

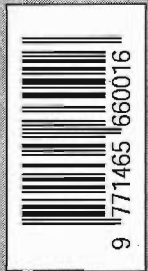
THE INDEPENDENT MAGAZINE FOR WARHAMMER FANTASY ROLEPLAY

WARTSTONE

ISSUE 16

SPRING 2001

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WELCOME TO TALABHEIM

EDITORIAL

By John Foody

We've been working on it for a long time, but in this issue, we can finally bring you the first part of our Talabheim background. I won't talk too much about it here, as you can find out all about it on page 15. For now, just let me say that I think everyone involved has done a great job. We look forward to hearing your thoughts.

I did deliberate long and hard about the inclusion of some of the articles this month – for a different reason in each case. I hope that you will write and let me know what you think of these pieces, and in particular whether you'd like to see more like this.

The first such piece is *A Touch of Evil*. This article developed from an incident in one of my gaming sessions. I think the article does stand alone, but nevertheless I am concerned that it leaves us open to accusations of vanity publishing. I hope you'll agree though that this is not just a report on the editor's gaming session, but a way of exploring some fairly important questions about the game and its setting.

In the section on Talabheim I have included what could best be described as designer's notes. However, this is not just a case of blowing our own trumpet. Talabheim is the biggest project that we have taken on and, if successful, we hope it will help people to develop their own campaign settings. As a result, I thought that some of you might find these snippets of background and project history entertaining and informative.

Last issue, I said that having extra pages would allow us to try out some very different ideas. *Tintabriel and Aurore* falls into this category. This is not an article or piece of game background, but something else entirely. It amused us, and we hope it will amuse you too – although I'm sure that some readers will consider it a waste of space. As ever, if you feel strongly (either way), we'd love to hear from you.

Now, it wouldn't be an editorial without a bit of a rant. To date, I've tended to stay off the topic of Games Workshop, knowing full well that I will be whistling in the wind. It has long been observed that Games Workshop have little regard for the consistency of their worlds. It is disappointing – but expected – that they ignore anything from WFRP, and it's unfortunate that their previous WFB background is also easily dismissed or changed. What's even worse, though, is that few of these changes seem to be deliberate; for the most part it simply seems to arise from a lack of knowledge or respect for the background.

Should this even bother us? In many ways, no. At an official level, Hogshead has suffered from having their work held up by Games Workshop because it doesn't fit their version of the world. However, when that official version is forever shifting and mutating, is it a surprise that things don't fit? It almost seems like hypocrisy. At an unofficial level we remain free to pick and choose the background we prefer – but this is not particularly satisfying.

The new version of Warhammer Fantasy Battle brought some of these issues to light again. The designers have moved the date forward to 2520. Although this provides some justification for the differences between different versions, inevitably, conflicts between the old world and their new version of it keep cropping up.

Part of the problem seems to be Games Workshop's perception of their audience. They aim their games to a certain age bracket, and thus the individuals that comprise this are always cycling through it. It doesn't matter if the history of the world changes every few years – no one will notice. The danger of this approach was highlighted when they announced that the success of Pokemon had affected them adversely. It seems absurd to make no attempt to hold on to those gamers who were once loyal fans.

Perhaps GW need to employ someone solely to look after their world. (They do have the Imperial Council who are allegedly responsible for this, but they seem to be failing in their task.) The publishers of Star Wars fiction do it. They ensure that a solid and consistent world is presented in all the books. Would it really be so hard to ensure the Warhammer World was equally well cared for?

Well – that's my rant and froth for this issue; as I'm sure you've heard enough, on to the real stuff...

INFO







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Talabheim Map on page 28 by Alfred Nunez, Symbols by John Keane

Thanks to: Iain Smedley, Bunny Smedley, Jay Forster, Graeme Davis, James Wallis, Peter Butterworth, Sebastien Boudaud, Alfred Nunez, N. Arne Dam, Anthony Ragan, Andrew Hind, Ryan Wileman, Peter Huntington, Toby Pilling, Luke Twigger, Tom McGrenery, Mark Bell, Zeno Collins, Mark Bell, Ourobouros and Tim Eccles.

SUBMISSIONS

Version 1.5 – July 1999

Warpstone is happy to receive submissions of both written work and art. We will *always* respond to submissions, even if they are not suitable for publication in Warpstone. If you send a submission and don't hear back from us in good time, please drop us a line to remind us. Failure to reply is simply a symptom of the chaotic nature of the Warpstone organisation. If you take the time with a submission, we will take the time to respond.

Payment

A published contribution earns you a free copy of Warpstone.

How?

We are happy to receive submissions by post or e-mail. Articles should be in RTF (Rich Text Format) or MS Word format. Disks should be 3.5", formatted for PC and marked with your name and article names.

Art Submissions

We are always looking for artists. You must have an understanding of the "Warhammer style" (which covers a broad range of styles, as our current artists will testify!), but we are happy to look at all kinds of work, whether your speciality is maps, caricatures, portraits or anything else. Just send us a picture you think should be included in Warpstone, and some examples of any other work you have done. Please remember not to send originals, but only copies.

Article Submissions

Warpstone tries not to include articles that rewrite game rules or are in themselves rules-heavy. In the same vein we are not looking for new monsters, careers, skills, gods etc. (That said, if you have something good send it in.) We are looking for articles that expand of the world of Warhammer, filling in the gaps that are present. We also look at how the game is played, discussing issues relevant to all gamers.

If you have an article but you're not sure whether it's suitable, send us an outline. We will tell you if we are interested in seeing it developed. If you could include a sample of some other work you've completed at the same time, this would be useful (but is not essential).

Regular Articles

Reviews: We will review WFRP material. If you wish to write a review on any other release (WFB etc.) then please check with us first to make sure no-one else is writing it. Should be 600+ words.

Comment Articles: We are always looking for articles where you put across your point of view on a particular subject. *Cameos:* Brief encounters and adventure outlines. Don't include character profiles, only descriptions.

Scenarios: Full length, detailed adventures. We are especially interested in scenarios that do not include hosts of creatures, lots of magic or loads of Chaos cultists. When these are included, they should be an integral part of the story. A tribe of goblins with +1 swords all round will prove the adage that 'the editor's red pen is mightier than the sword...' *Short stories:* Set firmly in the Warhammer World. Same guidelines as Scenarios.

The Article List

If you want to see any WFRP related article then let us know. We will add it to the article list. Only the following on the list at the moment;

Careers: As mentioned in issue 10. Not new ones, but fleshed out cultures and backgrounds for the current ones.

ETC.

I am... I am still alive. This I am sure of. My heart beats, my wound bleeds – but who am I to say that this doesn't happen to certain of the Undead? No, I must believe I am alive or else I would go insane. How did I get here? A vague idea some five years past. My companion had taken me up on this idea, others had joined us on the way. It had been a long hard journey. Attacked by Bretonnians convinced we were Slaaneshi cultists, robbed by Easterners of whom we knew little. Some hadn't made it to this stop, some just disappearing without trace, others... well, others had been seduced by charms best left unmentioned. Certainly the three we encountered last time still stalked us. Sometimes I can still see that terrible grin. The rambling blue-bearded Seer had predicted that I would meet the necromancer and his horde, but little did I truly realise the horror that awaited me in Talabheim...

REPORTS FROM THE HEART OF CORRUPTION

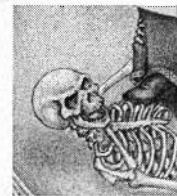
Reviews 2

We take a look at the latest Hogshead release, **Chart of Darkness**.
 "Any compilation like Apocrypha 2: Chart of Darkness is always going to be a mixed bag. This is no exception."



Talabheim: An Introduction 15

Some notes on the background of the **Talabheim** project and how it came it about.
 "Warpstone had been planning to do the background for a city for some time, inspired (and occasionally frustrated) to some degree by such predecessors as Irillian and Middenheim, amongst others."



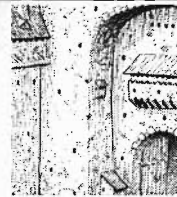
Fragments 3

News of **Warpstone in French**, a couple of reviews and other news.
 "Le Grimoire's team have translated a selection of articles from issues one to ten and put them together with all-new art."



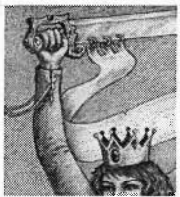
Talabheim 16

Finally, it's here. After all the promises part one arrives. This issue we look at much of the background and history of the city.
 "Welcome to the great city of Talabheim, a haven of civilisation amid the dangers of the Great Forest."



The Correspondent 5

Some discussion of **Culture in the Old World** and why there should be more of it.
 "I believe that a glaring omission from the WFRP portfolio is an Empire sourcebook."



Tintabriel and Aurore 32

An Imperial play that may seem a little familiar...
 "The true author of this work is one Siegfried Schwartzadler, a cleric of Verena of no small authority."



Who are the Feathered Priests? 7

In time for the release of the final **Doomstones** book we look at the long history of the saga.
 "Instead it was converted from a series of Dungeons & Dragons supplements."



Privileges 36

A scenario set amongst the heights and depths of **Talabheim**..
 "Across The Empire, the power and influence of the nobility has been slowly eroded. Although still weighty, the rise of the middle class, especially the merchants, has been a constant threat."



A Touch of Evil? 11

Just how far can PCs bend the rules before they step over the line? More questions than answers, as a throat is slit.
 "As the halfling had drawn the blade across the boy's throat he had smiled."



I Know Not... 46

The third and final part finds our hero discovering the source of his mistress' problems.
 "Some, like me, are simply men too small to care how they make their living, and too good at murder to do anything else."



ABBREVIATIONS

A	Number of Attacks	Fel	Fellowship	M	Movement	SMB	Strike Mighty Blow
AP	Armour Points	GC	Gold Crown	MP	Magic Points	SS	Secret Signs
BS	Ballistic Skill	GM	Gamesmaster	NPC	Non-player character	SW	Specialist Weapons
Cl	Cool	Gu	Guilder (Marienburg Coinage)	P	Parry	T	Toughness
CR	Complexity Rating	GW	Games Workshop	PC	Player Character	W	Wounds
DB	Dodge Blow	I	Initiative	R	Range	WFB	Warhammer Fantasy Battle
Dex	Dexterity	IC	Imperial Calendar	S	Strength	WFRP	Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay
EPs	Experience Points	Int	Intelligence	SDtR	Marienburg: Sold Down the Riverr	WP	Will Power
ES	Effective Strength	Ld	Leadership	SL	Secret Language	WS	Weapon Skill

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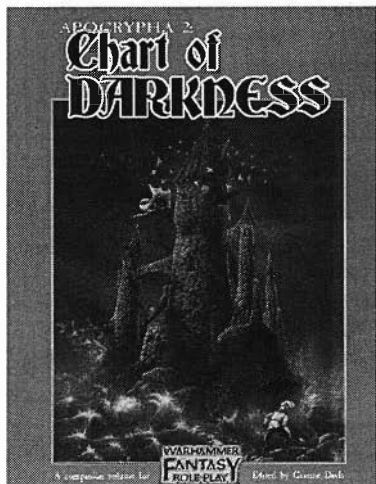
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REVIEWS

Apocrypha 2: Chart of Darkness

Edited by Graeme Davis

Reviewed by John Foody



Apocrypha 2: Chart of Darkness is the sequel, if you hadn't guessed, to the popular *Apocrypha Now!* It follows the same format, mixing articles from old *White Dwarfs* and other long out-of-date WFRP supplements with original material. Another link with *Apocrypha Now*, trivia fans, is that the cover of both volumes has the same tower. However, in this volume the newer stuff outweighs the old. Graeme Davis is the editor and primary author here, but he has conscripted the likes of Anthony Ragan and Ken

Rolston for this latest batch of writing. Much of the art is also fresh, and indeed in most cases the quality outshines older illustrations. We're pleased to say that many of you will recognise the presence of regular Warpstone artists.

The book is broken into various chapters, each containing articles on a common topic. The first is Crime & Punishment, which begins with a look at beggars and other lowlifes including some new careers and skills. This offers a few nice ideas for encounters and background, and adds some depth to Beggar PCs. However, still more could have been done to expand upon the culture of begging itself. This entry is followed by some new rules for the pickpocket skill which complicate matters but succeed in making the process more realistic. Next up is a handful of spells for Clerics of Ranald. These are potentially fun without being overpowered. Sensible ingredients too. The chapter finishes with a description of four prisons in different locations - mostly Imperial, but with one based in the Southlands. All are interesting and would be useful in a campaign. The Southlands Colony also offers a potential change of scenery for GMs wanting to move beyond the Old World. The background on prison reform in the Empire is valuable as well. Three adventure hooks are given for using these prison locations, although one is poor as it threatens to ruin the set-up given in the main description.

Next is a look at aspects of death in the Old World, concentrating on the Cult of Morr. A description of the cult opens the chapter, looking at its organisation and role. This is solid material, an essential addition to the culture of the world. However, it doesn't go far enough in detailing the workings of the cult; it doesn't look at its structure and responsibilities in enough detail, for example. Spells for Clerics of Morr follow, including the introduction of Rituals - a new kind of magic. The spells Deathsight and Locate Corpse further the Cult's role as the Forensic Scientists of their day. Deathsight gives almost as many ideas as it causes problems! Sanctity of the Grave examines the law concerning the dead in the Old World, and is a very worthwhile addition. A funeral parlour is well described, but is mainly useful for expanding on the role of the undertaker. It could be run as an encounter, but is not hugely inspiring. Finally, several encounters are suggested for placing in graveyards of the Old World, ranging from the good to the downright daft.

The following section, People and Places, starts with the first reprint of the book, Otto's Printworks. This is an interesting location with entertaining ideas to expand and use in a wider context. Then comes The Vermillion Pawn, WFRP's take on the fantasy magic shop, which plugs a

hole in the game world and may be nice to use as a regular feature in campaigns. Morbog's Marauders is background on a bunch of Orc raiders. Really, this is just a waste of space which perhaps would have been better structured as a scenario. Far too rooted in Warhammer Fantasy Battle, here it is just pointless. The Pandemonium Carnival, on the other hand, is an original encounter from which much can be made. Thankfully, it doesn't fall into the trap of over reaching itself. The chapter finishes with profiles and descriptions of Felix and Gotrek, the main characters from William King's novels. This is another waste of space. This does not include anything a GM couldn't come up with if they really wanted to include the duo.

With scenarios kept for the final chapter, the penultimate one contains everything that doesn't fit elsewhere. First up is additional background for character creation, with tables for weight, height, hair colour and loads more. It all seems a little much, but is ideal to pick and mix from if players want. One effective part is the listing of various names covering the various PC races. This is followed by some new herbs, introduced by a halfling herbalist. Herbs generally seem scarce in WFRP, and this should help encourage their use. In many ways they can prove more interesting than magic.

Divination is the strongest article in the book, expanding on the skill of the same name. It is particularly effective where it interconnects with religion. The critical hit and miss tables for divination are also nice, although GMs may have to use them with caution. Although some advice is given, more guidance on how GMs can use Divination in their campaigns would have been welcome. The last entry in the chapter is also the poorest: a listing of magic arrows and bows. There isn't much here that couldn't be thought up by GMs to fit their own campaigns.

The Scenarios begin with The Ritual, previously presented in *The Restless Dead* after first seeing the light of day in *White Dwarf*. It is rather simple, but transcends its limitations by virtue of its atmosphere, much supplied by the villains. The Affair of the Hidden Jewel is brief, but neat, again with a proper ambience. It is fun to play and takes a different approach to many WFRP adventures, one that works to its advantage. Ironstone Pass is also taken from the pages of *White Dwarf*. However, this is the weakest of the three, suffering from many of the same faults as The Ritual but unfortunately not having the character to carry it through.

Finally, there comes a new scenario, Deep Trouble in Karak-Zulvor. This is designed to go with the Doomstones Campaign and unfortunately suffers from many of the same problems as that series. It is really just an average dungeon bash, and including an interesting villain doesn't help enough. The best parts are the Warpstone effect rules and the chance to look at the layout of a dwarf hold. Some of the worst areas mirror mistakes I felt Ken Rolsten made in *Something Rotten in Kislev*.

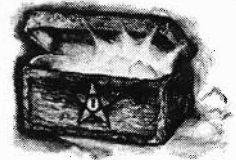
Chart of Darkness ends with a redesigned character sheet. Nothing revolutionary here, but it's a good looking template.

Any compilation like *Apocrypha 2: Chart of Darkness* is always going to be a mixed bag. This is no exception. Overall it is a less useful supplement than the first, but not by much, as both contain their share of poor articles. As with *Apocrypha Now*, the weaker pieces seem to be designed for WFB. The magic items and all the scenarios, to some degree, feel dated. It is also a book aimed firmly at GMs, with the few materials relevant to players mixed in amongst the GM's pieces. It could have been improved by giving more detail on various background topics - five more pages on the Cult of Morr, say, rather than magic arrows.

However, I still think the volume is an essential buy for WFRP GMs, even if only for the Cult of Morr, the information on divination and the locations. This is especially true if you don't own the older articles. You may need to work at expanding some of the material, but this isn't a bad thing; we are all used to this. It was a wise decision to introduce more original material rather than just relying on the old. If there is a third volume, we can only hope that it will be comprised of entirely new material, rather than dredging up anything that's still left lying around...

WARPSTONE FRAGMENTS

BRIEF REVIEWS AND NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF WARHAMMER



Warpstone goes French!

Issue 18 of the French WFRP magazine, *Le Grimoire*, was a Best Of Warpstone special. *Le Grimoire's* team have translated a selection of articles from issues one to ten and put them together with all-new art. The articles that appear in this *Warpstone* special are Secrets of the Warhammer Artists (by Graeme Davis), The Templars of Sigmar, Ulric and Myrmidia (by Peter Huntingdon), Templars of Manann (by Antony Ragan), Other Templars (by John Foody and Tim Eccles), Prosthetics (by John Foody), Witch-Hunters and Clerics of Shallya (both by Tim Eccles). An interview with James Wallis of Hogshead Publishing is also included, as well as The Dwarf in the Moon (by Sebastien Boudaud).

Le Grimoire 18 is available from Sebastien Boudaud, 3 Rue Andre Le Notre, 49300 Cholet, France for 95 francs or check out www.legrimoire.net for more details.

To all those of you awaiting our own Best of Warpstone, we shall have an announcement next issue.

Legion 2

Issue Two of Legion, the (very) occasional newsletter/mini-fanzine from the Warpstone team, was sent to all subscribers with issue fourteen. Issue One has been available on the Warpstone website for some time now and has proved very popular (Indeed, it is so popular the British Library contacted us to ask when the new issue was coming out!). Issue two will be available from there soon.

Bergsburg Newsletter

Also enclosed with subscribers' copies of issue 14 was the first issue of the Bergsburg Newsletter. Written by Luke Twigger, it gave some background to the project and included a free scenario. If you would like to know more about the Bergsburg project check out www.geocities.com/luke_twigger/bb_index.html.

Kim Newman Winner

Congratulations to James McGraw, who answered the question, "Which character will you find in both *Anno Dracula* and *Drachenfels*?", correctly. The answer was Genevieve Dieudonné. A signed copy of *Life's Lottery* is with James as we speak.

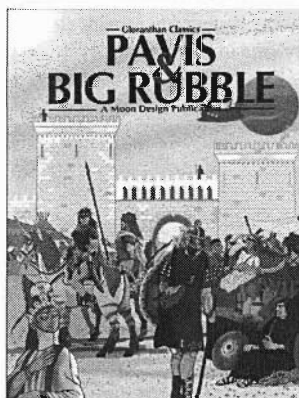
Elsewhere...

Iron Crown have gone bankrupt and Wizards of the Coast have laid off one hundred and fifty staff in the wake of the Pokemon slowdown * *Games Workshop* are to produce a *Lord of the Rings* games movie tie-in (more next issue) * The picture on pg 30 of last issue was Olivier Bergerat's.

The Knights of the Rose and Cross (Supplement for 7th Sea) Pavis & Big Rubble Tales of the Reaching Moon

REVIEW

by Tim Eccles



This reviewing lark is not as easy as it looks. In issue 14, I reviewed *7th Sea* with a number of favourable comments, suggesting that Hogshead and WFRP could learn a thing or two from the game and the support it was receiving. Unfortunately, my

boxed supplements for the (then) Chaosium game *Runequest* in its second edition guise. So, how have they fared over the years? From a WFRP perspective, there is little of immediate interest, since *Runequest* was set in an ostensibly bronze age world called Glorantha. However, whilst this means that it cannot be pulled straight off the shelf, *Runequest* (in many ways) trailblazed the themes pushed by WFRP - humour (albeit a very Americanised style), role-playing over hacking and the development of different human and monster cultures. The book offers a campaign for a city (Pavis) and the much larger ruins surrounding it (Big Rubble). The city is a hotbed of intrigue, between its human inhabitants, trolls and other non-humans. The trolls are a classic - that word again - race as presented in the Glorantha world, and additional interest is added by two competing human 'nations'. These are the descendants of the original inhabitants and the later human invaders, the Lunars. The latter reflect the evolution of RPGs as they are essentially portrayed here as hated invaders of an evil empire, whereas in the current Hero Wars version of the game they are represented as an equally valid culture with its relative belief structures. Whilst I find some of the actual scenarios very primitive, others are much more developed, and the overall background is extremely rich. There are a number of production issues, reflecting the problems Hogshead has had with reprints of the WFRP supplements. The art is variable, and the product is by no means as ground-breaking now as it was twenty years ago - how could it be? That said, if you cannot find anything in here worth reading and, er, stealing, then you are in the wrong hobby. *Pavis & Big Rubble* is indeed a classic product, dated around the edges, but still a weighty and worthwhile read.

The same basic problem of relevance for the Old World holds forth for *Tales of the Reaching Moon*, a *Runequest* (or Hero Wars now that a new Glorantha game is out) magazine. It offers very good value for money in terms of presentation and size, and if you think *Warpstone* offers good production values, *Tales* probably surpasses it. Anyway, *Tales* is excellently produced with high quality material. My only criticism for a WFRP readership is that

high hopes appear to have been sadly unfounded. The Knights of the Rose and Cross is not a bad product, but it is not exactly startling either. The supplement purports to examine a Théahan secret society. So it does. Unfortunately, there seems to be a shameless attempt to simply rip off real world history by changing a few names and throwing in a lot of NPC descriptions of dubious worth. The problem with this is that I should approve of these things. I have long argued, in the pages of *Warpstone* and to the constant distress of my group, that WFRP would be much better with a more sensible and appropriate use of real history. Equally, I think developing NPCs into real people, and not simply cardboard stereotypes is excellent. Unfortunately, *7th Sea* appears to be degenerating into over-simplistic history, and hiding this by changing an odd letter within the names of people and towns. I still think that *7th Sea* has some neat ideas, and this supplement may well be worth the money, but the honeymoon is definitely over.

I'm on safer ground with *Pavis & Big Rubble*, a re-release of a long out-of-print classic *Runequest* supplement, which is not going to let me down in the future. Okay, the term 'classic' is often misused, and time can often be very harsh on what were once deemed classics. For those of you who don't know, these were

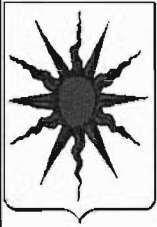
if you don't know the *Runequest* game (as was) or world of Glorantha at all, then you might be a little lost. The world is rather more unique than most fantasy environments, and *Tales* is very thorough in examining its subject. If you find some of what is in *Warpstone* a trifle too 'academic', then you probably won't like this. But, frankly, if you cannot get £3.50 worth of entertainment here, you are probably jaded from too many Slaaneshi parties. Issue 19 has a full gazetteer of the Upland Marshes - a perfect template for developing the WFRP regions. Hint, hint, Hogshead Publishing. The marsh is home to a believable Undead culture, a creditable task in itself. From a WFRP perspective, this makes excellent material and ideas for realistic development of Sylvania, the Badlands and - particularly - the Zombie Swamps.

I noted that like *Warpstone*, *Tales* continues this peculiar notion that we should all support *Valkyrie* magazine on the basis it is the only professional UK magazine. I would suggest you would be better off supporting these two products. Both are sharper, cleaner, better written and (in the case of *Tales*) cheaper. That way, we might get more scarce old material reprinted and genuinely high quality magazines produced that seem to be better able to offer fans what they want. *Tales* recognises that widening readership does not have to mean catering to the lowest denominator of monster bashes, chainmail bikinis and lists of new monsters/careers/skills/spells.

Pavis & Big Rubble (£45 hardback or £20 soft cover) & *Tales of the Reaching Moon* (£3.50; three issues for £10, although it is finishing on issue 20) are available from David Hall, 11 Barons Lodge, 110 Manchester Road, London. E14 3BL. Although I understand that David only has hardback copies of *Pavis & Big Rubble* left your local game store ought to have the soft cover still.

More Fragments overleaf...

THE BRETONNIA PROJECT



It is an understatement to say that Games Workshop's version of Bretonnia was a disappointment to many players. Gone was the diseased, depraved land of King Charles de la tête d'Or. Instead there was cod-Arthurian nonsense. All very well for the Battle game but not what we had hoped for in WFRP. However, all is not lost. For those of you dissatisfied with this version, a net project has been started that aims to produce a complete sourcebook for Bretonnia.

Project Co-ordinator Peter Butterworth said, "The project doesn't approve of the WFB5 Arthurian type background, and is instead based on the description in the WFRP rulebook and inspired by historical France (at least to a certain extent). Our view of Bretonnia tends to be rather low fantasy. As some of the project writers are French, the background benefits from the genuine French touch too." The project will provide a strong and original background for the corrupt kingdom of King Charles, with decadent nobles, daring musketeers, archaic knights and much, much more...

This is an ambitious project for and by WFRP fans; if you want to see it finished, please consider taking part in it. Anything Bretonnian is of interest. For further information, please visit the project website www.wfrp.de/hosted/bretonnia/ or email peter.butterworth@ircom.unilim.fr or write to P. Butterworth, Le journal, 87230 Bussiere-Galant, France



COMPETITION

We have a signed copy of *Apocrypha 2: Chart of Darkness* (reviewed on page 2) to give away to one lucky reader. Four of the book's artists and a number of the editorial team have put pen to paper to sign it for us. And as if that wasn't enough, we're also going to throw in a year's subscription to *Warpstone* for the lucky winner. To compete for this great trophy, just answer the question below and send it to us by mail, e-mail, carrier pigeon, UFO etc. All entries to be in the bucket by the 1st June 2001.

Question: *Apocrypha Now* was a play on the title, *Apocalypse Now*, the classic Movie by Francis Ford Coppola. But why is *Apocrypha II* called *Chart of Darkness*?



Hogshead News

Hogshead has just re-released *Death's Dark Shadow*, a reprint of the 1991 supplement by Carl Sargent. It features cover art by Dave Gallagher and the text has had a few minor revisions: the action no longer takes place after the end of *The Enemy Within* campaign. The eight-page section of

NPCs taken from the old Warhammer novels has also been removed. (On a separate note we hear rumours the old novels are to be re-released).

More excitingly, in January *Games Workshop* finally responded to the manuscript for *Realm of Sorcery*. The "Imperial Council" who vetted such projects had held it up at GW. However, we hear they no longer exist and apart from a few minor editorial changes, they've given it clearance for publication. It's now action-stations, and art is being commissioned, layouts are being

designed and lavish plans are being made for special editions of the book. A few years ago Hogshead was talking about a leather bound edition but we shall have to wait and see. They are hoping to have it released in time for the major American conventions, which are in July and August.

Otherwise Hogshead tell us they're in the middle of the, boring but necessary, traditional new-year flurry of reprints of all the books that are about to go out of stock.

On the other RPG fronts, there next big release, *Nobilis*, is coming along nicely. Bryan Talbot (of *Luther Arkwright* fame (if you haven't read this, check it out)), Michael Kaluta and Martin McKenna have all agreed to provide full-page art for the rulebook, and it is planned for release in early summer. The next release for *SLA Industries* will be the *Contract Directory*, which progresses apace.

Valkyrie

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THE CORRESPONDENT

Culture in the Old World by Tim Eccles

A theme that has been discussed in earlier Correspondent articles is that of regional cultures, and their use in fleshing out background for games. Although issue 14 offered some ideas for Ostland as an example of how this could be achieved, I believe that a glaring omission from the WFRP portfolio is an Empire sourcebook that could address this more widely. What's more, I believe that what little Imperial culture we do know about is frequently ignored in adventures. To this end, I'd like to offer a criticism of some glaring errors, and also a number of customs, traditions and generic pieces of folklore. Too often, folklore is simply used as a scenario hook, when it could add background and bring games to life - and confuse players when these things turn out not to be a clue or central to the adventure! The Old World should be a vibrant and rich place in its own right, regardless of whether a group of grubby adventurers happen to turn up inquiring about a one-eyed statue used in the Festival of the Golden Hammer...

What Game Culture Ignores

Regionalism

The Empire is described as a federation of states, each ruled by their own elector (rather than the emperor) and yet there are no regional differences in politics, law, culture, language, or any diversity. Even where religion is concerned, the Ulric-Sigmar division is under-used and few other local gods are developed. Do all Ostlanders really worship Sigmar? Why do none reflect the influences of those Kislevans living just across the border? Why don't they worship the type of gods more akin to the dark forests that comprise the land?

Despite the clear statement that The Empire is strongly diversified, there is very little attempt to build upon this. NPCs do not express regional sentiments. They do not complain about their neighbours. I have ruminated on this particular theme before in Warpstone 13, and offered ideas for Ostland in Warpstone 14, but this is a problem that will not go away.

Language

It is pretty self-evident that the idea of a universal language like Old Worlder is an improbable construct used to aid gameplay. Similarly, the idea of a universal Classical tongue echoes the role of Latin for Europeans as the language in which knowledge was recorded by ancient (Roman) scholars and re-discovered during the Reformation. The fact that the Old World has no equivalent to the pan-European Roman Empire that could have provided such a language could also be excused in the name of playability.

My particular concern with language, drawn from the above comments about the power and independence of the regions, is the lack of dialects - or even accents. Modern Britain still retains regional dialects and accents. As languages, Welsh and Cornish (technically western Welsh) are well known; Scottish Gaelic is less so, but even my native Lancastrian, for example, is an arcane language still recognisably reminiscent of Norse. A thousand years ago these languages were much more familiar. Modern German consists of a High German and a Low German, and, at the time of writing, a disagreement is ongoing between the EU and certain German politicians about the rules of German that should be followed in EU documents. Language is not uniform or universal, and yet The

Empire - with poor transport and communication and strong regional identity - has no regional languages, dialects, or even accents. As things stand, someone in Ostland would be more likely to understand someone from across the country in Wissenland than a minute across the border in Kislev.

Granted, dialects make things more complicated. I am not suggesting that the

common tongue of Old Worlder be ignored. However, I think that the world would seem more plausible if locals could also speak a local dialect, or at least speak Old Worlder with a strong accent. This could even be the focus for adventures, where words might have different meanings or connotations when used in a local dialect. Communication is not impaired - unless the GM wishes it to be - but diversity and colour are added.

Literacy

A classic example of how WFRP develops an idea only to ignore it is the concept of an illiterate society. It is likely that most PCs are illiterate. It is certain that most NPCs are illiterate. Yet there are posters, scrolls, letters and other forms of written information in practically every published adventure. Even orcs read and write! This just would not happen. From the background, and the allocation of skills, literacy is rare. Scenarios need to reflect this; GMs should stop relying on the written word in adventures and consider the alternatives.

At its simplest, one can make the read/write skill more valuable. Make obtaining a scribe to read written words part of the adventure, at least for NPCs. But perhaps the most obvious application in your game is the use of criers. All towns would have a town crier for proclamations. In addition, most organisations would have their own crier, and there would be a number of private criers whose services could be purchased. Public spaces would have a number of these plying their trade, calling notices and briefing citizens on new laws, special offers and anything else that needed to be disseminated. Rather than have notice boards and trees to pin notices to, make public spaces more central to adventures as the location of criers, and hence the sole source of information. There might even be attempts to silence a crier - by the appalled masses, by a professional rival, or by someone opposed to the message they are reading.

However, there is no need to penalise your players by introducing these ideas. I am proposing to make the game more colourful, not harder. Illiterate characters would have developed better memories to overcome their problem of being unable to maintain permanent records. There is no need to prevent players from keeping notes; it is simply that the world would not be cluttered with paper.

Currency

WFRP offers an interesting diversity of coinage, in that it states that money is not centrally produced but minted by local rulers. It then mysteriously presents the Gold Crown as not only universally equivalent within The Empire, and also with the Guilder. Rulers that cannot agree on religion - or much else - amazingly mint coinage with exactly the same precious metal content. Obviously this makes the game simpler - but if simplicity is required why bother to mention local minting in the first place?

Cultural Background - Some Simple Nuggets

The following terms and traditions are offered as simple ideas for GMs to incorporate into a campaign as background colour. Use them to flesh out the game, without (necessarily) having any direct relevance to a particular plot. They key is that the PCs should not know these things are irrelevant to their problems.

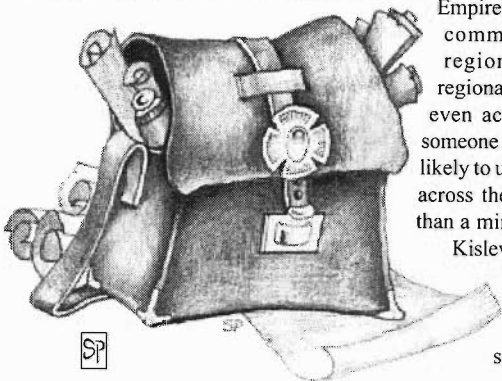
Bell: Most settlements have a bell tower or bell shack, since the sound of bells keeps demons away. Smaller settlements frequently sound them when visitors arrive, whilst others have formalised the sounding at a regular evening time - just in case.

Brabant: A term for someone from the Border Princes. Sometimes used to describe a mercenary camp, the inference being that the two are pretty much the same.

Bretonnian Silver: Copper. Used by Imperials, it is an obvious criticism of the amount of silver in a Bretonnian silver coin.

Brownie: A household spirit, worshipped by Halflings and some domestic servants, and thought to watch over the house - particularly the kitchen.

Candle: If a candle blows out, an evil spirit is about. Light a candle on each full



moon (Mannslieb) for each deceased relative in that year.

Copper Note: A bill of exchange or promise of payment.

Cordon: A military term, denoting someone who has earned the right to wear an additional ribbon. The colour and type of ribbon varies by unit.

Cornage: Tenancy on land reclaimed from wilderness or chaos, usually in payment of debt or similar crime. Some academics believe the term derives from Khome, but this is unlikely.

Cotereaux: An infamous group of Bretonnian footpads and cut-throats thought to have been wiped out a century ago. They were also a major sect of Khaine.

Coterie: Derisive term for a guild, particularly one involved in politicking.

Countess de Civillari: A cesspool or sewer. The Countess was a noted paramour of many famous lords, and is taken as indicative of the wantonness of the nobility by many peasants.

Cousin Mikhael: A dimwit. Used in reference to Kislevans generally, and in political circles to Kislev as a whole.

Demon's Throat: An instrument of torture, used to extract heretical beings and thoughts from the stomach.

Divorce: Throw the PCs an inn in which slavery is taking place. A woman placed on a leash is paraded around the market in front of prospective buyers. Illegal? Actually, it is a divorce. The concept of divorce is unknown to the majority of poor within The Empire, but there is a custom that dates back to the days before Sigmar where a man can sell his wife to another in order to be rid of her. Usually, these sales are arranged beforehand, between a wife and her lover. "Civilised" Old Worlders frown upon the practice, of course, but it is sometimes the only escape for a poor woman from an unhappy marriage. The exact origins of the practice are unknown, but courts recognise its validity since it is derived from custom.

Dragonade: A dragoon in religious service. Also used to mean a witch-hunt in which these soldiers are used to scour the region for suspects.

Droit d'Aubaine: A Bretonnian law, well known to all Imperials, that allows the monarch ownership of a foreigner's possessions upon his death in that land. Suspicion concerning deaths in that land is endemic.

Drum Party: A party whereby revellers are attracted by the beating of a drum. Polite parties use a small kettledrum.

Duendre: Estalian bandits.

Eating Habits: Never turn a loaf upside down after it has had a slice removed. Eat fish from the head towards the tail. Dropping a fork foretells a visitor. When setting places before the meal, always set one place too few.

Estafette: A Bretonnian term for a courier. Used in The Empire to describe one who carries a message between (noble) lovers.

Fate Holder (Fate Stealer; Fate Pointer): Albrecht Suzmann argued that life is controlled by the gods, but that they have only a certain amount of power they can wield. He termed this fate or mass of fate. He believed that certain individuals were awarded more fate than others were at birth. However, if these people could be found and killed, then their fate could be more evenly distributed among the rest – whom he described as Natural People of Chance. He is reputed to have been killed by a wandering band of adventurers.

Field Spirits: A proscribed belief within The Empire that seems to have been a rival to the worship of Ryha since the earliest days. It involves ascribing divinity to various plants in the form of a representative spirit, who is still occasionally represented as a kornwolf or harvest doll.

Hog Folk: A legendary folk believed to live in caves, being both mischievous and lazy.

Kerrigan: An Imperial chancellor of folklore, who bankrupted the government with mismanagement. Used by the lower classes to describe thieving or inefficient officials. Also, used by the elite classes to describe one who is working under impossible circumstances, and so not an insult in that particular context.

Kit cat: A type of mutton pastry, named after its halfling creator Kittiam Muscat.

Localised Laws: In Nuln it is illegal to drive a coach faster than 45mph; city safety statute notes that a coach travelling at 40mph will kill its occupants and driver through a lack of air. In Altdorf, it is illegal for non-teamsters to drive whilst blindfold. In Middenheim, it is illegal to walk on main thoroughfares upon your hands. In Talabecland, it is illegal to transport any type of rodent in your pocket. In Ostermark, it is illegal to keep pets. In Sylvania, speaking Reikspiel backwards is a hanging offence, unless your listener hears only backwards.

Moon-man: A madman, particularly one affected by the waxing of Morrslieb. A plural that is sometimes used is Moonie. Many of the insane become even more irrational as the chaos moon rises in power. The term can be applied to chaotics who seem to become more powerful, or at least more open, with the increased influence of the red moon. The verb to moon is sometimes applied to those who, usually through intoxication, temporarily engage in madness.

Nix: Shape-changing creatures that live in water, and are usually regarded as evil. However, nixes are supposed to have helped Sigmar in his negotiations with the Laurelor Elves because a nix princess fell in love with the god. Nixnacht is still celebrated in parts of The Empire in order to celebrate Sigmar's friendship with yet another people.

Redcap: Imperial name for a goblin bogeyman, so called due to his predilection for dyeing his helmet in human blood. Various scholars have ascribed the title to a particular creature, but the evidence is inconclusive. It is usually used to denote the leader of the goblins slain by Sigmar in sermons of hope in the face of evil by the clergy.

Hug: Different regions have different hugs. An Ostland hug means check your wallet. A Middenheim hug is taken as a term of hostility to Sigmarites. An Altdorf hug means watch your back. A Talabheim hug is a wrestling move.

Stone Heads: Many buildings in the Old World were built with carved heads over the door frame and/or set in the walls. This is believed to date back to the times when the tribes removed their enemies' heads and placed them around the camp. As they became civilised, Old Worlders began to use stone instead. The heads are often grotesquely demonic or goblinoid but may equally be human. The tradition is generally not continued today, although it appears to have carried on until late into the last century in more remote areas. However, many buildings throughout Kislev are still built with carved heads. This is believed to date back to the times when victors placed the heads of the defeated as trophies to the natural spirits. It was felt that stone provided a more permanent offering. The practice still continues today in areas where such worship persists.

"Tell that to the Freikorps": Freikorps are militias formed of middle and upper class individuals, often linked to guilds, churches or particular nobles. Whilst they form an excellent volunteer core for Imperial armies, they are also unafraid of involving themselves in private wars against those they disapprove of.

Conclusion

One of the major selling points of WFRP is the game-world. Everyone likes the Old World. I realise that this column has regularly pushed the need for more depth in this world, but to my mind the nature of RPGs has become much more complex twenty years on, and so the need for greater depth remains. No longer is it enough for WFRP to beat off its competition simply because it has a world and does not delve in dungeons every other adventure. This world has to be believable, both to make the game more realistic and to allow GMs to make their adventures more complex. As things stand in most WFRP adventures any culture that is offered is central to the adventure. Every ancient history book, every scroll one comes across, every village festival, every ritual is a central part of the scenario, and the PCs know to use it as such. The Old World lives outside our heroic PCs. As GMs, try and make it consistent and give it depth. Use folklore, books, tales, stories in taverns and old wives' tales as exactly what they are - background. These things are simply part of life, not merely a clue in the latest adventure that the characters have stumbled into.

Who are the Feathered Priests?

A Fresh Look at The Doomstones Campaign by Toby Pilling

In my view it is one of the great tragedies within the WFRP fraternity that the Doomstones campaign is not given the credit it deserves. Too often it is belittled as little more than a magic artefact quest with a few dungeon bashes. Nothing in my view could be further from the truth. With the release of Heart of Chaos, the final chapter in this epic campaign, it is a good time to revisit the Doomstones' scenarios.

