor in the building's forges to create metal items of wonder. The idea is to bring glory and honor to Volund and Donar just as their ancestors did before them. The forges also provide heat to the rest of the keep, a fact that Forgemaster has used to his faction's advantage in the past. During times of extreme cold caused by Hringida's forays into icy lands, other factions must swallow their pride and approach Forgemaster with requests to provide heat to their parts of the keep. Forgemaster almost always grants these requests—but the price of his heat is never cheap.

#### ARCHIVISTS

In the keep's former barracks, descendants of couplings between Mage War-era tieflings and humans use matriarchal rule to unite their faction in a common goal: create a new Caelmarath. Somewhat delusional and a self-proclaimed paladin of Isonade, Lady Stross rules over this faction via a strong cult of personality. Under her guidance, the Archivists have grown in size and ambition. In fact, their power has become such that the other factions keep wary eyes on them and on Lady Stross—who does nothing to try to diminish the tension her leadership breeds within the keep.

## **RATS IN WALLS**

Between the walls of the keep lives a tribe of gnomes who inhabit an ant farm-like warren of crudely carved tunnels. Descendants of gnomes that previously incurred Baba Yaga's anger, these faction members have institutionalized fear into an agoraphobic existence. They survive by stealing anything available; in fact, they believe that robbing outsiders brings the faction honor. Magn Gurt, the faction's current leader, often goads his gatherers to commit daring exploits. Meanwhile, the faction's elders whisper that such risks surely will bring Old Grandmother down upon them soon.



# **IZIKORLEVIX**, SCION OF THE CRIMSON TYRANT

Ithough the kobold emperor's Burning Spirelong has been ruined, everyone along the western borders of the Dragon Empire knows of Izikorlevix. At the apex of his reign, the diminutive but ambitious kobold ruled at least a dozen city-states and lesser kingdoms. Records that remain of this time reveal a brilliant figure both shrewd and subtle.

Izikorlevix (pronounced "Issa-CORE-le-vicks") came from humble beginnings. Even during his lifetime, no one knew the exact location of his birth; the kobold, however, seemed blissful in his ignorance. Instead, he preferred to research his lineage, which he claimed he could trace back 500 generations to an ancient red dragon called the Crimson Tyrant.

Seeking to match his ancestor, Izikorlevix conquered hamlets, towns, cities, and kingdoms; each victory he used as a foundation for the next. To build his empire, Izikorlevix frequently employed cunning statecraft, blackmail, and politics, which he augmented with his renowned talents in charms, illusions, and enchantments to achieve his goals.

In a quest to sate his hunger for power, Izikorlevix was responsible for dozens—maybe even hundreds—of excavations across Midgard to accumulate lore and artifacts. Eventually, he attracted the attention of a council of dragons, which grew suspicious and contemptuous of a mere kobold wielding such great power.

The most monumental challenge to Izikorlevix's rule came when the dragons marched on his mountain home, seeking to punish his pride. Yet the kobold's greatest challenge was also his greatest triumph; having anticipated the dragons' hubris, Izikorlevix secretly fashioned several items of great power.

These scepters permitted him to mentally shackle the dragons as if they were just ordinary, wild beasts.

Accompanied by his lieutenants, Izikorlevix met the invading dragons at his northern border. First, he turned them against each other. The survivors he magically bound into his service. These dragons remained Izikorlevix's slaves until the day the emperor died. The Rage of the Smoking Valley—as the battle came to be known due to the devastation inflicted on the battlefield—ensured Izikorlevix retained his kingdom for more than a century.

Although he was an ambitious autocrat, Izikorlevix also was remarkably egalitarian. His elite soldiers—

called Dragon's Breath due to their
distinctive, red dragonscale
longcoats and their enchanted,
dragon-bone crossbows—hailed from all walks of life and represented

many races. The kobold emperor's priorities lay in practical concerns such as competence and loyalty; his meritocratic inclinations, together with his cult of personality fortified by his vicious enslavement of dragons, meant he suffered few uprisings.

Despite his hunger for power, Izikorlevix cared surprisingly little about his legacy. He died a natural death at the age of 212, setting off a brutal succession war between dozens of heirs and several powerful generals. This conflict weakened the empire; a few years later, the liberated dragons

MIDGARD LEGENDS

struck again, razing the Burning Spire and shattering the scepters Izikorlevix had created to control their kind. The Dragon's Breath brigade disbanded. A few of its soldiers, however, spirited away fragments of the broken scepters. To this day, esoteric sages and eager treasure hunters believe these fragments still could be found by anyone who knows where to look.

#### FRAGMENT OF THE SCEPTER

Aura strong abjuration and enchantment; CL 20th Slot none; Weight —

Description

This item looks like little more than a ruined scrap of

steel, a fragment of twisted gold filigree, or a shard of a large gemstone. It radiates, however, great power. When kept on your person— and not in an extraplanar or nondimensional space— a fragment of the scepter grants you a +4 bonus to AC and to saving throws against creatures with the dragon type. In addition, you may target these creatures with mind-affecting spells or abilities if they are not normally valid targets. If you have a free hand and wrap it around the fragment while you cast such a spell, you may also gain a +4 bonus to overcome the target's SR.

## Destruction

Boiling these fragments in the blood of a slain dragon and then subjecting them to the breath weapon of a dragon of the same type—is the only way to destroy them.

# JOLINAR THE CURSED

olinar had never been a lucky man. As the third son of a powerful merchant, though, he had lived a life of carefree luxury; however, when all the older males of his family perished in a hunting accident, his mother turned the family business over to him. The results, in line with Jolinar's awful luck, were spectacularly terrible. In less than a year and a half, Jolinar transformed his family's profitable business emporium into a money-losing chain struggling to survive. Salvaging what little remained of the family's fortune, Jolinar's mother disowned him, evicted him from the family estate, and left him with only one store to run as his own.

Unable to attribute his failures to foolishness, Jolinar sought out Baba Yaga for help improving his luck. Her reputation for extracting heavy prices from petitioners, predictably, left Jolinar unfazed. He had surprisingly little difficulty getting her to promise to make him the luckiest man in the world. As payment, all Baba Yaga wanted was the location of the gnomish King Redbeard's hidden palace.

For two years, Jolinar traveled to the forest cities of Niemheim trying to discover the palace's location. He failed. Out of money and without hope, Jolinar returned to Baba Yaga and made the biggest gamble of his life. He planned to lie—to tell Baba Yaga that Redbeard's palace was located in the gnomish capital of Holmgard. The plan, Jolinar figured, was foolproof; after all, that vague piece of information was common knowledge. Jolinar's plan fulfilled the letter—if not the intent—of his promise.

When the two came face to face, Jolinar told Baba Yaga he knew the location of Redbeard's palace, but claimed he would only reveal it once she had fulfilled her end of the bargain. Jolinar also extracted a promise that she would not harm him or revoke his increased luck after he revealed its location. The witch sensed Jolinar was telling her the truth, but blinded by her desire to take revenge upon the gnomes, she ignored the nagging sensation that he was hiding something. Once the blessing was complete, Jolinar revealed that the king's palace was located somewhere in Holmgard.

Furious but bound by her promise, Baba Yaga neither harmed Jolinar nor removed his blessing. However, after he had left, she used a strand of hair she'd collected from him and crafted a powerful curse that projected incredibly bad luck onto those close to him.

Jolinar returned home, oblivious to the witch's revenge. At first, everything went perfectly. He won all games of chance he tried and raked in gold from even the riskiest business adventures. He even managed to convince his mother that he was a changed man. She welcomed him back into the family and reinstated his control of the entire family business. Jolinar was the happiest he'd ever been. Unfortunately, that happiness ended as quickly as it began.

Soon after reconciling with her son, Jolinar's mother died in a freak carriage accident. At her funeral, a business rival lethally poisoned everyone except for Jolinar, who, of course, just happened to be the only one too grief-stricken to eat. A few days later, a lightning strike killed Jolinar's best friend of 20 years. Most of his other friends and family soon died in equally strange and horrible ways, leaving Jolinar with huge sums of money, successful businesses, and estates to which he never knew he had any claim.

Too late, Jolinar noticed this cursed pattern, and he began to isolate himself to spare his few remaining loved ones. He even tried to take his own life on several different occasions, but his luck always protected him from himself. Today, Jolinar is rarely seen in public. Effectively isolated from society, he is a desperate, lonely man.

