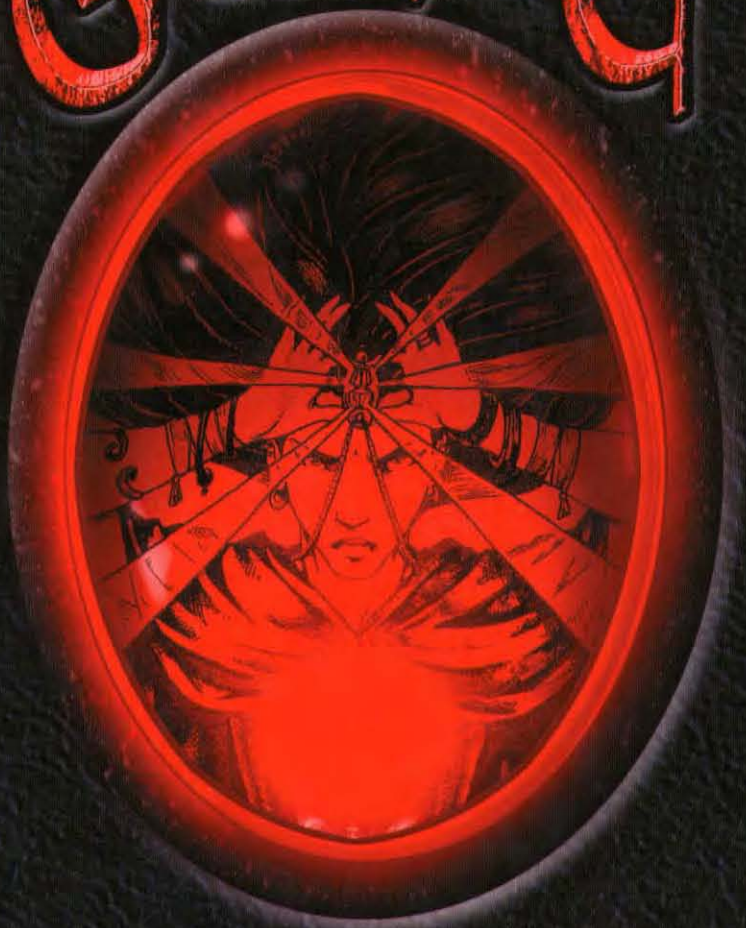
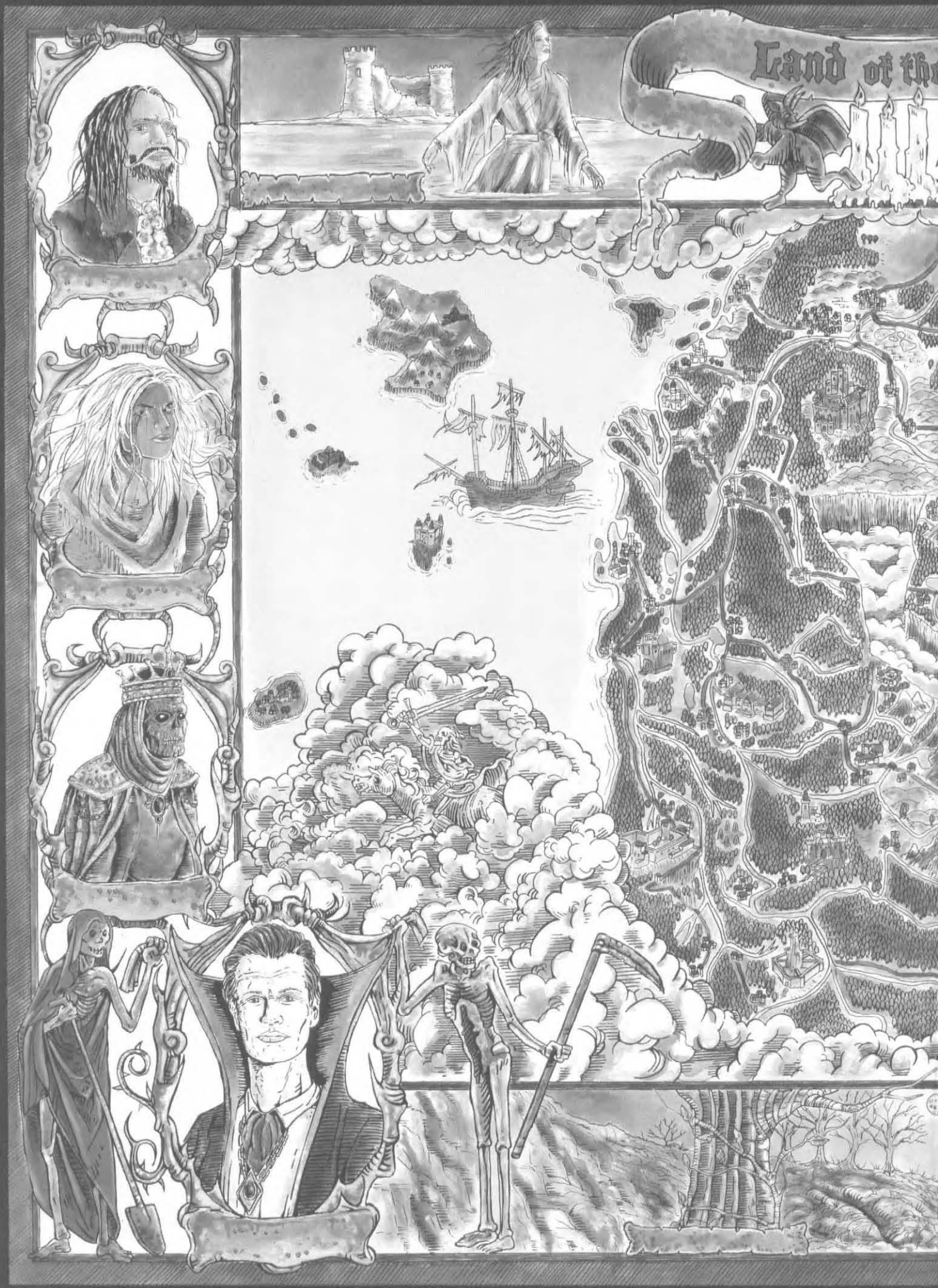
SWORD & SORCERY

Ravenloft

DUNGEON MASTER'S GUIDE™



A Ravenloft® Core Rulebook


Land of the

Mists

Ravenloft Dungeon Master's Guide

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Ravenloft Dungeon Master's Guide

Table of Contents

Introduction 3
- What is This Book? 4
- The Damned 10

Chapter One: Techniques of Terror 21
- Crossover Campaigns 22
- Creating Atmosphere 26
- Dramatic Techniques 42

Chapter Two: The World and Its Horrors 55
- Domains of Darkness 56
- Where Shadows Dwell: Communities of Ravenloft 66
- Sinkholes of Evil 86
- Expanding the Mists 102

Chapter Three: Structuring the Campaign 126
- Foes 144

Chapter Four: Parting the Mists 158
- Telling the Future: Tarokka and Dikesha 159
- Prophecy in a Campaign 182

Chapter Five: Magic in Ravenloft 192
- Magic Items 193
- Cursed Items in Ravenloft 212

Index and List of Tables 235

Introduction

"I have been so long master that I would be master still, or at least that none other should be master of me."

— Bram Stoker, *Dracula*

Unseen masters clutch the Realm of Dread in a jealous grip, intently poring over its every detail. This lonesome world is theirs — their creation, their plaything to do with as they wish. Their Mists can reach every mortal world, yet within their realm, no force or god will stand in their way.

So vast and implacable are these masters that few denizens of the Land of Mists even suspect that they exist, and no mortal can comprehend the roles they play in the grand design.

The unseen masters fill their realm with sights both glorious and terrible. They create life and they kill innocents. They bathe the night sky in the light of a full moon, raising a chorus of baying wolves. They paint the rosy skies of dawn each morning, sending the minions of darkness scuttling back to their tombs. They reward virtue, but allow evil to torment it. They reward evil, then torment it themselves. They silently observe heroes and villains alike, subtly ensuring that their paths cross.

The Realm of Dread is a grand tapestry, woven from threads of mist, shadow and dream, but only the unseen masters can see its patterns in all their awful glory.

In the world of Ravenloft, these unseen masters are the Dark Powers.

In the game of **Ravenloft**, the ultimate master is *you*.

What Is This Book?

Welcome to the **Ravenloft Dungeon Master's Guide**. If you're reading this, then you likely have already read many **Ravenloft** core sourcebooks and related supplements. We should also assume that you are already familiar with the core Dungeons & Dragons rules, including the *Player's Handbook* and the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. So, what does this book have to offer on top of all that?

If you're a Dungeon Master running a Ravenloft campaign, this book was written with you in mind. The **Ravenloft Player's Handbook** is designed as an introduction for both players and creative DMs, grounding players in the details of the setting and the expectations of the genre while giving DMs the tools they need to go out and create Gothic adventures of their own. Mystery is a vital component of Ravenloft's atmosphere, so some elements — such as the darklords' identities — are cloaked in secrecy to preserve their dreadful surprises. This book unveils more of Ravenloft's secrets and expands on the game's rules, enhancing the scope of your campaign. This book can help you incorporate new races and classes, add more cursed magic items, modify psionics and even create memorable sinkholes of evil and Vistani prophecies.

But what if you aren't a Ravenloft DM? The **Ravenloft Dungeon Master's Guide** still has much to offer, regardless of the d20 campaign or setting you prefer to play. It can be useful even if you just want to add a few elements of horror and dread to your adventures. These pages greatly expand on the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**'s guidelines for running tales of Gothic horror and adventure. Here you will find detailed advice on using pacing, structure and mood to set your players on edge while maintaining a balanced and entertaining game. You will even find complete advancement tables for the NPC classes from the D&D *Dungeon Master's Guide* — the "everymen" of the game.

Use this book as you will. Just remember: The Dark Powers are watching.

What Are the Dark Powers?

Ravenloft has existed as a campaign setting for 13 years, and in that time many theories have been offered to explain the true nature of its faceless masters. Are the Dark Powers good or evil? Are they many or few — or perhaps just one? Is their world real or just a living dream?

Now, let the truth be told.

The Dark Powers are a mystery, a secret. They are inherently unknowable, and no theory will ever fully explain them.

In other words, the Dark Powers are a creative device for the Dungeon Master. They're whatever you want them to be in your campaign, and no book will ever contradict you.

Chapter by Chapter

We begin with a brief introduction, featuring an overview of the darklords for all the domains detailed in Chapter Four of the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook.**

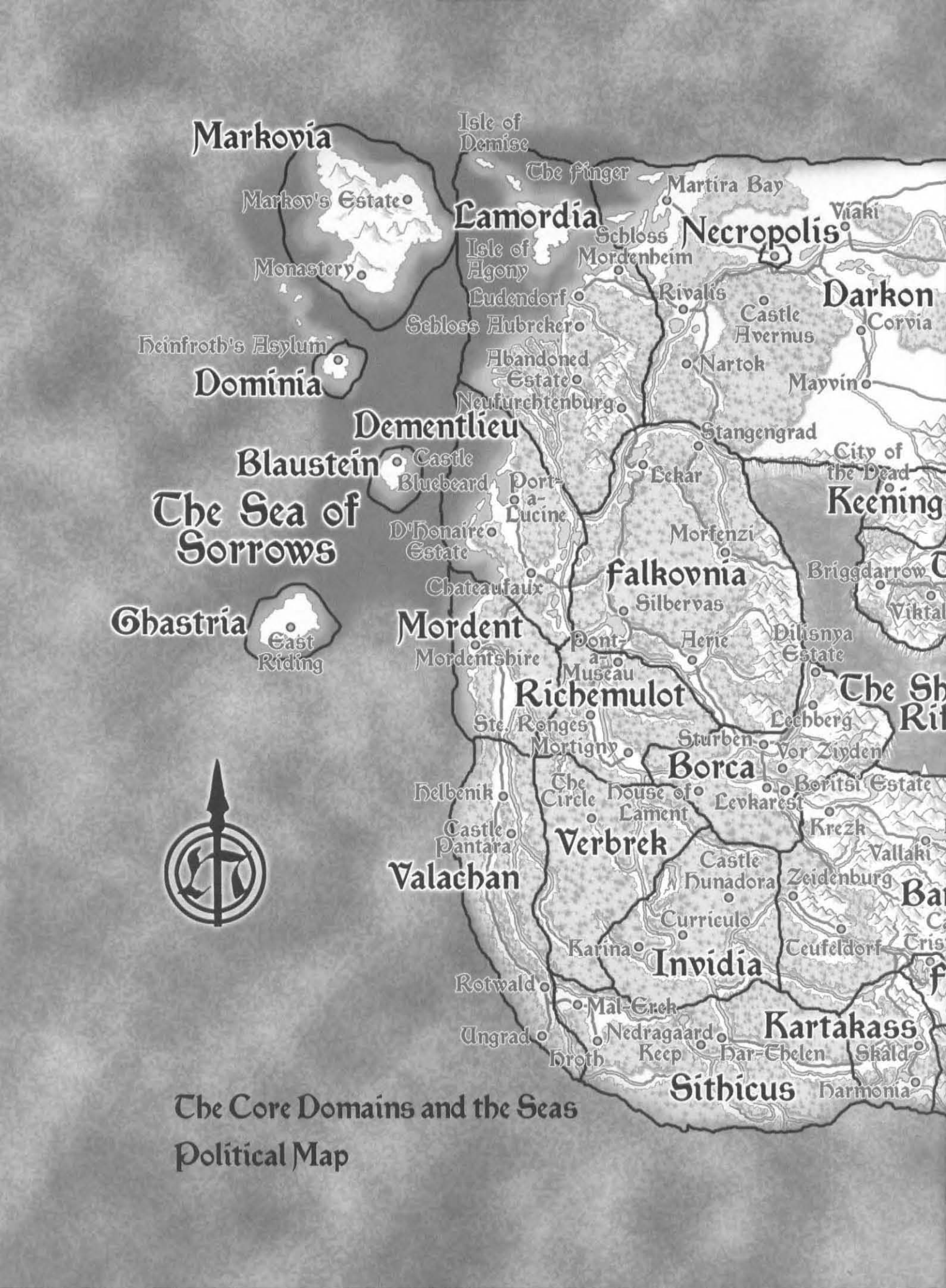
Chapter One: Techniques of Terror explores how to create a rich atmosphere of Gothic adventure worthy of Ravenloft. Here you will find simple tricks to set your players on edge, advice on using pacing to heighten tension and tips on how to use music, props and dramatic devices to enhance the feel of the game. Chapter One also addresses three different approaches to utilizing the Land of Mists in your game: the Native Campaign, the Weekend in Hell and time-honored Cannibalism.

Chapter Two: The World and Its Horrors delves into the Land of Mists. The core campaign setting offers an overview and the **Ravenloft Gazetteers** provide further details, but they cannot cover every corner of the Realm of Dread, nor every facet of the ever-expanding range of options presented by the d20 rules. Thus, this chapter provides advice on creating memorably eerie locales for your adventures, as well as adapting the general guidelines of the setting to whatever elements you introduce to your campaign, including new races and prestige classes.

Chapter Three: Structuring the Campaign addresses the practical aspects of running a Ravenloft campaign. Here you will find guidelines for running campaigns at all levels, including adventure styles that work best for your PCs' levels, as well as the types of monsters that can provide a challenging, but still balanced game. You will also find ideas for rewards for PCs other than experience points and treasure.

Chapter Four: Parting the Mists covers how to use the Vistani as a plot device to add additional layers of intrigue to your campaign, with a focus on their unequaled gifts of prophecy. Here you will find creative advice on predicting the future without railroading your players. We also present specific guidelines for using the Vistani's *tarokka* cards and *dikesha* cubes, including how to substitute ordinary playing-card decks and six-sided dice for these specialized props.

Chapter Six: Magic in Ravenloft expands on the guidelines for magic found in the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook.** Here you will find many new magic items for your campaign, additional tips for creating cursed items and guidelines for using psionics in the Land of Mists.



The Core Domains and the Seas

Political Map

Neblus
Mayhle
Karg
Nevuchar Springs
Tempe falls
Delagia
Sidnar
Moondale
Claveria
Liffe
Armeikos
Vechor
Abdok
Tepest
Kellee
Liara
Castle Faerhaaven
Kantora
Egertus
Nova Vaasa
L'île de la Tempete
The Lighthouse
The Tower
Isle of the Ravens
The Nocturnal Sea
Castle Ravenloft
Village of Barovia
Bergovitsa
Castle
Forlorn
Hazlik's Estate
Immol
Sly-Var
Ramulai
Toyalis
Hazlan
Arbora
Todstein
Graben
Seeheim
Knammen
Kirchenheim
Meerdorf
Graben Island

The Core Domains and the Seas
Geographic Map

Lake of Lost Dreams
Nezron River
Mistlands
Somulus River
Korst River
Vuchar River
Vale of Tears
Tempe River
Lake Korst
The foaming River
Khourx River
Lake Temporus
Mt. Nirka
River of Tears
Mountains of Misery
Mt. Nyid
Dnar River
Vaughn-Dnar River
Little Borchava River
East Timori Road
South Dnar River
Nova Vaasa
Lake Zarovich
Volgis River
The Three Sisters
Mt. Ghakis
Ivlis River
Mt. Sawtooth
Saniset River
Musarde River
Liffe
Vechor
Nostru River
Cliffs of Vesanis
L'île de la Tempete
Isle of the Ravens
The Nocturnal Sea

The Damned

The **Ravenloft Player's Handbook** only hints at the identities of the Dread Realms' true darklords. Sadly, space prevents us from collecting Ravenloft's doomed souls in all their tarnished glory within these pages, but a basic overview is presented here for ease of reference. Where noted, full details and game statistics for these villains can be found in either **Secrets of the Dread Realms (SDR)** or existing volumes of the **Ravenloft Gazetteer (GAZ)** series. Future **Gazetteers** will present the rest of Ravenloft's darklords as the series progresses.

