

Accursed



Frost and Fang

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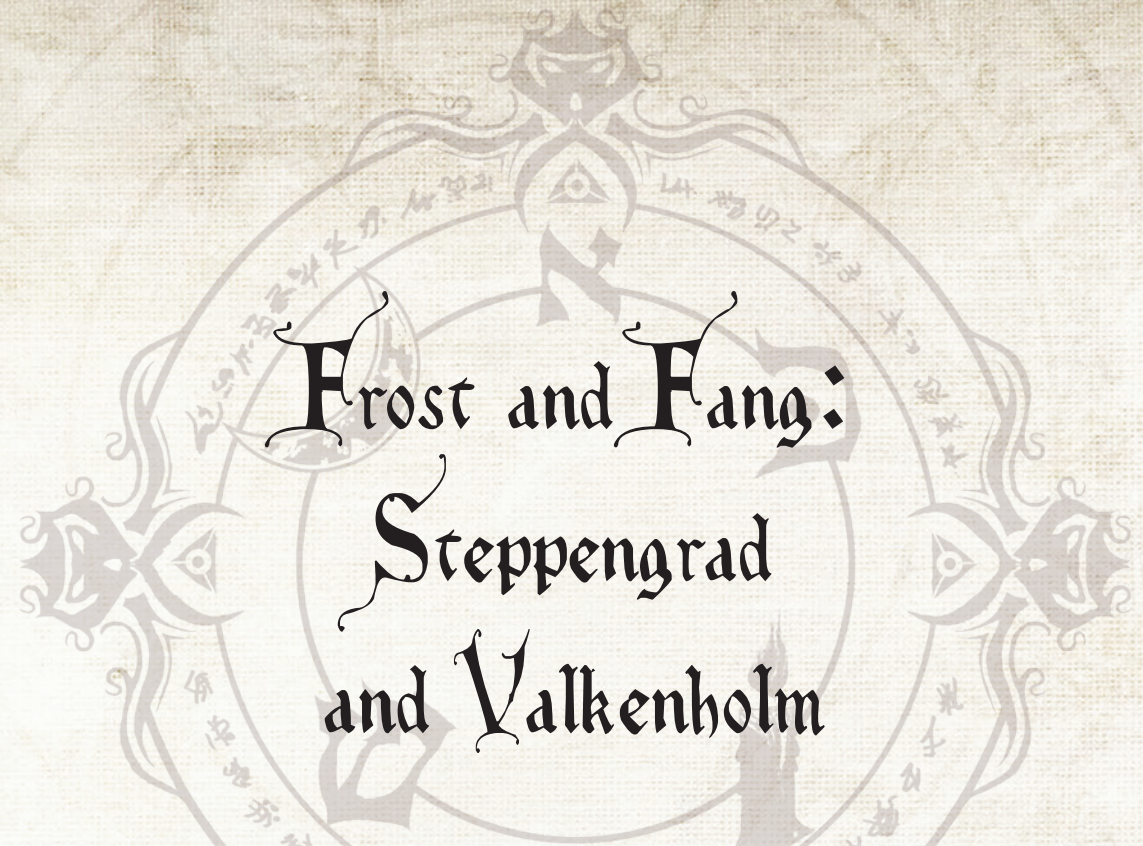


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Frost and Fang: Steppengrad and Valkenholm

"The frosts of the north and the fangs of the Blood Witch sucked the life from our homelands. We cannot defeat them alone. We must unite, rebuild, and wait for our foes to become complacent. Then, we butcher them—and we can end this alliance, once and for all."

Valkenholm's history began as a colony of Steppengrad, but they soon outgrew the Tsar and his Grafs. Ever since it became independent, the two nations have maintained a strong rivalry. Most often this has been expressed as a strong resentment between the two nations. Their economies have long depended upon one another—Steppengrad's agriculture complementing Valkenholm's natural resources. However, citizens of both consistently view their neighbors as their inferior. Every treaty signed between the two has depended upon the leaders on both sides feeling confident that they had the more beneficial side of the agreement.

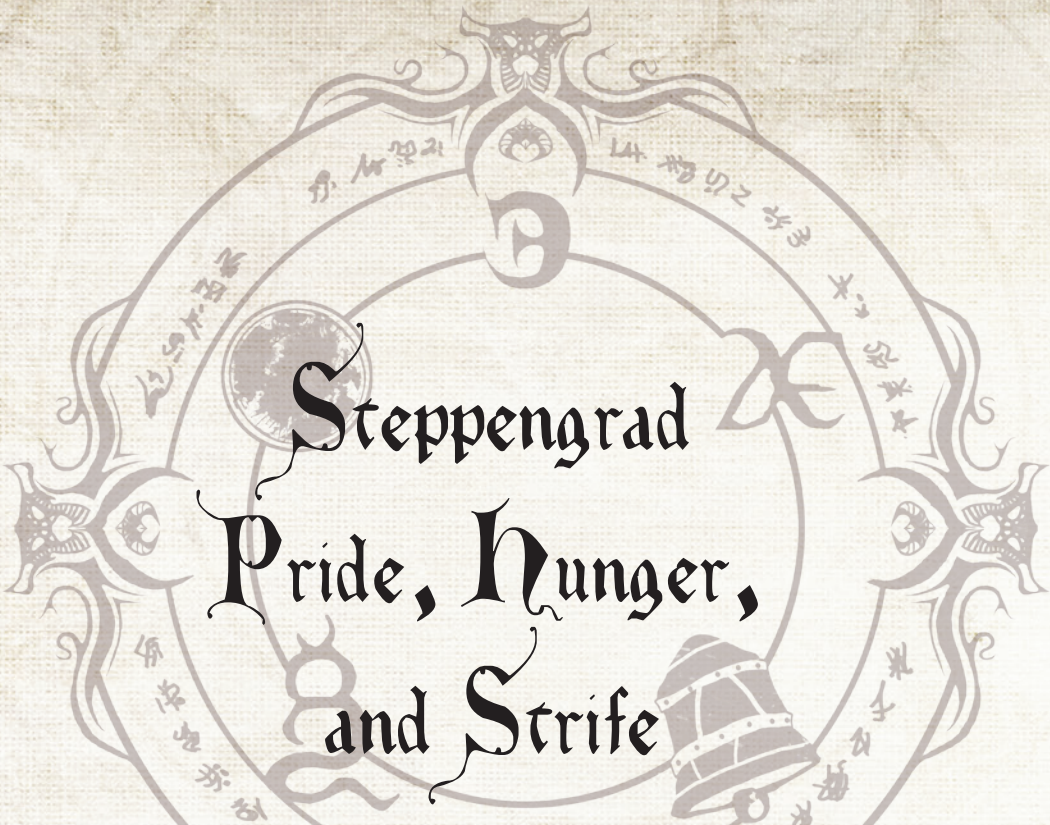
During the Bane War, Valkenfolk and Gradniki had no choice but to fight side by side. Their forces made up the bulk of the Army of Light—and their homelands were among the most critical battlefields. Defeat after defeat at the hands of the Witch Army caused terrible losses in terms of lives as well as lands. Since the war's end, each nation has drawn the direct interest of one of the remaining Witches. Baba Yaga and Sanguinara both revel in the suffering they inflict upon the inhabitants of their respective territories. Meanwhile,

survivors scheme to overthrow the tyrants, possibly with the help of the Order of the Penitent.

Daily life in these nations is a constant challenge, filled with difficult decisions. Sacrifice is a part of survival. Sometimes, that means a mild sacrifice—skipping a meal for the good of another or helping rebuild a community facility instead of taking care of one's own business. Often, however, the sacrifice is far more striking. The Blood Witch demands a regular tithe of Valkenholm's citizens to feed her vampiric banes and provide her with blasphemous entertainment. Baba Yaga's banes feed their constant hunger, devouring everything that Steppengrad can grow, leaving humans to starve in the cold.

Yet somehow both nations still survive. While many citizens fled to the southern nations and the islands of the Discordian Sea, far more chose to stay behind. An overwhelming loyalty to their homes, their neighbors, and their nations compels these people to retain them. Though their foes are overwhelming, they do not lightly yield to them. Instead, they try to use every possible asset they can find to resist the Witches.

The Order of the Penitent is based at Massif Helsenn located within Valkenholm. It represents the largest, coordinated effort to defeat the Witches, and yet it is permitted to remain. Some speculate that its existence is a last hope, left to survive only so that the Witches can eventually enjoy snuffing it out.



Steppengrad Pride, Hunger, and Strife

Life in Steppengrad has always been hard. Despite her beauty and natural wealth she is a hard land, and she requires her children to be incredibly tough just to survive. The summers are cool and rainy, especially in the north, and the winters are long, dark, and bitterly cold. The growing season is short, the ground often permanently frozen, and the land produces little food save for in the verdant Khazar River valley. Even before the coming of Baba Yaga and the scourging of Steppengrad, want and famine were not uncommon occurrences, affecting serf and noble alike. Today though, life for the average Gradniki is the hardest it has ever been. Many think the coming of Baba Yaga marks the end not just of Gradniki civilization but for all of Morden.

Crops refuse to grow, cattle and other food animals lie dead in their pastures by the thousands, and the rivers and lakes are choked with dead fish. Monsters roam the land, their mere presence defiling it. Dark witchcraft seeps through the villages and forests and over the steppes like fog; twisting and killing everything it touches. Baba Yaga once again walks among the Gradniki, spinning her lies and standing at the right hand of the weak-eyed puppet on the Imperial throne in Aziev. A whole generation of young men lies dead on Steppengrad's various battlefields, leaving it a country of women, children, the elderly, and the infirm. There is little work, even less commerce, and only the corrupt quisling of a Tsar and his cronies have the means to feed their

families on a regular basis. Such is the reality of post-war Steppengrad—famine, plague, grinding poverty, and a puppet government more interested in currying favor with an alien Witch and lining their own pockets than helping their fellow Gradniki.

Despite all of this however, the Gradniki survive. They survive as they have always—by trusting equally to both fate and The Creator, by hoping for just a little luck, and by relying upon one another. To an outsider, the Gradniki seem insensate, unmoved by their surroundings and the struggles of their daily life. This attitude is a combination of the Gradniki's famous fatalism, or *sud'ba*, and a pervasive attitude among them known as *avos*. There is a common gesture among the Gradniki when presented with a thorny problem, bad news, or a difficult decision—a slight shrug, a glance at the heavens, and hands held out with upturned palms. This gesture of stoic resignation is paired with the phrase, *byt' po semu* or “so be it,” and encapsulates the Gradniki's reliance on fate and predestination as an explanation for troubles. *Byt' po semu*—it is what it is, what is done is done, and now we must find a way to live with the consequences.

The flip side to Gradniki *sud'ba* is a sense of ungrounded optimism called *avos*. This attitude, often incredibly aggravating to non-Gradniki, is based upon a national philosophy of ignoring an action's possible outcomes while hoping that no negative consequences arise from it. This seemingly irresponsible, feckless attitude treats life as unpredictable and rests upon the

idea that the best a person can do is charge ahead and count on luck to see them through.

These seemingly contradictory attitudes, while often infuriating outsiders, help the Gradniki make sense of dangerous and unpredictable life in Steppengrad where bad things happen to good people in abundance, where the new boss is the same as the old boss, and where little can be done about it. For the Gradniki, it is better to accept one's fate and try to make the best of it than spend all of one's time angry and railing away at something that cannot be changed. This has served the Gradniki well throughout the centuries of their existence, and has helped them survive everything from the long, dark winters to the current post war troubles with, if not elan, then at least with a little grace and humor.

The Pillars of Civilization

In addition to their grim fatalism and often ungrounded optimism, Gradniki rely on what they refer to as the two pillars of civilization to survive and thrive in their harsh environment. The more facetious claim that there are three pillars—the samovar, the banya (see *Accursed* page 36), and *gorzalka*, a clear, powerful, potato-derived liquor. More traditionally, the pillars are a pair of powerful societal institutions that make up the backbone of Gradniki civilization. For countless generations, these institutions—the family and the church—have molded and supported the Gradniki, forging them into the people that they are today. Each one has helped the peoples of Steppengrad to weather the worst storms, survive the greatest disasters, and to come out the other side of their ordeals stronger and wiser for the trouble. The Gradniki believe that to be happy, *truly* happy—which is a rare thing in Steppengrad—every individual must find their own balance between the pair.

THE FAMILY

To the Gradniki, family is, perhaps, more important than any other part of their society. From Tsar Nikolai down to the lowliest peasant family, Gradniki draw strength, comfort, and wisdom from an array of immediate and extended family members. In Steppengrad, the old axiom that blood is thicker than water holds more truth than a simple saying. The romanticized Gradniki family includes a wise and caring mother, a strong and capable father, and dutiful and biddable children. Hard working, responsible brothers and chaste, bashful maiden sisters with wreaths of flowers in their hair complete the idyllic dream. Reality rarely reflects this. Gradniki society is plagued with all of the dysfunction found in other countries, but families tend to be stronger in

Steppengrad than elsewhere, and the family unit is prized over most other social groups.

Generally, Gradniki families are large, with an abundance of children. Even the wealthy elites often have upwards of ten children. In larger towns and what few cities remain in Steppengrad, people tend to live close to their families, usually on the same street or at least within the same neighborhood as their parents, grandparents, and often great-grandparents. Homes tend to be large and sprawling affairs housing numerous generations and family branches under a single roof more or less in harmony. Marriages tend to come early, in the mid to late teenage years, and are followed soon after, if not immediately, by a first child. Newlyweds commonly live with the husband's parents, until after the first child is born as a way to take some of the burden out of the beginning of married life and the raising of the first child. Children are not named until they are baptized, typically a month after their birth; an old superstition states naming a child before the Creator blesses him draws the attention of evil spirits.

Childhood in Steppengrad is over more quickly than in other countries. A collection of *babas*, aunts, and cousins tend raised the young communally, especially in the middle and lower classes. Many may not even be actually related to them. All Gradniki hold respect and veneration for family elders and the exceedingly elderly as a sacred duty, drilled into them from an early age. Children of the wealthy and upper classes are shipped off to military or boarding schools as early as five or six years old. They enter adult society well before their contemporaries from other countries. In poorer households, especially among the lower classes and the peasants, children are put to work as soon as they are physically able. Consequently, these children have little time for education in letters or social graces.