Both Jolinar's luck and his curse have inspired others to try to kill him; however, every attempt has ended in the most unlikely way. Weapons break, birds fly into the paths of arrows, bottles of poison turn out to be mislabeled healing



potions, potential killers are crushed by bookcases—always some freak instance saves Jolinar's life. In fact, his luck is so ruthlessly effective at protecting him from lethal damage that most assassins' guilds no longer accept contracts on his life.

As the years have passed, Jolinar has learned how to work within the bounds of his cursed luck. He has an arrangement with a local gambling establishment, which he frequents when the house begins to lose too much coin. Other businesses employ his talents to reduce their competition's profitability or to simply scare them into unprofitable deals. When Jolinar is truly desperate for a job—or even just some short-lived companionship—he sometimes will secretly join adventuring parties just before they venture forth on a difficult quest. None of these parties have ever been heard from again.

# **GAME MECHANICS**

Jolinar's boon provides him with a number of fortuitous advantages.

# **JOLINAR'S LUCK**

Jolinar automatically succeeds on all Dexterity skill checks outside of combat. On opposed checks in non-combat situations, he receives a +5 bonus to all die rolls. During combat, he receives a +5 bonus to all attack rolls and Dexterity-based skills. In battle, once he has lost half of his hit points, any healing spells his enemies cast automatically target Jolinar instead of their allies as long as Jolinar has half of his hp remaining or less. If he falls to 0 or lower hp, he automatically stabilizes.

It is impossible to inflict lethal damage on Jolinar. Any attempt to do so is counteracted by Jolinar's luck, which causes incredibly unlikely things happen to at the GM's discretion.

# **JOLINAR'S CURSE**

The effects of the curse are different when in combat than they are in everyday life.

# **OUT OF COMBAT**

Jolinar is surrounded by an aura with a 50-ft. radius. Racial, class, or item abilities that affect luck go the worst way possible for the creature that triggered the ability. Creatures within Jolinar's aura takes at least a -3 penalty to any rolls made while inside it; opposed rolls against Jolinar increase to a -5 penalty. PCs may take 10 on skill checks, but never 20.

Once a day, there is a 1% chance that a living creature within this Jolinar's aura will suffer an untimely or unusual death. Roll d%, and a natural 1 causes the death of a random creature located within Jolinar's aura. GMs may wish to avoid targeting PCs with this effect. In addition, any living creature to which Jolinar is emotionally attached has a 1% chance once a day of dying in a strange accident.

# **IN COMBAT**

The curse's effect extends to any creature that has targeted Jolinar with an attack; distance from Jolinar does not matter. Jolinar does not need to be aware he's been targeted in order for the curse to affect his attacker. Any creature that targets Jolinar with an attack takes a -5 penalty to all rolls for the rest of the combat. The effects of cursed items are doubled in intensity. Blessings given during combat automatically target Jolinar. Items that affect luck vibrate unpleasantly during combat; if such items are equipped, there's a 50 percent chance each round that their holders will drop them, or that those wearing such items will be slowed.

# SPECIAL COMBAT CURSE EFFECTS

To determine the curse's specific effect on creatures in combat with Jolinar, roll a d6 and divide by 2. The resulting effect targets all creatures attacking Jolinar.

1—**DISTRESS** (Will DC 16 negates) *Terrible cramps* overwhelm you. Take 2d6 +6 damage. You are dazed for one round.

2—**IMPENDING DOOM** (Will DC 16 negates) You recall all the deadly things you've heard about Jolinar's curse. This effect functions like fear (Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook).

3—**LOUSY LUCK** (Reflex DC 16 negates) You are slowed for one round, grant combat advantage to Jolinar, impede your allies' movement, and provide cover for Jolinar.

## TACTICS

Jolinar will not fight unless he sees no other choice. For the first three rounds of a battle, he will take a full-defense action. If running is a viable option, he will do so. He will surrender if given the opportunity and will stop fighting if he is no longer being attacked.

# Jolinar

# Male human expert 8/rogue 2

N Medium humanoid

Int+8; Senses Perception -1

# DEFENSE

AC 22, touch 19, flat-footed 18 (+3 armor, +3 Dex,+1 dodge, +5 luck ) hp 49 (10d8) Fort +2, Ref +10, Will +5 Immune to critical hits

# OFFENSE

# Speed 30 ft.

**Melee** dagger +10 (1d4/19-20), ranged +14 (1d4/19-20) Sneak attack +1d6

#### STATISTICS

Str 10, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 8, Cha 18 Base Atk +7/+2, CMB +7/+2, CMD 24 Feats Deceitful, Dodge, Mobility, Nimble Moves, Skill Focus (Profession [merchant]), Run Skills Appraise +11, Bluff+12, Diplomacy +10, Disguise

+9, Knowledge (geography)+10, Knowledge(local) +10, Linguistics +7, Profession (merchant) +15, Sense Motive +5, Sleight of Hand +9

Languages Common, Gnomish

SQ evasion, sneak attack (1d6), trap finding, rogue talent (stand up)

**Combat Gear** *cape of the mountebank* (activated automatically at 0 hp), *bracers of armor* +3, *eversmoking bottle* 

# **KJORD**, HOPE LOST, THE DEFIER

hirty years ago, in a brilliant flash of white-hot light, Prince Lucan's emissary crumbled, broken by a young priest's wrath. The emissary was part of the dark prince's brutish raiding party; their quarry was a young, terrified woman—barely more than a girl named Ennessa. As the emissary's lifeless body slumped to the ground, the rest of Lucan's men scattered, and Ennessa was saved that day from a dark fate. Instantly, the powerful young man whose wrath defied a tyrant became legend. Born a peasant, his name was Kjord.

Moved by the prayers of Ennessa—who knew she was about to be abducted and, most likely, murdered following unspeakable suffering—Kjord, a traveling preacher, had done the unthinkable. He annihilated the dark creatures and fomented rebellion in the village of Gorez, which had languished under Prince Lucan's thumb. Standing in the pile of ash that was Prince Lucan's emissary, from that day forward Kjord was transformed.

No longer just a simple preacher, Kjord now believed it was his divine duty to spur political change. He soon traveled from village to village, urging the downtrodden residents to defy Prince Lucan, even in the smallest ways such as reducing their tithes or rejecting his edicts.

For a short time, hope among the villagers spread.

Many even began praising Kjord's name as they would a god's. This angered Mavros the War God, but it also amused him, He warned Kjord: "Do not plant the seeds of hope where they will not grow. In the blood-soaked killing fields of Morgau, these seeds quickly turn to dust."

Embittered by what he perceived as Mavros's unwillingness to help the people of Morgau, Kjord accepted their worship and became their champion. He found he did not need to eat or sleep—so long as he was working to defy the fate predestined for this dark land. Believing his good deeds the harbinger of a new dawn, Kjord believed he could not be defeated and, for a time, that was true.

In the village of Gorez, villagers raised a shrine to Kjord in the form of his symbol: a silver sickle. Young people, in particular, embraced Kjord's message of defiance, hoping to escape the hard life of serfdom. The elders, suspicious of any type of change, cautioned the youths of the repercussions they might face at the prince's hands. Their warnings, however, went unheeded. After all, as the village's youngsters constantly reminded their elders, dour words could not compete with Kjord's miracles.

Meanwhile, Kjord's miracles continued. In the neighboring mining village of Kochen, he broke the dark magic gloom of centuries. Dispelling a curse Prince Lucan's predecessor laid, Kjord brought the sun back to the townsfolk. In Kullivern, after Kjord banished the harpy-witches that had preyed upon their livestock for generations, the villages raised him onto their shoulders with glee.

For his part, the vampire prince thought the reports of Kjord's miracles were a joke. After all, who would care about a few backwater villages? To soothe his ego, Lucan resolved to cut their grain rations; he'd starve them into submission. Doing so was hardly a pressing matter, though, and was well beneath his notice until he had an unsettling dream.

Vampires generally do not dream—at least not as men do—but one day, during his daily repose, Baba Yaga appeared to him. For the first time in his unlife, Lucan felt tiny, mortal, and terrified. In the dream, the witch warned him about Kjord's growing influence. In particular, she warned that, if he continued to give the villages hope, his power would one day eclipse the prince's; indeed, it had the potential to challenge the gods themselves. Baba Yaga's warnings echoed in the prince's mind for the remainder of his rest. That evening, Prince Lucan arose with a new purpose: to crush the disease known as hope and its carrier, Kjord. Quickly, Lucan alighted on a dastardly, deadly plan.