The origins of Doomstones goes back further than the original Games Workshop prints (under the Flame Publication banner). Most people know that it wasn't written originally for the WFRP game or background, but that instead it was converted from a series of Dungeons & Dragons supplements. Penned by Simon Forrest and Basil Barrett, virtually no one knows much about those originals.

This is something I intend to change.

The Doomstones Campaign ranks amongst my player's favourites and indeed I rank it higher than the superb Enemy Within. Why? To answer that question I have to go back to the mid eighties...

History

In those days, while the Thompson Twins and Howard Jones topped the charts, the Games Workshop at Hammersmith in London was my source of fantastical enlightenment. White Dwarf was worth purchasing, and it was through that publication I heard of a new series of modules coming out by an independent company: Beast Enterprises.

The campaign was originally released as a "systemless" supplement (but in practice D&D or Runequest) as part of the "Complete Dungeon Master" series. The main bad guys were a race of human warriors called the Henninga, who were changed to Orcs in the WFRP version. Interestingly, the order in which they came out differed from that which was adopted later by Flame Publications. The first part was published in 1984 and the last in 1987: CDM1 "The Halls of the Dwarfen Kings" aka "Dwarf Wars" CDM2 "The Lost Shrine of Kasar-Khan" aka "Blood in Darkness" CDM3 "The Watchers of the Sacred Flame" aka "Fire in the Mountains"

CDM4 "The Feathered Priests" aka "Death Rock"
CDM5 "Deep Water - Shallow Graves" never came to print, which to me has always merely added to the romantic appeal of the campaign and its general mystique. This discrepancy though has finally been corrected by Hogshead with its upcoming concluding part "Heart of Chaos". Also published was a short scenario in Issue 6 of Tortured Souls! (Beast Enterprises' in-house magazine) called "Between Fire and Stone", and an extra wilderness encounter in Issue 12 entitled "The Barrow".

The former adds a Goblinoid-infested complex to the Dwarfen ruins in the Yelstin valley. Unfortunately a fair bit of work is required to turn it into more than a simple dungeon bash, but the potential is there to transform the residents into a viable third power to interact with between the two warring Dwarfen factions. This works especially well if the bandit-like leaders are turned into mercenary (rather than evil) Ogres, who can at least be negotiated with, if not trusted.

The latter wilderness encounter can basically be guessed at through its name!

Contents

Apart from the story line, which I will go into later, the thing that distinguished the CDM series was GM support material. With each scenario was a booklet detailing the adventure, another on the NPCs and an illustrative one detailing some of the main scenes. There was also a GM's screen with most of the important maps on the back.

A multitude of player handouts was provided, printed on separate paper or card of differing colours. Finally - the piece de resistance of the whole package - there were floor plans detailing every single complex. They were meant to be used in conjunction with figures to show the positions of adventurers and protagonists in any battles. However, they worked just as well merely as visual aids and atmosphere builders. Believe me, they were beautiful. The most useful one was a large representation of the rooftops of Eyrie, invaluable for the climactic battle.

It was these floor plans that really differentiated the Complete Dungeon Master series from all their rivals of the time. Of course, they also happen to be the main thing

Flame Publications did not reprint when they converted the campaign to WFRP. It is a decision understandable for the cost implications, but a crying shame nonetheless. It has to be said that they were an invaluable aid when combined with the WFRP booklets.

Reviews

Independent reviews appeared in White Dwarf of the various parts in issues 66, 70, 86 and 91 and it's interesting to look back at some of the comments made. The reviewer of the latter two episodes was Paul Cockburn, a familiar name to WFRP players through his connection with the development of the game, editing the rulebook no less. Here are some fragments from his comments.

"With The Watchers of the Sacred Flame, the opening part of a 'heroic quest' style of inter-linking scenarios takes place; although the events in the previous two sets are part of the same campaign, it is only now that the players will see some long-term goal to pursue. This is, as might be guessed, to do with a powerful artefact - a plot device common to the series. However, this is more than just a carrot in front of the players, it is actually the most important aspect of a detailed and imaginative background. The players not only have a limited idea what it is they are chasing, they have scant idea of where it is, what relevance it has and who else might be interested in it! As a heroic quest, it is brought down to the level of a spy thriller, where you can't quite grasp the whole plot until the final page.

This works well, but I regret one thing. As a gamesmaster, I find it a pity that all the careful background and history is going to remain hidden from the players, while they chase around after the artefact and the bad guys. So much of the subtlety of this adventure is lost in play. I wonder if the players are to 'Understand It All' come the end of the Complete Dungeon Master Series..."

Later on, after describing some of the box contents:

"The plans are attractive, and all but one is perfectly clear when compared to the descriptions on the screen (the castle layout isn't always easy to follow). The 'players' views' might seem a little superfluous but I ended up using them quite a lot. The adventure has a lot going for it. There are many excellent encounters, both passive and deadly. The gypsy encounter is great fun, run it for all it is worth. Some people might find the encounters a little cramped - this is due to the nature of the floor plans, of course (at the scale, a decent size area is too big for the box), but it helps keep things manageable, and the Endless Plans are as good for scene setting as anything else."

After describing The Feathered Priests as "a cracker" and the A2 map of Eyrie as the "number one play aid", Paul goes on:

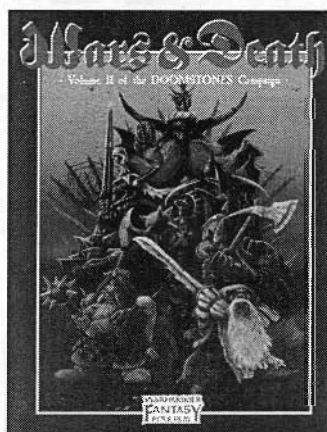
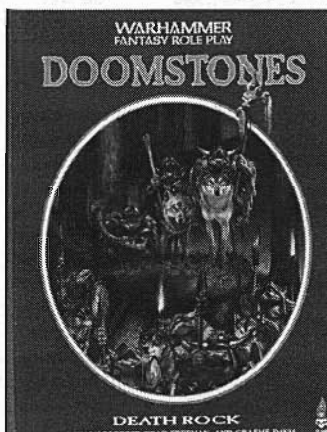
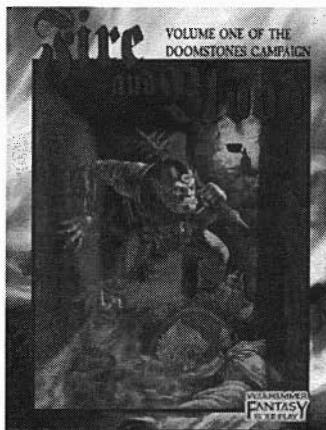
"And the adventure itself is pretty good, although it echoes the other plots of the series with its race against time, find the clues, Henninga on the horizon (they're the chief baddies) and big reward in the offing, with a potential sting in the tail.

But I do like this one, mostly for the setting. You should try to stretch the players, so that the exploration of Eyrie takes a long time; I'd even alter the timetable by which the adventure works, if my players were settling into routines, and making their forays to find the solution to the adventure's mystery against the background of ordinary events. And when the final confrontation comes as a sprawling rooftop battle, then you'll finish this adventure well satisfied. This is probably the best adventure play aid for AD&D since Ravenloft, with which it shares certain similarities in terms of atmosphere and setting.

I'll be running it more than once."

Flame Take Over

The next incarnation of the campaign came to life when Simon Forrest, one of the original authors, became an employee of Games Workshop. By around that time GW had set up the subsidiary WFRP producer, Flame Publications. It was encouraged to bring out as many supplements as possible as quickly as possible. As



SPOT THE DIFFERENCE PART ONE



The Bandits' Tower: Original Version (Left), Games Workshop (Right)

the Twisted lands. What a cool way to tie up those loose ends! Also, there is an interesting meeting between the players and a Greater Demon of Nurgle who, as an enemy of Tzeentch, is inclined to help them achieve their objectives. Perhaps these themes can be explored by enterprising GMs.

The only other event of note in the Flame years was the publication in White Dwarf of a supporting scenario called "Ironstone Pass". Sadly it is in reality little more than an encounter set on a mountain trail. Nothing intrinsically links it with the campaign, like meeting someone on their way to research a book in the fabled library of Eyrie, for example. As such, it might as well be used anywhere else in the Old World. As an evening filler it is fair enough, if uninspired.

Hogshead Years

The Flame experiment did not work the way Games Workshop wanted it to, which led to the hibernation, indeed near death, of WFRP. Nothing official was published to support the game until Hogshead came along. Even then, they had to build a base of new players and amass some capital from reprints before the expense of developing anything completely new could be risked. A wish list questionnaire was formulated asking WFRP players their preferences for re-issue. Though the Doomstones campaign came high up on that, subsequent sales sadly never matched the indicated interest.

Hogshead compressed the four original booklets into two, "Fire in the Mountains" and "Wars and Death". They also brought out a gem of an introductory adventure in Hogwash Issue 3 (also available from www.hogshead.demon.co.uk), which unlike the White Dwarf scenario is directly linked to the campaign. Of course, they have now

also concluded the campaign.

Sixteen years on from its inception, passing through several incarnations on the way, the circle is now complete.

As is the Doomstone itself...

As is the Doomstone itself...

As is the Doomstone itself...

As is the Doomstone itself...

As is the Doomstone itself...

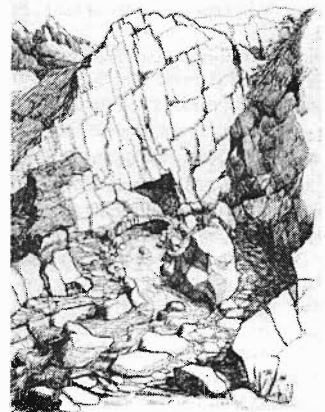
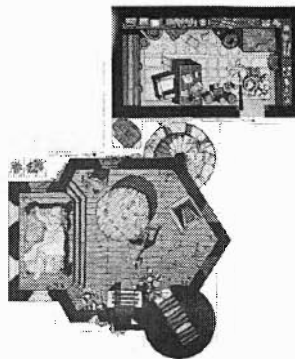
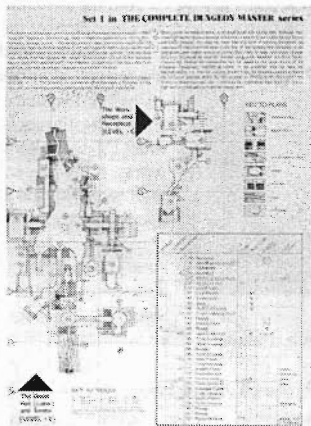
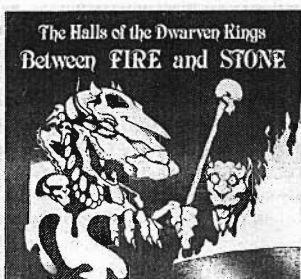
The Final Instalment: Heart of Chaos

The concluding episode has a much darker, doom-laden theme than the previous four. Many would say it is finally taking the campaign down the gothic, Warhammer path and away from its high fantasy roots. An apt way to end things. Just don't expect to live happily ever after...

Basically the players are not allowed to enjoy the fruits of their labour. Plans of world domination are shelved as they realise that uniting the crystals was a mistake rather than an achievement. A mistake that has opened up a chaotic rift, capable of wiping out half the Empire. They are forced to research the origins of the crystals, meeting some interesting characters on the way, to determine how to avoid the calamitous event they have unwittingly set in motion. All the time they are pursued and dogged by a variety of nasty agents and groups bent on their destruction. The finale is spectacular, but I don't want to give the game away.

There is a lot of scope for role-play, detective work and some excellent set-piece battles. The artwork is also the best of all the WFRP parts. It is definitely written in a different style, which is refreshing but takes some getting used to. It is a dark and grim adventure. The players will be enduring some parts of it as much as they enjoy it. Still, saving the Empire from destruction is a fairly motivating objective, if sometimes a thankless one.

SCENES FROM THE ORIGINAL DOOMSTONES



From left: Front Page of Original Fire & Stone, Map from GM Screen, Floor Plans, Part of GM Screen Cover

In my opinion, it is a worthy addition to this classic campaign.

Writers

Simon Forrest wrote the first two of the series and Basil Barrett the third and fourth (remember that's in CDM order, not WFRP). The interesting thing for WFRP players is that Simon subsequently became editor of *White Dwarf*, which may explain how Games Workshop/Flame Publications came up with the idea of converting the series. From my point of view I think it's a tragedy neither seems to have written anything else since; both seem to have dropped out of gaming.

Heart of Chaos has been written by Robin Laws, a well known writer in roleplaying. He made his name with *Feng Shui*, and has recently worked on the Runequest-derived *Hero Wars*. He also penned *Pantheon* for Hogshead, which has also just been released to great acclaim.

My Own View

To call the campaign a basic magic item hunt mixed with a monster bash is a great injustice. One might as well denigrate *The Enemy Within* series in the same way. The only thing one can really say against it is the absence it has of any Chaos cultists. But might that not be a good thing? Too much of the same can be boring. Anyway, you have a lovely chaotic factor in the malign, changeable influence of the Doomstones themselves, a resource I'm sure far too many GMs under utilise. The campaign has also been accused of lacking moral uncertainties, that there is too much black and white. I couldn't disagree more. O.K, there are some Orcs as baddies, but there is also a lot of interaction with neutral parties like the Ogres and even between warring Dwarfen factions. What I like most about the campaign are the remarkable set pieces, the detective work and the enormous amount of NPC interaction.

OK, so there are complexes, some underground 'dungeons', call them what you like. But rarely have they been so well thought out, distinctive, intelligently populated and atmospheric. From the first waterfall complex, through Torgoch's resting place, to the Ogre shrine, Eyrie and then the huge Dwarfen tomb itself, we have a series of some of the best 'dungeons' (how I hate that word) ever created.

Brainpower is at a premium in the campaign. Each instalment requires the gathering of clues and good analytical skills on the part of the adventurers for them to succeed. Also, every time there is a puzzle, there is a good in-game reason for it to exist. None of them ever appear to be 'just for the sake of it'.

Naturally there is fighting – what adventure has none? But the important thing in the series is that intelligent play can avoid much of it. This is true especially in the two main underground areas involving the Ogres and the Dwarfs.

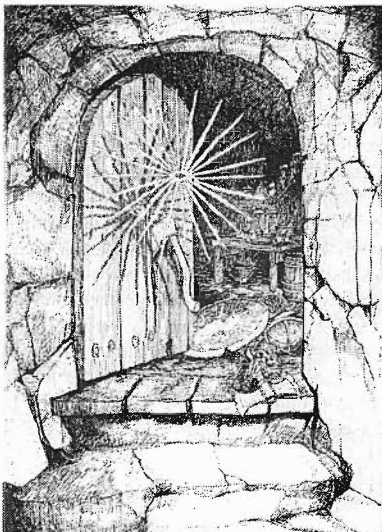
Which brings me onto one of the best aspects of the campaign – NPC interaction.

Fair enough, the first hasn't got that much, but then it's set in the wilderness. At least there is the Gypsy encampment, which can be great fun. It's the other three with the Ogre Priests, the Librarians and the warring Dwarfs, which provide endless opportunities for role-play, diplomacy and duplicity. How can anyone belittle this superb intercourse as uninspired monster bashing?

GM's Tips

I have my own ideas about how to get the best out of the campaign, even without the floor plans.

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE PART TWO



The Workshop: Original Version (Left), Games Workshop (Right)

Part One: Fire and Blood

Fire in the Mountains

First things first. The pre-generated characters are a good group to use, especially the Dwarf. I'd agree though with John Foody's comments in his review (*Warstone 3*) that they are overburdened with magical items. The simple remedy is to pare them down sensibly beforehand.

If using one's own player characters they'll obviously already have to be moderately experienced. One option that works particularly well is for those GMs who are fortunate enough to own the now out of print "Death's Dark Shadow" from Flame Publications. Have the campaign start in Kruezhofen with the player characters residing and starting their careers there. Use a few of the adventures in it until the characters have a career or two behind them, then run the excellent introductory scenario "Crossing the Border" in Hogshead's own *Hogwash 3*. They'll hopefully be local heroes by then, so Baron Sigfrid can approach them while he resides at one of the local taverns. Everything ties up quite nicely.

As for the adventure itself, it really needs little improvement. Ham it up on the Gypsy encounter and a good time will be had by all. If you like to use sound effects to enhance atmosphere, put a Gypsy King CD on!

Blood In Darkness

This part is perhaps the weakest. In the original CDM version it was the only episode issued in a folder – all the others were boxed. Another interesting historical anomaly is the fact that a Doomstone was not to be found in the Shrine of Kazar Khan – instead there were clues leading to the one found at Eyrie in the third instalment.

Certainly if any part of the campaign can collapse into a dungeon bash, it is this one. There are several ways though that a GM can make sure this doesn't happen. Utilising the Ogres correctly is a pre-requisite.

It is imperative that the players don't attempt to fight the Ogres. It doesn't help that they will know nothing about the history or occupants of the shrine before they arrive. One way to help them a bit is to stage an encounter on the journey to the shrine with a band of returning Ogre pilgrims, probably mercenaries. An avuncular Ogre Captain can provide some useful information and enable a dialogue and cover story to be set up more easily. It might sound like helping the PCs too much, but what it ensures is some great role-playing with *Rothonogg* later.

Make no mistake, the PC interaction with the Ogre Priest and his entourage is probably the high point of this episode. The plotting, blathering, deception and double crossing possibilities that arise out of this turn the scenario into something far more than a hack and slash. It also gives the GM a chance to give the PCs a unique and fascinating insight into Ogre culture. My preference would be to maximise the interaction, having the players witness and even take part in several Ogre ceremonies. Perhaps they could watch a religious blessing of another pilgrim take place. Or maybe a wedding (or the Ogre equivalent) can take place between one of the shrine's inhabitants and a visiting female. Maybe a couple of Ogre males will have to fight it out to decide who can stake claim to the Ogress in the first place. Martial tournaments and feasts can also be thrown in with as much bizarre ritual and player involvement you want. Make this a living, thriving but patently alien community.

The other factor it is important to use correctly is the malign, seemingly omniscient presence of Xhardja, the earth elemental. This is supposed to be a terrifying creature the players should dread because of its ability to strike without warning. You know something's gone wrong if the PCs roll their eyes and stifle yawns as it appears for the umpteenth time. The best way to think of Xhardja is like a great white shark in murky water. Use it sparingly. The PCs should be terrified of mud at the end. In fact, if ever there was a time for some musical atmosphere building, this is it. Get hold of the *Jaws* music, turn down the lights, and watch your players quiver...

Assuming they succeed, try to end this episode with a memorable event. The aforementioned feast with innumerable toasts should give the players a well-deserved feeling of achievement.

Part Two: Wars and Death

Death Rock

This is the strongest part of the campaign and simply a superb supplement. There is really little to add here. Make the most of the interaction between PCs and monks and run the detective like search for the Doomstone against the timeline of the Orc attack. The rooftop battle at the end is an amazing finale.

Need I say more?

Dwarf Wars

This is without a doubt the most difficult episode to run well. Like *Blood in Darkness* it can degenerate into a dungeon bash. But only if you let it. Run it with skill and imagination, and it can be the most enjoyable of them all.

The key is to utilise the Dwarfs to the full. The PCs are literally

caught in the middle of a civil war and they should have to wring out every last bit of role-playing skill they possess to succeed.

The Dwarfs make excellent allies or adversaries. Hopefully during the course of the scenario each faction will at different times behave as both to the adventurers, preferably more than once. These are intelligent, determined, resourceful and devious creatures, so use them as such. Try to evoke a 'Fistful of Dollars' type situation, with the PCs playing each side off against the other. Also, don't let the Royalist group inside the complex merely sit on their backsides while the adventurers explore merrily. Have them institute patrols, investigate sounds of fighting, lay ambushes and post guards – they are no cannon fodder.

A good idea can be to set out a timeline of events for both factions to follow. Work out what is likely to happen if the players weren't there at all. Also come up with contingency plans for each side. That way it minimises the effect to which GM's omnipotence can, albeit unconsciously, affect the Dwarfs behaviour.

One other crucial factor to work out is what happens after the players get the crystal. Normally they will also have found Hargrim's Crown at the same time, which is what the Dwarfs are looking for of course. It is just conceivable that they may escape the whole complex with both!

Lastly, don't be afraid to let your imagination run riot. Once when I ran the campaign the party managed to confess to Cranneg that they had some crystals. He promptly arrested them and confiscated their collected Doomstones. They later escaped during a raid by the other Dwarfs, then had to collaborate with them on how to get their possessions back. By this time, Cranneg had begun to fathom some of the lesser powers of the artefacts at his disposal out for himself...

Hack and slay? Only if you want it to be. This is more devious than dungeon. More underhanded than underground. Make the most of it.

The Doomstones

The section in each supplement on role-playing the crystals is good, but doesn't go far enough in my view. Certainly you don't want the players to start taking the crystals for granted and the willpower tests are a good way of making them use the powers sparingly. I think though a GM has an ideal opportunity to inject a deep feeling of unease, fear, jealousy and paranoia into the party with regard to these chaotic artefacts.

Start with adapting the section on using the crystals. Instead of the character unravelling each power after an hour of uninterrupted study, make the suggested

Intelligence test after each session of play. The character can make one roll for each crystal they possess, with the option of a second roll for each if they want to miss out on some sleep and relaxation. Should they take that option, reduce some of their physical characteristics slightly, such as -5 to WS and BS, which they can't regain until they opt not to study the crystals at all. Further penalties can be added, the idea being to urge the character to devote their entire energies to meditating on the Doomstones, to their own physical detriment. Also, when describing a new power, give the character a vision of using that power to benefit them, gaining glory in the process.

So for example, Borgin Forkbeard has just figured out how to use the lesser power Extinguish Fire of the Crystal of Water. That night he has a dream in which a fire is raging in his old Guildhall, threatening to destroy the invaluable library. Using the crystal, he puts out the fire in an instant, earning the respect and adulation of his academic peers. What you want to try to do is begin to isolate the crystal holder from the rest of the party. Make the crystal holder possessive and secretive; perhaps even showing them dreams in which other party members plot to steal their crystal.

As for the other party members, invent worrying events to take place whilst the crystal holder is meditating. Perhaps they observe him or her begin to mutter or chuckle to themselves unknowingly. Or during their watch whilst the crystal holder is sleeping, ectoplasm begins to form from their breath, turning into the leering face of a demon. Inject dreams and omens as you wish, but try to be subtle. If one character really annoys the crystal holder or they have an argument, you could even have an involuntary flash and effect from a crystal – perhaps their eyebrows suddenly get frazzled. Such is the power of the Id...

What I'm saying is that the Crystals should start to have a detrimental effect on party unity and a corrosive effect on the morals of the crystal holder. They have a chaotic heart after all. Use that negative influence as much as you can, to the benefit of the campaign as a whole.

Conclusion

The Doomstones campaign is not like the *Enemy Within*, but it doesn't pretend to be. Unlike the original CDM components, the player aids and even artwork are decidedly second rate. I feel though that the content and plot line are as good as anything produced so far for WFRP. Dismissing it with a sneer as an AD&D re-hash is a terrible mistake. I hope I've persuaded a few readers to treat it with more respect and that the ideas to improve it I've suggested prove useful.

TALKING ABOUT DOOMSTONES

As we were looking back at Doomstones, we tried to track down the various people involved with it. However, Graeme Davis was the only one we could find. Once again, Graeme kindly spared some time to talk to us.

What did you think of the original floor plans and artwork?

Not much, so far as I remember. Actually, I don't remember much about them at all, which suggests that they didn't make much of an impression on me. From what I remember of *Tortured Souls*, Beast Entz had a very distinctive art style - can't remember any of the artists' names, but I think one of them also did some work for Paul Cockburn's short-lived GM Publications.

Was it ever considered reproducing them for the Flame publication?

Not so far as I know. I'm pretty sure they weren't up to Games Workshop's standards, and at the time, Games Workshop was very tight on look and feel.

Who owns the rights?

Haven't a clue. Depends on what kind of deal Simon and Basil made with Games Workshop. I would guess that Games Workshop bought all the rights, because that's been their policy since the whole Kaleb Daark issue and even now they own the rights to anything Hogshead publishes for WFRP. I'd be pretty sure Games Workshop owns the Doomstones adventures for WFRP at least - if anyone were to try and establish rights to the CDM adventures for AD&D, I think TSR/WoTC/Hasbro would be all over them like a rash.

Whatever happened to part five, *Deep Water Shallow Graves*?

It never crossed my radar at all. I was vaguely aware of the title, but I assume it was never finished.

Why did GW choose to reuse scenarios instead of writing some new?

The theory behind Flame was fast and dirty - we were to pump stuff out quickly and cheaply. We actually achieved a sustained output of one book per month, plus Marienburg and other White Dwarf stuff. GW published the books at a somewhat slower rate, of course. The way it seemed to me was that the Games Workshop brass wanted to know there was material on the

stocks, in a general attitude of "never mind the quality, feel the width". We got the Doomstones adventures and the role play adaptations of the WFB packs that became *Lichemaster* and *Death's Dark Shadow* pretty much foisted on us. Also, it's fair to say that Mike, Tony and I had always been regarded as renegades by Games Workshop - or at least, not among the Faithful. So I think there was a concern that we should be reined in and not allowed to be wildly creative ourselves, for fear that we might come up with something that would add to the Warhammer world in a way that would not be ideal for the battle game.

How closely where the original authors worked with?

Not closely at all. Simon was then Phil Gallagher's right-hand man at the Studio and we were off in internal exile in a building a couple of miles away. Basically, the stuff was just handed over and we dealt with it.

What was the role of Nigel Stillman, Brad Freeman & yourself?

I credited Nigel because I worked something into one of the adventures that was based on something he'd recently done for WFB. I can't even remember what it was now. The politics became more and more tense as Flame went on, with WFRP being more and more marginalised because it didn't generate significant miniatures sales. The WFB appendices in some of the adventures are another sign of this - a desperate sop to try and appease the chiefs. Brad Freeman was contracted to convert the CDM adventures into a raw WFRP manuscript. I believe it was Ken Rolston who put GW in touch with him. By the time Flame entered the picture, Brad's work was done, and we were handed the result. My role was to prepare the text for layout and publication. I dealt with copy and technical editing, and rewrote where necessary to suit the current climate at GW. I actually rewrote quite extensively for style, but so far as content goes my main contributions were the pregenerated PCs and the random encounter outlines.

Did Flame ever do any work on the final instalment themselves?

Yes. Mike Brunton and I produced an extensive outline for the final adventure, which I still have. I gave James Wallis a copy out of interest, but what relation, if any, it bears to the Robin Laws' *Doomstones 3* I have no idea.

A TOUCH OF EVIL?

Justifiable Murder and the Nature of Neutrality

by Tim Eccles, John Foody, Peter Huntington & John Keane

When playing a WFRP session recently, an incident occurred that caused a discussion about the nature of neutrality and when neutrality becomes evil. This led into the murky waters of whether killing is justifiable under certain circumstances. Killing in RPGs is a common event, but all too often little is thought of it. The following looks at this one particular incident, but it is for the reader to decide whether other solutions were available or whether the nature of the game meant that there was only one possible outcome.

Blibby's Story

Blibby listened quietly. This wasn't quite what he had in mind when he became an adventurer, although to suggest that he "became" an adventurer implied more choice than he actually had. As a halfling Teamster, he always seemed to be the first to be let go. The guild was pretty good to him, but traffic was not what it had been, and only the lucky few had been kept on by Four Seasons. He leapt at the chance to become a scout. There was going to be a war – everyone said so – and scouts would be needed. So as patriotic as the next halfling, he volunteered. During training, he put up with size jokes and ridicule as he failed to ride a horse. But the war never came, and there was even less demand for scouts than before.

Then he happened upon this group – adventurers, they called themselves. At first, he had been impressed. There was Larrs, the suave and sophisticated gallant, Natascha the hardened mercenary and Helmut the learned druid. Well, he had learned. Larrs was a thief of some sort – and not a very good one at that, since he hadn't even been able to open the door to this warehouse they were currently (illegally) entering. The druid – barely worth using his name – was a coward, and about as likely to cast a useful spell as Larrs. Natascha, though, was different. She didn't call him names about his size or shape, or the hairiness of his feet. Well, not much. They had even shared a bed once – not in that way, but to save money – and she hadn't even joked about smelly feet. Which reminded him: he was broke. The problem with adventuring, he found, was that his colleagues seemed to do jobs simply because they needed doing. They kept talking about Sigmar, the Empire and the destruction of Chaos. All worthy causes, and ones that Blibby agreed with – but couldn't they occasionally get paid? Giving a widow his 60GCs life savings to get some particularly mean thugs away from her family had left him broke. 60GCs! Even now he wondered why he had done it, for he had never owned so much gold. It was the only job they had earned money on. Then he remembered the beating the thugs had given her. Time to pocket a few trinkets whilst the others were trying to find proof of this merchant's guilt in shipping arms to a group of orcs in the north.

Suddenly there was a scream and shout for help from the main warehouse, accompanied by a call for the Watch. Natascha! Blibby looked for Larrs, but he was simply ignoring the noise and continuing to search. Typical. Blibby leapt for the stairs. Natascha was at the bottom, clearly wounded, and was

fighting some watchman armed with a large club. As Blibby charged towards them, he noted that whilst the man was fighting to kill, Natascha was trying to disarm him. The idiot! Natascha slipped, and her assailant took full advantage inflicting, a vicious blow that shattered ribs and must have almost killed her. Surely only a miracle had kept her alive.

Without pause, Blibby attacked, striking a passing blow before getting whacked by the club. Then, just as Larrs turned up, the man had surrendered. Fool that he was, Larrs proposed that they tie the man up. Was he insane? Firstly, Natascha was sorely wounded and he himself had been injured. Secondly, the man had seen them, and could identify them.

Blibby began life as an innocent supporter of the Empire and a believer in the divine right and superiority of the nobility. What he had learned since joining this party was that the ruling elite was a petty, small-minded group of hedonists, caring for no one. He also knew that they owned the law. Simply being found here would get Blibby hung. And despite the fact that they had already uncovered several similar plots, no one would believe this merchant (or his noble sponsor) of dealing with orcs without some incontrovertible evidence.

Which was why they had broken into



this warehouse in the first place. Oh; make that evidence in triplicate, for when the first set of evidence got “lost”. Life wasn’t fair, and here was Larrs proposing to leave a witness to identify them for the gallows. They argued – briefly, as the Watch likely were on their way. Natascha required urgent attention from a proper doctor, and there was still the need to find some evidence.

Blibby would probably have (unwillingly) gone along with the tying up plan, had Larrs not proceeded to use his name in front of the prisoner. The idiot. Blibby, as a Teamster, would need to get a job in a warehouse if this failed – but more importantly a halfling called “Blibby” was hardly difficult to find. Blibby had hardly seen a halfling in the city since he had arrived. The man was going to have to die. He knew too much. Larrs protested at first but – thank the gods – finally acceded. It was clear that it wasn’t so much that he objected to the killing as that he simply didn’t want to do the job himself. “Esmeralda forgive me,” thought Blibby as he pulled his knife and slit the man’s throat. Calmly, he helped pick up the unconscious Natascha and headed for the surgeon.

Larrs’ Story

Larrs eased himself behind the coarse wooden bench seat and signalled the serving boy before settling as far back into the cubicle as he could, the half light of the smoky inn offering him the anonymity that he desired. Helmut slid in opposite and began twittering, but Larrs’ attention was elsewhere. The druid was only worth talking to if you weren’t after too taxing a conversation, but he had an entertainment value if you bothered to bait him. Not tonight – Larrs needed time to think. Blibby sat next to Larrs and began singing to himself under his breath; a jolly little ditty that showed he was in decent spirits. In a less tense situation Larrs would have teased him about it being the recipe for his great uncle’s hot pot. Helmut and Natascha would have joined in, Blibby would have got upset, would go on about stereotyping halflings, and they would all laugh, get drunk and go to bed. Tonight, though, Larrs did not share the mood.

The serving boy waddled to the table. The son of the inn owner, he was a fat butterball of a lad with hands like plates and a beer soaked apron. He knew his job though, and never served them watered beer or got miserly with the portions. “What do you lot want? Ale for the three that wash and water for the druid? Hey, where’s the woman?” More high spirits!

“She’s unwell and staying with family, so it’s three ales, and I do bloody well wash you fat pie!” replied Helmut, his long dank hair almost bristling with indignation.

“As long as she isn’t trying to bunk off without paying her bill. You lot will be liable for her you know. Any food?” he replied with a gleam in his piggy little eye. He knew the halfling would not refuse.

“What culinary delight is that apology of a chef destroying tonight?” snapped Blibby, his interest aroused. Larrs swore that he could hear Blibby’s stomach rumble at the very change in direction of the conversation.

“Da’s trying a new Estalian fish dish. Do you want it, or not?” replied the serving boy.

Larrs was growing irritated with the banal banter, “Just bring three portions and I don’t want ale. Make it brandy and be quick.”

“Sir” replied the boy curtly and made towards the kitchen.

Blibby slid off the seat, drew his knife, and headed after him.

“Where the hell are you going?” hissed Larrs.

Blibby stopped, turned and fixed Larrs with an icy stare, “I have to stop him” he whispered. “He will ruin the food if I don’t help him prepare it. If I let that happen, what sort of halfling would I be?”

By the time the boy returned Larrs could hear a halfling cooking song emanating from the kitchen, and the druid was asleep. With the cheap, throat-burning liquid, his shakes began to subside and he felt calmer. Nevertheless, something was disturbing him and he wasn’t sure what – which only worried him more. One person dead, another at the surgeons; how could so many things have gone wrong on what should have been a simple burglary?

It started well enough; access was easy, although he really would have to make a decent effort to learn how to pick a lock. Another night like tonight and he would need it to get out of prison. The first sign of trouble had been the scream and shout for help from the main warehouse. He knew it was Natascha. She had been going through the crates while he and Blibby were rummaging the office. Larrs could read, so it made sense for him to be there, but why Blibby? Nevertheless, Natascha was capable of looking after herself. Now that the alarm had been raised they were on borrowed time, and it was imperative that he searched faster. Blibby, though, had drawn his sword and galloped for the stairs.

Larrs had expected the fight to be over quickly, but it had dragged on. Reluctantly giving up his hunt, he headed towards them. At the bottom he saw Blibby engaged in a rather clumsy duel with a youth who presumably had been paid to guard the warehouse. Blibby was not the best of fighters, yet he was far from the worst that

Larrs had seen either. However, here he seemed to be doing his best to make the boy look good – although he had done enough to get the boy to surrender.

“Where’s Natascha?” Larrs had asked Blibby as he looked for something to tie the boy up with.

“There,” hissed Blibby pointing to what looked like a sack of turnips slumped in the half-lit corner. “The boy got lucky but I don’t think she’s dead. Why are you tying him up? He’s seen us; just finish him!”

Of course Larrs had killed before, but only in combat. He had never murdered anyone. “Blibby, you must be joking!”

“No! He has to die,” the halfling hissed maniacally, “you’ve told him my name. He can identify me. Finish him, finish him right now!”

Larrs and Blibby stared at each other, the boy lying prone between them, silent.

With the sound of the Watch coming, Larrs was at the door. “I won’t do it; if you think he ought to die, you kill him” said Larrs. As he had turned and looked back, the boy was already dead, his throat slit, Blibby’s knife dripping wetly.

They made their escape. Just. Now Larrs stared into his half-drunk brandy. All the while he felt he had missed something, something that was unsettling him.

Was he concerned about Natascha? Yes and no. He liked her; she was a bit strange, but it would be a shame if she died. But he would survive. Maybe he was worried about paying her bill at the inn; no, that wasn’t it. He didn’t intend paying his own, let alone hers. The night’s events kept rolling through his mind. He had missed something.

Was it the murder? Probably not; Larrs had seen murder before. Never done it, never had to.

He took another swig from his brandy. Blibby had murdered the boy. He could swing for that. In fact they all could. But he could see Blibby’s point of view. The boy could identify them, and to be honest Larrs didn’t fancy the possibility of going back to jail. Not after the last time! Nevertheless, it was a nasty business and he was glad that he had not committed that crime. It was not the murder that bothered him, not really. But the night’s events still troubled him. What had he missed, why did he feel this way?

The serving boy came over. “Compliments of Master Blibby,” he said as placed a large plate of something in front of Larrs. As Larrs poked and prodded the food, the succulent smell began to distract him. “Say what you like about Halflings, they sure can cook”. Then he realised what he had missed. Why he felt so unsettled.

As the halfling had drawn the blade across the boy’s throat he had smiled. Damn. Larrs was sure of it; he had grinned. The halfling had been eager, once the boy had been trussed and defenceless. He had enjoyed it. It was the smile that was so unsettling. Larrs recognised it from mad torturers in prison, even from the faces of goblins slaying Dwarfs. It was the smile of countless thugs in every city around The Empire. The smile of someone who enjoyed causing pain and suffering.

Larrs leaned back in his seat and the darkness of the smoke-filled inn swallowed him further. “Well well, Blibby my boy”, mused Larrs quietly, “You’re one of those, are you. This changes everything. Halflings are supposed to be nice, and we’ve seen that you’re not like that, haven’t we? What are you; mad or bad? Either way, you are going to need watching.” Larrs knew from experience that these sorts of people were dangerous. Maybe not to him personally, but trouble always stalked that type and you didn’t want to be there when it caught up. How long had Blibby been this way? Had he killed like this before? He thought for a second. Wasn’t there the incident with the pawnbroker a few weeks back? And this was just the stuff he knew about! Hell, the halfling had made him an accomplice to cold-blooded murder. This was trouble enough to start with. Enough to swing for.

Larrs looked suspiciously at the food on his plate. This halfling would need watching like a hawk. As he put the meal on the floor for the dog he shouted, “boy! Bring me some bread and cheese and glass of watered ale. Now!”

Werner’s Story

Even in the cold of the warehouse, the sweat began to drip from Werner’s chin and onto his tattered leather doublet. In his hand he could feel the wood of the club through the badly wrapped leather strap wound around the end. The thief, a woman it looked like, finished looking through the boxes by the door. In the office he could hear her companion scavenging for loot. As she stepped silently past he could see her face, a hand on her sword. She was from the Kislevian side of town, by her figure and the cut of her clothes. Father, the biggest thief of them all (which meant that he should know), said they were all dishonest. Werner didn’t believe it; many of the Knights at the Temple of Ulric were from Kislev and they were the finest men he had met. Maybe one day he would stand beside them. He would be a hero for stopping the burglar, and Herr Steinfield would give him a bonus: enough for some drugs from Kassius.

The brown Taal root was the only thing keeping Mother’s life bearable. The blood still came from her and now the black lesions had spread to her arms, but

the pain was less. She could no longer work, and Werner had to fend for them both. It was only when he got a job as a night watchman that he finally made enough money to make ends meet. In his heart he knew that Mother would be dead soon. Then he would leave this city. He wouldn't be a thief like his father. He would join the Imperial army in Altdorf and train to be a warrior, ready to fight goblins and those that followed the dark gods. When he told Brother Ivan, he could see disappointment in the Cleric's face, for once he killed he would be lost to the cult forever. But Werner understood it wasn't for him. In his heart he knew he would be a knight, brave and full of honour and chivalry. The only thing that would hold him to the city would be Marina. But she would wait for his return and be a hero's wife. So he stepped out behind the thief and prepared to strike.

The club fell hard: that would knock her out cold! Werner was shocked when the thief managed to stay on her feet. She staggered forward but turned quickly, sword in hand. The blow slowed her, though, and Werner leapt to attack, his swings deflected by her sword. She was good. She was also beginning to call for her friends, in between swearing at him in Kislevian. The only word he understood was goat. He realised he had to take her out quickly, before she recovered, but meanwhile he shouted for the Watch. From out of nowhere came a trick his uncle had told him a hundred times; he tripped backwards and she swung hard, but Werner twisted to the right, smashing the club down against her side. With a small grunt she collapsed, blood dripping from her mouth. She lay muttering, her eyes taking on a strange look. Werner felt sorry he had hurt her so badly.

From behind him came a noise, and he turned to see a halfling bearing down, sword aimed firmly at his gut. This time he was not so lucky...

His throat hurt from the gag. He was leaning awkwardly against the crates; his wrists and ankles roughly tied with hemp rope. The fight had been brief but seeing as he had no chance he surrendered. He hoped he would be safe; his halfling friends Egbert and Triteo were the nicest of people and he guessed this one would be nice too, now that his anger had subsided. Another man had joined him and they argued. There wasn't panic yet, but there was a disagreement going on. Werner's head hurt and he couldn't make out the words. These two didn't seem like any of the lowlife thieves he had seen before. Then the man said something and they both stopped and stared at him in silence. The halfling pushed his accomplice and the argument lifted a little. Now Werner could hear they wanted to harm him because they had been seen. Why? He had just been doing his job. The Watch would never find them. What about mother; who would look after her? Tears trickled from his eyes and he said a small prayer to Ulric.

In the distance he could hear the whistles – the watch, perhaps, or a teamsters patrol. But he knew it was too late. The halfling was by his side, the knife briefly catching the light before he felt the cold across his throat.

Some Thoughts by Tim...

As will become evident, my character is Blibby. Notwithstanding the fact that I would claim that the young victim is portrayed in a particularly favourable light, there are some distinctive issues that arise from the events in game terms.