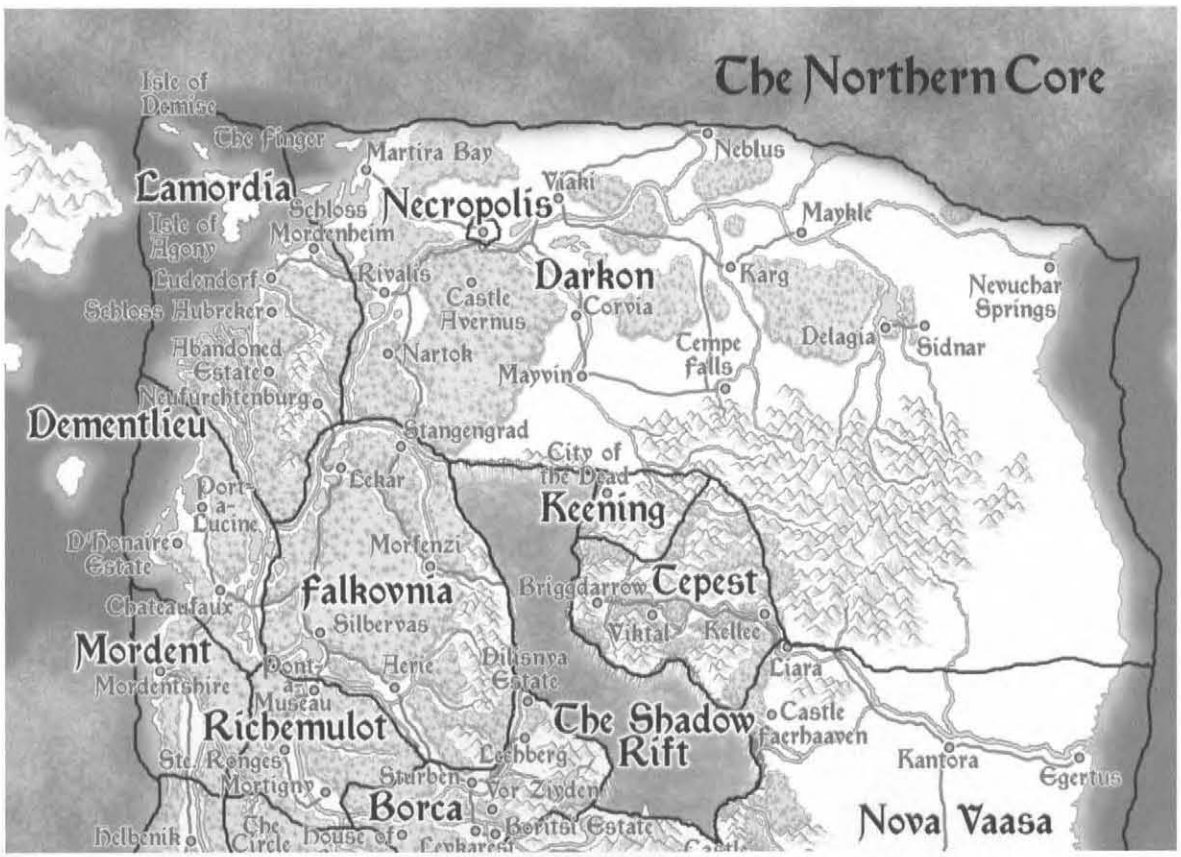
The Core

Barovia: *Count Strahd von Zarovich*, ancient vampire and gifted necromancer, is the infamous master of Castle Ravenloft. Centuries ago, he slew his brother Sergei to steal his bride Tatyana, then rampaged when she flung herself from the castle walls. Strahd still seeks her today, convinced he will one day be reunited with her reincarnation. **(SDR, GAZ I)**

Borca: Two feuding aristocrats rule Borca: the breathtaking *Ivana Boritsi* and her mercurial cousin *Ivan Dilisnya*. Both of these master poisoners gained their positions by killing family members both teeter on the edge of madness. Ivana, the Black Widow, seeks love but leaves a trail of dead suitors behind her. Ivan seeks only pleasure, but his favorite sensations are now so much ash upon his tongue. **(SDR, GAZ IV)**

Darkon: The endlessly scheming lich *Azalin* rules Darkon with an iron fist. Having sacrificed his son and his mortality for power, Azalin now finds those talents frozen; he can learn no new magic. Despite his limitations, he has never ceased in his spitefully defiant attempts to break free of the Dark Powers' shackles. **(SDR, GAZ II)**

Dementlieu: *Dominic d'Honaire*, an unassuming adviser on the Council of Brilliance, is the true power behind Dementlieu's throne. Able to bend men's minds to his will with but a word or glance, d'Honaire has secretly enslaved many prominent citizens. For all his power, however, the women he longs for can always see the vile corruption hiding behind his face. **(SDR, GAZ III)**



Falkovnia: *Vlad Drakov*, the sadistic mercenary warlord, earned his domain through years of butchery and carnage. Drakov craves respect: respect as a ruler, as a general and above all else, as a man. Yet, every invasion he launches against his neighbors meets a crushing, humiliating defeat. **(SDR, GAZ II)**

Forlorn: *Tristen ApBlanc*, an unhappy soul trapped within Castle Tristenoira, is the true master of this forsaken land. Tainted with vampiric blood from birth, Tristen turned against his druid guardian. In return, she cursed him to a strange, dual existence: vampyre by day, ghost by night. Centuries later, he still seeks to break the curse, but the evil and agony of his past deeds continually drags him back into his own history to relive his tragedies again and again. **(GAZ I)**

Hazlan: *Hazlik*, the Red Wizard, was long ago humiliated by his Mulan peers, who tattooed him with feminine symbols. He repaid their petty cruelty with murder. Even now, Hazlik's bitterness still drives him to woefully punish the Mulan of his distant homeland. When he sleeps, his dreams haunt him with his shame, continually eroding his hopes of success. **(SDR, GAZ I)**

Invidia: The Vistani-blooded enchantress *Gabrielle Aderre* is the true darklord here. When Gabrielle was just a girl, her mother prophesized that she must never know love, for any child Gabrielle bore would bring only sorrow. When Gabrielle later abandoned her mother to a grisly death and slew the former darklord of Invidia, she inherited the domain. For years, Gabrielle delighted in using her bewitching ways to torment the Vistani who had cast her out and any folk who found the love denied her. In 747 BC, however, a fiendish Gentleman Caller seduced Aderre. The result of their union was Malocchio Aderre, the Dukkar, a fiend in human form whose sins now overshadow those of his mother. **(SDR, GAZ IV)**

Kartakass: *Harkon Lukas* is both a charismatic bard and a ravenous wolfwere. Lukas dreamed of power in the world of men, alienating him from his predatory kin. His ambition and murders drew him into the Mists, but his dreams are even more distant now. Lukas can assume only a few humanoid forms, forcing him even further into human society, and his domain is a politically insignificant backwater. **(SDR, GAZ I)**

Keening: The legendary banshee *Tristessa* haunts this desolate wasteland. In life, she was an Arak sith and high priestess of the Spider Queen. She led her depraved cultists in a war for control of the shadow fey, but in the end, she lost. Tristessa and her deformed, spiderlike infant were staked to the surface to meet the dawn. Their bodies boiled away in the sunlight, but Tristessa's agony survived, tearing her domain from Arak. Her tormented spirit cannot rest until she finds her long-lost child. **(SDR)**

Lamordia: The hubris of Dr. Victor Mordenheim gave birth to Lamordia's twisted darklord. The monster *Adam*, a powerful and intelligent dread flesh golem, wants to live as a man, but never will. His patchwork body hideous and his mind wrathful, Adam roams the wilds of his domain, never ceasing to torment the creator who thrust an unwanted existence upon him. **(SDR, GAZ II)**

Markovia: *Frantisek Markov* is the master of this remote isle. Originally a humble hog butcher from Barovia, Markov turned his tools toward unnatural experiments. When he made his wife into one of his test subjects, the Dark Powers granted him a land where his blades and stitches could make men from beasts and beasts from men, but they also forced his body into an animalistic shape. Markov now seeks to use his skills to restore his own humanity. **(SDR)**

Mordent: Long ago, the aristocrat *Lord Wilfred Godefroy* murdered his wife and child in a bout of jealous rage, then took his own life when their spirits returned to torment him. When Strahd and Azalin wrenched Mordent into the Mists, Godefroy became its master. He now lords over the flittering spirits trapped within malevolent Gryphon Manor, but still cannot escape his vengeful family each night. **(SDR, GAZ III)**

Necropolis: The delusional negative energy elemental that rules this city believes itself to be *Death*, the end of all things. In truth, Death was originally Lowellyn Dachine, a servant of Azalin monstrously transformed in a test of the same experiment that cloaked Il Aluk in a shroud of undeath. Death thinks its destiny is to slay the entire world, but Azalin stymies its plans and the truth gnaws at its thoughts. **(GAZ II)**

The Nocturnal Sea: The reclusive and powerful necromancer *Meredoth* controls the Nocturnal Sea from icy Todstein Island. Meredoth wants nothing more than to be left alone with his soulless

undead creations, including the insidious lebendtod, but the passions and emotions of the living within his realm continually distract him from his work.

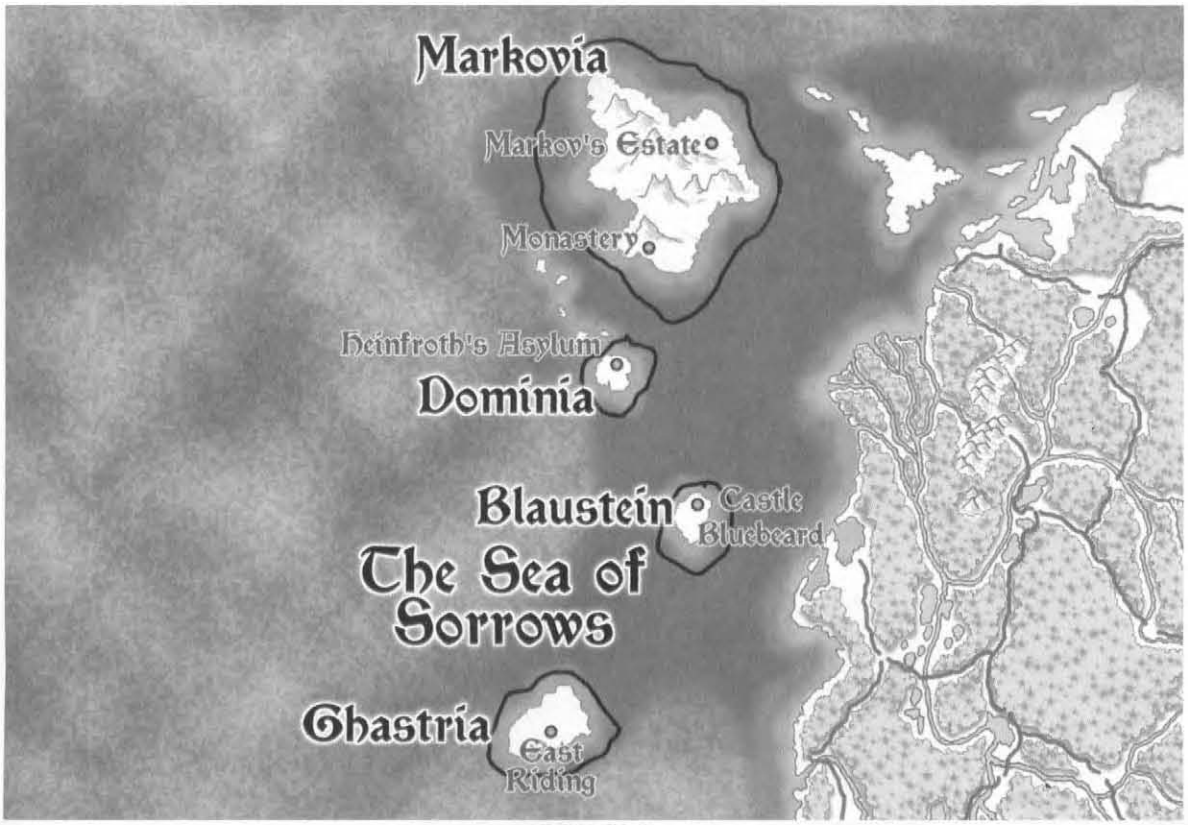
Nova Vaasa: The serial killer and crime lord *Malken* rules Nova Vaasa's underbelly, but he does not truly exist. He is an ancestral curse, born of jealousy and betrayal, handed down to the honorable Sir Tristen Hiregaard. Now the two entities share a single body, caught in a struggle for dominance that may never end. Malken detests Hiregaard and all he stands for, but to destroy Sir Tristen is to destroy himself. **(SDR)**

Richemulot: The cultured wererat rogue *Jacqueline Renier* rules these rat-infested cities, having murdered their first darklord, her grandfather Claude. Jacqueline is a scheming manipulator, but she also possesses the capacity for true love. However, she is cursed to assume rat form in the presence of anyone she loves, and the true object of her affections proved immune to her lycanthropy before vanishing entirely. Jacqueline is both surrounded by sycophants and utterly alone. **(SDR, GAZ III)**

The Sea of Sorrows: The ghost of the nautical explorer *Pieter van Riese* sails these waters at the wheel of his spectral ship, the *Relentless*. Captain van Riese sacrificed the lives of himself and his crew in an obsessive quest to find passage through the arctic ice of his home world. Now he sails the Sea of Sorrows, futilely seeking passage through the Mists to reach the glory he thinks awaits him at home.

The Shadow Rift: The shadow fey were created by the Colossal outsider *Gwydion*, an eldritch horror from the Plane of Shadow. When the shadow fey fled from Gwydion's clutches through a massive portal, Gwydion pursued them but was trapped in the void between realities when his slaves collapsed the portal behind them. The portal led to Ravenloft; Gwydion was contained first as the darklord of Arak, then of the Shadow Rift after the tumult of the Grand Conjunction. A being of unspeakable power, Gwydion still claws at the walls of existence, seeking to free itself.

Sithicus: The traitorous and power-hungry Vistana *Inza Kulchevich* earned damnation by murdering her mother, betraying her tribe and leading the former darklord of Sithicus to his doom. The Night of Screaming Shadows was her doing, but it claimed her humanity in the bargain. Inza is now a creature of seething darkness, lurking unseen beneath her subjects. **(GAZ IV)**



Tepest: As young girls, the sisters *Laveeda, Leticia and Lorinda Mindefisk* used their lies and beauty to lure many a man to his death, after which they would steal his coin and feed his flesh to their unwitting family. When a handsome rake turned the murderesses against each other, the Dark Powers gave them a domain to share and transformed them into a covey of hideous, cannibalistic hags. The Three Hags still use illusions and deceit to lure young lovers into their clutches, but they cannot hide their true, revolting appearance from each other. **(SDR)**

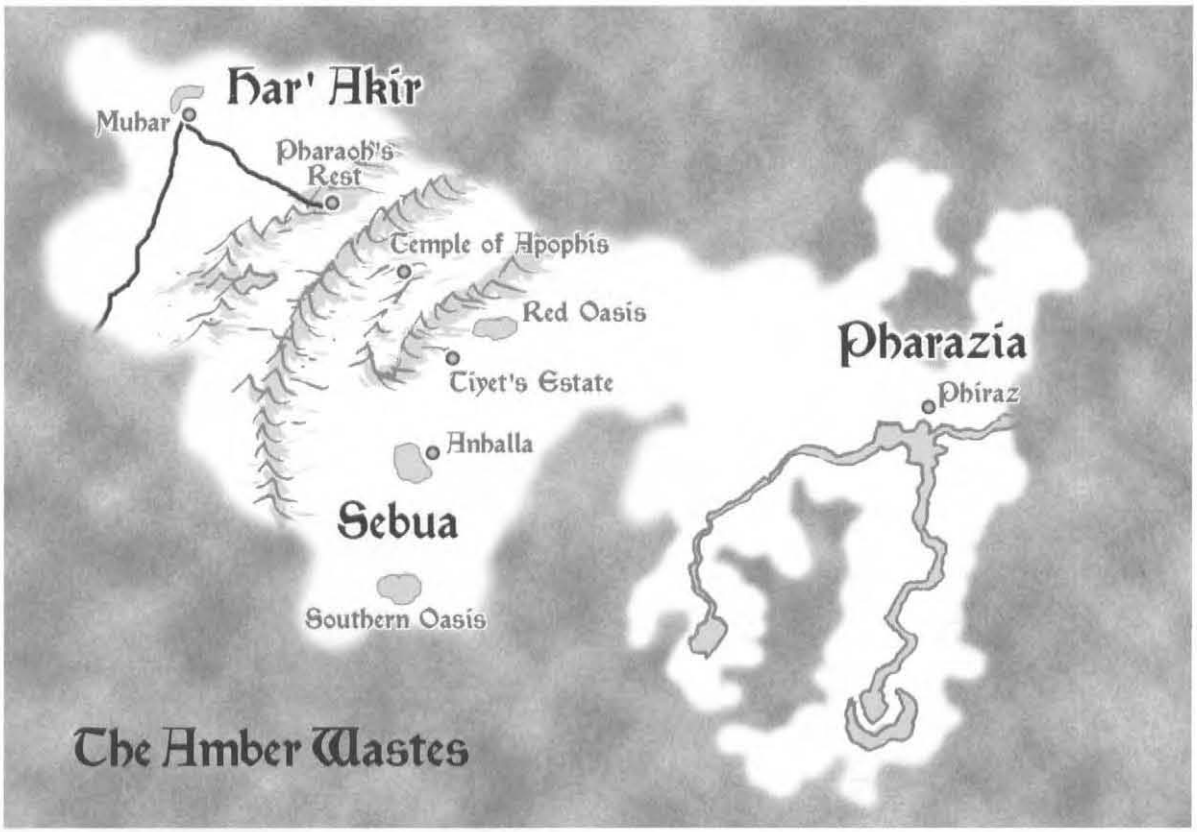
Valachan: *Baron Urik von Kharkov* began life as a simple panther. A spiteful wizard transformed Urik into a cultured man, then had him fall in love with a woman who had spurned the wizard's advances. When the wizard withdrew his magic, the panther slew its lover. When the mage made Urik human again, Urik fled in horror. Entering the Land of Mists, Urik surrendered his mortality to a Kargat vampire, vainly hoping to escape the anguish of his past. When Urik later fled Darkon, he received his own domain. Von Kharkov is a feral panther, a charming aristocrat and a fledgling nosferatu all at once, but he forever pines for the humanity that he never had. **(SDR, GAZ IV)**

Vechor: Long ago, the wood elf *Easan* stood alone against the rise of a demonic tyrant. The tyrant captured Easan and placed a demon's spirit in his soul to study the nobler aspects of his nature. Slowly, the spirits of Easan and the demon merged. As Easan's attempts to save himself grew more desperate, his experiments to study the immortal soul became increasingly deranged. Today, Easan the Mad still performs twisted scientific and arcane experiments to manipulate the immortal soul, but he can no longer remember why. **(SDR)**

Verbrek: *Alfred Timothy*, son of the former darklord of Arkandale, is chief cleric of the bloodthirsty Wolf God. Alfred is a fearsome werewolf in his bestial forms, but slight and frail when human. Alfred despises all humanity for the weakness he sees in himself, but he cannot purge that weakness. Whenever Alfred indulges in his animal lusts, he is forced back into his feeble human shape. **(SDR, GAZ IV)**

The Clusters

It is common for the darklords of clustered domains to share a common past or culture.