Throughout their adult lives, Gradniki work hard to provide for their families. This applies not just to spouses and children, but to parents, siblings, cousins and even more distant relatives. Gradniki are renowned for undergoing tremendous personal sacrifices to see to the betterment of anyone they consider family. The sense of community and social responsibility across all classes is incredibly strong, a tendency that makes Gradniki band together in tough times to better survive.

THE CHURCH

The Enochian Church, as it exists in Steppengrad, is quite a bit different than it is in other countries. The Gradniki are a people who like their traditions. Their culture is steeped in a social conservatism that looks upon everything new as highly suspect.

They practice a form of Enochianism that they call Orthodox Enochianism. It is an older, more primal form of the religion, more akin to the Enochianism of centuries past. It is also more heavily influenced by Steppengrad's ancient, pre-Enochian pagan religions than it is in other countries, and many of the Orthodox Church's rites and rituals are simply ancient pagan rites with a thin veneer of Enochianism laid over them.

The Church, and religious rituals in general, dominates much of Gradniki social life. The first party any Gradniki attends is his baptism, and the three most momentous occasions in any Gradniki's life—their baptism, their wedding, and their funeral—all take place within the walls of the parish church. Indeed, in smaller towns and villages, the church provides public spaces to celebrate feasts and holidays for every member of the community. Orthodox Enochian priests are considered among the most important people in Gradniki society. They are looked to for spiritual guidance as well as advice on marriages, the raising of children, the running of businesses, arbitration of disputes, and even, on occasion, emotional and physical healing.

Bukavac

Occasionally found in the company of the dreaded Rusalka, Bukavac were created by Baba Yaga to wreak havoc along Steppengrad's rivers and streams. A horrible amalgam of serpent and beast, Bukavac are large, aggressive, and extremely destructive creatures who are easily incited to violence. These banes have a broad, lizard-like body with eight legs, a long, snapping tail, and a blunt-snouted almost canine head. Their broad mouths are full of jagged teeth that constantly grow throughout their lifespans, and their feet are webbed and tipped with razor sharp claws. Bukavac are solitary creatures that spend the majority of their lives in the water, emerging only to attack creatures, people, and settlements close to shore. When attacking, either on land or in the water, a Bukavac emits a steady stream of grunts, screeches, howls, snarls, and barks that can drive even the stoutest Gradniki mad with fear.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4 (A), Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d10

Skills: Athletics d8, Fighting d8, Notice d6

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 11 (2)

Special Abilities

Armor +2: Thick, scaly hide.

Aquatic: Pace 8.

Claws/Bite: Str+d6.

Drag Under: Bukavac have a terrifying tendency to strike waterborne prey from below and pull them down to their doom. If a Bukavac hits with a raise, its target is considered grappled.

Fear (-1): Bukavac are terrifying creatures and their horrible visage and unearthly howls strike fear into even the stoutest hearts. Fear checks made when encountering Bukavac suffer a -1 penalty.

Size (+2): An typical Bukavac is nearly twice as long as a man is tall, and stands roughly half as high as an average Gradniki.

Swift: Bukavac are incredibly fast, especially over short distances. When running, these creatures roll a d10 instead of a d6.

Weakness: Bukavac suffer double damage from silver weapons.

Witchline (Baba Yaga): Banes of Baba Yaga can be sensed by Vargr Accursed within 25 feet.

Aziev

Once the jewel of Steppengrad and the envy of Morden, Steppengrad's sprawling capital city Aziev now lies in ashes. Only a few standing buildings and mountains of rubble remain to tell the tale of its former glory. Set in the shadow of an imposing, jagged mountain called Boyar's Rest and surrounded by rolling hills and wetlands, Aziev began as a small village called Dolac. As the power and prestige of Steppengrad grew over decades after its founding, her capital grew at a dizzying rate. Dolac soon outgrew its borders, and it quickly became apparent that a more grandiose city would need to be built to accommodate the influx of new Gradniki citizens.

The city, as it was plotted out in the first century of its existence, is based upon a sensible grid system relying on broad, straight boulevards running east to west with smaller connector streets running north to south. Much of the old village of Dolac was razed and in its place the Imperial Palace and the broad expanse of the Winter Square were built. Dolac-Gorod, as that part of the city would be called, was enclosed on three sides by tall, stony hills, and behind them the mountains rose up and separated the city from the Discordian Sea. A broad, ruler straight avenue named Yaroslavl Prospekt ran for dozens of miles from the eastern side of Winter Square out into the surrounding hills, and was designated as Aziev's main commercial thoroughfare. The rest of the city was divided into blocks, which were organized into districts with names like Tamburac Square, Nevskagorod, and Jelacic Park centered around a park or other public space.

The wealthy, middle, and professional classes lived in houses of various size and modesty, while the nobles dwelt outside of the city on large estates called *dacha*. The poor crammed into tenement buildings that dominated the various ghettos at the southeast corner of the city. They worked either in the fields or

in the city's growing smelting and refining industries, which the local mines and quarries fed. Alternating organized day and night watches kept the peace under the authority of the mayor's office. Volunteer fire brigades popped up throughout the city to protect citizens and property alike. In later years, the city built a complex sewer system, which immediately cut down on disease within the crowded city. By the time the Bane War broke out, some sections of the city, especially important places like Dolac-Gorod, had running water.

Baba Yaga and her armies invaded Steppengrad to bring the nation into the Bane War, and the city became *Fortress Aziev* almost overnight. Refugees from stricken parts of the country flocked there, swelling its already bursting population and taking over civilian jobs as men of the city were sent off to fight the war. Old city walls were refurbished and reinforced, and new redoubts and revetments were built to add to the city's defenses. Throughout the decades of the Bane War, Aziev slowly dwindled in population as so much of the Gradniki population was thrown into the meat grinder front lines. Buildings were abandoned, then stripped bare for materials and fittings that could be used for the war effort. Diseases, mysterious magical attacks, and bombardment of Witch Army artillery wiped out whole neighborhoods. In a single generation, Aziev went from a city of gold leaf, white stone, and red and blue lacquer to one of soot, ash, and ruin. Eventually, as the Witch Armies finally took the city at the end of the war, the surviving Azievites said goodbye to their beloved city, set it alight, and fled into the hills as the invading army was consumed in the fires.

Today, ten years after the end of the Bane War, Aziev is slowly, painfully being rebuilt. Tsar Nikolai I sits on the throne in the largely untouched Imperial Palace, and former Azievites and refugees from across the country have trickled in over the years to try to rebuild their shattered lives. Of course, as is usually the case for the long-suffering Gradniki, more is bad than good in Aziev. It is still very much a city under occupation. The ineffective Tsar is the ruler in name only, simply a weak-willed puppet of Baba Yaga. The Old Grandmother herself lives elsewhere, but her mark has been set firmly upon the once great capital.

The separation between the haves and have-nots is more apparent than ever, especially with famines and plagues sweeping across the land. Foreign mercenaries, led by savage Vargr, patrol the streets, always on the lookout for dissidents and terrorists. Beggars are everywhere, crime is endemic, and there is precious little to go around whether it be food, blankets, or hope. Baba Yaga's forces keep the ragged survivors—regardless of their social standing—in

a constant state of paranoid anxiety, a state that makes them easy to control. The headquarters of the Old Grandmother's army is the sadly diminished St. Vasily's Cathedral on the Winter Sqaure, a spot chosen to show her dominance over Steppengrad and its religion, and to give them ease of access to the levers of Gradniki power.

The future is uncertain for Aziev. The people, bent but not broken under the yoke of foreign occupation, continue to rebuild their city and nation. Often, they do so despite the best efforts of the Tsar's officials and the Witch army forces who fear a hopeful, optimistic population above all else. Much of the area immediately surrounding the Imperial Palace and Winter Square has been rebuilt, and some commerce happens along stretches of the shattered Yaroslavl Prospekt. While these and other improvements—such as a return of clean, running water in some places and a slow decline of especially violent crime—are indeed promising, no one has a clear idea what the eventual outcome might be. Can Aziev be rebuilt? Can it be returned to its former glory? Will Baba Yaga even allow that to happen? Perhaps, Creator willing.

Tsar Nikolai I

Officially, Tsar Nikolai I was a bastard son of Tsar Pyotr IV, who ruled Steppengrad during the Bane War. It is known that all of Pyotr's legitimate heirs were killed during the flight from Aziev. However, prior to Baba Yaga's arrival, there were no public records of the Tsar siring illegitimate offspring. The Gradniki murmur that Nikolai's bloodline is a sham, but no one seems willing to put the matter to a test—at least not as long as he continues to loyally serve the Witch.

For the most part, Tsar Nikolai I does little more than puppet the directives of Baba Yaga and her most trusted banes. He occasionally makes some minor concessions when sitting in judgment. At times, he makes short sighted, but magnanimous gestures toward the populace—declarations of festivals, disbursements from the palace pantry, and so forth. Ultimately, his decisions do little to aid Gradniki commoners, but they suggest that he is not utterly heartless.

If Witchmarked were to somehow free the Tsar from Baba Yaga's influence, his attitudes might change. That could provide the resistance with a voice and a figurehead. However, it is unclear just how deeply the Old Grandmother has affected the man. Some of the palace household suggest that Nikolai may no longer be physically capable of thinking for himself.

Dolac-Gorod

Dolac-Gorod, literally “the town of Dolac”, is Aziev’s central neighborhood and the seat of Imperial power. The oldest section of the city, Dolac-Gorod is traditionally considered the very first settlement of Steppengrad. For decades at the beginning of its existence, it was little more than a hill village. Its selection to become the seat of Prince Yaroslav’s power occurred for reasons not quite understood by modern historians. Very little of that quaint old village exists today, save for street and neighborhood names and a handful of truly ancient trees found on the palace’s grounds. Around the perimeter of the neighborhood, sections of old city walls can be found, typically integrated into newer homes, tenements, and government buildings. Many of its streets are still paved with centuries old cobbles. These old streets, many as old as the city itself, originally followed no logical rhyme or reason. Some were obviously once animal paths, as they twisted, turned, and meandered throughout the area. In the years since, more modern streets were laid down across these, though the original cobbled paths create unusual patterns that integrate with the more modern road surfaces.

Dolac-Gorod’s defining feature is the Imperial sector. Here, the Tsar oversees the business of empire from his throne in the Imperial Palace. The Palace, itself a monstrous and breathtakingly ornate building that dominates the buildings around it, stands at the west end of a broad paved public space called the Winter Square. Before the war, the Winter Square was the most popular public space in Aziev, a city renowned for its parks. Decorated with trees, plots of flowering shrubs, and scattered with iron benches and low stone walls, the Winter Square was perfect as a place of leisure for those with the time for it, and often featured public performances or celebrations for important feast days. In its center, standing atop a marble plinth in the shape of a six pointed star, stood a fifty foot tall statue of Prince Yaroslav, staring out over his people with benevolent calm. Unfortunately, nearly all of this was destroyed during the long war. The square is now flat and empty, carved up by bombardments and separated into small sections by walls of rubble. Here and there is evidence of rebuilding, but the process is slow and there is still much to do before the square returns to its unforgotten glory.

Along the perimeter of the Winter Square, which is paved in huge hexagonal stones and surrounded by an ornate iron fence, stand numerous important civil buildings. St. Vasily’s Cathedral stands opposite the palace on the east side of the square, a huge, onion domed church rivaling the palace in its scale and opulence. On the north side of the square stand



the remains of the National Theater of Steppengrad, a formerly grand theater that suffered substantial damage during the evacuation, and opposite the theater the National Museum sprawls along the south side of the square, its roof gone and its treasures still hidden deep in the city’s catacombs. The rest of the buildings around the Winter Square are anonymous government buildings, most of them still showing the scars of the Bane War and the evacuation and subsequent burning of the city even a decade later.

The Catacombs

Dating back to the founding of Aziev, the catacombs are one of the capital’s best kept secrets. Winding for hundreds of kilometers beneath the city and into the foothills beyond, they are a collection of broad chambers, corridors, cisterns, storage rooms, vaults, abandoned quarries, and armories. Aziev is an ancient city that is built largely upon itself, and has been destroyed and rebuilt many times. Consequently, many parts of the catacombs are time capsules from previous ages. Various building materials and architectural styles can be found here, from packed earth shored up with ancient timbers to hewn stone to modern brick and mortar. Some of the sections appear to be basements and even the ground levels of ancient buildings. Scattered throughout their length are the remains of city streets.



Throughout the centuries, the catacombs have served a number of uses. Whole sections are massive burial chambers or ossuaries where the bones of long-dead Gradniki are stacked to the ceiling like cord wood. Much of Aziev's drinking water is stored in massive holding tanks within the catacombs, brought down from the mountains via old aqueducts. Other spaces have, at one time or another, served as warehouses, libraries, secret laboratories, and emergency shelters protecting the population from natural disasters or war. It is rumored that there is a whole secret section, protected by devious traps and mazes that holds the Imperial treasury. Other rumors speak of whole subterranean communities made up of the destitute, homeless, outcast, and dispossessed; or colonies of horrible creatures stalking beneath the city streets. Since the fall of Aziev and its occupation by Baba Yaga's forces, rumors have spread of secret facilities deep in the catacombs where the Witch and her followers perform dark magics in an effort to finally bring Steppengrad to heel. Whether this is true or not is anyone's guess, but the fact is that the catacombs are vast and much of them are long forgotten. In a place like that, anything is possible.