One year after Kjord saved Ennessa from the prince's fiends, the hope he had kindled in the villagers was spectacularly extinguished. Accompanied by one-fourth of

his massive army, Prince Lucan strode into Gorez, intent on annihilating Kjord and all he held dear. Alerted to the prince's plans, Kjord cried out to Mavros for help. Again the god spoke to him. "False hope is poison," said Mavros. "No one can change the nature of this ancient land, not even me. Now, my servant, give up this folly and repent." Enraged and betrayed, Kjord refused the god's command.

> Without aid from Mavros, Lucan's army crushed Gorez so thoroughly that no trace of it remained. Prince Lucan turned the girl Kjord saved, Ennessa, into a vampire in front of the priest's eyes. Driven mad with grief and unable to face his failure, Kjord threw himself on a soldier's spear. With his crusade such a spectacular failure, Kjord no longer wanted to live. In his destitute state, he considered his entire life a waste and folly.

Immediately, steeped in the evil glory of his victory, Prince Lucan cast a dark spell to turn Kjord into one of his undead servants. As Kjord lay dying, though, he committed a final act of defiance. With his last breath, he uttered a single word: "Never." Just as quickly as Kjord was defeated, pure light spilled from his body as it, too, turned to ash.

With Kjord vanquished, life returned to normal for the people of Morgau. Those few villages that rebelled now entreated the dark prince in hopes of avoiding Gorez's fate. Every so often, though, a stranger appears with one true purpose: defy the Prince and inspire rebellion. These iconoclasts are invariably ignored, for the people learned a hard lesson from Kjord.

> The fallen priest's story now inspires people in quieter, subtler ways. Ten years after the destruction of Gorez, Prince Lucan faced in

battle and slew another hero, Julana the Red. He saw the white fire in her eyes and felt it depart when she died. At that moment, Lucan knew that, despite his efforts to eradicate all vestiges of Kjord, a part of the enigmatic priest survives still.

# **SPARK OF KJORD**

During his brief time of power, Kjord acquired the beginnings of a divine spark. In his last act of defiance he set it free. The spark now passes randomly to individuals who dare defy Prince Lucan, the will of Mavros, or simply their own fate.

**Benefit:** You gain +2 on attempts to persuade others to your cause. Once per day, when standing in defiance of authority and acting to advance a higher purpose, white fire burns in your eyes. You gain the benefits of a *potion of heroism*.

The effects of Spark of Kjord depart immediately upon death. Additionally, they will jump to another individual the moment the spark-holder wavers in his or her convictions. To date, none have held the Spark of Kjord for more than 11 days, as even the most confident and most sincere in their beliefs have moments of doubt.

If a PC is temporarily granted the spark, he or she must not act against his or her sworn convictions, which must be stated clearly. Also, the PC must make Will saves of increasing difficulty daily starting on the second day of carrying the spark (DC 10, +1 difficulty each day thereafter) to perfectly maintain his or her convictions.

The spark is not always a blessing. Some would consider it a curse. When the white fire is spotted in one's eyes, it is not long before word carries back to Prince Lucan, the servants of Baba Yaga, or the priest of Mavros all of whom have a stake in extinguishing it permanently.

# KUREAZOL, CLAW OF BOREAS

rom the Frozen Reach to the shores of Krakova, sailors often tell of a great iceberg that moves according to the will of the man dwelling within it. Reports of this iceberg's size and shape vary. Some say it resembles an ice-carved palace more than any naturally occurring structure. It's been known to give chase to ships; one tale tells of black-scaled horrors rising from the ocean's depths to pull vessels onto the iceberg's jagged shore.

Stories regarding the man who lives within the iceberg—named Kureazol, the Claw of Boreas—do not vary in their descriptions. The tales describe him as a tall man, exceedingly sharp-featured, with skin as taut as a drum. A great black beard, wild and wiry, drapes over Kureazol's chest, while his long hair is drawn tightly back from his brow and is held in place with an illuminated, crystalline circlet. Kureazol's eyes slowly shift from color to color—an effect that surely, most believe, reflects his strange, magical abilities.

Kureazol is a great sorcerer who wields ancient magic, attended by fearful skraeling servants, as well as other monstrous creatures of the far north. However, no one outside the frozen halls of Geskleithron knows that Kureazol is an example of his own god's cruelty.

Driven by insatiable curiosity, as a young man Kureazol left his home in Hyperborea and made his way to the desolate shores of the Bleak Expanse, where he spent a year wandering the unforgiving vastness. To survive, Kureazol honed his sorcery and observed the ways of the skraeling natives, who scrape out a meager living there. When he tired of this monotonous existence, Kureazol again sought adventure. One day, he came across a great city composed entirely of ice: Geskleithron, the city beneath the Tower of the North Wind—home of Boreas. Although he tried to watch the city stealthily, Kureazol was easily apprehended by Geskleithron's strange denizens, who sent reports back to their divine master. Curious about the foolish man who came alone to his home, Boreas assumed a human form and appeared before Kureazol. He then paralyzed him and turned his body to living ice. After examining Kureazol's brain and determining that he was not an enemy agent, he moved the living statue to a place overlooking the entire city, where Kureazol could witness its machinations forever as punishment for his trespassing.

It wasn't long before Boreas—ever tired of the company of his spineless, sycophantic servants—began to pass time talking to the frozen Kureazol. At first, the god did so to revel in the humor of his cruel deed. Over time, though, Boreas began spending long hours sharing his thoughts and plans with Kureazol. He railed against the Aesir and boasted of the day he'd claim their lands for his own. All the while, Kureazol could do nothing but listen.

After seven years, Boreas' curiosity about Kureazol's state of mind trumped his new desires to confide in him. The god then restored Kureazol to flesh and bone and bade him speak. To his amazement, the man began muttering and whispering both sides of a single conversation in which one participant seemed to be an imitation of Boreas himself!

At first, Boreas was angry. Soon, however, his anger turned to amusement, which shifted to amazement. Kureazol's imitations of the god were uncanny. It wasn't just Boreas' voice that the man so accurately mimicked it was also the words, which seemed to be coming from the god himself.

Boreas began experimenting. For example, he would interject thoughts and phrases into Kureazol's ramblings, and Kureazol would seamlessly incorporate them into the
dialogue. If Boreas left thoughts half-voiced, Kureazol, after a brief pause, would finish them as the god, and then reply as himself. Soon, it seemed as if Kureazol knew Boreas' thoughts better than the god did.

Boreas came within an instant of killing Kureazol countless times during his ramblings. What sort of mortal was he, Boreas wondered, who could so thoroughly know the mind of a god? What sort of danger might he pose? The longer Boreas stayed his hand, the more he began to see the strangeness within Kureazol as an extension of his own divine will. Perhaps so much exposure to the musings of a god worked some strange magic; perhaps Kureazol now possessed some small piece of Boreas. Further, Boreas realized Kureazol's replies showed proper deference, and the man took direction unquestioningly. If Kureazol was truly an extension of Boreas' will, the god figured, then he should use the man to expand his divine reach.

Soon, suffused with sorcerous power courtesy of Boreas, Kureazol headed south with a cadre of creatures faithful to his lord. He carried with him a blue egg which, when dropped into the sea, slowly grew into the mutable iceberg lair in which he now travels.

Soon after this iceberg's appearance, a village on the shores of the Swive was destroyed by enormous waves that grew out of a seemingly calm sea. Those lucky enough to have been on high ground during the disaster said they saw hide boats and skraeling men plucking survivors from the water. Instead of returning them to shore, though, the skraelings rowed the survivors further out to sea, where the iceberg rose from beneath the surface to receive them. They were never seen again.

Now, Kureazol's minions skulk throughout the Northlands—a strange assortment of men and beasts avoiding large settlements and cities but still working their immoral crafts. They offer bribes and make pacts with those willing to offer obeisance to the God of the North Wind. Those who refuse find they must contend with newly enriched and less scrupulous rivals at the least. Where silver will not buy them loyalty, however, terror and slaughter often serves.

Each of Kureazol's agents wears a periapt of the plenipotentiary, which aids them in their errands and allows them to relay to him daily progress reports. Every periapt of the plenipotentiary is made from a silver coin stolen from the hoard of a vaettir, a furious, undead nature spirit (see Northlands, page 108). The act of creating the item conceals its location from the vaettir. If an agent fails to submit a daily report to Kureazol, others are dispatched to investigate. If Kureazol believes an agent has abandoned a mission or that foul play has occurred, the sorcerer can speak a command word to reveal the periapt of the plenipotentiary's location to the vaettir, who will relentlessly hunt the item's current owner.