The Amber Wastes

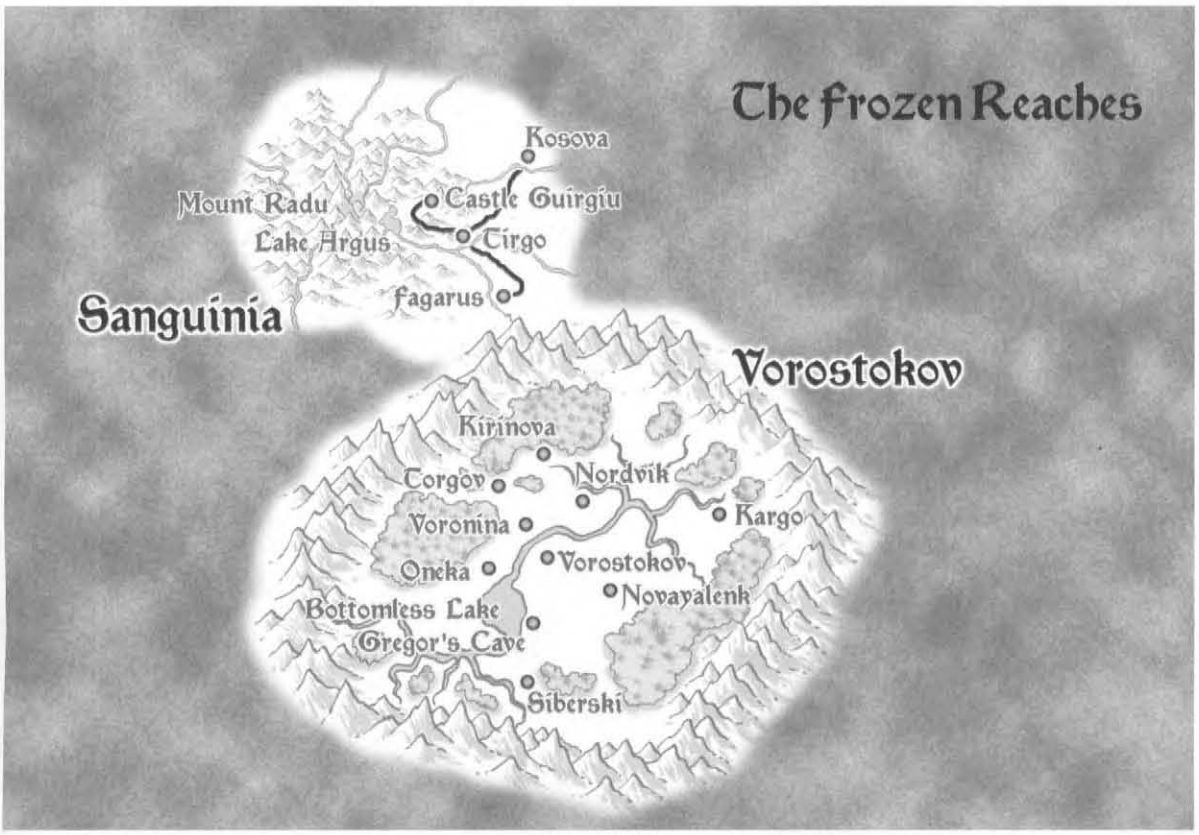
Har'Akir: As a mortal man, *Pharaoh Anhktepot* was high cleric of Ra and unquestioned ruler of the Black Land. Despite these blessings, he feared the afterlife and used his empire's resources to seek immortality. As the years wore on, he turned wrathful and razed many temples. For this sacrilege, Ra cursed Anhktepot; he would win immortality, but not as he had hoped. When Anhktepot's priests struck him down, he could still sense his surroundings as he was mummified and entombed. Anhktepot is now an immensely powerful ancient dead, but he slumbers for decades at a time, rising only in times of dire import. Anhktepot longs to live just a few more years as a mortal man.

Pharazia: The beauteous, angelic *Diamabel* is busy creating a new religion in his own image. Once a mundane desert nomad and son of a wealthy sheik, Diamabel was repulsed by his own people. As the leader of his tribe, Diamabel waged a brutal cultural war, intent on wiping out all who did not follow his creed. He believed that by "cleansing" the deserts, he would become a being of light and splendor. When the Dark Powers granted him a domain, his wish came true — by day. At night, he becomes a winged, skeletal horror, a form no less horrifying to him than to his people.

Sebua: The ancient dead *Tiyet* wanders these wastes alone. Unlike Anhktepot, she is still fair of form, on the surface at least. Beneath her supple skin, she remains as dry as dust. Born the daughter of a prince's scribe in the Black Land, Tiyet seduced and deceived her way to becoming the prince's First Wife. When the depth of her treachery was uncovered, Tiyet committed ritual suicide to escape the wrath of her husband and the gods. Tiyet now haunts the desert, a lonesome creature driven to feed on beating hearts.

The Frozen Reaches

Sanguinia: As a young man, *Prince Ladislav Mircea* was as handsome as he was vain and selfish. When a lethal plague ravaged his lands, Mircea abandoned his subjects, retreating to Castle Guirgiu with his dearest friends to wait it out in splendor. When disease penetrated the castle, Mircea had his infected friends thrown over the walls. When Mircea himself contracted the plague, he turned to



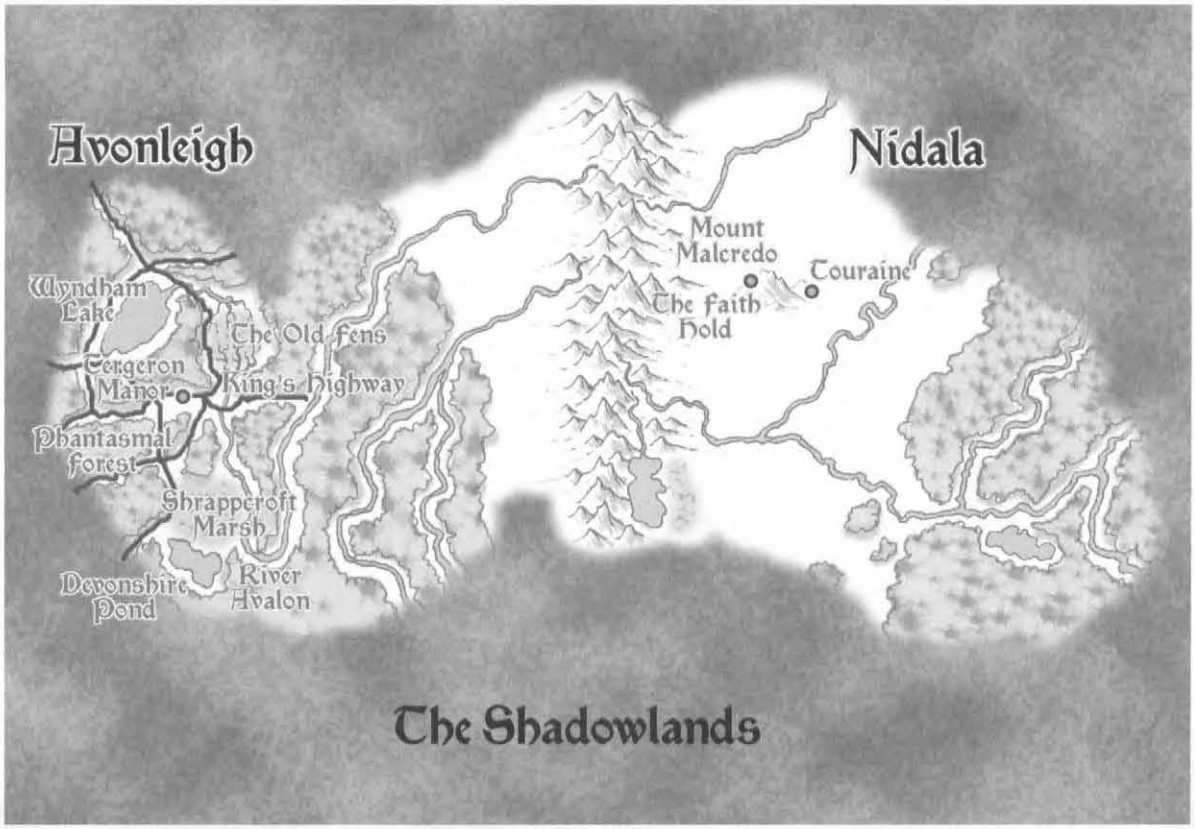
a frantic study of alchemy and bodily humours, attempting to save his own life with the untainted blood of his guests. When Mircea finally succumbed, he rose again as a vrykolaka, his mind terribly intact. Mircea still lurks in his castle, seeking an alchemical cure for undeath.

Vorostokov: *Boyar Gregor Zolnik* was once a simple hunter, trying to find game to support his village through a long and brutal winter. He discovered a huge, mortally wounded black wolf and remembered an ancient legend. Donning the wolf's pelt and devouring its heart, Zolnik gained the ability to take the wolf's shape. In this new form, he downed much game, became a hero to his village and won a wife, but the lycanthropic hatred and hunger grew strong in his heart. When Zolnik discovered his wife had been untrue, he slaughtered her and her entire family. Eternal winter settled over the land. Zolnik still wants to be a hero, but now he can only feed his people with the corpses of villagers who would not submit to his control.

The Shadowlands

Avonleigh: The tyrannical wizard *Morgoroth* once ruled a vast empire, but he came to regret his evil ways. His power crumbled, so he created a magic portal to a new world — a fresh start. He entered the lands of the Circle a generation after the War of Evil. There he met the last two Shadowborns: the paladin Ferran and his sister, the cleric Aurora. They forgave him his sins, but Morgoroth's ill-fated love for Aurora tormented him, and old foes pursued him. Morgoroth returned to evil, slaying Ferran and abducting Aurora. When the rest of the Circle rode to her rescue, he destroyed them all. Morgoroth soon discovered the Mists around his lands and found Aurora in stasis within a crystal coffin. He tried to open another portal to escape, but this one backfired, annihilating his body. The ghost of Morgoroth still haunts Tergeron Manor, jealously guarding Aurora.

Nidala: Knight Protector *Elena Faith-hold* was once a noble and true paladin of Belenus, who fought beside the renowned paladin, Kateri Shadowborn, in the Knights of the Circle. Together, they led their forces to victory against the armies of the incorporeal, demonic entity Ebonbane. When Lady Kateri was mysteriously assassinated shortly after the Heretical Wars, Lady Elena launched a new War of Evil to wipe out all malevolent forces everywhere. Her methods turned



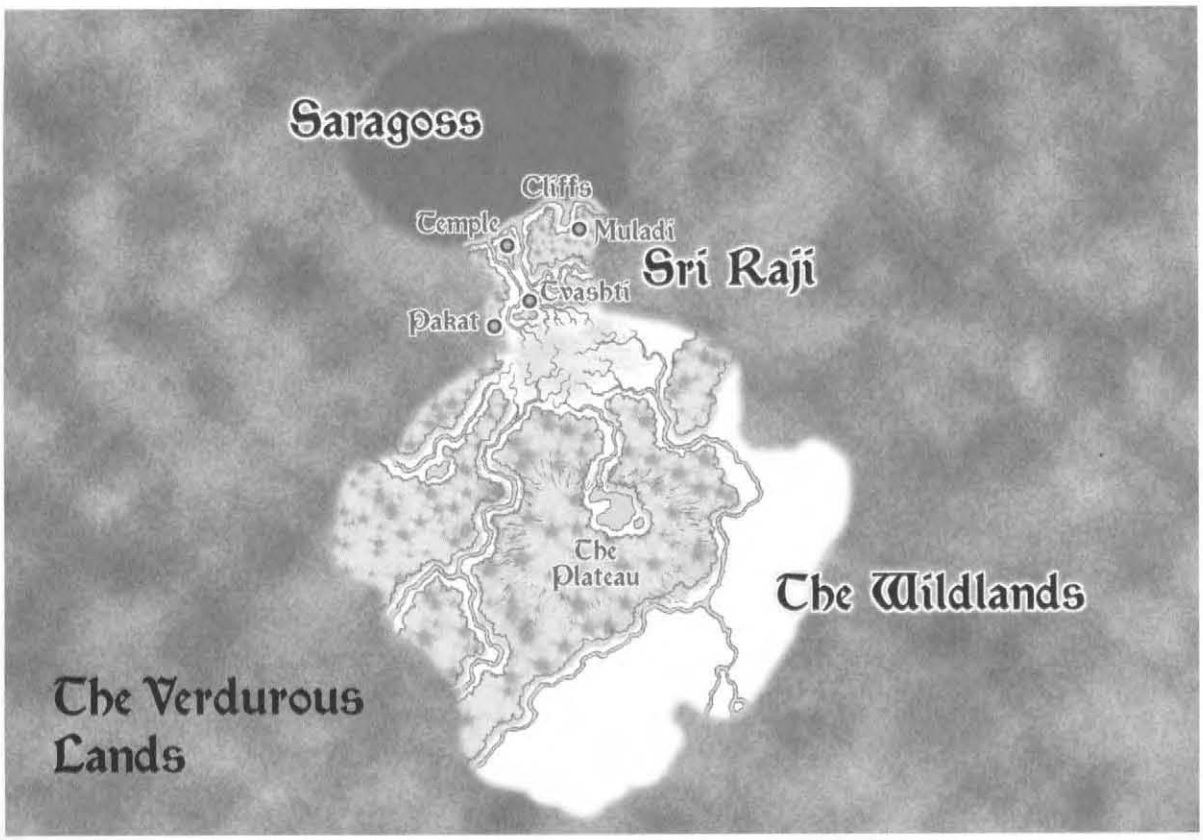
bloody; her righteousness turned to wrath. As Belenus abandoned her, the Dark Powers drew close. Elena is now a blackguard, crushing the will of her people. She still believes herself to be an upstanding defender of good, but she is tormented by moments of doubt.

Shadowborn Manor: This estate, which drifts through the Phantasmal Forest like the nucleus of an amoeba, is the prison of the demonic entity *Ebonbane*, nemesis of Lady Kateri Shadowborn. After she drove Ebonbane from her world in the Heretical Wars, its last followers channeled the fell spirit into a magic sword to strike her down. Ebonbane won its duel with Lady Kateri, but the Dark Powers trapped it within the manor grounds with Lady Kateri's resolute spirit. Ebonbane is consumed by the desire to destroy Lady Kateri and all she ever held dear. Ebonbane is so powerful, that should it ever shed the corporeal form that binds it, the Dark Powers would not be able to contain its spirit.

The Verdurous Lands

Saragoss: *Draga Salt-Biter*, wereshark and cleric of the Sailor's Bane, began as a cabin boy. Pirates raided his ship, killed the crew and threw him to the sharks as bait. Draga survived, but was secretly infected with lycanthropy. Impressed, the pirates accepted him into their ranks. After he had gained their trust, Draga slew them all, then launched his own long and brutal career of piracy. Draga's ship and crew are gone now, dragged to the bottom of Saragoss. Draga's curse terrifies him; he can no longer breathe air, and every time he assumes shark form, he permanently becomes more sharklike in mind and body.

Sri Raji: *Arijani* is the high priest of Kali, a rakshasa and a demigod, son of a human mother and the deity, Ravana. Arijani was raised among rakshasas, who ridiculed him as a half-breed. Arijani despised his kind and betrayed them to human hunters. Ravana sent an avatar to stop Arijani, but the rakshasa used trickery to overpower his father. Arijani drew a promise from his father — that no rakshasa would ever harm him — and then slew the avatar anyway. Arijani believes that Ravana has imprisoned him in Sri Raji, and he worships Kali so she will free him. He is powerful and cunning, but he can no longer walk among men; his illusions always cloak him in monstrous forms.



The Wildlands: A cruel and massive *Crocodile*, king of his kind, roams the swamps and rivers of these untamable jungles. When humans first came to the Wildlands, each animal gave Crocodile a gift of themselves to bolster his power, so that he could devour the naked apes. Crocodile did as he promised, but then used those gifts to prey upon the animals themselves. Crocodile hates and fears the naked apes, for prophecy claims that one may someday destroy him. The Wildlands are no place for mankind. Crafted goods break down, while animals slowly gain Intelligence, as if affected by the *awaken* spell.