Yaroslavl Prospekt

Yaroslavl Prospekt, named for the legendary founder of Steppengrad Prince Yaroslavl, is Aziev's main thoroughfare. It stretches from the Imperial Palace and the Winter Square in Dolac-Gorod out into the countryside east of the city. It serves as the central landmark from which all directions in the city are given. If someone knows where the Prospekt is, goes an old Azievite saying, they know where in the world they are. It is said that the bed of the Prospekt was laid down by Yaroslavl himself, but the details of much of its construction and original use are lost to time. The street itself is very well engineered, as befits the main thoroughfare of a mighty nation's capital. It is broad and smooth, bowed to shed rainwater and snow melt and paved with thick, flat stones that resist the heave of the ground beneath it as the ground freezes and thaws. Before the Bane War and the great fire which accompanied the city's evacuation, Yaroslavl Prospekt was lined with trees for its first few miles, possessed a grassy, tree-filled median, and was lit with modern gas lamps for its entire length. Foot and carriage traffic clogged the Prospekt beginning to end, bringing people and commerce to and from the capital. The most expensive shops, cafes, and restaurants were found along the Prospekt, as well as respected theaters

and galleries. All of this was burned to ash during the occupation and evacuation, and today the Prospekt is only a shadow of its former self.

Although much of the once great city still lies charred and empty, the rebuilding around the Imperial Palace and throughout Dolac-Gorod driven by the Witch controlled Tsar has affected the old thoroughfare. Trees have been replanted, fences and gutters repaired, and paving stones replaced nearest the palace. Reconstruction and repair of the Prospekt is underway at various spots along its length. As the population slowly returns to Aziev and the city is rebuilt, it is hoped that Yaroslavl Prospekt will once again return to its former glory and its rightful place as Steppengrad's main street.

Stone's End

The massive canyon system known as Stone's End marks Steppengrad's southern border. A long, deep, jagged scar cut eons ago by the Kodorovska river, a tributary of the mighty Khazar, it runs for hundreds of miles from the banks of the Khazar in the east to the foothills of Manreia's Serra de Preccio mountains in the west. Almost unfathomably vast, the canyon is over two miles deep in places and can range from a few dozen feet to over two miles across at its top. The earliest mentions of the canyon in Gradniki history come from legends and oral histories passed down from the nomadic herdsmen who called the area home in the centuries before Yaroslavl consolidated them. These legends, eventually recorded by Enochian missionaries and included in their histories of the Gradniki, tell of apocalyptic battles waged between warring tribes of giants in the times before humankind arrived in Morden. Their destructive fury leveled mountains, boiled rivers away, and destroyed the very land itself. Stone's End, say the legends, are the last remaining entrenchments from that ancient war.

For centuries, the southern Gradniki have lived in and around Stone's End, thriving in its seemingly inhospitable environs. At first glance, the canyon seems arid and stony, home to little more than lizards, birds, and dust. This, however, is far from the whole truth. Thanks to its length and depth, Stone's End features a wide variety of climates, from the aforementioned arid stony places to lush, green areas centered around the river and the many seeps and springs that trickle from the canyon walls. Clouds and fog have been known to form within its walls, and there are even sections with their own localized weather systems thanks to tricks of the wind, heat, and evaporation from the river. Countless species of hardy, edible plants litter

the canyon's walls and floors, and various fungi grow in the caverns and tunnel systems that criss-cross the area. Most of the animal life within Stone's End consists of serpents and lizards, insects, birds, and various species of bats. While some of these are edible, the Gradniki who call the area home have historically survived on fish caught from the Kodorovska River and herds of domesticated climbing goats. In addition to these native creatures, packs of mules and draft horses brought in to work the industrial sites still roam the canyon.

Due to its wealth in natural resources and the abundant power provided by the reliable and fast flowing Kodorovska, Stone's End was once one of the most important industrial areas of Steppengrad. Mining, refining, and milling were big business before the Bane War. The remains of dams and mills can still be found along the river's length at the bottom of the canyon. Along with these ruined mills, many of the old Gradniki settlements are still inhabited, although sadly diminished by the war and ensuing famine. Most of these are, or rather were, company towns owned and administered by the various factories or mills to which they owed their existence. Centered around a specific mine, mill, or foundry, these settlements were built like any other Gradniki town with modest homes, workers' barracks, churches, parks, shops, one or more banya, and a handful of taverns and tearooms. Some were built along the river and were milling or fishing towns, others were built into the walls of the canyon itself and served as homes for miners or lumberjacks.

Today, there is little in the way of industrial activity or commerce within Stone's End. A generation of war, the predations of Baba Yaga's children, and the deadly, lingering famine have destroyed much of what the Gradniki built over the years. The few settlements that remain are shabby and worn, their inhabitants desperate and starving like the rest of their countrymen. The desperate conditions within Stone's End have only been exacerbated by the influx of refugees from elsewhere in the country and the appearance of twisted and terrible creatures in the service of Baba Yaga, such as the cannibalistic Psoglavac and packs of wandering Vargr.

Bivac Partizan

Located somewhere in the rugged canyon lands in the northwest of Stone's End, a few days' march from the gates of Aziev, is the small settlement of Bivac Partizan. An extremely rough and primitive camp, Bivac Partizan is the operations center for the numerous groups of mercenaries and guerrilla fighters operating in and around Stone's End. As befits

its inhabitants' rough and rugged lifestyle, Bivac Partizan features few of the comforts of civilization. The approaches to the camp are heavily trapped and watched at all times by keen-eyed guardsmen. Shelters are lightly built shacks or tents designed to be taken down at a moment's notice. There is a small forge, a common building where partizans gather to drink and share news, an infirmary, and, of course, a banya. A natural spring nearby provides fresh water and a small fertile area in which to grow some edible plants. The men and women living in the camp survive on little more than what they can scavenge from the land, and all the food is held in a communal storehouse and rationed out as needs be.

The inhabitants of Bivac Partizan are a mixture of former army soldiers, desperate civilians, foreign mercenaries, professional guerrillas, and fighting men and women of every description. There is little in the way of overall leadership, save for a few volunteers who organize watches and see to it that the camp is kept safe and clean. Most of the inhabitants are either solo operators or small, tight-knit groups who merely use the camp as a temporary base of operations. It is rumored that Lidiah Yefremova keeps a semi-permanent bivouac in the hills above the encampment, and she and her men are occasionally seen in the common building gathering information or in the surrounding area.

The Krepost

The great fortress of the Krepost is the last bastion of the Imperial Gradniki Army left in Steppengrad. Built in the final days of the Bane War, the fortress is home to the ragged remains of Steppengrad's once huge and powerful army. In its way, the Krepost is a marvel of both Gradniki engineering and the can-do, make it work attitude so common in Steppengrad. Using only the materials on hand and the tools carried in with them, the desperate and starving engineers who built the fortress created a nearly impregnable edifice that survived the full brunt of a Witch army in the space of one month. Constructed of rough-hewn local stone using traditional Gradniki building techniques, the Krepost is little more than a tall, thick stone wall built across the mouth of a dead-end box canyon near the middle of the Stone's End canyon complex. The wall is nearly a hundred feet tall and thirty feet thick, topped with battlements and pierced with gun ports. Two powerful redoubts bristling with heavy cannon flank the single approach to the massive, iron-reinforced stone doors. The canyon walls to either side of the fortress are littered for hundreds of yards with tunnels and small galleries from which defenders can shoot down upon their attackers. Behind the wall is a small

military camp with barracks, a stable, a forge, a broad parade ground, and housing for a handful of ragged civilian refugees.

To an outsider, especially one well versed in military engineering, there seems to be a large, glaring flaw in the construction of The Krepost—there is no way out. Built as it is into a box canyon, there is seemingly only one way in or out of the fortress unless one were to scale the sheer cliff faces that surround it. Of course, the Gradniki engineers, as desperate and rushed as they were, were no fools. At the back of the box canyon that houses the Krepost are a series of hidden bunkers built into the cliff face. These bunkers, which house the fortress's magazine, armory, and food storehouses, are also connected to a series of long, well-guarded tunnels that lead from the canyon floor to the surface some ten miles from Stone's End. These tunnels grant a secret escape route for the fortress, and the entire population can be evacuated in just a handful of hours should ever the need arise.

The Gradniki soldiers at the Krepost are a rag-tag mix of different units ranging from conscripted infantry to artillery to the remains of the dangerous Gradniki cavalry. These soldiers, forced together by circumstance, now train together as a single fighting unit in what is, perhaps, the first real example of combined arms soldiering in Morden. General Yuriy Pavalevski oversees the drilling of these troops, and the defense and administration of the fortress. General Pavalevski, a military engineer and artilleryman by training, is a stooped, elderly, frail looking man with a shock of white hair and a thick white beard. Despite his frail appearance, the general is still a strong, energetic man with a sharp mind, a knack for administration, and enough leadership ability to recognize potential in subordinates and promote them quickly through the ranks to positions in which they can do the most good. He was the leader who called for and oversaw construction of the fortress. His diligence and drive saw to it that much of the retreating Gradniki army survived its final desperate battle with Baba Yaga's forces. Recently, General Pavalevski has been sending scouts and spies out into the countryside to make contact with surviving army units in an attempt to build an army large enough to oust the Old Grandmother's forces from Aziev and retake the city for the Gradniki.

Tjesnac

Tjesnac, meaning "The Gorge" in the local Gradniki dialect, is one of the larger industrial settlements still inhabited within Stone's End. Located at the bottom of a deep valley in a small offshoot of the main canyon, this once bustling city was built around a sprawling

complex of ore refineries and smelters. Served by its own small tributary of the Kodorovska and a complex of roads carrying mule-drawn wagon trains, Tjesnac was, at its height, one of the leading providers of iron and steel for the government in Aziev. During the Bane War, the town and its industrial assets were of particular interest to Baba Yaga's army. A decades long struggle ensued as the Old Grandmother's banes and Witchmarked laid siege to the town and its citizens and workers desperately tried to repel them. Eventually, despite their courage, the city's defenders were overrun and Baba Yaga's army poured in to take control of the city. However, thanks to the pent up frustration and rage of a long siege, the Witch army forces set about burning Tjesnac to the ground and shattering its infrastructure despite the orders of their superiors. The orgy of destruction lasted nearly two weeks, and nothing in the valley was left untouched by the violence.

Today, Tjesnac is mostly empty, its streets choked with weeds and the charred remains of shattered factories home to flocks of birds and bats. Of hundreds of former inhabitants, only a few dozen Gradniki remain, living among the burned out homes and shattered mills. These hardy survivors have been slowly rebuilding the town and some of its industrial infrastructure. At least one foundry has been returned to operation, using stolen and scavenged equipment. That facility has resumed making steel for both The Krepost and the guerrillas at Bivac Partizan. In addition, a few seams of coal and iron ore have been recovered in the caverns surrounding the city, and a small mining operation has been set up to feed the new foundry. Unfortunately, work in these mines has disturbed a few packs of Psoglavac who have been living in the caverns since the end of the war. Deadly skirmishes between the Gradniki and the cannibalistic banes have been on the rise.

Psoglavac

Once the men and women who worked in and around the many mines in Stone's End, the Psoglavac were twisted by Baba Yaga's magic to act as shock troops for use in mountainous terrain. They are roughly the size of a man with long arms, bowed legs, and a stooped, almost hunch-backed stature. Their bipedal stance and human-like form are where their similarities to humanity end. Their strange mixture of animal and human characteristics is quite unsettling. They have dog-like heads covered in short, matted

hair with long muzzles full of ragged teeth made of solid iron that drip with a paralytic venom. They have a single, glaring, bloodshot eye set deep in the middle of their sloped foreheads, pointed ears, and a delicate, highly sensitive nose on the end of their snout. Their legs are alternatively described as similar to those of a goat, with cloven hooves but also with sharp dewclaws at their tips. Their incredibly strong hands have three fingers and a thumb, all tipped with filthy iron claws that can rend even the strongest materials.

Psoglavac live in rocky hills or mountainous regions, typically in caves or abandoned mines. They retain much of their intellect through their transformation, and gather in small groups or family units around a single, strong-willed chieftain. They are nocturnal and are more at home in the dark than they are in the light. Indeed, bright light causes them intense discomfort and they avoid it at all costs.

Like many of the Old Grandmother's children, Psoglavac are constantly hungry and spend much of their time searching for food. Their preferred food is flesh, particularly that of humans, but they eat nearly anything including carrion and exhumed corpses. As they were created to fight in mountainous terrain, Psoglavac are natural climbers and spelunkers. They can scale nearly any surface, and are equally at home deep underground or on the loftiest peak.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Athletics d10, Fighting d6, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Subterfuge d10, Tracking d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6

Special Abilities

Bite: Str+d4

Iron Claws: Str+d6 (AP1)

Low Light Vision: Psoglavac ignore all penalties for Dim and Dark lighting conditions.

One-eyed: Psoglavac have terrible depth perception, and suffer -2 to all Trait rolls requiring it such as throwing at a target or jumping a gap.

Light Sensitivity: Psoglavac suffer a penalty of -1 to all Trait Rolls in brightly lit areas or broad daylight. This stacks with the penalty from having only one eye.

Paralysis: Victims who suffer a shake or a wound from a Psoglavac's bite attack must make a Vigor roll at -2 or be paralyzed for 1d6 rounds.

Wall Walker: Psoglavac only make Athletics rolls to climb sheer surfaces under the most adverse



or stressful situations—otherwise they automatically move across vertical surfaces like walls or cliff sides as easily as a man walks across a room. When climbing, a Psoglavac's Pace is its standard movement rate, and they may also run while climbing.

Weakness (Silver): Psoglavacs suffer double damage from silver weapons.

Witchline (Baba Yaga): Banes of Baba Yaga can be sensed by Vargr Accursed within 25 feet.

Tarayev Wastes

The Tarayev Wastes is a broad, frozen region of soaring, saw-toothed mountains, endless steppe-tundra, and thickly forested taiga that marks the northernmost border of Steppengrad. Sparsely populated even before the Bane War, this empty, spare, and windswept land features some of the harshest conditions and hardest creatures in Morden. In the Wastes, daylight is rare and twilight can last for days or even weeks. Flickering auroras fill the skies, creating strange shadows and bathing the deep snows and dark forests with unearthly colors.

The entire region has a peaceful, otherworldly beauty that belies its dangerous nature. The Wastes are deceptively dry, with most water either deep underground or locked up in frozen lakes. Temperatures are often well below freezing, even at midday. Strong and frigid winds howl constantly over the land, and especially on the flat and featureless steppe-tundra can kill an unprotected human in minutes. Raging storms can appear in an instant, pounding the land with stinging sleet, freezing rain, and heavy snows. It is thanks to these capricious and deadly conditions, as well as the short growing season and paucity of arable land, that the region was never settled and retains much of its primeval nature.