## PERIAPT OF THE PLENIPOTENTIARY

Aura moderate evocation; CL 10th Slot neck; Price 5,000 gp; Weight—

#### Description

Composed of an old silver coin hanging from an iron chain, a *periapt of the plenipotentiary* functions exactly as a *ring of sustenance*. In addition, it grants a +5 competence on Diplomacy checks, and can be used to cast light and sending once per day.

Unknown to the wearer, the item's creator can speak a command word and reveal its location to the vaettir from whose hoard the coin was created. The vaettir invariably will hunt the item's owner to collect the stolen coin.

## **Construction Requirements**

Craft Wondrous Item, *create food and water, light, sending,* a silver coin stolen from a vaettir's hoard; creator must have 5 ranks in Diplomacy; **Cost** 2,500 gp.





# KYRSA **HEARTWOOD**, THE LADY OF GREEN SHADOWS

evered as a healer, teacher, and guardian by the forest tribes of the east during the early days of the Mharoti Sultanate, Kyrsa Heartwood defied dragons' fire and died. Her story, however, lives on to inspire those toiling under the claw of draconic oppression. Throughout the Empire's slums and ghettos, the huddled poor whisper about Kyrsa's bond with the deepest powers of the forest. The bond, they say, changed her skin to the green of dappled leaves and her eyes to the silver of moonlit pools. The Empire's residents remember Kyrsa Heartwood as the Lady of Green Shadows.

Born to the humans of the shamanistic Cat tribe, Kyrsa learned the languages of trees and beasts and befriended each tribe's totem spirit. In return, the spirits shared with her the forest's secrets, and she used them to help those in need. Village healers tell of how she cured the Bloodless Plague with a flower from a secret glade—then showed the villagers how to grow the flower themselves. Woodsmen recount how the Lady of Green Shadows ascended the Three Pinnacles to end a vicious practice of hell-tainted cannibalism. In doing so, she secured peace for the long years while the Mharoti were just a rumor in the North. The poor tell these tales openly, even in an Empire where dragons quell all dreams of freedom.

The greatest tale of the lady—the one that ends in fire, death, and a flicker of hope—is rarely told, however. In fact, most only dare to speak of Kyrsa's end in the company of trusted family and friends.

In Kyrsa's time, even the mighty minotaur nations fell before the fire monks of the elemental temples and the legions of the Sultanate. With every conquest, the borders of the Empire crept further east. Eventually, Axtravix, a red dragon who coveted all forests, invaded with her armies. Attacking with draconic arrogance, she expected no great resistance—but fled in shock when Kyrsa summoned the deep, cool silence of the forest to overcome the dragon's fire. Consequently, totem spirits savaged the monks and pitiless trees devoured the dragon's armies. Axtravix was defeated, but the battle caught attention of the Great Wyrms of the fledgling Empire.

Inevitably, four majestic potentates of the Empire came against Kyrsa with flame and arcane might. Ancient beings of inhuman power, each potentate could easily overmatch any mortal—even one blessed by the ancient forest. When they attacked Kyrsa, the conflagration raged for a day and a night on the Field of Cinders. Incandescent energies utterly consumed Kyrsa's wellsprings of strength. Reducing her last redoubt to a black, glassy scar, the dragons enslaved Kyrsa's people. They scattered the slaves across the Empire, quelling their pitiful resistance forever—or so the dragons thought. In the days before that final battle, Kyrsa planted seeds of hope for her people. Foreseeing her imminent doom, Kyrsa gathered the few remaining tribal leaders under their totems of Bear, Eagle, and Cat. Though the leaders begged her to flee, she refused and gave each an acorn suffused with the silvery light of her eyes. She promised that, when the acorns grew into mighty trees, she would return to free the tribes. Urging them to save themselves, Kyrsa then left to embrace her fate. The Cat tribe remained on the battlefield while the others fled, and when Kyrsa died, so did they. Most storytellers assume the acorn Kyrsa gave the Cat tribe was lost that day on the Field of Cinders. However, cats—and especially spirittotem cats—are cunning beasts.

When the Bear and Eagle tribes escaped Kyrsa's fate, they traveled south and west via secret routes to plant their precious gifts in places beyond the Empire. Now, in a deep glade in a remote southern forest, a young, silver tree reaches for sunlight through the dense canopy; meanwhile, the insubstantial form of a mighty bear hulks at its base, worshiped by the local fey. Far to the southwest, in a crooked valley, a sapling braces deep roots against mountain winds. High above, an immaterial eagle soars on silver wings, watching all with fierce, unblinking eyes.

Spirits, fey, and tribal warriors defend the saplings against agents of the Elemental Temples who would rip Kyrsa's last legacy from the ground. Beyond these guardians, the trees' greatest defense is the overwhelming arrogance of dragonkind, which does not truly believe that mere woodland magic will ever threaten their Empire. Despite the danger the surrounding areas pose, rumors of blessed trees draw brave adventurers from across Midgard. Many seek healing panaceas or components for powerful enchantments, though most return empty-handed—or not at all. However, the success of a few—such as Halvar Ingarod, who returned with the peerless bow of unworked silver wood to wield during the defense of his homeland inspires new seekers each year.

Few sages within the empire or beyond have divined the true fate of the acorn Kyrsa entrusted to the Cat tribe. Despite what many believe, the third acorn survived. Near what is now the heart of the Empire, within the Sahrini Desolation, a crystalline cave lies under a lake of dragon-fused obsidian. Daylight refracts through quartz seams in the roof onto a silver sapling, which is ringed by grim-faced spirits of fallen tribal warriors. In its branches, a shadowy cat grooms its silver fur and smiles secretively. Like its bear and eagle counterparts, the cat waits patiently for the grown trees to recall Kyrsa's soul from slumber.

Today, Kyrsa's promise inspires some to take up the mantle of the Children of Green Shadows. A secretive

fellowship formed to prepare for the lady's return, the Children exchange information and resources to improve life for those crushed beneath the scaled claw of tyranny. They also smuggle secrets beyond the Empire to the dragons' enemies. Members of this secretive order recognize each other through the acorns they wear strung around their necks, though the amulets usually are tucked inside their clothes to avoid notice. Some senior members' acorns are enchanted to help avoid detection, to protect the bearer from flames, and to allow the passing of simple messages over distance.

## THE CHILDREN OF GREEN SHADOWS

#### Alignment: CG

**Headquarters:** The Retreat, a closely-guarded oasis hidden in the south of the Dragon Empire.

**Prominent members:** Old Yriza, Pezzir the Woodsman, Jaqo Alambrian.

**Resources:** A network of traveling tinker messengers, access to magical healing abilities, stocks of mundane supplies and a small amount of coin put by for emergencies.

Scope: Eastern Empire

## GOALS

The original goals of the Children of Green Shadows were simple: survive the dragons' onslaught, protect Kyrsa's silver saplings, and remain ready for the lady's return. Over time, the order developed into an organization that provides mutual aid to the Empire's enemies. They trade information about which noble's demesne is safer and where lucrative work exists. They try to smuggle food to starving villages during times of drought or hunger. When they deem it worth the risk, the Children take opportunities to strengthen the dragon's enemies in the hopes of forging alliances that will be useful when the Lady of Green Shadows returns. As part of this effort, they hunt information on Izikorlevix, seeking news of his shattered scepters. Recently, they even have aided spies from Illyria and Triolo-though this risky decision caused much fearful discussion among the order.

## ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP

A loose-knit group held together through the bonds of friendship, respect, and mutual need, the Children have little in the way of a strict hierarchy. When making decisions, groups usually defer to the elder members present; older women usually are given the most clout. Acting as keepers and interpreters of Kyrsa's wisdom, the Elder Siblings—an informal council of the five eldest Children—seek the best ways to achieve the fellowship's goals during times of danger and doubt. Although the most powerful among them tend to be druids, witches, and oracles, the order calls upon more martial comrades when needed.

Couriers of the order travel freely among the many poor tinkers on the roads of the empire, passing information around the widely separated provinces of the Dragon Empire.

## **PUBLIC PERCEPTION**

Secretive due to necessity and force of habit, the Children live as traveling tinkers, simple village healers, or forest hermits. They are simple folk who serve their communities except when they're called to take risks for the greater good.

> Many of those the Children help never know that an organization was involved at all. Often, they attribute their good fortune to the kindness of strangers. Most Empire nobles, if they remember Kyrsa at all, remember an inconvenience

long destroyed. They see no reason to fear or respect those who tell her story.