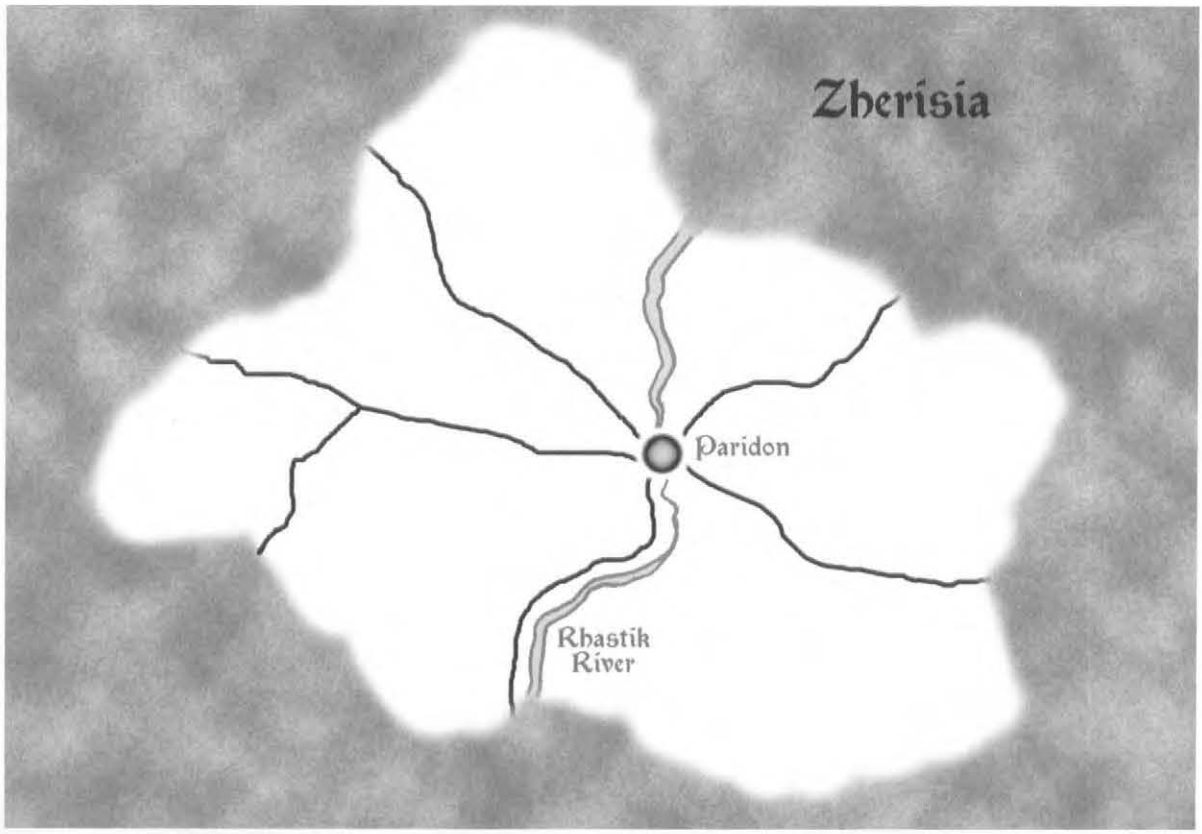
Zherisia

Paridon: The hidden master of Paridon is the dread doppelganger *Sodo*, who carefully wiped out all the elders of his clan so he could rise to power. The Dark Powers gave him the ability to mimic any humanoid shape, but he can only hold those shapes for a few moments at a time. Sodo is a sadist addicted to dealing pain, but his touch heals wounds and can even raise the dead. The "Bloody Jack" killer that has stalked Paridon for generations has been a series of doppelgangers, all wielding the *Fang of the Nosferatu* (Chapter Five, "Cursed Artifacts") on behalf of their lord.

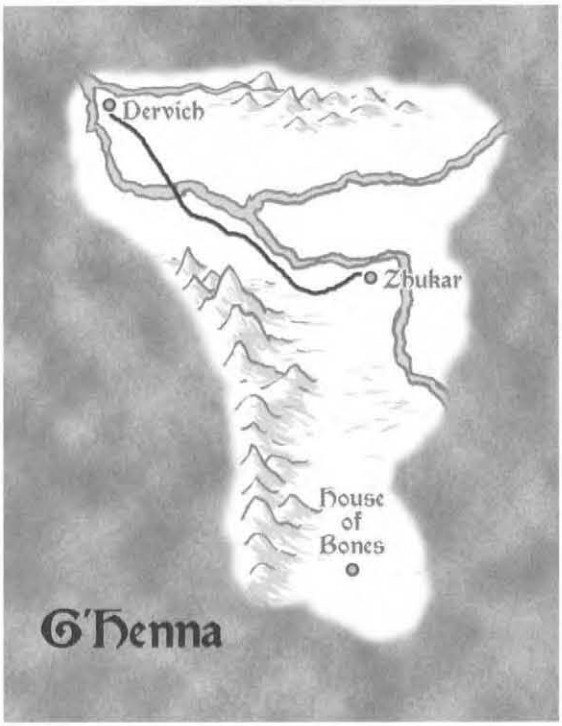
Timor: The *Hive Queen* is an exceptionally intelligent and powerful marikith queen, but she was not always so. The Hive Queen was once a lovely but heartless human princess. Her mother was a greedy queen who had the city of Timor constructed over a marikith hive solely to prove that she could conquer her own fears of the horrid creatures. The princess despised her mother and had a wizard transform her into a marikith queen to frighten her mother to death. The plot worked, but the wizard betrayed the princess. Rather than a mere illusion, her transformation was real and irreversible. The Hive Queen is deeply ashamed of her appearance, but her primary interests lie in expanding the power of her brood.

Islands of Terror

Bluetspur: This blasted realm is ruled by the *Illithid God-brain*, a living conglomerate of thousands of mind flayer brains and an entity of immense psionic power. No human knows exactly what crimes the God-brain committed to earn its domain; perhaps no human could ever understand.



The God-brain floats alone in a briny pool, far beneath the surface, attended only by mindless illithid tadpoles. More than anything else, the God-brain desires experiences — to move; to breathe; to truly live.

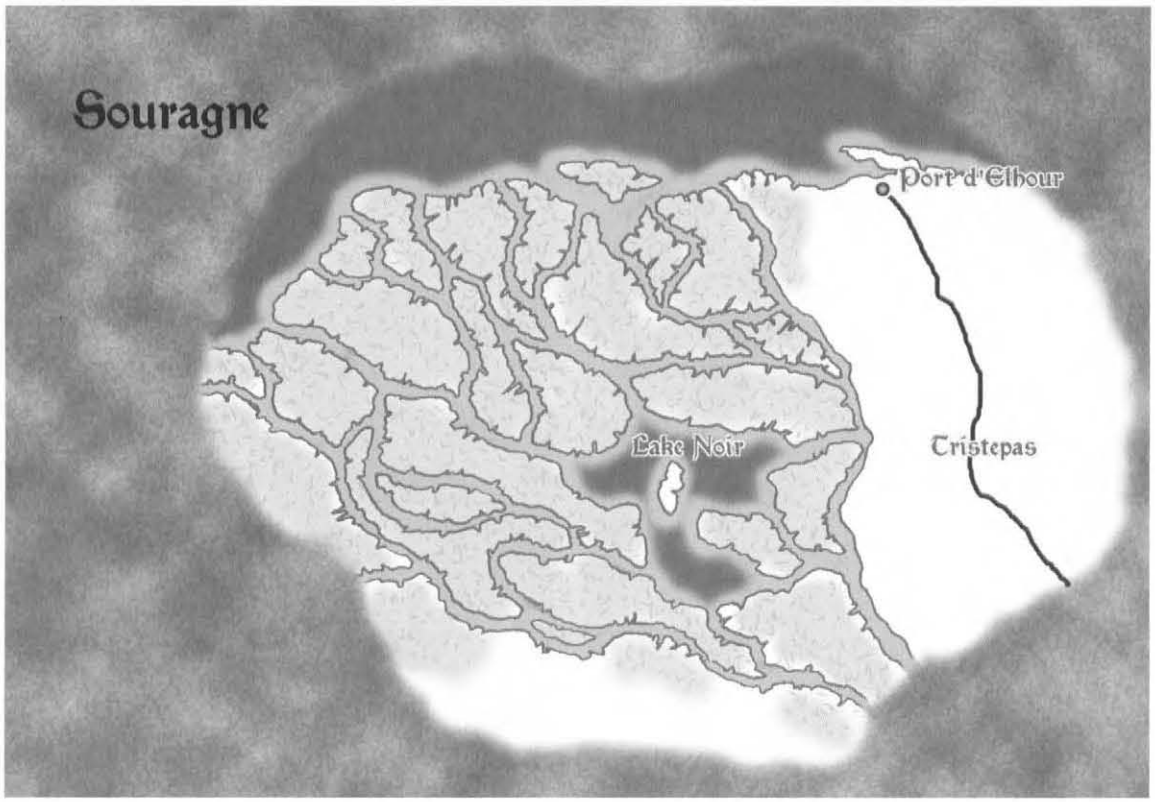


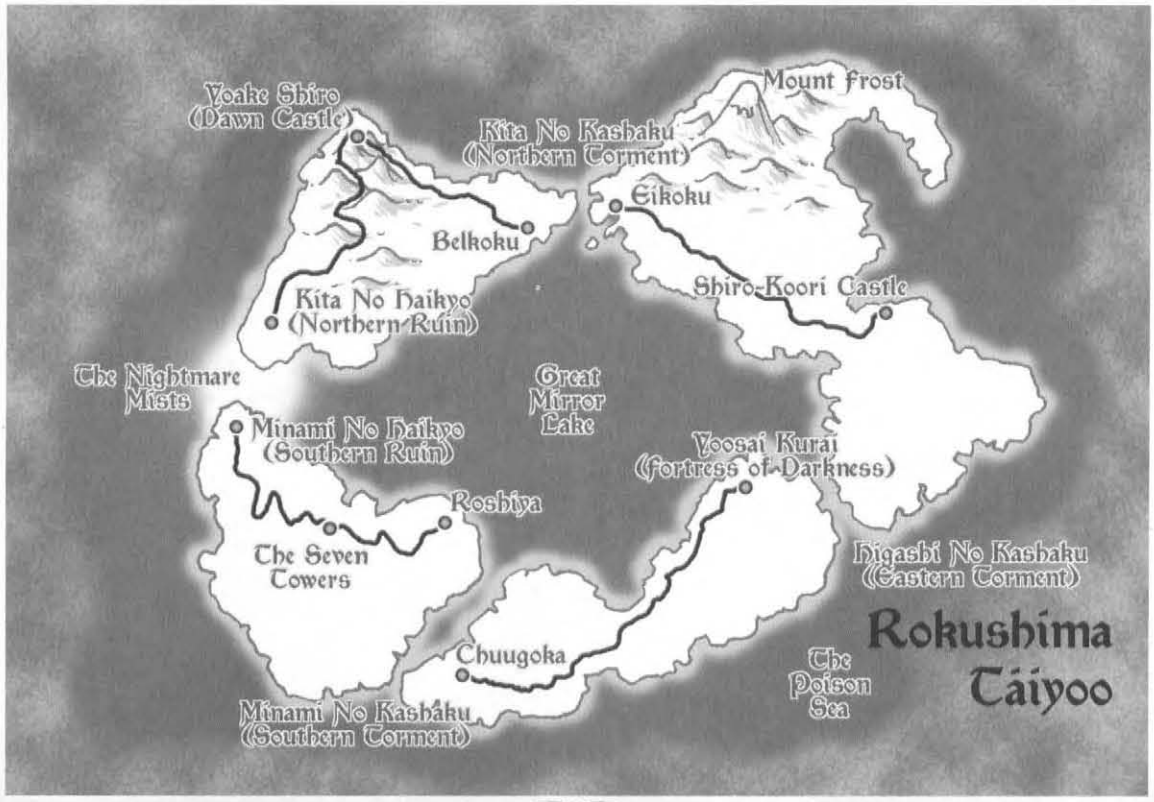
G'Henna: The ancestors of *Yagno Petrovna*, Prophet of Zhakata, survived the massacre at Castle Ravenloft. They hid themselves away and isolation led to inbreeding. Even Yagno's own kin considered him deranged. As Yagno grew, he started to worship an imaginary deity he called "Zhakata." When he attempted to sacrifice his sister's newborn to this Zhakata and was driven into the Mists, his delusion became reality. However, Zhakata never answers Yagno's divinations or speaks to him in any way. Petrovna is continually plagued by doubt.

Odiare: The bogeyman *Maligno* is the beloved creation of the kindly and gifted, but deranged, toy maker Guiseppe. A dread carrionette of unusual intellect and guile, Maligno simply wants to be flesh and blood, not wood and paint. Unlike other lesser carrionettes, however, Maligno cannot transfer his mind to a living body. Maligno adores children, who treat him as though he were real, but he despises adults and anyone else who sees him for what he is.

Rokushima Táiyoo: *Shinpi Haki* may be the most impotent darklord ever known. In life, Shinpi was a ruthless warlord and *daimyo* who twisted the codes of *bushido* to his own ends. Over the course of his life, Shinpi carved out a mighty empire using treachery, murder and despair to crush his foes. Before he died, Shinpi divided the six islands of his empire between his six sons. His body had barely cooled before the Mists descended and his sons turned on each other. When the first two sons died, their islands sank into the sea. Daimyo Shinpi, now a powerless geist, can only watch as his remaining sons — Yoku, Yake, Yami and Yugami — destroy all that he built.

Souragne: *Anton Misroi* was originally a sorcerer of minor skill and the owner of a large plantation. When he erroneously came to believe that his wife was unfaithful, he had her and her friend dragged into the swamps and thrown into quicksand. Misroi's wife cursed him as she drowned — and then her corpse resurfaced to drag him down to the same doom. Misroi begged the heavens for salvation as he was pulled under. When he remerged, he was neither living nor dead: a zombie lord. For years, he haunted the swamps, killing his former slaves and servants as best he could. He also spied on the spirits of the swamp, and from them, learned several forbidden secrets. Misroi used those secrets to restore a semblance of his humanity and to become a Lord of the Dead, but he can never leave the swamp he calls home. Misroi craves human contact; the workers on his plantation are now all mindless, rotting slaves.


Souragne
Port d'Elhour
Lake Noir
Tristepas


Yoake Shiro
(Dawn Castle)
Mount Frost
Kita No Kashaku
(Northern Torment)
Eikoku
Belkoku
Shiro-Koori Castle
Kita No Haikyo
(Northern Ruin)
The Nightmare
Mists
Great
Mirror
Lake
Minami No Haikyo
(Southern Ruin)
Yoosai Kurai
(fortress of Darkness)
Roshiya
The Seven
Towers
Higashi No Kashaku
(Eastern Torment)
Rokushima
Táiyoo
Chuugoka
The
Poison
Sea
Minami No Kashaku
(Southern Torment)

Chapter One: Techniques of Terror

Thou, to whom the world unknown
With all its shadowy shapes is shown;
Who see'st appalled the unreal scene,
While Fancy lifts the veil between:
Ah Fear! Ah frantic Fear!
I see, I see thee near.
— William Collins, "Ode to Fear"

Ravenloft blends the thrills and wonder of classic sword-and-sorcery adventuring with the looming dread of Gothic horror. The battle against evil in Ravenloft can be daunting — even terrifying — but it is not futile. Chapter Six of the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook** explores the themes and motifs of Gothic adventures. This chapter is a companion piece to that overview, delving into the details of DM tips you can use to evoke an atmosphere of dread for your players while ensuring that the game stays fun for everyone.

This chapter begins with "Crossover Campaigns." That section explores several methods of incorporating Ravenloft elements into your adventures, whether you're running an entire campaign in the Land of Mists or just looking for a horrific change of pace.

Next, "Creating Atmosphere" examines various ways to create an eerie and engrossing gaming environment for your players. This section presents simple ways to tweak the d20 rules, notes on roleplaying NPCs and advice on using music to evoke the moods you desire.

Lastly, "Dramatic Techniques" provides two stylistic tools — pacing and cut scenes — that any Dungeon Master can use to finely tune the levels of intrigue and suspense in her adventures.

Crossover Campaigns

Although Ravenloft is a freestanding campaign world, nothing says you have to use it that way. This section examines several ways for you to use Ravenloft's horrors in your game.

The Mists Campaign

The **Ravenloft Player's Handbook** already presents the Realm of Dread as a full, independent setting, its ties to other worlds only as strong or as tenuous as you desire. The default assumption is that you will be setting your entire campaign within the Land of Mists, so you can find ample support for this style of play in any Ravenloft sourcebook.

That said, Dungeon Masters running Mists campaigns would always do well to remember a key difference between fantasy and supernatural horror: the difference between the *fantastic* and the *unnatural*. Both genres are home to mortal mages who can command the dead to rise from their graves; what distinguishes the two is the reactions each strives to evoke. Fantasy seeks awe and wonder; horror lends itself to outrage and disgust.

When running a long-term Ravenloft campaign, always remember to maintain this sharp contrast between the *wondrous* and the *wrong*. Allow heroes to marvel at towering citadels, displays of magic and fantastic creatures. At the same time use NPC reactions and the repercussions from events in your game to hammer home that the dead should *not* walk; men should *not* transform into slavering beasts, and mortals should *never* play with the toys of the gods. Accentuate the unnatural by emphasizing the natural. For every prowling vampire, remember the village of decent folk it preys upon. For every tale of obsession and betrayal, consider the families whose loving ties see them through the years.

Should you neglect the lushly romantic aspects of Ravenloft, presenting the setting as an unceasing parade of horrors or as a gruesome meat grinder with which to destroy player characters, then the unnatural becomes commonplace. The sharp contrast of light and dark fades to gray, and both horror and wonder curdle into grim resignation.

The Weekend in Hell

You may not be interested in running full campaigns of Gothic adventure. Indeed, other settings, even other genres, may simply hold a place of prominence within your heart.

What if you're in the mood for a Gothic change of pace? Dow you want a chance to give your players one taste of true horror, perhaps? The Dark Powers are here to oblige. Their Realm of Dread is a nexus of worlds, many of its domains modeled on, or stolen from, the countless worlds within its grasp.

For reasons known only to the Dark Powers, the Mists sometimes reach out to snatch up outlander player characters, keeping them only long enough for an adventure or two before just as inexplicably sending them home once more. Traditionally (and rather sardonically), these brief jaunts to the Realm of Dread have been known among Ravenloft's design teams as Weekends in Hell.

When running a Weekend in Hell adventure, feel free to accentuate Ravenloft's horrific aspects (just as long as you don't drive your players away). You don't need to worry about shedding light on Ravenloft's "good side," because your outlanders'

home world already provides a sharp contrast with the claustrophobic and forlorn Land of Mists. In fact, when running a Weekend in Hell scenario, you only need to consider two things: Getting the heroes *into* the Mists and getting them back *out*.

Spirited Away

The Mists of Ravenloft can capture any mortal in their tendrils, regardless of its power, and they can reach into any world that has ever felt a shiver of dread. In fact, many of the darklords of Ravenloft originally hailed from distant worlds. Therefore, the Mists provide a ready-made excuse to pull your outlander player characters into Ravenloft for a session of horror gaming. Of course, the Mists can also appear within a Mists campaign to draw native heroes into distant domains.

Why the Mists abduct certain people and not others is a mystery. Sometimes they seem to have specific goals in mind for those they snatch away, yet at other times it appears to be a completely random event. Whether the Mists have a specific purpose in mind for your characters is up to you.

Of course, using the Mists is a big hint that the characters are headed to Ravenloft. If you prefer to keep things more mysterious, the Mists may manifest as a blinding storm or heroes may enter one end of a tunnel in their world, emerging from the other end in Ravenloft. Whenever a character passes through any kind of portal or barrier, be it walking through a door, waking from sleep or just dunking her head under the surface of a cool mountain pool, she may find that she has not emerged where she expected to be.

Heroes may even become Mist-led in their home worlds, not noticing as the terrain around their campground slowly fades away. If they emerge into a domain culturally similar to their home, they might even wander for weeks before realizing how far from home they truly are.