When examining alignments, and we are focussing particularly on those of Neutral and Evil here - or the point at which neutral becomes evil, the following issues arise:

- Perception. Do people who are "evil" see themselves as such?
- Motivation. Can a (supposedly) good cause outweigh an evil deed? Does the end justify the means?
- How does one tally up the weight of good/ neutral/evil acts in order to judge a character's alignment?
- How far can one take the Neutral alignment's defence of self-interest?

Personally, I have difficulty distinguishing between the varying distinctions of murder and lawful killing. I think these are artificial and created by our own society – initially, at least, from a Judaeo-Christian perspective. However, the Old World has a different society than our own, with different gods. Indeed, not only are the major deities like Sigmar notably militaristic – and

supportive of varying types of murder – but there are also deities purely associated with war. We need to think from this perspective, and not from our own. In this vein, no one questions killing a goblin. There is no suggestion that it (since it is not human, we usually do not refer to them as he/she) is asked if it has killed, if it wanted to fight, if it is simply following orders, if it enjoys eating villagers, if it is actually of good alignment. The list is endless. To have one rule for humans and another for monsters would not hold in the Old World, in my view. One of the things we love about WFRP is that ordinary humans are frequently the monsters!

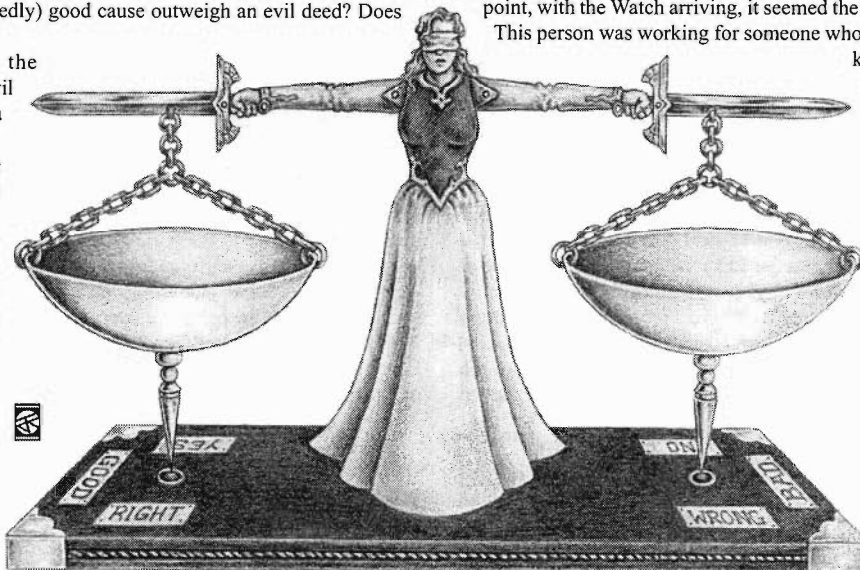
Once a combat is initiated, then a known outcome (that of death) is accepted. Most fighters in WFRP campaigns are relatively inexperienced, and without the Strike to Stun and Disarm skills. Blibby certainly did not have them, and had never, to my knowledge, fought someone with them. This reflects real combat to me, which is messy and unscientific. You simply hit someone – hard. Usually this will kill them, and if it does not, then most characters will be very wary of leaving someone who attacked them with the option of trying again at a later date. Concepts of fighting "fair" are the province of the nobility, while those of terms and warranties for surrender are the province of Conventions yet to be created.

Natascha got herself into this mess by trying to disarm the youth, who was fighting to kill. Let us be clear here: Werner was fighting normally, Natascha was trying to disarm. True, we were robbers, but we were attacked by someone out to kill us. In addition, if Natascha – or any of us – had been caught we would have been hung. The colourful story text ignores the fact that, by deciding to engage in combat, the youth had effectively determined that someone was going to die in some way – at his hands, at the hands of the law, or at our characters'. The Old World does not extend either a liberal democratic judiciary, or a care for mitigation. It simply enforces an oppressive law to maintain a fearful populace.

Therefore I think that the social and political conditions found within The Empire dictated the killing. Blibby has done this before (with a pawnbroker who worked for the crimelord whose people were beating up the woman mentioned earlier) and since (to the merchant and his toughs). The point here is that they more clearly "deserved it", being thugs and murderers themselves, whilst the young lad – as presented by his story – is less obviously "evil". That is not to say that such actions were done remorselessly, but it was necessary to guarantee one's own independence and – more importantly – life, and to ensure that the investigation was successfully completed. (The arms shipments were stopped and the Empire – or parts thereof – were saved.) As a result I am sure that the act falls within the scope of neutral actions, since it is self-preserving, saves the lives of four (as opposed to one) and ends in a "good" deed. Within the barbarity that is the Old World, I see little problem with such a course of action. I think PCs have to kill on occasion, and in order to survive they have to use any and every "unfair" tactic they can think of. What's next? Will the moralists will be demanding that PCs sign a Constitution on NPC Rights, or a Marienburg Convention on the treatment of prisoners, or to cease the use of crossbows, firearms or other "unfair" weaponry? Put it this way: Blibby still thinks of himself as an essentially "good guy". He would be more than happy if everyone obeyed (fair) laws, followed non-chaotic gods and lived happily ever after. Since they do not, though, well – accidents happen.

Whether or not he was mistaken, whether or not there were alternatives, at that point, with the Watch arriving, it seemed the only method of self-preservation.

This person was working for someone who ran extortion rackets, had people killed, burned down houses and sold weapons to an orc leader who was close to commencing a Waaagh! in the northern Empire. This person had attacked first, fought to kill, had almost killed a comrade, had badly wounded Blibby – and then simply decided to surrender, expecting fair treatment. This was someone who could then sell them out to the Watch. Perhaps Blibby made a mistake in the heat of the moment, and if he had found out more about the boy he would be twice as sorry, but it does not alter the fact that this was well within the bounds of so-called 'neutral' actions.



Larrs was not concerned with killing the boy, but in killing him once he had surrendered. My fundamental problem with this is that it is simply an artificial distinction. A death is still a death, whether it's called killing or murder.

Some Thoughts by John K...

On the trail of an arms shipment to Orcs, which as good citizens of The Empire and self-styled heroes we felt it was our duty track down, we broke the law. As we often have to do. In this case, it was by breaking into a warehouse in search of evidence and our next lead. Larrs and Blibby stayed in the office while my character, Natascha, went into the warehouse to try and find these shipments of arms. Rather foolishly, in hindsight, I thought the place empty. It was here that Natascha encountered Werner.

Once he attacked I made a conscious decision to try and disarm him. At the point when we broke into the warehouse, nothing had been proved about the owners' guilt. We weren't sure we'd find anything. The guard attacked out of a sense of duty and, it seems, heroism. Whether we found his employer guilty or not, he was innocent. It was obvious that he was young and inexperienced, compared to Natascha's many years of training and adventure. To kill an innocent person who was unlikely to be able to defend themselves competently was against her principles. As it happened, she made a bad lunge, and a lucky blow rendered her unconscious. My character is no saint and has done things I have later regretted. She has killed, and will kill again, but will not become a heartless, compassionless murderer. I stand by my decision to attempt to disarm the guard.

"If we had been caught, we would have been hung," Tim says, using this as a basis for his self-preservation argument. But how far can this argument be stretched? "I was robbing a bank, in order to finance my potential Empire-saving adventures, and had to kill all the guards to prevent myself being executed?" Tim also argues that once combat is initiated the outcome of death must be accepted. But at the same time, I've often heard it argued that it would be more realistic if once in a while our enemies surrendered rather than fighting to the death as they so often seem happy to do?

Tim also seems to toy with the meaning of the word 'murder', shaping it to suit his argument. But what is 'murder'? Obviously it is the intentional death of an individual by the hand of another. This is exactly what happened in this case. Tim tries to play down the act by arguing it was justifiable.

In the real world, each society has its own views on the rights and wrongs of killing another human being. Most agree that, fundamentally, it is wrong – although there are usually cases when this objection can be dropped. Does the fact that the death penalty was abolished in England some years ago mean that England is more civilised than other countries? No, it is merely a difference in popular beliefs and politics. Until it is politically safe to abolish the death penalty, death row will remain. And who is to say whether it is right or wrong – it is simply a matter of personal beliefs. Can the death of one atone for the death of another, or even of countless others?

In the Old World the concept that life is cheap (excluding the nobility) is widely held. However, the laws of the world recognise and punish those guilty of murder. With a framework to deal with crime and punishment, one cannot expect to commit a crime and receive no legal retribution for one's actions. Thus we return to the classification of this particular crime – is it murder or justifiable homicide? Just what is Blibby's justification for it? Is he justified because a corrupted employer hired the guard? If this is the case, then there is also a justification for killing Blibby, who has worked for unsavoury employers in his time! Is he justified because the boy tried to do the job for which he was being paid? Or is his only justification that Blibby (as a PC) expects to do great and glorious deeds in the future?

As Tim points, out the Old World is a world where the existence of gods is a recognised and provable fact, and the majority of these gods have no problem with their followers killing in their name. So how does murder fit into the culture? Why are those guilty of murder punished, when all they have done is helped their victim go to the gods? Or does the act of murder steal their souls away from the realms of Morr? And what of murder sanctioned by the gods? Can an initiate of Ulric slaughter unarmed followers of Slaanesh and claim they were morally justified in doing so? Again, this is something I have a problem with. There are plenty of double standards and inconsistencies in the classifications of right and wrong. I'm sure many would argue the slaughter of unarmed followers of Slaanesh is fine – but in my books it is not. Hand them over to the authorities to be judged by their peers and the gods. They may well be executed, but at least they have been given a chance, and justice will have been served.

Regardless of the guilt or innocence of the victim, the method of death is what concerns me most. Werner was cold-bloodedly murdered, slaughtered like an animal – tied up and his throat slit. He was summarily tried, convicted and executed, and not because of his guilt but because he may have heard someone's

name. The term "cold-blooded" stems from a description of the killer, cold of heart with no warmth of compassion or remorse – a description which seems to fit Blibby a little bit too well!

Some Thoughts by John F...

I'm not so sure about the "saving The Empire" bit, but it is obvious that Blibby's actions arose out of self-preservation. However, it is an extreme view of self-preservation, and one needs to ask whether his actions were excessive, even within the context of the (admittedly vicious) Old World. After all, Blibby did have other options he could have explored, such as going underground in the halfling ghetto, or elsewhere – even leaving the city. He was also well aware of the (lack of) efficiency of the Watch. The decision to murder Werner was taken all too easily – something that has happened to countless NPCs in many RPGs.

Did Werner invite his own death by taking on the job of a guard? It seems unlikely that common thieves would resort to murder whenever they are seen. It rarely happens in our world and I see no reason to think it dramatically different in the Old World, even where life is cheaper. Are Blibby's actions actually increasing the chances of the Watch trying to track him down? What seems the more likely: trying to catch a halfling thief ("light-fingered bunch anyway, Sarge") or hunting down a psychotic halfling murderer?

Murdering prisoners may be understandable to someone in Blibby's position, but it is certainly evil. Combat may be murder, but at least the participants have a choice, no matter how unbalanced or unfair the circumstances. Blibby, no matter what his protests, was not defending himself. Werner was an innocent. Blibby's action crosses the line separating neutral and evil. I am not sure Larrs' belief that Blibby smiled isn't embellishing the point too far, though. Just because he feels the need to kill those in his way, it doesn't mean he has come to enjoy it. But it also doesn't mean that the action is excused. Both our modern day society and that of the Old World (certainly for the ruling and middle classes, anyway) would perceive it as an evil act. Will Blibby ever believe he is evil? It is unlikely, if he can continue to justify his acts as self-preservation and thus safely 'neutral'.

It may seem strange to be discussing alignment when it is something that is ignored by most WFRP players. Yet the deeds of players are open to discussion, and alignment provides us with a way of debating motives and values. Things are not as simple as saying that x number of murders means a character is evil; even if Blibby's actions in this case are evil, this could simply be a temporary lapse. He might not be evil, even if – once in a while – he carries out an act that could be interpreted as such. On the other hand, if he repeatedly takes this route, it starts to look less like a one-off lapse dictated by circumstances, and more like the development of a rather unpleasant moral stance. To what degree can "serving the greater good" relieve Blibby of his actions? A nurse who murders one patient is not excused because they have cared for countless others.

Alignment remains a horribly artificial restraint. The consequences of crossing the shadowy boundary from neutral to evil, or, indeed, good, need to be so much more than a change of word on the character sheet. Every action can be justified under the banner of self-preservation and neutrality. Kill all the children in a village, as they may come after you one-day. Throw a baby to a jabberwocky to give you a few extra seconds to run in the other direction. (Yes, this did happen in a game!) After all, these are the same characters that will save The Empire one-day.

Without any roles to enforce it, what are the consequences of evil acts in the Warhammer world? This is down to the GM to decide, but they should be similar to the real world. Constant murders will attract the attention of the Watch, the disdain of fellow party members and even the interest of the gods. Players should be encouraged to flesh out the dark path that their character is taking, although this can create problems for other players and the GM. In the end, players need to take responsibility for their characters' actions and use them to develop the character in a new direction. At the same time, others should not feel they have to accept what they perceive to be an evil character in the party. They can be ousted, handed over to the law, or killed – or are they on shaky ground there, taking the law into their own hands...? The character may become an NPC, which can make for an interesting end to their involvement – especially if they returning to haunt the party at a later date.

So what did happen to Blibby? At the time of writing, that remains to be seen. Let us just say that he and his fellow party members are enjoying the hospitality of Talabheim, waiting a date with a judge.

"So we commit young Werner's soul to Morr."

There are no easy answers here, such topics having been discussed by greater minds than ours without any resolution. However, we would be interested in hearing your thoughts on the conundrum that we face.

TALABHEIM: AN INTRODUCTION

The City and the Project by John Foody

"It had been a long journey, but there in the distance stood Talabheim: The Eye of the Forest."

This issue brings the first part of Warpstone's Talabheim project. This is an attempt to bring Talabheim alive, to make it a city that GMs want to use and players want to visit. We are very pleased with the outcome. I thought it was an opportune moment to provide a little background on the project, for those who are interested in such things. Warpstone had been planning to do the background for a city for some time, inspired (and occasionally frustrated) to some degree by such predecessors as Irillian and Middenheim, amongst others.

The Talabheim Project will be spread over four or five issues of Warpstone and will be supported by scenarios set in the city. So far we have published *Headhunters* (#14) and, in this issue, *Privileges*.

Why Talabheim? Well, originally, Nuln was going to be the city we detailed. I had developed a background for Nuln as part of my old campaign and that was intended to provide a template for the city. I was also made aware that Noel Welsh had done some good work on that city. However, on speaking to James Wallis of Hogshead I found that a Nuln sourcebook was in the works. Middenheim: Done. Nuln: Being done. Altdorf: Didn't really want to do it as it had been partly detailed in various sources, and it also seemed a prime candidate to be done by Hogshead. That left Talabheim, the poor relation of The Empire's cities. In the end it was the best thing that could have happened.

Little had previously been written about the city, with the background in the rulebook and WFB Empire sourcebook setting a number of challenges. Big crater. Big tunnel. Fiercely independent with peculiar local customs. Once capital of Talabecland. Settlement outside the crater. We also needed to throw in the nearness to Kislev and a wide range of conflicts. Noel and myself put together a background, with Noel's idea of the city really giving it focus. The city was to be conservative, in decline and backward compared to its western cousins. We also wanted the religious view to be different, with Sigmar and even Morr taking a back seat. Late night discussions with various Warpstone editors also gave a number of ideas, including Talabheim's big secret. This was not to be detailed, but only hinted at. GMs could then do with it as they wished. When we had drafted a background I realised that the job was going to be huge.

Hence I gathered together a group of writers who had submitted work to us in the past. Not all had had their work accepted, but we'd

been impressed anyway. Simply, each writer took an aspect of the city or a location, and after being passed the (usually very sketchy) idea of the area set about developing it. It's taken a number of years to get to these final stages, and contributors have dropped out and others joined, some penning work at short notice. During the development of the project, the team discussed various aspects in some detail, particularly Alfred Nunez, Anthony Ragan and N. Arne Dam who all helped out immensely. All those who contributed have added something worthwhile to the city, and it would be a different – and poorer – project without any one of them.

During the early days I saw a draft of the Marienburg sourcebook, and this was a major inspiration for the style of the city. It is also worth mentioning Alfred and Anthony's work on the Temples and religion. They are due to pen *Realm of Divine Magick*, and thus some clues to its content will be found here.

Once everyone had finished their sections it was brought together, with the co-ordinators trying to ensure everything tallied. It was then put through the usual Warpstone proofing process.

Some way in, Talabheim was compared in style to Gormenghast. Although it is amongst my favourite books, the similarities had passed me by. I think they are there, especially with the Record Keeper. However it was a subconscious influence, and where it has occurred it is more of a coincidence. Each aspect of Talabheim has been thought through, in its own right. Thus the relative impotence of the guilds and merchants is a direct result of the peer's power, and Talagraad and the independence of Talabheim provided creative challenges that are reflected across the work.

Some parts of the city might not be to everyone's tastes. Some may see them as a little too fanciful. However, as with all such things, they can be cut out and ignored if a GM so wishes. Some small aspects will contradict with future Hogshead projects, but we discovered this very late on. To change them would have drastically changed the nature of the project and so we 'fudged'. One example was the presence of a Magic College we discovered was to be detailed in *Realm of Sorcery*. Its author, Ken Walton, generously sent us the relevant part of the manuscript and we came up with a workaround. There is also no way of determining if Games Workshop's future changes will alter things further.

I could go on and on about the various parts of the city and project, but it is as it stands. If it works, then GMs will use it and it will become part of the lore of the Old World. I certainly cannot ask or hope for anything more.



Talabheim: Credits

Project co-ordinators & City Outline: John Foody & Noel Welsh

Project Team: N. Arne Dam, Alfred Nunez, Anthony Ragan with Andrew Hind, Ryan Wileman, Luke Twigger, Tom McGrenery, Mark Bell & Zeno Collins

Thanks to: Ken Walton

Part One: Background & Law: *John Foody & Noel Welsh* / History & Timeline: *John Foody, Noel Welsh with N. Arne Dam, Alfred Nuñez Jr & Anthony Ragan* / Politics: *N. Arne Dam* / Religion: *Alfred Nuñez Jr & Anthony Ragan* / Custom & Law: *John Foody & Ryan Wileman*

...AND NOW TURN OVER FOR PART ONE

TALABHEIM

The Eye of The Forest

We joined the sprawling column of traders, onto which harassed members of the city guard tried to impose some semblance of order. People, animals, carts overloaded with goods strapped down by fraying leather straps - they all filled the road in a noisy and dirty mass. The Parade of Geistschreck was two days away, and so the traders were in no haste - which was just as well, for at the head of the queue I could see the stiff mannerisms and uniforms of the city's Excisemen. They were questioning a fruit seller, a Tilean by the look of him, and from his stubborn posture it looked like the exchange might go on for some time.

Beside me, Kayliss snorted in disgust: 'Got Kertad'. He buried his head in the leather-bound book he had been reading for the better part of the morning. Kayliss was a Dwarf craftsman of some skill, and he had offered me a lift just outside Schoppendorf in exchange for a pouch of pipeweed.

I liked Kayliss, but he was no conversationalist, unlike the traders standing together on the roadside. They passed bottles of local vodka around as they told stories of their journey, each more fanciful than the last. This troupe of colour and personality reminded me of the carnival we had at home when I was a boy: bear dancers and fire eaters, not to mention the occasional wizard displaying his powers. Their noise surely carried over the ridge and into the unseen streets of the city itself, announcing to the inhabitants that the parade and festival was almost upon them again.

We all fell silent when the clocks of Talabheim struck the hour. Even at this distance we could hear them clearly. Five times the three clocks rung out and between each strike we stood in silence, the guards waiting respectfully for its end. Kayliss raised his head from the book and looked

towards the city. The bells stirred the excitement in my stomach; Talabheim was just ahead and, within it, the Diszipunterr University. Here, I hoped to find my brother.

I thought back to last night, when at the coaching inn the landlord had been encouraged by the regulars to tell the tale of the night when the fourth clock tower was damaged by the evil wizard Archas von Tremane. I was captivated by the story of betrayal, danger and heroism, and although we knew the outcome we all breathed a sigh of relief when it was revealed that the Duke had survived the assassin's blade.

Climbing from the cart I walked the edge of the path, heading towards the gate. My own dreams for the last four years had been of gazing onto the fabled Temple of Ulric. Each night, since the day when I heard my education was to be finished here, I offered my prayers. As the gate drew nearer I hurried my pace, until soon I could see the fabled 'Wizard's Way'.

Standing beneath the shadow of Ulric Tor, the sight took my breath away. The tunnel they called the Wizards Way was magnificent; huge statues of Taal and Ulric guarding the passage through which the traffic passed onto Ostenstrabe, that famed road stretching into the heart of the city.

It wasn't until we had passed through the slums and approached the Old City that I got my first real look at the Temple itself. Its huge double doors straddling the road, its wall topped with battlements, and there on the far side, the damaged tower. It stood as proud as its three working brothers, its face cracked and the blackened hands forever stopped at one minute to twelve.

"They say that when that clock strikes twelve, chaos will hold the city and good men and women will be lost." I jumped at the gruff voice and turned to stare up at the face of the sergeant. He was staring at the

temple, a huge moustache hiding his mouth, but I could see in his eyes that he had lost his heart to the city.

"It is unlike anything I have ever seen."

"That it is lad, that it is - and I've seen a lot." We stood watching it for a moment until one of the men shouted for his attention and he turned to leave.

"It may be beautiful, but you should try sleeping next to it. Louder than a Dwarf mine." Glancing at my clothes he decided on "Sire" to finish his sentence and marched off.

Talabheim; it was my home now. Talabheim.. Spirit-Fear, the Gospodars called it. What adventures was I to discover here amongst its roofs and people?

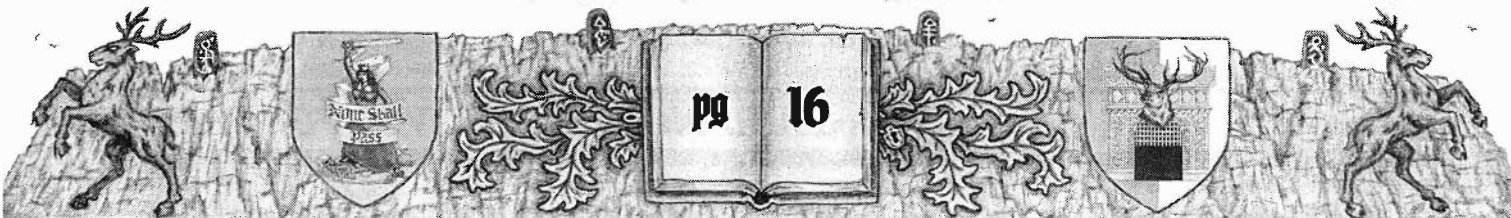
ENTRY TOLLS

Market Goods: 5% of Price
Per Leg: 2/- (human or horse)
Per animal: 1d to 1/- depending on size.
Per Wheel: 5/-

ONE-WAY TRIP (Wizard's Way to City)

Tunnelway Coaches
Coach Trip: 12GCs + 1GC for each bag/chest
Cart: 4GCs

Hochland Crossing Coaches
Passengers must pay a 2GC 1/- "training fee" in order to become "guards". They are loaned a sword and chainmail shirt and paid a fee of 1/-.



The Eye of the Forest

Welcome to the great city of Talabheim, a haven of civilisation amid the dangers of the Great Forest. A city often seen as the poor relation of The Empire's four great city-states, an impression reinforced by its easterly location. The city stands in a huge crater; it edges acting as natural walls, making the city impregnable. The only entrance to the city is through the half mile long Wizard's Way, guarded by a fortress at each end. Once through the tunnel it is still some distance to the city itself although some come just to visit the great Temple of Taal or the famed Compass Monoliths located nearer to the tunnel.

It is the last safe crossing point of the Talabec until Altdorf and virtually all traffic going to and from Kislev makes its way to the city with its markets a source of varied offerings. Indeed much of the city's feel is Kislevite. Various arguments about The Agreement of Braxix, Ivan the Lunatic's attack on the city and other contentious parts of the city's history related to its dealings with Kislev occasionally flare up into heated arguments at all levels of society.

The city is very conservative, the fortifications without mirroring the attitudes within. Ancient noble families hold power, ruling from the Peer House. Indeed, the nobility's influence is felt strongly throughout the whole archaic system, with five families controlling almost everything. The current ruler, Duchess Elise Krieglitz is not yet married, although a number of politically appropriate suitors have been mentioned.

Talabheim is almost two cities in one; such is the divide between the upper and lower classes. Money rules here and the nobles have all the money. There aren't many legal ways of getting ahead in Talabheim with the nobility dominating the lucrative trade business backed by strong laws protecting their rights. Therefore, the young entrepreneur has to resort to bribes, shady deals, blackmail, smuggling and murder to get their way. In fact, so does the noble who wants to better their family's standing.

The Guilds also have some influence, making them the only voice for those outside the nobility. Again, positions are handed down on a father-to-son basis. Social justice is not a word that could be applied to Talabheim. The masked individual known as The Record Keeper records judgements in the courts and Peer House. Past judgements inform present judgements and punishments are harsh, especially on commoners. Talabheim is a city full of ritual, most stretching back centuries. These rituals dominate every aspect of life in the city and can be confusing for newcomers. To abandon these would be seen as the worst possible templer of fate. Indeed, ignoring some of these are criminal acts. Ignorance is no defence.

Religion is very important in Talabheim, with worship of Taal and Ulric strongest, both Cults dominated by heavily conservative factions. Law has a strong foothold here and the Kislevite influence of Spirits is present, but for reasons to be detailed later, not very strong. For unknown reasons Magic works sporadically here.

Talabheim is also a place of secrets, from the shady dealings of the nobles to Kancer's 'Court of Fools and Vagrant Lords'. Who built the Wizard's Way and the Compass Monoliths? Who is the Record Keeper? What is the truth behind the Festival of Gold? Why was the Old City all but abandoned? Will the fourth bell ever ring again? And why do those that question the meanings behind the rituals regularly disappear?

However, in many ways Talabheim is a city in decline. Financially, it has often been The Empire's poor relation and in recent years is struggling to find a role for itself. Laws and customs are strangling it, but few people can see this. On the streets, agitators call for reform: a call backed by Merchants and others. However, Talabheim rulers have always reigned with a firm hand and sedition is punishable by death.

And so, Talabheim awaits. "Drink Vodka, praise the Gods and watch the wall. Then you will know Talabheim." as they say.

Entering Talabheim

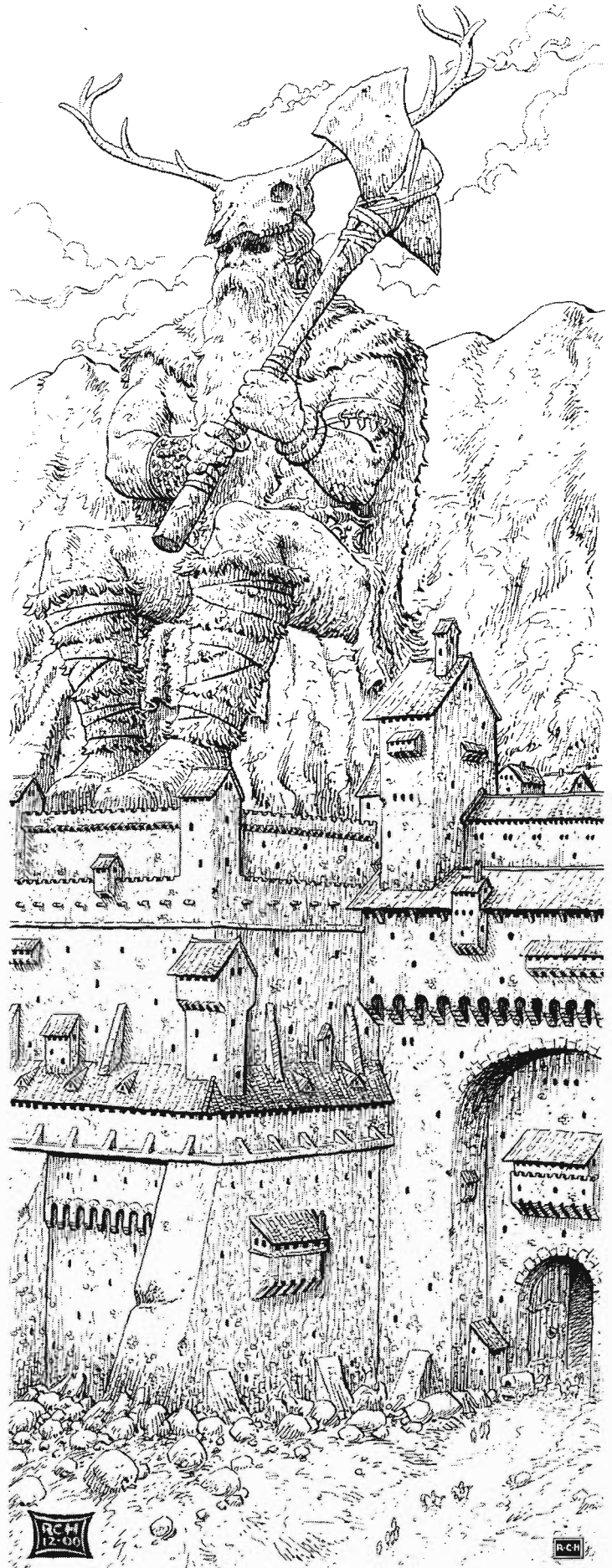
There is only one route into Talabheim, and that is through the Wizard's Way: half a mile long and broad enough for two wagons to pass. At each end of the tunnel stands a fortress, and rumours abound that magical defences are also at work here. The two fortresses, Ulric Tor and Taal Tor, are always fully manned; they also act as headquarters for the military. The tunnel is reached by a single road leading up from the town of Talagraad which has grown around the deep harbour on the river. The tunnel is open only during the hours of daylight, except to those carrying the Royal Seal of Talabheim or the Emperor.

Those arriving by river are greeted first by the bustling port of Talagraad and then by a long walk to the city itself, still some miles away. To help visitors on their way, Tunnelway Coaches provide a number of services to the city. The cost of this trip is expensive, but they also run a cheaper service, cramming everyone in the back of a cart. There is an alternative service run by Hochland Crossing Coaches, but this is of dubious legality. The only other option is to walk.

Tunnelway Coaches

Coach Trip: 12GCs + 1GC for each bag/chest

Cart: 4GCs



Hochland Crossing Coaches

Passengers must pay a 2GC 1/- "training fee" in order to become "guards". They are loaned a sword and chainmail shirt and paid a fee of 1/-. The reasons for this strange business will be explained in a future issue.

Ulric Tor

The first gatehouse is heavily fortified and armed. Built across the entrance of the tunnel, huge statues of Taal and Ulric flank the gate itself. The garrison here is large, their lives regimented by sets of customs and traditions. The Excisemen also have their headquarters here.

Each morning a soldier is lowered over the wall. He then walks the winding road down to the bottom of the crater, checking the road is clear of all traffic. When this is confirmed he blows the 'Dawn Horn' and the gates are opened. It is also a signal for the traffic, waiting at the foot of the road, to begin the crawl upwards.

Meanwhile, the Ceremony of the Gate is taking place. The three Keepers of the Key approach the gate to be met by the garrison commander. The main gate has three keyholes but there is only one known key and the senior Keeper carries this. The garrison Commander steps forward and requests the three keys in a ritualised exchange. The origin of this tradition is lost.

Commander: "Pass forward the three Great Keys so Talabheim can be open to the Forest."

Keeper: "We cannot. Only one key is held."

Commander: "Where are the other two?"

Keeper: "They are missing, presumed lost. Forgive us our failing and take the last key." (He hands over the key and then all three Keepers kneel)

Commander: "I take the last Key of the Gate. If the gates do not open you will be killed where you kneel." He turns and hands the key to a Sergeant. The Sergeant then walks to the three keyholes and tries the key. Only on the third hole does the lock open. He returns the key to the Commander who hands it to the Keeper.

Commander: "This is the first key to open the Gate. Guard it well."

They wait until the sound of the Dawn Horn. The gates are then unbarred and the portcullis raised.

Tolls

The Excisemen men are an efficient and generally unbribeable department. Of course, part of the reason for this is the penalty of death for an Excisemen accepting a bribe (as recorded in The Book of Records against Mikhail Alkock). They examine each cart quickly and calculate payment, which must be paid immediately. Those that disagree with the evaluation can appeal or turn back. Appeal takes between three and five days during which time all goods are impounded.

Market Goods: 5% of Price

Custom & Law The Walls have Ears

A servant found to be "spreading his master's business to his master's detriment" (i.e. gossiping) may be sentenced to up to a week in the stocks. On the fourth day his ears are to be nailed to the stock with an iron nail "no smaller than an inch or larger than three."

Per Leg: 2/- (human or horse)

Per animal: 1d to 1/- depending on size.

Per Wheel: 5/-

Clerics of Taal & Ulric are excluded, as are the one hundred and fifty Premier Families and those carrying the few appropriate Guild passes.

"We don't like change around here."

In addition, the following items are actively discouraged from being used or displayed within the Crater: chainmail, shields, all weapons apart from swords, daggers and staves. Additionally, crossbows (of all kinds), longbows, all gunpowder weapons and plate mail are completely illegal. These restrictions don't apply to those wearing colours of the military orders.

Taal Tor

Sometimes known as 'Taal's Tower', this fortification is the only interior building visible from the forest outside. As well as the inner gate, it acts as a watchtower for the surrounding area. A large pyre waits on top to be lit as a warning beacon to the city itself. The guards use large brass telescopes, imported from Marienburg, although it took 32 years of argument to implement this innovation.

Taal Tor is not as heavily defended as Ulric Tor but is still solid enough to slow down would-be attackers. In fact, part of the tunnel is blended with the fortress, providing a killing ground as the enemy attack the gate. This has long been known as The Bear's Mouth.

High up in the tower are four small prison cells, although three are now used as storerooms. The fourth is known as 'The Baron's Cell'. On the three nights before the coronation of a new Duke/Duchess, the incumbent-to-be must stay here, setting forth to the Temple of Ulric on the dawn of the Coronation. This celebrates the freeing of Duke Otto Dissell and his subsequent victory over Duke Ludwig the Deranged.

However, the actual cell is not the same. This was quietly changed after the discovery of a secret door, not to mention the cold body of the Baron (who was soon to be Duke) Mikhail von Kliest. It was this that allowed Marquis Otto Dissell IX to rise to power, although nobody ever dared suggest he was actually responsible for the assassination.

Wizard's Way

This is the only entrance to the city. It is a very simple round tunnel, the bottom of which is filled with a thick matted carpet of straw and mud. It is wide enough for two wagons to pass side by side. Two lines of lanterns line the tunnel; these are kept lit by the oil-boys - twelve teenagers, organised by a Guard Sergeant and responsible for keeping the lamps cleaned and burning. Fierce winds continually blow through the tunnel.

No magic is used to guard the tunnel, in spite of its name - although that doesn't prevent common belief from attributing all sorts of magical powers to it. Rumour also has it that a little-known group of Dwarfs named 'The Last Line' maintain a store of gunpowder under the tunnel so that, should they ever need to collapse the tunnel, they can do so in an instant - at the cost of their own lives. If such a group exists, though, they do a good job of keeping their members secret.

Ostcastrab

This famous road leads from Wizard's Way through the

city and out into the crater, spanning a full two thirds of the crater. At the end stands The Last Inn, otherwise known as the Inn at the End of the Road. The road was designed and built by Dwarfs and slopes gently down into the city from its initial elevated position above the floor of the crater. It is still in good condition, even after centuries of use. The road is mainly intended for trade use; as a consequence, wagons and coaches have right of way and do not have to stop for pedestrians.

Slums have grown up on either side of the road, so that it effectively cuts this sprawl into a North and a South quarter. For the inhabitants of these slums, getting from side to side is a problem. There is a legal crossing point: a set of wooden steps leads up to the road from each side, each set with its own guard at the top. These guards have the right to refuse access and to ask questions about the nature of a traveller's business. However, in addition to this, rumours persist that there is a tunnel between the two quarters. Further east, of course, the road descends to the level of the crater's floor, and so is low enough to cross.

Crater of the Sun

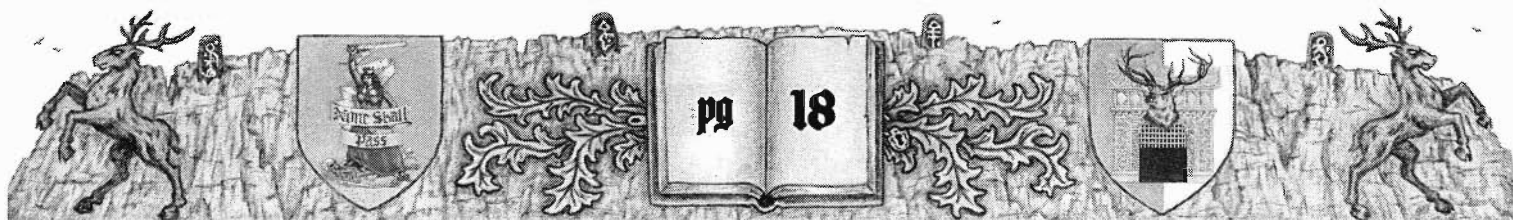
Legend has it that the crater which surrounds and protects Talabheim was created by Taal to protect his worshippers. It was once called the Crater of the Sun, although that name is rarely used now. Nowadays, the name Talabheim refers to both the crater and city. The crater's rim is sixty feet tall, with steep, unscalable sides. The rock is extremely hard, "as if fused by the sun", and even the best mining equipment makes slow progress through it.

The floor of the crater is covered with deep rich soil, and is fed by a number of springs that appear along the crater's rim. To the east of the city, these springs flow into the Crystal Lake. The city itself extends from the west of the crater, slowly encroaching on the disappearing farmland and the few villages to the east. Due to the strength of the rock, many buildings have only shallow foundations. A number of drainage channels (which lead to the bottom of the crater's edge) have been here since the beginnings of records. Ludwig Krapper was the genius behind the sewage system implemented in the richer parts of the city. This is a collection of wooden channels - not man size tunnels, as are found in other cities. However, there are rumours of undercaverns that stretch for miles downwards; this, though, is just a story for children...

Magic in the Crater

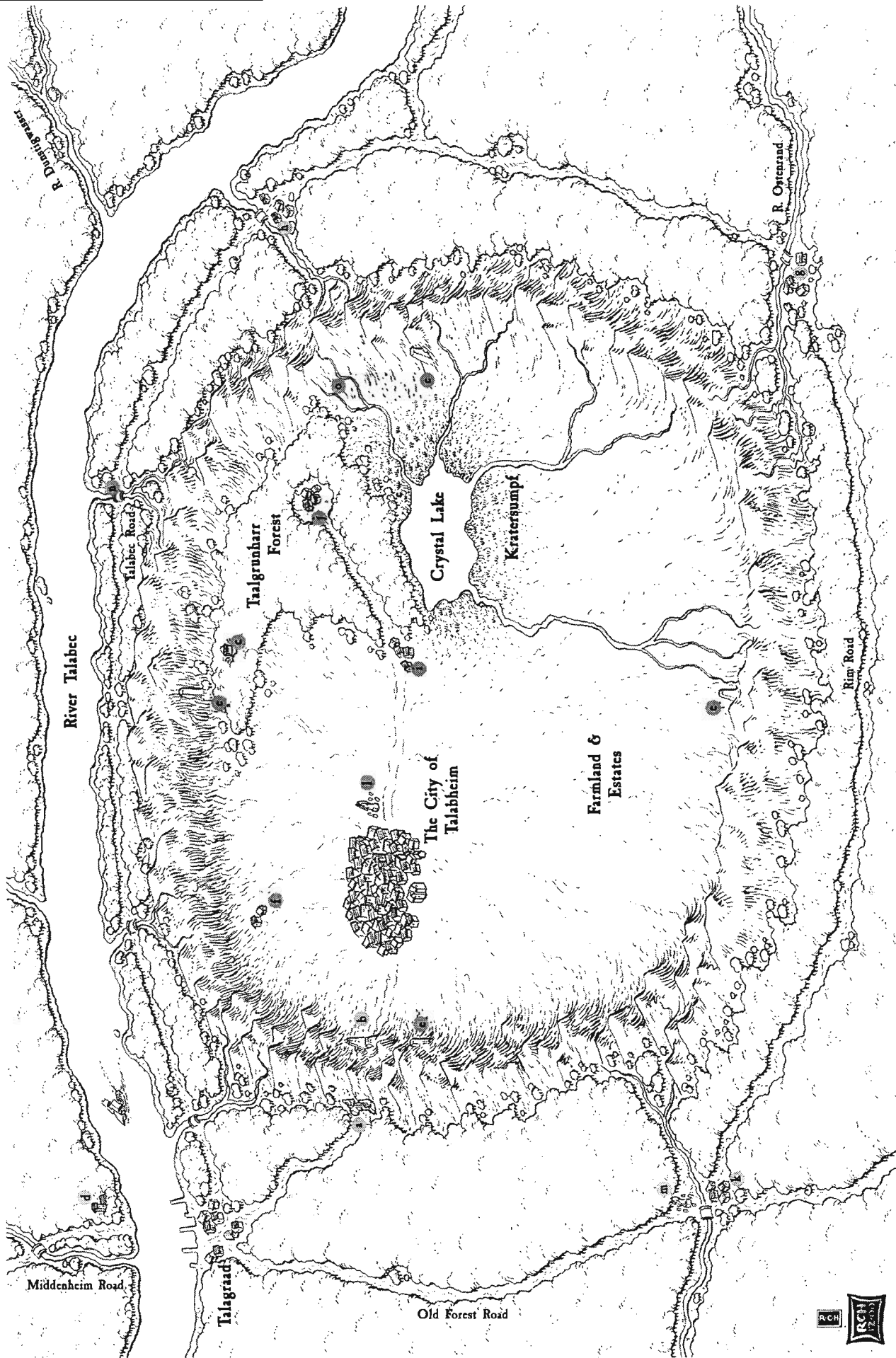
The rock that surrounds and protects The Eye of the Forest has a number of strange properties. Dwarfen mining experts have speculated a huge mountain must have fallen from the sky, creating the crater and fusing the surrounding rock in the process. (This, though, is a theory that few normal folk give any credence to - flying mountains, indeed!) Whatever the cause, the area is highly difficult to quarry or mine, and it is cheaper to import stone from the Worlds Edge Mountains. No self-proclaimed experts, not even those with their flying mountain theory, have yet come up with a good explanation for the Wizard's Tunnel and the Compass Monoliths.

