

EPIC HIGH FANTASY

Shandar

GUIDEBOOK



SHAYA'NOR

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DARKNESS AND SHADOW

"Twenty years have I held the role of High Chancellor. Twenty years of listening to people whine, complain and to those who believe they can rule better than I. Their voices are usually silenced, replaced by the quiet shuffle of decaying feet and creaking limbs. Your fate, should you continue to question my policy, will be worse than theirs." ~ Lord Roarke de'Lear, Duke of Gol'Darak.

THE NATION OF SHAYA'NOR

Welcome to Shaya'Nor, the guidebook of the Shadowlands. Herein you'll find some secrets, some new information and learn more of the history of this place. A once-dwarf held kingdom, it's now home to monsters and worse. Home to the Corrupted, and Vainar the Wise with his Necrolords, their Dark Church is the dominant religion in the area, all who call Shaya'Nor home are wise to venerate these beings, lest they suffer a fate worse than death.

Here in Shaya'Nor, death is just the beginning, and definitely not an end. You'll learn of the incredible might of the undead who serve in various roles, tilling fields and hauling cargo effortlessly from one place to the next - and you'll also learn of the five major houses and the ruler of Shaya'Nor itself, the High Chancellor.

Prepare yourself, leave your superstitions at home and enter a land of monsters where beauty can be found, even in the soul of a savage beast.

AN OVERVIEW OF SHAYA'NOR

The sun doesn't shine unimpeded here. Even when it tries to shine; something blots it out and washes the landscape with a dull sheen, covered in mist and half-formed shadowy terrors.

Shaya'Nor isn't just the home of the shayakar, the corrupted fae who followed Vainar into what was once Dranak'Or, the home of the dwarves for centuries dating back as far as 4283 B.C. It's the home of vampires, werewolves, liches, spectres, wraiths and other creatures which traditionally go: 'bump in the night.' It's the shadowed glance through half-pulled curtains, the tug of mist on your ankle in a graveyard, the outstretched hand of a zombie lurching in the night.

Skeletons patrol the city streets alongside the Nightguard. The Capital City of Gol'Shakar is an incredible sight; a gothic paradise teeming with politics and trouble in equal measure, of course,

Liner Notes: Shadowed Lands

If you're a fan of 'gothic horror' you're probably going to love Shaya'Nor. It's almost the distilled essence of what you love, thrown to the winds and given wings to fly casting its dark shadow across the whole populace. It's a diverse land, not just one of terror, and there's a lot of beauty lurking around this place for the traveler to discover. It is, however, where terrors come from and a dangerous place.

Vampires, werewolves, liches, and much worse all hold court here. It's a great place for a political style of play with grand adventures wherein the heroes are pitted against the machinations of one House, while in favor with another. It shouldn't just be a realm played for the monster of the week, as that's not the essence of Shaya'Nor; it's about plots, counter-plots, and dark conspiracies along with decadent vampire nobles tied together with webs of intrigue.

Sean says there's a lot of inspiration here from popular sources (Van Helsing, Sleepy Hollow, Dracula and so on), and I can see it. Its fine to have these sources, but don't use them as shortcuts to get the understanding of Shaya'Nor. There's more to it, much more - there're many specific and unique elements to this realm which require attention to best get the most from it. It's a land consumed in Darkness and evil, but there're many noble and beautiful things to be found in Shaya'Nor as well - rather like Shaintar itself, don't be fooled into thinking everything is black and white, or even shades of gray.

some might say these things always go hand in hand. The whole land roils and bubbles like a witch's cauldron with some 2.8 million population, comprised of mostly shayakar, with humans, dwergs, and corrupted goblins making up the rest of the living population. The humans who weren't lucky enough to be born to the elite are the lowest in this society, and are often used as serfs when the zombies aren't tilling the fields.

Of course it's pretty easy enough to turn a dead human into a zombie, so they're useful either way.

The government of Shaya'Nor is a mix of aristocracy and oligarchy. Each region has hereditary rulers, who form a council, otherwise known as the Dark Council. It's from this number the High Chancellor is chosen, every seven years, though the current High Chancellor has been in office for several terms.

This resultant society is feudal, built on repression and the power of the highborn nobles.

The high class, known as the Shayakeim, are the lords and masters of the land, ruling over the lower class known as the Terraheim. There's some chance for a lower class to move into an upper, but this usually comes at someone else's expense, friend or foe

- often it matters not to the social climber who views everyone above them as another rung to be climbed on the journey to the top.

There's another class which we'll talk about later on, known as the Kiraheim. They're a new class of merchants and they're impacting the social structure of Shaya'Nor in diverse, frightening, and interesting ways.

With this new merchant class has come interesting trade opportunities, something which is amazing given how much the Shaya'Nor nobility hates the rest of Shaintar. There's now a pretty diverse economy thanks to the Kiraheim, who've focused trade on agriculture and forestry - taking advantage of the natural resources once claimed by the dwarves.

The shayakar are the predominant race here, humans come a close second. Most of the other races are accepted in Shaya'Nor, save for the dwarves who're hunted down and killed without exception if discovered within Shaya'Nor's borders. The underground homes in which the dwarves had lived when the land was still known as Dranak'Or, before Vainar's followers usurped it and changed the name to Shaya'Nor, are now occupied by the dwarves' corrupt kin, the dwergrs. Other non-shayakar fae are hunted, enslaved, and kept as 'feeding stock' for vampires, werewolves, and worse.

It's said you must truly embrace the Darkness to have a remote chance at life in Shaya'Nor, lest you're already shayakar.

The undead may however make up the largest population of creatures in Shaya'Nor, outnumbering the living by a large margin - a margin which grows daily.

HISTORY OF SHAYA'NOR

Darkness is all consuming and in 2500 B.C., the lands to the northeast suffered terribly, they fell under the sway of a powerful dark shadow. These lands, believed to have been the home of some of the earliest to craft advances in technology and metalworking, the dwarves, and their homes were invaded by Vainar and his followers. The dwarves were driven out or destroyed in a single, cohesive campaign of terror.

With him Vainar brought his chosen, a third of the fae population.

They're many historical accounts of the Darkness and its claim over Dranak'Or. Each one tells same terrible story of how the land itself changed as the survivors hid and slowly made their way from their

old homeland - some were caught, some were killed on the spot and some were sent to a fate worse than death - slavery wasn't the worst part.

What a fall this was, a land so suddenly changed by Dark powers, the skies growing overcast and mist claiming much of the ground. Into this new land came terrible necromancers, creatures of corruption, and the undead. Those humans most favored by the shayakar became vampires or werewolves, with the rest of the humans becoming serfs or turned into 'feeding stock', bred for one purpose, as humans breed cattle in other lands.

A few humans, canny, cunning, and devious, pledged themselves to their dark masters, learned the darkest of arts, and helped the evil take the land, escaping the fate of their less ruthless brethren.

Eventually an elaborate and byzantine society formed around Vainar. Open conflicts and wide-scale bloodshed gave way to the subtle knife of political maneuvering. The clever words of intricate scheming replaced the sword and axe. Violence still breaks out, but more often than not it's very personal and is resolved through duels and smaller skirmishes.

The people who're not part of the great and noble game are serfs or food. There's virtually no escaping this.

DARKNESS COMES

"It was midday when the sun was at the highest and shone most bright. A sudden flash burned the image of two great burning eyes plummeting from the sky into all who saw. Then, a great and powerful wind swept the darkness across the valleys, mountains, and streams. The winds came from being wrapped around the inverted body of a terrible black mountain whose peak touched the very soil. Everything. Everything in its path was swept away." ~ Dain, 2500 B.C.

There are dozens of accounts of the day, written in old journals or hidden away in diaries - and all are the same. Sometimes these stories were told face to face by trembling survivors, huddled in taverns by a warm fire on cold winter nights. These tales are likely to be accounts of the physical manifestation as Vainar fell, to lend further credence to these stories dwarven metal smiths wrote: "Much of the metal we mined after the great and terrible windstorm of 2500 B.C. was much darker, harder to shape, and resisted the singers' will."

This metal was thrown aside and all but forgotten, becoming Black Iron and this written account might well be the first which references the metal.

"We pulled this metal from the ground; it was dark, dark like the skies which heralded the inverted mountain. Glimmer cut her finger on it, and it bled like a river. It took days for it to heal and it was a simple nick. We dug out more and each bucket was as bad as the last. In the end we tossed the stuff over the side of the precipice and forgot it." ~ Ingot, Apprentice Wright in 2500 B.C.

As historical records state, more and more dark creatures flocked to Dranak'Or during the time of the shadow's fall. With them came the shayakar - pale skinned elves, the chosen of Vainar. They gathered in the lands and renamed them Shaya'Nor in 2400 B.C. A steady flood of creatures and beings of Darkness flowed into Shaya'Nor and by 1700 B.C. evil's host were united under one single rule. The Dwarves were not immune and corrupted dwarves (called dwergs) - came to live there and mine the corrupted metal.

Haarak Tuul, Vainar's right hand, united them all and became the greatest, most terrible, and most powerful of all the Necrolords to ever set foot upon Shaintar.

GENOCIDE

A great massacre occurred in 1600 B.C. when Tuul united his folk to eradicate all dwarves in Shaya'Nor. It was complete and utter genocide and only took three years to slay them all. The only dwarven kind left were those dwergs who had succumbed to the corruption of the metal. In 1603 Tuul's campaign was complete; the dwarves were all dead or driven from Shaya'Nor.

Now Vainar and Tuul began to turn their eyes upon the rest of Shaintar, drawing up their plans against the land - they had centuries to plot to gain control of it all.