Recently, however, mighty Storros stirs in his Repository, troubled by dreams of a giant dragon impaled on three silver spikes and strangled with shadowy vines. Roused from his contemplations to investigate, Storros's fearsome gaze surely will fall on the Children before long.



# MHAROT, FOUNDER OF THE EMPIRE

harot (pronounced "ma-ROT") was a young, hot-blooded dragon—a braggart who called himself the Fire on the Peaks 400 years ago, while he was in his prime. He wooed other high-flying female fire dragons, he worshipped Baal by burning entire villages, and he ate horsemen and wizards sent to subdue him. Then, one day, a band of seven adventurers caught him napping, and he barely fled his cave in one piece. The scars still mark his belly, though Mharot never speaks of these wounds or how he sustained them.

During the month it took Mharot to heal, the dragon slept and dreamt. The World Serpent Veles—a figure of powerful coils with a voice roaring like a forest aflame appeared to him in his convalescence. He told Mharot to seek out and to convince 10 other great dragons to forge a pact of unity among the scaled folk. As the Word of the World Serpent, Mharot promised riches and fat sheep to all those who listened.

The rest of this story is well known. Together, the great dragons founded the Mharoti Empire, and it has grown year after year, like a serpent shedding its skin. The human sultana, the kobaldi servitors, the dragonkin edjet, and great elemental legions have swept nations away, turning the hinterland mountains into the heart of a great empire.

Now Mharot's lair is a shrine and place of pilgrimage for tens of thousands of his most devoted followers each year. The great wyrm himself rarely leaves his chambers, though his alchemists and elementalists capture his sleeping and sulfurous breath and blood to transform them into an elemental cordial that strengthens the power of draconic blood.

Mharot works largely through intermediaries now. He appears in public only once or twice each year, when he or the high priests of Baal perform the Ritual of Transformation on some of his most favored followers. Others receive his breath and blood as the *blood of flame cordial*, given as a reward for their faithfulness.

## MHAROT'S BLOOD AND MHAROT'S FIRE

The blood and fiery breath of Mharot are distilled and given away to his most loyal servants.

## **BLOOD OF FLAME CORDIAL**

Aura moderate evocation [fire]; CL 10th Slot —; Price 1,100 gp ; Weight —

## Description

Sealed in a glass vial, this warm cordial glows a pale orange. When ingested, its power rushes into the blood, lungs, and heart, creating a surge of fire elemental magic.

When ingested, the blood of flame cordial enables any reptilian creature—especially dragonkin and kobolds—or any creature with a draconic bloodline, such as a sorcerer, to breathe fire the following round at a single target up to 30 ft. away, dealing 4d12 hp fire damage (DC 15 Reflex save for half damage).

After each use, the drinker must make a DC 13 Fortitude save; if the save fails, he or she can no longer breathe fire and gains the nauseated condition for 1 round. In any case, once the drinker makes three successful saving throws, the cordial's power is exhausted, though in this case the drinker suffers no ill condition or effect.

**DC 30 Knowledge Arcana:** It is little known that nonreptilian creatures drinking a *blood of flame cordial* can still breathe fire, just as draconic creatures do. However, they must make a DC 18 Fortitude save after each use of the breath weapon or suffer the effects listed above.

Construction

Craft Wondrous Item, maximized *scorching ray*; **Cost** 2,000 gp

## MHAROT THE FOUNDER

Mharot's scales flicker with the constant shift of flame and smoke; their ancient weight resembles a waving field of yellow hazy with grey and orange. His body lights from within, his mouth is an incandescent hollow, and his bulk is both swift and ever-changing. Mharot's eyes are black and unyielding, and his blood glows and burns like molten iron.

## Mharot the FounderCR 20

#### XP 204,800

LN Colossal dragon (fire)

Init +3; Senses dragon senses, smoke vision; Perception +33

Aura fire, frightful presence (300 ft., DC 27)

## DEFENSE

AC 40, touch 2, flat-footed 40 (+38 natural, -8 size)

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MIDGARD LEGENDS





hp 412 (25d12+250) Fort +24, Ref +14, Will +21

**DR** 15/magic; **Immune** fire, paralysis, sleep; **SR** 30 **Weaknesses** vulnerability to cold

## OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft., fly 250 ft. (clumsy)

Melee bite +31 (4d6+25/19-20), 2 claws +31 (2d8+19+8d6 fire claws), 2 wings +29 (2d6+9), tail slap +29 (2d8+25) Space 20 ft.; Reach 15 ft. (20 ft. with bite) Special Attacks breath weapon (60-ft. cone, DC 30, 20d10 fire), crush, manipulate flames, melt stone, tail sweep Spell-Like Abilities (CL 25th) At will—detect magic, find the path, pyrotechnics (DC 17), suggestion (DC 18), wall of fire Spells Known (CL 15th) 7th (4/day)—limited wish, riding the thunder\* 6th (6/day)— contingency, greater dispel magic, tar pool 5th (7/day)-elemental conversion\*\*, telekinesis (DC 20), teleport, wall of force 4th (7/day)— fire shield, greater invisibility, scrying, stoneskin 3rd (7/day)-fireball (DC 18), fire claws\*\*, haste, sea of fire\* 2nd (7/day)-alter self, detect thoughts (DC 17), misdirection (DC 17), resist energy, see invisibility 1st (8/day)-alarm, grease (DC 16), magic missile, shield, true strike 0 (at will)—arcane mark, bleed, light, mage hand, message, open/close, prestidigitation, puff of smoke, read magic \* From the Midgard Campaign Setting \*\* From the Player's Guide to the Dragon Empire

#### STATISTICS

Str 47, Dex 10, Con 31, Int 20, Wis 21, Cha 20 Base Atk +25; CMB +47; CMD 56 (60 vs. trip) Feats Cleave, Duplicate Spell\*, Greater Vital Strike, Improved Critical (bite), Improved Iron Will, Improved Vital Strike, Iron Will, Multiattack, Ley Line Magic\*, Power Attack, Quicken Spell, Staggering Critical, Vital Strike

\* From Midgard Campaign Setting, page 19 Skills Appraise +33, Bluff +33, Diplomacy +33, Fly +9, Intimidate +33, Knowledge (arcana) +33, Knowledge (history) +33, Perception +33, Sense Motive +33,Spellcraft +33, Stealth +12

Languages Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Dwarven, Enochian, Khazzaki

## TACTICS

## **BEFORE COMBAT**

Raging and arrogant, Mharot orders his servants to destroy any threats. He lives among multitudes of drakes and dragonkin, and he thinks he should not be bothered with combat except as entertainment. He always casts *fire claws*, *sea of fire*, *wall of force*, *stoneskin*, *elemental conversion*, and *fire shield* as protective measures when alarms are raised. He inspects visitors with a *gem of true seeing* before allowing them to approach.

#### **DURING COMBAT**

Mharot fights with great fury and cunning, using *elemental conversion* to transform damage types against foes expecting fire damage from his magic and breath weapon. He delights in casting Duplicate Magic fireballs and in breathing flame over a sea of fire, and he is quick to destroy foes with fire claws.

## Morale

Mharot is overconfident and unused to setbacks, and so he is unlikely to retreat unless the odds are truly horrible and dozens or hundreds of his retainers have been slain. However, he is no fool, and he knows his position courts many enemies—fellow dragons and the Sultana are always one day away from an attempted coup.

Mharot has always cast at least one or two *contingency* spells to activate if he drops below 50 hp, giving him an immediate *riding the thunder* effect and *greater invisibility* to take his closest allies and flee quickly.

## BACKGROUND

Mharot speaks with authority and brooks no interruptions; his word is law within the empire. Despite his age and indolence, he remains remarkably quick and his ability to foresee political and physical threats remains sharp. The fact that he can no longer see the borders of his realm does not bother him. He is easing into a time of indolence and seems content to let others squabble over the provinces and armies—so long as every coin of tribute arrives as it should.

#### **MOTIVATIONS & GOALS**

Mharot wants the empire to continue to grow, and his various allies and foes to prosper under the banner of a draconic nation. He seeks to bring "strays" into the empire especially powerful ones such as Kharaland the Wind Dragon or the swamp and river dragons of the Southlands.

As a dragon of advanced years, Mharot spends much of his time dreaming. His waking hours are largely given over to promoting the ranks of the strongest of his emirs and beys. In time, Mharot seeks to awaken the World Serpent and to hold a second conversation with it, at the hour of his death, leaving his great task complete.