The crater has a number of other strange properties. Compasses and Lodestones do not work here; they simply start spinning erratically. Spirits have little power; although they can be summoned, they are weak. Some of the more powerful spirits are actually afraid of the site, and the Gospodars call Talabheim 'Spirit-Fear'.



Talabheim and its Surrounding Area

- a. Ulfic Tor
- b. Taal Tor
- c. Temple of Taal
- d. Temple of Karog
- e. Compass Monoliths
- f. Klarfeld
- g. Breitblatt
- h. Gründach
- i. Sumpfrand
- j. Vateresche
- k. Waldfährtc
- l. Ewigtraum Cemetery
- m. Grünschatten Cemetery
- n. Taal Brucke
- o. Red Falls





The place also affects all kinds of Magic, except (for some reason) that of Druids and Elementalists. Spellcasters claim they can feel themselves being drawn into the rock. Although most of the time spells simply fail to work, sometimes the effects are more dramatic. Each time a spell is cast, the caster makes a WP test, with a 10 point penalty for each Level of the Spell (Petty magic counts as level 0). Spell casters can improve this roll by 10 for each additional magic point they spend. A simple failure means nothing has happened - but failure of more than 30 points means that something untoward and unpredictable has taken place. Perhaps a Flight spell summons a small stuffed bird, or the caster is covered in soot after trying to cast a Fireball. A roll of 00 means that something even more dangerous has happened. For example, a Fireball spell might explode and damage the caster and everyone near him, or a Glowing Light spell might permanently blind everyone who was looking in its direction. Whatever the outcome, magic points and ingredients are lost as normal.

These strange effects have led to the Wizard's Court and the Prison of the Magi being located in Talabheim.

Custom & Law Head Stand

Placing an image of the Duke (or Duchess) upside down is considered treason.

The City Guard

Located in the two gate fortresses and the city barracks, the City Guard are a professional well-trained group. Their numbers are limited, with only one hundred and twenty five on full time duty. However, these are ably backed up by both the Knights Panther and the Storm Guard, an elite group of knights responsible for the

Grand Duke's safety. The City Watch also falls under the City Guard's umbrella.

Also nominally on full time duty are Baron Rougestar's Tithe-men. These twenty musketeers were given to the defence of the city by the Baron to make a point about the stupidity of refusing to employ gunpowder weapons. He had done his legal footwork - the city couldn't refuse the gift. However, as the City doesn't know what to do with them, they do little but sit around, drink and brawl.

All citizens over the age of sixteen and not of noble blood are required to submit to five days of military training each year. These take place on Festags throughout the calendar, and participants are schooled in spear, sword and bow. They are paid a shilling at the end of each day. The male nobility are expected to be present on the field of battle in time of war, and most are schooled in the arts of horsemanship and warfare by their own private tutors.

The People

Socially, everyone in the city knows their place. Every class dislikes and distrusts the others. The nobility are generally seen as unrefined by their western counterparts. Indeed, as a rule, they are poorer but paradoxically have far more rights. They are also far quicker to voice their superiority, insulting commoners in the streets and acting as though they own the place (which of course they do). They perceive the lower classes as being there to do the dirty work and provide cannon-fodder when needed. However, the nobility do have a great fear that the lower classes will one day rise up against them. This fear is far in excess of the real threat, but it does drive them to excessive responses towards any perceived challenge to the status quo.

However, the nobility are also bound by strict rules. Although these are rarely enforced, they carry strict penalties. For example, a noble may not marry a

commoner (the sentence for this is exile and confiscation of goods) or pass on their property to anyone except their first son when they die. (If there is no first son then there is a complicated list of priorities). Also, the influence of Kislev is keenly felt here: many of the nobility have Kislevite backgrounds and names, although historically these have been played down during times of tension with their eastern neighbour.

The Middle Classes are relatively small. Because the nobility in Talabheim control much of the trade, merchants have much less influence than they do elsewhere. However, the last two hundred years have seen their numbers and wealth increase, for although in theory they all work for noble houses, a large proportion of the profits come their way. Nevertheless, they work within tight controls. The prices they may charge are regulated, as are their numbers. There are also laws fixing the quality and composition of common goods such as bread and cloth. Merchants tend to keep to themselves, ignoring the poor (who are unsightly and dangerous) and in turn being ignored

by the rich (who view them as upstarts). They are the most vocal opponents of the strict laws and traditions of the city, as they have the most to lose from them and also have the education to attempt to do something about them. Many Lawyers, Merchants and other professions perform their work unofficially, perhaps employed as "advisers", and try to stay one step ahead of the relevant Guild.

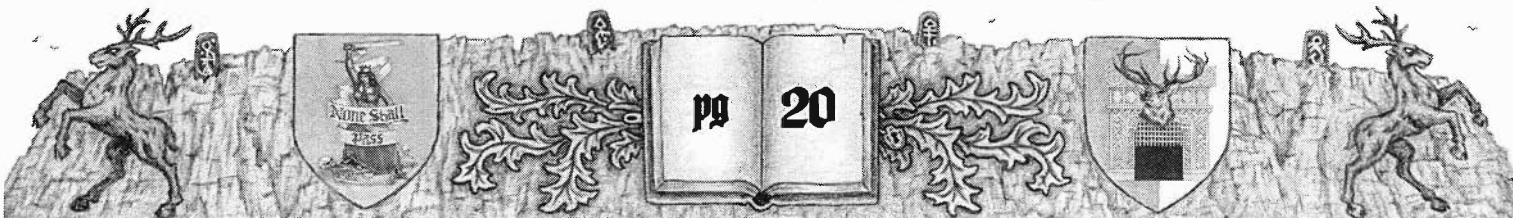
At the bottom of the pile, as always, are the poor. Confined to the worst parts of the city, they have little contact with their social superiors. In fact, they are often completely ignorant of how the city is run and who rules it. Representatives of the authorities are despised, and should any venture into poor districts they are likely to be spat upon, and perhaps worse. Personality-wise, the stereotypical local is ignorant, coarse, drunk and violent. Cheap or home-made Vodka is to be had on every corner, being far safer to drink than the water. A number of wells do provide clean water but this is used mainly for washing or for boiling food.

With the open sewers and general lack of regard for their health, life expectancy is horribly low. In addition, relative to other Imperial Cities, there is far less concern for the poor. One of the main problems is the lack of a major river running through the city. It is a fact that upsets the theories of many Imperial Geographers, who pontificate endlessly that any major settlement needs easy access to fresh water to survive. The answer for the poor of Talabheim is simple - they live in filth and make do with dirty water.

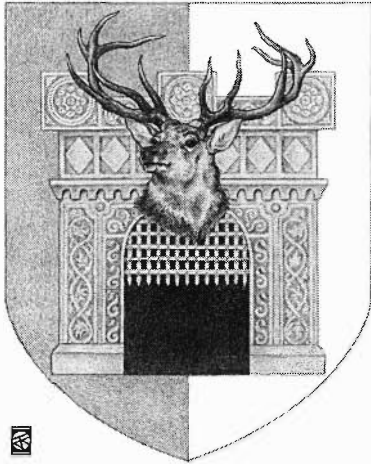
"My old man's a raker, he wear's a raker's hat, he fell into the cess-pit and that was the end of that."

Traditional Talabheim Rhyme

Talabheim has no modern sewage system and is unlikely to gain one in the near future. Instead, the poor



COAT OF ARMS



Talabheim has two commonly used Coat-of-Arms. The original shows the importance of Taal, with the gate symbolising the entrance of the Wizard's Tunnel, and thus Talabheim.



The second arose after Frederik Untermensch founded the Duchy of Talabheim in 2429 IC. He was in need of a Coat-of-Arms for his duchy and, with the aid of creative historians, he based it on (false) legends of Talabheim's resistance against the Sylvanian aggressions circa 2011 IC. This was supposedly meant to remind the new Talabecland Grand Duke that Talabheim had come through von Carstein's rampage proudly, in contrast to Talabecland. The crowned figure on the coat of arms is Empress Otilia (representing the House of Untermensch). Although the new coat of arms is worn to war and at parades, the old coat of arms of the city is more likely to be seen in heraldry and elsewhere.

areas use a number of cess-pits. These are emptied by the Guild of Rakers, shovelling the contents into wagons and taking it out of the city. They are poorly paid and, socially, are the lowest of the low. A number of streams do run through the city and several of these have been channelled to run along roads. In the poor areas, though, they are often used as toilets. Here, the call of "muck's out" is still heard as rubbish is thrown into the street from a window.

In the well-to-do areas a series of wooden channels has been built into the roads, running just below the surface. Streams are diverted through these, and waste is thrown down at a series of access points. In heavy rain, they are prone to flooding sending their contents into the streets.

Climate

Talabheim is subject to frequent rains and, in winter, snowfalls. At night, the temperature rarely rises above freezing. Summers are often warm, sometimes uncomfortably so, with little wind entering the crater. Occasionally, localised storms do descend on the crater, causing a lot of damage, especially to roofs and badly built slum housing.

Compass Monoliths

Hewn from the wall of the Crater, these four 75-foot monoliths stand at each compass point. They are carved with a line of unknown symbols, facing inwards. Legend has it that they stood here before the arrival of Talgris, and their purpose is unknown. The most commonly held belief is that they were placed by Taal to mark the boundary of the city. The Cult of Taal has taken this as official doctrine, and offerings are lain around them. This practice is often carried out in honour of the dead.

Another common legend about the monoliths is that they occasionally 'moan', causing those around to suffer headaches, sickness and occasionally visions. This has not happened for many years.

Resources

Talabheim is not rich in natural resources. The little surrounding land contains forest scattered with farmsteads. Its wealth is mostly derived from its function as a central marketplace between The Empire and Kislev, although it does export some timber and a few local delicacies. Market specialities include timber, fur, mercenaries and vodka. In fact, Talabheim is the poorest of The Empire's cities, and the cost and quality of living is lower than that of western settlements. Taxes are levied on goods entering the city, and on landlords.

HISTORY

A Fireside Story

The tribe had travelled far, a long, hard journey. In those days, his people were nomadic hunters. Talcred, son of Krugar, had been dead for three summers, and his son, Talgris, now led the people. Talgris had been sent a vision by Karnos, a vision of a place that would be safe from the Forest Spirits that meddled with and persecuted the tribe. He felt the desire for security, for safety, all too keenly - the Rubezahl, one of the forest spirits, had taken his own wife, just weeks after giving birth to his son.

That night, Karnos threw the sun to the ground and the earth shook. For three days and three nights the sky

was dark, and when the light burst forth again, Talgris lead them towards the place of Karnos. It took them many days, for there were no paths and the was winter harsh, and the Forest Spirits harassed them. In his son's fourth year, Talgris and his people saw the Crater of the Sun.

In time, Talgris reached the foot of the Crater, but could find no way to enter. Many men tried to scale the sides, but to no avail. Some began to call it "the mountain that cannot be climbed". For thirty days, Talgris prayed to Karnos for a sign. On the thirtieth day a bird of flame flew from the forest and spoke to Talgris. "I am Barrer, servant of Taal, whom you call Karnos. I have come to show you the eye of the forest." He led Talgris up a road that appeared before him, and into a tunnel. They emerged to a sight that caused Talgris to fall to his knees. The walls of the crater rose majestically into the sky, while a carpet of green was laid across the base. Barrer led him to the centre. "All this is yours, the place where ancient powers still sleep. All you see around you is for your people and those that come afterwards. Here, you will build and prosper. The keys to the city are a gift to you. Here Taal and his brethren are always to be honoured, as are all the spirits of the forest, who will cause you no harm here. And I - I shall always watch and protect, to make sure the laws of Taal are faithfully kept."

Extract of letter from Professor Marcos to Doktor von Nalnheim (Deciphered)

Of course, your belief that the story of Talgris is literally true is preposterous. It is a metaphor, a myth. Naturally, some elements are bound to resemble fact. We agree that Talgris and his people were the Talabec Tribe, a nomadic folk looking for a permanent home in the land Sigmar had granted them. Taal's sign was a meteor, but it cannot be the one that formed the crater, for it seems that the tunnel and road were there when they arrived.

The alleged appearance of Barrer bears this out. I doubt I am mistaken in my belief that Taal sent a message in the form of a Phoenix, a legendary creature reputed to be from Lustria or the Southlands. This bird of rebirth is a metaphor that shows that the crater had been used before and, in being given to Talgris, was being reborn. Of course, this doesn't answer the question of who was here before...

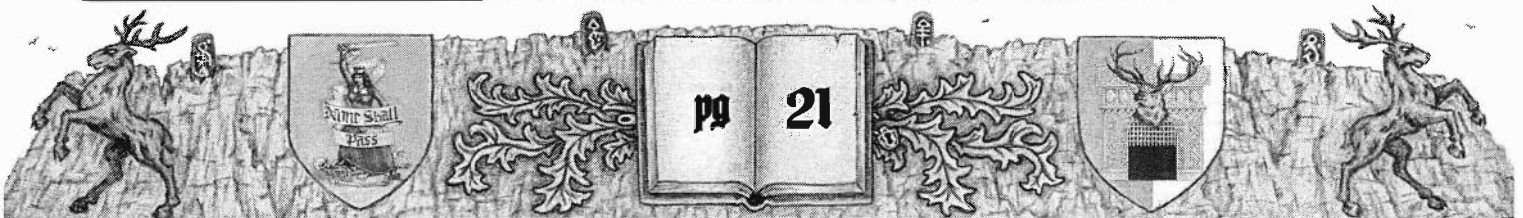
Early History

Talgris founds Talabheim. Trade flourishes. Much of Talabheim's early history is shrouded in mystery and speculation, although the story about Talgris is widely believed to be factual. Most scholars agree that the Talabec tribe founded the settlement which grew into modern Talabheim. Talabecland was given to the tribe by Sigmar himself in thanks for participation in the Goblin Wars. Talgris was the first to find his way into the crater.

As the forest became more dangerous others followed, and the town grew slowly around the foot of the Wizards Tunnel. Soon it became the centre of trade in the eastern Empire, and goods were exchanged with

Custom & Law Instant Relief

Commoners may not urinate in public places, unless against the rear wheel of a cart and out of the sight of all women.



TALABHEIM TIMELINE

- 0 Krugar, Chief of the Talabec tribe, is granted sovereignty over the lands along the Talabec river by Sigmar.
- c40 *Talgris founds Talabec Heim at the foot of the tunnel.*
- 73 Establishment and expansion of the cult of Sigmar, open conflict with the cult of Ulric begins.
- c100 *Trade begins with other major Imperial settlements. Talabecland marked out.*
- c300 The Peer House is created as a forum to discuss the law. Each noble family supplies a representative. The Office of Record Keeper is founded to record the house's judgements.
- 500 *Talabec nobles fail to exploit the resources of the surrounding forests. Numerous skirmishes take place with Stirland.*
- c500 The Norse begin to settle the frontier Northeast of The Empire. The villages of Erengard and Dorogo are established during this time.
- c650 *Talabecland tries to extend its borders at the expense of Stirland. Fighting is bloody and Stirland hold out, taking advantage of Talabecland's political infighting.*
- 1102 Emperor Boris Goldbringer conspires with the High Priests of the Imperial cults to arrest wizards and charge them with heresy. Many are burned at the stake.
- 1111 *As war and disease ravage The Empire, Talabheim is used as a base for adventurers, trappers and missionaries to explore the upper reaches of the Talabec. Plague reduces Talagraad to a ghost-town. Talabheim avoids the worst of the outbreak. Rumours persist elsewhere in The Empire that the Grand Duke's advisor Ruyser Ostenwald made some dark pact to save the city.*
- c1135 Tarnhelm Keep is attacked on the Night of Screams. Skaven are narrowly held back. The nobility begin their gradual abandonment of the Old City.
- 1152 *Emperor Mandred assassinated. The Electoral Council ends in stalemate. Grand Duke Theodor "The Bull" returns to the city and declares war on Stirland. This is to be the first of many civil wars. Middenheim annexes Middenland.*
- 1360 Grand Duchess Otilia declares herself Empress in response to the Grand Count of Stirland's election as Emperor. The Cult of Sigmar is outlawed. Ar-Ulric moves to Talabheim to support Otilia (and also save his neck due to a falling out with the Graf of Middenheim). Civil war continues to reign.
- 1364 *The Nobility finally leave the Old City,*

the other ever-growing towns of The Empire. The boundaries of Talabecland were established over these years; however, for centuries the tribe failed to exploit the forest's resources through a mixture of poor leadership and constant skirmishes with beastmen and goblins.

Becoming a City

Brokagon founds the House of Peers, The Temple of Taal is built.

The people of the city, compared to their more western counterparts, were ill-educated and remained militant. Frequent bouts of in-fighting meant they stayed divided. Although records of the period are sketchy, it is known that Chief Brokagon, the Elector of the Talabec, who angrily brought the various faction leaders together. Seating them around him he said, "none may leave this gathering until our problems are no more. Each man must tell us his grievance, and as equals and leaders, we will judge his case. My friend Auster is lettered and he will record our decisions so that they are not forgotten." On this spot the original Peer House was built and the true city grew.

It was a period of growth, led by Brokagen's son Theodor. He had the Peer House proclaim him Grand Duke of Talabecland, as he established his family's right to the lands of the Talabec. His son, Talgris II, was responsible for building the Temple of Taal and shocked many when he became a Cleric of the nature god.

Civil War

Black Plague and Civil War. Age of Three Emperors begins.

The City grew over the coming years. As war and disease ravaged The Empire, Talabheim managed to avoid the worst. The city was used as a base for those with designs on the upper reaches of the Talabec. When the Electoral Council of 1152 ended in stalemate, Grand Duke Theodor "The Bull" returned to the city and declared war on Stirland. Officially, it was in reprisal for Stirland's raids on Talabecland, but rumours suggest that it was actually over personal matters. Many took this as an opportunity to pursue their own agendas and civil war broke out across The Empire. For two hundred years Talabecland and Stirland blustered and battled each other. This situation finally came to a head when the Grand Count of Stirland was elected as Emperor with the support of the Cult of Sigmar. In response, Grand Duchess Otilia declared herself Empress and outlawed the Cult of Sigmar. Ar-Ulric moved to Talabheim to support Otilia, as her objectives tallied with his own. The fact that he was running from the wrath of Middenheim's Graf Heinrich may have played no small part in his arrival to Otilia's court.

With the pronouncement that the Grand Duke of Middenland had declared himself Emperor in 1547, the Age of Three Emperors began. The then Ar-Ulric reached an agreement with the Grand Duke of Middenheim to return to his office to the City of the Wolf. Stunned by the loss of the High Priest of Ulric, Talabheim went to war against Middenheim and many starved as food prices soared. In the farce that was the Battle of Dellburg, Talabecland forces were routed. Middenheim's Emperor Siegfried marched his army throughout the night to bring them to the gates of Talabheim. However, the siege proved ineffective; his army was devastated by disease and then slaughtered as they attempted to battle their way into the crater. Many

mutter that the disease was the work of Nurgle: a repayment for Ruyser Ostenwald's bargain with the outlawed god.

In a superb piece of diplomacy, Talabecland signed a treaty with the newly-independent Middenland. However, the much-discussed plan for both regions' armies to take Middenheim came to naught with the appearance of a new enemy.

Horde from the East

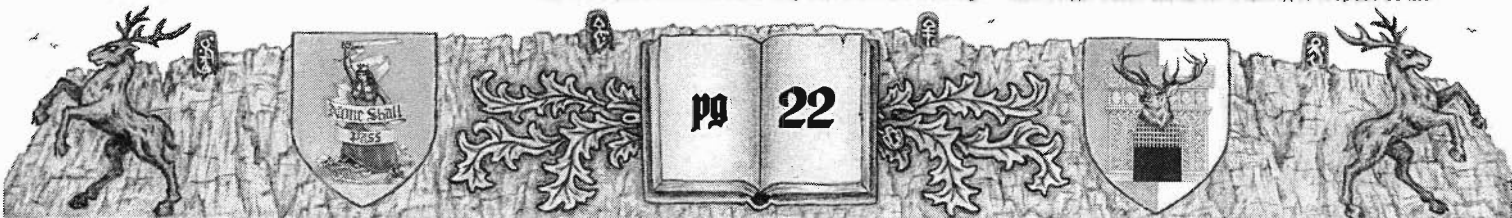
Ungol Hordes appear. Peace Treaty collapses in confusion. Slaughter in the Streets. Braxix becomes a legend.

In 1750, a flood of Gospodar immigrants from the East arrived in the city bringing news of fierce raiders. The power and skill of the Ungol hordes were much underestimated, and they speedily occupied the eastern area of Talabecland. Although the city refused to surrender, no attack was forthcoming and the Ungols retreated. However, this peace was not to be permanent. Years later, in 1900, Ungol warbands again threatened Talabheim, burning surrounding farmsteads to the ground. Emperor Gregory Dissell, unwilling to face them in open warfare, acknowledged the sovereignty of Ungols over all the land east of Talabheim, including the entire eastern portion of Ostland.

The Kislevite nobles now living in Talabheim became a vocal force. They contributed to the internal pressure (adding to increased threats from Middenheim, Stirland, Ostland, and the newly-independent Ostermark) to allow the Peers to consider aligning Talabecland with Igor the Terrible's Confederacy of Kislevite States. The argument was won on the floor of the Peer House, with eighteen of its members dying in the 'debate'. Igor's son, Prince Ivan, was invited to the city and, among much pomp and ceremony, the Treaty was signed. However, things became confusing after this. Talabheim's Emperor failed to awaken the next morning, possibly due to the dagger in his back. All copies of the Treaty were lost and the new Emperor had Prince Ivan and his entourage thrown from the city. The Kislevite Prince swore revenge.

Once he became Tsar, Ivan "the Lunatic" set his sights on Talabecland. The news of his mighty army's approach reached the city on the celebration of Geheimistag. Inhabitants, fuelled by drink and panic, took out their fear on the local Kislevites. Thousands were murdered in the ensuing rampage, rivers of blood running down the streets. Ivan razed Talagraad and took Ulric Tor. For the first and last time, an enemy entered the Wizard's Way. They were stopped at Taal Tor, and the Kislevites named it the Bear's Mouth. The Tsar's army disintegrated with the coming of winter, and Marshall Braxix gave chase to the rabble. He was joined by an army of Ostlanders who had been guarding their border against the invaders. Ivan was captured, and Braxix surprised everyone by negotiating with him. The 'Agreement of Braxix' extended Talabecland's borders to the Upper Talabec and across the Foothills. Ostland regained some lands, but most remained lost to the Kislevites. The Ostermarkers were enraged over Talabecland's attempt to extend their rule, thus beginning a twenty-five year struggle.

In time, Braxix achieved peace with Ostermark, Ostland, and Stirland. The peace deal brokered removed all claims of Talabecland from the Sigmar-worshipping Ostermark. Braxix became a living legend and a figurehead for those wishing to dispose of the



The Royal Families

Von Brunckhorst - an arrogant and conservative family that claims to be the sole true descendants of Krugar and Talgris which (at least in their own opinion) makes them the rightful rulers of Talabheim. They have strong support in the Peer House, and the Brunckhorst Claimant, Count Tavel, enjoys great respect as current Speaker, while his nephew has recently been appointed as Lord Chancellor. The Brunckhorsts hate the Syberg-Gronzys and invariably refer to them as the Kislevite Usurpers. They are appalled at their claim to be a Royal Family. Secretly, Count Tavel dreams of seizing the throne. It pains him deeply that the Brunckhorsts have failed to reign for centuries. Therefore he is trying to come to better terms with the Ulrican priests, for relations with the cult have been strained since the rise of the Otilians.

Untermensch - this (in)famous family dominated Talabecland and Talabheim history from the fourteenth to the twenty first century. By far the best known Untermensch was the self-proclaimed Empress Otilia I. In fact, many refer to her successors as the Otilians. Now, their influence is in decline, especially since Otilia IX Untermensch allied with the von Krieglitzes and founded the von Krieglitz-Untermensch dynasty. Former allies of the Untermenschen are now divided between the Krieglitz-Untermenschen and the Untermensch family (headed by Duke Frederik), costing the Untermenschen much power. (Frederik's ducal title is the result of a decree by the last Untermensch Duke; he should not be confused with the real Duchess of Talabheim, Elise von Krieglitz-Untermensch).

Von Nebelsfeuer - a rich and influential family whose original power base lay in the eastern parts of Talabecland. It has little support among the Peers and owes most of its influence to its close ties with the Talabec armed forces. Since time immemorial, the Nebelsfeuers have been commanders of Tarnheim's Keep, although nowadays that role is purely titular. Due to their interests in eastern Talabecland they have traditionally been quite hostile to Kislevites. They are still deeply involved in Ostermark politics. The Nebelsfeuer Claimant is Margrave Helmut, who is sometimes compared with his most famous ancestor, Gregory I Dissell.

Syberg-Gronzy - the Sybergs were amongst the leaders of the Gospodar immigrants when they settled in Talabecland in the 18th century. The Sybergs were gifted with a lasting talent for trade, and were soon amongst the leading Talabheim merchants. Eventually, they were appointed Barons after helping Emperor Talgris IX with his severe financial problems. During the Sigmarzeit Riots in the 23rd century, Baron Boris Syberg became the leader of the rebelling opposition. After the Grand Duke's escape, the Peers were forced to appoint Boris as Grand Duke of Talabecland. He sat for four years, after which the Nebelsfeuer-Brunckhorst alliance marched against Talabheim and forced him to escape to Erengard. Since then, the Sybergs have intermarried with the Gronzys and regained their position as leaders of the Kislevite minority. Lately, they have gained a seat in the Peer House. They are scorned by the other Peers but much respected by the merchants, and are held in even higher regard by Talabheim's Kislevites.

Krieglitz-Untermensch - rulers of Talabheim for the last fifty years. This dynasty is the result of Otilia (IX) Untermensch's martial union with the second son of Dieter IV von Krieglitz. With their connections to the Untermensch allies as well as the von Krieglitz dynasty of Talabecland, the Krieglitz-Untermenschen appear to be thoroughly entrenched on the throne. They are not seen as a true Royal Family, since many Talabheimers consider them a sub-branch of the Untermensch family. Yet technically they are part of the House of Unfähiger, whose current head is Gustav von Krieglitz, the Grand Duke of Talabecland. All in all, it is no wonder that trying to understand the dynastic relations of the area is a pastime for a select few...

current Emperor, Eckhardt II. The Emperor became worried at the General's popularity and Braxix was arrested and executed on charges of treason. Few neutral observers believed that he was in fact guilty of the crimes.

And Now...

Magus the Pious arrives. Talabheim secedes.
Centuries of Imperial civil war end when Magnus the Pious rode into Talabecland. From here his army readied to ride North to battle the resurgent Chaos forces. They were, eventually, victorious. After Magnus' reign as Emperor ended, another crisis in succession nearly led to war. Cooler heads prevailed and the crisis passed.

Later, Emperor Dieter IV was forced to flee to Talabheim after taking the decision to remove him from the throne. A Ducal Bull proclaimed him ruler of Talabecland. Soon after, Talabheim declared itself a City-State (The Duchy of Talabheim). Dieter's second son married the daughter of the Duke of Talabheim. She became Duchess Otilia IX, and together they founded the Krieglitz-Untermensch dynasty. With this marriage, the fates of Talabheim and Talabecland were once again intertwined, much to the discomfort of their neighbours.

The Talabheim Calendar

The citizens of Talabheim take their festivals very seriously. All the important Imperial festivals are honoured, but the following are seen as particularly special. All these days are characterised by very heavy drinking, and drunken violence is not uncommon. On all such days, shops and markets are forbidden from opening. (This only applies to the festival day itself, not to any days of celebration following them).

Hexenstag - Festival of Spirits and Parade of Geistschreck. The Parade, led by a priest of Taal, travels from the Wizard's Way to the Northern Monolith. Celebrants carry bells and drums, and tie brightly coloured strips of cloth to their clothes. This parade is to honour Taal's protection from malign spirits. A similar parade takes place about the city walls, although the more elaborate urban version is not considered "proper" by the Taal priesthood. Urban revellers dance around the walls of the Old City, many dressed as bears, wolves, phoenixes and griffins. This carries on, with much attendant drunken revelry, until late into the night. Perhaps the reason why such a colourful event has not become more popular is because it takes place in Winter. The day after is often sometimes jokingly called Militiaday, as "I had to have a day off for Militia training" was a favourite excuse of the hung over.

Mitterfruhl - Many make pilgrimages to the Temple of Taal and a huge open-air ceremony is held. At one stage the crowd call out the names of the dead so that they are remembered.

18th Sigmarzeit - Sigmar's feast day; Magnus is also celebrated. The celebrations are centred around Magnusplatz. A jousting tournament for nobles takes place.

Last Festag of Sommerzeit - Race Day: The four main noble families compete against each other. The route stretches from tunnel to city, but each participant choose their own path, the only requirement being to reach the East gate. Much betting takes place as even the commoners turn out to cheer on their favourite.

There are usually attempts made to hinder the

following the lead of the Empress who moves into the New Palace. It becomes a dark, evil place, home to the city's poorest.

1458 After a vicious winter, widespread starvation is averted after Obel von Matterburg brings food from the West. He is killed doing so.

1547 *The Age of Three Emperors begins. Ar-Ulric returns to Middenheim after accepting a vow of celibacy for all Ulrican priests.*

1550 Talabecland goes to war against Middenheim. Many starve as food prices soar and trade slows.

1552 *Emperor Frederik V and his Talabecland forces are routed at the Battle of Dellburg. Bold tactics by Middenheim's Emperor Siegfried bring his army to the gates of Talabheim. However, the siege proved ineffective, his army was devastated by disease and then decimated in a final futile assault. Middenland frees itself from Middenheim's domination.*

1681 Night of the Restless Dead. For one night throughout the Known World the dead stir and walk the land, sowing terror and confusion. Entire villages and towns are overrun and destroyed before the night of terror ends.

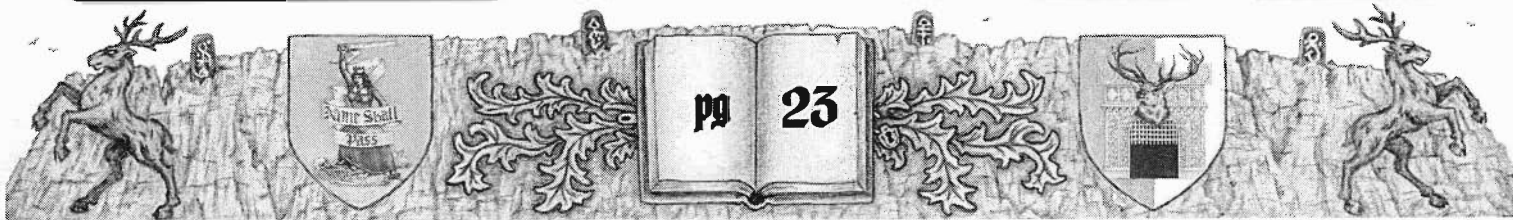
1690 *Talabecland signs treaty with Middenland.*

1750 Ungol hordes occupy the Eastern reaches of Talabecland. They halt some miles from the city. Talabheim's Emperor Helmut II refuses to surrender the city, but no attack is forthcoming. Many Gospodars (Kislevites) arrive in city. A hefty entry toll forces many to live in Talagraad.

1900 *Ungol warbands threaten Talabheim, burning surrounding farmsteads to the ground. Talabheim's Emperor Gregory Dissell acknowledges sovereignty of Ungols over all the land east of Talabheim (including a sizable chunk of eastern Ostland).*

1905 Talabecland and Ostland war intermittently for the next forty years over Talabecland, Talabecland finally agreeing to give the Ungols the entire eastern portion of Ostland instead of a larger portion of their own land. Those in Talabecland's eastern provinces declare themselves free from Talabheim's rule and join with Ostland. The war ends with the agreement that Ostermark becomes an independent province.

1979 *The "Wizard's War" begins in Middenheim and spreads throughout The Empire and the Old World. Witch Hunters are much sought after to deal with evils*



of all kinds. Talabheim's Emperor Oskar III and Nuln's Empress Margaritha (Magritta) I clash in several border disputes across the River Reik.

- 1991 The "Wizard's War" ends in the banishment and execution of a number of Demonologists and Necromancers. Within two years, Cult hierarchies begin the violent suppression of sorcery. Many suspected hedge wizards and other sorcerers are burned at the stake.
- 2010 Wars of Vampiric Counts begin with the devastation of Ostermark by Vlad von Carstein, first of the notorious Vampire Counts of Sylvania. Undead armies rampage from Stirland to Ostland. Talabheim's Empress Otillia IV orders the Wizard's Tunnel sealed whilst Talabecland is ravaged.
- 2101 Internal pressure and increased threat from Stirland, Middenheim, and Ostland forces Talabheim's Emperor Talgris XII, known as the fool, to consider aligning Talabecland with Igor the Terrible's Confederacy of Kislevite States. Confusion reigns as the Treaty is signed, Talgris is killed, the Treaty is lost and Igor's son is ejected from the city. Talgris' son is proclaimed Emperor Eckhardt II.
- 2122 Tsar Ivan "the Lunatic" (Igor's son) marches on Talabheim. As the news of his mighty army reaches the city on Geheimnstag, Kislevites are murdered on the streets. Up to 4,000 are believed to have died in the massacre. Talagraad is razed to the ground. For the first and only time, an enemy enters the Wizard's Way. They are stopped at Taal Tor, and name it the Bear's Mouth. The Tsar's army disintegrates with the coming of winter and Marshall Braxix chases the rabble east. Ivan is captured and Braxix surprises everyone by talking to him. The Agreement of Braxix restores some of Talabecland's original borders to the Upper Talabec and across the Foothills. Ostermarkers rise up against Talabecland and begin a 25 year struggle. Ostland and Stirland ally themselves with Ostermark.
- 2148 A treaty with Ostermark, Ostland, and Stirland forces Talabecland's recognition of Ostermark's independence. Braxix is arrested and executed on charges of treason.
- 2273 A band of adventurers stop the assassination of the Emperor at the hand of a Chaos Sorcerer. The dark wizard meets his demise in one of the clock towers of the Temple of Ulric.
- 2287 Baron Boris Syberg leads the Sigmarzeit Riots and is appointed Grand Duke, when the incumbent escapes. Four years

opposition and, on many years, riots occur.

Sonnstill - The Festival of Gold. The streets are adorned in cheap gold cloth and, on the longest day of the year, the city seems to be alight. Standing at Taal Tor, an observer would see a sea of shining gold. It is an offence punishable by death to sell anything on this day. Traditionally, the nobility pass out Vodka to the poor (and the poor just pass out!).

Geheimnstag - On this day of mystery, the nobility cut the gold cloth of Sonnstill into masks. Balls are held and tradition demands that no-one is called by name. A huge fair is held on the Field of Justice, which is the only time commoners may walk upon it.

Some time in Erntezeit - When the Harvest is over, feasting and drinking takes place across the city.

24th Kaldezeit - The anniversary of Ivan's abandonment of the siege in 2122.

19th Ulriczeit - A festival in honour of Barrer and the founding of Talabheim. The gates are closed until Midday. At night, torches and bonfires are lit everywhere. The ashes are taken home by many and daubed on newborn children and animals to bring them luck.

Mondstille - Ulric's feast. The City's troops parade past the palace in all their finery. Jousting takes place.

POLITICS

"Why, we are destined to rule! None of this 'democratic town council' rubbish here!"

If one doubts the social rigidity or the distinctions between the levels of social hierarchy in Talabheim, they need only take a look at the political institutions. The man on the street, with no noble blood running in his veins, has no say whatsoever in political machinations. The nobility is divided into a number of layers, and the influence of individual nobles is crucially dependant on the status he holds.

The Duke and the Royal Chancellery

At the pinnacle of power we find the Duke (or, at present, Duchess). All executive power lies with the Duke. In addition, he has the power to veto all laws passed by the Peer House. To assist the Duke in administering the City State he appoints the seven members of his Geheimekonseil (Old Reikspiel for 'Secret Council'). The seven Geheimeräte, invariably members of the Premier families, are the closest thing to a government you will find in Talabheim.

The Royal Court is currently a modest affair, which is due to the notoriously frugal Duchess. This is often the case, though, since the amount allocated to the Talabheim ruler is decreed in the Book of Judgment, and the sum has not been changed for centuries. Thus it is quite inadequate for the rulers' needs, leading them (on more than one occasion) to rely on wealthy merchants for support.

The Talabheim civil service is called the Royal Chancellery, and is based in and around Marble Hall in Blutberg. It consists of a number of departments headed by the Lord Chancellor, who attends the meetings in the Geheimekonseil. Contrary to the workings of the Geheimeräte, the Lord Chancellor must be approved by a simple majority in the Peer House. The chancellery is famed for being absurdly ineffective, even by Old World standards. Only the most stubborn citizens find answers to their enquiries or complaints, even after having spent days (literally!) being sent back and forth in Marble Hall and the

adjoining buildings. The best known department is probably the Department of Guilds and Trade, which seems to be the very essence of inefficiency. This is where you will have to go if you are dissatisfied with the rulings of the city guilds. The sheer reputation of the office makes most entrepreneurs give up in advance and head for other towns.

The only office that seems to be relatively efficient is the Department of Taxation. Of course, if the taxes were not paid, it would be nigh on impossible to finance such a huge and inefficient administration.

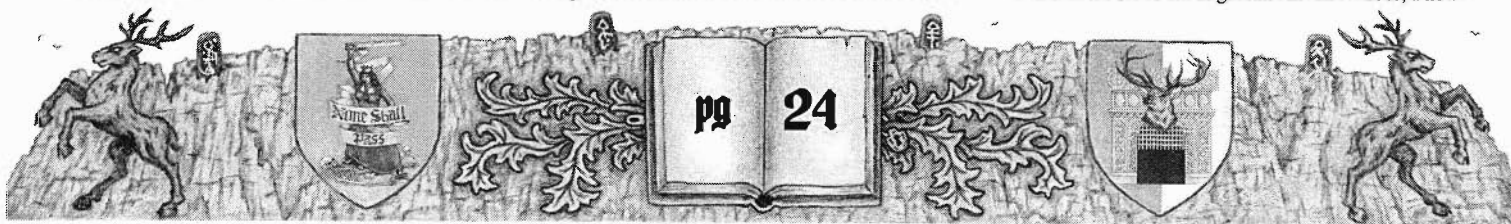
The Premier Families and the Peer House

For more than two thousand years the judicial power of Talabheim has lain with the same one hundred and fifty families. These families are commonly known as the Premier Families. Towards the end of the third century, Chief Brokagon established the Illustrious Assembly of Peers, where each noble family of the Talabec people was given one vote to settle disputes and agree on common policy. Today, the descendants of these very nobles sit in the Peer House, where "those that owe Nothing to Anyone nor Anything barring True Humbleness to Taal and Ulric shall, as a Consequence thereof, rule the Talabec Nation Fairly, Humbly and Properly". Sometime during the fifth century the Peers' Assembly ruled that their number should be one hundred and fifty and that all seats should remain with the families of the one hundred and fifty nobles then present. As the years went by, they became known by the name of the building where they met, the Peer House.

Of course, over the years, some of the families have died out (with or without the help of opposing families). In this case, the Duke elevates one of the Rural Families to the rank of Premier, and the head of this family is granted a peerage and a seat in the Peer House. The individual peer then names his or hers heir amongst the members of their family. Upon the peer's passing, the named heir is granted the seat in the Peer House for life. This is in direct contrast to the law that all property must be handed to the first born son. Inevitably, this has made for a lot of confusion, resentment and spilt blood over the years.