THE HORDE OF SHADOW

In 700 B.C., during a time known as the Coming of the Hordes, Vainar and the first Thirteen Necrolords led the Hordes and engulfed almost all of Shaintar in Darkness and evil according to plan. This is commonly known as the Age of Darkness and began in 600 B.C. It was the combined strength of the dwarves of the Hellstorm Mountains, what is now called the Freelands, and Dregordia that managed to withstand the terrible might of Vainar's army, ultimately holding fast.



Yet the Hordes ruled for nigh on 300 years until the Ascended and their chosen avatars and allies again walked the lands in 300 B.C. They drove back the armies of Darkness into Shaya'Nor, destroying the first Thirteen and capturing their essences into Netherstones. This victory - it was discovered - had great cost. The weapons wielded by and forged for the enemy were terribly harmful to fae and other spirit folk. The cost was high...

Saiderin, Vainar's younger brother led the forces of Life against the enemy. They'd never succumb to the Darkness - and pushed hard and pushed Vainar and his forces further and further back. Vainar was able to escape into the realm of the Nether, but not before he played one last dire trick upon his foes. He unleashed a terrible and virulent plague which wiped out nearly two-thirds of the fae population of Shaintar. The resultant losses to the eldakar race lead to the widespread interbreeding with humans that created the alakar and madukar, as well as several magically gifted (mostly) human bloodlines.

A BROKEN HORDE

Without the power of their masters, the inhabitants of Shaya'Nor were broken; they warred amongst themselves in petty, tribal skirmishes and battles. Though they sought a return to the power they'd managed in the Age of Darkness, it never happened. Of course, after a while new leaders would emerge, unite a few tribes and create minor havoc against the lands outside their borders - but they never reached one-tenth the cohesion created by Vainar in the Age of Darkness.

Shaya'Nor appeared to remain leaderless, lacking in direction for some 2,000 years, a fact which most folk were happy about. They were content to let the minions of Shaya'Nor lie cowering in the furthest reaches of northwestern Shaintar.

In the meantime, those same centuries saw the rise of Ceynara: the Queen of Hell and Goddess of War, in the Goblin lands and Kal Empire.

Vainar seemed to have been all but forgotten.

THE RETURN

This would not last, for Vainar was not so easily defeated and his power not so easily shattered. In 1998 A.C., still recovering most of his strength and power from casting his plague-curse on Shaintar he emerged once again. This time he was not so open; he worked in secret and built his armies quietly over the course of centuries, content to let Shaintar think

he was only a memory. It was his plan this time to defeat his enemies and place Shaintar under one rule: his alone. He ordered his minions to dig deep into the mines abandoned long, long ago by the dwarves. The nearly forgotten dwarves had the skills he now required.

There they found what they sought, Black Iron. The metal was mined, collected, refined, and forged into huge caches of weapons and armor. Vainar was preparing for a second Age of Darkness, and this time, he would not fail.

To further cement this plan he began to place, secretly of course, his agents into the courts of Olara, Galea, the Freelands, the Kal-a-Nar Empire, and Camondel. In 2110 A.C. Harkor ki Doman allied himself with a cabal of necromancers outcast from Shaya'Nor. He was granted an unnaturally long life by Vainar, and it's whispered he reigns to this very day. Many believed this was all part of Vainar's plan. While scholars continue to debate the facts, they all agree that many corrupted goblins joined forces with Vainar's growing army in 2189 A.C.

ALLIANCE

In the events which shaped the Dragon War (2216 to 2234 A.C.) Vainar had to put his plans for domination on hold, for the Dragons refused his offer to join the massive army of Shaya'Nor. They felt since they were the first 'true gods' even before Shanais and Targon (who don't consider themselves gods anyway). Rather than help Vainar, the dragons took umbrage at what they believed a petty offer of alliance and they attacked Shaya'Nor.

This was a milestone in history. For the first (and only) time the forces of Shaya'Nor, aligned with the Empire, worked with the free people of Shaintar toward a common goal - the defeat of the Dragonlords and the Dragons. This alliance brought about an end to the Dragon War in 2234 A.C. and resulted in the total destruction of the dragons.

Their victory was a source of great celebration for the free peoples of Shaintar, but it was a bitter blow to Vainar - he lost most of his armies and this set back his plans greatly.

DARKNESS AND FLAME

Shaya'Nor once again retreated back into the mist to lick its collective wounds and remained a complete mystery for seven hundred years. What transpired then within those misty borders is anyone's guess. It wasn't until the outbreak of the Betrayal War in early

3021 A.C that Shaintar once again trembled beneath the joined might of both Vainar and Ceynara.

Reports came in from all corners of Shaintar. Vainar had accumulated most of the Netherstones, and was planning to unleash their power in Corelisia in a final effort to fully corrupt it. The Seven Cauldrons had once again been opened.

Darkness and Flame stood united and a terrible future akin to the Age of Darkness of 600 B.C. seemed to stand in front of everyone. Yet the forces of evil do not make good bedfellows, they're distrustful and don't quite grasp the qualities required to forge a great alliance - honor, loyalty, and trust. With the rule of Shaintar in his grasp it was Vainar who betrayed Ceynara.

BETRAYAL OF THE FLAME

Vainar removed his troops at a critical juncture in their joint campaign, engineering the murder of an agent of Flame. Glain Nollan - Avatar of Ceynara's son: Kolvos. This ignited a bitter confrontation between the Queen of Hell and the Shadowlord. They fell on each other's throats like jackals - their battle resulted in Ceynara and her minions being cast back into the Abyss, it's believed Vainar the Fallen also perished at the same time.

This isn't the first time folk have believed such.

In 3097 A.C Druids and benevolent Kingdoms, with their associated rulers organized the Centenium Council - the reasons for this were unclear, save for rumor of darker shadows gathering once more, deep in the mists of Shay'Nor.

Is Vainar once again poised to strike?

ARCHITECTURE

Shaya'Nor was once a vibrant land, full of light, life, and beauty beyond compare. It had color and gorgeous skies, vistas as far as the eye could see which delighted many a rover who wandered through the realm before it became the Shadowland, when it was known as Dranak'Or. Now, the landscape reflects the Darkness which so effectively rules and the monsters (even the pretty ones) which make up the populace - barring the humans who are little more than livestock.

The shayakar have brought with them a darker take on the buildings of old, whilst humans build as their betters direct. To witness corruption, one only has to look at the once proud places many dwarves called home, now twisted and turned into something which

has a savage beauty all of its own.

Tall parapets, gothic mansions, and grand towers are the order of the day in Shaya'Nor now. Many of the dwarven keeps with their carefully crafted aesthetic have become twisted, horrible, dark homes to the dwarves, their anvils turned to a new goal that of working the terrible metal that is Black Iron. These remain a painful reminder of the once proud kingdom of the dwarves which once stood in the place of the Darkness.

Multi-layered and tiered architecture dominates many of the towns and cities, the bigger the building the higher the status of the family who inhabits it. There's also a predominance of graveyards with elaborate mausoleums, with locks on the inside rather than the out, so the residents within can at least get some peace from the living.

The few travelers who foolishly think Shaya'Nor is a land of monsters, with riches to be plundered and sucked dry have snuck into the nation only to find their doom in such a place - liches don't like to be disturbed by pesky treasure hunters and make their displeasure known, at length. It is ironic to station the offender as an eternal guard outside of a door, making certain their master isn't disturbed again.

Color is washed out, there's little vibrancy here now, there's hardly any brightness - it's mostly dark tones, with mixes of dull grays and blacks - especially when it comes to the nobility's architecture - the darker the stone, the deeper the connection to the shadow which they venerate.

NAMES

To examine names in Shaya'Nor, one should look at the patterns created by the various lords and ladies themselves, since Shaya'Nor is a land full of shayakar, with humans and troglinesh following naming patterns of those who rule.

Lord Roarke de'Lear; Lady Jeannette de'Lear, Duchess of Ey'Falar; Lord Terak Shehazim, Prince of Bloodhold; Lord Jericho Drake, Duke of Kayus; Lady Gwendolyn Yantar, Duchess of Greyhold, and Lady Anastasia Drake, Duchess of Shard.

Lord Borvold de'Lear, Prince of Doom; Lady Fendra Yantar, Duchess of Frostwall; Lord Lairek Drake, Duke of Blackhold; and Lord Andark Filikene, Duke of Ey'Nevor.

Lord Vashon Filikene, Prince of Ey'Mord and Lady Ellya de'Lear, Duchess of Gol'Bokhor.

Lord Kuurg, Prince of Theak `Var. (By the way - he's a troll)

A lot of Shaya'Nor names can also be considered to have a great deal in common with Camon.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Humans are humans, but shayakar are corrupted elves - so, while they kind of look like elves, they have more accentuated features, harder and sharper, with incredibly pale skin. The key to remember about Shaya'Nor is the name: Shadowlands.

Shayakar tend to similar builds to their alakar cousins. Their eye and hair colors, though capable of the same spectrum as most fae, tend toward either very dark or starkly bright colors (or lack thereof; there are a lot of platinum-haired and crystal-eyed shayakar, as well as those with raven black hair and eyes). The hair is usually adorned for the high born and combed/styled in a variety of ways, often corrupted from other societies and folk.

The shayakar's ears are definitely more defined than those of their uncorrupted fae cousins.

Then you have the various undead, liches, wights, ghouls, mummies, and the incorporeal ones - none of these have a standard look about them, they tend to reflect who they were in life, usually in a much worse state due to their undead status. They're likely to reflect the circumstances of their death, unless this would impede their work, a zombie with a missing leg isn't so great at tilling a field for example; and at the best of times zombies are never easy on the eye.