Portals, Magic and the Planes

The Mists of Ravenloft also linger in the places *between* places. Whenever heroes use magic *portals* or teleportation spells, the Mists may divert their journey. Planar travelers are also at risk,

though the Mists usually seem to ignore the Outer Planes. Wanderers who find their way to the Deep Ethereal must also beware. The Realm of Dread prowls eternally through that hidden plane, that bottomless sea binding the Near Ethereal of every mortal world. One moment, a planar traveler may be floating through the featureless fog of the Deep Ethereal; a moment later, she may find herself rudely dumped into one of Ravenloft's domains, with just a few wisps of mist dissipating around her heels.

Conjunctions

Conjunctions are the inverse of being spirited away. Rather than dragging the characters into Ravenloft, a piece of Ravenloft comes to them.

Sometimes, a sliver of the Realm of Dread is superimposed on another world. The original landscape vanishes, replaced by that of one or more domains. No one knows where the original terrain goes during its time of displacement, but some sages speculate that it may be drawn into the Mists, replacing the lands missing from the domain. Where once stood nothing but a barren hill, travelers might now see a ruined tower, a regal manor or an entire town — and vice versa. This rare, unpredictable event is known as a *conjunction*. The cataclysmic Grand Conjunction of 740 BC stands as the most notorious example of this phenomenon. Had the Grand Conjunction not collapsed, the Realm of Dread would have turned itself entirely inside out, casting its domains to the Material Plane, while drawing the Material Plane into itself.

During a conjunction, individuals may freely walk between the original world and the section of Ravenloft that appears, but they should be cautious in doing so, for conjunctions are always temporary. Eventually, the piece of Ravenloft vanishes, and the original landscape is restored, unchanged. Those who are in the piece of Ravenloft when it vanishes find themselves trapped in the Land of Mists.

While spiriting your characters away provides your outlander PCs with a chance to interact with Ravenloft, a conjunction lets your entire campaign world interact with the Realm of Dread. Soldiers from Falkovnia or werewolves from Verbrek might invade your characters' homeland, or the ruler of their home might find herself abducted by a Barovian vampire because she reminds him of his long-lost love. The possibilities are endless, and once the adventure is over you can banish the tendril of Ravenloft back to its misty confines.

Escaping the Mists

Of course, once the adventure (or group of adventures) is over, you need a way to return your outlander characters to their homeland. The Mists free their prisoners only when the Dark Powers command it, and the Dark Powers follow your commands. Thus, ultimately, all escape routes from Ravenloft boil down to the will of the Dungeon Master.

Should you decide to end your players' time in the Realm of Dread, you have several options at your disposal. The Mists might simply deposit the heroes back home after their harrowing adventure, perhaps after they perform some virtuous and noteworthy deed, such as destroying a darklord or lifting a curse. Time flows strangely in Ravenloft, so when the heroes are freed, they could, conceivably, be sent to any place and any time on the Material Plane. Indeed, many outlanders are returned to the exact time and place they first entered the Mists, regardless of how many months, years or centuries may have passed for them in the meantime.

If the Mists are not so kind, the Vistani might be able to return the characters to their homeland, for a suitably epic price. A few darklords even claim to have discovered secret exits, though of course they cannot use them for themselves. These darklords may offer to reveal their secrets in return for unthinkable services — whether or not their claims hold any truth.

Failing that, the heroes may choose to seek out conjunctions, hoping to find one that can carry them home, or they may search for one of a handful of two-ways *portals* rumored to exist. However, escape is not as simple as that. In truth, no permanent *portals* exist offering true escape from Ravenloft, but a few temporary *gates* to the Material Plane do exist. These *gates* remain closed, intangible and undetectable, except for specific triggering conditions. These triggers may include dire prophecies, complex rituals or astronomical events such as eclipses or falling stars. Other triggers may be even more esoteric. According to legend, one *gate* can be found within Castle Hunadora, former home of the darklord Duke Gundar, but it remained open only as long as the floor was kept wet with the blood of Gundar or his kin.

If the Mists do not simply free outlanders, then their quests for escape are always arduous and often futile. The search for a passage out of Ravenloft has formed the central motivation of many an outlander campaign.

Optional Rules: Language Barriers

As mentioned in the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, no Common tongue is spoken in the Land of Mists. In a Mists campaign, where the heroes can contrast unwelcoming foreign realms with the comforts of their homelands, the lack of widespread languages can be a useful tool to socially isolate the PCs. However, if the heroes have no grasp of the local language — a situation that outlanders are likely to encounter — their complete alienation can quickly become counterproductive. Heroes unable to communicate will likely be unable to understand the events occurring around them. Clues become useless, investigations are rendered all but impossible and carefully structured plots degenerate into a bewildering string of inexplicable events.

If language barriers are threatening to become a serious problem for the outlanders in your game, the following options may provide solutions.

No Change: The heroes must sink or swim based on their ability to improvise means of communication. Using this option, the "default" for the Ravenloft setting, spells such as *comprehend languages* and *tongues* become far more important for outlanders and wide-ranging heroes. If such magic is not available, you may want to provide a helpful NPC who can act as a translator. The NPC may befriend the PCs, perhaps she too came from their homeland, or she may be a professional guide, forcing the heroes to pay for her services.

Local "Common": When outlanders enter the Realm of Dread, allow them to discover that their "Common" is known here as the local domain language. For example, outlanders who enter the Mists in Mordent may find themselves fluent in Mordentish (or rather that the Mordentish speak Common), allowing them to get their bearings before continuing on to more exotic lands. Other domain languages remain just as inscrutable, however. This option is particularly effective if you select a domain that shares other cultural traits with the outlanders' homeland, perhaps hinting that the domain's darklord was also drawn from their world.

"Common" is Common: If language barriers are simply causing more trouble than they're worth, as can be the case in Weekend of Hell scenarios, simply add the Common tongue back into the setting. Most NPCs are again able to communicate with the heroes, but they may still revert to their local domain language when making private, suspicious asides to their kinsmen.

Using Bonus Languages

Characters from culturally isolated lands (be they Islands of Terror or simply remote villages) may begin the game fluent only in their native domain language, regardless of their Intelligence score. If a character leaves her bonus language "slots" empty, she can later fill those slots through total cultural immersion, allowing her to learn languages without having to expend skill points. The player should state her intent to use the "total immersion" technique whenever she wishes to fill one of her empty bonus language slots. Once a character decides to learn a language, each month she spends immersed in a foreign culture entitles her to an Intelligence check (DC 25) to learn that culture's language. Each additional month the character spends studying the local tongue (which she can do while engaged in other activities) grants her a cumulative +1 competence bonus on the Intelligence check. (Thus, after six months of immersion, the check drops to DC 20.) Of course, this process can be time-consuming, but characters can always learn languages more quickly by spending skill points as normal.

Example: Casidhe hails from the village of Briggdarrow in Tepest. Although she has an Intelligence score of 17 (granting three bonus languages), she grew up with minimal exposure to foreign folk and thus begins play fluent only in Tepestani. If she later travels the Core, she can learn up to three additional languages simply by interacting regularly with the local populace. After she uses total immersion to fill her three bonus language slots, however, she must spend skill points to learn further tongues.

Bringing the Horror Home

A third option is to simply incorporate pieces of Ravenloft into your own campaign world. Few campaign settings are mapped out in their entirety and thus provide plenty of room for bits and pieces of Ravenloft to intrude. The various domains of Ravenloft are, in many ways, worlds unto themselves, and you can usually remove them from Ravenloft and place them in your campaign world without doing them harm. Don't hesitate to think of Ravenloft accessories as a toy box filled with horrific rules, locales, NPCs, monsters and more to add to your preferred settings. Cannibalism is a time-honored DM tradition, after all.

Creating Atmosphere

Ravenloft is a campaign setting that focuses heavily on mood, atmosphere and tone. It is important not just to create an atmosphere of darkness, but one charged with emotion. Ravenloft isn't simply about terror. It is about tragedy, triumph and redemption; it embodies good and evil, love and hate, justice and cruelty.

Creating such a strong emotional atmosphere can be challenging. After all, you are trying to instill excitement and horror, not just in the characters of the campaign, but in your players as well. You aren't just trying to appeal to any audience; you are trying to affect the emotions of your friends, the people who may know you better than anyone else in the world.

Ravenloft's unique atmosphere and the emotions it evokes distinguish it from other fantasy games. This section helps you find ways to create the dark moods and eerie atmosphere of Ravenloft.

Thirteen Tips for Tension

Below is a list of tips and tricks that Dungeon Masters can use to enhance the levels of suspense in their games. Not all these tips will be effective for every group, and many of them are subject to the law of diminishing returns: the more you use

them, the less effective they are going to be. Experiment with these tips, find the ones that work best for you and your players, and don't hesitate to develop your own methods that best fit your style and campaign.

One thing to remember is that roleplaying is a cooperative experience, not a competitive one. Ravenloft puts a lot of power and responsibility in the hands of the Dungeon Master, and the stated goal to "Make things scary!" can be an intimidating one. In the effort to craft a frightening adventure, it can be tempting to be heavy-handed, and some Dungeon Masters come to the mistaken conclusion that the best way to run a horror campaign is to abuse the players. Some of the tips below encourage hiding information from the players in order to keep things suspenseful, but you should endeavor to be honest even in your secrecy. Arbitrarily punishing player characters for using their class abilities or fudging die rolls and stats so that the bad guys always win is going to frustrate players quickly. Even in Ravenloft, fun is more important than fear. These tips are designed to help make your adventures more frightening for the players, but if you find that any of them are making the players more frustrated instead, it's time to stop using them.

I. Remove Distractions

Some groups like to set a mood when they play: turning down the lights, playing by candlelight and so forth. Whatever environment you find conducive to roleplaying is fine, but before you worry about using more advanced techniques to maintain a horrific atmosphere, the most basic and important thing to do is to remove any distractions. Turn the television off, try to avoid unrelated conversations and remove anything else that might pull your players' minds out of the game.

II. Hide the Mechanics

James' rogue, Vandel, is ambushed by a broken one. David, the DM, checks his notes: Vandel has an AC of 17. David rolls for the broken one's two slam attacks: a 15 and a natural 20. Rerolling the critical threat for an 18, the broken one has scored a near miss and a critical hit. The DM rolls damage: 10 points, leaving an already-battered Vandal with just 9 hit points left. David relays the results to James:

DM: *The creature lashes out with its misshapen hands. One claw barely misses your throat, but snags on your collar. In that moment, the shaggy monstrosity's other paw brutally smashes you across the jaw! Searing pain shoots through your face; you can taste hot blood in your mouth. The force of the blow knocks you free of the creature's grip again as your collar uselessly tears away, but you know you can't survive another hit like that. James, you're up. What do you do?*

An important part of building tension is the maintaining of atmosphere, and phrases such as "saving throw," "attack bonus," and "Hit Dice" can make it hard to retain a believable atmosphere of horror. Whenever possible, let the game mechanics remain invisible. For example, don't refer to the Mummy King's high Armor Class; describe the unnatural durability of his undead flesh instead. Don't tell players the DC of their saving throws or ability checks; just let them roll and tell them if they succeeded or failed. This can turn every combat into a mini-mystery, as the players spend the first few rounds working out their foes' defenses through trial and error.

Perhaps the most dramatic possibility is to keep track of the player characters' hit points yourself. Don't let the players know exactly how many hit points their characters have left. Instead of telling them to deduct 8 hit points thanks to the mummy's backhand, provide a colorful description of the blow, including how forceful it was and how much pain it caused and let the player guess exactly how much damage was done. Be prepared to give a player a general, descriptive reminder of her health whenever she asks, however. A hero who's only lost a few hit points might just be "a little rattled, with a few scrapes." If a hero is down to her last few hit points, you might say that "her limbs are stiff and her vision is swimming, as she struggles against the pain to stay on her feet."

Ultimately, this tactic's goal is simply to encourage the players to think about their characters in descriptive terms, rather than raw numbers. Hiding the mechanics has the added bonus of leaving your players uncertain about the exact capabilities of the foes they face, and nothing adds tension like uncertainty.

III. Phantom Dice

DM: *You discover a narrow stone staircase curling down into whatever dark chambers lie beneath the ruined abbey.*

Carissa: *"Whatever that thing Marik saw was, it must have gone down here. I will go first."*

The DM checks his notes. The staircase is cramped and shadowy, but neither trapped nor guarded.

DM: *All right. Before you start down the stairs, though, give me a Spot check.*

Optional Rules: Making Combat More Perilous

Ravenloft is a realm of Gothic adventure; though heroes can expect to be regularly terrorized by their foes, they should be capable of striking back against the darkness. Adventures where heroes have to hack their way through a clutching mob of the walking dead have as much place in Ravenloft campaigns as the slow and considered exploration of a vampire's mausoleum. That said, if your PCs have started to greet onrushing horrors with a jaded yawn, you might want to experiment with methods of making combat more lethal. The Thirteen Tips for Tension present ways of creating a threatening atmosphere within the existing d20 framework. The rules provided in the next few sidebars present optional changes to those rules.

As always, you should discuss new rules with your players before introducing them in your game. The goal is to make combat more thrilling for the heroes, not to inadvertently convince your players that you're stacking the deck against their characters.

Option One: Lower the Threshold

If a creature suffers damage equal to the massive damage threshold (*PHB*, Chapter 8, "Injury and Death," *Loss of Hit Points*) in a single attack, it must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 15) or be slain outright.

One of the simplest and most effective methods of increasing the danger to PCs is to lower the massive damage threshold. At its default level of 50 points, mid-level heroes can wade into most battles with confidence. The lower you set the threshold, however, the more the heroes need to worry about a single, lucky shot striking them dead.

If you reduce the massive damage threshold to a mere 10 points, the heroes become dangerously fragile. Regardless of a character's level or hit points, virtually any foe suddenly has the chance to tear out her throat with a single attack. Combat in a "threshold 10" game is very lethal, so you should expect your players to avoid it at every opportunity. Character classes geared for battle, such as fighters and barbarians, will be much less attractive than classes that shine outside of open combat, such as rogues and bards.

To create the balance between menace and thrilling action called for in Gothic adventures, we recommend setting the massive damage threshold at 25 points. In a "threshold 25" game, minor foes won't deliver instant kills, giving the heroes the confidence they need to face their enemies. However, heroes may have think twice before approaching a powerful menace.

Some creatures, primarily constructs and the undead, are not subject to massive damage, regardless of where you set the massive damage threshold. Thus, the lower you set the threshold, the more powerful you will make these creatures in comparison to the PCs.

Keep in mind that this option is most influential while the player characters are in the mid-levels. At starting levels, any attack that deals massive damage is likely to wipe out a character's hit points, killing her whether or not she makes her saving throw. Conversely, at the highest levels, heroes will usually be able to succeed at the Fortitude save, dampening the danger.

Option Two: Drag Them Down

The default d20 rules allow characters to keep fighting at their full abilities right down to their last hit point, proving a basis for extremely heroic, "cinematic" combat. Another method of making players more wary of combat is to impair their character's ability to function as they near death.

Using this option, a character must make a Fortitude save (DC 15) when he drops below half his total hit points (do not include temporary hit points in this total). If the creature fails this saving throw, then a combination of pain, anxiety and fatigue causes him to suffer a –1 circumstance penalty on all attack rolls, ability checks, skill checks and saving throws. If the character drops below one-quarter of his normal hit point total, he must succeed at another Fortitude save (DC 15) or the circumstance penalty increases by –1 (to a total of –2 if both saves are failed). These penalties go away as the character recovers hit points.

Creatures ignore these penalties if they either have no Intelligence or no Constitution score, are not subject to critical hits or massive damage or are immune to pain or stunning effects. Thus, while a single lucky stab at a barbarian's arm may impede her for the rest of the fight, a shambling golem or dripping ooze can battle on unhindered to the end.

As opposed to lowering the massive damage threshold, this option's effects manifest more evenly across the levels, but keep in mind that it too gives creatures such as constructs and undead a distinct advantage. It also increases the importance of healing magic in your campaign, since the PCs survival often depends on keeping their hit points replenished.

Patrick: *All of us?*

DM: *No, just Seriah; she's the one in front.*

Carissa: *Okay. [Rolls.] I got a 22. What does Seriah see?*

DM: *[Pausing to scribble in his notes, then sounding guarded.] Hmm. You don't notice anything out of the ordinary.*

Carissa: *Oh. Maybe Marik should go first?*

Dice rolling can detract from atmosphere as well, but it's a simple matter to turn things around and have it work in your favor. By having your players make meaningless die rolls and allowing them to think that the rolls have meaning, you let the players' imaginations create tension for you. Have the players make Listen or Spot checks without telling them why, and don't tell them if they succeeded or not. Roll dice behind your screen when a player declares an action, pretend to make note of the results and refuse to elaborate on what the roll meant.

Overuse of this technique can grow tiresome, but when employed judiciously it can give your players enough paranoia to make the actual threats that much more frightening.

IV. Death Be Not Proud

This is a crucial tip on what not to do. Some DMs believe that the key to horror playing is a high body count, but using character death as a means to create tension is almost always a bad idea. Don't make your adventures a contest to see who can go the longest without dying. In fact, the more frequently you kill off the PCs, the less your players will emotionally connect with their characters. If you feel a fiat death is the best way to accentuate the terror of a situation, sacrifice an NPC to the moment. Of course, Ravenloft wouldn't be very scary without the threat of death, so don't be afraid to face your players with potentially lethal encounters. Just make certain that you always give them a fair, fighting chance, and remember that it's impossible to frighten a dead man.

V. Cosmetic Changes

Experienced players are often familiar with the exact capabilities and vulnerabilities of the monsters that cross their paths. You don't need to constantly create new monsters to throw a little fear of the unknown into them, however. All you have to do is make the familiar seem unfamiliar. Changing a monster's appearance, environment and habits can make the players uncertain of what they face, and you don't need to change the monster's statistics at all. The caliban is one example of an old creature (the half-orc) given new life by a simple change in presentation.

For another example, consider the cloaker. Using simple descriptive changes, or with just a few minor tweaks to its game statistics, you can make the cloaker a sheet of flying, animated flesh created by a mad necromancer, an amorphous mantalike creature from the bottom of the sea or a furry bat-thing lurking in the treetops. All these descriptions can use the cloaker's statistics with little or no modification, but the resulting horror may well be unrecognizable even to your most jaded players.