The forests of the Wastes are densely clustered with masses of spruces, firs, pines, and larches stretching for hundreds of miles. These forests are home to the great Gradniki Brown Bear, a deadly and solitary ursine hunter who is often featured in Gradniki legend, to huge packs of northern wolves, and numerous small mammals that make their meager livings off the rich loam of the forest floor. On the broad steppe-tundras, massive herds of wild ungulates, like the aggressive and antlered Gradniki white elk and the humpbacked wisnetski, feed on hardy grasses and fruit bearing shrubs while white hares and ice boars subsist on various species of mosses and lichens. Off the northwestern coast, whales, seals, walruses, and massive schools of cold water fish patrol the ice-choked sea lanes of the tormented Discordian Sea.

The few human settlements in the Tarayev Wastes are small and spread far apart. The majority are hermit

dwelling, hunting, fishing, and lumber camps, and the occasional, hardscrabble homestead. There are no cities in the Tarayev wastes, only a handful of small settlements in its southern region. There are few roads, and those are little more than glorified goat paths. Nor are there any rail lines or transportation canals. Despite the difficulty of reaching and traveling through the Tarayev Wastes, persistent rumors have circulated for generations regarding secret gulags and labor camps deep in the forests or high in the western mountains. It is said that the Tsars built these labor prisons centuries ago as a way to dispose of political dissidents, rebels, troublesome citizens, and dangerous criminals. Most Gradniki dismissed these rumored secret prisons, but like some rumors, they contained more than a grain of truth.

There were secret labor camps scattered throughout the remotest parts of the Wastes. Each prison was built to provide specific needs for Steppengrad's growth and survival. Some were mines or lumber camps, others were factories, refineries, or mills producing steel, refined ores, and alchemical agents. The prisoners were kept in terrible conditions and worked ceaselessly until their eventual death. Only after that were their bodies discarded in mass graves. The existence of these labor camps was a closely guarded secret within the Gradniki government, and only a handful of very highly placed ministers knew the truth about them. The Tsar's gulags remained operational and hidden until the beginning of the Bane War, when Baba Yaga's forces swept through the wastes destroying most of the camps and taking their inhabitants for her armies.

Today, the Tarayev Wastes exist largely unchanged and untouched by the ravages of the Bane War. While some of Baba Yaga's banes stalk the forests, and small settlements of Vargr exist here and there, the region remains unsettled and unexploited. Even the effects of the great famine are reduced in the Wastes, a fact that Gradniki chalk up to the dangerous and ever changing climate that can kill even Baba Yaga's powerful hunger trolls and gorge wolves.

Ostrog

Ostrog is one of the last remaining Imperial-era forced labor camps remaining in Steppengrad. Located high in the mountains that separate the Wastes from the frigid northern Discordian Sea, Ostrog was a productive sulfur mine in the days before the Bane War. Working in horrible conditions in the depths of a series of extinct volcanoes, prisoners extracted countless tons of sulfur to feed the labor camp's fume belching smelters. The refined products were then shipped to Aziev and Stone's End to be used in the

creation of gunpowder, patent medicines, and various other scientific and industrial applications. As was the case with all of the Tsar's secret gulags, the death rate at Ostrog was appallingly high as the inmates were worked to death digging sulfur from the ground. As the Witch armies spread across Morden and Baba Yaga laid siege to Steppengrad, most of the work camps were closed, the inmates and overseers both conscripted into the Gradniki army, where most were destroyed by the rampaging horrors of the Witch army. Ostrog was kept open, however, churning out refined sulfur and a handful of other important compounds to fuel Steppengrad's war machine.

Thanks to its remote location and the heroic efforts of both the Gradniki army and the Tsar's chief of state security, the location and nature of Ostrog was kept a secret for decades. As the Bane War raged around them, the prisoners at Ostrog toiled on, their ranks replenished by traitors, deserters, and prisoners of war. Eventually, the Witch army learned the location of Ostrog and moved immediately to take or destroy the labor camp in the hopes of dealing a heavy blow to Steppengrad's ability to make gunpowder. Quickly and without warning, a Vargr-lead army of mercenary infantry supported by banes and artillery units swept into the narrow valley where Ostrog lay and took the gulag with little resistance. Overseers and prisoners alike were gathered up and either pressed into service in Baba Yaga's army or taken away to be turned into the Old Grandmother's savage banes.

Today, Ostrog continues to produce sulfur and other chemical compounds, only now it is in the service of Baba Yaga rather than the Tsars. A pall of sulfurous smog hangs over the camp, and the prisoner-laborers die at a greater rate and in more horrific ways than in the past. Even death is no escape. Under the Witches, mindless, undead automata created from the corpses of dead laborers perform much of the work. In addition to the mining and smelting of sulfur, a frightening number of banes come from the gulag. These banes, existing creatures such as gorge wolves and Bukavac, along with the occasional new creature or creatures, are created in a magical laboratory deep within a long abandoned mine complex. Prisoners are brought here from all across Morden and subjected to terrible experimental magics, while Warlocks in Baba Yaga's service develop new and devastating rituals and alchemical compounds to speed the destruction of the Gradniki.

The Hermitage

The Hermitage is a small and remote settlement in the farthest northern reaches of the Mrak Forest in the Tarayev Wastes. Centered around an unnamed small



and shockingly deep and cold lake, the history of the Hermitage is, to say the least, quite obscure. Evidence suggests that pre-Enochian monks founded it, perhaps five or six hundred years ago. For nearly its entire existence, the Hermitage has served as a religious retreat for the especially pious. The Hermitage is the most northerly settlement in Morden. In spite of this, the monastery remains a place of comfort and sanctuary in the howling wastes.

Nestled around its lake deep in the Mrak forest, the Hermitage consists of a small, ancient stone monastery dedicated to St. Sergius, the Enochian patron of hermits and the wilderness. Here in utter isolation, a handful of monks live a particularly ascetic life of prayer, fasting, and study. In addition to their religious studies, the monks of the Hermitage tend a flock of hardy tundra goats, raise bees, breed fish, and cultivate a selection of hardy tundra plants for their consumption and that of the few guests they receive. Within the monastery there is a small infirmary where the monks tend to sick visitors and supplicants, some small, spartan shacks that house the monks and any pilgrims who might be in attendance, and a number of shrines dedicated to different saints important to the Gradniki. Overall it is a comforting, safe haven that is protected by its remoteness and the fact that few know of its existence.

Since the end of the Bane War, the Hermitage has gained some popularity among those fleeing the

predations of Baba Yaga and the seemingly endless famines. The war had little effect on the remote facility, and food and comfort are, if not abundant, at least available in the settlement. The current head of the Hermitage is an extremely ancient and knowledgeable abbess named Leóna Rak. Mother Leóna has served in the holy orders of the Enochian faith for nearly eighty years as a healer, a teacher, and a translator of ancient texts. Tall and gaunt with dark, flashing eyes and a face deeply lined by both pain and joy, she cuts an imposing figure as she goes about her daily duties. Since the end of the Bane War, Mother Leóna has worked tirelessly to assist refugees and war veterans who find their way to the Hermitage. She provides healing, spiritual guidance, information, and what food and comforts can be shared. She has even opened her doors to those Vargr seeking peace and an end to their servitude to Baba Yaga. More than one powerful Enochian-allied Vargr owes their life, their sanity, and even their very souls to the ancient Abbess of the Hermitage.

Medved

Rare and exceedingly dangerous, Medved are giant, savage, ursine creatures created by Baba Yaga to patrol the broad expanse of the Tarayev Wastes. Like many of Baba Yaga's creations, Medved were once normal Gradniki who were captured by the Old Grandmother and turned into beasts via dark magics. In the case of the Medved, they were once hermits; either religious seekers or social outcasts who called the forests and tundra of the Wastes home when Baba Yaga attacked. Gathered up wherever they were found, Baba Yaga coveted these hardy individuals for their resilience and local knowledge. Using her arcane powers, Baba Yaga turned the hermits into savage, lumbering creatures resembling the great Gradniki bears who led solitary lives in the Wastes. Once created, Baba Yaga used the Medved as scouts and as hunters for tracking down and destroying rebels and guerrillas operating in the forests of the Wastes.

Medved stand more than twice as tall as an Average Gradniki, with powerfully muscled frames covered in dense brown and gray fur. They can walk on two or four legs, and have a startling burst of speed for such a bulky, heavy-looking creature. They are intelligent, most having kept their intellects through their change, but are single-minded and focused upon hunting and tracking. This single-mindedness, combined with a certain amount of savage fury, make them seem more animalistic than they really are. Their hearing and sense of smell are incredibly sensitive, and they can even see the heat given off by living creatures, making them very hard to evade or escape. When attacking, Medved tend to close quickly with an opponent and

attempt to pin them to the ground or rend them to pieces with their powerful teeth and claws. They can also, terrifyingly enough, breathe a cone of freezing air and ice particles, which freezes and stuns opponents, making them easier prey. Thankfully, there are very few Medved. Those who still exist live only in the colder, most northerly reaches of the Tarayev Wastes.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d12+4, Vigor d12

Skills: Athletics d6, Fighting d8, Notice d8, Subterfuge d6, Survival d10, Tracking d10

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 10

Special Abilities

Bite/Claws: Str+Id6.

Fear (-1): The size and ferocity of an enraged Medved is a terrible sight. Fear checks made when encountering these creatures suffer a -1 penalty.

Hardy: Their experience as hermits and the magical energies that transformed them make Medved exceptionally hard to kill. Whenever a Medved is Shaken, further Shaken results do not cause a wound.

Ice Breath: Medved can breathe a cone of frigid ice and snow to slow or kill their opponents. This attack uses the Cone Template, and every target within the cone may make an Agility roll at -2 to avoid the attack. Those who fail suffer 2d10 damage and must make a Vigor check at -2 or become Fatigued. Fatigue can be recovered once the character has an hour in a warm location.

Infravision: Medved can see the heat signatures given off by living creatures, and suffer no penalties for dim or dark lighting conditions.

Size +2: Medved are the largest creatures in the Tarayev Wastes, towering over even the massive Gradniki bears which share their hunting ranges.

Weakness (Silver): Medved suffer double damage from silver weapons.

Witchline (Baba Yaga): Banes of Baba Yaga can be sensed by Vargr Accursed within 25 feet.



Gradniki Edges

Characters from Steppengrad may select from the following Edges in addition to those listed in *Accursed*.

FATALISM

Requirements: Novice, Wild Card, Gradniki.

The dour fatalism of the Gradniki is legendary. The proud, long-suffering people of Steppengrad bear the hardest times and the worst privation with little more than a shrug, upturned palms, and the phrase *byt' po semu*, or “so be it.” This resigned attitude has served the Gradniki well, especially during the horror of the Bane War and the devastation of the ensuing famine. Characters with this Edge willingly, if a little grudgingly, accept the hand that fate has dealt them, allowing them to ignore one level of wound modifier.

CHILD OF THE MOTHERLAND

Requirements: Novice, Wild Card, Gradniki

The Gradniki have a powerful, intimate connection to their motherland that extends well past the normal kinds of national pride found among the other peoples of Morden. They are *of* the land, not just *on* it, and they draw an incredible amount of strength and comfort from a country that, to others, seems intimidating and inhospitable. A character with this Edge gains +1 Toughness and +1 to all Spirit and Guts rolls made to resist Fear and arcane powers while within the borders of Steppengrad.

MAKE IT WORK

Requirements: Seasoned, Repair d8, Gradniki

In Steppengrad, there is an old saying that states that necessity is the mother of invention. For centuries, the normal state of the average Gradniki has been want—want of food, want of materials, want of tools. However, two things the Gradniki were never in want of were tenacity and inventiveness. This has led to a number of unique Gradniki solutions to problems ranging from reattaching a wheel to a cart without the proper tools to keeping a mill or refinery running without regular shipments of fuel. A Gradniki with this Edge is especially good at solving problems without the necessary tools or materials to do the job, and has a knack for keeping things running with little more than baling wire, spit, and willpower. This Edge eliminates the -2 penalty to Repair rolls made while lacking the proper tools and materials for a job.

Gradniki Hindrances

Steppengrad characters may select the following Hindrances in addition to those listed in *Accursed*.