## **SCHEMES & PLOTS**

Mharot's schemes are mostly counterplots against the other great Morza of the Empire. He plans to destroy the Nurian mages or the Khandirian demon-princes. He thinks in terms of decades and contemplates his successors far more than he once did; he often tests his thousands of fire drakes and concubines to determine which love and serve him best. His other plans are filled with the cruelty of a cat toying with a mouse; this seems to be his view of the Khazzaki and the slavers of Reth-Saal, who amuse him and whose opposition to the empire is little more than noise.

# SAINT VADIM

ife is hard on the Rothenian Steppes, where only the wind is free. Scrambling serfs, devoted monks, solemn warriors—all seek intercession from the saint they call Vadim, or The Hell Tried.

Saint Vadim is the patron saint of perseverance, redemption, and deliverance. He strengthens his followers against adversity and succors the oppressed. He intercedes when all hope is lost. Once imprisoned within Hell itself, Vadim suffered many trials and painful revelations before finally emerging victorious—and alive. In fact, Vadim is the only mortal to ever escape alive from Hell's dungeons. For this, and for his devotion to Volund, he ascended and is venerated.

During his nine-year ordeal in the infernal realm, Vadim learned that Hell's most powerful tool is despair, which can be dealt with in two ways: resign oneself to misery, or enroll with the legions of Hell itself.

This wisdom is true even in Midgard, for those who have hope can endure even the most heinous trials. Those who have lost hope, however, are already defeated.

## SAINT VADIM

Herald of Volund, The Deliverer, The Unshackled, The Hell Tried, The Twice Blessed, The Redeemer of Hope. **Domains:** Community, Good,

- Healing, Liberation, and Strength **Subdomains:** Agathion, Archon,
- Azata, Family, Freedom, Resolve, Restoration

Alignment: Good

42

Favored Weapon: A key-shaped iron rod

## WORSHIPPERS

Monks revere Saint Vadim for his inner strength. Rogues implore his intercession when picking locks and unbinding shackles. Paladins seek his wisdom when looking to defeat devils. All look to him for perseverance against hopeless odds.

## SYMBOLS AND BOOKS

Saint Vadim's holy symbols are a rodsized iron key, a pair of broken shackles or a shining disk overhead. The Saga of Saint Vadim is an epic tale of his descent into Hell, his suffering and trials, and his redemption and deliverance. He is often depicted with a huge key brought from Hell, which he uses to break shackles and to smite his enemies. His clerics and high priests sometimes will bear similarly shaped iron rods or staffs.

## FOLLOWERS

Saint Vadim's devotees are most common on the Rothenian Steppes, where hardship is easily found. His churches stress simplicity and fellowship, and they are known for their many great heroes who overcame life's afflictions. His clergy emphasize that suffering is not a curse; rather, it is an opportunity to identify weaknesses and to discover new strengths and abilities.

A few clerics and oracles even have refused to be healed of certain physical afflictions, preferring to remain blind or crippled. They then used these afflictions to become more disciplined and to identify with Saint Vadim's ordeal. However, they are not above healing and serving others; many itinerant friars travel in pairs and aid those in need.

> Clerics devoted to Saint Vadim can cast good hope as a 3rd-level spell. Monastic orders also are devoted to the saint. They spend their time in meditation and discipline, striving for perfection and looking for opportunities to aid the oppressed. In some cases, they also have been known to join in peasant revolts and other actions against abusive lords. Local rulers keep these monastic orders under observation, but they are wary of openly acting against them lest the people be stirred up.

While Vadim's devotees accept that some are born to rule and others to serve, they reject slavery and the idea that an individual can be owned by another individual. Where rulers are righteous and charitable, Saint Vadim's followers support the social order. Where rulers bring suffering and oppression, the orders subvert the social order.

## **MASKS/OTHER FAITHS**

Vadim's manifestations guide, convict, or reveal the truth. They can be shining auras of affirmation or rattling chains of warning. Saint Vadim's faithful have no rivals and few enemies except



tyrants and the lords of Hell. Priests and worshipers work cooperatively with other faiths that value fortitude, redemption and deliverance.

## **FAMOUS SHRINES**

## **BEACON OF HOPE BASILICA**

One of the largest wooden buildings in the Kingdom of Vidim, Beacon of Hope Basilica is an immense church whose original structure was built, followers say, by Saint Vadim himself. Three sacred relics reside in the Basilica.

The Skull & Bones of Saint Vadim and The Sacred Shackles are displayed in opposite wings in the church. Pilgrims come to see and to touch them in hopes of receiving a miracle. The third and most wondrous relic is concealed in the basilica's apse.

When Saint Vadim's buried bones were exhumed, a blood-red stone was found where his heart had been. Resembling a human heart, The Blood Stone still drips with the saint's blood. It is a precious relic; a single drop of Saint Vadim's blood can cure any manner of supernatural ills—it can even restore those suffering from lycanthropy. The stone is well guarded, for it is said that a vampire suckling on this saintly blood would acquire untold powers.

## THE GATE OF DEVILS

Resembling fiendish gargoyles, these 11 statues adorn the West Gate of the Tsar's castle, sneering down at passersby. According to legend, the gargoyles ascended from Hell along with Saint Vadim. Now, they await a time of great peril.

## TRAITS

#### **Unshackled (Faith trait; Regional, Steppes)**

Your belief and a tiny keepsake relic from the Basilica of Hope helps loosen restraints and open ways. **Benefit:** You gain a +1 luck bonus to Disable Device. It is always a class skill for you.

## Strength of the Hell-Tried (Faith trait)

Your devotion to Saint Vadim has taught you inner strength. Benefit: Double your wisdom modifier to DCs versus Intimidate. Receive +1 to saves versus charm and compulsion effects.

## Patience Of A Saint (Faith trait)

Your faith, hope and perseverance have taught you how to endure hardship.

**Benefit:** As the Endurance feat, but with only a +2 bonus and no benefit for sleeping in armor.

# THE SONGRAVEN

all throughout Midgard, one resplendently ragged figure casts a giant shadow of guile, trickery and irrepressible humor: the huginn seer-poet and adventurer Drouin "Croak-eye" Stroud, more often called the Songraven.

The Songraven is fond of titles, half of them his own coinages. He is known variously as the "Rascal of Kammae," because he talked his way past the jailers of Nethus to trade secrets with the chained god; as the "Navigator of the Western Ocean," because he devised a mnemonic quatrain to defeat that ocean's confusing nature; and as the "Feathered Fool of the Dragon Court," because he satirized various Mharoti nobles and lived to tell the many tales. In short, the Songraven boasts a legend as large as life and twice as long. Students of the Songraven's exploits conclude that no one mortal could be responsible for all the feats or stories attributed to him. Like his titles, most tales of this keen emancipationist and bawdy songmaker's adventures flow, at some point, from his own febrile mind and sordid tongue.

Although the Songraven's origins are, like the irrepressible legend himself, shrouded in rumor and speculation, it's agreed that Drouin originally was an outcast among his northern family. When he found himself bereft of support, he left to find his fortune among Midgard's varied folk. Already a gifted satirist with a keen eye for characters and detail, Drouin apparently found favor and renown in the courts of the Seven Cities before an injudicious remark prompted him to make a swift exit. Time spent in the various courts of the warring Seven Cities marked a formative period for the young huginn. The endless quarrels and intrigues fueled his impressionable, creative mind, forming the backbone of myriad stories, satires, and poems.

While traveling the length and breadth of Midgard, Drouin found that infamy followed him, both for his exploits and the retelling of them. Soon, he began to weave his own mystery and legend into something much larger than himself. He took to inserting himself into old legends, reforming them into new "classic" tales. For example, The Drake-farmer's Plight was respun to feature the Songraven as the nemesis rather than the iconic, vengeful dragon Khato. The great lay Katuriel's Bliss Drouin refashioned into The Songraven's Joy, which revolved around a vaguely satirical monologue about the pleasure of ale and song rather than the more serious original. While his output of original material was impressive in its own right, it was Drouin's adroit ability to mimic, borrow, restyle, and insert that made for a growing Songraven mystique that people adopted and cherished. Throughout Midgard, the Songraven became equally a savior, sinner, slave, and seer-in short, he was the perfect everyman.

In his later years, with the ultimate audience fast approaching, Drouin seemed to find the unknowable his greatest adversary. His stories became more philosophical and, occasionally, very dark. Many say the old Songraven visited the Court of Mnemosyne and was called to sing all the songs he knew in an attempt to jog the fleeting memories of the Court's stricken mistress.