The Peer House sits during winter and spring. The Peers gather on the first day of Kaldezeit, where an entire day of rituals marks the new season. The day begins at the temple of Taal, where the Peers and the Duke gather to receive the blessings of Taal. After lunch at the royal palace, an intricate series of rituals in and around the Peer House culminates where the Duke's receives the Chalice of Winter containing blessed wolf-blood from Fräi-Ulric. (Some claim that nowadays it's just red wine). He drinks from the chalice and says, "may the power of Ulric now invested in me bring fortune and happiness to my people". The Peers cheer, and yell, "Hear! Hear!"

The Peer House can pass laws with the support of two thirds of the Peers in attendance. When a law has been proposed and properly debated (which usually takes hours if not days) the Speaker (invariably the eldest Peer) sends a herald to get the Record Keeper. Upon the latter's arrival, the Speaker asks every member present one by one, naming the member with all their titles (meaning that the voting usually takes no less than half an hour!), if they give their assent. The member answers yeh or neh. If two out of three approve, the Speaker asks the Record Keeper if the law will contradict prior judgements passed by the Peers, as stated in the Book of Judgments. In case it does, a new





debate is initiated after which another vote will take place, only now three fourths of the Peers in attendance must vote yeh in order to carry the law. If the law is approved, the Speaker asks the Duchess whether to approve or reject the law. She often attends the meetings, sitting on a platform above the arguing throng. If the law is approved and signed by the Duchess, it will be declared from a balcony at the Peer House at noon the following day, after which it is considered part of Talabheim Law and entered in the Book of Judgement.

Needless to say, this complex procedure greatly reduces the number of proposed laws, let alone the number of new laws passed. As a result, most of Talabheim law is ancient and quite outdated. Examples of such laws are to be found everywhere. One law, for example, says, "the Storm Guard are to be presented to the Duke every thirty days. If their swords or leathers are found to be lacking they are to be instantly

dismissed." However, the Storm Guard now wear chain-mail or plate - yet at every inspection they dutifully take out their ceremonial leathers for inspection.

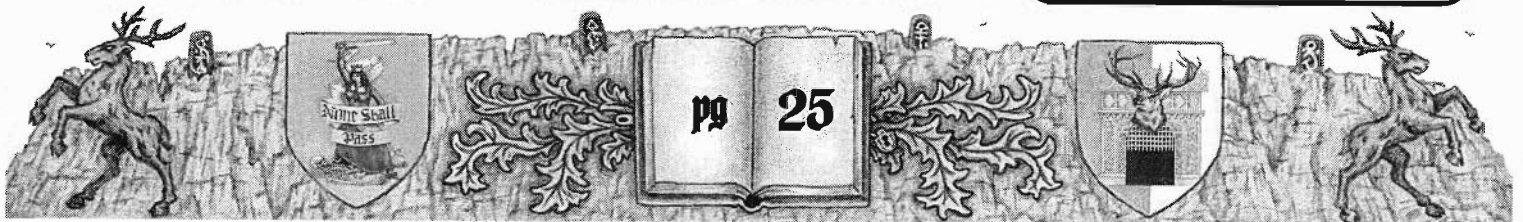
The Peers do approve some laws issued by the Imperial authorities. Others they ignore or reject since they contradict prior judgements of the Peers. Which law is superior remains an open question, although Talabheimers (of course) only accept laws entered in the Book of Judgement. So far, no one has appealed against a verdict to the Imperial Supreme Court. Presumably, only a person of immense influence would succeed in such an attempt.

The Peer House after 2429 IC

Today, there are only fifty-six de facto members of the Peer House. The explanation for the drastic reduction shall be found in the dramatic events that led to Talabheim's secession from Talabecland. A majority of the Peers found that they were now vassals of the new Unfähiger Grand Duke of Talabecland. In fact, 99

later he is ousted by the former Grand Duke who retakes the throne.

- 2290 *Sigmarite Cleric Stefan Kunden becomes the last 'martyr' of the Ultrican Witch-hunts. He is arrested whilst preaching for a united Empire.*
- 2302 Magnus the Pious rides into Talabecland. The Templars of Ulric sent out to arrest him swear allegiance instead. With much rejoicing, the people and their rulers support him.
- 2303 *Magnus the Pious arrives in Talabheim with the Imperial army on way to Kislev.*
- 2304 Magnus the Pious elected Emperor over a newly unified Empire. One of his first acts is to legalise sorcery and grant charters to certain of their "schools."
- 2429 *The von Krieglitz family move to Talabheim. Emperor Dieter IV was forced to flee here after the decision to remove him from his throne. His old lands in the Grand County of Stirland are turned over to the Haupt-Anderssen family. A Ducal Bull proclaims him ruler of Talabecland over the Grand Duke of the ancient Untermensch family. Soon after, Talabheim declares itself a City State (The Duchy of Talabheim) under the rule of the old Grand Duke.*
- 2430 The Barony of Hochland is transferred to Talabheim. Two months of riots grip the city as many of the rigid customs have been put aside over the political confusion, some have even been made irrelevant. The uprising is violently suppressed and the district of Eldenstadt is burnt to the ground.
- 2434 *Witch-hunter General Mikhail Rieves declares that the city is "riddled with the changer's weak-minded fools", and says a thousand will be burnt within a year. He leaves the next day, and dies a broken man. His final words are, "see me now: a man killed by a secret."*
- 2456 The second son of Grand Duke Dieter I marries the only daughter of the Duke of Talabheim and founds the von Krieglitz-Untermensch dynasty. Upon the Talabheim Duke's death, she is the first Krieglitz-Untermensch ruler of Talabheim, under the name Ottilia IX.
- 2478 *Trade disagreements lead to a slight cooling of the relationship between Talabecland and Talabheim.*
- 2482 Stirland threatens Talabecland's borders. General Ruteur of Talabheim leads a "mercenary unit" to help and defeats the Stirlanders at the battle of Falscher Falls. A second army is ambushed and the General's brother is executed for treason
- 2503 *Elise von Krieglitz-Untermensch becomes Duchess of Talabheim.*
- 2507 Gustav von Krieglitz becomes Grand Duke of Talabecland.



A Small Inquiry into the Foundation of the Duchy of Talabheim

By Dr. Albrecht von Kaubafen, with Antonius Scholasticus and Alfred von Nuln

In the 2429th year of Sigmar's Empire, Emperor Dieter IV von Krieglitz of the House of Unfähiger had proven himself incapable of solving the Westerland problem. The Church of Sigmar, led by the Knights of the Holy Unity and backed by many nobles, were utterly disappointed with Dieter. The House of Unfähiger had been loyal members of the Sigmarran Church for many generations, most crucially when Leopold von Krieglitz had been chosen as Magnus the Pious' successor in favour of Magnus' younger brother, Grand Duke Gunthar von Bildhofen, who had converted to the Cult of Ulric. Now, however, the Unfähiger Emperor could not maintain the unity of Sigmar's Empire.

Dieter IV's failure to maintain the unquestionable unity of Sigmar's Empire eventually caused the Church of Sigmar and the First Families to remove him from the Imperial Throne. With threats of excommunication and civil war being levied against him, Dieter IV was forced to give up the throne and flee. Prince Wilhelm III of Altdorf, the Grand Prince of Reikland, was proclaimed Emperor Wilhelm II of Sigmar's Empire. In the following month troops loyal to Dieter besieged the Palace in Altdorf in what is known as the War of Succession, but they were easily defeated.

Meanwhile, Dieter had holed up in Talabheim. It has been said (but never proven) that Dieter's staff and the Cult of Ulric had planned the trip even before Dieter was dethroned. The fact is that three days after Dieter arrived in Talabheim, he converted to the Cult of Ulric. When news of this reached Nuln and Altdorf, the nobles of Nuln and Stirland removed Dieter's title of Grand Count of Stirland, and Wilhelm was appointed as the head of the Haupt-Anderssen dynasty in his place. The Haupt-Anderssens had been allies of the von Bildhofens since before Magnus' rallying of The Empire and had been at the front of the Imperial Army when it repelled the forces of Chaos in Kislev.

This left Dieter with virtually nothing, and the Cult of Ulric seemed to have gained very little from its connection with the former emperor. Secret meetings were held in Middenheim between Graf In Solveig and Ar-Ulric. In Nachgeheim, 2429 IC, Ar-Ulric sent out what is now known as the Ducal Bull, stating:

It is the will of Ulric that his new-found faithful servant, Dieter von Krieglitz of the House of Unfähiger, is given the Grand Duchy of Talabecland to rule, answering only to the Emperor of Sigmar's Empire and Ulric himself.

It has been speculated that Graf In Solveig was the mastermind behind the bull; the Middenheim

Grafs had supposedly never forgiven the Untermenschen of Talabecland for their foul play in the year 1359 IC, when Grand Duchess Ottilia Untermensch convinced Ar-Ulric to move to Talabheim. Now, Graf In Solveig was supported by the Cult and the still powerful head of the Unfähiger in removing the Untermenschen of Talabecland. The Cult of Ulric stood to gain a new powerful member in their struggle with the Church of Sigmar. One problem remained unsolved, though: The new Emperor - and especially the new Grand Count of Stirland - would not be pleased by the prospect of Dieter von Krieglitz as leader of Talabecland. It gave him a powerful base for vendettas against the men who had dethroned him.

These problems were solved a week after the publication of the Ducal Bull. Grand Duke Untermensch of Talabecland had allied himself with the merchants of Talabheim. They had craved an independent Talabheim for centuries (one important factor being the potential reduction of taxes). The Grand Duke and representatives of the merchants sent out their Proclamation of the People exactly one week after the Ducal Bull, stating:

It is the will of the Citizens of Talabheim that their beloved Grand Duke Untermensch rule them in these times of worry. Therefore, the Grand Duke has decided to abdicate from the Grand Duchy of Talabecland in order to bring all his efforts to bear on the problem of maintaining the wealth and prosperity of the city of Talabheim. Hence, as of this day, the 22nd of Nachgeheim in the 2429th year of Sigmar's Empire, the city of Talabheim is no longer part of the Grand Duchy of Talabecland, but an independent Freistadt.

Emperor Wilhelm II and (probably more importantly) the Church of Sigmar now saw an opportunity to divide one of their traditional opponents, Talabecland, in two. The Emperor called for a meeting in the Volkshalle in Altdorf. With the Cult of Ulric suffering from internal strife between its Middenheim leaders and the Talabheim faction who supported the Grand Duke, Ar-Ulric wisely let the Grand Duke and the many devout followers in Talabheim have their way. Thus any further losses by the Ulricans to the Cult of Sigmar were avoided. The meeting was at an end, and Wilhelm II sent out the necessary decrees, including the transference of the Barony of Hochland to the newly founded Duchy of Talabheim. This was no great surprise, as the Hochlanders had been an Untermensch stronghold for ages.

And so, as of Mittherbst 2429 IC, the dethroned Emperor Dieter IV became Grand Duke Dieter I of Talabecland, which he would remain until his death. Dieter's second son would later marry the daughter of the Duke of Talabheim. She was the only child and thus sole heir to the Duchy of Talabheim. Thus was the Krieglitz-Untermensch dynasty of Talabheim founded, and peace settled in the divided Talabecland - much to the discomfort of the Stirland Grand Count....

Peers proved to have their land holdings within the Talabecland lands, and were thus forced to swear allegiance to Grand Duke Dieter. Actually, the number should have been 101, but the heads of the two Royal Families (the von Brunckhorsts and von Nebelsfeuers) refused to swear allegiance to Dieter, considering it to be below their dignity.

In the months following the events of Nachgeheim 2429, there was much confusion as to who should sit in the Peer House and thus rule Talabheim. The merchants who had supported the Duke during the troubled times believed that they had been promised representation. The Rural families that owned land within the Talabheim borders claimed that the now empty seats should be granted to them as if the 99 Peers had died without issue. Yet the remaining 51 Peers, who for various reasons had not sworn allegiance to the Unfähiger grand duke, were not at all interested in sharing their power with either. After enthusiastic debates, the Peers and the Talabheim Duke, who was not that fond of the merchants, came to an agreement resulting in what is referred to as the Half House Decree. It stated:

Ulric, Our Lord and Protector, has in his divine wisdom given us the Charter of Our Illustrious Assembly of Peers through His representative among us, the Most Holy Ar-Ulric

As a consequence We find ourselves in no position to deprive the right of seat of any Peer, granted according to said divine Charter, without the consent of the Most Holy Ar-Ulric.

Yet any Peer that should swear allegiance to anyone but the most right Duke of Talabheim is inarguably in no position to give a fair and proper ruling as one must expect from him

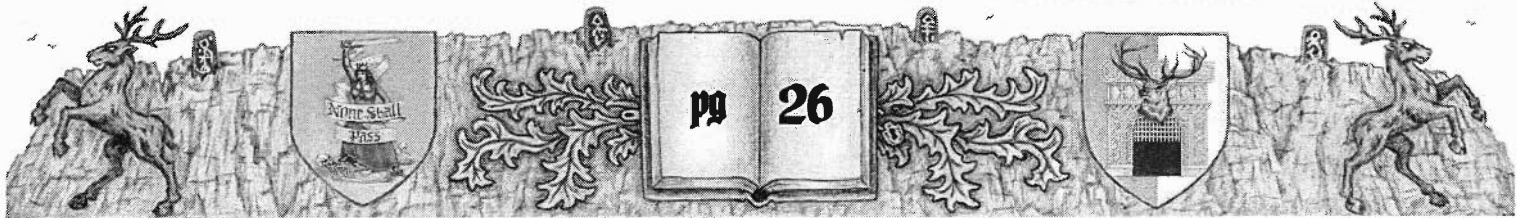
Therefore, We rule that any Peer that is not in any and all ways a free and independent man, barring his unconditional loyalty to the most right Duke of Talabheim, shall have no vote in Our Illustrious Assembly of Peers.

In other words, the ninety-nine members kept their seats, thus blocking the entrance of new members, but were deprived of their right to vote, reducing the de facto number of Peers to fifty-one. The merchants were furious, but no one else seemed to care; things were back to usual, just as any Talabheimer wants them to be. The lawyers still debate the validity of the Half House Decree, although not in public. The Duke was happy to have apparently succeeded in passing on the problem to Ar-Ulric. So far, no one has asked Ar-Ulric to voice his opinion. Due to the tense political situation, if he was forced to take a stand on the issue it is unlikely that Ar-Ulric would look too kindly at the petitioner...

Over the years, five of the Premier Families based in Talabecland have become extinct, and their places have been filled with Rural Families, bringing the de facto number of Peers up to the present 56. One of the new Peers is Baron Syberg-Gronzy, head of the disputed Royal Family.

The Rural Families

Below the Premier Families there is a large number of nobles who are without direct political influence. As was the case with the Premiers, their number was severely reduced after the 2429 IC secession. Since then, the Duke has elevated a rather substantial number of influential citizens to the nobility, including a number of leading Kislevites. This has caused some stir amongst the Peer Families.





Duchess Elise Krieglitz-Untermensch

The current ruler of Talabheim is Duchess Elise Krieglitz-Untermensch. She appears to be a rather shy person and makes as few public appearances as her duties allow. The Duchess has kept a remarkably low profile in Imperial politics since she ascended the throne in 2503 IC. Some, including the Brunckhorst and Nebelfeuer families, deduce that she is indifferent to the welfare of Talabheim and have requested that she play a more significant role in order to secure the city's interests. Others, including most merchants, praise the Duchess for her ability to keep Talabheim relatively clear of the current conflict between Talabecland and Ostland.

Whatever their opinion, Talabheimers are a bit confused by their unusually anonymous ruler. There has been much talk of the 31 year old lady not having married yet - from the foul gossip in the Suden Eldenstadt to the speculations in the Peer House of who will succeed Duchess Elise if she fails to bear an heir. There have been rumours about a liaison with one Freiherr Nikolaus von Teich-Adler, a lawyer belonging to the rural nobility, whom the Duchess personally appointed First Secretary to her Geheimekonseil last year. Allegedly he has a big influence on the Duchess' final decisions - yet the Freiherr is not of suitable rank for a marriage, and Count von Brunckhorst has been heard complaining about the city-state being ruled by a mere yokel. Obviously, more than one Peer has initiated his own investigations into the exact nature of the relationship between the Duchess and the Freiherr, and incriminating facts on Freiherr von Teich-Adler would be a valuable commodity.

Becoming a noble in Talabheim grants certain privileges. The more important of these include different (i.e. less) taxes and exclusive rights to trade in certain articles. Also, nobles enjoy much better protection against legal suits (see the Law section, below).

The leading Rural Families have not entirely given up their dream of taking the seats of the suspended Talabecland Premier Families. Twelve families, lead by Margrave Theodor Teich-Anderssen, are working on plans to be elevated. This is not known to the public, although many have noticed their great interest in the legal status of the Half House Decree and also certain meetings with high-ranking Ultrican priests. The twelve families also seem to have been very enthusiastic about the recent elevation of Baron Syberg-Gronzy to the rank of Premier.

Guilds and Trade

The guilds in Talabheim lack the influence of most of their western counterparts. This is mainly due to a seemingly endless number of ancient privileges and exclusive rights given to certain noble families regarding the handling and trading of most goods and services. Any successful master artisan or merchant is dependent on licences from his noble patron. Hence few guilds have succeeded in regulating business for their own benefits. Not surprisingly, what influence they do have, they hold on to with a vengeance. The combination of the endless number of individual privileges and officious guilds has made it virtually impossible to start a new business.

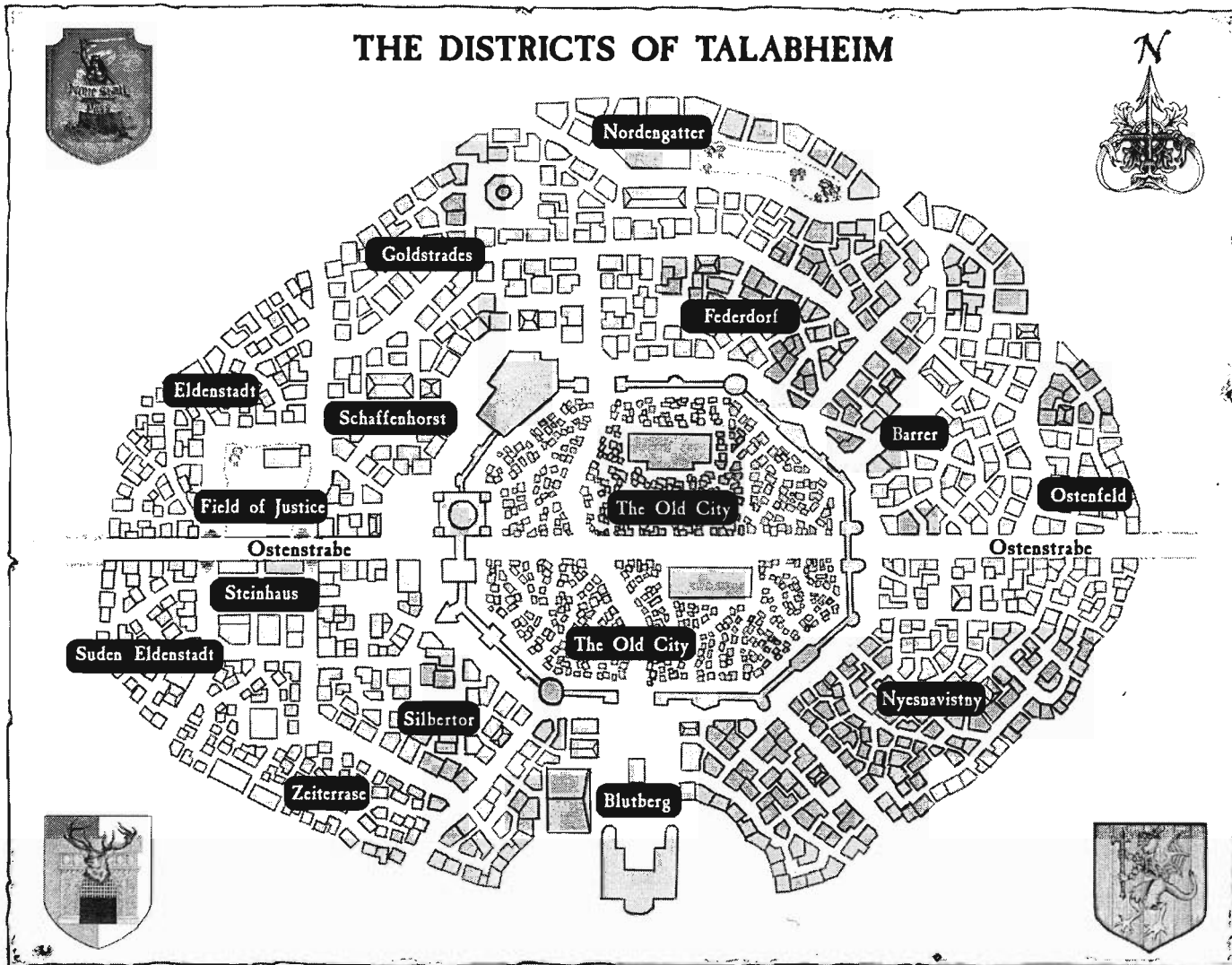
During the last two centuries, the Premier Families have been quite disturbed by the influence of the Marienburg guilds, who forced the downfall of that

city's aristocracy. This has led the Premiers to put even firmer restrictions on the guilds, which they control to a large degree through the Department of Guilds and Trade.

A notable exception to this pattern so far is the Guild of Labourers. This was formed just over two hundred years ago during the rule of Grand Duke Boris Syberg, and it works hard to improve the conditions of the "poor and exploited" manual workers. Lately, one of its leaders, Frederich Spiegel, has turned performances at the Nyesnavistny theatre into regular mass guild meetings. The Lord Chancellor von Brunckhorst himself is considering a ban on the Guild as a way of getting rid of public unrest before it turns into something dangerous. Right now, he is placing spies in the guild in order to learn how big the problem has become.



THE DISTRICTS OF TALABHEIM



Recently, an illegal paper by one Adam Schmied has been secretly distributed in Silbertor and Schaffenhorst. It claims that Talabheim will keep falling behind the other cities as long as the nobility's privileges remain, since "said privileges confer unbearable burdens on trade and innovation, to the misfortune of all". The paper has proved popular with some merchants and with industrious artisans. The Department of Guilds and Trade is publicly ignoring the paper, while engaging in several secret attempts to find the source and get rid of it.

LAW

The Record Keeper

This is one of the most important functions in the city, and one of the most secretive. The Record Keeper is responsible for the recording of all judgements made in the Peer House and the High Court. There is but one Book of Judgements (metaphorically and in the eyes of the populace, at least), and it is generally only allowed to be touched by the Keeper himself. However, in special circumstances, his guard and the three Voices of the Book may also do so. The guard is a member of the

Knights Panther, who swears his life to the position and also to future silence. As any new Judgement is recorded, he draws his sword ready to accept any personal challenge from those that disagree. The Voices of the Book are three hooded men who attend the lower courts.

The Record Keeper and the Voices are responsible for informing the Peers and Magistrates of past precedents. From these, current judgements are made. The Record Keeper is the central figure in the whole stodgy and rather unyielding system.

The Record Keeper is anonymous: he is never seen without his mask or the Book. He is only ever referred to by his title. Both the position and book are both representations of the law, unchanging and faceless, the incarnation of the position. Many believe that the now-smooth mask is the death-mask of Auster himself, the very first Record Keeper.

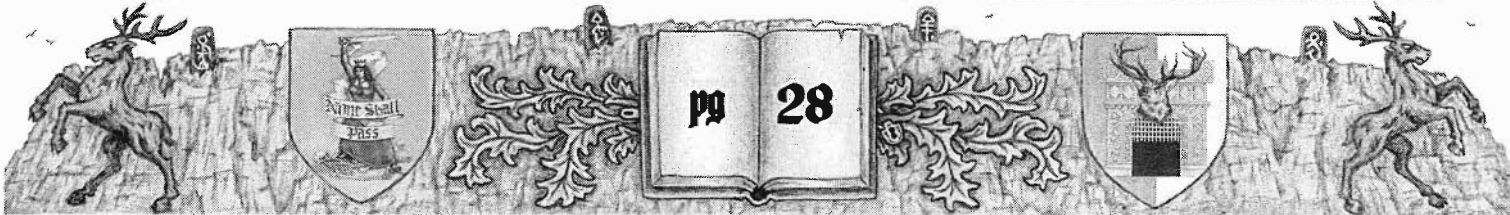
The Record Keeper and the Voices live in a warren of passages and secret doors located below the floor of Peer House. In fact there are currently eight members of The Auguste Brotherhood of Oath Sworn Keepers and Protectors of the Book, and they alternate their time between the duty of Keeper and Voices. (Note that, confusingly, none of them act as Oath Sworn

Keepers in the sense used below). In addition there are three Librarians, past Keepers who have grown too old for the task. They maintain a huge and superbly organised library, whilst their brethren help to keep the Book and the protected copies (used in case of damage or excessive wear and tear) up to date.

The brethren usually choose new members of their order from amongst the large Civil Service. They are chosen for their intelligence and loyalty to Talabheim, and for their sense of duty. In recent years they have also been chosen for their devotion to Verena, although such devotion must be heavily influenced by Law. This has been the form since the summary execution of two members who were suspected of being Tzeentchian

Custom & Law The Record Keeper

Tradition states that when the Record Keeper appears at Court where the accused is a commoner, he must touch the base of the Record Keeper's staff. This shows that he submits to the Record Keepers authority. Refusal is not an option even if it means a punch in the stomach and a club to the head.



cultists. The Brotherhood also has to fight to maintain some independence, as various attempts by members of the nobility to control them have been attempted. Recently, the ruling family have tried to exert influence over rulings. This is partly because of the discovery that one Record Keeper (in fact the most senior) is Budimir Untermensch, uncle to the Duchess and long thought dead.

The Courts

The Laws of the City are heavily biased against the poor, and the concept of justice here is harsh. It less shaped by Verenan ideals than by an eye-for-an-eye, tooth-for-a-tooth philosophy. The justice system is somewhat confusing, and like everything else, is filled with ritual. Magistrates in the Lower Courts are from the Civil Service, while in the two higher Courts, they are taken from the nobility.

Magistrates are officially known as Oath Sworn Keepers. They perform many duties in addition to serving in the role of judge. They also issue Warrants, act as witnesses to contract signings and carry out numerous other similar functions. They are generally well respected, and "having a Keeper in your pocket" is a desirable thing for anyone with influence in the city.

The Lower Courts

The city is divided into fourteen judicial districts. However, these are gathered into groups, served by four Courts, all attached to Watch-Barracks. These are located in the Goldstrades, Suden Eldenstadt, Blutberg and Barrer districts. Talagraad has its own court. These are served by the three Voices of the Book, who divide their time between the courts. At any session, a single Magistrate sits in Judgement. These act as both Criminal and Civil Courts. Judgements are based completely on past judgements, and - because the Record Keeper is not in attendance - no judgements that might set a new precedence may be passed.

In fact, many cases are heard without a Voice of the Book in attendance, and partly as a result of this, punishments are erratic and often harsh. Cases are tried without lawyers, unless the judge permits one to be present. Normally, the prisoners speak for themselves. Prisoners wait an average of three days to be seen, and the trial usually lasts around an hour. About ninety-five percent of cases return a guilty verdict.

Cases may be referred to the High Court for consideration, although this is very rare. This usually happens when the Magistrate feels out of his depth for political reasons.

Trail by Combat is rarely used now, and was outlawed for most crimes during a rare period of reform which saw political pressure being applied by the Cult of Shallya. Nevertheless, the city still employs three Judicial Champions.

The High Court

Lower rank nobility are tried in the High Court by a bench of three Magistrates, all drawn from the nobility. Again, Civil and Criminal cases are tried here, as is Military Law. Should a commoner give evidence, their word carries less weight than a noble's. This Court sits weekly, and is attended by the Record Keeper. Many of the punishments are light. Military law is an exception, though, with punishments other than corporal being a very rare exception.

Peer Court

Here the Peers are tried by their peers. Grievances and

accusations are raised, evidence and past judgements are heard, points are debated and a vote taken. A summary is then presented to the Grand Duke, who passes judgement. The Court sits in the Peer House.

An aspect that is now unique to the Peer Court is the rather unusual power to try members of the nobility who are deceased ("habitually noblese corpus" is the correct legal term). Three punishments can result from a guilty verdict:

1. The noble is disgraced and his body parts scattered around the crater. Thus he can never be properly buried. The Cult of Mórr have fought hard against this in the past, but Emperor Echardkt's decision stands as recorded in the Book of Records: "He is buried within Taa's boundaries but not with his family, for his disgrace is a disgrace firstmost against his family."
2. He is fined. The family must pay the fine.
3. In the worst cases, the Noble is stripped of his title, and thus his heirs are too.

This has happened very rarely, typically for political reasons. Various other parts of The Empire have practised this law in the past, but all have now outlawed it. However, in Talabheim, it remains in the Book of Records and is therefore valid.

The Ecclesiastical Court

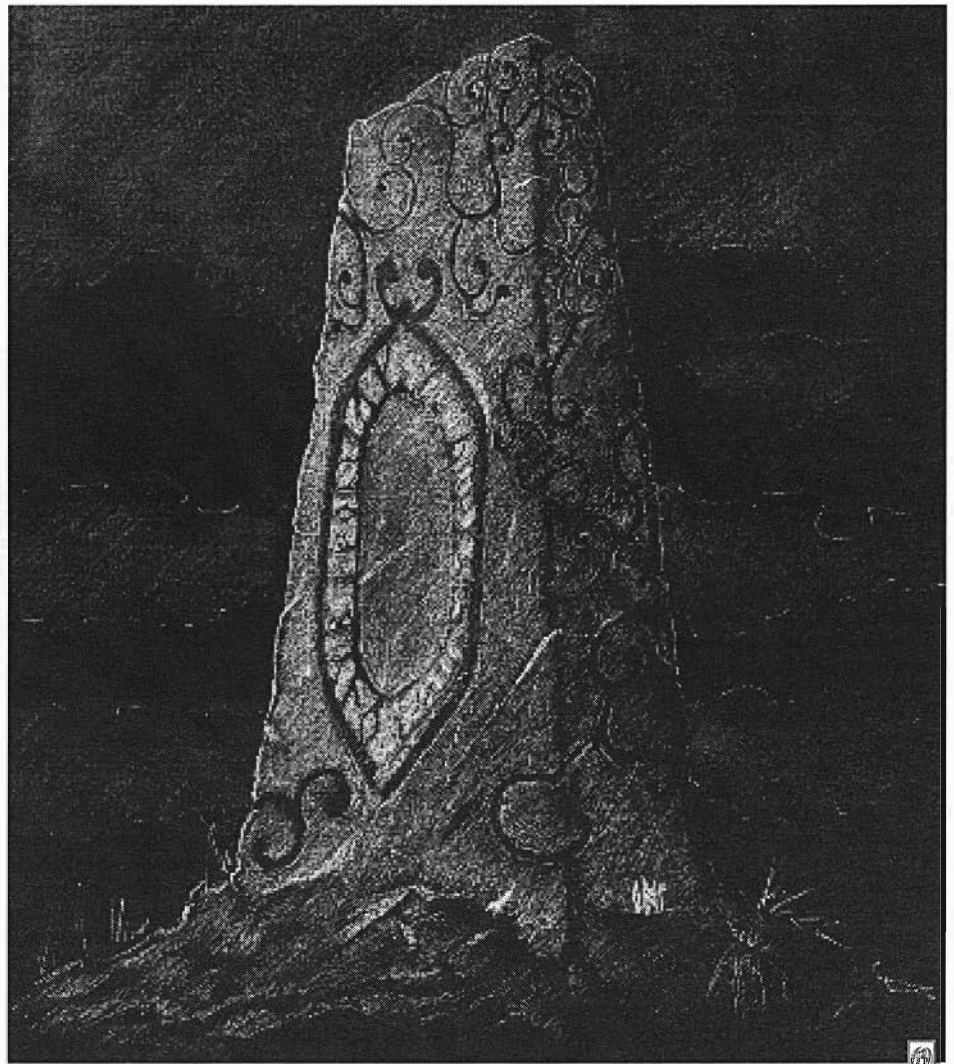
A three-judge panel, this court rules on any case involving proscribed cults, or the clergy and property of a sanctioned cult. Judgement in these cases requires nothing more than a simple majority from the three-judge tribunal. Those sentenced to death are burnt in the square outside the Temple of Ulric. Such executions are always public. (See *Religion*).

The Talabheim City Watch

Under the control of the City Guard, Talabheim's Watch are actually well respected in many parts of the City. Known as The Dogmen, they take their orders from Blutberg and, as is to be expected, are restricted by various arcane laws. Each district (except Nordengatter, Eldenstadt & Suden Eldenstadt) has a Watch Barracks, known locally as Kennels.

Crime

Crime in the city is confused and varied. There is no dominant organised criminal gang, just a number of smaller factions competing endlessly for status and power. Eldenstadt is controlled by The Vory, but they are trying to spread outwards. Legends say the beggars of the city are controlled by a Beggar King.



RELIGION

Talabheimers take their religion very seriously. Taal was the principal god of Talabheim in the first millennium of The Empire, but the disastrous reign of Emperor Boris the Incompetent and the subsequent Black Plague forced many to include supplications to Ulric in their prayers. Ulric eclipsed Taal when Ar-Ulric fled Middenheim in 1360 I.C. and took refuge in Empress Otilia's court. Even though the Ar-Ulric returned to Middenheim 200 years later, the cult of Ulric remained the major religious force in Talabheim.

In spite of the fact that Middenheim is the centre of the Cult of Ulric, Talabheim is the heart of Ulrican radicalism. The anti-Sigmar extremists are stronger in this city than in any other Ulrican stronghold. Some say that these zealots include Talabheim's ranking priest of Ulric, the Fræi-Ulrik ("counsellor of Ulric"). It is rumoured that even Ar-Ulric has ordered his subordinate to tone down his inflammatory rhetoric for the sake of Imperial unity.

The political clout of the cult of Ulric is furthered by their control of the Ecclesiastical Court of Talabheim. The jurisdiction of this court covers any case involving the clergy of a sanctioned cult, damage to religious property, and any individual or group accused of being in the priesthood of a proscribed cult. By law, the Fræi-Ulrik appoints one of the judges from his clergy, as do the High Priest of Taal and the Arch Lector of Sigmar. In most cases, the representative of the cult of Taal tends to side with his Ulrican counterpart.

During the oppression of the cult of Sigmar, the third judge typically came from the ranks of the Ulrican priesthood, although there are a few historical instances when the Talabheim Emperor had the grace to insist that a member of the resident Verenan cult be appointed to the vacant "Sigmar" seat. In 2304 I.C., Magnus restored the position of the Sigmarite Arch Lector and all its inherent privileges in Talabheim.

The cult of Taal still retains a major influence in the rural portions of the crater. According to ancient law, the High Priest of Taal has the power to veto any decisions made by the Peer House. This archaic law has not been put into practice since the time of Empress Otilia I. Still, the opening session of the Peer House for the new year includes an opening evocation to Taal and Ulric for their divine guidance.

Taal

The original patron deity of the Talabec tribe, Taal is honoured in the many place names that abound in the region, such as Talabecland, Talabheim, the River Talabec, and Talagraad. With the ascension of the cult of Ulric in the city proper, the worship of Taal became more pronounced in the surrounding rural areas. Taal's pastoral followers erected a temple in his honour amid an age-old sacred grove. Taalite pilgrims from nearby Talabecland and Hochland journey to the temple every Spring Equinox to pray for Taal's blessings for the new year.

Many archaic folk customs trace their origins to the early days of Talabheim. One of these is the annual parade to the northern monolith in the crater. This parade takes place during Hexenstag. A priest leads the parade to honour Taal's protection of his people from the malign spirits that inhabit the forest outside the crater walls. A similar parade takes place about the city walls, although the urban version is not considered

The Creation of the Crater

Although there were many tedious duties as High Priest of Taal, the job was not all bad: Dieter Weisswald loved telling the old stories to the children during the Summer Solstice. "They are so young and inquisitive," he mused; "such a shame that the world is so dangerous a place."

"Tell us how the crater came to be, Venerable Father?" asked Johann. He was a ten year old boy and bright beyond his age.

Dieter settled his old bones down onto the stump of the tree. "That tale has been a favourite of mine since I was a lad like yourself, some fifty years ago," he said. "Now, listen closely."

"It happened a long time ago in an age when the Gods were young. The world was a different place back then: there was peace and harmony between the land and the few who inhabited it. Large-eyed demons came to the world and called it all their own, but the Gods in their infinite wisdom gave them a land where the setting sun comes to rest after a hard day's labour. Then the Great Disaster struck and other, more powerful beings came into our world.

"They were invaders full of evil and destruction. The Gods saw the damage to the land and took up arms against the attackers. This was the Gods' War, and it wreaked great damage to the world. Led by the brothers, Taal and Ulric, the Gods forced the Powers from Beyond into an uneasy stalemate. The Earth Mother could not see her creation abused any further, so she called for a truce with the Four Lords of Chaos.

"The Sun God Oermath, her husband, was outraged. How dare his wife reach a truce with the invaders? This could not be permitted - even if it meant he must do battle with his wife and kin. Oermath's allies were Solkan and Arianka, themselves newcomers to our world, though implacably hostile to the Four. They were determined to continue the war, whatever its consequences -- the Four would not be allowed so much as a toe hold in this world.

"Taal and Ulric knew their mother's mind. It was within the Earth Mother's power to utterly destroy the outworlders, but the force required would destroy all life in the world, including her mortal children. The Earth Mother could not bring herself to murder her kin. Taal and Ulric could live with her truce, since both brothers had grown powerful during the Gods' War and were certain they would win, even if it took an eternity.

"Taal and Ulric were more worried about the immediate threat from their own kind. The sibling newcomers, Solkan and Arianka, were encouraging Oermath to battle his wife for supremacy. In their own way, the Law Gods were as much a danger to the natural order as those of Chaos. Still, at least they did not have Oermath's power to destroy everything. Taal and Ulric knew that they had to act decisively if they were to save what they had left.

"Ulric's son Mórr was sent with Manann Taaolson to hold the attention of the Law Gods, through the use of trickery, if necessary. With the Law Gods occupied, the two sons of the Earth Mother attacked her husband, their father. The battle was furious but short, and the brothers cast Oermath down from his celestial throne to the forest below. A huge crater was formed where the Sun God crashed. Defeated and humiliated, Oermath yielded to his sons' demands that he honour the Mother's agreement. Oermath was then banished to a land far to the south which, in his rage, he scorched and devastated. He turned that lush southern realm into a desolate, sand-filled wasteland.

"And that, my son, is how this crater known as the 'Eye of the Forest' was formed."

"proper" by the Taal priesthood. Urban revellers dress as bears, griffins, and phoenixes, and dance around the streets.

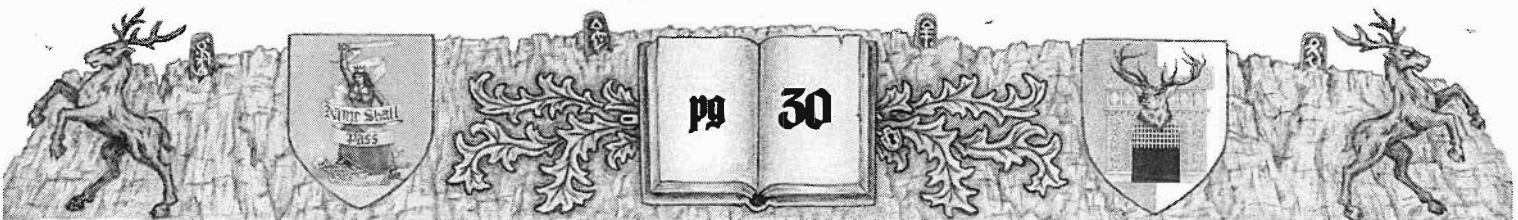
Another Taalite custom that continues in the crater is the burial rites for the dead. Many Talabheimers believe that Taal's power in the crater exceeds that of any deity, even Mórr's, when it comes to protecting the dead. There are three different Taalite death rites. The first rite is normally reserved for the nobility and clergy. It consists of a funeral procession to a previously prepared tomb within the southern crater wall. The body of the deceased is interred with certain personal possessions while receiving Taal's blessing. The second rite is cremation, which is used for deceased commoners. The corpses are placed upon a scaffold at the east end of the crater and set aflame, while the mourners sing the cult's funeral dirge. The third method is reserved for those condemned to death for major crimes, like murder. A blow to the head by a cudgel begins a process that finds the criminal hung, castrated, burned, and then tossed into the bogs that surround the small crater lake east of the city. However, in recent years, this tradition has been replaced by public hangings.

Rhya

Unlike more rural provinces, such as Talabecland, the worship of Rhya in the crater is intertwined with that of Taal. She is more often invoked when it comes to family matters, especially when it involves giving birth or healing a child. Herders sometimes entreat Rhya whenever their livestock are experiencing difficult pregnancies, or some unknown illness has descended upon them. In other pastoral matters, such as the health of crops or spring freezes, Taal is the one most called upon by the rural population.

Ulric

The cult hierarchy of Ulric wields more power in Talabheim than they do in any other Ulrican stronghold, including Middenheim. The majority of the Talabheim priests firmly believe and support the doctrine of the Sigmarite Heresy. Only political pressure and subtle threats of excommunication from Ar-Ulric keeps them from openly declaring their beliefs and burning every Sigmarite they can find. The religious tension between the two cults has begun to find its way back into the lives of ordinary Talabheimers.