CAPRICIOUS (MINOR)

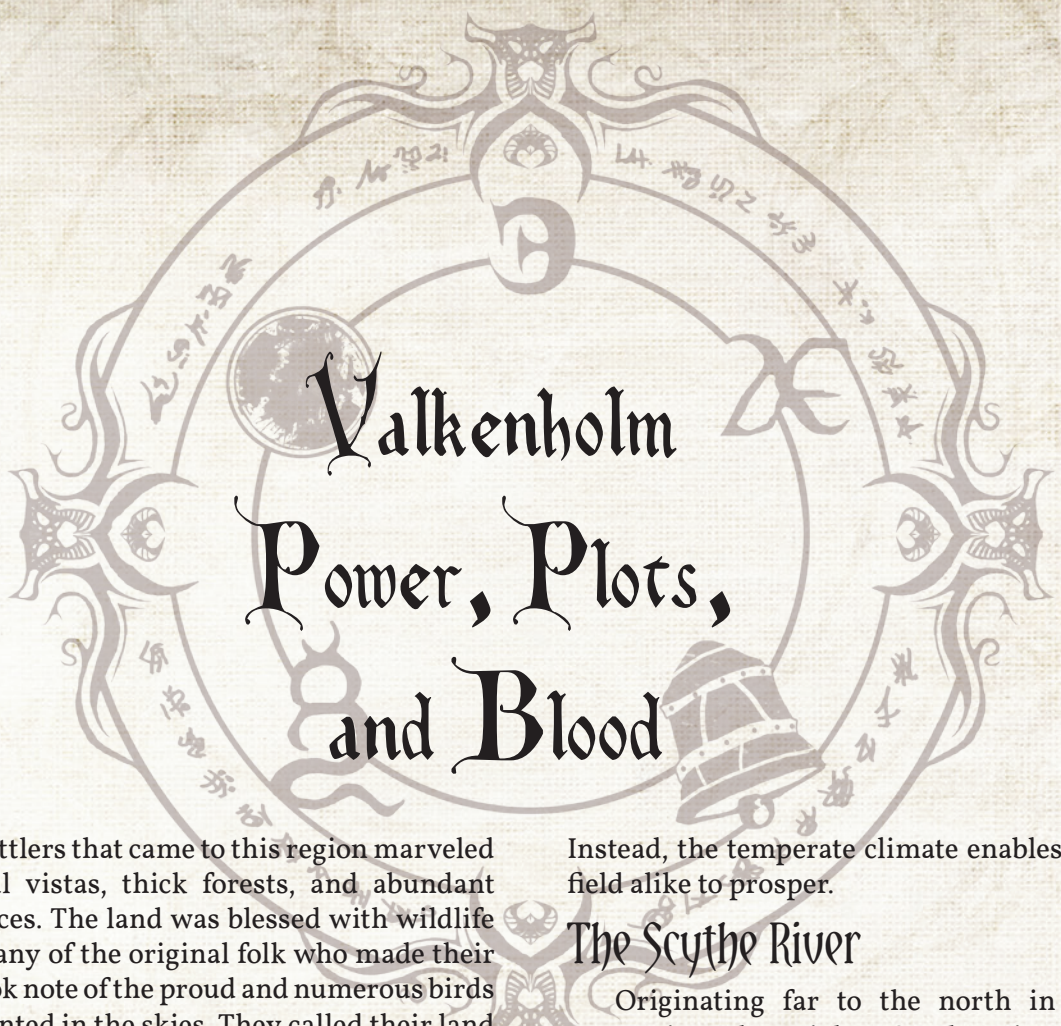
Gradniki are a passionate people whose moods can be as changeable as the weather. They can go from laughing to weeping to white-hot rage in an instant, a trait that people from other countries often find unsettling and off-putting. While most Gradniki can temper their mood swings, their reputation for powerful mood swings, emotional outbursts, and overreaction is not without merit. Characters with the Capricious Hindrance are governed by their passions, fly off the handle easily, and tend to be difficult to deal with in social situations. This grants them a -1 penalty to Charisma.

UNFORGIVING (MINOR OR MAJOR)

No one can hold a grudge like the Gradniki. For a people who are otherwise so resilient, many Gradniki take offense very easily, and they tend to hold on to a grudge like a miser holds on to his wealth. Indeed, it is said by outsiders that at the end of their lives—after a Gradniki has forgotten their youth, their family members, and even their own names—they still remember their grudges. When taken as a Minor Hindrance, an Unforgiving character is cold, dismissive, and uncharitable toward the target of their grudge, refusing to talk to them in public and often telling tales about them behind their back. When taken as a Major Hindrance, an Unforgiving character goes out of her way to hinder and harm the individual against whom she holds her grudge, including sabotage, ostracism, and even physical violence. Note that the target of the grudge must be a recurring character in the campaign.

FANATIC (MAJOR)

The passionate nature and national pride of the Gradniki, combined with their long suffering at the hands of Baba Yaga and her banes, can, in some cases, manifest as violent fanaticism among some Gradniki. This is especially true among surviving members of the Gradniki army, partisans like Lidiah Yefremova, many Vargr, and high-ranking members of the Order of St. Vitus. A fanatic believes so strongly in a chosen cause that she does nearly anything in service of it. They tend to have one-track minds, and can find a way to make nearly any subject relevant to their beliefs. They constantly talk about their cause, and are often aggressive in their attempts to persuade others to agree with them. When a Fanatic is given a task that directly serves to advance her beliefs, she *must* do it, however foolish or dangerous it may be. Fanatics are incredibly hard to deal with since their views are so rigid and unbending, and they suffer -1 to Charisma when dealing with those who don't share their passion.



Valkenholm

Power, Plots, and Blood

The first settlers that came to this region marveled at its beautiful vistas, thick forests, and abundant natural resources. The land was blessed with wildlife as well, and many of the original folk who made their homes here took note of the proud and numerous birds of prey that hunted in the skies. They called their land “Falcon-home,” and soon it was a prosperous realm in the heart of Morden. Like the birds they admired, the people of Falcon-home were fierce, independent, and bold. They soon spread across Morden’s central region, and, in time, that land became known by its modern name, adapted through the local dialect: Valkenholm.

Originally, Valkenholm was settled as part of the sprawling empire of Steppengrad. Scouts and rangers who explored the region found a rich bounty of unclaimed land. Dense forests covered much of the region, fed by the vibrant flow of the broad Scythe River. Minerals, wood, and animals were all plentiful, and the area was further blessed by a mild temperate climate.

Geography

Valkenfolk benefit tremendously from the nation’s geographic location. Far inland, Valkenholm is buffered from the Discordian Sea’s unpredictable weather patterns. The howling winds from the Darkwall mountains unleash their fury upon the Outlands, before reaching Valkenholm. The unrelenting heat of the Hyphratian desert never reaches this far north.

Instead, the temperate climate enables the forest and field alike to prosper.

The Scythe River

Originating far to the north in the Darkwall mountains, the mighty Scythe River travels down through the Outlands close to Steppengrad’s eastern border. From there, it runs south through the heart of Valkenholm before vanishing into the swamps of the Sunken Lands. The Scythe is known for its cold, clear waters. It is also famous for being navigable for much of its length by standard flat-bottom boats and rivercraft. Few waterways in Morden can boast such a length of travel suitable for ferrying cargo and passengers. Thus, the river trade the Scythe offers is important to Valkenholm’s prosperity.

The Dunkelvald

A dense forest dominates central Morden, covering almost all of Valkenholm. Each of the nation’s settlements required settlers to carve out open spaces from the forest, before they could till fields or begin construction. The forest has few natural clearings, and most of its trees are old growth hardwoods. The forest teems with life, including a diverse range of herbivores and a few deadly predators that sometimes intrude upon the nation’s cities.

Lumber taken from the Dunkelvald is a key part of the Valkenholm economy. Since the Bane War, there are

far fewer logging camps than before, but the Witches still expect Valkenholm to provide a substantial tithe in lumber. To offset the ongoing tree harvest, prison labor camps cultivate and plant saplings in harvested areas.

The Sunken Lands

The mighty Scythe River ends in a deep, steep-sided valley known as the Sunken Lands. The valley itself widens out to a large degree, allowing it to steal sunlight from the shadow of Cairn Kainen's Highlands to the East and South. The river itself drains into numerous underground cisterns and watersheds, filling the valley with an infamously deep and dangerous swampland.

The Sunken Lands are sparsely populated. Those that live there tend to be concentrated into superstitious and insular village communities. It is said that the folk of the Sunken Lands are descended from Cairn Kainen clansmen, and the way that these folk treat outsiders makes that comparison apt. Outsiders are rarely welcomed, though traders are tolerated, and entertainers are greeted with open arms. Most of these villages are logging camps or sawmills, handling the lumber sent down from upriver in Valkenholm proper.

Monsters are encountered more often in the Sunken Lands than anywhere else in Valkenholm. Several bands of cauldron-born have made their way down from Blackroot Wode to the East, and there are many banes that prowl amongst the swamplands. The earliest reported encounters with the deadly swamp kraken took place here, and there are entire tribes of leech-men lurking in the foulest, deepest reaches of the marsh.

Swamp Stalker

The Blood Witch seems to delight in unleashing horrors into the wilder parts of Valkenholm to feed. One of these banes is the swamp stalker, which haunts the Sunken Lands and has become the subject of terrifying stories among the people who live there. Swamp stalkers resemble huge moray eels, with maws full of needle-sharp teeth and a voracious hunger for human flesh.

The nearly boneless nature of the swamp stalker makes it an efficient hunter in its chosen environment. Swamp stalkers sometimes drape themselves over logs and trees, waiting for prey to mistake it for another limb or vine. Others lurk just under the water's surface, ready to spring on an unsuspecting victim. The creature's size means it is difficult to fend off alone, causing several villagers to restrict trips beyond their walls to groups of three or more.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4 (A), Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d12

Skills: Athletics d8, Fighting d6, Notice d6, Subterfuge d6

Pace: 5; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 10

Bite: Str + d6.

Special Abilities

Aquatic: Pace 10.

Camouflage: This creature gains a +2 bonus to Stealth rolls in the appropriate environment (swamps and wetlands).

Low-light vision: Swamp stalkers ignore penalties for Dim or Dark lighting.

Size +2: Swamp stalkers are around 8 feet long.

Swallow: If the bane scores a raise on its Fighting roll, it has swallowed its prey. The victim suffers 2d6 damage per round and is immobile. He can be released only when the creature is dead.

Weakness (Wood): Swamp Stalkers suffer +4 damage from weapons made from wood.

Witchline (Blood Witch): Banes of the Blood Witch can be sensed by Dhampir Accursed within 25 feet.

The Last Battlefield

The climactic moment of the Bane War occurred to the west of Valkenholm's forested border, in the Ash Plains. There, the massive armies of the Grand Coven clashed with those of Morden's Grand Alliance. Heroes and monsters alike were slain, the very ground soaked with blood both pure and foul. One of the Witches that invaded Morden is believed to have been destroyed here—the Djinn. The Grand Coven itself was sundered not far from here, and their dark army disbanded. The hopes of Morden's freedom were crushed upon a massive plain that has come to be known as the last battlefield.

Ten years later, the battlefield is still recognizable as the site of unimaginable carnage. The ferocity of the conflict here gutted the land, burned trees to the ground, and left deep, rotted scars in the earth. The battlefield itself is quite large, encompassing an area miles in diameter. Such trees that remain or have grown since in the poisoned land are twisted as if tortured by the very ground that provides them life. There is a foreboding sense about this place, as if the evil and dark memories of the Bane War have taken physical form.

Any who step upon the plains here find their footing unsteady, as much of the ground is a stinking mire of death and vengeance. The remains of those who fought here are sometimes preserved within the muck and ash that remain, only to act as a nasty surprise for visitors who disturb the muck to expose decomposing bodies clad in rusted mail or clutching broken weapons. There is a stigma here that clings to everything, as if the place labors under its own kind

of curse. Many would-be scavengers have contracted various diseases by digging in the battlefield looking for plunder.

Surprisingly, both men and banes alike avoid the Ash Plains. No nation even claims it as part of their territory. This desolate region sees few visitors, although it is known that several Accursed make pilgrimages to the battlefield, hoping to find some sense of closure... or searching for ancient treasures. Rumors say that a lone Enochian priest—himself an Accursed—labors every day to try and lay the dead to proper rest according to his faith. He has been about his task for nearly a decade, lairing in a small camp on the river's edge. The priest welcomes visitors to his fire, it is said, and bears the weight of unbearable sorrow.

The Blood Witch ignores the battlefield completely, only laughing enigmatically if the subject is ever brought up in her court. Once per season, the Redhawks send a patrol along the edge of the Battlefield, but even these puissant warriors keep well clear of journeying any further within. Whatever may happened here with the Grand Coven, Sanguinara clearly has no desire to remind herself of the past.

History

The nobles or Grafs of Steppengrad saw the lush forests of Valkenholm as a prime region for settlement. At that time, Steppengrad herself was a prosperous nation, but the upper classes were restless and sought some way to distinguish themselves. The richest and most ambitious nobles made their way into Valkenholm, establishing plantation-like farms, logging camps, and mining outposts. These Grafs used their vast wealth to build large and impressive homes, many of them copying the castles and towers they had seen on trips to the Outlands and Caer Kainen.

In truth, it was wise that the Grafs gave some thought to building such defenses, for the common folk of Valkenholm were treated poorly indeed. Seen as little more than serfs enduring back-breaking work to satiate the Graf's greed, the commoners lacked any middle class and were given fewer privileges than similar classes of people back in Steppengrad's heartland. This treatment spawned a handful of peasant rebellions against the Grafs. None of these uprisings were particularly successful, thanks in large part to the Graf's well-paid guards and the strength of their castle walls.

However, the status quo could not remain in place more than one generation, no matter how strongly the Grafs resisted any form of social change. As the abuses of the lower classes continued, the people of Valkenholm became more determined than ever

The Last Survivor of the Last Battle

There are many legends about the final battle of the Bane War that took place nearly fifty years ago. Several of these legends concern the tale of a lone survivor from King Stefan's personal guard. Supposedly, this survivor was a senior knight of the Order of the Bells, a steadfast veteran of several battles against the Witches' forces, and a man who was so scrupulously honest that he confessed even the most minor of sins.

The knight's name is not known, although some storytellers have claimed it to be Daine, Rickard, or Montague. The tales do agree that this surviving knight—if he truly exists—possesses a deep spiritual purity and righteousness of spirit that keep banes at bay. Other tales say that the survivor is judgmental and headstrong. Whether the survivor actually holds any of these virtues or vices, none can say for certain.

More recently, stories told around hearths throughout Valkenholm describe the survivor taking on a new quest. According to these tales, the last knight of the last battle seeks a holy sword—the *Spatha Sancta* (see page 21)—believing that this blade holds the power needed to destroy a Witch. Given the strong focus of these tales in Valkenholm, it is likely that the survivor intends to use the blade on Sanguinara.

to take a stand. In the dead of night and in secret conferences, word passed from hamlet to hamlet, village to village. Servants conspired with blacksmiths and cooks whispered plans with valets.

Over one autumn season, a loose plan came together to rise up against the Grafs. This time, it would be an organized effort building from the center of the nation and spreading like wildfire. The architect of this rebellion was a hostler by the name of Stefan Hightower. Cunning and courageous, it was Stefan who directed his fellow conspirators' efforts, and it was Stefan who insisted that only the Grafs were valid targets for the rebellion's wrath. Many argued that the nobles' immediate families must be purged in order for the uprising to succeed, but Stefan would not be moved. The Grafs had brought this upon themselves, so only the Grafs would be held accountable. This event would come to be known in history—both for Steppengrad and Valkenholm—as the Winter Uprising.

Rebellion and Self-Rule

When the rebellion began, it was swift and certain. Castle after castle, tower after tower, hamlet and village and city alike were freed from the tyranny of

the Grafs by Stefan and his men. The uprising itself was bloody—inevitably, perhaps, given the Grafs' host of bodyguards, mercenaries, and footmen. Nevertheless, thanks to Stefan's foresight, when the last Graf was cast down and the last town of Valkenholm liberated, the people could hold their heads high. They had fought for their freedom, but they had not sunk to the level of their oppressors.