Vampires are a whole other matter, when they are first created they have pale skin and as they grow older and more powerful their skin color changes - turning from moon pale to night black, or obsidian. They can't hide their true nature until they reach Master, then at long last they can change their color at will, allowing them to blend in easier. (It's said that the Master Vampires may need to concentrate to maintain this, requiring all their will to focus on appearing more like a living being).

Werewolves can most easily blend in, of all the transformed Corrupted. They're quite capable of hiding their inner beast until you're off guard and then... well, best hope you've not insulted the werewolf in question, lest it come back to bite you.

CLOTHING

There's a definite structure to the social strata of Shaya'Nor and it reflects in the clothing of the various classes. The Terraheim, lower ranked population and humans (who are second class citizens regardless - apart from those humans who have risen to power) are usually dressed in simple garments, tunic, breeches, boots or shoes, and little in the way of ostentation. The women favor simple dress, the men's work clothes denote their role, such as a game keeper, tavern owner, or huntsman.

Even shayakar must follow these rules, though they tend to favor more ornamentation. It's the Shayakeim, the nobility, who get the lion's share of the exceptional clothing, fabrics, and tailoring. In high society masques are a favored thing, with elaborate ball gowns, jackets, and all the trappings. Shaya'Nor truly shows an eclectic range of fashions amongst the high born.

The more ostentatious the costume, the more influence and power the Shayakeim has in society. Of late there's been a predilection for long coats and cloaks amongst both men and women here, with dark purples and blacks forming the majority of the color scheme, usually made from rich velvet and silk. Jewelry and many expensive adornments are another way the nobility shows itself different from the lower classes, with incredibly intricate headdresses or hair styling for the women.

Vampire clothing is utterly incredible and probably the most expensive and showy of all the fashion on offer in Shaya'Nor.

FOOD

Many of the Corrupted have a taste for elf flesh, so the non-shayakar, non-corrupted fae who find themselves in Shaya'Nor will discover too late they're enslaved, yet the fate for all captured elves is to eventually be on the menu for someone (or something) else. What a dreadful surprise it must be to find oneself the aperitif at an extravagant dinner party.

As for regular meals, there are many wines, meats, and more on the menu here in Shaya'Nor. The vampires all have a taste for the life giving fluid of many of the races, and the werewolves dine on the most succulent of all flesh, elf or otherwise. They'll take cow and pig any day as well; they're not terribly fussy.

Banquets are a huge tradition and their courses can run to nearly thirty dishes, each one succulent and interesting. It's the mark of a good host if their banquet has an escalation in food quality, going from dish to dish, increasing in taste and complexity until the final course. These affairs can last hours, if not days amongst the Shayakeim society.

If they can get it, they'll import much from Camon, including Camonere chefs. These chefs tends to create dishes that make those served in their native land pale in comparison; it is wise to do so when a failure to please could result in that chef being on the menu himself.

DRINK

Blood is life and there's a whole section on the Blood Price. However as a social drink, some vampires enjoy it rather a lot, some of the more decadent of the vampiric rulers and nobles mix it with a bit of alcohol to experiment with the taste and texture. They're often viewed by their peers as somewhat eccentric in this regard. It should be noted that only Vampires truly drink the blood of others.

The shayakar enjoy the fruits of the vine as much as anyone, with a variety of locally produced, if somewhat bitter vines. For real flavor and taste in their bottled vintages they go for imported wines and spirits from Camon, though certain sweet Olanar vintages are also favored when they can be acquired.

SOCIETY AND THE SOCIAL LIFE

The Game of Politics is most important to the people of Shaya'Nor, especially the high born. The Shayakeim or nobles play it daily, with the lives of others as the ultimate goal. They weave webs of intrigue so totally convoluted as to make heads spin. Verbal duels are an art form and more appreciated than those with blades, with women often coming out squarely as the leaders of such confrontations. There's a saying that the true power behind a Shaya'Nor man's words is the woman who's carefully chosen them for him to say.

This doesn't happen all of the time of course and it's not true in every case, since men and women enjoy varying definitions of equality in the Shadowlands. It's known by many that ladies are more adept at the more subtle intricacies of politics than their menfolk. It makes a true alliance of Shayakeim noble families very dangerous indeed, putting two like-minded individuals together as a pair can be enough to cement a family's power for centuries, especially amongst the vampires.

Dances, masquerade balls, and social functions of all kinds fill the upper ranks of nobility with things to do. The lower classes are left to work, to live, and to eventually die in service of their peers. Those who're lucky (or unlucky) find death isn't the easy way out, and they often return to serve even after they pass on. Well, their bodies do. This can happen as a result of old age in servitude to a powerful necromancer, or when someone fails to understand the nature of the Game and falls afoul of an ancient custom or two.

Vampires and werewolves fill most of the key leadership roles in society.

Liches are placed in carefully selected mystically-orientated roles. They often serve, when it suits them, to tutor and expand one's understanding of magic.

Zombies are the rank and file of the nation's workforce, tilling fields, doing menial jobs, and moving goods around. If they fall under the Prince of Rot, they serve as lieutenants of the undead portions of Shaya'Nor's armies.

Skeletons can serve as guards, guardians, and bodyguards. Also, under the Prince of Bone they can fill the sergeant role in the armies.

Ghouls are very good at cleaning up the messes which nobility leaves behind them. They're used as messengers and cannon fodder and will never rise to the upper classes in the Shayakeim's eyes.

Wraiths serve as the unquestioned enforcers, serving the High Council's will and making sure the law is obeyed.

Shades and specters enjoy status as the masters of spycraft, being able to slip around virtually unnoticed and deal with unfortunate intelligence leaks quickly and efficiently.

Wights are reclusive beings, given to guarding ancient secrets and treasures, keeping unwanted attention from the secrets of Shaya'Nor the High Council would rather remain so.

Mummies are left to their own devices for the most part, pursuing their own secretive agendas and goals - usually beyond the ken of the other Corrupted. When a mummy does appear in Shaya'Nor's society, there's no one, not even the most powerful of rulers, who'd knowingly bar its way or refuse it access.

ART AND CULTURE

Decadence breeds an interesting take on art and culture, and the very social structure of Shaya'Nor makes all of these things quite possible. The Terraheim have different desires than the Shayakeim, enjoying a variety of simple things, hand crafted arts, painting, and sculpture. There's a lot of basket work amongst the lower classes, menial crafts and anything which can be of service to the upper echelon is swiftly encouraged and in many cases exploited.

They have folk songs, songs designed to keep their spirits up on dangerous nights when the sky is darker than usual and foul things walk abroad. Many of these songs are sung in a round, or have a called response, usually accompanied by drum beats, bells, and dancing. Since humans are prone to creating travelling communities of like-minded folk, moving from place to place, these traveling songs and dances find their way all over Shaya'Nor carried from community to community.

When they think no one's watching, the humans become freer with their expression and the most rebellious ones compose pointed music, caricatures of art and suggestive dance. Woe betides them if they're caught though, because these things run counter to the control of the Shayakeim.

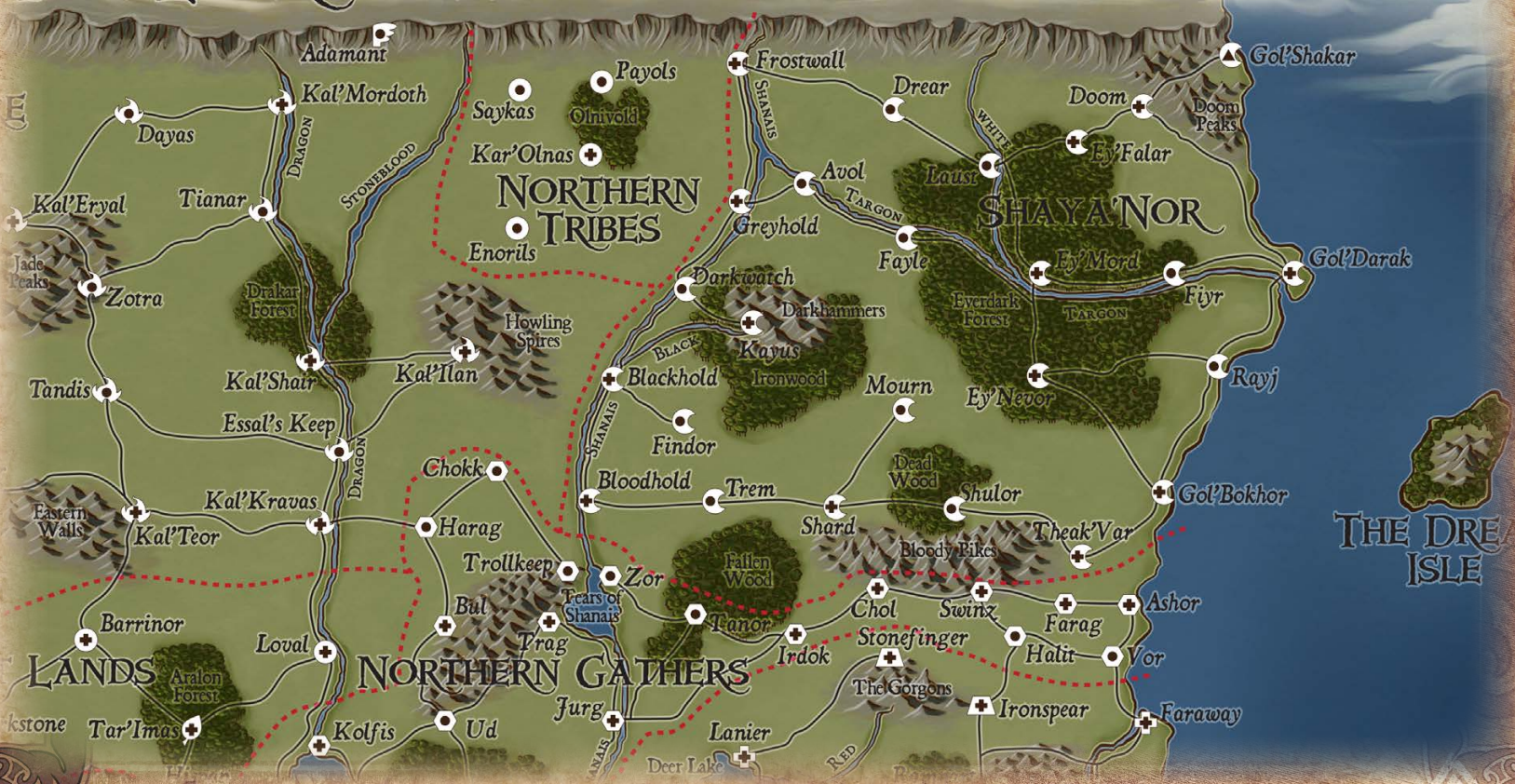
The troglodites, hobgoblins, and trolls who live here follow the predominant society, worshipping Vainar.