A contingent of Templars of the White Wolf has permanently been assigned to the Talabheim temple. They reside in the barracks that form the southern half of the temple complex. On the few occasions that they are not in the confines of the temple complex, Templars of the White Wolf can be found on patrol in the Old City (where they augment the relatively incompetent Watch) or the Blutberg district.

Though loosely associated with the cult of Ulric, a contingent of Knights Panther is also based in Talabheim. Their primary role is to root out anyone tainted with the mark of Chaos. It is not unknown for the Knights Panther to launch forays into the poorer districts in search of mutants and cultists. A more covert arm of the Knights Panther, known as the Kaosjaegeren, investigates rumours of Chaos activity among the middle and upper classes. Any evidence found is then turned over to the Ulrican Inquisition.

The Ulrican Inquisition is made up of three judges who are selected by and only answerable to the Fræi-Ulrik. These judges are allowed to use whatever means necessary to procure a confession. Until the time of Magnus, many Sigmarites ended their days at the hands of the Ulrican Inquisition. Magnus intervened and forced a law through the Peer House that permitted a representative of the Arch Lector to observe the Inquisition's process to ensure that only those truly tainted by Chaos were tried.

Barrer

A servant of Taal, Barrer is the protector of Talabheim and the Spirit of the Crater. He is often depicted in legend as a large hairy man or a bear. A few legends have Barrer assume the form of a phoenix. Kislevite émigrés refer to Barrer as "Father Bear" (see *Something Rotten in Kislev* for more details on Father Bear), although many Taalite priests disavow any ties between the two spiritual beings. There was an attempt by a couple of Taalite priests some fifty years ago to declare Barrer a Saint, claiming some evidence that he was a historical figure elevated to divine status by Taal, but this movement failed to gain support from other priests.

A small temple to Barrer can be found adjacent to the larger temple of Taal; this is maintained by Taal's

priests. This temple is similar in construction to Taalite temples. There is nothing within the temple's walls except for a central fire pit and several logs for seating. During the ceremony of the Summer Solstice (another of Taal's holy days), the priests of Taal honour Barrer with a benediction and a special offering of berries and honey after they perform the ceremonies dedicated to Taal.

Ranald the Protector

More than any other Imperial city-state, the social structure of Talabheim is very rigid. The middle class of merchants, traders, and artisans has gained little influence and prestige compared to their counterparts

not care less what these "experts" believe. To them, Karog is the River and they would be tempting fate to ignore such a powerful force.

A temple to Karog was constructed centuries ago across the river from Talagraad, replacing an older structure that was burned down during the Age of Wars. In structure, it is similar to a Taalite temple. The one significant difference is the woodcarving of an otter above its entryway rather than the antlers of a stag typical of Taal's temples. The temple is maintained by the river folk from Talagraad, although itinerant priests of Taal stop by occasionally.

A festival is held every Spring Equinox in celebration of Karog waking the river from Ulric's

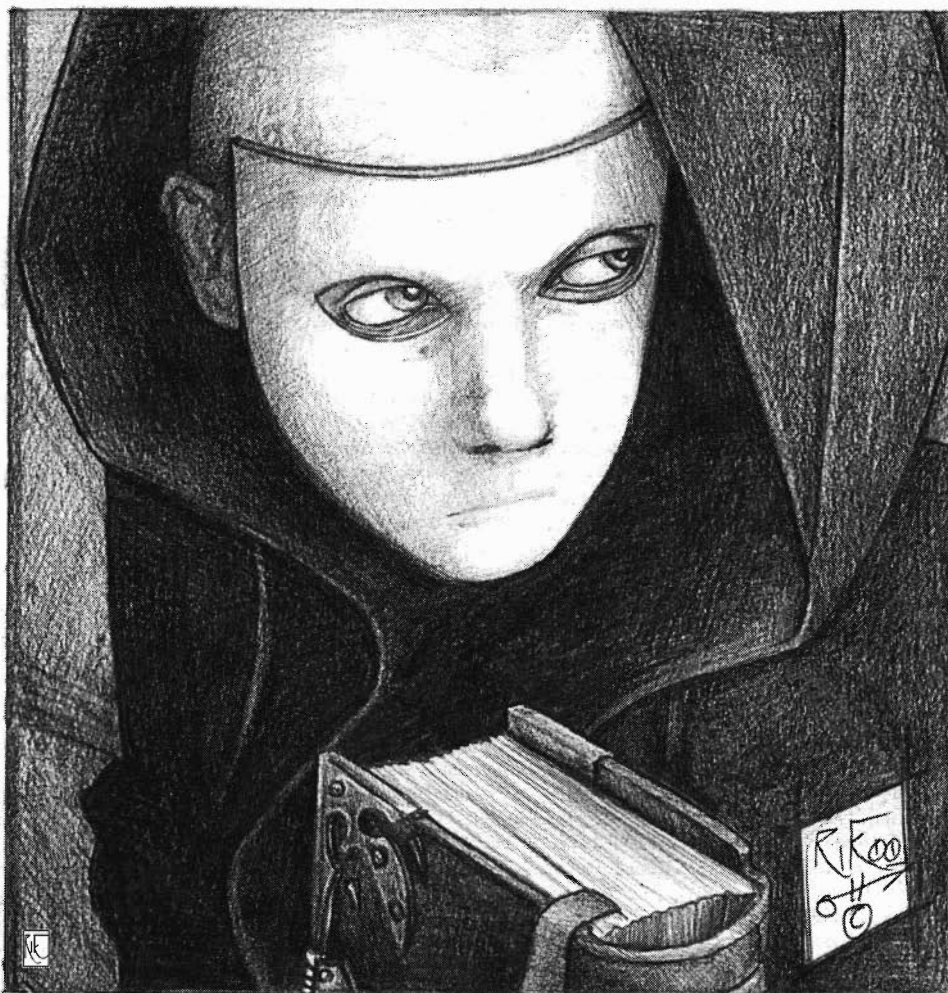
wintery embrace. In olden times, this ceremony included the sacrifice of a young woman by drowning. The river people believed this would rouse Karog from his slumber and he would reward his people in turn with good catches of fish in the Spring and Summer. Human sacrifice was outlawed several centuries ago, but some believe this barbaric act is still practised under the cover of night. The fact that the Peer House and the Cult of Taal have reiterated this ban several times lends some credence to this suspicion.

Sigmar

The history of the Sigmarite cult in Talabheim is one of hardship and persecution. In Talabheim's early days, the Sigmarites had an uneasy but tolerable relationship with the cults of Taal and Ulric. In 120 I.C., Grand Theogonist Kazgar I (the Grand Theogonist who began the tradition of a priest of Sigmar assuming a Dwarf name upon their elevation to the hierarchy of the cult) created the position of High Capitulor (later

changed to Arch Lector) to assist in spreading the word of Sigmar's Laws and Imperial Unity throughout The Empire. One of these, High Capitulor Skaldor, was based in Talabheim and assigned to administer the flock in the northeast frontier.

Things continued in this manner until Emperor Boris the Incompetent's disastrous reign. The weight of his heavy taxation caused rioting in many cities. It also caused a backlash against the cult of Sigmar in Talabheim. Resentful of Sigmar's rising popularity, Ulrican extremists used the opulent lifestyles of the Emperor and the Sigmarite hierarchy as proof of the corruption of Sigmar's cult. The onslaught of the Black

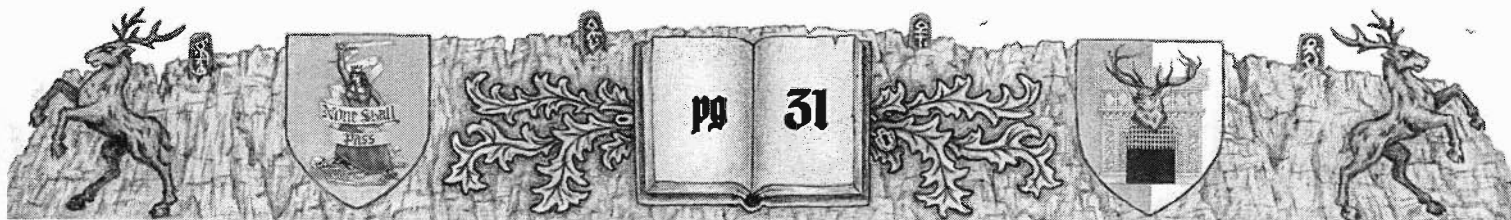


elsewhere. In contrast, the poor have fared worse. Small wonder then that the protector aspect of Ranald has a large following among the downtrodden. The organisation of the cult is loose, which helps it thrive even though it has been officially proscribed.

Other aspects of Ranald are followed in Talabheim. The number of their cultists remains unknown since active persecution drives them underground.

Karog

Many theologians view Karog as an aspect of Taal rather than a separate deity. The simple people who receive their livelihood from the River Talabec could



Plague highlighted religious differences. The priests of Taal and Ulric declared that the plague was a sign of the Gods' displeasure with the rising canker of heretical Sigmarites. In rebuttal, the Sigmarites claimed that the pestilence was caused by the faithlessness of Ulricans and Taalites. Some Sigmarite shops were vandalised and burned before the authorities re-established order.

During the Age of Wars, the anarchy in the surrounding lands forced Talabheimers of all religious persuasions to put aside their differences in their struggle for survival. Sigmarites in Talabheim provided loans to strengthen the city's defences and raise arms. In this way, the cult of Sigmar began to gather followers and regain some of the prestige it had before the reign of Emperor Boris.

In 1360 I.C., Grand Duchess Ottilia Untermensch declared herself Empress after losing the Imperial election to Grand Count Otto von Marburg of Stirland. A cunning schemer, Empress Ottilia I knew she needed legitimacy to support her proclamation against the Sigmarite Emperor Otto VI. Ottilia threw her lot in with the Ar-Ulric extremists. She provided refuge for the Ar-Ulric (who was fleeing Graf Heinrich of Middenheim) and supported his position on the Sigmarite Heresy. She then outlawed the cult of Sigmar, and the persecutions of Sigmarites began in earnest. Arch Lector Bardin was thrown into a pit and killed by hungry wolves. Many Sigmarites fled, whilst those caught by fanatical Ulricans were hung. Some Sigmarite cultists built hidey-holes into their homes while others went underground and created secret societies so they could continue to follow their faith.

For nearly nine hundred and fifty years, the Talabheim Sigmarites paid higher taxes and were periodically fined for continuing to practice their faith. During occasional episodes of Ulrican suppression, Sigmarites would hide in secret sanctuaries. In 2303 I.C., the victory of Magnus the Pious over the forces of Chaos breathed new life into the cult of Sigmar in Talabheim. Magnus' eloquence convinced the Peer House to overturn Ottilia's edict against the clergy and members of the Sigmarite cult. Magnus then re-established the seat of the Arch Lector in Talabheim with the blessings of the Peer House and Ar-Ulric (who, as part of the deal, was allowed to establish a presence in Nuln).

The cult of Sigmar represents a sizeable minority of Talabheim's population. Their relationship with the cult of Ulric is best described as tolerable. To avoid any contention the cult of Sigmar heavily emphasises its message of Imperial Unity, but the past refuses to vanish. The martyrdom of St. Bardin the Faithful remains a highly contentious issue between the cults of Sigmar and Ulric, as are the years of Sigmarite persecution.

Anti-Sigmarite sentiment is once again on the rise in Talabheim. Arch Lector Aglim is a strong voice for Imperial Unity and an end to religious strife, and he has brought his concerns to the Fræi-Ulrik and Peer House. Both have expressed their sympathies and promised to do what they can to prevent history from repeating itself. Though not completely assured, Arch Lector Aglim has decided to wait and watch, for the moment, at least. He is also preparing contingency plans in the event that Fræi-Ulrik is not able to control the militant fringe of his cult.

Spirit Worship

The Gospodar people (now known as Kislevites)

migrated from the eastern steppes beyond the Worlds Edge Mountains and settled in the Urskoy and Lynsk valleys around 1500 I.C. They came to know and worship the spirits of the land they settled. Soon after, missionary priests of Taal and Rhya ventured forth from Talabecland and Talabheim to teach the Gospodars about the gods worshipped in the Old World.

Many Gospodars fled westward in 1750 I.C. to escape the ravages of the invading Ungols. The influx of these unexpected refugees was too much for Talabheim to handle so a hefty entry toll was levied upon them. Most Gospodars could not afford this tax and were forced to settle in Talaberg (latter changed to Talagraad, given the Kislevite presence now prevalent in that town), much to the displeasure of the existing residents. The Gospodar people found that the forest spirits present around Talabheim were very similar to those who lived in their former homes, albeit weaker. Since the ancient names of these spirits have vanished from the memory of the descendants of the Talabec tribe, the Gospodar named them after the ones from their land. (see Something Rotten in Kislev for more details on Kislevite spirit worship).

Unlike their kinsmen to the East, the Kislevites of Talabheim are more dedicated in their worship of Taal, Rhya, and Ulric, though not nearly enough to satisfy the official clergy. Spirit worship remains strong, especially among the Kislevites living in the rural areas. The Kislevite Festival of Spirits is held in the forest outside Talagraad on Hexenstag. Many Talabheimers attend these festivities for the vodka, dancing, and general merriment. Though their priests warn against "pagan rituals," many Talabheimers take part in the folk dances and songs to appease the forest spirits, who are known to take a mean and bloody revenge on those who do not respect them.

Verena

The Verenan presence in Talabheim numbers is small. Since Talabheim law has its roots in ancient Ulrican law, the cult of Verena plays a very limited part in the city's legal landscape. Their service as mediators is seldom used here, and they mostly give advice to those individuals who hail from out of town.

During the oppression of the cult of Sigmar, the cult of Verena was occasionally called upon to sit in the Ecclesiastical Court as one of the judges. These situations tended to occur whenever the incident involved cults other than Ulric, Taal, or Sigmar.

Arianka

It's interesting that a Goddess who has been imprisoned for several millennia should have a following. Many laymen believe Arianka is an aspect of Verena who demands that meticulous records be maintained on everything (sometimes in triplicate!) to ensure that vital knowledge is always accessible. Small wonder a good number of the bureaucratic civil service pay her tribute.

If the Verenan priesthood understands the true nature of Arianka, they aren't telling anyone. A small shrine dedicated to Arianka is located in a side chamber within the temple of Verena.

Shallya

For all the good work that the Shallyan priesthood has done for the Talabheim's poor, the cult has a very small following and no political clout. The only accomplishment they can claim is the successful

petition to have Tarnhelm Keep converted into a prison and executions by combat proclaimed illegal, except for certain high crimes, such as murder or Chaotic apostasy.

Flushed with this success, the ranking Shallyan priest at the time believed the moment had come for the cult of Shallya to push the other cults to reform some of their ancient, and violent, customs. Hubert the Conciliator (as he was known by the Shallyans) knew that the Ulricans would be a problem, so he decided to converse with the Taalites in the countryside about their arcane and unenlightened rituals. Hubert's beaten corpse was later found hanging from an oak tree within sight of the city's eastern gate. There is a faction that believes Hubert should be elevated to sainthood; others argue that his very act of engagement may be construed as violating the pacifistic tenets of the cult. Following Hubert's death, rumours were circulating that his death was caused by an ill-advised relationship with a Taalite farmer's daughter.

The pacifism of the Shallyan cult is one reason it is not as popular in Talabheim as it is elsewhere in The Empire. The fact that even Ranald the Protector has a much larger following than Shallya does not dissuade the priesthood from caring for the sick and infirm. Nor does it discourage Talabheim's poor from taking advantage of Shallyan charity. There is, in fact, a suspicion among authorities that the cults of Shallya and Ranald have at times put aside their differences to help renegade Sigmarites escape - each for their own reasons, of course.

Handrich

Few Talabheim merchants follow Handrich. This is primarily due to the fact that the god is perceived to be little better than Ranald (and a Wastelander/Reiklander deity, to boot) in the minds of the nobility and cult of Ulric. On the other hand, there are some members of these two well-respected groups have outstanding loans with the merchant houses of Marienburg. It is this latter fact that has kept the Ecclesiastical Court from proscribing the cult of Handrich as they did with Ranald.

Mórr

The power of Taal within the crater has allowed his priests to conduct ancient burial rites for deceased Ulricans and Taalites successfully. Ecclesiastical Law limits priests of Mórr to burial rites for other cultists and the residents of Talagraad. The Talabheim cemetery is located just outside the eastern edge of the city. Several wealthy Sigmarite families have mausoleums located within the cemetery's grounds where their deceased are interred. These mausoleums, as well as the sacred ground, are well maintained by the Mourners' Guild. Those too poor to pay for a plot of land are often cremated on pyres and their ashes scattered.

In conjunction with the cult of Ulric, the cult of Mórr investigates reports of necromancy and the presence of Kháine cults. A priest of Mórr would join the Ecclesiastical judges as an expert witness in determining the guilt of anyone suspected of being a Necromancer or follower of Kháine.

The Guild of Mourners does operate in the city a large building in Goldstrades. However, it is unusual in that it is operated by both Taal and Morr. Customarily, bodies are stored here until taken to the respective graveyard.



Tintabriel and Aurore, OR The Tragedy of the Treasonous Lovers.

A Play in three acts by Mark Bell

Foreword

The origins of this play are obscure, yet the uncouth and unlikely name to which it is attributed hint at a nom de plume. I have taken the liberty of making some discrete enquiries, and now have reason to believe that the true author of this work is one Siegfried Schwartzadler, a cleric of Verena of no small authority. It seems that before embarking on his current (illustrious) career, this worthy man made all manner of associations in the *demi monde* of Altdorf, and dabbled in diverse occupations, including, it would seem, that of playwright. Whatever the truth of its origins, the piece is not without virtue, and has already been performed to much acclaim in the town of Bergsburg.

Dramatis personae.

Tintabriel, An Elven courtier
Tellestria, Tintabriel's father and representative of the Elven court
Aurore, A lady in waiting to the Queen of Bretonnia
The Queen of Bretonnia
The King of Bretonnia
Duvale, Captain of the guard
Ladies of the Queen of Bretonnia
Soldiers of the King of Bretonnia.

Act I

Scene I

An antechamber in the Bretonnian King's palace.

Tellestria
Well met, kinsman.

Tintabriel sees his father and rushes to embrace him.

Tintabriel
Father! I knew not that you were in the land, or a great feast should have been made ready.

Tellestria
Quiet, my son. There is a time for song and merry making, and another for sober council. I fear that today belongs to the latter.

Tintabriel
What sayest thou, Father?

Tellestria
I am come in haste from the court of Lorien, to warn you of danger, and to beg your aid.

Tintabriel
Say on, Father - I am yours to command.

Tellestria
My son, the King of Bretonnia has long coveted the rich and fertile lands of Albion, but lacked the ships to carry his

army to their misty shores. An enemy of our folk has told the king that the wood of the Sighing Ash, a tree only to be found in Lothlorien, will make ships so light and so strong that they will dance around the Albion barbarian's long ships like a cat around a hedge-pig. The King has determined to raid Lothlorien, and steal our sacred trees.

Tintabriel
Isha preserve us! What must I do?

Tellestria
You must become the eyes and the ears of our people - you must use your place at court to uncover the secret of when the raid is to be. When you know, send word to me in Lorien. Your mind must be a sprung trap, and your nerves of steel, to deliver your folk from these perilous times.

Tintabriel
As Hoeth is my witness, it shall be done. Go now, father, and await my word - in the execution of this task, none shall stay my hand.

Tellestria leaves. Tintabriel remains, lost in thought and hidden in shadow.

Scene II

The Queen enters with her ladies. Tintabriel eavesdrops.

The Queen
Are the Dwarves not the most adorable creatures? So foolish looking, yet so grave! Perhaps I should keep one as a servant.

Lady in waiting
And what of the Elves, my lady. There is one at court, after all?

The Queen
Well, I suppose they are pleasant enough, with their quick wits and fingers, but one never quite knows what they are thinking.

Aurore
Since I was a child, I have delighted in tales of the fair folk. My dearest dream is to visit their land some day.

The Queen
If the king's plans go well, perhaps we will get you one as a pet.

Ladies laugh.

Tintabriel emerges from the shadows. Exit Queen and ladies. Aurore remains.

Scene III

Tintabriel is struck by Aurore's beauty.

Tintabriel (*aside*)
What a wondrous creature!

Tintabriel approaches Aurore. Bows.

Tintabriel
Good day to you, lady - a good day indeed that shines on such wondrous beauty as thine own. I am Tintabriel na Tellestria, known in the tongue of your land as "a song to the frosty moon". Might I have the honour of your name?

Aurore (*shyly*)
My name is Aurore, sir.





Tintabriel

Truly? "the golden light of the new born sun" - indeed an auspicious name, and of a surety an omen.

Aurore

What canst thou mean, sir?

Tintabriel

When I was a child we used to sing:

Lady sun and Gentle moon
around the world dance face to face
she won't let him catch up too soon
but he knows she'll let him win the race.

Aurore

I'm not sure I understand, sir.

Tintabriel takes Aurore by the arm.

Tintabriel

How long will we run before you let me catch up?

Act II

Scene I

A wood in the palace grounds.

Tintabriel and Aurore walking arm in arm, gazing into each other's eyes. Tintabriel sighs.

Aurore

What is it, my love?

Tintabriel

Nothing, just that when we're together the air is so sweet that I want to breathe it all. It is a strange thing to discover such happiness after so many years. If only we had met sooner! All that time wasted.

Aurore

Poor Tintabriel - alone for so long. But consider, my darling, I am but newly a woman. Had we met any sooner, I would still have been a child (becoming melancholy) and I will grow old while you are still young.

Tintabriel

Ah, now at last I understand! You have nothing to fear, my sweet - when we return to the forest of my birth, the song of the earth and the dance of the trees will keep you young, just as it does my own people.

Aurore

Oh! There is something I must tell you, love. The King plans to cut down the forest to build ships. You must send word to your people to warn them. Go now, and make haste, for the King will attack on the morning after geheimnifnacht.

They kiss. Exeunt.

Scene II

Same scenery as in scene II, but rearranged and with different lighting to represent Lorelorn forest. A battle is taking place between the King's men and the elves.

Duvalle

My lord, we are betrayed! An ambushade.

A soldier staggers past, an arrow in his throat.

The King

It is as good as any other place. Now shall these mincing poppinjays taste the mettle of true Bretonnian Chivalry.

Another soldier dies writhing at the king's feet. Duvalle pulls the arrow from the man's back.

Duvalle

See my lord: Elven arrows not only fly straighter than our own, but carry a more mortal message - look, they are steeped in manbane juice - the merest scratch will bring Morr calling.

The King

Let them play the poltroon, it is nought to me. True steel brings death swift enough.

Another soldier collapses in Duvalle's arms.

Duvalle

There's too many of them, like the leaves of the trees themselves! My lord we must retreat. If not for your men, then to save your royal person.

Diverge alarums.

The King

Curse them, in Ulric's name! I'll make them pay. Sound the retreat, and find the traitor. I'll warrant it's that snivelling worm Tintabriel. Put him to the question, and wring the truth from those sneering lips, however hard you must twist.

Act III

Scene I

The throne room of the palace.

Tintabriel is strumming a lute. Enter three soldiers, swords drawn.

First Soldier

Put aside your leisure, Elf. My lord Duvalle orders that ye be detained.

Tintabriel leaps to his feet.

Tintabriel

Know you not my name and lineage? You have no right to detain me. No, ye nor any other in this land. Withdraw, or pay the price!

Second soldier

Put up your sword, half man. Do you think to fight us three?

Tintabriel

Aye, and a thousand more if they speak with so uncouth a tongue.

Tintabriel draws sword.

Tintabriel

Come then, scurry knaves.

They fight. Tintabriel kills the Second Soldier.

Tintabriel

Who is the half man now, worm?

Fight continues. Tintabriel disarmed and subdued. Two remaining soldiers remove Tintabriel and their companion.



Scene II.

The King is on the throne. Duval enters and bows.

Duvalle
My liege, the Elf Tintabriel has been put to the question.

The king
And what did you discover?

Duvalle
My Liege, the horrible torments that were inflicted, compounded by Araby's most persuasive potents, would have made the most closed-mouthed sing like the nightingale - but the Elf said nothing. Were he anything but an Elf, I would swear to his innocence.

The king
Your words are but smoke. Show me the fire - what meanest thou?

Duvalle
My Liege, I have heard tell that the Elven kind can clear their minds at will, of any memory that is uncomfortable or unwanted. If Tintabriel has done this, no power on earth can bring back the memory, still less make him confess it.

The king
If Tintabriel has no recollection of the deed, how can we punish him for it?
[He sighs]
I had rather he was alive, to pour oil on the stormy waters between our peoples. The Elven folk's anger is terrible.

Duvalle
As you command, my liege.

Scene III.

Aurore
Ah my love! When I heard what violence you had wrought among the king's men, I feared for your life.

Tintabriel
What, Lady? Have we met? I fear that you are over familiar, madam.

Aurore
Merciful Shallya, they have turned his head! Tintabriel my darling, do you not know me?

Tintabriel
Forsooth lady, you are passing fair, yet I swear I have no memory of you - still less of loving you. Perhaps you have been deceived by a false dream, the consequence of the King's good Elven wine? It is said that it can work strange wonders in the minds of men.

Aurore
Oh gods, my heart is breaking! How can it be that what was once so great, the very centre of our lives, now is set at nought? How can it be that these very mountains have crumbled into the sea in a single night?

Your cruelty destroys me sir - if you love me no longer, at least avow that you loved me once.

Tintabriel
Fie, madam, enough. I am sore tired, and my body cruelly hurt. I pray you, let me in peace.

Exit Tintabriel. Aurore collapses weeping on the dais before the throne.



Scene IV

Aurore sits up.

Aurore
Alas, the world is mad, or seemeth so to my poor wit. What else could explain such terrible cruelty? Woe betide the poor mortal who dreams of happiness.

Yet wait - I perceive a glimmer - the world is not mad, just cruel. I have heard tell the elder folk can clear their minds at will, to forget whatever is painful or un-needed to them. Could it be that my poor Tintabriel chose to forget our love so that he could not betray me at the hands of the torturer? Oh the world is truly cruel as the winter wind! What choice, that is no choice at all - to betray your love, or lose it! The gods must have abandoned us to lead us to such a terrible fate. How can I face life, when such crushing blows await around every corner? I will no more of it.

Picks up poisoned Elven arrow and cuts her wrists.

Adieu, my love. Perhaps the gods will be kinder to us in another world.

Aurore dies.

Scene V.

Enter Tintabriel. Sees Aurore slumped on the dais. Rushes to her side.

Tintabriel
What is this? The lady Aurore, dead at her own hand. It seems that her malady went deeper than simple delusion. The love she spoke of was true enough for her, in any case.

Yet wait! The sight of her still white face stirs something in my breast, as if I had seen her asleep in some happier circumstance. Can it be that she spoke true? That I forgot my love like some cloudy dream?

[Pauses; cries:] My soul, what have I done?

Picks up Aurore, and holds her to him.

Tintabriel
So be it, fate! You have robbed us of our happiness, now I shall deprive you of our misery!

Stabs himself in heart with arrow. Dies.

Curtain.

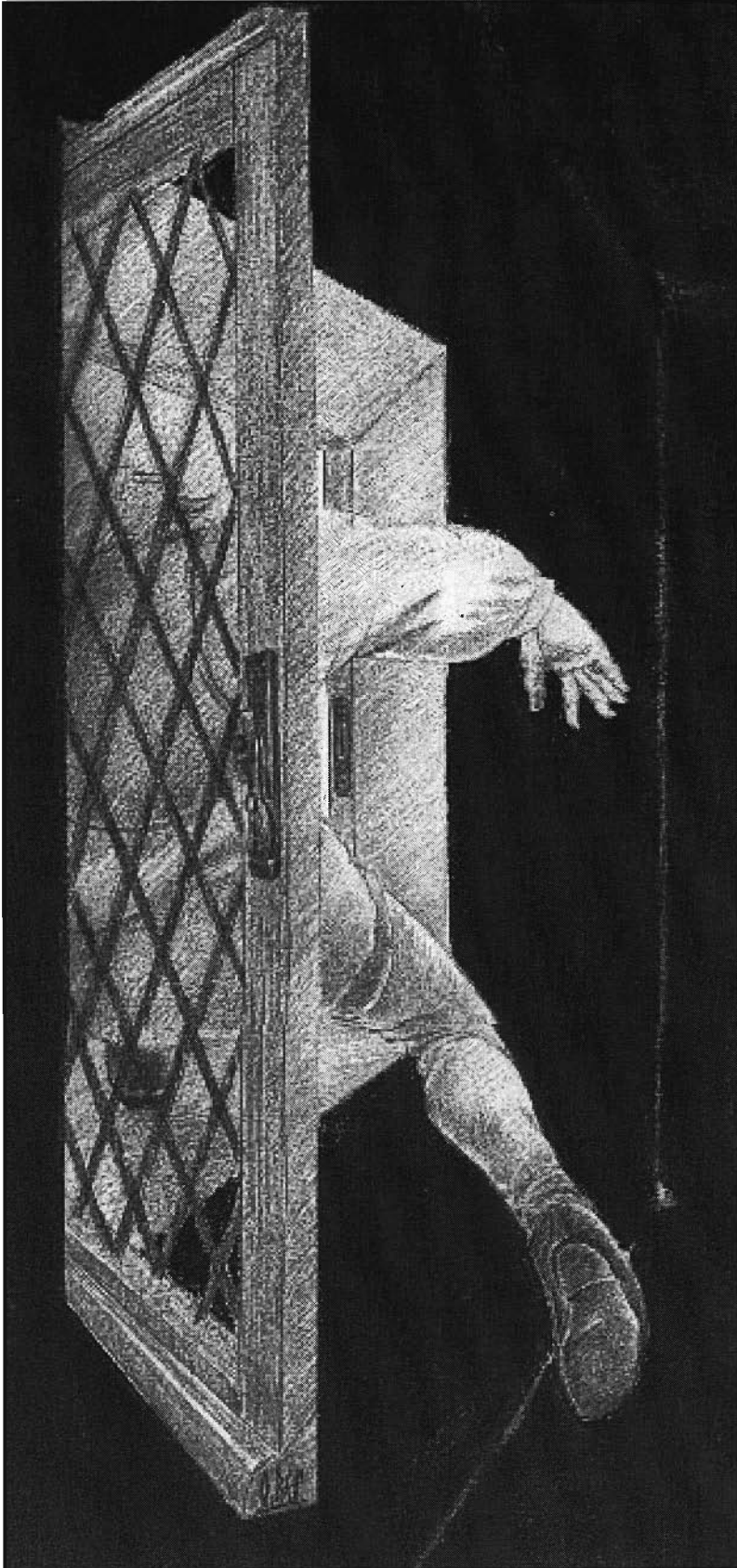
Narrator
Now this sad tale's end draws near apace
But gentle folk be of light heart
For when Verena pleads their case
Morr could not in death the lovers part.

So now two trees in the Loren wood grow:
One is green, the other white
Their branches hold each other close
And sing their love into the night.

end.

PRIVILEGES

A Complete Scenario set in Talabheim by John Foody



*"Talabheim is ours. I am born to rule and you are born to serve."
Anonymous Noble*

*"Blue blood will take you to the scaffold if you spill it, or save you from it if runs through your veins."
Street Agitator*

Across The Empire, the power and influence of the nobility has been slowly eroded. Although still weighty, the rise of the middle class, especially the merchants, has been a constant threat. In Talabheim this process has been slower than elsewhere, the rights of the nobility enshrined in the rigid and antiquated legal system. Nevertheless the Merchants, led by their Guild, have made progress. Worried by what they have seen elsewhere, some members of the nobility have striven to halt this tide and protect their heritage.

It is a new battle in this war that will involve the PCs. Three days ago the Kislevite Merchant Grigori Barsky arrived in the city. He represented a group of merchants in the east of his country who wished to transport large amounts of quality furs through Talabheim into The Empire and on to Marienburg. Barsky was to negotiate the best deal with various interested parties. Whoever he chose would have to invest heavily, but would stand to make a fortune from the deal.

On his arrival, two factions immediately courted Barsky. The first was Antonio von Regiheim, a successful merchant, social reformer and senior member of the guild. Barsky liked the merchant and saw someone he could do business with. The second bidder was Baron Staffan Syberg-Gronzy, member of the Peer House and leader of one of the most powerful families in Talabheim. He was to be the only noble bidder, having agreed this with the other families in the city. His offer was as good, although Barsky disliked his arrogance immediately. However, the Baron also made it clear that if he should not win the negotiation, life could be made very difficult for Barsky and his representatives. The Kislevite was well aware of the power of the Syberg-Gronzys, and knew this was no hollow threat.

However, Barsky is a shrewd man and he begun a bidding process that would end in a better deal for him and his partners. Thus both von Regiheim and an ever more irritated Syberg-Gronzy have been visiting Barsky's inn at regular intervals to improve their offers. Syberg-Gronzy has tired of this "sheep-market bidding", though, and decided to balance the odds in his favour. It would also solve another, more personal, problem he has.

Through his many contacts, the Baron recruited Ragast Erichmann, a competent and ruthless operator. His loyalty lies with a Northern noble, although quite to what degree is unclear. Certainly Erichmann is pursuing some hidden agenda. The Baron is aware of this loyalty, but is old friends with Erichmann's Lord, and so is not too worried about this situation. Erichmann was tasked with disgracing von Regiheim and murdering the Baron's own niece, Irina. Irina has become an embarrassment to the Baron, and he suspects she knows things about him that he doesn't want known. Erichmann has taken the hint, and has decided to kill two birds with one stone.

But Erichmann is a man with enemies. Yuri Hangovich has been trailing Erichmann for some months now, trying to discover what his master's plans are. Tracking him to Talabheim, Yuri discovered that Erichmann was interested in von Regiheim, and that Erichmann had arranged for his house to be burgled. He lost track of Erichmann, but found himself on the trail of the burglars. Confronting the pair in the house, a fight broke out and Yuri killed one of the men. However, Yuri was arrested as he left the property, and was quickly tried for murder. The second burglar escaped.

The PCs will become involved with the plot to discredit and frame von Regiheim, and by association the merchants. They will also come face to face with the ruthlessness of Talabheim's ruling class. However, before they get this far, they will have to trawl through the criminals and lower classes of the city.

PRELUDE

Burn

At some stage before the scenario proper begins, the PCs come across what seems to be a tragic incident. While travelling through, or near, The Old City, they hear the sounds of screaming and shouting. As they approach they see thick smoke rising into the air, followed by the stench of burning wood.

A small crowd has gathered to watch a house burn, flames licking out of the windows. Some men are attempting to douse it with water but they are completely disorganised and are having little effect. A hysterical middle-aged woman is being forcibly restrained from running in, crying that her daughter is in the house.

What happens next is down to the PCs. If they take charge they will be able to stop the fire spreading too far. If any PC bravely decides to enter the burning house to search for the girl, they will have to contend with heavy smoke and, before long, collapsing stairs and ceilings. Any such rescue is in vain, however, for the girl is not in the house - although the would-be rescuer will not be able to determine this; they simply won't be able to find her in the smoke, flames and debris.

Feel free to expand this encounter by adding small details; perhaps someone trying to stop the PCs entering the house, or an opportunist pickpocket. Award PCs experience points for acts of bravery and intelligence. They may also make some future friends if they act particularly unselfishly.

If the PCs act quickly and talk to the crowd, they may learn that a young man with red hair was seen running away before the fire. The girl who died (everyone is convinced she was inside) was named Judith; she was a good-looking girl of twenty years. (In fact, she was kidnapped, and the fire was lit to cover her disappearance - although it is unlikely anyone would really care here. Why will become clear later.)

The main scenario begins two days after this event.

PART ONE

About to Swing

How the PCs enter the scenario is for the GM to decide. The best option is for one of the PCs to be a friend of Yuri Hangovich. They don't have to be close, but the PC should be convinced that Yuri is trustworthy and honourable. If this is the case, then the PC in question sees a poster (or overhears it being read in some public spot) announcing the forthcoming execution of Yuri for murder and theft. He is due to be hung tomorrow at noon in Ulricplatz, which is located in the shadow of the Temple of Ulric.

An alternative way of getting the PCs involved is for them to be hired by Henrich Goldstrade, a member of the Merchants Guild who has heard Yuri's pleas of innocence. Goldstrade suspects something is wrong and hires the PCs, through a third party, to investigate Yuri's claims. In this case, the PCs will be paid (the amount is at your discretion) to talk to Yuri and discover why he was in the house and why it was being robbed.

Either way, PCs should find themselves heading to the legendary prison of Tarnhelm Keep to talk to Yuri before his appointment with the hangman's rope. Some research into why Yuri has been arrested would be beneficial. The word on the street is that Yuri

killed one of his accomplices while robbing a house and was arrested by the Watch at the scene.

Tarnhelm Keep

The imposing prison of Tarnhelm Keep casts a shadow over the area surrounding it. Getting in is not a problem (getting out of course is another matter entirely), as bribes paid to the jailers will provide access, although characters will have to provide a half-decent cover story ("He's my brother", "He owes me money", etc.). A bribe is also needed to get through each locked door, so the outlay can be expensive. Characters carrying any weapon other than a simple hand weapon will be unable to gain admission, as will magic users (although clerics will be trusted).

The PCs will be led through dimly lit dank corridors by a disinterested jailer, accompanied by a low soundtrack of silence broken only by occasional shouts or moans. Within minutes, characters feel claustrophobic and uneasy in the confines of the prison walls. Yuri is imprisoned in one of the upper levels for his final night. The jailer opens the heavy door and shows the PCs into the small cell. He will stand at the door unless bribed to "disappear" for ten minutes. The only light shining into the cell is through a tiny barred window. Through this can be seen Ulricplatz, and the building of Yuri's gallows. The only furniture in the room is a straw mattress and, in one corner, a tray with a bowl of congealed soup.

Yuri will be upon his feet when the characters enter, and will be ecstatic if he recognises a friend. His clothes are now rags and he has been badly beaten, both by the Watch and the jailers. He has continually protested his innocence, and is thus frowned upon for not having "repented his crimes". He is more than happy to tell his story to anyone who will listen.

Yuri arrived in Talabheim on the trail of Ragast Erichmann, a man he has been following for some time. Erichmann had framed a friend of Yuri's for murder, and although Yuri himself escaped he was forced into exile. Yuri suspected Erichmann was conspiring in something greater, although it was not clear what. However, some investigation revealed that Erichmann served a noble in the north of The Empire and was acting on his orders. Through overhearing conversations and talking to various undesirable, Yuri discovered that Erichmann intended to plant evidence that would discredit Antonio von Regiheim, a merchant who has been campaigning for social reform in Talabheim, much to the annoyance of various Peers. He suspects Erichmann is working on behalf of a third party in the city, but does not know whom.

Two days ago, he saw Erichmann talking to a young man with blotchy skin and lank hair who was dressed in a clerk's uniform - but he did not recognise the clerk's livery. Erichmann handed a sack to the Clerk and then left. Following him, Yuri was led to a tavern in the Eldenstadt district (he cannot remember the exact location) where he met someone in a side room. He lost track of Erichmann at this point, and so decided to make his way to the house of Antonio von Regiheim in the hope that he would find something there. He did not have to wait long. In a matter of hours, he saw two men, one carrying the sack, break in to burgle the merchant. Yuri followed them in. He came across the first one downstairs, and they fought; Yuri accidentally killed the burglar as he attempted to subdue him. He tried to catch up with the dead man's partner, but only managed to catch a glimpse as he

leapt from a window. It was at this point that the Watch arrived. Yuri didn't really try to put up a struggle. After he was imprisoned, he learnt that the dead man was named Boris Rotavich and the son of a local merchant. All he can recall about the accomplice was that he was a small, stocky man, with fair hair and - based on what he could tell whilst he watched them break in - a habit of scratching his ear nervously. At his trial he was accused of being one of their number, and the death the result of a falling out over some of the ill-gotten gains.

Yuri's version of events is essentially true. Although the PCs may suspect otherwise, the Watch's presence was a coincidence. No one believed Yuri's versions of events, though; his trial was short and clear-cut. After telling his story, he begs the PCs to carry on his investigations and avenge him.

Any attempt to free Yuri is filled with difficulty, and in all likelihood, both he and the PCs are likely to die. The players will need to be ingenious to stand any chance of success; any attempt to force their way in or out will be an utter failure, and the PCs will simply end up on the scaffold alongside Yuri. One option might be to forge a pardon, although the PCs will need access to an original to use as the basis for the forgery. Even if this is successful, the alarm will be raised within hours and Yuri (and the PCs) will be hunted down ruthlessly.

The Execution

Assuming the PCs do not get Yuri out of jail, he will be hung at midday. A large crowd gathers to watch the four executions due to take place that day. Yuri receives the worst of the crowd's anger, for he refuses to show remorse for his crimes. The victim's father is present, but the PCs will not be able to get near him at this time. Erichmann does not attend.

Antonio von Regiheim

A successful merchant, von Regiheim has made his fortune from trade with Kislev, exporting and importing various sought after items. In his late thirties, he is handsome and well dressed, with an aristocratic bearing. He is at ease with nearly everyone and makes few enemies at a personal level. However, he has come into conflict with the Peers for trying to loosen their control on the city by making trade less restrictive. He genuinely believes that such progress is for the good of Talabheim. His zeal and leadership has made him a figurehead for many merchants and the focus of discontent for the nobility.