Stefan became King Stefan Hightower the First by popular acclaim, for the people of Valkenholm could think of no one more suited to lead them. The first proclamation of the new monarch was a formal announcement of sovereignty for Valkenholm as a free and separate nation from Steppengrad. The King did not wait long to begin enacting further social reforms throughout Valkenholm to prevent any return of the tyranny they had fought so hard to escape. A feudal system was instigated with the most responsible members of the rebellion forming a new peerage of nobles, each responsible for important sections of the nation. An empowered House of Commons in the new capital, the largest city in Valkenholm—Kulidar, would represent the commoners.

An Age of Prosperity

Under the reign of King Stefan, Valkenholm and its people thrived for generations. The nation's economy, built on the growth of a strong middle class and the ease of shipping trade along the Scythe River, became one of the strongest in Morden, second only to Manreia. The ruling class of nobility, inspired by the example of their king, governed wisely and well, enacting several progressive laws and edicts to prevent further abuses like those that had triggered the revolution.

During this time of plenty, the Valkenfolk spread throughout their land, settling new towns and villages. They opened new trade routes with Steppengrad and the Outlands, bringing in more settlers who wished to share in the nation's bounty. Only the deepest, darkest portions of Valkenholm's thick forests were left alone—known as the Deepwode, these black forest groves remained untouched and largely unexplored.

Unfortunately for the Valkenfolk, the nation was struck down at the height of its success. When the Witches crossed the Darkwall and brought war into the Outlands, a shadow was cast across all Morden. The Bane War had begun, and nothing would ever be the same again.

The Church

The Enochian faith is deeply entrenched within Valkenholm's culture. Nearly all villages have at least some form of Enochian shrine, while larger

communities feature old churches and cathedrals. Like Steppengrad, the faith has deep roots in the realm. Generations of Valkenfolk have attended the weekly blessings of brown-robed Enochian priests.

Most of the faithful observe worship services bi-weekly at their local shrine, temple, or church. Priests advise citizens on nearly every aspect of daily life, serving the spiritual needs of the flock. In addition, the churches are centers of learning and study, especially for medical knowledge, so the Enochians are often called upon to minister to the faithful's physical ailments as well as those of the soul.

There are some who find it surprising that Sanguinara has not taken direct action against the Enochian Church, especially since the founding of Order of St. Vitus, a haven for Accursed. What most folk believe is that the Countess and the Church have a sort of wary truce between them. The Enochians, for their part, do not openly agitate against the Countess nor give her any reason to meddle in their affairs. In return, the Blood Witch has seen fit to largely ignore the Church's actions in her domain.

There are numerous theories as to why this complicated relationship persists. Some say that the Blood Witch may be both extremely powerful and cunning, but even she has her blind spots. When it comes to Sanguinara, her pride insists that there is no possibility that the Church could ever be a serious threat to her rule. Thus, she ignores the Church not because some kind of deal is in place, but rather due to the fact that she is absorbed in orchestrating dozens of byzantine schemes from her court in Kulidar.

Other scholars believe that the Enochian Church's caution is to blame. With a Witch in their own backyard, the church would be wise not to rock to boat. There are exceptions, of course, such as Father Hunyadi (see page 19). Typically, Enochian priests keep out of Sanguinara's business in Valkenholm and stick to ministering to the people. Lastly, keeping out of the Church's affairs provides the Blood Witch with an opportunity to threaten this arrangement if events seem to be spiraling out of her control (see *A Policy of Restraint* on page 20).

Arguments persist over which interpretation is correct. There are a few holdouts who stubbornly insist that both may be true, whilst others claim just as stridently that both are false. In the end, the only sure thing about the Enochian Church's position in Valkenholm is that it is precarious, at best.

Father Hunyadi

The Enochian clergy are no friends to the Witches or their servants, and none oppose them more vigorously than Father Elias Hunyadi of Valkenholm.

An elderly priest renowned for his education and judgment, Father Hunyadi has begun a new stage in his life since the arrival of Sanguinara. The priest has dedicated himself to organizing resistance against the Witches, and he uses both rational discourse and fiery, passionate oratory to inspire others in pursuit of this effort. Father Hunyadi has had numerous close calls with the Watch, and the elaborate precautions he takes to continue his secret crusade have caused some to label him paranoid. He never stays in the same place for more than one night and often chooses common folk to act as messengers and agents to cause small, seemingly coincidental effects—a cache of powder and bullets left in a certain basket at a certain street corner or a note instructing an innkeeper to provide food and shelter for four strangers to arrive at midnight. The priest has become known as “the spider” by the Watch, a tribute to the efficiency of his efforts. Many Accursed (knowingly or otherwise) owe Father Hunyadi their lives due to the assistance he and his network provide for the Order of St. Vitus in Valkenholm.

Massif Helsenn

The oldest and most majestic stronghold of the Enochian Church is the sprawling cliffside cathedral known as Massif Helsenn. The Massif was built early during the reign of King Stefan the First, when the Enochian faith was sweeping across most of Morden. Since then, the cathedral has only grown in prominence and stature, meaning that in modern times it is considered the physical center of the faith and a symbol of the Enochian creed.

Physically speaking, the Massif is composed of a tall central tower of grey basalt that dominates the region for leagues. Below it, the cathedral is a squat and massive construction, incorporating a gothic style of architecture with many tall, stained-glass windows depicting important figures of the Enochian religion. Since the end of the Bane War, a small community has developed around the exterior of Massif Helsenn. Refugees built up and inhabit this ramshackle town, adding marketplaces, housing blocks, and a zigzagging labyrinth of streets to the surrounding hillsides.

Massif Helsenn is also the headquarters of the Order of St. Vitus, more commonly known as the Order of the Penitent. This group of Accursed fights back against the Witches who have conquered Morden, and the Massif is where they are equipped, trained, and briefed on missions related to that goal. The site has an enormous library filled with books on various subjects, including one of the largest collections of information on Witchcraft, banes, and the occult. The Massif also possesses an elaborate alchemical laboratory capable

A Policy of Restraint

Sanguinara enforces her edicts on Valkenholm through subtlety rather than overt oppression. This “policy of restraint” ensures that the populace is aware that the Blood Witch is intentionally choosing the velvet glove over the iron fist. She accomplishes this through the following methods:

- Sanguinara confines the majority of her banes to wild and undeveloped lands, only allowing a handful to terrorize large settlements. Small villages are frequent targets for these monsters, however.
- The Countess takes care not to replace too many important citizens with vampires or her own agents. This allows the people to believe that they still have some nobles who represent their interests in her court. Putting up the appearance works in her favor, as it decreases the likelihood of revolution.
- The Blood Witch restricts most of her enforcements and edicts to Redhawk patrols, notices on the village green, and sending carefully worded messages to town leaders. Sanguinara rules by fear, but she is not so unwise as to bolster that fear with constant displays of tyranny.
- The Countess keeps her hands-off approach to the Enochian Church as an example of her mercy and forbearance. This allows her to use indirect threats against the Church as a means to further manipulate the folk of Valkenholm into doing what she wants. In the Blood Witch’s own words, “You wouldn’t want me to find an excuse to change my policy about the Church, now would you? I’m sure neither one of us wants to find your quaint little religion pulled out by the roots.”

of producing many exotic materials. Often, these materials exploit vulnerabilities of the Witches and their Banes.

Culture

Valkenfolk have suffered much since the Bane War began. Their pride has been broken. Once, they considered themselves just a little bit better than citizens of other realms. Now, patriotism and morale have plummeted as they labor under misfortune. The presence of the Blood Witch as the ruler of their land has had an impact as well—even the subjugated clans of Cairn Kainen are largely ignored by the Morrigan, after all. So the people of Valkenholm have had to adapt to their circumstances.

Most of the common folk have a grim, dry humor, joking at the twists and turns of life with absurd understatements. A jape used regularly along the Scythe River goes like this: “No flood yet this season,” followed by a significant pause and a meaningful look, then emphasizing the follow-up: “Yet!” This refrain often results in tight smiles, chuckles, or shaking heads amongst those who make their living on or near the river.

Superstitions and Folk Tales

The most prevalent superstition for Valkenfolk involves the deepwode: the darkest, most remote parts of their land’s thick forest. The saying goes, “When the mist curls around the trees and the shadows seem like sentinels, when you feel like you’re being watched—you’ve entered the deepwode.” It is believed that these hidden groves are where the most dangerous monsters lair; where nightmares are born. Some scholars attribute this to the deepest woods having been the territory of dangerous predators, such as wolves and bears.

Perhaps because of this, black-furred wolves (which are not at all rare!) are considered bad luck. It is believed that the Blood Witch can see through the eyes and ears of wolves, and that both leeches and mosquitos are her servants. Some apothecaries in Valkenholm have learned to keep their stock of leeches behind the counter to avoid the stigma of this belief. For those who believe in this superstition, the discovery of a swarm of leeches or mosquitos is a cause for major concern. This particular belief is strongest among the many settlements near the Scythe River.

THE SPATHA SANCTA

In the evening, Valkenfolk both noble and common enjoy tales about the holy sword known as the Spatha Sancta. There are many stories about the blade, concerning heroes who wielded it against darkness. According to legend, the Spatha Sancta was forged by a divinely inspired smith, his craft blessed by the Creator. The sword’s blade is said to gleam like polished silver, its edge to cleave through any defense. Some stories say the weapon’s inherent purity burns the creations of the Witches, and some even whisper that the Spatha Sancta may be one of the only ways to destroy a Witch. After all, the Djinn’s destruction was caused by the strike of King Auberon’s fey-enchanted spear.

One tale of the Spatha Sancta concerns a knight of some renown, Sir Ventura. This knight was exploring a cavern in the Darkwall mountains at the height of the harvest moon. There, he fought a ghostly warrior who wished to claim the knight’s soul. Nearly beaten, the knight found a sword close at hand in the grasp of an ancient corpse. Wielding the blade, he finally defeated his spectral opponent.

The Song of Seth describes a young shepherd who came across a sword buried point-first in the soil. Taking the blade back to his village, he found that a newcomer had entranced most of his friends and family with unusual bargains. Whilst holding the sword’s hilt, young Seth could see that this newcomer was an Unseelie Fey in disguise. When Seth exposed the Unseelie’s deception, his village exiled the newcomer and celebrated the young boy’s accomplishment.

Celebrations and Holidays

Perhaps the most festive celebration in Valkenholm is known as Hallowseve. This event comes at the end of the harvest season, and involves feasts, dances, and friendly competitions in villages and towns across the realm. It is customary for each participant to offer a portion of their meal to the Creator. In recent years, a new twist has been added to Hallowseve. More common amongst the younger folk, the new tradition requires a small, separate gathering after moonrise to share grisly tales of Jack O’Harvest, an infamously terrifying bane.

Every year, there is Founding Day, remembering the uprising that created Valkenholm and enshrined by generations of kings. To mark the occasion, every home is meant to display a wreath of amaranth or holly. Traditionally, visitors who touch the wreath and offer a blessing to the king (now considered treasonous under the Countess’s rule) are granted hospitality at any home displaying it.

Food and Drink

Taverns across Valkenholm stock *houshkah*—a type of fiery brandy. Traditional brews are also readily available, including wines, meads, and beers. Hunters and miners typically prefer darker brews, while the noble classes tend toward wines, often imported from Manreia.

Many households rely on *catch-bowls*, a term used for pots of simmering stew or soup that are served for nearly every meal, as their main source of food. These catch-bowls are typically stocked with hearty vegetables and chunks of meat—most typically fowl and beef. Naturally, folk near the Scythe River dine on varieties of fish. A silver-scaled trout-like fish called *shanner* is deliciously flaky when fried in an iron pan with a handful of spices.

Music and Dance

The folk of Valkenholm learned much from their neighbors, particularly the Remans of the Ash Plains. The legacy of that ruined realm lives on in the wild reels and jigs of the country folk near the river. Nobles

Kulidar

- 1 - Crimson Hall
- 2 - Charity Cathedral
- 3 - North Market
- 4 - South Market



prefer more refined music, typically produced by flute and violin rather than by fiddle or accordion. Dances in the Blood Witch's court are formal affairs, with every part choreographed in detail. Many taverns and dance halls outside the capital, however, prefer their music free and light, their dancing improvisational and energetic.

Kulidar

Even after the Blood Witch's conquest, Kulidar is one of the largest and most cosmopolitan cities in all of Morden. Rivalled only by Palmyria in Manreia, Kulidar is a bustling centerpiece for commerce, industry, and social intrigue. Much of the city's center is of older and more complex construction techniques and architecture. The diversity pleases the eye and blends into a pattern of different, yet complimentary styles. The further one gets from the center, however, Kulidar's character changes slowly into one of crowded tenement buildings, decaying warehouses, and raucous taverns meant to service the needs of river men, sailors, and mercenaries. Residents divide Kulidar into three distinct districts. However, newcomers may have a hard time navigating between these or even telling one apart from the other where the districts border.

Noble District

Built around the heart of Kulidar, Noble District is a picture of wealth, luxury, and class that has been influential across Morden. The ruling families of Manreia have been particularly envious of Kulidar's almost effortless appeal, and several Manreian villas have touches intended to call to mind Kulidar's solid, fanciful style. A small number of shops and services are available in the city center—mostly those oriented toward folk with plenty of money to spend. Carriage services, purveyors of fine dresses and suits in the latest styles, and wineries make up the majority of these establishments. Art galleries, book dealers, and antique shops make up the remainder amongst a handful of cafes, prestigious social clubs, and the occasional specialized service provider.

By far, however, the Noble District is composed of fine manor houses, mansions, and cliff-side estates. The rich and powerful of Kulidar always display their status ostentatiously, most commonly through their homes. One can sometimes gauge the ebb and flow of a family's fortunes in Sanguinara's court simply by observing the decorations, cleanliness, and stability of staff at these various chateaus.