The Shayakeim are more proper in public but behind closed doors they're wilder, prone to the byzantine excess of the ruling classes. Lavish parties, social get togethers which last for days, and structured noble dances form the backbone of their cultural expression. Their art is very complex and often depicts scenes of suffering and strife from their lives, or the lives of others. The art is always painted in somber tones and always with a misty like quality.

Their music is often played by a band or orchestra, with string instruments, wind, and piano being the major components of such.

Gossip is the lifeblood of the nobility in their culture, and if you can talk the talk, you can walk the walk in their upper echelons. A few humans have demonstrated an incredible gift of a silver tongue amongst the ruling classes, and a romantic-inclined vampire has been known to spare them a terrible fate due to their amazing grasp of social grace. Both fascinating and disturbing to the creature, these humans become collector's items, dressed and paraded to boast amongst the vampire's peers.

THE EVERWALL



They also gather in the streets to talk, politely of course, usually behind fans (if women) about this and that. Many women have developed a secret sign language using their fans to communicate information; this particular Fan Language is useful to avoid the cut and thrust of the Game of Politics between many Shaya'Nor family groups.

Vampire society takes the excesses of the Shayakeim and upgrades them dramatically; everything is done with more panache, more style, and more expense.

Werewolves can run the gamut of simple desires in arts and cultural wants, going from raucous folk songs to elegant classical pieces for example, or simply feral art to the most complex of all paintings full of hidden meanings. They devour these subjects as fully as they adore their next meal, proving without a shadow of a doubt not all beasts are without some form of class.

TRADE

Shaya'Nor hasn't really been a nation of traders and merchants in the past. After all, it's a land of monsters with werewolves who'd negotiate price with claws and teeth, vampires who would try using guile and cunning, yet put off potential buyers or intimidate sellers. So over the last century they've developed the Kriaheim (the Chosen of Fortune), a class whose sole reason for being is to trade in imports and exports - allowing the nation to indulge itself further.

Now there is a thriving export of various goods, through the Kiraheim that serve the interests of the nation using trusted traders from the outside. Export goods trend towards art, perfume, and certain clothing which is starting to take off in Camon; the exquisite fabrics of Shaya'Nor are considered rather desirable along with other, less savory items like drugs and poisons. Shayakar Nightchain never fails to fetch a handsome price, particularly when traded to the Malakar Dominion.

Imports include wine, food, and luxury items. All desired by those from all walks of life, though the Shayakeim always get first pick. Additionally, certain hand-crafted tools with many uses are currently in high demand.

RELIGION

There's but one religion in Shaya'Nor and it's the Dark Church, established by Vainar and the Thirteen Necrolords, the unquestioned hand that guides the rest of the nation. These are the gods of Shaya'Nor without question. Fear is a great motivator and the Church uses it daily to cement its control, for no

Liner Notes: The House of Vainar

Oh look, more secrets to share with you. What few know, even now deep within the borders of Shaya'Nor, is the Church of Vainar and the Thirteen have truly been serving the Fallen One in a very real and personal way. Lord Reaver thought he'd figured out a way to pull Vainar from the Void, taking his body to the High Church in Ey'Mord.

Now Vainar remains in his avatar form in the care of the Church, where he's been for years. They've even planned a special ceremony of ascension for him, but it's so far unclear when they might be able to accomplish this, as it is an incredibly difficult and essence-intensive series of rituals. In the meantime, thanks to its attentive care for this body, the Church is certain it has his favor and his most special attention, as well as the attention of the Thirteen.

Of course, in the case of the Thirteen Necrolords, the attention may be for entirely different reasons.

member of the population must be allowed to lose its fear of Vainar or the Necrolords - not even the favored Shayakeim.

The Dark Church is held firmly in the grip of House Filikene for over a thousand years. With their combination of shrewd politics, patience, and genuine (if zealous) faith and magical mastery has given them the edge in maintaining control of the Church. Everyone in Shaya'Nor agrees the Filikene are held in great favor in the eyes of Vainar the Wise.

The Church might be the closest thing to a proper religion in Shaya'Nor. Everyone is expected to participate in the core activities of the Church, from the highest Lord to the most pitiful of serfs - attending worship on the Sixth Day is, in fact, one of the only respites a serf or lower class human in Shaya'Nor can have. Everyone in the nation goes to services. If it means they must pay lip service during the many rituals however; at least they get an hour or two of peace in return.

Even if some few become sacrifices, it's a small price to pay.

Rituals and the like are led by necromancers acting as priests and high priests, combining their religious imagery and incantations with magical efforts and spells. The highest members of the Dark Church are Shayakeim, who along with liches serve as priests. Lord Vashon Filikine, the Prince of Ey'Mord, is also the Arch-Cleric of the Most High Church of Vainar the Shadowlord and the Thirteen Lords of the Dark. This is the highest rank within the Dark Church.

MARRIAGE, FOR CONVENIENCE

Whilst the Terraheim and humans enjoy marriage as most marriages go, and the priests are usually willing to use the ritual to keep the masses in line. Usually. Regardless of social standing, marriage in Shaya'Nor is often one of convenience.

The Shayaheim know this all too well and their bonds of matrimony often only extend to alliance rather than to love. There are those tales of noble, courtly love throughout the society and they're often the subject of much gossip among noble circles.

Someone who marries just for love is considered, to put it politely, rather odd.

Better to marry someone who can give you an advantage in the Game, someone who can give your family a better standing amongst their peers. Thus balls, masquerades and such social functions are not only the hunting grounds of the social elite for sport, they're also potential sites to track down and court a favorite possible mate.

The highest of noble elite play the matrimony game very well, making it part of the political Game. It's one you'd be best prepared to play to the limit of ability should you be caught in the Game of Courtship here, for the price of losing is a rather steep one most of the time - you may end up as white as bone guarding the very door of the woman or man you sought to woo.

Vampires marry for alliances; though some marry for passion - love rarely enters into a vampire marriage. Still, there's always an exception to the rule - it's possible an alliance between a vampire and a werewolf could form into a bond strong enough to cement the two in a marriage. Werewolves are probably the most likely to form strong mate-like bonds, after all, they're still the most human of the Corrupted.

DIVORCE, OR MURDER?

There are alliances which are made for all time, and those which are made to be broken. It's all part of the Game, with pieces being moved around an elaborate living chess board, where men and women toy with emotion. If things become too unsettled in this regard, a marriage can be annulled by the correct Church representative.

Or you can always murder your spouse, though it's best if you use poison or magic, as those are easier to conceal than most other methods. In a land full of monsters, honestly, what's one more corpse or three when there is status to consider?

DEATH

One wrong move, one mistake can lead to an untimely demise in Shaya'Nor. It can be as simple as running afoul of one with more power than you. Perhaps a scheming servant of one of the many vampire lords gave you some news which you must bring to the lord of the manor, he kills you because, well, you brought the news in the first place and in a fit of pique he tore your head off.

Death's not the end, a necromancer can easily make it all look better. Sure your body will have a little less vibrancy, but it can sort of work as it did before. The Darkness doesn't make it easy to live in Shaya'Nor, but it makes it fairly easy to reanimate when you die. The downside is that you most likely won't be there to enjoy it. Some Dark spirit from the Nether will be what animates your corpse while you may, if you are lucky, become a ghost.

They can always use another skeletal minion, or zombie worker, or spectral spy.

There're quite a few elaborate death rituals in the land, some of them are complex funerary rites which have been designed to keep the spirit of the dead where it firmly belongs. These rites are considered illegal by most folk in the land, and anyone caught performing them is punished quite severely.

Most of the death rituals belong to the Shayakeim, the nobles and the rulers. These are lavish affairs with elegant parties afterwards. It's not unknown for the dearly departed to return to join in the festivities later on as well, should they come back particularly powerful. This is most often the case when the ritual is the turning of a new vampire.

BIRTH

In some circles birth is to be celebrated, usually it means another life to be corrupted by the Darkness in Shaya'Nor - if not already born to it. There are numerous rituals which surround birth in the various communities, humans are fond of celebrating such things, and vampires view births of other races from behind cold calculating eyes, working the new pawn into their Grand Game.

The rank and file undead, those who can think at least, could not care less.

A child born to someone of higher class is an excuse for a birth party, an excuse to show the child off like a pretty dress or gem-studded trinket.

BLOOD IS MORE THAN LIFE

As time passed and the nation became more civilized, certain rules were established which promote growth and stability, not slake the ground in blood thanks to the wanton destruction. Vainar needed Shaya'Nor to become more than it was.

Yet the Corrupted wouldn't be denied their rights, the open right of feeding and destruction was something they felt was required to function. All attempts to ban it, or enforce rules upon feeding were met with violent and bloody reprisal; that nearly drowned Shaya'Nor in civil war.