VI. By Any Other Name

DM: *As you round the corner, several skeletal corpses pry themselves from niches in the catacomb's walls. Their skulls turn to glare at you in unison, and they all start shambling in your direction.*

Carissa: *Seriah can handle a few skeletons. "Stand back!"*

Carissa makes a turn check for her cleric and adds up her turning damage. The DM notes the results.

DM: *Good job! All but one of the skeletons shy away, throwing their bony hands across their fleshless faces. They're already starting to retreat. Patrick, Marik is up.*

Patrick: *Only one left? No problem. Marik steps forward to strike it down.*

DM: *Okay; roll to hit.*

Patrick gets a total of 16, no match for this skeletal ancient dead's AC of 21.

DM: *Your sword skitters down the corpse's ribs without cracking any of them. As you realize this skeleton is tougher than it looks, it looses a hollow, echoing cackle as it strikes back....*

This tactic is a variation on cosmetic changes and hiding mechanics, but is worthy of its own mention: Never call a werewolf a werewolf if you can call it something else more evocative and mysterious (though without lying). Once you identify a creature as a "werewolf," it's defined, and the player characters dutifully break out the wolfsbane and silverware. Instead, describe its appearance, relaying only what the heroes' senses can tell them, without resorting to definitive identifiers. Don't call it a lycanthrope; call it a "huge, twisted beast, shaped in mockery of a man but with a wolfen mien; it is covered in heavy fur, and vicious teeth fill its slavering maw." Faced with this wolf-thing, the player characters can plainly see the threat before them, but they cannot be sure what the

threat actually is. It might be a werewolf, but it could also be a wolfwere, some kind of gnoll or even a wizard employing a *polymorph* spell. Until you tell the players what it is, they can't be certain, and uncertainty is the mother of suspense.

VII. Getting Personal

During their adventures, the player characters should have the opportunity to encounter characters they like: friends, family, allies, romantic interests and so on. These emotional entanglements are a prime way to get the proper level of tension in subsequent adventures. When a close friend is abducted by a madman or dominated by a vampire, the personal investment makes matters significantly more urgent. However, never forget that these allies should act as moral support for the heroes and should be full characters in and of themselves. Placing allies in danger too often risks reducing your NPCs to nothing more than serial victims. Should an ally actually betray the heroes, expect a struggle to restore the players' trusting natures. You don't want to inadvertently punish your players for forming in-game relationships, but as an every-once-in-a-while motivator, it's hard to beat.

A closely related tactic, but one that carries much less risk of backlash, is simply to identify the players with their characters during your game sessions. To be clear, this is not to suggest that the players exist in the world of Ravenloft. It's simply a way to make the events that characters experience seem more immediate and exciting to the players. Encourage the players to do this as well, as long as they're comfortable with it. Rather than saying, "The ettercap lunges at your bard," say, "The ettercap lunges at you." This simple change in pronoun use places your players right at the heart of the action.

VIII. The Ticking Clock

Nothing adds suspense like the tick of a second hand. Giving the player characters a time limit in which to accomplish their goals adds a sense of urgency that makes every encounter more frightening (as well as limiting the heroes' ability to take 20 on many checks). It's best to express the time limit in game time rather than real time, as the players need to have the opportunity to freely express their characters' actions. By scrupulously keeping track of just how long the PCs' actions take, you will be adding a whole new level of tension to the proceedings.

Rest and Restlessness

Given the choice, every hero would face her foes while fully rested and ready for action. Sadly, the forces of evil are seldom so accommodating.

Sleep

Victims are never so vulnerable as when they lie in slumber. A sleeping creature is considered a helpless defender (*PHB*, Chapter 8, "Combat Modifiers"). Sleeping creatures are aware of their surroundings, but only dimly. Assume that a sleeping creature is taking 10 on all Listen checks and "taking 1" (adding +1 to the check rather than rolling a die) to all Spot checks. A sleeping character who succeeds at either check is roused by the nearby activity and awakens. Once awake, a character needs to spend a standard action to get her bearings before she can act.

Staying Awake

Sometimes, particularly when facing a "Ticking Clock" (see text), a hero may need to carry on in the face of her worsening physical and mental exhaustion. After a full night's rest, a character can remain active for 16 hours (20 hours for elves) before tiring. At the end of that period, she must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 15) or become fatigued (*PHB*, Appendix, "General Guidelines and Glossary"). If the character decides to stay awake, she must make another Fortitude save every four hours. Each successive saving throw increases the DC by a cumulative +2. For example, a human resisting sleep makes Fortitude saves at DC 15 after 16 hours, DC 17 after 20 hours, DC 19 after 24 hours, DC 31 after 48 hours and so forth. The Endurance feat grants its +4 bonus on these saving throws.

A fatigued character who fails a second Fortitude save to stay awake becomes exhausted (*PHB*, Appendix, "General Guidelines and Glossary"). Each time an exhausted character fails further Fortitude saves to stay awake, she suffers a cumulative –1 penalty on all attack rolls, ability checks, skill checks and saving throws for each failed saving throw.

In addition, whenever an exhausted character experiences a calm, quiet moment of rest, she must succeed at a Concentration check to avoid falling asleep. The DC of this check is 10+2 for each Fortitude save the character has made to stay awake.

All penalties for lack of sleep return to normal after a full night of complete rest.

For examples of situations where time is of the essence, consider heroes trying to reach the master vampire's coffin while sunset steadily approaches or fighting their way through fanatical cultists while the high priest conducts a summoning ritual. The ticking clock also works in the long term. Keep a campaign journal, using it to track not only information such as the heroes' exploits, dates for Horror or Madness recovery checks and the like, but also sunrise and sunset times and the lunar cycle. (Any farmer's almanac can provide this information for you.) The nights grow long in the Core, plunging the land into as much as sixteen hours of darkness at midwinter. The vampire hunters among your PCs will soon come to dread the ebbing days of autumn, while afflicted lycanthropes will keep a wary eye on the waxing moon.

IX. One Hand Tied

The heroes have taken shelter from an unexpectedly large band of goblins within a claustrophobic cairn in the Tepestani hills, splitting up to guard both entrances. Unfortunately, none of the PCs have noticed that the cairn itself is of goblin design....

DM: *...And yet another goblin marauder falls to Marik's blade! At this rate, you can tell that these raiders would need to be pretty lucky to get a spear past your full plate.*

Patrick: *Good, good! I glance back down the tunnel and yell out to the others to see if they need any help at their end.*

DM: *You do that, but you turn just in time to see something silently gliding up the tunnel toward you. It has the same silhouette as those degenerate creatures outside, but its form is luminous, transparent and indistinct. All you can make out clearly is the hatred in its burning red eyes.*

The DM rolls for an attack and scores a hit.

DM: *Before you can react, the spirit reaches out — and sinks its knobby hand into your chest, passing through your armor as if it weren't even there! Make a Fortitude save.*

Patrick: *Uh oh.*

Players know what their characters are good at and what they are bad at, and they naturally try to place their characters in positions where they can excel and avoid situations where they will have difficulty. One method of adding suspense to an encounter is to place the characters in a situation where their strengths are worthless and they must fall back on less developed abilities. A party that prides itself on its power in combat is going to be less comfortable with an encounter where stealth is required to prevail, while a group with impressive spellcasting ability is going to be nervous if deposited in an Island of Terror where magic doesn't work. Like many of the tips in this chapter, this tactic should be used with care; by making a character with specific capabilities, a player is making it known that she wants situations in which those capabilities will be useful. Don't take the heroes out of their element too often, just often enough to keep them on their toes.

X. The Hidden Weakness

Few gaming styles can ruin suspense more than a full-tilt, head-on, sword-swinging charge through an adventure. Suspense needs time to build, and that means your players should be encouraged to be patient and take things a step at a time.

One method of doing that is the hidden weakness. For example: The heroes are faced with an evil ghost that is impossible to harm by conventional means; their mightiest weapons and magic do nothing to it. Forced to pull back, the player characters begin a closer investigation of the haunted house and the village it lies in. Eventually, by talking to the local doctor, they discover the ghost was murdered by arsenic poisoning. The next time they face the spirit, their weapons are smeared with arsenic, and the ghost falls, its hidden weakness exposed.

Damage reduction, a common special quality among monsters, implicitly encourages this concept. For example, silver weapons cleave neatly through many lycanthropes' flesh, but most of the damage dealt by other weapons is absorbed harmlessly. The revised Dungeons & Dragons rules have reduced damage reduction ratings across the board, but in a Ravenloft campaign, you may wish to increase creatures' existing damage reduction by +5 (thus increasing 10/silver to 15/silver) or to bolster their supernatural defenses. We recommend that you only increase a creature's damage reduction if some kind of nonmagic weapon can pierce its defenses; a creature vulnerable only to powerful magic may well leave heroes with no choice but to flee.

The hidden weakness has the added bonus of encouraging the player characters to learn more about the villains they fight, which always makes for more interesting adventures. As an aside, characters should get at least as much experience for defeating a foe with their wits as they get for bashing it to death.

XI. Use All the Senses

To perk up his players, the DM has decided to spice up an otherwise uneventful overland trek with an encounter with a dread troll.

DM: *As you hike through the woods, you come to a small stone bridge spanning a wide gully. The bridge is crumbling and mossy; considering the overgrown wagon trail that crosses it, you would guess it hasn't been maintained in years. For a while now, the crunching of the leaves under your feet has been bothering you, but only now do you realize why. The crunching isn't unusually loud, but the rest of the forest has fallen silent. The only sounds are those of your own movements and the subdued burbling of the creek before you.*

James: *Does the bridge look safe? How big is this gully, anyway?*

DM: *The bridge seems solid enough. The gully looks to be about 20 feet across. You peer over the steep edge and see that it's about 10 feet deep. Shallow, muddy water at the bottom ripples as it flows around a number of pale, rounded stones poking up out of the creek bed. You notice a faintly stale, acrid scent in the air. The creek smells stagnant, even though you can see the current.*

James: *Hmm. "Let's not get our feet wet, guys."*

Carissa: *"Come on, let's keep going." I will walk carefully to keep my footing.*

Patrick: *"Ladies first! I will be right behind you."*

DM: *Fair enough. Seriah's about halfway across the bridge, when a long, warty green arm suddenly lashes up from the shadows beneath the bridge, its clawed hand slapping against the stone with a wet smack. A damp-looking creature pulls itself into view, grinning up at you all with a wide maw of yellowed fangs. "A toll for my bridge," the creature snarls, its voice sounding like metal scraping on metal. "A skull for my toll. It matters not whose, but quickly now choose!"*

If you want to keep your players engrossed in a scene, make sure you describe the heroes' surroundings in detail; not just how things look, but also how they feel, sound and smell. If you can subtly hide clues of hidden dangers within your descriptions, your players will kick themselves later

for not picking up on the warnings. For example, if the heroes are checking into an inn run by predators that use it solely to lure in their victims, you might mention a coating of dust on the bed sheets — a hint that no guest has actually slept here in some time.

Props are another good way to engage the players' senses. Instead of reading what a note or journal says, hand them a note and let them read it for themselves. Don't go crazy with props, though; rubber spiders and silly string are not going to make adventures more suspenseful.

XII. A House Divided

The player characters are strongest when they stand as a unit. Fear comes from being in a position of weakness. Separating the player characters and having them face individual menaces while they try desperately to reunite can deliver plenty of suspense. The game's class system strongly supports this tactic; each character has areas of expertise and areas of vulnerability. Only when the heroes work as a group can they combine their strengths to counter their weaknesses.

PCs can become physically separated, or they can be mentally separated, although they remain together as a group, devious foes may find ways to turn the heroes against each other. Domination magic and shapechangers such as doppelgangers are particularly effective at eroding party unity. On occasion, a strongly motivated foe may be able to divide the party's loyalties simply by arguing and defending her position; this is most effective when the villain's twisted actions are intended to promote some "greater good."

If you're physically separating the heroes, you usually don't need to separate the players themselves. In fact, doing so can prove irritating; players like to be privy to the ongoing action even if their characters aren't. Don't split the party too often or for too long, as the technique requires a lot of jumping from scene to scene that can detract from the mood if done in large doses. In fact, serious overuse of this tactic can result in paranoid players who are aghast at the thought of "splitting the party" for any reason.

XIII. Changes of Scenery

Whether your game focuses on native heroes or outlanders, it's often a good idea to give your campaign a solid grounding in a specific location before sending the party to all ends of the Land of Mists. Not only does it give your settings a richer background and a base for the heroes, it enables you to use changes of scenery to throw the characters off guard and make adventures more unsettling, again contrasting the unnatural (or merely exotic) with the familiar. If your campaign kicks off in Mordent, for example, run several adventures in Mordent and let the players grow accustomed to that environment before widening your scope. When the Mists swoop in and drop them in Har'Akir, they will have quite a few adjustments to make before they get their bearings. If you use this tip, the courteous thing to do is to drop the characters back in their preferred setting once the adventure is over. On the other hand, you might find that the players prefer the flavor of the newer environment, while many outlander campaigns focus on the search for a way home.

Portraying NPCs

Regardless of how you present or alter the rules, the surest and most time-honored way to achieve an emotion-charged atmosphere is through roleplaying. How you portray your NPCs sets the tone of the game session while setting a precedent for your players. If you are roleplaying heavily, throwing yourself into each character, your players will be inspired to follow suit. If you maintain a detached perspective on the game, your players likewise remain distant from the events before them. More than anything else, roleplaying is your most powerful method of dragging the emotions of Ravenloft from the game itself into the room with your players.

To Voice or Not to Voice?

When portraying a specific NPC, many Dungeon Masters affect a character voice: a verbal persona woven from a distinct accent or affect. Employing a character voice is an extremely effective tool for the DM. By speaking in a character voice, you help players differentiate between your various NPCs. If you refrain from using character voices, you must be prepared for the fact that your players are listening to the same voice every time they encounter a different NPC. After a while, all NPCs begin to sound the same. At best, players may have a hard time distinguishing various NPCs in your campaign. At worst, your players may soon begin to think that there is no difference between the various NPCs. They could come to see your characters as various iterations of yourself.

The best tip for assuming a character voice is to avoid feeling embarrassed. If you have never used character voices, it may be awkward at first. However, if you persist with the use of voices in your game, you will find that you can easily build up a repertoire of dozens of character voices, which greatly expands the gaming experience for you and your players.

How Do I Do Voices?

Learning how to do character voices is fun and easy. Here are a few basic pointers:

Start With What You Know: Most people can switch to one or two accents just from their general life experience, affecting commonly heard dialects, such as "British," "Southern" or "Brooklyn." Find an accent that you can imitate and practice it. You aren't looking for authenticity. Indeed, your accent will most likely be less than perfect and would never fool a native, but that's not what matters at a game table. All you're looking for is something to help your players instantly distinguish a particular NPC from others they meet.

Play With Pitch and Volume: Affecting a character persona can be as simple as adjusting the pitch of your voice. Try talking in a high voice when portraying one NPC and in a low voice with another. Play with volume as well. A character that only speaks in whispers is very different from a character whose boisterous nature means she only speaks with shouts.

Developing Personas: A famous impersonator once told an interviewer that he crafts his impersonations around certain "key phrases," a little quip or saying that his persona often repeats. Once he had mastered the key phrase of the character, he would expand his persona from there, slowly developing all the various quips and mannerisms of the character he portrayed. This technique of picking up voices can be used to expand your character-voice repertoire greatly.

Example: David wants to develop a good, solid Irish accent for his bartender NPC. After watching some movies set in Ireland, David decides he really likes the Catholic priest featured in one of the films. David particularly likes the way the priest says, "Ach. In all me life and times, I never saw a woman do that before."

David practices saying this line until he settles into the right inflection and tone. Once he has this one line nailed down, he expands from the catch phrase, practicing the use of other words with the same accent. He starts with changing the end of the line:

"Ach. In all me life and times, I never saw a horse running so fast."

"Ach. In all me life and times, I never drank so much ale."

From there, he progresses to changing the beginning of the line:

"I have lived for 73 years. I never saw a woman do that before."

"I have seen a man do that, but I never saw a woman do that before."

And so on, until David can speak just about any line while affecting a fake Irish accent. Once David has practiced enough, he no longer needs to use his key phrase. David will never pass as a native Irishman, of course, but he will at least be able to differentiate between his NPCs.

Practice Makes Perfect: It may feel childish at first, but many Dungeon Masters actually practice using their character voices. Some practice in the car, others practice in the shower. Where you choose to practice, be it aping movie lines as you leave the theater or later at the breakfast table, is up to you, but practicing your character voices regularly helps you feel more comfortable with them.

Don't Get Embarrassed: The first time you affect a voice in front of your friends, they may be uncomfortable; if it strikes them as comical, they may even laugh. If you stick with your character voice, however, everyone eventually sees that you aren't joking around and settle down. Most players appreciate it when their Dungeon Master puts on a character voice for them; it shows that the DM is going the extra mile and that she is putting effort into their gaming experience. If you are successful with your character voices, you may find your players joining in the fun and developing unique voices for their own characters.

Establish Recurring Character Voices: Once you have a few voices down, associate those voices with particular characters in your campaign. Each time you speak as a particular character, use a specific character voice. You will find that soon, all you need to do is start using a certain voice, and your players instantly know who's supposed to be talking at any given moment.

Example: Andy has been running a campaign for a while in which the main villain has clashed with the party several times. The villain, a Barovian blackguard, speaks with a heavily accented Transylvanian accent.

Andy waits for a moment in the campaign where the player's characters believe they are alone. They are speaking to each other about their future plans when all of the sudden, Andy interrupts them with a strongly accented, "Well, well, well. We meet again."

His players are startled; so are their characters. "He's here?" they all exclaim at once. The players recognized the campaign's major villain simply by Andy's use of the villain's particular voice.

Develop a Grab Bag: In the back of your mind, always keep a few character voices floating around your head, ready to pull out at a moment's notice. By doing this, you continually have a quick repertoire of NPCs to whip out as needed, such as a grumbly shopkeeper, a curious child or a pompous noble. Having a grab bag of voices helps with any campaign, because this allows you to produce instant personas for any NPC for any unexpected occasion.

I Just Can't Do Voices

Many Dungeon Masters simply don't use character voices. Some lack the verbal agility. Others have a hard time keeping different accents straight. Yet others simply can't take themselves seriously while affecting an accent or vocal tone that isn't theirs. Don't worry; there is something that is just as effective as character voices when it comes to characterization.