THE BLOOD WITCH'S COURT

No mention of Noble District is complete without addressing the court of the Countess, Sanguinara. As the ruler of Valkenholm, she has brought many changes to the seat of government in Kulidar. Once known only as the Hightower, this palace is now named for its current resident—the Crimson Hall. Within this tall and luxuriously appointed edifice, the Blood Witch holds court—a social gathering that is known across Morden for the labyrinthine nature of its intrigues and the stunning impact it has both socially and visually for newcomers unused to such decadence.

Impeccable tailoring, a sense of style, and—above all—confidence is a must to survive in the ruthless social currents of Sanguinara's court. Every courtier is constantly watchful for any weakness, as the court rewards the vigilant and the opportunistic. Sanguinara herself rarely dispenses favors or displeasure directly within the court, but it is enough that the courtiers recognize her authority and that pleasing her is a sure path to social dominance. Even more than that, members of Sanguinara's court are quite influential—any aspiring merchant, outsider, or lesser noble who wishes a particular favor must make an appearance in the court or involve a proxy. Examples include mining rights, tax waivers, and even forgiveness for past crimes—any of which could come at the cost to nobles belonging to the court.

An unusual feature of Sanguinara's court is that the countess always extends an invitation to the Enochian church. Rather than upset the delicate balance, the priesthood almost always sends a representative to attend her fetes. Priests sent to these functions are often considered outsiders and shunned by most of the attendees of the court. Newcomers rarely fail to notice the dour and severe dress of the black-robed Enochians in contrast to the vibrant plumage of the other courtiers.

Blood Maiden

It is unknown why the Blood Witch crafted this bane to serve her. Some believe it is because the blood maidens serve well as spies and informants, but others point out that the Watch serves those same purposes. Some claim that the blood maidens represent Sanguinara's desire for companionship she can utterly trust, but others say that vampires fill that role. Whatever the truth, these banes are amongst the most rare creations of the Blood Witch—no more than a handful exist throughout Valkenholm.

In appearance, a blood maiden looks much like a crimson-haired woman of stunning beauty. However, blood maidens possess a mouth full of razor-sharp teeth, and when that maw is opened, their inhuman

Plans within Plans

The Countess continually encourages the nobles of Valkenholm to engage in Byzantine schemes and plots. The point of these plans is to elevate a family's wealth, influence at court, or status at the cost of another. While the Blood Witch enjoys the resulting intrigue, the suspicion and expectations this behavior encourages creates an opportunity for canny Accursed.

Persuasion and Intimidation checks gain a +2 bonus in Valkenholm's high society if the character adequately links his actions with the schemes of the Blood Witch's court. For example, the character might hint that his group's activities are part of a certain noble's conspiracy, or declare that the enemies they are tracking down are, in fact, part of some hidden plan of a nobleman's rival. The Game Master should use his discretion as to whether the Skill check should receive this bonus in play.

nature becomes plain. The blood maiden's mouth is much like that of a lamprey—and a lamprey is, in fact, this creature's alternate form. In an instant, a blood maiden can shift between her humanoid and lamprey shapes with ease. In either form, the bane's funnel-like fang-lined mouth can inflict deep wounds, devouring both meat and blood to gain unnatural strength and vitality in return.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d10

Skills: Athletics d8, Fighting d10, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Streetwise d6, Subterfuge d10, Tracking d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 7

Special Abilities

Bite: Str + d6.

Blood Frenzy: Once a significant amount of blood is spilt, either on land or in the water, the blood maiden goes into a feeding frenzy. This state adds +2 to the blood maiden's attacks and damage for the remainder of the fight.

Aquatic: Pace 10.

Fearless: Blood maidens are immune to Fear and Intimidation.

Foul Strength: A blood maiden who inflicts a wound on a foe with its bite gains +1 die type in Strength and Vigor for the remainder of the scene, to a maximum of d12. Outside of combat, these increases last for one hour.

Weakness (Wood): As a creation of the Blood Witch, blood maidens suffer +4 damage from weapons made of wood.

Witchline (Blood Witch): Banes of the Blood Witch can be sensed by Dhampir Accursed within 25 feet.

Trade District

The largest region of Kulidar is known as Trade District. Here, most of the city's middle-class citizens live and work. All kinds of dwellings can be found in this sector, ranging from impressive multi-story homes to crowded tenement buildings where numerous families live in single-room apartments. The Trade district is one of the few places in Morden where visitors can find a vast array of services and shops. There are printing presses, carriage-makers who build to order, hostlers, alchemists, apothecaries, cartographers, and even a few shops that specialize in making musical instruments. However, industries that focus on wood are actively discouraged from the district. Instead, blacksmiths, jewelers, and metalworking shops are far more prominent here. The Countess has frowned upon woodworkers and carpentry shops to the point where the majority of those services can only be found outside the walls of Kulidar.

The crowded conditions in Trade District make it the best option for those who wish to keep a low profile while in the capital city. The streets are often thronged with citizens travelling to or from work, shopping, or travelling to the outlying farms that lie along the river's edge. The city is so large, in fact, that a handful of Accursed on the streets of this district are not particularly unusual. Of all the places in Morden where Witchmarked can go about their business in relative normalcy, Kulidar's Trade District sets the standard.

Church District

The smallest of the three districts of Kulidar, this region is near the Scythe River. During the early days of King Stefan's reign, he turned over a portion of the city to the Enochian faith as a gesture of goodwill. The King's intent was to welcome Enochian priests into his capital, where they would then build a sprawling center of worship that would only enhance the city's prestige. The King's plan succeeded, but only to a point. The church did indeed build a temple, convents, and monasteries in Kulidar, but ultimately, they decided that Massif Helsenn would be their grandest cathedral and returned the land set aside for their use in the city to the King's control.

However, the name of the district stuck. Church District does feature Charity Cathedral, several schools, and monasteries for different orders. However, it is far more prominently characterized as the main river port for the city. A long series of wharfs runs along the riverbank for visiting traders to use for loading and unloading cargo. Warehouses are available nearby to store goods that are in transit. There are shipwrights who ply their trade here as well, and sailors patronize many low cost inns, brothels, and taverns that service their kind.

The port is often quite busy, as Kulidar is a center of trade between the nations of Morden. Even in the depths of the coldest winter, the Scythe River remains flowing, ensuring that trade barely even slows down during that part of the year. Sanguinara tends to keep an eye on the port here with the Watch, ostensibly to stop smuggling. In truth, the Blood Witch is merely being cautious that her rivals—including her fellow Witch, the Gorgon, Melusine—do not attempt to disrupt this profitable activity.

Mines of Valkenholm

Several mineral-rich veins thread throughout the surrounding stone just below the surface of Valkenholm. Quarries and mines have been established in nearly every corner of the nation to uncover the area's wealth. Some Valkenfolk have struck it rich merely by panning tributaries of the Scythe River, whilst others have located significant deposits of bauxite, iron, and copper. Silver and gold mines are much more rare, but there are established mines that have encountered these precious metals in abundance.

During the time of the Grafs, the mines served only to enrich the nobility. Under the rule of King Stefan and his descendants, however, miners were encouraged to organize and own a stake in the mines in which they worked and knew so well. This led to the establishment of the Miner's Guild, a powerful force in the House of Commons for many years. However, the Guild has suffered greatly under the reign of Sanguinara. The Blood Witch keeps this organization under careful scrutiny by the Watch, for several members of the Miner's Guild are amongst her most outspoken opponents. The Miner's Guild has given refuge to the Accursed from time to time, especially those who are working with the Order of the Penitent to try and break Sanguinara's grip on their homeland.

The Watch

Spies, secret police, and killers. Those three epithets are commonly associated with the group known as the Watch. Founded in the early days of Sanguinara's reign, the Watch was established by the Blood Witch to root out any who objected to her rule. Naturally, the organization evolved over time as a tool to express the Countess's displeasure with any dissidents. Over time, the Watch has become well known as an extension of the Blood Witch's will—intimidating any who are brave enough to express dissatisfaction or disagreement.

The Watch's reputation extends its influence far beyond the actual organization's numbers. Sanguinara keeps the Watch small—it is said that there are

less than fifty members. The organization spreads disinformation about itself and pays for informants, agents, and other cat's-paws to make it seem like the Watch are everywhere in Valkenholm.

Law enforcement is the least of the Watch's duties. Certainly, the Watch does consult on matters of security and have been called in from time to time to investigate crimes when the Countess has a special interest. However, the Watch's responsibility as "secret police" is by far their most common task, hounding any political opponents. Accursed, especially members of the Order of the Penitent, have become a focus for the Watch in recent years. The organization keeps a sharp eye out for any would be heroes attempting to disrupt the Blood Witch's schemes.

The Watch also acts as Sanguinara's espionage force, keeping tabs on rival agents and pilfering any plans or letters they can obtain from foreign diplomats, merchants, and other figures of note. The Watch's attention is split in many directions, meaning that they are not particularly effective as spies, but this does not stop them from trying. In many cases, the Watch's dark reputation is enough to ensure that someone, somewhere, is willing to divulge the secrets that they seek.

At least a dozen members of the Watch operate as professional assassins. A young woman known as Little Red Cap is believed to lead this select subunit. Her name comes from her tradition of dipping the hood of her cloak in the blood of her victims. A ruthless predator, Little Red Cap and her band of killers have been responsible for "vanishing" over a hundred people within the last several years. What is truly frightening is that no one targeted by this group has survived, no matter what precautions they may have taken. Some dissidents have been slain inside locked rooms within a well guarded castle, killed during the performance of a play, or simply disappeared from the interior of a moving carriage. Little Red Cap and her men are certainly one of the most important reasons that the Watch is feared, even beyond the borders of Valkenholm.

Within the nation, the Watch inspires fear—but never respect. The people of Valkenholm who remember the reign of King Stefan chafe at the draconian measures Sanguinara has instituted, and the Watch is seen as one of the most prominent symbols of the Blood Witch's rule. Members of the Watch have come to enjoy the perks of their station, but they must be on their guard whenever they are out amongst commoners. Fear only goes so far, and more than one Watch agent has faced an angry mob at an inopportune time.



Watch Agent

This profile represents a typical Watch Agent in Valkenholm. Watch Agents are assassins and spies, not front-line warriors.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Athletics d6, Fighting d6, Intimidation d8, Lockpicking d8, Notice d6, Persuasion d8, Subterfuge d6, Streetwise d6

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5;

Toughness: 8 (3)

Edges: Attractive

Gear: Hand axe (Str + d6) or dagger (Str + d4), reinforced great coat (Armor 3), badge of authority, lockpicks, disguise, crowbar, grappling hook and line

The Redhawks

While the Watch keeps the people of Valkenholm in line, the Blood Witch counts on her retinue of vampiric knights to protect her person. The Redhawks are plate-clad warriors who ride jet-black horses and are all quite skilled with blades. A few Redhawks have chosen to learn the art of the lance, although the wooden weapons are dangerous for a vampire to wield. Regardless of what arms they bear, the Redhawk knights are the Countess's mailed fist, riding

out whenever she needs to send a strong message of her displeasure. More than a few villages found to be harboring Accursed or engaged in sedition have been razed under the crimson-and-black banner of these cruel soldiers.

The Redhawk order of knights has a long history within Valkenholm, founded by King Reacher over a hundred and fifty years prior to the end of the Bane War. Prior to Sanguinara's arrival, the Redhawks had a sterling, if little-known, reputation as border guards and sentinels against creatures wandering down from the Outlands. Upon the eve of the Blood Witch's conquest, the order's leader, Sir Azriel, pledged his undying loyalty to Sanguinara and brought the brotherhood into her bloody service.

Many in Valkenholm believe that the Countess's choice of bodyguard is a slap in the face, denigrating the proud falcon that had been the sigil of the nation for many years and replacing it with an entirely different gore-red raptor. Nor are the Redhawks particularly chivalrous—Sanguinara prizes her knights for their loyalty, strength, and callousness above all. Never has any Redhawk failed to follow the Countess's orders to the letter. In addition to that fanatical zeal, Redhawks are outfitted with finely crafted weapons, armor, and a well-trained steed. Finally, after swearing their oaths, Sanguinara personally transforms each Redhawk into a vampire with her kiss. The Order of the Penitent considers the Redhawks one of the most dangerous threats in Valkenholm, aside from the Blood Witch herself.

Because they often accompany Countess Sanguinara to formal events, Redhawk knights must be more than mere warriors—they must also blend the art of bodyguard and courtier. Although the group is a form of brotherhood, there is a healthy rivalry among the Redhawks for the Countess's favors. This rivalry occasionally escalates into feuds and duels between the proud knights, while the Blood Witch revels in the attention. Sanguinara encourages this competition, encouraging her knights to act like jealous lovers.

Competing for the Countess's favor is a complicated art among the Redhawks. Some knights have distinguished themselves in fields of art. At least two are accomplished lyricists, while others dabble in gothic-themed poetry and song. Other Redhawks prefer to attract her attention with feats of arms, but this is often a doomed venture—the leader of their group, Sir Azriel, is nearly indomitable in combat and tends to overshadow the others. A few of the younger, more foolish knights have attempted feats of daring instead, taking unwise risks such as attacking

multiple enemies alone or using bare hands rather than a weapon in combat. Others try riding their black chargers at breakneck speeds in flashy methods, such as galloping through the crowded market square at dusk. The antics of these younger and more foolish knights are tolerated by the veteran Redhawks. "Fools," they say, "are good for sport, amusement, and drawing out an enemy's blade."

Redhawk Knight

The Morden Vampire statistics found in *Accursed* (page 118) are quite dangerous, but Redhawks are much more skilled.

Attributes: Agility d12, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d12, Vigor d10

Skills: Athletics d6, Fighting d12, Intimidation d10, Knowledge (Heraldry) d6, Notice d10, Persuasion d10, Riding d10, Subterfuge d10

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 10; **Toughness:** 10 (3)

Gear: Plate mail, broadsword (Str +d8)

Special Abilities

Charm: Vampires can use the *puppet* power using their Smarts as their arcane skill. They can cast and maintain the power indefinitely, but may only affect one target at a time.

Children of the Night: Vampires have the ability to summon and control bats. This requires an action and a Smarts roll at -2. If successful, 1d4 swarms of bats come from the surrounding wilds in 1d6+2 rounds.