THE BLOOD PRICE

The Blood Price requires each and every Terraheim be assigned a value, this value assessed and recorded, resulting in a process which is firmly entrenched in the bureaucracy which truly runs Shaya'Nor. Factors such as skills, age, health, years of service and more are figured into complex calculations, these records are then kept by the various offices of tax ministers throughout the nation - maintained and kept alongside the rest of the normal taxation information.

This coldly efficient system turns murder into business and reduces it to numbers, allowing a Shayaheim to murder any Terraheim at any time. Depending on the circumstances, there's no worry of reprisal or recrimination after the event as well, because the Blood Price paid to the family of the victim. This is the way of things, at least as far as the law of the land is concerned. Traditionally, the price is such that a family can even better their circumstances.

There's a knock-on effect to this however, one which horrifies anyone outside of Shaya'Nor, especially those from the Southern Kingdoms if it's discovered. Some of the lower class will take their elderly and those too infirm to be cared for easily and sell them to vampires or werewolves for food or to the wealthy to use as pawns in their cruel Game.

GOVERNMENT, TITLES, AND RANKS

Shaya'Nor society is more complex than one might imagine. Yet, there's some important social and political positions worth discussing, as well as the basic classes which define the social strata of the nation.



HIGH CHANCELLOR

This is an elected position, one voted upon by the Council of Chancellors through majority once every seven years. The role can change over time, from nominal power or real power, due to the force of the person (he or she) elected to stand as High Chancellor. Currently a vampire lord of considerable power, Lord Roarke de'Lear, Duke of Gol'Darak holds sway. He's done so for twenty years, through intrigue and the occasional shrewd meal, making him the longest reigning leader in Shaya'Nor and rumor has it he's not willing to step down without a fight.

CHANCELLOR

Those who sit on the ruling council of Shaya'Nor are the Chancellors; these are the men and women who determine the fate of the nation and her people. They rule their lands with absolute authority, holding the title of Duke or Prince which is based on tradition. In truth neither is actually considered to be better or higher than the other in Shaya'Nor politics. Once the various factions agreed to unify as a nation, all kingly crowns were set to one side in favor of the Council. Yet since Shaya'Nor is a land built on old ways and class systems, the other lordly titles are still very important to the house and faction traditionally.

Currently there are thirteen Chancellors, including the High Chancellor. This number is woven into Shaya'Nor's history, yet the Chancellors do not reflect the actual makeup of the Necrolords themselves.

Six are vampire lords: Lord Roarke de'Lear; Lady Jeannette de'Lear, Duchess of Ey'Falar; Lord Terak Shehazim, Prince of Bloodhold; Lord Jericho Drake, Duke of Kayus; Lady Gwendolyn Yantar, Duchess of Greyhold, and Lady Anastasia Drake, Duchess of Shard.

Four are werewolf lords: Lord Borvold de'Lear, Prince of Doom; Lady Fendra Yantar, Duchess of Frostwall; Lord Lairek Drake, Duke of Blackhold; and Lord Andark Filikene, Duke of Ey'Nevor.

Two are liches: Lord Vashon Filikene, Prince of Ey'Mord and Lady Ellya de'Lear, Duchess of Gol'Bokhor.

Lord Kuurg, Prince of Theak `Var, is the only troll Chancellor to sit in power.

DOMINUS

This title is usually given to anyone who rules a city, major estate, or town who's not a Chancellor. The proper way to address them is by their title,

so Dominus, plus the name of their domain. The shayakar necromancer who rules the City of Mourn, Lord Seylchus A'Nyron is most often referred to as 'Dominus Mourn.'

The Dominae officially only answer to the Chancellors and they're all considered to be Shayakeim. However, there're many unofficial and sometimes subtle distinctions within the ranks of the Shayakeim themselves - it's a wise Dominus who recognizes who holds the real power in their area.

The Dominus who wants to keep his life (or undeath) intact, keeps bloodshed and wanton destruction to a minimum lest they incur the wrath of a Chancellor. Anything can be used to cause a Dominus to be ousted and another bloodline to be installed depending on the severity of the mistake. Otherwise titles are passed down within the same bloodline. In the case of vampires, that is generally through the offspring of the vampire's siblings.

SHAYAKEIM ("SHADOW'S CHOSEN")

The very top of the cultural food chain in Shaya'Nor belongs to the Shayakeim, they are the rulers, the military strategists and leaders, the masters of magic and the most prosperous of all merchants in the nation. It's impossible to be considered Shayakeim unless one's been fully embraced by the Darkness. Vampires, werewolves (and to a much lesser degree, other were-folk), and liches comprise the majority of the Shayakeim.

There's a few shayakar necromancers who are well on their way to lichhood who're considered to be Shayakeim.

A few hobgoblins and trolls who dabble in Shaya'Nor politics, carefully, are also considered Shayakeim if they have any influence, if not, then they're given the title Ordakeim instead.

The Shayakeim answer only to the Chancellors, some even refuse to answer to them if they are of sufficient power and standing. Most of this class views each other as equals, with the old idea of elders being of greater status long since eroded over the last couple of centuries or so.

Once you reach Shayakeim status you are both blessed and cursed, for you aren't an individual who hides from Shaya'Nor's destiny, you help shape it and this puts you firmly at the center of a game, a game in which the stakes are high and losing can mean consequences far worse than death.

Liner Notes: Vampires and Werewolves

Vampires and werewolves make excellent top-dogs for the power structure of Shaya'Nor. Not only do they have the most non-alienated connection to the Living world, but they can still think and reason, they can still pretend to be regular folk. They make effective administrators and caretakers of Shaya'Nor's day to day affairs. Most of the other undead are just too alien or too horrific in their thought processes to be useful in such roles.

I share Sean's love of the idea of vampires and werewolves playing at being human, clad in the trappings of this decadent society - knowing there's a beast lurking inside and waiting for the moment when they can show their true selves. Monsters they are, and monsters they'll always be.

MAGISTER

The Magisters handle the direct day to day business of running the nation, they serve the Chancellors directly and many are Shayakeim. Those who aren't are usually from the Ordakeim class. These Magisters are spread out all over Shaya'Nor and assume many roles, such as Magisters of Law, Administration, and Commerce - you can find these in every province of the nation. There's also Magisters of Defense who're placed in charge of the local militia and city guards.

Magisters operate usually with a sizable staff, with at least a handful of lower ranked Deputy Magisters and a dozen or so Secretaries and aides. These lesser civil servants are often considered a higher station than the average citizen; however, this doesn't give them any special privileges beyond those which are granted by their Magister, this extends to their authority as well - they can only do what the Magister empowers them to do, nothing more.

Magisters obey the orders of their own Chancellor, but also show respect to the other Chancellors and those of the Shayakeim who're higher placed than they. 30% of the Magister positions are inherited, the others are by appointment.

ORDAKEIM

This elevated rank in Shaya'Nor society was born from the wisest of the monsters' need to elevate others to help them in the organization and management of the nation. All shayakar bloodlines are considered to be of the Ordakeim class. There're also human clans within the Ordakeim, though most of those are in the outer regions of the nation.

The Ordakeim are the ones who really run the nation, in the name of their Dark masters undoubtedly. They're the administrators, bureaucrats,

military officers and the diplomats, the scholars, and the clergy. They keep society functioning when the darkest and most bestial natures of the Shayakeim take over.

MINISTERS

The Ministers serve the Dominae, akin to the way the Magisters serve the Chancellors. They're on a smaller scale of course. There's some crossover between Minister and Magister, and something which is often beneath a Magister is handed to a Minister, and something which is beyond a Minister is boosted up the chain to the Magister - thus the power structure keeps on flowing and the task is dealt with accordingly.

Ministers are usually of the Ordakeim status.

BARON/BARONESS

This title is given to the wealthiest greater landowners in Shaya'Nor. They oversee their fiefs in a typical feudal style, supplying their Chancellor with both revenue and resources. Most come from the Ordakeim class, but quite a few lesser Shayakeim sit in the baronial role over some of the largest estates in the Shadowlands.

Barons and baronesses can also serve in other capacities, such as ambassadors, high government, military officer. In these cases they appoint a lesser functionary - a count or seneschal oversees their estate. In many cases the "estate" is no more than an elaborate manor house on the edge of one of the cities.

In recent years there's been a change (see below) effecting the rank and title of Baron or Baroness, the focus on trade and mercantile affairs has warranted the extension of the title to wealthy merchants and guild masters.

THE KIRAHEIM ("CHOSEN OF FORTUNE")

This new social class has shaken up Shaya'Nor quite a lot; the traders and merchants of this class have more power than many in the Shadowlands and it disturbs those higher up the ladder. Over the last century this class rose to power, at first only comprised of those humans who showed incredible craft or trade skill. These humans, masters of their chosen craft or profession, were accorded a new status to save them from crowding out the traditional bloodlines of the Ordakeim and greater classes.

If you were a guild master or extremely wealthy, Kiraheim status was yours.

It was only the beginning, as those with power and wealth soon exploited the political choices and opinions of others. Powerful guild masters with hordes of laborers, full coin purses, and trade savvy soon began to present themselves as Kiraheim - and got away with it.

This rapid evolution of Shaya'Nor culture meant all but the base laborers and true peasant class could be counted as Kiraheim, this massive number of skilled folk achieved a level of power over the Shadowlands in a short time and it's a fact which the aristocrats find horrifying. The Kiraheim make the trade goods, they make the trades, and they manage the finances of the nation.

There's a class war brewing and many Shayakeim, Ordakeim, and others have gone into bloody feuds against the Kiraheim recently to try and put them in their place.