The Importance of Motion and Gesture

Affecting a character voice is not the only thing a Dungeon Master can do to promote atmosphere and roleplaying, nor is it the only way a DM can differentiate between her NPCs. Your gestures, posture and motions can develop a persona without having to speak, let alone using a character voice. Here are some examples of gestures and postures:

Shy or frightened characters tend to stay shrunken and small. They hunch down and keep their arms close to their sides. Their eyes may dart about if especially nervous, and they try to avoid physical or eye contact.

Bitter or grizzled characters frown and glare. Their lips are set in a permanent snarl. Their motions are lackadaisical (after all, what's the point?). They tend to sit back a lot, content to have things happen to them.

Authoritative characters stand tall and proud. They make broad and sweeping motions to match their grand stature. All their gestures bespeak power and action. They might pound a fist into a palm or point at someone in condemnation.

Sinister characters tend to look at the world through very wide eyes or narrow, squinted eyes. They often carry a wry smirk on their faces, as if they know something you don't.

Elderly characters look about with half-lidded eyes. They move slowly and gesture minimally. Their hands might shake while they are gesturing or speaking. Taken to an extreme, these mannerisms can also mark undead that bear the insufferable weight of countless centuries. When Bela Lugosi portrayed Dracula, he always remained as still as possible; every movement had a specific purpose. Try portraying a lich or mummy the same way, acting as though indulging in any indication of life is a distasteful burden.

Wise characters look thoughtful. They may wear a slight frown upon their faces and listen before speaking, nodding sagely at every word. They may clasp a steady hand on someone's shoulder when about to give out a piece of advice.

Spunky characters can't help the grins on their faces. They like to wink at others or bite their lip in a sprightly way. They enjoy teasing and poking fun at others. They're always moving about in every direction.

Brooding or angry characters speak little. They glare steadfastly at those they address. They clench their jaws, ball their hands into fists and fold their arms.

Sad characters often stare into space, pondering their woe. They move slowly, using little effort. They shuffle their feet and slump their shoulders. They may smile slightly, but their smile doesn't quite reach their eyes, and it falters quickly.

Calculating characters stare at people for a long time, in order to assess them. They often look people up and down, scrutinizing them from head to foot. They think before they speak and move with very orderly, restrained gestures.

Manic characters are never quite in control of their bodies. Whether madmen or goblyns chomping at the bit, they may exhibit nervous tics, or they may continually twiddle their fingers. Their bodies are seldom still.

Happy or welcoming characters often hold out their arms to people. They laugh often, even if it's just to humor their guests. They often touch or clasp their friends, giving them pats on the back or rubs of the shoulder.

Of course, none of these suggestions is absolute. They are meant for your perusal, to prompt you to explore different ideas for your own personas. You may find a different way to portray a character or characters. Do whatever works best for you.

Using gesture and posture is very important when it comes to roleplaying or characterization. Dungeon Masters who don't use different voices often differentiate their characters through gestures and posture. Some DMs combine both techniques, adopting voice, gesture and posture to transform themselves into a truly different persona.

Whatever techniques you choose to use, roleplaying is of primary importance in a Ravenloft campaign. The more convincing you make your NPCs, the more your players will buy into the world that you have created. And the more they believe in your world, the more excited, thrilled and emotional they will feel about it.

Sinister Scores

Imagine watching Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* without the discordant, haunting music drifting through the empty halls of the haunted hotel. Picture Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* without its famous theme implying the presence of the unseen shark. Think about the shower scene in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* without the famous screeching of violins echoing the stabbing of the blade.

It's hard to imagine these great thrillers without the music that accompanies them, isn't it? Music plays an integral role in setting a movie's feel. It prompts the audience, tells them what to expect and emotionally prepares them for the coming scene.

Why should your game be any different? By using music, you can insidiously alter the mood of your session, just like movie scores alter the mood of the scenes for which they were written. In fact, many terrifying horror movies suddenly feel flat and lifeless if deprived of the emotional underpinnings of their musical scores.

In movies, music greatly affects the dramatic content of the scene. For example, a long drive down a country road can seem either peaceful or terrifying; a darkened room might be sad or tense; the preparations for a battle may feel invigorating or doomed. It all depends on the tone of the music accompanying the scene.

Using Music in a Campaign

Different Dungeon Masters prefer varying styles of music in their campaigns. Some DMs prefer modern pop; others use strictly classical works. Some DMs use movie scores; others use CDs filled with sound effects or environmental backdrops (such as thunderstorms or crashing waves). In many ways, movie scores work best since they are specifically designed to affect a particular mood and to play as background under an extended scene. Popular or contemporary music may not work well for Ravenloft, particularly since popular music has a modern context and, of course, modern songs tend to be short. Allow your personal taste and the taste of your players to determine what music you use. Here are some tips on selecting the right music for your campaign:

Preview Your Music

Before selecting the music for your campaign, make sure you preview it. Many websites that sell CDs allow you to listen to portions of a CD before purchasing one. Some bookstores allow you to preview all the tracks of any CD in the store. These places are great resources for you to preview music. Nothing is more disappointing than purchasing a CD and then discovering that only one or two tracks on the CD are usable for the campaign. In particular, be sure to differentiate between movie scores and movie soundtracks. Scores are the instrumental themes that set the emotional tone of the film, while soundtracks are collections of individual songs that may only be vaguely related to the film itself. Obviously, the former is what you want.

Select the Right Music

Imagine a really great Ravenloft session. You have the lights turned down and creepy music is playing softly in the background. Your players are staring at you, rapt with attention. Then, suddenly, the music you put on turns into a sweeping love theme just as you introduce your villain. Everyone laughs, and the mood is ruined.

Nothing is more disastrous to a game session than playing a great music track and having the music change unexpectedly. When selecting music for a campaign, choose music tracks that maintain a steady, persistent mood. This type of music is called thematic music. Avoid dynamic music: music tracks that change frequently (soundtracks being a prime example).

Why Thematic Music?

Thematic music in a campaign allows you to take the time to describe things to your players. During your descriptions, you want your music to flow with what you are describing or saying. You don't want the music to disrupt your scene with sudden changes in the tone of the music. Musical changes tend to break the mood. The best way to ensure you are purchasing thematic music is to preview it before buying it. Listen to the entire track that you want to use once you have bought it. While this might seem obvious to some, many Dungeon Masters don't listen to their music tracks all the way through before using them and miss the sudden changes that may come near the end of the track.

Make sure the music that you want is at the beginning of the track as well. It is troublesome to try to fast forward through a CD track in the middle of a game session, just to get to the part of the song that you like. If you use a computer in your game sessions, you may want to create sound files from your CD collection. Doing this allows you to select the specific music you want at any time with just a click of the mouse.

Become Familiar with Your Music

Make sure you know your music well. This aspect of using music is difficult for some Dungeon Masters because, while the music they have selected makes for a great game, it's not always something they want to listen to in their spare time.

Nevertheless, knowing your music pays rich dividends. If you are familiar enough with your music tracks, you will know when the music is about to swell or diminish. You can use this knowledge of your music to your advantage, making your voice swell or die down with the melody, becoming dramatic as the drama of the music increases.

Avoid Overkill

Dungeon Masters tend to find one or two good tracks on a CD and use them over and over. Avoid this pitfall. Eventually, your players will get sick of the music you use and instead of getting them in the mood, your music will get them to roll their eyes and say, "Not this again!"

When using a music track, it's all right to let a track repeat three or four times. More than five times, however, and even the most engaging melodies can grow repetitive, boring your players.

Use your music sparingly. The best time to play music and establish the mood is at the beginning of a new encounter. After a few minutes, slowly turn down the music, for a nice "fade-out" technique and play without the music for a while. You will find your music is more effective when you use it to punctuate something in your campaign. Note that the "hide the mechanics" tip is useful here as well; try to draw as little attention as possible to your manipulation of the music. If the action has to pause for a minute every time you want to switch CD, you may be doing more harm than good.

Advanced Music Techniques

Many DMs are already familiar with using music in their campaigns. Here are some tried and true techniques that take the use of music a step further.

Develop Character Themes

One very effective way to use a music track is to play it every time a certain character or setting comes up in a campaign. Representing characters with repeating themes often occurs in movie scores. Heroes, villains and even locales or events can have pieces of music associated with them.

If you use this technique well, you may not even have to introduce your characters. As Spielberg did with *Jaws*, all you have to do is start playing a particular character's music and your players know he or she has arrived.

This technique is especially powerful when crafting villains. Imagine your PCs sitting and talking quietly, when suddenly you cue up the theme for Strahd! Without having to say a word, you have announced the arrival of a major figure in Ravenloft! You can even use this music when a character's presence looms large, even when the actual character is nowhere to be seen. Strahd's theme might arise not only when he is physically present, but when some weary burgomaster stares absently out a window, telling the heroes what he knows of the vampire's wretched tale.

You can also apply themes to places in the same way you assign a piece of music to particular characters. Perhaps you always play a certain piece when the PCs arrive at particular village or enter a particular realm.

Develop Campaign Themes

You can add a nice touch to your campaign by assigning music that reflects the mood or geographic location of your campaign. Try to choose similar sounding music and avoid music that doesn't mesh well. The heavy sound of thrash metal may appeal to your idea of music to underscore combat, but it may clash intrusively with your selection of eerie, atmospheric themes for a scene that takes place in a haunted house.

Whenever you run a new campaign, try to select music that not only goes together, but also fits the kind of campaign you're thinking about. For instance, if you're running a campaign set in a misty land full of moors and cliffs, you might look for music with a distinctly Celtic bent. In Ravenloft, you probably want a good selection of dark, brooding music. However, you also want your music to fit the domain in which you base your campaign. A Barovian campaign might have heavy Romanian connotations, while a Mordentshire campaign might be more reminiscent of an English countryside. Try building a library of folk music from around the world, popping in a CD of "gypsy violins" when your PCs visit a Vistani camp or Indian music when visiting a marketplace in Sri Raji.

If you own a lot of music by the same composer, you can try using only that composer's work for your campaign, giving your campaign a specific sound. This, too, can establish a musical theme for your campaign.

Musical themes for campaigns serve as an effective DM tool because it draws players further into your world. If all your music pieces refer to each other, then your campaign world will be all the more consistent and convincing.

Craft Scenes Around the Music

Normally, dynamic music can prove difficult to use effectively in a game session. Dynamic music may change so often or so suddenly that it breaks the mood. That's why we advise against using it. On the other hand, dynamic music can be used to great effect when using a scripted description or cut scene (a dramatic technique introduced later in this chapter).

You may play dynamic music in the background while you describe a scene or action, varying your voice along with the music. Usually, the best idea is to use dynamic music to accompany a specific speech or description you prepare before your game session, giving you a chance to rehearse your timing. This technique is challenging, since it requires you to listen to the music, think about what you are going to say, and then speak in time with the melody. However, if you can master this technique, you will not only amaze your players, you may create a riveting scene that lingers in your players' memories for a long time to come.

Develop a Repertoire

Many Ravenloft DMs focus on buying creepy, mysterious music, but not every moment of your campaign is going to be dripping with dread and suspense. Remember that much of your heroes' time is spent in taverns, talking with NPCs or in the thick of combat. Thus, it is important to develop a musical repertoire to cover varying situations.

Consider selecting music for these eight common roleplaying scenes:

Tragedy: Ravenloft is a campaign rich with tragedy. Selections of melancholy or lonely music suit scenes where the players are consoling someone suffering from grief or oppression or when they feel that way themselves.

Mystery: Scenes of terror often have a mysterious element about them. Try selecting cloying themes that hint at and play with the listener. Naturally, scores from mystery or conspiracy films often work best here.

Warmth and Friendliness: You may want more convivial music for happier situations such as relaxing in a tavern, exploring a town fair or carousing with friends. Medieval or renaissance style music often reflects the appropriate mood for these moments.

Stealth and Suspense: Play music that reflects a tense, quiet theme when the PCs are sneaking up on an enemy's forces or breaking into a crypt or a supposedly deserted mansion.

Royalty: When your player characters interact with people of power in formal situations, you need good music for "throne room" scenes. Use a grandiose march or royal theme for these occasions.

Celebration: Play music with a boisterous, lively theme to reflect the mood of a festival, ball or some other social gathering.

Romance: Romance, particularly doomed or star-crossed love, plays a big part in Ravenloft. Classic love themes work well for these scenes. You will find that most movie scores have a love theme.

Action: Playing good action music during combat is always an effective technique to enliven the players. Energetic marches or stirring scores from action movies work well here.

All these situations come up a lot more than you might imagine. If you can find music for all these situations, you may find that you have a complete musical repertoire that fits any situation.

Recommended Music

Here is a sample list of music that may be effective in your campaigns. The selections below focus on music for scenes of eerie, whispered dread or frantic action, since music will often be most effective in these situations. However, most of the CDs listed below contain a variety of music that you can adapt to other scenes as well. Remember, even in Ravenloft, life is not always dark and brooding. Sometimes the light shines through, giving the heroes something to fight for.

Creepy Music

2001: A Space Odyssey (various artists): Aside from the famous orchestral themes, this score includes some wonderfully haunting music. A number of the tracks are filled with a choir of men or women singing single, high-pitched notes. You may only find four or five usable tracks, but those may be enough.

Blade (Mark Isham): This score contains dark, brooding music with a bit of a modern bent to it. Despite the movie's modern setting, the score is timeless. Not all the CDs' tracks are usable, but there are enough good selections to warrant the purchase.

The Craft (Graeme Revell): This score evokes a nice, solid mood. Be careful, some of the tracks are pretty dynamic and change in mid-stride.

Eyes Wide Shut (Jocelyn Pook): This score will be something you love or hate. The opening theme is a single note played faster and faster on a piano. While this effect can prove nerve-wracking to players, you might find it useful for scenes invoking madness or involving locations such as insane asylums

The Haunting (Jerry Goldsmith): The score to this remake opens with "warped carnival music" that is particularly effective for use in a macabre ball or carnival. There are some great horror themes on this CD, but overall, the score is dynamic. Beware of sudden changes.

Hellbound: Hellraiser II (Christopher Young): This is a favorite among movie score aficionados. The opening track is one that is extremely grandiose, dark and majestic. This is a great track for when your most powerful villain arrives.

The Sixth Sense (James Newton Howard): This score contains great themes of terror and sadness. The only drawback is that this music is fairly dynamic. It's a useful score, but be sure to know the sequence of tracks thoroughly before you use it.

Further Recommendations

12 Monkeys, Paul Buckmaster
8MM, Mychael Danna
A Simple Plan, Danny Elfman
Devil's Advocate, James Newton Howard
Mary Reilly, George Fenton
The Omen, Jerry Goldsmith
The Others, Alejandro Amenábar

Action Music

The 13th Warrior (Jerry Goldsmith): This score makes an excellent CD for combat music. Almost every track on the CD evokes the spirit of battle. This score is one that you can easily put into your stereo and leave running for extended combat scenes.

Aliens (James Horner): There are about three solid combat themes on this CD and two dark suspense themes. One nice thematic track contains a sad, tragic theme. Despite the score's hard, technological edge, it can be extremely effective when the heroes are besieged by a relentless onslaught of foes.

Dark City (Trevor Jones): Lovers of modern music in their games should like this CD. It is split into two sections; half of the tracks are modern, while the other half contains the classic score. The action-packed themes of the scored half sound great, but they are very dynamic, so use them most effectively for scripted scenes.

First Knight (Jerry Goldsmith): This score offers another good choice for combat music, since most of the tracks lend themselves to battle or conflict. The last combat theme is not just action-filled but also epic in scope. The opening theme of the CD is fantastic for the feeling of walking into a grand castle, but may be too bright and shiny for Ravenloft.

Gladiator (Hans Zimmer): This score has some energetic combat tracks that differ from each other enough to prevent your players from tiring of them. The music represents a variety of moods, some of which evoke great tragedy and mystery, not just action.

Last of the Mohicans (Trevor Jones and Randy Edelman): This CD consists of with fantastic action-packed music that will get your players going, but it contains more than just action music. Besides containing a compelling love theme, the CD's opening theme is extremely heroic in scope. The only drawback is that the music has a Celtic-Native American bent that may not be appropriate for many Ravenloft campaigns.

Lord of the Rings (Howard Shore): These scores have some great action tracks, as well as ominous tracks of mounting evil, but the music is fairly dynamic. A great strength of these CDs is that they include a variety of themes that you might find useful for many different scenes.

Total Recall (Jerry Goldsmith): From start to finish, this score contains nonstop action music that provides an excellent background for combat. This is a movie score you can just put into your CD player and play without having to think about it, but it also contains a great mystery theme. Overall, it is an excellent buy for those wanting combat music.

Further Recommendations

The 7th Voyage of Sinbad, Bernard Herrmann
Carmina Burana, Carl Orff
Enemy at the Gates, James Horner
The Mummy, Jerry Goldsmith
Requiem for a Dream, Clint Mansell
Sleepy Hollow, Danny Elfman

Soundtracks to Computer Games

Soundtracks to computer games are hard to come by, but well worth the purchase. Even more so than movie scores, computer game soundtracks are composed to sustain a single mood for an indefinite period of time. Thus, most computer game soundtracks are filled with thematic music and almost devoid of dynamic music.

Finding and purchasing the soundtracks to video games can be difficult, though. Most are only offered in a special collector's edition of the com-

puter game. Some soundtracks are actually sold separately from the game, but only offered for a limited time. In a pinch, however, if you play near a computer, most of the time you can simply load up the game and allow it to sit idle, providing a soundtrack for your session.

A number of computer game soundtracks that have proven themselves memorable are listed here for your consideration.

Diablo and Diablo II: These CDs contain a variety of dark music to choose from. Fortunately, these CDs also feature a wide selection of tracks, from ones used in the village to ones used in combat.

Icewind Dale: This is an excellent CD with a wide variety of music. The only drawback (if it can be called a drawback) is that there are numerous tracks and it's hard to remember them all. The CD is made up of a majority of lonely themes that work perfectly well in a horror setting.

Myst: The soundtrack of the famous computer game can be found in special editions of the game and in some specialty stores. This soundtrack contains with lonely, distant themes

Riven: The music to the sequel of Myst is even more compelling than its predecessor. This is a great CD filled with thematic music. Most of the tracks blends together, so a DM can simply put this CD in the player and forget about it. This title is versatile enough to prove useful for DMs who are just starting to use music.

Quake: The excellent score to the original game by Trent Reznor is possibly one of the best CDs one can buy for a horror game. You won't find the actual soundtrack anywhere, but the music is included on the CD-ROM of the computer game. If you can find the old *Quake I* computer game, the music tracks are included after the program track.