The Songraven's journeys with huginn reavers in the Western Ocean led to this haunting refrain. Now, it's sadly a calling cry to slaughter—the last thing many unfortunates hear.

Darque sails, cloudy Black feathers fly Race the wind, and huginn Or rowdy you will die.

In Barsella, the gruesome reports of the predations of these mad huginn do not make the Songraven a popular figure. Not surprisingly, the Songraven appears throughout huginn lore. His exploits are never consistent from tale to tale, though. Ask a huginn what they make of the Songraven and you'll get a remarkably wide range of opinions—he's either lauded as a wise, humorous, representative scion of the northern verbal culture or reviled as the irresponsible fiend who taught the Zobeckers the practice slitting ravens' and crows' tongues to help them "speak." The Songraven himself reserved his highest praise and most biting criticisms for his own people. Mostly, though, he worked to impress upon Midgard the primacy of huginn and heru as clever thinkers, skilled artisans, and formidable warriors.

Generally regarded as a lore keeper, poet, adventurer, and satirist, the Songraven's exploits mark him as crafty manipulator of crowds and charmer of individuals. It is widely agreed that the Songraven's wisdom far outweighs his otherwise less-than-edifying behaviors. Simply put, the Songraven masked his true exploits under a wing of staged buffoonery, outlandish chicanery, and irreverent banter.

The Songraven's current whereabouts are unknown, but reported sightings of are common enough, though they vary in details. Sometimes, it's said he now appears old, with fading plumage. Others recently have described him as hale and hearty. These varying descriptions have given rise to yet more tales.

Those bards who follow the tenets of the Songraven tend to master unusual arts—as shadowtalons, or so they're called, their deeds forge new legends and their stories cultivate more tales of Songraven. The existence of shadowtalon bands is denied in Kammae, where such bards are hunted and executed with extreme prejudice. In the Dragon Empire, huginn shadowtalons excel as extensions of the Sultana's assassins among the numerous jambuka. Their existence in the Empire, however, is controversial, especially given the Songraven's beliefs that avians—and, by extension, huginn, are distant relations to dragons.

## SHADOWTALON

Emulating the darker deeds of the legendary Songraven, shadowtalons excel at obfuscation, trickery, and evasion. Favoring dark clothing and light weapons, shadowtalons are hunted mercilessly by the Eyeless of the Oracle of Kammae and are widely welcomed as champions of slaves and the oppressed. Although huginn and heru become shadowtalons most often, the Songraven's varied exploits have inspired many other races to become shadowtalons.

**Bardic Performance:** A shadowtalon gains the following types of bardic performance.

*Piercing Cry (Ex):* You may make a ululating, squawking cry that gives allies a +4 bonus to a new save against ongoing sonic or language-dependent magic effects. Foes within range must make a make a Will save (DC equal to shadowtalon's level + Perform skill bonus) or be shaken for 1-3 rounds. The cry is a swift action and uses one round of bardic performance. This performance replaces countersong.

*Raven's Feint (Ex):* This subtle weaving and moving allows you to move at full speed using the stealth skill without penalty. Moreover, while this performance is in effect, you



do not grant attacks of opportunity while casting spells, using spell-like abilities, firing missile weapons, or using natural attacks. This performance replaces distraction.

- Swooping Motions (Ex): At 3rd level, you can mimic the raven's swooping flight. Using this performance, you gain a +1 dodge bonus to AC. Any opponents adjacent to you lose any Dexterity-based bonuses to AC against your attacks. You gain attacks of opportunity if adjacent opponents do not target you. This performance replaces inspire competence.
- *Carrion Crow (Su):* At 8th level, you can imperil foes with a deadly dance. During this performance, all wounded creatures within 30 ft. of you gain the bleeding condition and take an amount of bleeding damage per round equal to 1/2 of your level. After the performance ends, the bleeding damage decreases to 2 points per round. Undead, regardless of injuries, likewise take this damage. This performance replaces dirge of doom.

Omnivorous Mind (Ex): At 6th level, you choose up to three Knowledge skills. You may add your Charisma

## **TITUS** PATRASCU, FALLEN PALADIN

orn during a lunar eclipse while bearing his caul—a sign of the Moon Goddess's blessing— Titus Patrascu was destined to achieve greatness. As young man, Titus' extraordinary physical strength and great endurance was obvious. He soon entereed the service of Hecate as one of the Eyeless, her divine order.

During his time as a paladin, Titus exemplified bravery, fighting prowess, and leadership skills. His heroic deeds were many. For example, after blinding Baruch Gildhorn with his own sundered horn, Titus bested the minotaur general in one-on-one combat, thus bringing a bitter border skirmish with Capleon to a swift conclusion. Later, Titus rescued the priestess Balbina Ruso from a huge, Ringwood ghost boar using nothing but a small dirk and a witchlight mushroom.

For these deeds, Hecate favored him in omen and in blessing, allowing him to become the youngest-recorded First of the Eyeless. As leader of the holy armies of Kammae Straboli, Titus guided Hecate's soldiers in battle against her rivals in the Seven Cities.

Of all Titus' deeds, none exceeds his glorious capture of the god Nethus. Heedless of his own safety, Titus leapt onto the King of the Sea's back and wrapped his divinely kissed chains around the god's protean form; all the while, Hecate's priestesses chanted their terrible spell of enslavement.

Once the god lay bound and prostrate, the priestesses demanded that none discover the means of the Wave-Lord's imprisonment lest the secret somehow lead to his freedom. modifier to these as well as your Intelligence modifier. This ability replaces the versatile performance gained at 6th level.

- Raven Style: You may only choose from the following versatile performances: act, comedy, oratory, percussion, and sing.
- **Beady Eye (Su):** At 10th level, as a standard action, you may designate one opponent as the target of your concentrated ire. The target must make a Will save (DC equal to your level + Perform skill bonus). On a successful save, you gain a +2 bonus to either AC, ability checks, attack rolls, Will and Reflex saving throws, or skill checks (your choice) against the target until the end of your next turn. If the target fails, the penalty lasts for a number of rounds equal to 3 plus your Charisma modifier. At 16th level, the granted bonus increases to +4. You may target a different opponent or the same opponent (applying a different effect) each time this ability is used, and you can use this ability a number of times per day equal to 3 plus your Charisma modifier. This ability replaces jack-of-all-trades.

The Eyeless and the Unchanged-But-Ever-Changing Cabal manufactured a lie; they claimed Nethus impaled Titus on his trident while the champion struggled to chain him. In this story, Titus died a hero's death from the wounds and Nethus simply disappeared. The devoted paladin agreed to the fabrication and vanished into exile, awaiting word from his goddess's servants about how to proceed.

That was many years ago. Since then, Titus's once lofty ideals and his paladin's code have languished behind his alter ego, Otho Greyhair, a wandering sellsword who is willing to serve any banner in Midgard. For Titus, every engagement he's encountered as Otho has lacked any sense of holy purpose. The years have weighed heavily on the valiant Titus, and his new work has been hard to stomach. Thus, Titus drinks heavily while struggling to accept his life's direction.

He daydreams of serving his goddess once more—of riding again with the Eyeless, of striking down her foes and of channeling her terrible glory. Titus' drunken rancor makes him even less attractive to employers looking to avoid rabble-rousers; he typically wins a contract by challenging recruiting officers and their lackeys to free-forall, bare-knuckle brawls. This practice helps him prove his skill in combat, but it wins him no friends.

For years now, Titus has dodged the handmaidens of Mnemosyne, whose agents hear whispered rumors that he still lives. They scour Midgard for him, rightly believing he knows how Nethus might be freed. Fortunately, Hecate's last gift to him holds steadfast—Titus remains cloaked



from any divination except the prying eyes of other gods of Midgard.

## **THE IRON ROD TAVERN**

Located in the backstreets of Tintager's Old Quarter, this dark tavern of questionable repute serves as a

gathering place for sellswords, warmages, and tiefling sorcerers who wish to fight the elves of the Arbonesse. Mercenaries deploying for jobs traditionally leave small notes stuck to the walls with sealing wax. These notes are removed only when their writers return safely; needless to say, countless scraps of parchment remain.