COUNT/COUNTESS

In tradition this was the title given to the lesser landowners, those who fell under the rule of a Baron, or were directly ruled by a Chancellor. Some of the more powerful baronial houses might have a count or three in the upper echelons. The heirs or chosen successors of most barons were usually afforded the status of count.

Thanks to the Kiraheim however, things have changed. This title is now often given to Kiraheim who perform a great service to the Shadowland or offer extensive financial support. The purchase of a title is now a tacitly approved practice in Shaya'Nor.

This has caused a rapid expansion of the number of counts and countesses in the upper crust of society - leading to a popular saying from those of higher station: "One cannot swing a dead cat in a room without hitting a Count or Countess these days."

Those of Kiraheim status who cannot claim the title of Count or Countess are afforded the title Master, instead.

TERRAHEIM ("CHOSEN OF THE MASTERS")

Things are cut and dried as far as the upper classes are concerned, the Terraheim are at the bottom and this is where they'll stay. These are the peasants and slaves, the only difference between the two being that the former have some illusion of freedom. Humans comprise the vast majority of the Terraheim, with a smattering of other races, especially in the slave ranks.

The Terraheim can be culled at a moment's notice, and in a land ruled by monsters this happens a lot. Of course, they're slightly protected by the Blood Price which affords them a modicum of relative worth within their own ranks.

THE FIVE HOUSES

These are the Five Houses who have carved out their own areas of special interest in Shaya'Nor and have helped shape the land into what it's become today. They exist in a delicate balance, a dance if you will, with conflict and rivalry put aside for the most part, or kept to the shadows.

HOUSE DE'LEAR

The De'Lear Family have ruled Shaya'Nor for two centuries due to their willingness (and ability) to play the Game better than their peers. They've mastered politics and plots others could only dream about and it's given them a true advantage in this nation. Shaya'Nor's greatest Magisters and Ministers hail from this bloodline and they are the absolute definition of aristocracy in Shaya'Nor.

The House is under the rule of the largest family of vampires in all of Shaintar, for hundreds of years their bloodline has been made stronger, as only the best and most capable have been allowed to take the ascent, being made into a vampire, and drawn into the eternal Darkness. Whilst there are large and notable numbers of werewolves, liches, and other Corrupted in the House, it's the vampires who truly rule it and Shaya'Nor by extension.

HOUSE DRAKE

House Drake is the most feared of the Houses in terms of military tactics and strategy. Only twice in the whole history of the nation has the Grand Marshal of the Army has not been from House Drake. As a result, Shaya'Nor's military prowess rivals that of the Kal-a-Nar Empire, largely because the Drakes are primarily a house of werewolves with a few loyal clans of troglinesh serving long and honorably within their ranks.

House Drake's necromancers always ensure the House has an ample supply of lesser undead to call upon at a moment's notice. While greatly respected and feared as a military force, the pride of the Shaya'Nor army is the Nightguard (discussed in the Military of Shaya'Nor) which was founded by House Drake.

HOUSE YANTAR

House Yantar is the youngest of the Five Houses, and the one which is considered to be the root of the Kiraheim. They're a family of merchants, traders and craftsmen primarily. When a particularly ruthless bout of political infighting wiped out the majority of their Shayakeim and Ordakeim, the wealthiest and most capable shayakar and humans who remained worked hard to consolidate their power and fortunes.

Rather than accepting their fate, rolling over to die and letting the other Houses absorb them, they did something else - they froze nearly all trade and commerce, grinding the government to a halt until someone listened to their demands. The Chancellors listened and eventually agreed to protect their autonomy.

For a time, Yantar was the only House to be ruled by a non-Corrupted. Eventually this changed and now the House is ruled by a triumvirate - a werewolf, vampire, and a lich. Whilst the vast majority of the Ordakeim of the other Houses are shayakar, Yantar is evenly split between human and shayakar population. This has given the House a unique position outside of Shaya'Nor, since they can communicate and conduct trade easier with other factions.



HOUSE SHEHAZIM

House Shehazim is the most prosperous and agriculturally inclined of the Five. Whilst other Houses may have significant agricultural holdings and land, House Shehazim produces more foodstuffs and owns more farmland than any two of the other Houses combined. Owing to a long-standing ancient tradition, the House is a matriarchy. Vampires and werewolves rule the top echelons, but Yantar also boasts the only significant number of werebears and wereboars known in Shaintar.

House Shehazim is as consumed by Darkness as any of Shaya'Nor, yet their concern is not to spread Darkness, but to strengthen their homes, families, and holdings. The Terraheim of this House are the most prosperous and best treated of any in the Shadowlands. Those who are chosen for feeding live modestly comfortable lives prior to their demise. There've been changes in recent years, as House Shehazim has chosen to slaughter fewer and fewer of their human livestock, choosing instead to merely feed from them. The were-creatures have begun to choose animal stock to slaughter rather than humans.

The other Houses view this as a weakness, but House Shehazim knows the truth - they've never been stronger.

HOUSE FILIKENE

They are one with the Darkness, one with the path to spiritual completeness in Shaya'Nor. House Filikene are the unquestioned masters of necromancy, of the Dark Church, and more. They venerate Vainar and his Necrolords as gods; they speak as the voice of those gods and enjoy immense power because of it. House Filikene is an incredibly diverse House, with the greatest concentration of Corrupted within it. Even ghouls can attain much glory and standing if they serve the Dark Church loyally, and well.

House Filikene also boasts the most powerful wielders of magic, studying and working within the Filikene College of Magic located in Ey'Mord.

LAW

There are many laws, rules, regulations, and variances within Shaya'Nor. These change between fiefdoms, towns, and cities, though the Council tends to set their rules as most important. As a rule of thumb it's best to know one must always be careful of breaking any law here in the Shadowlands and that the crimes are always less heinous than the punishments.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

As varied as the crimes are, the punishments are usually pretty standard in the Shadowlands. The Blood Price allows the Shayakeim to enact retribution directly, so it's the favored method of punishment - other punishments include incarceration, loss of status, enslavement, and of course death - followed by an immediate return to unlife as a servant skeleton, zombie, or otherwise.

SHAYA'NOR MILITARY

Joining the ranks of the military is the best way to advance your standing in Shaya'Nor as a human or other non-shayakar. The military is deceptively large, second only to the Kal-a-Nar Empire. Each of the thirteen provinces has a standing army; the whole is lumped into the banner of the Grand Army of the Dark.

The military is broken into three elements: the Core, Special Details, and the Horde. The Core handles the standard infantry based operations, operates as a standing defense force, and acts as a central core of any offensive campaign - they can also be used as an enforcement arm of the law.

Special Details are ad-hoc Special Forces, smaller groups of especially skilled individuals who're assigned tasks to which they're universally suited. The Nightguard the oldest of this force (described in its own entry); the Midnight Council, a militant group of Adepts; and the newest group, the Shadow Riders. The Shadow Riders are part raider, part border patrol - best described as an autonomous force of light cavalry. They have highly skilled riders, archers, trackers, survivalists, and thieves amongst their ranks. The Shadow Riders report to the Magister of National Defense, who in turn answers directly to the Council of Chancellors, leaving the Riders outside of the military structure - something they prefer.

The Horde is the gathering of lesser Corrupted and numerous troglinish which fall under the southern provinces of the nation, usually around Theak'Var. The force also contains mindless skeletons and zombies, which are easy to control. The rest, though, becomes a true Horde when Shaya'Nor goes to war and it's a terrifying prospect for the rest of Shaintar when this transpires!

THE SHAYAKAR NIGHTGUARD

This ancient policing force of Shaya'Nor has a long and influential history. They're an order of honorable warriors, with respect for their counterparts throughout Shaintar, and the deadliest of spies and assassins - they're all of these things rolled into one.

Their roots run as deep as the earliest history of Shaya'Nor. Masters of stealth, subterfuge, and intrigue - so immersed and attuned to the inherent magic of their auras, they wear the Darkness like a cloak. They're masters of combat and of magic and their least powerful agents can summon dark mists, while the more powerful vanish at will or become full-fledged necromancers with terrible dark power.

The most powerful and entrenched of the Nightguard develop a power known as the "Death Whisper" or Agkershul - upon their death they may send a final short message to another clan member, this also reveals how they died and why.

Consummate defenders, the Nightguard have long defended their home, ruthless and cold when the need arises. Their code of honor permits them no defense from heinous acts, some will punish themselves if they are forced to commit something which violates this code, and others may even take their own lives.

In a land where everyone has an agenda, political or otherwise, it is only the Nightguard who do not seek any political influence and power. Many fear the day when the Nightguard unite and turn their powers toward a political end, they're right to do so as well - for it's unlikely any other force in the nation could stop them.

SECRETS OF SHAYA'NOR

THE STARWATCHERS

Strange, rebellious cult or powerful prophets who may be the key to Shaya'Nor's salvation? Only an infinitesimally small fraction of those living in Shaintar have any sense of the truth about who the Starwatchers really are.

There are two distinct levels at which the Starwatchers operate. The vast majority of those involved in the conspiracy - Kiraheim, Ordakeim and Shayakeim alike - believe they are part of an organization dedicated to the overthrow of the status quo leadership of the nation. For all practical purposes, this puts them at direct odds with the De'Lear family and all who serve them, or serve

alongside them. To them, the Starwatchers as an organization is an extraordinarily efficient and effective political conspiracy.

That is only part of the truth, and for a small, utterly concealed inner circle, it's by far the much lesser truth they serve.

At the heart of the Starwatchers is a cabal of shayakar who all share two qualities: they are *Unshadowed* (see the Shayakar Racial Edges section) and they are all descendants of the Scion of the Starfather known as the Dreamer (mother of Vainar, Saiderin, and Landra). These special shayakar, all possessing nigh-perfect covers within their organization, and all placed in a way as to lead and control all operations, call themselves True Starwatchers.