The PCs can easily locate von Regiheim at the Merchants Guild as he is spending much of his time here in negotiation with Grigori Barsky. Indeed, when the PCs arrive, the two are holding discussions, and a clerk will tell them that von Regiheim is too busy to see them today. However, if he is told that they are here in connection with the burglary, he will say that they may wait if they wish, although it may be a little time.

As they wait, the clerk will tell them what a great man von Regiheim is, standing up against the might of the Nobles for the good of the people. If asked, the clerk will say the von Regiheim is in a meeting with Grigori Barsky, a merchant from Erengrad. If they are friendly towards him, he may let slip that the Kislevite is looking for a deal to bring furs into the south of the Empire via Talabheim.

Eventually, the office door opens and von Regiheim and Grigori Barsky enter the lobby. Barsky is a huge man, sporting a large beard and wearing fur-trimmed clothes and boots. The pair shake hands and Barsky leaves, saying, "I will contact you soon,

my friend; your offer sounds very, very tempting." The clerk approaches von Regiheim and whispers to him. He strides over to the PCs and shakes their hands, asking if he can help them.

The merchant refuses to discuss any business with them, especially the current negotiations. As to the murder of Boris Rotavich, he firmly believes that the watch uncovered a burglary where the thieves had fallen out. He dismisses any idea that he had been targeted, or that Yuri was innocent. He is also sceptical that there could be any connection to the Guild or his own business, as his papers are kept at the guild or his office. The fact that Rotavich was the son of a merchant (who, as it happens, was not associated with the guild) is just coincidence. Since the death, he has heard several rumours that the boy was a bit of a wild one.

The Watch

Asking at the Watch House produces few results. They are happy to believe it was a simple burglary that went wrong. The three had broken into the house and began to argue over the loot. They ended up fighting and one got killed. They knew Rotavich as a drunk and troublemaker, so they are not surprised he came to a bad end. They do know he is due to be buried tomorrow.

Rotavich

The dead man, Rotavich, is the only real clue the PCs have at this stage. His body has been turned over to the Guild of Mourners for burial. His father Alexis is well known amongst the Kislevite community and, to a lesser degree, amongst the merchants. The family home is located in the Silbertor district. In his early twenties, Rotavich was forced into the burglary to pay off debts he had incurred through a lifestyle of drinking and gambling. A petty criminal, he was a disgrace to his father and carried a reputation as a waster. He had no wish to follow his father into business. His father's desire to disown him was only halted by his mother, who also kept her beloved only child in money.

The 'burglary' that led to his death was actually an attempt to plant evidence in the home of von Regiheim. Rotavich owed money to a Pawnbroker named Ragol, who acts as a front for The Vory, a Kislevite criminal group.

Rotavich will be cremated, the ashes scattered in the lands surrounding the Temple of Taal. It is a wet, windy day and a dozen or so mourners are in attendance. Most are family members; the others, business acquaintances of his father. Rotavich's mother is on the verge of a collapse, sobbing hysterically. There is no sign of the accomplice

amongst them. Attempts to approach any family members here will lead to extreme disdain and may poison any future relations.

This Boy's Life

The Rotavich family home is a large, impressive house, standing out from surrounding buildings thanks to its whitewashed walls. Approaching the family at any time in the days following Rotavich's death is fraught with difficulties. They are in deep mourning and the only members who will agree to see the PCs are Rotavich's father and uncle. Here the PCs will need to tread very carefully, as both are still in a degree of shock. Gentle questioning will get answers, but if they push too much or accuse Rotavich of being a criminal then they will get themselves thrown out. A good cover story would be for the PCs to claim they suspect the dead man was framed. His father (and uncle) realises his son was a troubled young man, who led a bit of a wild life. Nevertheless, they still hoped that he would take over the business one day. The family blame the death on Ivan Ivanvich, Rotavich's manservant, who has since gone missing; they also suggest that his friends may know something.

The Rotavich household has four members of staff, who live in cramped quarters at the back of the house. They are happy to discuss the dead man; none have any real loyalty to the family. However, they will watch out for Ivan Ivanvich, who, until the murder, also lived here. They will jump to protect him from any accusations that he was responsible for the death, or for leading Rotavich astray. If anything, they claim it was the other way round. Despite their different social status, Rotavich and Ivanvich were best friends since youth and were unlikely to hurt each other. Ivanvich matches the description of the man running from the house, though. They have no idea where he has gone - not that they would tell the PCs anyway.

There have all heard rumours that Rotavich was in debt to a local pawnbroker. It seems he lost a lot of money gambling, and the pawnbroker had bought the debts from a third-party. They know he frequented a vodka house on Nort Wag in the Eldenstadt district. Ivanvich also told them Rotavich rented a house there. Rotavich would come home at all hours, drunk and abusive. Some nights he would be cut and bruised from fighting.

Any reasonable cover story will allow the PCs to gain access to Rotavich's room. It is a large bedroom, sparsely decorated. The lock on the inside of the door is good quality (CR-10) and no-one has the key. However, it was opened by the family on his death, although nothing has been touched. A dozen empty bottles lie under the bed. On a side table there is a folded piece of paper with a rough picture of a pair of clasped hands in front of a cross (Player Handout One; the handshake is a common symbol of Händrich). This is von Regiheim's coat-of-arms, given to Rotavich so he could identify the house, which displays this outside, and the brooch. In the paper is some white powder. This is a dose of Ranald's Delight, an occasional indulgence of Rotavich. Behind a tattered armchair is a poorly concealed secret compartment. In here is a bag of cheap looking gambling chips (showing a Kislevite Bear) and a good quality dagger (9GC).

Old Friends

If the PCs ask the family who Rotavich's friends were they will be pointed in the direction of a group of well-to-do merchant

offspring. This group of young men and women spend their time (and their parents' money) enjoying themselves and avoiding responsibilities. Though all of Kislevite stock, there is little trace of their accents and all think of themselves as belonging to a modern Empire.

All of them are shocked by Rotavich's death. They are also happy to gossip about him, as it becomes obvious they didn't really view him as one of their own. Contrary to his family's belief, he had not been spending much time with them in the last couple of years. They all agree that Boris was avoiding them and had fallen in with 'bad' company. They also heard rumours that he lost a lot of money gambling. When they last saw him, he seemed to be depressed about a failed relationship. He refused to tell them the woman's name but hinted she was well connected. He once took a pair of them to a Vodka House in the Eldenstadt area, but they found it too revolting to stay. They didn't really take much notice of Ivan, as he was of "the lower sort".

The Vodka House

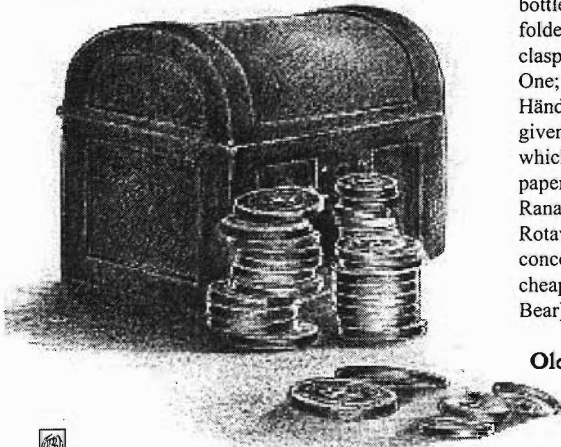
Nort Wag is a grim road, lined with ramshackle buildings, the road filled with debris and detritus. The people here stare at the PCs hostilely. Few shops display signs and the Taverns (or Vodka Houses as they are called here) are hidden away. To find any will take a few bribes of three to four shillings.

After some false starts, the PCs will come to the Vodka House frequented by Rotavich. Inside, it is a dark, smoky and generally just grim. The twisted ceiling beams are low, and tall characters will have to crouch. The clientele are just as grim as the surroundings - quiet and drunk, slowly emptying the vodka bottles placed in front of them. Some are involved in card games, piles of pennies shoved to the middle of the table. The barkeep, a short man with a pronounced limp, will ignore the characters until they show their money - and even then he refuses to talk to them. However, the other patrons are far more easily bought. A few glasses of Vodka will loosen their tongues. Drinking with them for a while or playing cards (and not winning too much) will earn the PC some friends for life. As long as they keep the drinks coming and don't expect too much in return, that is.

They knew Rotavich and his two friends, as they used to come in here to drink and gamble. "They were like a bucket with a hole. We liked them." He would always come in with Ivan and (up until a few months ago) another man who they think was called Leko, a handsome young man with red hair. It seemed that he and Rotavich fell out a while back. They heard rumours that Rotavich got involved in some big money games and lost badly. His debts were then bought out by Ragol, a local pawnbroker. "He was Ragol's man. His dog. What Ragol asked him to do, he'd do. Until all the money is paid back." They heard rumours that Rotavich was robbing the house to pay Ragol back. They also heard that Ivan was with him the night he died, and that he is hiding out in the area somewhere.

The Gamblers

Eldenstadt is home to many illegal gambling dens, some of which just appear for a night or two. Others are more regular, most paying some tribute to The Vory. PCs asking about Rotavich will discover that he gambled where he could. However, it was to a Regular gambler named Klausit that he owed over two hundred gold coins. Klausit sold the debt onto the pawnbroker Ragol for a quarter of that amount.



The Pawnbroker

Ragol is well known among the poorer Kislevites of Talabheim. He is known to work for The Vory. In Eldenstadt, this goes without saying, as he would have difficulty maintaining such a high profile business without their permission. In his forties, Ragol is a crafty and sharp operator with no time for scruples. However, he tries to convince potential customers otherwise, claiming he is their friend, there to help them in their time of need. Most of his trade is in jewellery, as it is one of the few items that the poor can pawn.

His premises are hidden away from the main streets, surrounded by fallen-down housing. The shop is an old building, rumoured to have been a guard outpost swallowed by the city's growth. One storey tall and built solidly from brick, there is only one entrance. This is through a stout wooden door, which is barred and locked at all times. Inside it is dark and smoky, with foul smelling candles illuminating the rotting furniture. The walls are covered with shelves, each piled with items that have been pawned and never collected. Here sit two guards. Ragol's clerk serves buying customers. Those pawning items are seen by Ragol himself, who will drive a hard bargain, giving just a fraction of the item's cost. Two more bored heavies sit in his room.

Ragol had bought Rotavich's debts out, thus leaving the young man in his control. This had been a purely financial speculation on the pawnbroker's part, as he knew Rotavich was from a wealthy family who would probably pay him in the end. In the meantime Ragol had used him to run a couple of errands across the city. When one of the local heavies, Zanovalt the Bastard, came to him to say he wanted him to do a job, he couldn't say no. Zanovalt was a powerful figure in The Vory and Ragol sent Rotavich to him. When he heard that Rotavich had been killed, he knew it would only be a matter of time before questions would be asked about the whereabouts of Ivan, so he has had people out looking for him ever since.

Getting to see Ragol is easy, although he will always be surrounded by his men. This is also true outside his business, although he will refuse to talk to them anywhere but his office. When surrounded by his guards, Ragol will be overbearingly arrogant. However, if they get him alone (and this can only be done by getting rid of the guards) he will tell them whatever they want to know. If the PCs mention Ivan, he will send his guards into the next room and talk privately. He will say he does not know where Ivan is but will pay them 50GCs if they find him. He says it is so he can make sure he is protected. He will not admit, unless under threat, that Ivan and Rotavich were "hired" by Zanovalt the Bastard.

Finding Ivan

Fortunately for Ivan, the thugs Ragol has sent after him are not the brightest of men. Ivan is in hiding in an abandoned house on the edge of the district. Any of the Rotavich family servants can point the PCs to his family house. It is a broken down ramshackle affair, a bunch of evergreens tied to the door, a traditional defence against unfriendly spirits. His mother and family say they haven't seen him for weeks, but they seem nervous. Part of the reason they are nervous is that Ragol's goons having been asking the same questions; the rest of the nerves are because they do know where he is. Threatening behaviour will soon get the neighbours gathering round menacingly - not because they are concerned about the threats, but simply because they're not willing to tolerate them

from outsiders.

Once a day, Ivan's ten-year-old sister brings him food. She sneaks out into a back alley and then runs down side streets until she reaches the derelict house in which he is hiding. The PCs will have to be good to catch her, as she will stop if she spots pursuit and scream blue murder if she is grabbed. Trailing her over a couple of days (she uses the same route each time) is probably the PCs best bet.

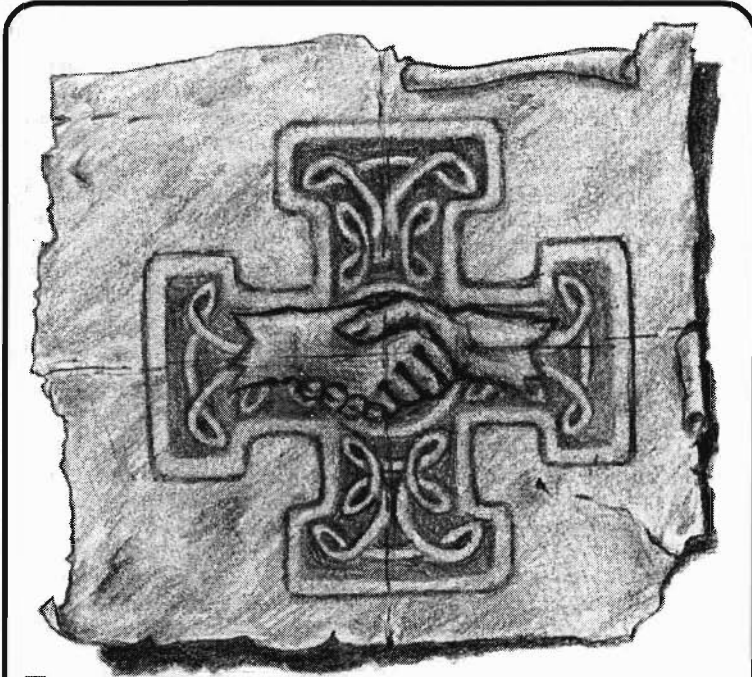
Ivan is very scared. If he hears the PCs entering the house he will attempt to get out of a back window. However, if his sister is there he will stay to defend her. He will be happy to talk once he is sure the PCs aren't there to kill him. He thinks Ragol wants him dead, as does Zanovalt the Bastard, who he will say hired them. He has a fierce sense of loyalty and that, along with friendship, forced him to follow Rotavich. He says Ragol sent them to von Regenheim's house to steal a brooch. They were also to hide a bag of clothes in his cellar. Rotavich dealt with the bag while he stole the brooch. However, when he came downstairs he saw Rotavich struck down, obviously dead. He panicked and ran for it.

Zanovalt the Bastard

Zanovalt is a middle ranking figure in The Vory, the criminal group that holds sway in the Kislevite sections of Talabheim. However, he is still influential and dangerous, and a bad enemy to make. He is responsible for debt collection in Eldenstadt and Suden Eldenstadt. Few non-Kislevites will have heard of him, and the Kislevites themselves are unwilling to talk about him, "Shut up you fool!" is the most common response. The Watch certainly know of him, saying he is a vicious thug who isn't afraid of beating up whole families for a shilling. However, he no longer does his own dirty work. He lives and works from an inn in Eldenstadt, The White Hill.

The White Hill is located at the end of a dingy avenue. Two men sit outside drinking, and will question any strangers as to their intentions. If they are seen to be a threat, one will knock on the window summoning half a dozen club-wielding thugs. The easiest way to bluff the guards is to say that they have come to pay Zanovalt a debt.

Inside, the inn is smoky and dark. A dozen of Zanovalt's thugs sit around, some playing cards, others just talking. Most are congregated around a stout oak door to the side of the bar. A half-dozen other men sit around drinking quietly. As the PCs arrive, a scrawny-looking middle aged man comes scuffling out of the door and talks to two of the guards. This is Andrei Wimpski, Zanovalt's clerk. The pair nod and leave the inn on a debt collection errand. The man returns to the room to the sound of



Player Handout One

shouting.

If they claimed to be here to deliver money, one or two of the PCs will be summoned into the room. Inside are three armed thugs, and the door is left wide open so that others can enter quickly if needed. A door on the far side of the room is the only other way in or out. The room is very hot; there is a huge fire roaring in the corner. Wimpski sits at a desk, one hundred and fifty GC of coins piled around him. He counts individual piles, recording the amounts in a large ledger. In the corner, sitting on an armchair and seemingly swamped by numerous furs, is Zanovalt.

As his names suggests, Zanovalt is a nasty piece of work, no matter how much his corpulent frame suggest otherwise. If the PCs mention von Regenheim or Rotavich, Zanovalt will nod wisely and ask why they wish to know. He will refuse to divulge any information, but listens to their arguments carefully. However, he is not really concerned with their answer; he simply waits to be sure that they are even vaguely on the right trail and then, with the merest glance to one of his men, he signals his thugs to attack.

The three thugs in the room will block the PCs, while Zanovalt escapes and locks the other door. At this stage the PCs are in real trouble and they should know it. If they surrender, they will be disarmed, put in chains and locked in the cellar. The captors will talk about the fate that awaits them in Kislevian - but the grins and fingers drawn across the throat will be all too clear in any language. If they fail to escape they will be taken by wagon to a farm just outside the city and fed to the pigs.

If, on the other hand, the PCs prove too tough for their attackers, killing at least three, the others will run for it. They will leave behind a quivering Wimpski.

Whatever the outcome, if they engage Zanovalt's men in combat, they will have made a powerful enemy. If they kill or threaten Zanovalt, the situation will be even worse, as they will be actively pursued by The Vory. Contracts will be placed on their heads, although the reward will be low enough that few will be tempted.

Under Arrest

Whatever they are up to, the PCs will hear the news that von Regiheim has been arrested for kidnap and murder. (If they try and visit him again, they will be told this in outraged and weeping tones by the house staff, or with indignation by the clerk at the guild.)

The victim was Irina Gronzy, a fifteen year old girl and a member of the family of his business rivals. She was kidnapped five days ago and a note was delivered asking for a ransom. This was duly paid, but the girl was not released. Two days ago, her body was found dumped in a field outside the city. A blood-covered brooch was found near the body. Its symbol is a common one representing Haedryk (two hands shaking), but with an unusual cross behind them. A tip-off was received that the brooch belonged to von Regiheim, something that investigations soon confirmed. Soon after, the Watch raided his home and found a bag containing the girl's bloodied clothes in the cellar. He was arrested and dragged to jail. The Watch now stand guard around the house.

Everyone is certain of his guilt, and each rumour adds a new spice - a chaos cult, that the girl was his mistress, or that this was a revenge attack. However, the Watch and the nobility are firmly of the belief the kidnapping was simply to allow von Regiheim to gain a business advantage against the Syberg-Gronzys.

PART TWO

At this stage, the Baron's plan is moving smoothly. The arrest is the result of his attempt to frame von Regiheim and thus cause him to lose out on the Barsky contract. As an added bonus, it also provided the opportunity to solve another of his problems, showing just how ruthless he is. Irina Gronzy is his niece, the daughter of his brother. However, he has long known that she was born as the result of an affair that her mother Katrina had with a commoner. Ever since, the Baron has used this information to force Katrina into acting as his mistress from time to time. However, in the last few months Irina has earned a bad reputation as a party girl, taking too many drugs and being blatant with her favours. This has brought shame to the family. He had attempted to speak to her - but they ended up in bed. It was only afterwards that he realised quite how damaging this whole situation could be if word got out. Thus the Baron arranged for Irina to be kidnapped by Erichmann and murdered. Incriminating evidence would be found linking von Regiheim to the crime. The power wielded by the Syberg-Gronzy's would be enough to ensure Regiheim hung for his crime.

However, Irina is still alive. Erichmann arranged for the kidnapping to be carried out by Rotavich's old friend Leko. Leko had also been working for Zanolat the Bastard and had regularly supplied Irina with drugs. He was supposed to kidnap and kill her, passing the body to Erichmann, who would dump it and plant the evidence incriminating the merchant. However, Leko had other ideas. Irina had slept with him before in exchange for drugs, and he knew she was weak. With gold coins spinning before him, he saw that he could use the girl to make some money. He successfully kidnapped her, hiding her away, and fed her with powerful, addictive drugs. A side effect of this that he welcomed was that Irina fell deeply in love with him - or at least, became totally dependent on him, which was nearly as good. (Little does he know that Irina had fallen for him anyway.) He knew now that his plan would work. His intention was to place her in a brothel and act as her pimp. She was

young, clean, beautiful and spoke like a lady. He planned to make a fortune.

The problem of how to tell Erichmann barely troubled him. In the Old City, he found a girl who could pass for Irina if her face was damaged. He killed her, passing her body to Erichmann. Leko then burnt her house to destroy any evidence and cover his tracks. (This was the fire the PCs encountered at the beginning of the scenario). Erichmann was annoyed that she was somewhat mutilated, but wasn't too upset as he thought she could still be identified. Leko is perfectly aware that if Erichmann were to find out what he had done he would kill him and Irina without a second thought. However, the rewards outweigh the risk as far as he is concerned.

Trial

The trial of von Regiheim takes place the day after he is arrested, which, should the PCs ask, is uncommonly quick. Magistrate Olvaga, who is renowned for his incorruptible and harsh stance, conducts the trial. In fact, Olvaga is in the pay of Syberg-Gronzy (through a third party) and is responsible for arranging the hasty trial. Although he has been told to ensure von Regiheim is found guilty, he does so in the belief that he is truly guilty of the crime, and that all he is doing is helping a friend see justice done swiftly.

The courtroom is packed by the time the PCs arrive (if they attend, that is), and they will have to push through the crowds to reach the court. When they enter the court they are required by law to remove their hats, and to bow (men and women) before a statue of Ulric & Verena holding a pair of scales between them. Failure to do so will result in the Court guards throwing them out. If they protest too loudly, they will be thrown in the cells, to be fined and released next day.

A little while later the bailiff arrives, and begins proceedings by reading a list of all the judges that have sat in this court. This goes on for an uncomfortable thirty minutes. As it finishes, the Judge enters, bows to the statue, and then hands a gold coin to one of the viewing public before washing his hands in a bowl held by a guard. Taking his seat, he is followed by the Record Keeper himself, an event which causes a few gasps. The Prisoner is then brought forward - a recently beaten von Regiheim. He is made to touch the base of the Record Keepers staff, showing that he submits to the judgement of the court. Tradition out of the way, the case begins.

Evidence is a given by a Captain of the Watch, the farmer that found the body, a friend (Nadja Kreuzer) of Irina (who tells of her good breeding and morals) and the Syberg-Gronzy senior scribe who received the ransom note. He is asked why he thinks von Regiheim chose her as his victim, and he replies, "Irina was chosen to distract Baron Staffan Gronzy from some negotiations that von Regiheim was also involved with." The Prosecutor gives his opinion that she was to be used as collateral so that the Baron would pull out of the negotiations. The defending lawyer calls no witnesses. The Judge then asks if any man "of equal of superior status" wishes to speak on the accused's behalf. None do so. If a PC stands up to give evidence or protest, they will be asked their name, standing and occupation. Unless they are of middle or better class, they will be refused leave to speak.

It should be no surprise to the PCs that von Regiheim is found guilty. The Judge's summation speech is a vicious attack on the now utterly dejected von Regiheim. He is called evil, but instead of

concentrating on the kidnapping and murder his main crime seems to have been that he has striven to undermine the social and 'natural' order of Talabheim. He hands down a death sentence, secure in the knowledge that von Regiheim carried out his radical acts of sedition to "undermine the Peers." He is sentenced to be hung at midday in two days' time. The Judge finishes by asking if he would like to plead mercy; now that he has been shown to be guilty, he should show remorse for his crimes. Silence fills the court as von Regiheim shakes his head - at which the judge storms out of the court.

As the merchant is dragged away, spat at and hit by the angry crowd, the PCs should be fully aware of the miscarriage of justice they have just witnessed. Hopefully they will be spurred into action and will attempt to free von Regiheim. If they need some added incentive, Aldus Vetheim, a member of the Merchants guild and friend of Von Regiheim, will approach them. He asks them to come to the Guild this afternoon and see him.

The Witnesses

The farmer who found the body has nothing else to add, except that he is still shaken up the experience. He is an honest, straightforward man and has nothing to hide. The Watch Captain is likewise telling the truth, and PCs talking to him will soon tell that he is an unimaginative man happy to accept things at face value. The Senior Scribe has also told only what he knows, being unaware of any plot. However, his thoughts on the motive come from listening in on Baron Staffan's conversation (one he was spreading wherever he went). Irina's friend leaves in a carriage immediately and will need to be tracked down at home if the PCs wish to talk with her (see Friends).

Merchant in Jail

Getting to see von Regiheim is no easy task. The PCs will have to pay a heavy bribe to the jailer and allow their weapons to be removed. In pain from a fresh beating, the utterly dejected merchant is happy to see the PCs. He proclaims his innocence to them and will be grateful that they believe him. He believes he has been framed to enable the Syberg-Gronzy family to get the commission from the merchant Barsky. If the dead girl hadn't been one of their own he would have suspected the family themselves, particularly Baron Staffan 'The Stone' Syberg-Gronzy. He has no firm idea of who else could be responsible; his only thought is that it must be one of the Premier families. Many of them would be happy to see him locked away and the Merchant Guild disgraced.

He asks the PCs to find who framed him, and additionally, who murdered the girl. He will pay them well if they succeed. They should not visit him any more, he says, but should instead deal with someone senior at the Merchants Guild. They will ensure the PCs are paid. He recommends Aldus Vetheim, a friend he would trust with his life.

The Merchants' Guild

Two newly hired guards stand at the entrance to the Guild. PCs are not allowed entry but instead must talk to the clerk through a panel in the door. After convincing him of their identity, they are taken to see Aldus Vetheim. He is waiting in a plush office, talking to another merchant who is introduced as Hans Keimheim. They are offered chairs and refreshments.

Vetheim thanks the PCs for their time and asks them for their version of events. Listening carefully, he asks if they would be willing to help the Guild.

Remuneration would (of course) be offered for their time. Assuming that they say yes, he asks them to find those responsible for framing his friend and bring this information to the guild. "My friends, I know that Antonio is innocent of these crimes but that he will hang unless you can find some proof that will free him. The Guild's reputation has been damaged by this, allowing the Nobility to steal away our livelihoods as they have been doing for centuries. I ask that you will work to free Antonio and, in Verena's name, allow justice to prevail."

The amount offered to the PCs is left to the GM to decide, but it should be generous. It will be paid on completion, but a small amount can be haggled for up front to secure their commitment.

The Enemy Peer

Getting to see a representative of the Syberg-Gronzy family is very difficult. The PCs should also be aware that such an action would bring unwanted attention. As far as the family is concerned von Regenheim is the guilty party. The only people that they will be able to see are the Lord Klaus Syberg (Irina's grand uncle) or her mother.

Lord Syberg is an old man, but his mind is still sharp. He is firmly of the conviction that von Regenheim is guilty. However, he is also aware of Irina's reputation, and is therefore unhappy to have anyone going digging around for dirt. To this end he will offer the PCs a bribe to keep their noses out of it. This will be paid after a contract, drawn up by his lawyer, is signed.

Mother

Getting to see Irina's mother is easier than it might seem. The family home is open to all visitors so that they may pay their respects. If the PCs are on their best behaviour the staff will feel they cannot turn them away. Lady Syberg sits in a darkened room wearing a fashionable black mourning dress. She dabs at non-existent tears with a silk hanky, while a daughter comforts her. Even talking to her briefly, the characters will sense that she isn't really that upset. They may read more into this than is there, but the simple truth is that she disliked Irina. Her oldest daughter, born of an illicit affair, had been a disappointment to her. She blames her for her own death.

However, Lady Syberg is milking the grief for all it is worth, and getting lots of sympathy. Irina was last seen five days ago leaving the house with her friend Francine Seigel - "such a good family." Irina had been depressed ever since her fiancée - "I don't think we should mention his name at his time" - recently left her for another woman.

Her kidnapping was witnessed by one of the maids, who raised the alarm. But by then it was too late. Her brother in law, Baron Staffan, received the ransom note; she never saw it. He has dealt with the entire affair on her behalf. If asked why her husband didn't deal with it she shrugs, giving the firm impression she doesn't have much faith in him. Irina's father is unaware of the death of his daughter, being away on business. He does not get on with either of his brothers, being an honourable and timid sort. He

dropped the Gronzy part of the name when he was younger.

Investigating Irina further may give the PCs a sense of déjà vu, perhaps having recently done the same with Boris Rotavich. Getting in to the house to investigate is a little harder this time, but talking to and bribing the servants will pay dividends.

Staff: The house is served by fifteen staff, ranging from footmen to a nine-year-old kitchen boy. All of them have felt the wrath of their mistress and her surviving daughter on regular occasions. The master of the house is usually absent, as is the case now. Irina was liked by many of the servants, some of whom remember her growing up. She did have a bad temper and they were aware she "didn't always act like a Lady, if you take my meaning", although they won't elaborate further.

The two staff the PCs really need to see are Helena (the maid who witnessed the kidnapping) and Artur the Butler. In her late teens, Helena is nervous talking to the PCs, and is still plainly upset that she didn't raise the alarm in time. She had been cleaning the ashes from the fireplace when she heard a noise in the corridor. Investigating, she saw two men taking Irina out and she hid until they had gone. Then she raised the alarm. If asked, Helena says Irina wasn't struggling, but "poor mistress would have been too scared". Both of the men were armed with swords and she couldn't see the faces. All she can remember is that one of the men had a plaited beard and the other one was shorter, "not much taller than a Dwarf."

If asked if she knows of any reason why anyone would want Irina dead, Helena shakes her head. She suspects, as do all the staff, that Irina was killed by von Regenheim as the result of an affair gone wrong. If the PCs get her onto this subject it becomes clear she is holding something back. With a little gentle pushing, she says she knew that Irina was seeing a man who the family would disapprove of. He wasn't of the aristocratic class, but she was in love with him. She thinks his name is Leko Busko. She thinks this is the real reason her engagement was called off.

Artur has been with the household for thirty years and is very loyal. He was fond of Irina but was also aware that some of her behaviour was reckless. Irina once asked him to escort her to a tavern in the Eldenstadt district, and then swore him to silence when he did so. From his description, the PCs will, if they visited it earlier, recognise it as the Vodka House on Nortwag. This was some months ago; she went there to meet Leko.

If asked about distinguishing features, Helena and Lady Syberg are aware that Irina has a small birthmark on her left thigh. Artur also remembers this from her childhood. However, they will not volunteer this information.

Irina's Room. Her room is untouched. Neat and feminine, it is surprisingly small compared to many of the guestrooms. There is no jewellery and few personal items. If the PCs ask the maid, she will be able to tell that some of the clothes are missing. The assumption was that she had packed to leave. Under the bed can be found a small miniature portrait. Of the style worn in a locket, it is a painting of a younger Lady Syberg. Irina discarded it before she absconded.

Friends: Irina's social circle was a mixture of young nobles and merchants. All are from very wealthy or influential families and almost without fail they are incredibly obnoxious and patronising. All of them



have a fear that the lower class will rise up against them one day and see the PCs as being at the forefront of this invasion. Where the PCs catch up with them depends on the GM, but a party or an upmarket tavern seems likely. Some of them will certainly be drunk, and others seem to be high.

All of them are shocked by Irina's death. They know she slept around and took plenty of drugs, but they all do much the same and so don't think anything of it. They all have theories about her death, but most believe the story that came out in court.

One girl is particularly upset at the mention of Irina's name. This is Francine Seigel, her best friend for many years. She was aware of many of Irina's activities and - although occasionally joining her under protest - disapproved. Seigel acted as cover on a number of occasions so that Irina could see Leko. She knows she loved him deeply, although Seigel didn't trust him. Despite his good clothes, he was obviously from the wrong side of town. In fact, Leko is known to the entire social circle, with whom he was allowed to socialise. The reason was simple; he supplied them with cheap, quality drugs. This is where the lovers first met. Leko stopped meeting with the group after he beat one of them unconscious in a fight, no longer able to tolerate their jibes about his lowly station.

Also on the edge of this social circle is Nadja Kreuzer, the woman who spoke at the trial. She wasn't as close as Seigel, but is from a better family. She was asked by Baron Staffan to say some words as to "Irina's good nature, her fine upstanding upbringing and good blood." She was more than happy to do so.

The Funeral: Irina's funeral takes place four days after her death. She is to be buried at the Grünschaten Cemetery. The ceremony will be attended by over two hundred people, and officiated over by a Cleric of Taal and a Cleric of Morr. The Mourners arrive in a line of coaches and leave the same way, protected the whole time by a dozen or so guards. Some of the most powerful people in the city are in attendance, and those in the know use it as an opportunity to observe current political allegiances. The PCs will have no opportunity to speak to any member of the family, and persistent attempts to do so will get them arrested. If the PCs blunder in, make them suffer. These are powerful, noble families, and they do not take lightly to armed, stropy commoners accusing them of all sorts of crimes. (They will take this line whether the PCs accuse anyone of anything or not.) It would be conceivable for a particularly tactless PC to get themselves charged with attempted murder. Such charges do not have to be fair. If they have met any of Irina's friends then they will be able to speak to them here, although Nadja Kreuzer will not be present.

Guild of Mourners

Irina's body was brought here after it was found. It was then prepared for burial before being taken to the graveyard. If the PCs arrive before the funeral they will not be permitted to view it, although Brother Martjin will be happy to talk to them. He dealt with the body and its preparation and remembers the dead girl very clearly. He believes that she was tied up, and that she suffocated to death - although her face was also badly carved up. If asked directly about whether she was recognisable, he will pause and then confirm that this might be enough to disguise her face from those don't know her well. He is certain that she had no birthmark. It was Baron Syberg-Gronzy who came

to identify the body. Due to the injuries, the Baron really did believe that this was Irina.

Merchant (Barsky)

Barsky knows nothing of the murder, but the PCs may decide to track him down. He is staying in Schaffenhorst at the comfortable and clean Empress Otillia Inn. When the PCs arrive, they see a coach outside guarded by two armed soldiers. The livery (a spilt shield with a bear holding a shield in one half, the other showing a mounted knight) of the men and vehicle is that of the Syberg-Gronzys. Baron Staffan is inside with three guards, putting his case to Barsky. He is making a firm attempt to try and discredit the whole merchant's guild in Talabheim. The Baron has detailed the full gory story of von Regiheim's crime, throwing in other rumours concerning von Regiheim and the Guild in general. Getting close enough to hear it will be difficult but a sneaky plan or *Excellent Hearing* might succeed. By the time the Baron leaves, Barsky is convinced that the future of the deal lies with the Syberg-Gronzys. However, as is his habit, he has asked for a day to think on the Baron's proposals.

If the PCs talk to Barsky afterwards he will tell them that he has dropped out of talks of with the Merchants' Guild and intends to sign with the Syberg-Gronzy family the next day. He was appalled at von Regiheim's crimes. What Barsky won't say, but which is at least as important to him, is that he realises how difficult it would be to work in Talabheim with opposition from the nobility.

Fiancée

The fiancée can be found at the Great Northern Lodge, a club for young gentlemen. Lord Klaus Lieberswitz will be happy to talk to the PCs about Irina. However, they won't be able to talk to him inside the club unless one of the PCs is a noble - and even then the "common sorts" must wait outside.

In his thirties, Lieberswitz is a handsome and well dressed but pompous man, mostly concerned with appearances. His family name is the most important thing he possesses, which, as his family owes thousands, is not a particularly long list. He is quick to disassociate himself from Irina, but he did have a genuine soft spot for her. A mutual friend arranged the engagement, and he was quick to see the advantages. His family owned a number of wine concessions in the city, and giving these up for the clearing of his debts was a small price to pay.

Lieberswitz broke off the engagement when he found out she was acting immorally, sleeping around with all sorts of men. His most loyal manservant, Castell, saw her with a pair of "rough sorts" in one of the city slums. He travelled to her home to confront her and found her intoxicated. She refused to deny her behaviour and said she loved this ruffian she had been seeing. Greatly upset, Lieberswitz stormed out, cancelling the engagement with a letter to her uncle. He also demanded payment for "his losses" - something that is yet to be forthcoming. He hasn't pushed this claim, knowing that he should not make more of an enemy of the Syberg-Gronzys than he already has.

Lieberswitz will allow them to speak to Castell if they so choose. A thickset man with a bulldog loyalty to his master, he is to be found in the Club's kitchen enjoying the fire and some soup. He won't speak a bad word about Lieberswitz, but is happy to slur Irina. He doesn't hold back, calling her a whore and a slut. He had been visiting his sister in Ostenfeld (which is not really a slum) when he had seen Irina

("tarted up like a good-time girl"). She was in the company of two men, one of whom she was acting intimately with (Leko). The other was a fat man with only one ear, holding a pair of white dogs on leashes. He had got close enough to her voice, and even heard the younger man she was with call her "my Duchess Irina". He is in no doubt that it was she. He came to the club immediately to tell his Lord.

Strangely, enough he saw the young man with red hair that she had been with some days later. Lord Lieberswitz had been at court fighting a case (he owed money to a merchant who had supplied him with clothes and jewellery) when he had seen the man talking to a court clerk he knew, Claus Antonov.

If the PCs speak to other nobles or associated staff about Lieberswitz, the superficial details of his story will be confirmed. He was indeed to be married to Irina, an engagement broken off after three months. Many rumours were in circulation about the relationship. Many asked why such a lower tier noble as Lieberswitz, widely known to be bankrupt, was favoured with the hand of a Syberg-Gronzy. Some say that their fathers were friends (false) while others say that the Baron was glad to be rid of his niece. Other rumours, common when she was first born, resurfaced questioning her legitimacy. When the engagement was broken, many believed he had instead fallen in love with a lady from Nuln whose company he was seen to be keeping.

The Watch

Again, if approached, the Watch aren't overly eager to help the PCs. Certainly any suggestion they are trying to free von Regiheim will be treated with scorn and get them kicked out of the Watch House. However, a small bribe, or even just buying an off-duty member of the Watch a drink, will get them the latest gossip.

The body was found in a field just outside the city. When the Watch arrived they found her tied up, the body covered in dried blood. Next to her lay a sack, and they suspect she was suffocated with this. This has since gone missing.

The Watch were stumped as to the identity of the girl until a prisoner who was about to be hung confessed to the crime. Apparently, he had been paid to kidnap the girl and handed her over to his employer, who he named as von Regiheim. In his confession he said von Regiheim gloated that he would use her to make himself rich before butchering her. Unfortunately, the criminal was hung before the Wardens passed on news of the killing.

The dead man was Claudio Rheims, a well known burglar and occasional heavy. He had been accused of crippling a member of the Watch as he escaped; in fact, the watchman had failed to leap the same gap Rheims had just jumped. The confession was forged and signed by the Governor of the Prison, a friend of Baron Syberg-Gronzy. The PCs will not be able to find a Warden that was present at the confession (as there was none). Only if they know someone in the prison or offer a heavy bribe will they see the confession. Nothing new can be learnt from this.

However, there is a more damning piece of evidence that PCs who follow up this incident will discover - one overlooked in the Baron's careless arrogance. Rheims was arrested the day before Irina Gronzy was kidnapped. However, this fact alone will not be enough to have von Regiheim freed.

The Weakest Link

If the PCs do manage to capture Zanovat, he will resist telling them anything without torture. As soon



him, or indeed threaten him physically. He will try and make a deal in which he will hand over the information if they do not mention his or Olvaga's involvement in the scheme. Quick thinking PCs will realise that having a Magistrate owe them a favour is a worthwhile reward.

Antonov was asked to arrange the meeting with Erichmann as a favour by Andrei Steblou, secretary to Lord Sasha Kalmikov, one of the Peers, and was also asked to carry out whatever task was required. The meeting was arranged in the tavern called Barrer's Flame, where he was to ask for Erichmann. The innkeeper pointed him out, and Antonov saw him talking to two men. The first was tall, blond, with plaited beard and a bad scar over his eye, while the second was shorter, with red hair. The shorter one left straight away, while the blond one whispered to the man before disappearing. Ragast Erichmann himself was tall and heavily set, dressed in black

as any threats of torture are made good he will tell them what they want to know. However, it is assumed that it will be the clerk Wimpiski that PCs will get their hands on. Wherever they do this he won't resist, shaking nervously as he truthfully answers any questions.

Zanovat was given the evidence to plant by Claus Antonov, a clerk at the nearby Lower Court. Antonov acts as a liaison between Zanovat and Magistrate Olvaga. Usually, it is a simple financial arrangement, Zanovat paying the Magistrate to pass certain sentences or to use his influence in the circles of power. Occasionally, though, Olvaga asks a favour, and Zanovat considers it to his advantage to keep the Magistrate happy.

Claus Antonov

The PCs will not be able to track down Antonov until after Antonio von Regiheim has been arrested for murder, although they may have learnt of his role before this. Antonov is easy to track down at the Courts, where he is well known. Smartly dressed, but with blotchy skin and lank hair, he is friendly and talkative but will intelligently sound the PCs out before giving them any information. He has acted as Magistrate Olvaga's right hand man for fifteen years, and whilst not friends, they are aware their present good fortune is reliant on each other. Simply, Antonov arranges the deals, collects the money and pays Olvaga after taking his cut. Even a cursory examination of Antonov shows he lives way beyond his apparent means. However, Antonov is well aware of the precarious position he occupies. The Vory have become increasingly insistent lately, and have started over-using the services of the Magistrate, something that places them all in danger. He also suspects he and the Magistrate would be killed rather than helped if they became a liability.