Titus often can be found in this tavern. Dressed in a rough chain shirt, often drinking liberally, the former paladin rants about devotion being a fool's game. Now in his midsixties, Titus appears to be nearly two decades younger, probably due to

his physical fitness and his immunity to disease. Bitter and surly, he trounces any challenger who wishes to arm wrestle for coin. Only the bravest dare ask "Otho" what he means when he drunkenly mentions that he's pretending to be dead.

Titus is a neutrally aligned with six levels of expaladin of Hecate and six levels of fighter.

# YAFRAM THE DESOLATE

orn in the small oasis village of Rabiyah Watan more than a century ago, Yafram eked out a bare existence in the Sarklan Desert's unforgiving landscape. Her mother taught her how to meld magic with nature to create new varieties of desert flora, but when a long drought came, Yafram could not save Rabiyah Watan. Slowly, its precious, life-giving waters diminished, until only a few villagers remained. The final blow came when the Tamasheq tribe raided Rabiyah Watan.

During that raid, hiding in the village cistern, Yafram witnessed her parents' brutal deaths. For months she remained in the village's ruins, barely surviving on whatever she could scavenge. Nearly mad with hunger and despair, she cried out to her gods, but most did not hear her prayers. One—the dark goddess Malak, a mask of Mordiggian—heard her cries, however. Malak offered to grant Yafram revenge on the desert people who destroyed her village, and the distraught woman agreed. She eagerly swallowed whole the tiny, undead scorpions Malak told her to consume as a symbol of rebirth.

Learning from her new divine patron, Yafram concluded that the natural progression of life to death to undeath was the true purpose of existence. All living beings, she decided, are but sources of creation for the undead. Embracing undeath allowed the living to achieve life everlasting, Yafram believed.

Guided by her goddess, Yafram emerged from the ruins of Rabiyah Watan and made her way towards Siwal, where she found that her village was already forgotten. Her true, dark nature hidden by the scorpions that coursed through her body, Yafram infiltrated the Gardeners of Siwal. Under their tutelage, she rose quickly through the order's ranks, and she crafted many wondrous items to bring life to the desert and glory to the desert rose of Siwal.

With Malak's guidance, Yafram sought ever new wonders to solidify Siwal's reputation as a place of learning and growth—and to cement her own status. Ultimately, Yafram's brilliance gained her the title of Master Gardener.

46

Secretly, however, she continued to commune with Malak through the scorpions in her blood. All the while, the dark goddess showed her how to fill the desert with the undead. By filling the desert with life, she would create the necessary vessels for Malak to feed her insatiable hunger and to spread her infection across the world.

Blinded by his love for the young desert girl, Faysal abn-Noor, the Paladin of Aten, courted Yafram and won her hand. As part of her betrothal gift to Faysal, Yafram planted an az-zagāya tree from a sapling. Fertilizing the sapling with her own blood and magic, it matured rapidly; she then cut a length of wood from it to fashion into the shaft of a mighty spear. Pleased that his spear carried Yafram's essence within it, Faysal imbued it with his god's divine power.

Yafram travelled across the desert, practicing lunar gardening and using moonlight to grow lush, nightblooming plants. She revived dried-out oases and built vibrant new sanctuaries that drew settlers by the hundreds. At the same time she experimented with fashioning undead varieties of plants that were immune to the ravages of time. She constructed the *Moon Dial of Yafram*, which produced undead plants during lunar phases. These plants released spores that glowed like fireflies and spread a sinister plague of undeath. She also created the *Periapt of the Southern Winds*, which commanded the desert winds and raised devastating sandstorms.

The priests of Nun and Naunet only belatedly realized that Yafram had crossed into the forbidden. Not seeing the depths of Yafram's obsession with undeath, Faysal tried to reason with her, but it was useless. Under cover of darkness, she stole out through the gates of Siwal and vanished.

Traveling through the desert, Yafram went from oasis to oasis and used the moon dial to release the spores and the periapt to conjure winds to deliver her plague. The infection quickly spread, creating plague zombies. With her growing army, Yafram marched across the desert flanked by phalanxes of zombies and undead plants. Yafram overwhelmed the hill fortress at Qavriah, a stronghold of the Sultan of Siwal, and converted the inhabitants into more recruits for her growing army. After that, villages began to fall like dominoes.

Desperate, the people of Siwal sent their best wizards, their Tamasheq allies, and Faysal to destroy Yafram. During the battle, spectacular sorceries rained down upon the desert. Knowing that she could corrupt Faysal's weapon and use it as a trigger to complete her ritual to become a lich, Yafram tricked Faysa into plunging his holy spear into her chest. The swarms of scorpions that erupted from her body killed Faysal—but her evil plans did not fully succeed. Yafram lost the periapt and the moon dial.

## **CURRENT PLANS**

Revived 30 years ago, Yafram secured her phylactery—an immortal black desert rosebush—in Rabiyah Watan's cistern. Now, once again she grows her undead forces. Her goal remains the same: complete the transformation of the entire desert into her personal undead paradise. Although still powerful without her items, Yafram must obtain the moon dial, the periapt, and Faysal's spear to bring her plans to fruition. When she is reunited with her tools, she plans to attack Siwal itself. Using it as a base for her empire, she will spread her vile plague among the entire southern deserts. She'll then turn her baleful eye westward, toward Nuria-Natal, and eastward, towards the Mharoti Empire. Her ghul servants have relentlessly sought the Children of Haseena in

their frantic search for the artifacts she so desperately wants.

While she has all the usual powers of a lich, Yafram also commands a unique ability. If killed by mortal hands, her bond with the moon dial accelerates her revivification. When the item is placed on an altar near her phylactery, Yafram revives within seven days of being destroyed. Without it, she must wait for the arrival of a particular comet that appears within the Mage Stars constellation every 70 years.

## THE CHILDREN OF HASEENA

After rising as a lich, Yafram refashioned Faysal's spear into a cursed artifact able to cast lightning bolts that can tear down city walls. Mockingly, she called it the *Broken Spear of Faysal abn-Noor*. After learning of the spear's power, the Imajaghan Haseena bint Ziryab defeated Yafram, but she could not destroy the lich. Instead, she gave Yafram's spear to her people to hide.

Haseena's descendants, referred to as the Children of Haseena, strive to keep the spear, the moon dial, and the periapt from Yafram's hands. They know if she is ever reunited with her artifacts, Yafram may be unstoppable. Aware that

it's too dangerous to keep the artifacts together, separate bands of the Children's tribe move tirelessly across the desert to keep Yafram's servants from finding the items. Two items remain secure; they are the broken spear, which is hidden in an old, remote desert temple, and the periapt, which is in the hands of a trusted, traveling warrior. Recently however, Yafram's hunters, led by the ghul Sukkarah Saif, discovered where the Tamasheq hid the moon dial. Mercilessly slaughtering everyone in their way, they stole the moon dial but suffered debilitating losses in the process. Moving very slowly, the remaining ghuls even now limp towards Rabiyah Watan.

The Children of Haseena also seek Yafram's phylactery. No one knows its location except that it's somewhere in forsaken oasis of Rabiyah Watan, whose location remains elusive. Over the years, tribal scholars have attempted to find clues to its whereabouts in the writings Yafram penned while she was Master Gardener. The most telling writings, however, have yet to be located. Rumors claims that, cleverly hidden in a complex of trapped catacombs below the temple of Nun, a secret trove of tomes and experiments rests in an abandoned chamber. Supposedly secured there before Yafram fled the city, these writings contain knowledge not only of Yafram's birthplace but also of the secrets of the moon dial and how to destroy it.

## **MOON DIAL OF YAFRAM**

Aura Strong necromancy; CL 18th Slot none; Weight 6 lb.

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#### Description

This is a round, soapstone disk with a raised, crescentshaped dial. When exposed to moonlight, you may command the dial to transform all vegetation within your line of sight into undead plants, which release glowing spores that move at 10 ft. per round in a 60-ft. radius. The effect ends after 6 rounds. Any living creature caught in this radius is affected by the spores. They burrow into flesh and infect victims with Yafram's blight.

Yafram's Blight(Su) Curse and disease; save Fortitude DC 20; onset 1 round; frequency 1/minute; effect 1d6 Con damage; cure 3 consecutive saves. If constitution damage is equal to or greater than the victim's Constitution score, the victim becomes a plague zombie capable of infecting others with Yafram's blight through its slam attack. The moon dial may be used 5/day. No more than one use may be in effect at a time.

#### Destruction

The moon dial can be destroyed by exposing it to direct sunlight for seven days without allowing a shadow to touch it. It then must be smashed with a +2 or greater *disruption* weapon on an altar of Aten.

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