All True Starwatchers have the *Transcend the Call* Shayakar Racial Edge, as well as the *Greater Night Gifts*. Additionally – and most importantly – all True Starwatchers possess the *divination* power.

For them, the power works differently than it does for Priests of Light. They must sleep under a clear night sky, face toward the stars. Their eyes remain open, and in the stars they may see messages conveyed by the Dreamer; she is using a combination of Shadow (untainted by true Darkness) and other cosmic forces to reach this unique group of her descendants, hoping they can be her conduit to help in the great battle against the Merchant and other dangers to Shaintar and the world.

Overthrowing the status quo of Shaya'Nor is, indeed, the goal of the Starwatchers. Most of them, however, have no idea just how much more is planned as the True Starwatchers gain both knowledge and power.

USING THE STARWATCHERS

Uncorrupted by Darkness, the True Starwatchers are allies to the forces of Light and Life. Any group attempting to operate in Shaya'Nor, either for a specific mission or long term, will have a much higher chance of success if they are in contact with this clandestine organization. The rank-and-file contains plenty of humans and non-Darkness operatives, as well as fully Shadowed shayakar and even Corrupted and undead. For the greater goal of overthrowing the De'Lears, even the worst sorts will aid outsiders at the direction of the True Starwatchers. The Starwatchers have numerous connecting points with the Black Lanterns, among other similar groups outside of their nation.

THE EVERDARK FOREST

One of the most dangerous places in Shaya'Nor, and this is saying something. It's truly dangerous and even the most powerful werewolf alphas know to keep clear of its deepest reaches. There are cities and towns within, but between those places its rumored darker spirits dwell, and things even more terrible.

What lurks there? Belief has it the truly ancient dead inhabit the hidden places, beings which rivalled the first Thirteen for power in the days gone by. The Everdark Forest is a huge swath of forest which makes up Shaya'Nor, the shadows are darker, the air colder and more oppressive.

Fortunately, the outer edges of this forest as well as the inhabited areas are relatively safe - the places between these, as said previously, give the most powerful Corrupted pause for thought. The normal rules don't apply, the strong minded go mad, death is a blessing and not the worst thing which can happen to you in the Everdark.

LORD ARKAEON

No one knows where this monster came from; he inhabits the darker regions of the Everdark and he's commonly known as a Spectral Lord. He is a true power to behold; he has his own agenda and plans. He appears as a shadowy shayakar warrior armed with a dark sword and shield, clad in night's black plate armor.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d10, Spirit d12+2 (d10 Wild Die), Strength d4, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d12, Knowledge (Arcane) d10, Knowledge (Cosmology) d8, Notice d10, Stealth d10, Taunt d12, The Way d12

Pace: 12 **Parry:** 10 (3) **Toughness:** 13 (4)

Edges: Arcane Background (Adept), Dreamdancer, Elan, Force of Will, Improved Counterattack, Improved First Strike, Improved Frenzy, Improved Sweep, Level Headed

Gear: Aetherial Great Sword (+2 Fighting, Damage Spi+d12+2, affects spirit and real world), Aetherial Armor (+4, Coverage -6), Aetherial Shield (+3 Parry)

Powers: *barrier, confusion, havoc, mind reading, mind's eye, pummel, puppet, quickness, telepathy*

Essence: 45

Special Abilities:

- **“Cold, Draining Hand of Death”:** Touch attack, Spirit vs. Vigor to cause a Fatigue level; 2 Fatigue levels with a raise; for every Fatigue level delivered, the spectral lord heals a wound
- **Ethereal:** Permanent; can only be affected by magic, can affect real world with sword, Powers and “Cold, Draining Hand of Death”
- **Fear:** Terror, -2
- **Flight:** Flying Pace 12, Climb 0
- **Hardy:** Second Shaken results do not cause a wound
- **“I Know My Forest”:** As a full round action, Lord Arkaeon can focus on any location in the Everdark Forest and use all of his senses as though he were there
- **Infravision:** Halve penalties for Dark lighting against living targets (round down)
- **Telekinesis:** As the Telekinesis Power, at will; using Spirit
- **Undead:** +2 Toughness, +2 to recover from being Shaken, immune to poison and disease, no wound penalties, no additional damage from called shots
- **Weakness:** +4 damage from White Silver and Everwood
- **Weakness:** Arkaeon cannot ever leave the confines of the Everdark Forest, forever cursed to remain within its borders

FRAGMENTS OF SHADOW

DARKEST BEFORE THE DAWN

A man asks the heroes to go look for his lost friend in the Everdark Forest; he's setting them up for a fall since he's been working with agents of the Kal-a-Nar Empire who're trying to infiltrate Shaya'Nor. He lost touch with his scout and he wants them to find her, her fate is unknown and what will happen if the heroes are found to be working with a Kal Empire spy?

BLOOD AND WOLF

A werewolf comes to the heroes and asks for help, he requires aid in a romantic endeavor and he needs the heroes to help him court his chosen mate. Who is his chosen mate, what's their reaction to his affections and more importantly how does he try and persuade the heroes to help him?

POWERPLAY

This is a politically charged scenario, the heroes are caught between two rivals of different houses, the rivals have an agenda and they need the heroes to help them succeed. What's this agenda, who're the rivals and more importantly - which side will the heroes choose? Is either side right; is there a greater Game afoot?

PLAYING SHAYAKAR AND SHAYA'NOR EDGES

Shayakar (“Shadow Blooded” if translated to Galean) are members of the fae (elvish) race that spawn from those who originally followed Vainar – once the Soulfinder, now the Master of the Necrolords – in his fall into Darkness. More than a third of the total population of fae at that time followed Vainar, seeking the wisdom of his search for answers in the hidden places, not fully grasping the terrible price to be paid.

Shayakar are found mostly in the northeastern realm of Shaya'Nor, though handfuls of them can be found doing the bidding of their various dark masters throughout Shaintar. As well, there is a small, yet growing population in the Malakar Dominion.

Although all of those who originally followed Vainar were tainted by the same Darkness that consumed his soul, the race as a whole is not completely lost. Shayakar are not actually born to Darkness and can choose not to accept the shadow gifts that are their natural legacy. The vast majority do not choose this path, naturally; to do so would mean certain ostracizing, at the very least, if not outright persecution and even death in later life.

Shayakar tend to similar builds to their alakar cousins. Their eye and hair colors, though capable of the same spectrum as most fae, tend toward either very dark or starkly bright colors (or lack thereof;

there are a lot of platinum-haired and crystal-eyed shayakar, as well as those with raven black hair and eyes). Shayakar tend to live about twice as long as humans, though they mature at the same rate (early adulthood at sixteen to twenty).

STARTING RACIAL PACKAGE — THE UNSHADOWED

This is the starting Racial Template for those few shayakar who somehow resist the pressure to accept their dark heritage.

- **Cold Natured:** Shayakar are very comfortable in the far northern climate, gaining +2 to resist negative conditions from cold.
- **Enemy:** All creatures of Light and Life tend to see the shayakar as a racial enemy and will attack them first if possible. In fact, shayakar are generally despised throughout the Southern Kingdoms.
- **Fae Beauty:** The fae are inherently beautiful and graceful, and the shayakar starkly, eerily so; they start with a +2 Charisma.
- **Heritage:** Shayakar begin with a d6 in Agility and Smarts.
- **Keen Fae Senses:** Shayakar begin with a d6 in Notice and +2 with sight-based checks.
- **Light Sensitivity:** Unshadowed have a mild sensitivity to light, suffering a -1 to all Trait rolls requiring their vision in broad daylight or bright lighting conditions.
- **Low Light Vision:** The blood of the fae gives the shayakar the gift of night vision. Ignore attack penalties for Dim and Dark lighting.
- **The Seduction of Shadows:** The shayakar are constantly called by the Darkness to give into their inborn nature and accept their Night Gifts. Whenever placed in a high stress situation (usually combat) at night or in dark surroundings, a shayakar must make a Spirit roll at the start of the situation (first round of combat) to resist using his Night Gifts. He must also roll any time he is Shaken or Wounded. Once he succumbs, he can continue to use the Night Gifts for the rest of the scene, but he is Marked by Shadow. Once he has been Marked a total number of times equal to his Spirit die, he becomes Shadowed.
- **Weakness:** Unshadowed shayakar suffer +1 damage from all four of the classic mystical substances – Black Iron, Blood Steel, White Silver, and Everwood.

VAINAR'S CHILDREN — THE SHADOWED

Those shayakar who ultimately give into their dark nature gain the following abilities and weaknesses.

- **Mystically Secretive:** Shayakar have the innate ability to Conceal Arcana on their person at will (using their Spirit if they don't have a Spellcasting roll).
- **Night Gifts:** Shayakar gain Level Headed and Combat Reflexes, but only in darkness and shadows.
- **Weakness:** Shayakar suffer from the Bad Eyes Hindrance and also suffer one level of Fatigue when in daylight.
- **Weakness:** All shayakar are vulnerable to Everwood and White Silver (they suffer +2 damage from those sources).

Note – Fully Shadowed shayakar trade the original Unshadowed Weakness for the higher vulnerability to Everwood and White Silver.

RACIAL EDGES

Aevakar Heritage

Requirements: Background, Shayakar, Must be taken at character creation

Even most shayakar don't believe there are any aevakar-blooded among them. Of those miniscule few who followed Vainar into his mad plunge into Darkness, only a fraction even survived the transformations that came.

Shayakar with this Edge have leathery wings that grant them flight of Pace of 8 (with a d6 "Run" die). The wings are generally brown, black, or dark grey in color, and are easily concealable beneath a cloak. Shayakar with this Edge reduce their Toughness by 1.