Regeneration: Vampires have the ability to rapidly heal wounds. Vampires possess Slow Regeneration. Wounds caused by wooden weapons can only be healed normally.

Swift: Vampires gain +2 Parry and the Quick Edge.

Weakness (Blood): This is not a weakness to blood itself, but a method of stalling a vampire. If a pint of blood is thrown over a vampire (requiring a successful Throwing attack), it must make a Spirit roll or be Shaken as it licks up the blood.

Weakness (Invitation Only): Vampires cannot enter a private dwelling without being invited. They may enter public domains as they please.

Weakness (Sunlight): Vampires catch fire if any part of their skin is exposed to direct sunlight. After that, the vampire suffers 2d10 damage per round until he is dust. Armor does not protect against this damage.

Weakness (Wood): As a creation of the Blood Witch, vampires suffer +4 damage from weapons made of wood.

Witchline (Blood Witch): Banes of the Blood Witch can be sensed by Dhampir Accursed within 25 feet.

Disbanded orders of knighthood

After the end of the Bane War, there were few knights left alive in Valkenholm. Those who remained had either arrived too late to take part or had been wounded and managed to escape the hungry, hunting banes in the battle's aftermath. Once Sanguinara completed her takeover of the nation, there were only a handful of places such warriors could hide. In fact, most chose to die in battle, often against impossible odds, rather than lay down their arms under the Blood Witch's subjugation. One of Countess Sanguinara's first acts upon assuming control of Valkenholm was to formally disband and label outlaw the proud orders of knighthood that had defended the royal lineage for centuries. Now, only the vile and hated Redhawks are allowed to become knights of the realm.

The former chapterhouses and headquarters of these knightly orders have been torn down, repurposed, or stand empty—filled with dusty remnants of a bygone age. There are a few old men with fierce eyes who know what it was like to serve as a knight under King Stefan. Although these days, it is more likely those men were young squires or pages when the Last Battle came. For the most part, the knights of Valkenholm are but a quaint memory. Yet, there are some strong souls who remember the codes of honor and chivalry—embers of defiance against the Blood Witch awaiting only an opportunity to flare into rebellion. Oftentimes, these would be knights are the sons and daughters of the defeated generation, raised on stories of glory and righteous duty.

A sampling of the disbanded Valkenholm knightly orders include:

- The Twilight Brotherhood
- The Order of the Gauntlet
- The Dawnblades
- Band of the Silver Crescent
- Sisters of the Moon

Medivita

A small yet prosperous town in Eastern Valkenholm, Medivita is a picturesque destination for wealthy nobles looking to escape the metropolitan environment of Kulidar. Count Jurgen, the town's mayor, is famous for his collection of art and sculpture from across Morden. Jurgen lives in a palatial villa perched on the edge of a tall cliff, sometimes used as a port of call for Manreian airships.

Originally a farming village, Medivita's natural beauty attracted the Valkenfolk nobility, and several built summer homes here. Over time, the frequent visits of these wealthy and influential people had a profound effect on the town. Medivita is one of the few

King Stefan's Regalia

A common folk tale that circulates in the countryside of Valkenholm discusses the fate of King Stefan Hightower after the Last Battle. Some believe that when the king fell in battle, his regalia—said to consist of his crown, cape, and orb—was taken from the castle and hidden away before the Blood Witch seized power. According to the stories, these items can prove the lineage of Valkenholm's true ruler, whoever that may be. Others say that once the regalia is reclaimed, it is a sign that Countess Sanguinara's reign is coming to an end. Mostly, adventurous youths in the villages of Valkenholm are the only ones who put much faith in these stories. Nevertheless, in the depths of night, more than one greybeard has muttered in his cups about the regalia of the last king... perhaps in the vain hope that it might be found and reclaimed some day soon.

small settlements with higher prices for every good and service than Kulidar itself. The common folk of Medivita are not ungrateful for the prosperity of their town, but they do nurture a hidden resentment of the arrogant way many nobles treat their homes and businesses as if there were no other purpose than to please their overbearing, privileged folk.

BARONET MICHAELUS

Medivita's darkest secret lies within a grand mansion built high above the rushing Scythe River. Only reachable via a crumbling stone bridge, the mansion looks old and run-down, its grandeur faded after years of neglect. It is the home of Baronet Michaelus, a middle aged man, squandering the wealth of his minor noble house in a mad quest to see the future.

Michaelus is dying slowly of a consumptive disease, every year wracks his body with greater pain, his mind bitterer about his fate. A tall man, the Baronet was quite a warrior in his youth and retains some of that strapping physique—though his face is quite gaunt, his skin blemished with boils and pockmarked from his ravaging ailment. According to rumors at court, the Baronet contracted this plague when he dared to dabble in witchcraft. A miscast spell resulted in the Baronet's current condition.

The townsfolk of Medivita have grown accustomed to the reclusive nobleman's eccentricities. Mysterious deliveries in the dead of night are not uncommon. Nor are the unusual visitors he receives at dusk considered noteworthy. Some amongst the Accursed have noted that this apathy is quite out of the ordinary and



suspect that the Baronet has somehow laid a mantle of disinterest over the settlement.

The Baronet's formerly keen intellect has become twisted toward unlocking the future, to catch a glimpse of what is to come in a bid to change his destiny. He has purchased, at great expense, a vast orrery—a contraption of clockwork gears and brass spheres, mimicking the movements of the heavens. This device has become his prognosticator, reading the portents of the future in the movements of the complex machine. The orrery was constructed by the infamously insane genius of Manreia, Franken Von Nachtmachen.

The Baronet caused a small scandal amongst the Blood Witch's court when it became known that he had employed a small tribe of Leech-men as his personal guards and valets. The mad nobleman clads these hideous banes in human clothing, making them a mockery of butlers, valets, and other servants. It is not entirely known how he secured these monsters' loyalty. However, the answer may lie in the numerous disappearances from the small village over the last few months. Rumors claim that human bodies, bled white, are dumped into the river every fortnight.

Recently, Michaelus's orrery has attracted the interest of the Order of St. Vitus. Victor von Drake has dispatched a group of Accursed to determine whether or not the machine works. Having a means to divine the future would be a powerful tool against the Witches, no matter how dangerous such knowledge might be.

Leskassa

Deep in the Sunken Lands lies the village of Leskassa. On the surface, it appears to be a fairly typical example of its kind, if even more isolated than others. Leskassa is centered around its wood mill, with several outlying warehouses where lumber is stored and dried. A mayor and merchant council run the village, as the wealthiest and most influential members of its limited population.

All sense of normalcy and industry come to a complete halt during each midsummer festival. This week long event is held in Leskassa to honor a being known as "The Green Man." It involves the citizens dressing in elaborate costumes, dances, and feasts. There is a competition for the most fanciful or lifelike topiary in honor of the season. Far more sinister, however, is that the role of "the Green Man" must be filled by an outsider, typically one plied with strong drink to muddle his understanding. At the height of the celebrations, the Green Man's proxy is tied to a stone and sunk deep beneath a muddy estuary, entombing the victim for all time there amongst countless others.

None are truly certain of the origin of this festival, not even the villagers themselves. If asked, some of the elders suggest that the Green Man might have been an unseelie fey who cursed the village. Others claim that the Green Man was another being altogether, slain during the Bane War.

Ghorgenni—The Village of Scars

In eastern Valkenholm lies a quiet hamlet tucked away in a picturesque valley. The village of Ghorgenni is on a well-travelled trade route that winds all the way to the capitol. Once known as the Kingsway, this thoroughfare has a new name under the rule of Sanguinara—the Red Road.

Ghorgenni is primarily a farming village, although it does possess one uncommon industry: candle-making. There is a sophisticated chandlery in the village, and several locals are involved in the process of crafting exquisite, scented, wax candles. Once known for its craftsmanship, there is an altogether more sinister reason that the town has garnered notice since the end of the Bane War.

The men and women of Ghorgenni were uncommonly attractive and gathered many admirers over the decades. So well-formed of face and figure were the youth of Ghorgenni that at one time, there was a tradition amongst wealthy young nobles from

the Outlands and Caer Kainen to woo spouses from the village. It was this tradition that led to the Blood Witch's first, fateful visit.

Sanguinara chose several of the town's most beautiful young men and women to become her attendants at Kulidar. None of these young people were ever seen again, and the village was thrown into deep sorrow. At the turn of the next solstice, Sanguinara came again, once more taking a handful of attractive young people with her.

The town held a meeting the very next night. They knew that the Blood Witch would return, and they were determined to save the next generation of their families from enduring whatever fate lay ahead in Sanguinara's court. The discussion lasted throughout the night, and from that next day forward, the town has enacted a course that has so far worked to avoid the Blood Witch's attentions.

Everyone who lives in Ghorgenni bears a deep and disfiguring scar. Whenever a child comes of age, they too are initiated into the town's solution, and a ragged blade is drawn across the face. It is a gruesome answer to the Blood Witch's threat, but none can question the villager's dedication to protecting their own.

Chiropteran

These bizarre creatures resemble a hybrid between a man and bat. Standing roughly seven feet in height with a wingspan to match, the face of a chiropteran is hideous—possessing many bat-like features, including a protruding snout, vicious fangs, and huge, pointed ears. The body of a chiropteran is lanky, but corded with muscle, and covered in bristles of short night-black hair. Its eyes are a deep, vibrant crimson in color.

Created by the Blood Witch to be scouts and assassins, the chiropterans rarely travel in groups larger than three. More often, a single chiropteran is dispatched with orders to kill, intimidate, or locate a potential target. Chiropterans are not particularly bright, although they are sentient beings and not animals. They can speak in short phrases, although it can be difficult to make out their words due to the creature's bestial maw.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d8, Subterfuge d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7

Special Abilities

Bite/Claws: Str + d6.

Combat Reflexes: +2 to recover from being Shaken.

Fear: Anyone who sees a chiropteran (or hears its

howl) must make a fear test.

Flight: A chiropteran flies with Pace 18 and a Climb of 3.

Frenzy (Imp): Chiropterans can make two Fighting rolls per round with no penalty.

Low-light vision: Chiropterans ignore penalties for Dim or Dark lighting.

Weakness (Wood): As a creation of the Blood Witch, chiropterans suffer +4 damage from weapons made of wood.

Witchline (Blood Witch): Banes of the Blood Witch can be sensed by Dhampir Accursed within 25 feet.

Valkenholm Edges

The following are new Edges available for Accursed characters.

BLOOD RUNNER

Requirements: Seasoned, Dhampir or Vampire, Agility D10+,

The creations of the Blood Witch, perhaps unsurprisingly, draw power from consuming what flows through the veins of their prey. This macabre diet provides certain benefits, especially for the Vampires and their Accursed kin, the Dhampir. For these beings, it is possible to tap into the vital life force contained in blood, enhancing one's own speed and grace. Those



who learn this secret become unnaturally swift on their feet, and it is far more difficult to successfully land a blow against them.

If the character feeds on enough fresh human blood to have dealt a wound to the source, she increases her run die by one step and gains +1 Parry for the next 12 hours.

KING STEFAN'S LEGACY

Requirements: Novice

Valkenholm was both the mustering site of the Grand Alliance and the location of the final major battle of the Bane War. The land has several old battlegrounds where the defenders of Morden fell against the Witches and their dark armies. These fallen heroes left behind many master-forged weapons and armor, some of which were taken later by scavengers or recovered by determined family members. In any case, the character has become the guardian and possessor of one of these items, but it is a blessing with two edges. First, the item itself is of great quality. Second, however, the weapon or armor is marked with the emblems of the Alliance, making the character a target for the Witches and their servants.

Select one melee weapon or one piece of armor. A weapon gains a permanent +2 bonus to damage, while armor gains a permanent +2 armor rating. This Edge can only be selected during character creation.

MERCILESS ASSASSIN

Requirements: Seasoned, Dhampir or Vampire

For the nobles of Valkenholm, murder has become a commonplace tool in their schemes. Whether exacting revenge or simply removing a key player from the game, assassins have plied their trade openly under Countess Sanguinara's reign. A sharp blade and a bloodthirsty mind can earn a fortune in Kulidar serving the whims of the Blood Witch's court. Both freelance killers and those sworn to the Watch have learned to strike when their foe is most vulnerable.

When the character spends a benny to re-roll damage, she may add +2 to the total result.

Valkenholm Hindrances

The following are new Hindrances available for Accursed characters.

BLOOD FEAST (MAJOR)

The allure of fresh blood is difficult to describe to one who is not a Vampire or Dhampir. Crafted into each of the Blood Witch's creations is a dark hunger, a craving for the coppery taste of this crimson fluid. Some amongst Sanguinara's creations feel this desire for blood more strongly than others, finding it difficult to restrain themselves from acquiring more.

Taking this hindrance replaces the Dhampir's Blood Hunger. If the character does not feed on blood she must make a Fatigue check every 24 hours thereafter. The first failed roll makes the character Fatigued, the next Exhausted. The character does not go beyond Exhausted due to this Hindrance. Additionally, the character must make a Spirit Roll at -2 whenever presented with the chance to taste fresh blood. If the character fails this roll, they suffer from the Mean Hindrance for the next 12 hours.

OBSERVED BY THE WATCH (MINOR)

To be under the gaze of the Watch is not a matter of small concern, at least, in Valkenholm. Within the borders of that nation, the Watch's influence is pervasive, their agents present in nearly every settlement. Taking this hindrance means that the character has attracted the Watch's interest, and that they have marked her as an enemy of the Blood Witch. It is nearly certain that the character's public activities are noted and recorded, information about the character's appearance or gear is reported to the Countess, and that banes or other servants of the Blood Witch are rarely far away.

SCHEMER (MINOR)

It is not difficult to become ensnared in the web of plots and conspiracies found in the Blood Witch's court. Sanguinara enjoys the game precisely because it is addictive to many. The triumph of seeing a particular plan come to fruition or for foiling the carefully nurtured strategy of an opponent can become habitual. Possessing this Hindrance means that the character is obsessed with weaving (or unraveling) plots involving high society, the Blood Witch's court, or any another similar gathering (such as the Council of Warlocks in Manreia). The character suffers -1 Charisma outside of such groups due to his preoccupation with byzantine conspiracies.