The PCs will be able to get the pertinent information out of Antonov if they threaten to expose

leather, and spoke with a Northern accent. The blond man was Erichmann's associate Alain Grubbelheim. The other man was Leko himself - If the PCs have a description, they should be reasonably sure of this. Antonov didn't know Erichmann, but correctly suspects his identity: he is a renowned murderer and thief in the pay of an unscrupulous and ambitious noble. Why he is Talabheim, why he wished to arrange the crime, or what his link with Lord Kalmikov is, he has no idea. In fact Kalmikov is not involved in anyway but he does use the magistrates services from time to time.

The meeting was brief. The man handed over the brooch and bag and gave clear instructions of what should be done with them and when. He was surprised to hear that the victim was Irina Gronzy, as Lord Kalmikov is a known associate and friend of the Baron. Since then, however, he has heard rumours that the girl is alive. Two days after the meeting he saw the man again, this time entering 'The Blind Beggar' inn in Schaffenhorst.

Olvaga

The PCs will not be able to meet Magistrate Olvaga. He is guarded at all times, and should they break into his home and threaten him he will promptly die of a heart attack. If the PCs have been seen entering or have left evidence (a broken window or dead bodyguard, for example) this will be treated as murder.

The Blind Beggar

This grotty three-story inn stands out from the surrounding houses only by virtue of its rusting sign. The owners have made no effort to convert it into a more standard inn layout and thus it remains laid out as it did when it was a family home. It is a mess of small rooms, the owner and his family living in the old servants' quarters. The front room holds a small bar and is full during the evening. The door is always

open and a bell on the wall summons the landlord.

Kapo the landlord is a dour, miserable, middle aged man who has little time for his customers. As he sees it he provides cheap, dry(ish) rooms, and what more can they expect? The price of a room doesn't cover any loyalty to his clientele; thus he will be perfectly happy to point out the top floor room belonging to Ragast and Grubbelheim. He doesn't think they are currently there at present.

If you feel the PCs haven't yet done enough investigation into the other parts of the scenario then neither Grubbelheim nor Erichmann are here. However, if they have, then Alain Grubbelheim is in their room. He is the man described by Claus Antonov (tall, blond, plaited beard, bad scar over eye) and is Ragast's sidekick. As the PCs are heading up to his room he will open the door and spot the PCs. Unless they completely ignore him (very unlikely) he will run back inside the room and yank a bed in front of the door. He will then climb out the window and attempt to escape over the rooftops. The GM can use this as an opportunity for a long chase for the PCs, with rolls for leaping across roofs and climbing wet tiles, perhaps finishing with a fight among the chimneys. However, Grubbelheim should not be taken alive. It should not be too difficult to contrive his death; one way or another, he will end up falling to the streets below.

In the room, behind a bed, the PCs will find a ten-year-old child bleeding heavily with a dagger sticking from his stomach. Dressed in rags and dirty, he was delivering a message to Grubbelheim, and had sneaked past Kapo as ordered by Ragast. Grubbelheim stabbed him to silence him when he was spotted. His name is Feil and he begs by day, living in the Old City at night. He was given two shillings to bring Grubbelheim to The Great Eastern inn in Ostfeld. If the PCs get Feil to a physician quickly they will save his life.

The room is bare of anything of importance. The PCs will discover various small bits of clothing, weapons and armour while a through search recovers a purse with 10GCs 5/-. The purse itself is made of velvet, but also has a crest sewn on. This belongs to the Syberg-Gronzy family. There are no other clues.

Whatever the PCs do they will not encounter Ragast here. He is too clever to be caught in any trap and will spot them if they wait for him or else see Grubbelheim's body splattered on the street. The PCs only real tactic at this point is to head to Barrer's Flame to track down Erichmann.

The Great Eastern

By the time the PCs reach the inn, Erichmann is gone. For a few shillings the barkeep will "remember" seeing Erichmann waiting. He also arranged for Feil to deliver a message, although he has no idea of what the message was. He was sitting with a short man, stocky and "Dwarf like", although he is certain he is not a Dwarf. The barkeep is also sporting a cut lip from where Erichmann hit him, thinking he was trying to listen in on his conversation. Erichmann wasn't far wrong as it happens; the barkeep heard them saying that the girl wasn't dead and that the Kislevite kid had tricked them.

Finding Leko

Finding Erichmann now is going to be a difficult task. However, the PCs should be aware that Leko is involved somehow. Tracking him down will be easier, especially as they know people who know him. Asking about Leko in the Vodka Houses of

Eldenstadt, they will eventually hear the rumour that Leko has set him self up on the other side of town in Ostenfeld. However no-one knows any details on this, however, as he has cut himself off from his old acquaintances.

Asking around Ostenfeld for Leko will be a long and fruitless task. However, if they have the information that he was seen with a large man carrying two dogs, things will be easier. Locals will know that the area around the eastern gate of the Old City has a reputation for crime and prostitution, and once the PCs arrive here they will find people who know of this man. His man is Wim Klammer and he a well-known pimp, often to be found in The Ostenfeld Hearth tavern.

The Ostenfeld Hearth

A grim, often violent place, the PCs will have difficulty getting answers out of the patrons of the tavern. Unless they try and accost one of them on their own, then the best plan is to pretend to be looking for the man to arrange a prostitute. When they do get someone to talk, the informant will whisper that Klammer runs a brothel on Braunstrasse. The brothel is doing well as they have a duchess working there. It will also be mentioned that another man was just asking after the "Duchess"... The description matches that of Ragast Erichmann. It will be obvious that the PCs are on a tight schedule, as Erichmann is obviously rushing to kill Irina Gronzy and clear up any proof of what has gone on.

The Brothel

Erichmann is just ahead of the party in racing to the brothel. Leko has put Irina to work, successfully "selling her" as The Duchess. Splitting his profits with Klammer, she was located in his brothel. The brothel is located in a large and grand building that once used to be a hotel. When the PCs arrive, Erichmann has already caused a stir. The bouncer on the door is lying unconscious on the floor, blood dripping from a wound in his head. Inside, a number of the girls are nervously standing around the foot of the stairs. The brothel's madam, a middle aged woman, is sitting in a chair, shaking in shock. The prostitutes will say that a man came in and asked to see The Duchess. When he was told he would have to wait he started to get angry. It was then that The Duchess's friend, the young man with red hair (Leko), suddenly appeared and shouted for the bouncer to get rid of him. The intruder made short work of him and then chased after the young man.

On the first floor corridor, more girls and some customers are gathered around a door. From inside, shouting can be heard. When the PCs arrive they see a chaotic scene; a naked Irina Gronzy is screaming in the corner of the room, and Leko is standing in front of her, sword drawn. Ragast is facing them, his own sword out, the tip covered in blood. On the floor lies the girl's dead customer. Erichmann wants Irina and Leko dead, and Leko is really only concerned for his own life. Irina will try and protect Leko.

Outcomes

Should Erichmann succeed in killing Irina Gronzy then Antonio von Regiheim will hang for her murder. The body alone is not enough to prove his innocence. After all, it's not impossible to get "someone who looked like her", and the Baron will have far more influence in court. Syberg-Gronzy will also win the Barsky contract.

If Irina Gronzy is taken alive from the brothel and returned to her family or other authorities, then

they will have no option but to release von Regiheim. The PCs may even receive a reward for their efforts, although it will be made clear this is for their silence. Baron Staffan will ensure that Irina Gronzy is quickly placed in an asylum to try and cure her of her deviant ways. The merchant guild and von Regiheim will owe the party a huge favour.

As far as the main players, the guild and Baron Gronzy, are concerned, the bottom line is who is awarded the contract for importing furs. Grigori



Barsky will award to the Syberg-Gronzy family unless the PCs tell him what has happened, and satisfy his questions as to the actions of both groups. Although the PCs may strongly suspect that Baron Syberg-Gronzy is involved up to his neck, they will have little way of proving this. Trying to get others to believe them will get them labelled as idiots. Dangerous idiots in fact. The PCs should realise that their best option is just to walk away.

If Erichmann escapes, the PCs will have made a dangerous enemy. What his plans are in Talabheim is up for the GM to decide.

THE MAIN PLAYERS

Grigori Barsky Kislevite Merchant

A bear of a man, Barsky is always dressed in the furs he makes his living from. His huge beard, black but streaked with ginger, seems to merge into the animal fur. An honourable, intelligent and capable man, he started in life as a trapper, taught the art from an early age by his father. However, in his twentieth year he was badly wounded by a pack of wolves. Near death, a trader nursed him back to health. As he slowly recovered, he learnt the art of selling and proved to have a real flair for it. Travelling to the nearest town he made a fortune trading the furs the trader had bought that year. In the years that followed he became the spokesman for a group of Kislevite traders and merchants. Recently they decided to try and expand their operations, and Barsky was sent to Talabheim.

Antonio von Regiheim Merchant & Social Reformer

A widower in his late thirties, von Regiheim has dedicated the years since his wife's death to trying to reform many of Talabheim's antiquated laws. Many a cynic has pointed out that the changes he is fighting for all concern the lifting of trade restrictions on the non-nobility, and thus directly benefit him as a merchant. However, this ignores the fact that he truly believes that such changes will benefit all citizens of Talabheim. Although he spent many years building

up his trading concerns (mostly importing and exporting various sought after items from Kislev) this has taken a back seat recently. He is a senior member of the Talabheim Merchants' Guild and is well liked by his fellow merchants.

Irina Gronzy Kidnap Victim

Darkly attractive, on the surface Irina is the very epitome of Talabheim nobility; charming and well aware of the rules of the game. However, she has a deeply rebellious streak. Her father was rarely around, and when he was, he ignored her. Her mother just criticised her and made it clear that her younger sister was her favourite child. Irina tried her best to fit in, but recently just gave up and threw herself into a hedonistic lifestyle of drugs, drink and sex. Leko was the first man that seemed to look after her and she fell in love with him, but still had dozens of relationships, many with married men. During these she began to discover many truths about her uncle the Baron.

With her father unwilling to deal with her, the Baron decided to take her to task for her decreasing reputation. Aware that he could destroy her, she tried to seduce him. Never able to turn down a beautiful woman, they slept together. She now had some power over him but foolishly revealed that she knew several sordid secrets about his life. In doing so, she sealed her fate. When Leko came to her and said she was in danger she believed him. In his power and addicted to the drugs he supplied, she agreed to do whatever he wanted to make them some money "to secure their future together".

Ragast Erichmann Henchmen & Villian

The illegitimate son of an Ostland Noble, Ragast (pictured on page 41) was born to a servant girl raped by her master. However, his father, a devout Sigmarite, was ordered by the local cleric to be responsible for him. The noble brought him up but his childhood was one of cruelty and abuse. He grew up cold and detached from those around him, but kept his sadistic streak well hidden. When he was fifteen he stabbed his half brother to death in an argument, but escaped the bounty hunters sent on his trail. In Talabheim he made a living as a street crook, known for his casual willingness to use violence. In time he was betrayed by an associate and arrested. Instead of being sent to prison he agreed to join the army in a campaign against orc raiders.

He served ten years in the army, honing his natural skills until he was a without equal amongst the foot soldiers. Not everyone appreciated his arrogance, though. The day before he was to become a free man he murdered an officer, escaping as he done so many years before. He had no trouble finding work as a mercenary, eventually coming to work for a Noble living in the north of The Empire. The noble had grand plans of power, and Erichmann soon became his valued right hand man in carrying out tasks wherever needed.

He is currently travelling with Alain Grubbelheim, an associate from his mercenary years. He knows that Grubbelheim will protect his back and stand by him if needed. However, such loyalty is fragile. Erichmann is a competent and ruthless operator and should be a worthwhile foe for the PCs. He is intelligent, with a sharp tactical brain. He is also more than capable of holding his own in a fight. He will not be afraid to cut and run if outnumbered.

He has a rugged and scared face, and his eyes



ten of his men to die while he escaped. Those who have come to know him for any length of time find out he is amoral and evil. He has few ambitions or pleasures and just travels through life seeing what happens. If he hurts a few people on the way, then so be it. Such "talents" were recognised by Erichmann who saw him as a kindred spirit. Although he has come to trust Erichmann, he is more than aware that he would be cut loose if it came to it. Still, he would do no less.

Sven Vidarson

Thug
Sven is a heavy, brought along by Erichmann at the climax of the scenario. He is a mean and bitter Norseman, his life plagued by his short stature. Many have mocked him for this saying that he has Dwarf blood. Thus, he has been in more brawls than he cares to remember. He has also gained an animosity against Dwarfs.

Leko Busko
Villian on the make

Growing up in the poverty of Eldenstadt, Leko was always desperate to move on and expand his horizons. His uncle trained him to be a pickpocket, and he plied his trade in the city's markets. He moved onto burglary when his uncle was caught and hung for his crimes. Some time later Leko befriended Boris Rotavich, seeing him as a source of money, while introducing him to the low life of Eldenstadt. Around the same period, Leko began selling drugs, mainly to the sons and daughter of the merchants. They introduced him to a group of nobles including Irina Gronzy. Sensing she was attracted to him, he began a relationship with her. This led to Erichmann contacting him.

Although he is in his late twenties, Leko

maintains his boyish looks and charm. His hair is a dark red and he is particularly vain about it. He relies solely on himself, but is skilful at manipulating others to trust him. His ultimate goal is to gain respect and power, and he attempts to get this through money. He wears brash clothes, often with cheaply dyed fur collars. He carries a pair of daggers wherever he goes and keeps a broadsword hidden in his home in Ostenfeld, where he moved after deciding to leave Eldenstadt far behind.

Baron Staffan 'The Stone' Syberg-Gronzy
Noble & Merchant

Although his elder brother sits in the Peer House, Baron Staffan is the real power behind the Syberg-Gronzy family. The Baron controls the family's trade interests as well as their extensive lands, which are concentrated in Eastern Talabecland and Kislev but include small holdings across The Empire. He stills sees Kislev as his spiritual home, but rarely leaves Talabheim. He is extremely adept at playing the political game and makes a formidable team with his brother.

Even considering the power and arrogance of the Talabheim nobility, Staffan's immorality and greed is remarkable. He has never been afraid of using violence, blackmail or any other methods to achieve his goals. He is also an avaricious womaniser, but for him the conquest is all important. Certainly he has never been able to resist a woman, and has had affairs with his younger brother's wife and, of late, slept with his niece (although he was aware that she was not related through blood). He is a dangerous opponent, although he considers few 'commoners' worthy of his attention. Thus if the PCs do ruin his plans they do not necessarily have anything to fear.

Greying at the temples, the Baron is a handsome man, always dressed in the finest fashions, carrying a gold, jewel-encrusted swordstick. He is also rarely seen without a bearskin cloak, which has led to his nickname of The Bear. He also has the more common nickname of The Stone, earned for his negotiating techniques (as in "getting blood from a stone"). He is never seen without a pair of bodyguards and one or more servants. He makes a great display of his wealth and power and is known to lash out at those in his way. To others in the nobility or those he deals with in business, he is genial and witty.

He is married, but loathes his wife and has little time for his three young children.

are humourless and make people uncomfortable around him. In Talabheim, he will be dressed in black leather armour. He carries a sword at all times, one stolen from the officer he murdered - although the coat of arms has been scratched off. He also has a pistol secreted about his person, shot and powder hidden with his money in a secret pocket.

Alain Grubbelheim
Heachman

Tall and blond, Grubbelheim would be described as handsome if it weren't for the bad scar over his eye and the sneer on his face. His other notable feature is a plaited beard. The son of a mercenary, he followed his father in the unit's baggage train until he was old enough to fight. Although a competent fighter he gained a reputation as being unreliable, once leaving

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THE MOST NOBLE OF CITIES
Part Two of our Talabheim background takes us into the city itself.

THE NINE TRIBES
A look at the Tribes of Sigmar's time.

THE VON BILDHOFENS
An examination of this influential family.
& MUCH, MUCH MORE...

OUT
SUMMER
2001



SP

I Know Not, The Birth of Fox Crowe

Part Three of Three

by Ourobours

Assassins throughout the world live around us as shadows in the walls. I should know. I've been an Assassin for nearly a decade. Sometimes we masquerade as businessmen, sometimes as Watchmen, sometimes as bounty hunters; sometimes we are noble sons destined not to inherit. Some, like me, are simply men too small to care how they make their living, and too good at murder to do anything else. We have our meeting places, though they are smaller than you might surmise.

I knelt, removed a manhole cover from one of Wolfenburg's main pipe-ways, and lowered myself in. My boots sunk ankle-deep in the fresh-water slush that crept along the tunnel floor and I almost cried out as the liquid sent needles of cold into every bone of my feet. I dragged the cover back over the opening, cutting off Manslieb and Morrslieb like the lid of a tomb. Within moments, I had a lantern lit and was moving in a crouched run through the pipes that all led to the same place. Wolfenburg had an aqueduct to bring in fresh water from the Middle Mountains. Pipes, dating back to classical times, funneled the water to the city's many fountains where men may stop and fetch water whenever it pleased them. The water was all sent out from a single location where it was collected and distributed: the Cistern. The system worked on the simple principles of gravity, and needed little or no upkeep. No one ever bothered to check on a system that worked, and so it has been the meeting place for the Guild for all recorded memory.

Kings, Emperors and common men suspect an assassin behind every tree and

curtain. In reality there were only five in all of Wolfenburg. Two were now dead; I used to be the third. As I approached the small, man-made cavern, the smells of food reached me and I knew that Tabakov, the Master, was there. He always was.

Tabakov was surrounded by braziers burning a foul, too-sweet incense that clawed at the eyes and lungs. His doublet strained at his waistline and his jowls rested firmly on his chest, swallowing his neck completely. I pulled myself up into the Cistern, passing bas-reliefs of naked women pouring water from ever-full jugs as the Master of the Assassins Guild was cleaning the meat from a turkey leg. He wiped plump, nearly spherical palms against velvet pantaloons, stretched nearly full. Wide, useless feet wiggled in satisfaction as nameless slaves toiled at the braziers to prepare a never-ending march of food. He flopped back a mop of greasy, stringy hair and shoved fried potatoes into his face. The aged, rusted grate that separated the Cistern from the waterways a few feet beneath us groaned under my weight as I closed the distance. Four of the five slaves, their flesh drained of colour and their limbs devoid of fat or muscle, moved around him on his wooden throne to adjust a pillow here, a blanket there. The last of the zombie crew was providing the constant stream of food and drink. If he ever left, if he had a home, or another life, I did not know of it. I had never seen him otherwise than he was right then, fed and pampered by his slaves in this waterway beneath the streets.

His black, pig-like eyes alit on me, finally torn from the silver plates laden with steaming feasts. He spoke from around a mouth of turkey. It would not have mattered if it were otherwise, for his mouth always sounded full.

"Lukas! I was about to send some shadows to fetch you. I have heard some rather disturbing whispers from the Grand Sage. I thought you might be able to shed some light upon them. Please help yourself." He said calmly waving his hand towards the food.

I towered over him, his body laid out as a perfect target, but he pulled out a large, leather pouch and laid it on the table. The dull metallic clink spoke volumes about its hidden charge. It was a sack of gold. Small shadows within began to reach for me and clench my gut with the hunger for it. With enough gold, no man holds sway over any other; no drought, no blight, no sickness can claim him that cannot be bought away. Gold was the master of men's lives – mine as well. I managed to shake my head as my breathing quickened with the anticipation of wealth.

The lump of flesh before me waved off his servitors and leaned forward, huge belly straining his clothing at odd angles, pulling at the white undertunic as his fat jiggled grotesquely. His sausage-like fingers opened the pouch with astonishing dexterity, spilling golden coins into my sight. "I have a most dangerous mission that has met with some... difficulty." He swallowed a mouthful of beef, but it didn't help the words escaping his mouth. "There are rumors that the difficulty is you, Lukas." He paused for a moment. "I do not put too much stock in the tales of Shadows. Informants can be so undependable, you see." He leaned back, as if relinquishing the gold to me, and folded his hands on his massive lumpy chest. "Perhaps, given time, I could forget the rumors that seek to rust your reputation. I have a contract that needs fulfilling tonight. A noble lady needs to meet you, my friend. This sack here says you will reach her."

My world had spiraled down upon the coins flowing from the purse. The gold alone was a shining castle, a warm hearth, and protection from the long and bitter trek from my broken and burnt home...

You are a Hero, Fox Crowe. You always have been, and you always will be.

I screwed my eyes shut and felt the Seed within me begin to grow. My life was a graveyard filled with the corpses of other people's families. The road had been washed with blood and paved with skulls. All I was and all I am is a pit. A pit with a mouth wide enough to swallow anyone worth coin.

"Come now, Lukas. Eat something; you look very pale. Just take the purse, drink some wine, and I will let you know the name of her."

A Phantom Angel holds out to me Khaine and Morr, the jeweled Scorpion and the poor Raven. A horde of nightmare creations breaches the gates with terrifying ease. A sword sputters and flares as it is corrupted in its purpose.

A scream, crystal pure and resonant, shatters the half-remembered indifference to the plight of my fellow men.



"Her name is Aelia. She is an Elector to the Empire."
"So you know of her? Who spoke of this? Perhaps we can find out the spy that caused Karl and Sandra to fail."

I know what I have been, what I am. I am no Hero, but I am no longer an Assassin, either. The Animal wroked, and began to paw within me. I opened my eyes. "I am your Spy."

I would like to tell you he folded like a shoddily made privy, but it would be a lie. His face was as untroubled as a tranquil pond. He pursed his huge, bloated lips for a moment and nodded sagely. "I thought as much."

I half heard the taut line releasing, and I knew I was a dead man. The world was caught in amber. The animal leapt into me, into my muscles from my soul and threw me to the side. A slave was turning her dead eyes to me. A goblet of grease was edging off a hunk of pork into the brazier sending choking smoke into the air. Lazy tendrils of incense simply halted and spun about me like ghosts waiting to collect my soon-wayward spirit. I watched the bolt rush to me like a longing lover seeking my heart. It edged along, inching across the distance from the darkened passage where my killer was still holding the spent crossbow. The bolt was expertly fired, my reaction second-rate and off-balance, a wild gambit to prolong my life a few short breaths. Headless of my effort, too strong for the whisper mail I wore, the bolt should have cored me and ended my life in an instant. As I fell to the rusty grate, it cracked against the wall five paces behind me.

It had missed.

Brogan Kalinstein, a long, muscular man, pulled himself into the Cistern from a darkened water pipe. He drew his two long-swords as I drew my Phantom Angel and my newly purchased short-sword. He came in cautiously, but purposefully, edging in for a kill. You see, from the time we join the guild, we buy our lessons from our seniors. We pay them from our contracts to teach us how to kill. Each successive generation of the guild is thus more deadly, filled with techniques from all its members throughout the years. I know fighting styles from Cathay, Nippon, Araby and Kislev; places I have never visited myself. Unfortunately, so did Brogan.

The Animal leapt into my arms, but I refused to give it control. I was going to need all of me to kill him. Brogan, bedecked in coarse, utilitarian clothing, looked more a mercenary than a poisoner; the gray paste that coated his weapons told another tale. He hefted the blades and spread them out, just off center to his right and left.

"I can make it quick, Lukas, for old time's sake." He waited a half beat for me to reply – then attacked, swinging a sword in from either side, hoping to catch me with my mouth open and my weapons quiet. No such luck; I know that trick. Talking distracts you from fighting. Do one or the other. My blades met his, my heavier Phantom ringing clear and crisp and pushing his long-sword out of the way. My short-sword, much lighter, was almost tossed aside by his strike, but held true just the same. The opening he left me was a classical mistake when people fight with two weapons. Never strike with both weapons at once, as the enemy will parry them both, and you will be standing there with your middle hanging open for all the world to see, just like Brogan here. My foot lashed out, caressing his groin with no small force and sending him sprawling. I suppose a hero would have backed off and taunted him, allowing him to feel humiliated by his lapse of skill and caution. I guess I am no hero.

I moved in mercilessly, a wind of storming steel. He recovered well, slinging his blades about himself, attacking and defending with each blade in turn. Our strikes began to ring inside the Cistern like a nightmare chorus of bells. Each echo bled into the next peal of laughter from our razor-edged femme-fatales.

We were intent upon each other, shutting out the moons, the planet, the city, the street, the pipes, the Cistern. All that existed in our duel were two masters of death, waltzing toward oblivion. A single cut from his coated blades meant my agonized death, a single kiss from mine may kill, but would more than likely only slow him. A losing proposition on my part. I disengaged, swinging the bastard sword in a wide arc, and spun away, my short-sword gripped close to block any follow-up strike he had coming in. There was none; his lank blonde hair was plastered to his forehead above his empty eyes, his chest heaving from the exchange. He waited a moment, catching his wind. As my arms burned from the exertion, and my head began to swim, I knew I had to pull some trick out of my sleeve to win this, because I wasn't in any better shape than he. I don't know how long we had engaged, but it felt like forever.

Let's see if you see this coming... I switched my weapons, moving my lighter sword into my more strained right hand. The Phantom Angel I gripped at the unsharpened base of the blade, around the Angel's head. The blade was pointed toward the floor; the winged crosspiece and hilt were toward the ceiling. Brogan's eyes narrowed as he took in my new stance, then decided attacking was better than waiting for whatever I had in store for him. He came in and swung, and I shifted the bastard sword up to block his strike at my legs. Changing angles he looped the sword up and at my head, and I lifted the sword to catch the strike on the crosspiece. He stepped to the side, his other sword leaping forward in a strike to my vitals. I parried hurriedly and stepped inside his striking zone. Now that we were nearly face to face, even my short-sword was hard to wield. He probably took it for a mistake; he probably thought I had moved in too far. I was willing to let him.

Using the pommel of the Phantom, I pointed out that his nose was a little misshapen. Hard. Thrusting at his face, it was a simple and unwieldy club, but it shattered his nose quite nicely. I bounded back out of his striking range and let him soak in the pain for a moment. At times like this, it's important to use an enemy's feelings against him. So I smiled.

The little smirk struck home. He came in at me again and I simply deflected shot after shot with the shield-sword technique, then moved in and smashed the pommel of the sword into his left eye.

Of course, I smiled again. I was doing minimal real damage to him, but Brogan was a man. To be struck by another man, then smiled at as if you were as ineffectual as a dog on a chain, is more than some people can bare. If Brogan didn't hate me before, he hated me now. He had also seen me do this trick twice, and was ready to kill me the third time I did it. The menacing grin he gave me let me know he had figured a defence and was ready to stake his life on it. That was fine with me; so was I.

A third time I began to bound in past his swords – then pulled back.

Brogan, anticipating my closure, dropped his swords, and reached for my weapons... which, of course weren't where they were supposed to be. He began to lunge forward to grab my arms, hands, weapons, anything to keep me from killing him. He was off balance, off guard and he was way too late to recover. I backed off another step and lifted the phantom angel above my head, then plunged it into his collarbone as if it were a spear. It graded past bone and sinew, slicing tendon and vein, ravaging his lungs and ringing off his pelvis. I must have gotten his heart as well, because Brogan was a no more than a discarded puppet when he hit the floor. I sheathed my short-sword and knelt down and retrieved the Angel from his body, letting his bright heart's blood pour through the grating into the crystalline water below. I made a mental note not to drink the fountain water in Wolfenburg for a while. The

one thing that did spoil the moment was that, for once, I had managed to live up to my reputation and exit a battle unscathed, and unfortunately there was no one around to see it. No one who was going to live through this, anyway.

When I turned to face the master, his face was twisted into a hungry grimace that I was having a hard time believing was fear. "So it was you at the Grand Sage." I nodded, slinging the red stain from my sword at him, pattering him with Brogan's blood. His face contorted as his long, leech-like tongue pecked a drop from his cheek. He groaned like a man satisfied by an army of prostitutes. "Hmmm... It is too bad, Lukas. I made a lot of money from you." His slaves covered in the corner as I lifted the Phantom Angel and stalked towards their master. He was too deep in his drug-induced haze to realize he was a dead man. "But, I suppose all good things have to end, Luukkasssss..."

Paralysis washed over me as Tabakov's voice, normally distorted, became nearly unrecognizable. The smile spread, wider and wider, nearly touching his jaw line as two brown growths launched forth to frame his teeth. He stood and stretched, sending shards of velveteen and silk flying in all directions. His jowls were gone, replaced by a skeletal head with gnashing mandibles. His chest barely big enough to contain his spine, segmented with six pairs of gigantic insectoid legs folded out from where the illusion of girth was formed. They began tasting the ground, bearing his now starved body aloft. Two massive pincers swung up and began rending the air in anticipation of kneading my flesh. His legs, once mistaken as flabby tree trunks in his pantaloons, were rail thin and emaciated as the twin scorpion tails unwound from his thighs, dripping acid as they arced above and behind. His body, where it was flesh, was covered in thick, sparse black lines that could have been hair. Where his body was inhuman, he was covered in dense plates of copper-hued chitin. He loomed above me, his own flabby feet and pudgy hands hovering above the ground as he was borne aloft by his nightmare parts. These extremities shrank like emptying water-skins as massive claws burst forth, raining black ichor into the city's water.

Icy hands grasped at my innards, twisting my intestines with broken glass. My heart refused to beat in the presence of the mutant bearing down on me.

His voice sounded like rough stones being ground in the stomach of a giant as he laughed at me. One claw lashed out and tossed me into a wall where cavorting nymphs were carved. The world rocked and spun as my much-abused skull began to seep a trail of crimson into my collar. Like a tortured animal, I scrambled to my feet on base instinct alone, slinging my short-sword from its sheath to defend myself from the Master of Assassins.

"Do you like it, Lukas?" I hurled my body to the side, sprawling away from the creature as it tried to hammer me with a massive pincer. The claw shattered the iron grillwork where I had been standing and sent shrapnel to kiss my face like stinging wasps. I regained my feet only to face him again, his six legs carrying his body to me like a wind of poison.

"Do you like what our god has done for me?" I barely managed to bat one of the venomous tails away from my face before it struck, sending shock waves through my left arm and into my shoulder. I lunged forward in a desperate attack at his torso, but his many beweaponed limbs were held too far in front of his body for me to land a blow that would not expose myself to instant death.

"Do you like it?" The second tail swatted the blade from my hand while a pincer gripped my middle and began to squeeze.

"For a man whose soul is already sold, I would think you would want to live a little longer." I felt the world spiraling in, the Fog coming to claim me whole this time and spirit me off to the land of Morr. There he would set me aside to be claimed by Khaine, God of

murder. I began to hear the buffeting of thousands of wings... raven's wings... the souls I had sent to death before their time

"Don't you remember that, Lukas?" I pulled out a needle from the hidden sheath in my sleeve and shoved it into the crack of muscle where the claws joined. I pushed it in deep and twisted savagely.

"You made a bargain Lukas!" I sailed through the air and crashed against the wall, crumpling in a heap at the baseboard. My joints and back felt as if I had been run over by horses and it was all I could do to paw at the grate beneath me as my blood mingled with the water, drop by drop. My life was seeping from me in half a dozen places. The Fog rushed in again, and I pushed it back, but not so far. It haunted me, waiting finally to take me whole.

"You sold your soul, Lukas!" The Animal roared within me, urging me up, moving my body against my desire to lay back and die. I wrenched knives from their hiding places, hurling them with the Animal's pure abandon. They spiraled off the iron-like spikes of hair and caromed off thick armor plates. Tabakov plucked the needle from his claw and tossed it behind him, admiring his monster self for a moment as the slivers of steel bounced harmlessly off of him. The cold, demonic man that resided within me for so many years read off my odds of survival as just short of pure suicide. He smiled within me as my legs buckled, knowing he had been the only rational part of me all along. He was the part that sold men's lives, judged their worth, and clinically absorbed their last breaths. He prepared to do the same to me.

"You are an assassin, Lukas," hissed Tabakov; his black-eyed gaze leveled on me again, his ravaged face leering from around the mandibles that had begun to seep drool.

"And you belong to both of us!" He began to rush for me, a demon on six, spindly legs.

"You belong to me!" My hand closed on the Phantom Angel's hilt. It had been thrown here when I was first struck, and now it was in my hands again. A few weeks ago, I died with this blade in my hand, I suppose it was only fitting I do so again, this time for good. He was rushing in at full speed, his beweaponed extremities arcing back to strike. I managed to struggle to my feet...

...and felt the Seed inside me begin to sing.

"You belong to Khaine!" He struck.

I dove to one side, trailing the sword behind me to cover my flank like a shield. I felt a tail's impact on the blade and heard a scream that brought dust from between the rocks of the walls. It hit me like a physical force and sent me sprawling. I slapped the ground with my free hand, absorbing some of the shock of the fall, and rolled into a crouch. Tabakov screamed with pain as one severed tail flopped about like a landed fish. The blade of the Phantom Angel wept blue flame, fire dancing about the steel, burning the dark corrosion from itself in long streams. It was as if I had dipped it in eldritch oil and lit it aflame, for it burned like fire, but flowed like water from the blade, extinguishing as it fell to the grate below. The room was bathed in its blue glow as Tabakov reared again and launched himself toward me.

Witch-fire. The 'hunter had called the sword Witch-fire.

His many limbs shot at me, pinning me to the wall as I tried to escape. Angel lashed out, severing one claw as its mate found my thigh. My bone snapped as I parried the remaining tail, cutting it and spilling vitriol down upon the grate and upon Tabakov himself. Acid splashed my arm, sending numbing waves into my shoulder and throwing the world into an unfocused blur. The creature leaned in close to my twitching form, opening his mouth and mandibles wide to crush my head. Somewhere inside the Seed caught fire... burning into my soul past the pain and blood and tears. My eyes snapped open and burrowed into his twin dark pits.

Tabakov, for all his power had forgotten his own mortality. He had made a mistake, he had gotten his vulnerable body too close.

"My name is Crowe." I heaved with the sword, sending it singing in a horizontal arc. The Pincer about my leg jerked; once pudgy hand-claws raked at my mail. I heard a scream that sounded like a mountain itself had split asunder, then everything went black.

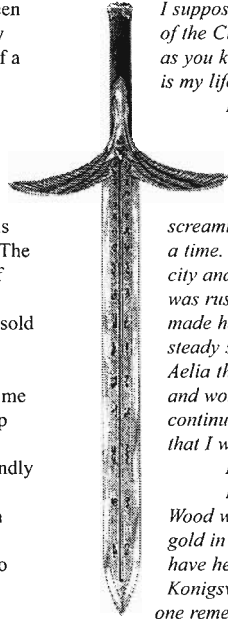
The world was in colour, bold and rich. The fir greens reached into me and pulled at me, the sparse clouds above were no mere white, but a brilliant mother of pearl. The water of the steaming pool was warm, silken and wet like a virgin's womb. The fir trees above captured my attention as they played around each other; the skeletal hands of dancing lovers.

I lifted my head from the coal-black loam to stare at a cloaked angel standing chest deep in the pond. I had known he was there. Something began to scrape my heart with veins of frost as the figure raised his arms. Two hands carved of aged alabaster emerged from within the robe woven of webs and night. He held a regal raven in his right hand, carved of ebon wood so pitted and worm-eaten it seemed to wither in his grasp. His left held the finest sculpture I had ever beheld. Easily ransomed for a king's crown, the jade scorpion glittered with gold inlay and seemed to hold an unending fury within it. He seemed to be offering the statuettes to me, waiting with the patience of one who has no life left to run out. Seeing the riches before me, I paused.

The scorpion was rich, and heavy. It was an anchor to me – one that would pull me into the mud at the bottom of the pool. I saw in the multifaceted gems along its back a thousand different fates for me, but all of them were, in the end, the same. I

would end my life empty, soulless and alone. I began to drink in the deep rich, ebon wood of the Raven. It was not worm eaten, but was made to look so by the whirls of the wood's roiling grain. Each of the paths in the wood was a mystery, a secret offered to me. Another quest, another deed, another hope.

I solemnly took the raven to my breast.



I suppose a hero would have died there, dark and alone in the recesses of the Cistern. It would be a nice, neat ending to this story. Then again, as you know, I am no hero. And you will forgive me if there is more; this is my life, not some poxy bard's tale.

I awoke and found my final strike had cleft Tabakov's spine in two, severing his arms and head from the rest of his misshapen body. My leg was broken, my skull once again felt like a horde of Dwarfs were mining for ore in it, my left arm was bent at an angle that was surely not natural... but I lived. I dragged my screaming body from the Cistern and back to the Inn, finger-lengths at a time. It took twelve hours to traverse the lengths of piping under the city and when I showed my blue-lipped form in the court of the Inn I was rushed to Aelia's suite and bedded down. There I was cared for and made hale and whole again, with Geila's whispered prayers and a steady stream of quacks, herbalists and churgeons hired by Milady. Aelia then sent a carefully worded letter to Horatio, threatening war and worse (me, to be precise) should the attacks on her person continue. They didn't. Not that she asked me to assassinate him. Not that I would have accepted if she had asked.

I'm not in that line of work anymore.

Instead he took up the expensive task of guarding the Shadow Wood without the support of her troops. It would save her carts-full of gold in the long run, but I know she would gladly become a pauper to have her father back. There would be bad blood between the Von Konigsvalds and the family of Krieglitz for generations... even after no one remembers why, I should imagine. Aelia did not win the bid for Turken Valan by the way; it was won by Emmanuelle Von Libewitz of Nuln. Aelia had fought hard for it and lost much, but as I have said, it is neither a fair, nor often a just, world.

I traveled with Aelia in her carriage back to her castle and told her the truth. The whole truth. She took it well, and didn't pry into the details I left sketchy. Because I am not a liar, I did not say I was trying to forget that much of my life, and she allowed me that dignity. She did hug and hold me and promise that whenever I needed a home I could stay with her.

Then, when we got back to the castle she disappeared like a wraith. She was always busy overseeing some facet of her lands or titles. There were disputes to settle between the nobles beneath her, making sure taxes were collected, ruling in court over capital crimes. In short, I saw her less and less. Theo was made into her high-warden, charged with keeping the roads cleared of bandits and worse things. Geila was her nanny, and always would be. She took to caring for me as well, often coming to speak with me during the cold nights of winter. We talked of little things, because my life was yet to be filled with anything big. I was just practicing, honing my skills with daily exercise throughout the winter, learning every brick and block of this massive castle. Now it is spring, and I don't feel like I can stay.

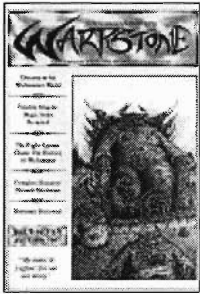
I am staring now, as I pen the final words of this tale, out of a window that overlooks the fringes of the Shadow Wood. I am wondering if the darkness inside me has been tamed, or simply sated for a time. Here is like a child's play room, safe and secure. Whether I am a good man or bad cannot be judged here. It must be out there, under magnificent wine-colored sunsets like the one before me. I don't know how I have survived so far, or how I will continue, but I will. I must. I have questions about who I have become that need answering. Of course this has nothing to do with the fact that Aelia has become engaged to be married, because we all know I am not in love with her.

Right. Sure. Whatever I say.

Yes, I know. I didn't bed the girl, get the gold or become a king; life is funny that way. I know there will be other girls, other tales. Looking at the bright, crisp blade of the Phantom Angel as it lays at my side I know at least one question has been answered. I am no hero, but one day maybe I can become better than what I am. At least I killed the monster, and I will never be him again in my lifetime. That, at least, is something. Oh, yes – and I killed Tabakov too. Killing's easy, though. Building something, inside or outside your soul – that is the hard part.

I know; it is an abrupt end. That is because, my friends, it is an artificial one. My life went on before this story and will continue afterwards. Should I get a few spare moments I will pen the rest down for you. I think this is more a story of a bad man than a good one... and I know not where it will see its end.

Fox Crowe



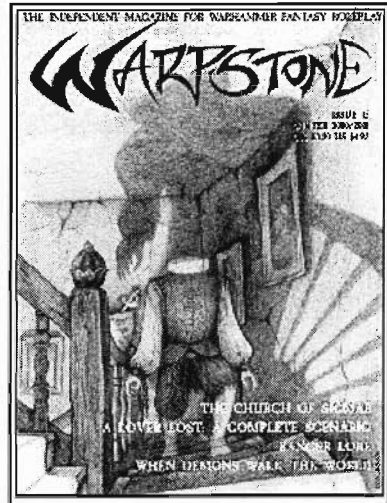
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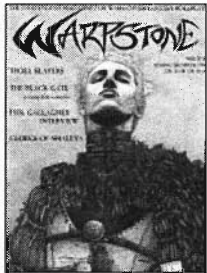
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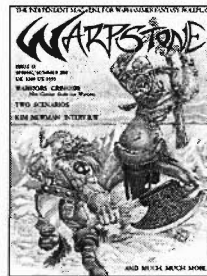
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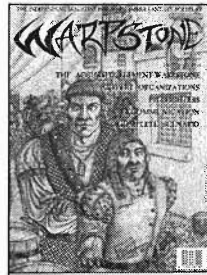
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