Shayakar with this Edge qualify as Aevakar for the purposes of taking the following Racial Edges: *Aerial Archer, Improved Aerial Archer, Aerobatics, Greater Aerobatics, Draft Rider, Fast Flier, Fly By, and Sprint Flier.*

Note that shayakar taking this Edge may not take *Alakar Heritage* or *Eldakar Heritage*.

Alakar Heritage

Requirements: Background, Shayakar, Unshadowed

Many of shayakar birth retain strong links to their alakar heritage.

This Edge may be taken once per Rank; when taken, the character may select an Alakar Racial Edge of Novice or Seasoned rank. The character is considered Alakar for purposes of selecting this Edge, but must meet all other requirements.

If *Resist the Call* is taken, the shayakar may then select Veteran Alakar Edges. If *Deny the Call* is taken, all Alakar Edges are available to be taken with this Edge, and it can be selected twice a Rank instead of just once at that point.

Note that shayakar taking this Edge may not take *Aevakar Heritage* or *Eldakar Heritage*.

Control the Call

Requirements: Novice, Shayakar, Unshadowed, Spirit d8+

Some shayakar seek the difficult path of mastering their inherent birthright without succumbing to the full Corruption of Darkness. Most who try ultimately fail, but a handful successfully walk the very blurry line between Shadow and the Void.

Unshadowed shayakar with this Edge make a Spirit roll at the end of any scene where they used their Night Gifts. On a success, they do not gain a Mark.

Note that shayakar taking this Edge may not take *Resist the Call*.

Deny the Call

Requirements: Veteran, Shayakar, Unshadowed, Resist the Call, Spirit d8+

Though risking utter rejection and ostracizing from their own people and society, some shayakar truly master the ability to shield their souls from the Darkness of their birth.

A shayakar with this Edge no longer faces the Seduction of Shadows, though he may still willingly succumb to Darkness if he chooses to at some point. Such discipline also imbues the character with a general +2 to all Spirit checks (increased from the +1 of *Resist the Call*).

Eldakar Heritage

Requirements: Background, Shayakar, Unshadowed, Spirit d8+

More than a few shayakar retain strong connections to their eldakar bloodlines, though precious few choose to acknowledge it. Fewer still ever find a way to connect to this heritage.

This Edge may be taken once per Rank; when taken, the character may select an Eldakar Racial Edge of Novice or Seasoned rank. The character is considered Eldakar for purposes of selecting this Edge, but must meet all other requirements.

If *Resist the Call* is taken, the shayakar may then select Veteran Eldakar Edges. If *Deny the Call* is taken, all Eldakar Edges are available to be taken with this Edge, and it can be selected twice a Rank instead of just once at that point.

Note that shayakar taking this Edge may not take *Aevakar Heritage* or *Alakar Heritage*.

Greater Night Gifts

Requirements: Shayakar, Nightguard or Transcend the Call, Nightguard d6+

Advanced members of the powerful and mysterious Nightguard come to know the many useful abilities and talents one can attain when one realizes the unique properties of Shadow that stand apart from Darkness. Those who reach the enlightened state of Transcend the Call also discover these powerful truths.

Taking this Edge confers the *Arcane Background: Night Gifts* on the shayakar. The Nightguard Skill (associated stat is Spirit) is used to enact these abilities, and the character begins with 5 Essence and two specific Powers, *Invisibility* and *Obscure*.

Future level-up can be spent on New Power, with the following list available: *Analyze Foe*, *Arcane Shield*, *Blind*, *Boost Trait*, *Burrow*, *Clairvoyance*, *Conceal Arcana*, *Confusion*, *Damage Field*, *Deflection*, *Disguise*, *Dispel*, *Drain Power Points*, *Entangle*, *Environmental Protection*, *Farsight*, *Fear*, *Healing*, *Illusion*, *Intangibility*, *Legerdermain*, *Lower Trait*, *Mind's Eye*, *Phantasms*, *Postcognition*, *Puppet*, *Quickness*, *Silence*, *Slow*, *Slumber*, *Speak Language*, *Speed*, *Stun*, *Succor*, *Telepathy*, *Teleport*, *Wall Walker*, *Warrior's Gift*.

In addition, any character with Greater Night Gifts may invoke *Darksight* at will, but only on himself.

Life Everlasting

Requirements: Background, Shayakar

One of the promises of Vainar was a kind of immortality that surpassed that which the fae had known from their devotion to Life. Those shayakar of the original bloodlines are embodiments of that promise.

This Edge confers immortality on the shayakar, ensuring he will stop aging in any significant way once he reaches maturity. As well, he is immune to all forms of natural disease.

At Seasoned rank, such a shayakar becomes immune to even unnatural and mystical diseases, including those conveyed by curses. At Veteran, no poisons or toxins will cause the shayakar's death, though he can still be incapacitated by them.

Heroic shayakar with this Edge gain the Slow Regeneration ability, and Legendary shayakar with Life Everlasting gain the Fast Regeneration ability. Only items of artifact-level power or High Magic can end the life of such a being.

Note that a shayakar that has this Edge may not take any of the following Edges: *Control the Call*, *Deny the Call*, *Master the Call*, *Resist the Call*, or *Transcend the Call*. Vainar's gift of Life Everlasting requires at least a tacit acceptance of one's connection to Darkness.

Master the Call

Requirements: Seasoned, Shayakar, Unshadowed, Control the Call, Spirit d8+, Knowledge: Cosmology d6+

Shayakar who reach this level of control over the Seduction of Shadows continue to play a very dangerous game, but they play it very well.

Such a shayakar may invoke Night Gifts at will, instead of only under stress; the night time/in shadows requirement remains, however. As well, he gains a +2 on his Spirit check at the end of the scene to resist being Marked.

Resist the Call

Requirements: Novice, Shayakar, Unshadowed, Spirit d6+

Shayakar who truly wish to avoid the doom of their people struggle against a constant siren call to the sweet embrace of Darkness. Such a struggle can result in a truly determined mind.

Unshadowed shayakar with this Edge gain +2 on all Spirit rolls when attempting to resist using Night Gifts. Such intense mental discipline also results in a general +1 to all other Spirit rolls.

Note that shayakar taking this Edge may not take *Control the Call*.

Transcend the Call

Requirements: Veteran, Shayakar, Unshadowed, Master the Call, Spirit d10+, Knowledge: Cosmology d8+

The tiniest fraction of the shayakar population come to know the exquisite truth – the Shadows that are their legacy are not wholly tied to absolute Darkness. In achieving this enlightened state, they discover an entirely new world of their own.

Shayakar with this Edge may now invoke their Night Gifts at will with no fear of being Corrupted. As well, they are now able to master the *Greater Night Gifts*. Finally, anyone with this Edge may use the Deathwhisper ability of the Nightguard.

PROFESSIONAL EDGES

Nightguard

Requirements: Shayakar, Shadowed, Assassin, Thief, Agility d8+, Spirit d6+, Nightguard d6+

The elite warriors, assassins, and spies of Shaya'Nor, the Nightguard are respected and feared throughout Shaintar. They are effective and deadly, and certainly capable of using deception and skullduggery to accomplish their goals, yet they are also honorable and noble in their own way.

The Nightguard automatically gain a bonus to all Stealth checks of +2, due mainly to their inherent connection to the aspect of the Patterns called Shadow. This bonus stacks with the +2 gained from Thief and other sources. Nightguard also gain the *Arcane Background: Greater Night Gifts* (described in the Shayakar Racial Edges).

Shayakar also gain the Deathwhisper gift, a unique power that only works once, and only upon their actual demise. At the moment of death, a Nightguard can send a tiny piece of his soul to anywhere in Shaintar. This bit of his essence, which manifests as a tiny wisp of shadow emanating from his corpse, flies almost instantly to the named target and delivers a whispered message of no more than two or three sentences. This can be a piece of vital information, a call for vengeance against a specific target, or a final message to a loved one. Many Nightguard have been known to, facing impossible odds, commit suicide in order to get information back to their homeland so that they do not fail in their mission.

All Nightguard follow a specific code of conduct, which is like a unique Code of Honor that comes with the Edge.

The Nightguard Code

- The Shadow and I are One. The Shadow is my Guide, and my Tool. We use each other for the greater glory of the Nation.
- The Mission is Paramount. Whatever I must do to see it done, will be done. My life is gladly given for the greater glory of the Nation.
- My Brothers and Sisters in the Nightguard are as Blood to me. Our bond is as family. Let nothing sever that bond, and the strength we gain from it will carry us through all challenges, for the greater glory of the Nation.
- The Shayakar are the Chosen of the Shadowlord, and we are the Guardians of the Chosen. Let all our actions be to that end, and for the greater glory of the Nation.
- Lesser beings are but obstacles in the path of our Missions. They are to be avoided or eliminated as reason dictates; not with malice, but efficiency, for there is no room for petty emotions or base instincts when a Mission is underway. We fight them when we must, evade them when we can, for they provide no greater glory for the Nation.
- Greater beings – those who show skill, dedication, and purpose – are to be fought with honor whenever possible. The Mission is Paramount, but if circumstance allows, honorable combat should always be given to one who is deemed worthy of it. Such challenges always bring greater glory to the Nation.
- The Deathwhisper is our special gift, a last moment to serve the greater glory of the Nation. Never let it be wasted, for it is more precious than all the treasures of the world. Praise the Shadow for it.

Liner Note – The Greater Glory of the Nation

Most assume the mantra “for the greater glory of the Nation” refers to the Nightguards’ service to Shaya’Nor. There are some, however, who suspect the “Nation” may represent something very different to the upper echelons of the Nightguard...