Other Picks

1492: Conquest of Paradise (Vangelis): This score is what you need to round out the rest of your soundtrack collection. It has very little in the way of creepy music or action music, but the score is perfect for all the downtime your PCs spend in other places, such as darkened ballrooms or quiet bedchambers. What makes the CD excellent is that almost all the tracks can be used in a campaign for something. It's a must for campaigns where intrigue and conspiracies are rampant.

Bram Stoker's Dracula (Wojciech Kilar): This is an excellent soundtrack, but it's filled with dynamic music. The love theme is excellent, a haunting melody that might be happy or scary depending on how you use it. "The Hunt Builds" is also an excellent track for combat or preparation for combat. There is one really nice track with a lot of sound effects of female vampires flicking their tongues. It is an extremely disturbing track and great for when you want your party to fight a horde of ravenous creatures.

Conan the Barbarian (Basil Poledouris): Again, this CD contains usable music on almost every track. The familiar theme of "The Anvil of Crom" will get your PCs excited during combat, while the "Friendship Theme" supplies perfect tavern music. The only drawback for Ravenloft fans is that this CD doesn't have much in the way of creepy and mysterious. But you can use it for just about any other scene.

The Crow: The City of Angels (Graeme Revell): This CD contains savage, dark music. The opening theme suggests approaching doom, while the second track may make even the staunchest of players uneasy. This CD has a variety of songs, but most of them are filled with overtones of grand wickedness, making it an excellent purchase for Ravenloft fans.

Dune (Brian Eno and Toto): This score of the David Lynch film has it all. A number of the tracks are mysterious and creepy, but there are several combat tracks as well. This CD contains a track perfect for use in a throne room and even a great love theme. You could buy this one CD and never have to buy another for use in a campaign.

Ravenous (Damon Albarn and Michael Nyman): If you decide to get or listen to this CD, don't be discouraged by the first four tracks. The rest of the CD is amazing for Ravenloft. Filled with disturbing music, this score is a must for those who wish to instill horror in their players. The next to the last track is the secret treasure of this CD. It will disturb you.

Silence of the Lambs (Howard Shore): This CD consists of brooding, dark music. All you need to do is put it into your CD player and let it play. The music rarely changes, so you can almost forget that the CD is there. This is another recommended score for those just beginning their Ravenloft music collection. For those who want that special track, Number 12 suggests a theme from someone's nightmares. A particularly disturbing track at the end of the CD evokes a nice layer of horror.

Further Recommendations

Brotherhood of the Wolf, Joesph LoDuca

The Ghost and the Darkness, Jerry Goldsmith
Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Patrick Doyle
Messa da Requiem, Giuseppe Verdi
Norma, Vincenzo Bellini
Requiem, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Dramatic Techniques

Up to now, this chapter has offered tips that any Dungeon Master could use at any time to heighten the tension of any adventure. Using the advice in the remainder of this chapter, however, requires more forethought on your part. This section is devoted to presenting two ways to specifically structure the flow of your adventures for the maximum dramatic potential.

Pacing

Think about the last horror film you watched or the last eerie novel you read. In most cases, if you examine the structure of these entertainment packages, you notice that the nerve-wracking, action-packed scenes are interposed with quieter, more introspective scenes. These "quiet" scenes may serve to add depth to the characters, increasing audience empathy or they may simply act as breathers, giving the audience a chance to settle down and reflect on what they have seen. Just as importantly, these calming scenes relax the audience, lulling them into dropping their defenses. In fiction as in roleplaying, if you simply harry the audience with a ceaseless succession of horrors, never offering a change of pace or a moment of respite, eventually you simply batter the audience into submission. Horror drains into dull shock as the audience no longer can emotionally react to what they see.

How do tales create these moments of anxiety or calm? That answer is all in the pacing. Every medium incorporates some way of accelerating the flow of information to the audience. Like the waters of a river, the faster the information flows, the more turbulent it becomes. In film, action scenes use quick cuts from shot to shot to create dynamic scenes. Comic books rely on a rapid succession of narrow panels to much the same effect. Prose moves from long, languid descriptions of peaceful moments to terse statements as the creature bursts through the door! Splinters go flying! The beast eyes the room's cowering occupants. Throwing its head back, the beast shrieks its rage!

Although the ultimate goal is the same, pacing works a little differently in roleplaying games than in fiction. Even in the most chaotic melee, your players still need you to describe the world for them, so it's unfair to withhold vital information (such as what a hero can see from round to round), even if it does slow down the action.

However, you do have an advantage that filmmakers and novel writers do not: By adjusting the challenge of encounters in your games, you can make it easier or more difficult for your players to proceed.

This section offers three simple models of how to pace encounters in your adventures to create a more suspenseful experience for the players and their characters.

Scaling Encounter Levels

The D&D *Dungeon Master's Guide* introduces the concept of Encounter Levels (ELs), which are tied to the Challenge Ratings (CRs) of the obstacles you place in the paths of the player characters. ELs thus present a method of tailoring the difficulty of encounters to your party's level, ensuring that the heroes are sufficiently challenged without making the adventure impossibly hard. The better you understand Encounter Levels, the more skillfully you can control the pacing of the adventures you create.

To establish exactly how difficult an encounter of a given EL is for your heroes, add the character levels of all party members, then divide the total by four. This determines the effective party level, or PL, at least as far as Encounter Levels are concerned. Include NPC allies such as companions and cohorts in your total, but do not include summoned creatures or animal companions gained through class abilities; these are already taken into account.

Example: A party of four 6th-level adventurers has a PL of 6; but six 6th-level adventurers result in a PL of 9.

Comparing an encounter's EL to your heroes' party level provides a basic guideline for how much of a challenge that encounter poses for the heroes. Keep in mind that the "resources" referenced below includes all the heroes' expendable assets, including spells, potions, scrolls, arrows, hit points and so on. Heroes won't use up their most valuable resources unless they need to, so a fully refreshed party that drops to 80% of its resources seems far less noticeably damaged and desperate than a party reduced from 40% to 20% of its resources. In addition, never forget that in a basic, four-member party, "losing 25% of the party's resources" may manifest as an unconscious or even slain party member.

EL = PL – 6. Expect the encounter to expend no more than 2% of the party's resources. Foes at this EL are nuisances at most, obstacles that can be easily surmounted.

EL = PL – 4. Expect the encounter to expend only about 5% of the party's resources. Opponents at this EL pose a minimal threat, though they may get in a lucky hit or two before being defeated. The heroes likely won't use any resources that cannot be quickly replenished. Heroes are unlikely to feel threatened, but twenty encounters at this EL in a row, giving the heroes no chance to rest and replenish themselves, may drag them down.

EL = PL – 2. Expect the encounter to expend roughly 10% of the party's resources. Ten encounters at this EL in a row, without a chance to rest and recover, may wipe out the party.

EL = PL. Expect the encounter to expend roughly 20% of the party's resources. Five encounters at this EL in a row, without a chance to rest and recuperate, could wipe out the party.

EL = PL + 2. Expect the encounter to expend roughly 40% of the party's resources. This is a challenging fight; fatalities are possible, but members of a well-organized party are likely to be badly wounded. A second encounter at this EL, without a chance to rest and recover, will likely leave the party badly battered; a third such encounter might destroy them.

EL = PL + 4. Expect the encounter to expend roughly 80% of the party's resources. One or more of the heroes may survive, but it could be a Pyrrhic victory, leaving the survivors devastated. A second encounter at this EL, without a chance to rest and recover, almost assuredly wipes out the remaining heroes.

EL = PL + 5. Expect an encounter at this EL to expend 120% of the party's resources. That is to say, unless the party is exceptionally prepared to handle this threat, it likely either poses an insurmountable obstacle or destroys the heroes.

Keep in mind that the farther you stray from an EL equal to your party's level, the less predictable the results become. Depending on the skill of their planning and the adventuring classes of individual party members, some groups of heroes may be better suited to overcome certain obstacles than others. It's not unnatural for heroes to have unexpected trouble with an encounter which, purely by the numbers, should be an easy task for them. Meanwhile, that same group may tromp all over a foe who, again based on its EL, you had assumed

would be invincible. You can lessen this unpredictability, though not eliminate it, simply by paying close attention to the adventurers in your group. A party that focuses all its strengths in one arena leaves itself comparatively weak in others.

Example: A party with extra front-line combatants, such as fighters or barbarians, should have less trouble hacking apart physical threats. A party with extra clerics has less trouble with the undead. A party that favors rogues has an easier time at stealth and can bypass most traps. Arcane spellcasters are particularly well suited for tackling supernatural foes, but their resources are the most sharply limited. A fighter might be able to hack down wave after wave of minor enemies, but once a sorcerer uses up her spells, she's in trouble.

The Pendulum

In the Pendulum model of pacing, ELs swing back and forth between highs and lows. Just as in the tales described above, scenes with low ELs give the PCs a chance to catch their breath and hope that the worst is over, but the next encounters, when the EL rises yet again, quickly disabuse them of that notion.

To plot a Pendulum adventure, select a "high-point" EL and a "low-point" EL. High-point ELs should be quite challenging but not lethal. ELs one to three levels above the party level act as a good ceiling. Low-point ELs should be comparatively easy, ranging between two to four levels below the party level. Once you have your extremes set, you must decide how rapidly to shift between them. There should be a sense of balance in the adventure; if you decide to run two successive high-EL encounters, you should follow it with two low-EL encounters. This gives the PCs a chance to recover before you raise the stakes on them again, creating an emotional roller coaster for the players.

Pendulum adventures are actually so common that they are virtually the default system of pacing. Indeed, any adventure in which the player characters have the freedom to set their own pace follows Pendulum pacing; whenever the heroes drain their resources in a difficult encounter, they can retreat to a "calm" scene to rest up.

The classic dungeon crawl is the epitome of the Pendulum adventure. One room might be harmless and empty (or nearly so), while the next could contain monstrous vermin or a ghost of fearsome power.

Example Pendulum Scenarios

• **Castles Forlorn:** At the behest of their new, druidic allies in Forlorn, the heroes delve into the haunted halls of Castle Tristenoira to rescue an important captive. One moment, the castle is a ruined goblyn lair, but turn a corner and the heroes may find themselves lost in the castle's distant past. Can they preserve their sanity long enough to rescue the hapless soul and escape while time twists around them?

• **They Hunt by Night:** The heroes are pursuing a foe that only emerges at night, be it a vampire, spectre or afflicted werebeast. Although the heroes must spend their nights battling against the creature's minions, daytime gives them a chance to recover and prepare.

• **The Signature Killer:** The heroes are asked to investigate a murderess stalking the narrow streets of a large city. The heroes spend most of their time gathering information, but each new clue leads to an attack from one of the killer's accomplices. Each defeated foe brings the heroes closer to their nemesis, but is there a conspiracy of blood at work here?

• **In the Crypts of Kings:** The subterranean tombs of Har'Akir are said to hold the treasures of a lost kingdom. The heroes can take their time creeping through the stone passageways, but each chamber reveals new lethal traps and ancient guardians.

• **Piecing It Together:** The heroes discover the existence of a foul artifact. Split into five pieces and scattered to the far corners of the Core long ago, it could grant awful power to those who reassemble it. Even worse, the PCs learn of a rival group already seeking the components to claim the artifact's gifts. The heroes must race against time, and across the world, to collect the five components and find some way to destroy them before their evil rivals catch up.

• **The Fever Dream:** After a short bout with disease, the heroes find themselves fading between dueling realities. In one, they wander through a nightmarish world; in the other, the normal townsfolk of a humble village insist that the heroes are raving madmen, their minds addled by fever. Are the heroes truly deranged, or can they see something the villagers cannot? Which reality is real?

The Pit

In the Pit model of pacing, Encounter Levels start at a comfortably low level and stay low before shooting suddenly and dangerously high as the "floor drops out" beneath the PCs — perhaps literally. The sudden rise in ELs should be dramatic and unexpected. The Pit model develops suspense by lulling the PCs into a false sense of security before turning things upside down with a menace that bursts out of nowhere.

To plot a Pit adventure, start with a low EL, low enough that encounters do not pose a serious threat. ELs three or four levels below the party level is a good baseline. ELs should stay more or less at this level, perhaps varying by a level or so, until a crisis point sometime during the adventure. How many encounters occur before the crisis point is up to you, but keep in mind that the players should be fairly close to full strength when the crisis finally erupts. At the crisis point, the EL should rise sharply. The EL at the crisis point should be extremely challenging, at least two or three levels above the party level.

Alternatively, you may want to make the set EL just one level above the party level if you have many encounters planned for the immediate aftermath. On the other hand, to truly terrify the heroes, you could send the EL soaring four or more levels above the party level. However, only do this if you also intend to give the heroes an obvious escape route and hints that discretion can indeed be the better part of valor. These "forced retreats" are most satisfying for the players if they can later discover the hidden weakness of their insurmountable foe, allowing them a second chance to come back and claim victory.

Following the crisis point, ELs drop back to high, but survivable levels, perhaps one or two levels above the party level, and then remain steady until the end of the adventure.

The epitome of the Pit adventure is the classic scenario in which the heroes are ambushed and captured and must then escape from their captors after being stripped of their gear. Alternatively, the heroes might discover that the minor villain they thought they were dealing with is actually the henchman of a much more powerful foe.

The Vise

In the Vise system of pacing, Encounter Levels start low but gradually and steadily rise through the course of the adventure as the situation grows ever

Example Pit Scenarios

• **From the Shadows:** During a disastrous encounter with a spectral, headless horseman, the heroes are wiped out to the last — or so they think. When they awake, they discover that they are now nothing more than severed, animate heads mounted on a shelf in the laboratory of a lich who has been carefully studying their progress for years. Their headless bodies are nearby, reduced to mindless servants. Can the disembodied heroes find a way to restore themselves and escape?

• **The Strangers:** The heroes retreat to a bucolic inn or the remote cottage of a friendly peasant family for rest and relaxation as they have so often in the past. Unfortunately, since the heroes' last visit, creatures in the service of a powerful villain have replaced their old friends. Be they skin thieves, doppelgangers or podlings, the impostors are more than happy to wait until the heroes have retired to bed before they strike.

• **The Chrysalis:** The heroes finally corner a villain they have been doggedly pursuing for some time. They easily defeat the evildoer, but the Mists are not yet done with him. Perhaps the villain was a wizard, who needed to be killed in order to rise again as a lich; perhaps the heroes catch up with the villain just as the Dark Powers finally sweep him into a domain of his own, trapping the heroes with him.

• **The Other Side:** Through a strange curse or magical mishap, the heroes are unexpectedly shunted into the Near Ethereal. Now they must contend with restless entities and the tangible memories of old horrors as they try to find a way back to the material realm before the spirit world claims them forever.

• **The Capricious Hand of Fate:** The heroes are traveling through a hot clime, such as the Verdurous Lands or summer in the Core and are appropriately attired, when the Mists sweep them into a domain frozen in the depths of winter. Unless the heroes quickly adapt to their new environment, their bodies may not be found until the spring thaw.

• **The Maddening Storm:** An apparently normal day rapidly descends into chaos when an unusually violent storm envelops the town. Formerly friendly and welcoming residents suddenly take to the streets to attack each other and the heroes. Can the heroes uncover the cause of the spreading insanity before the townsfolk all murder each other? Even worse, the heroes are besieged by the same monstrous hallucinations affecting the residents; can they save a reality they cannot recognize?

Example Vise Scenarios

• **The Awakening:** Long ago, a cruel priestess was promised seven lives after death. Now her tomb has been opened, and she walks the earth once more. Each time the heroes destroy the ancient dead, it returns in a more powerful form. Will they be able to stop the cycle of reanimation before the seventh, most powerful incarnation?

• **The Yawning Gate:** A cult of evil spellcasters is performing nightly rituals to open a *gate* to an infernal realm. Each night, the *gate* grows wider, allowing larger and greater horrors to enter the world.

• **The Endless Horde:** The heroes find themselves surrounded by seemingly limitless enemies, such as rats, zombies or goblyns. Individually, the creatures pose little threat, but each battle presents a slight drain on the party's resources. The heroes can repel the early waves without difficulty, but if they can't escape before their supplies run out, they will be overrun.

• **The Mark of the Beast:** During the heroes' exploits, one of their number is afflicted with lycanthropy. The hero can be safely contained during the full moon, until an innocent mistake frees the beast one night, allowing it to maul a friend. Now two party members must be contained each month; if another accident occurs before the bloodline is severed, will another ally fall victim to the curse?

• **The Charnel Pit:** The heroes are staying at the sprawling, ancient manor of an aristocratic friend, taking shelter from the storm raging outside. When their host asks them to look into some eerie spectral sightings, the trail leads them to a mass grave sealed beneath the cellar floor. When the heroes break the seal, they release an amorphous horror driven by the vengeful spirits of long-forgotten murder victims. The creature appears to be a grave ooze, yet it is a sly killer, and with each victim it absorbs, it grows....

• **The Play is the Thing:** The heroes have fallen into the illusory world of an accursed playwright who believes that all reality flows from his quill. The more they struggle against his control, the more bluntly he plots their doom. The heroes have seen this play before, and they know their characters are fated to die in the final scene. Can the heroes free themselves from the mad writer's yoke before the curtain falls?

more dire. Early encounters should be easy for the player characters to overcome, but it should soon become apparent to the heroes that their situation is worsening: If the heroes don't act quickly, events eventually become too difficult for them to handle. The Vise model uses this combination of increasingly difficult encounters and the implied time limit to make for a suspenseful adventure.

To map out a Vise adventure, choose an EL as a starting point. It should be easy for the party to handle, perhaps 4 levels below the party level. Then choose an end point, which should be quite challenging; perhaps three or four levels higher than the party level. Between the starting EL and the ending EL, the ELs should rise slowly but steadily. Exactly how quickly they rise depends on how many encounters you plan on including and how you wish to pace the adventure, but each encounter should be at least as challenging as the one before. In a Vise adventure, the heroes usually need to investigate and stop the source of their peril before the Encounter Levels overwhelm them.

In a slight variation on the theme, you can also create a Vise adventure by keeping the ELs steady, but never giving the heroes a chance to rest and recuperate. Although the challenge remains static, the player characters steadily grow more tattered and fearful as they exhaust their resources.

Example Combined Scenarios

Vaults of the Damned

This example demonstrates how to use different pacing models to create thrilling and varied adventures.

• **Act I: The Pendulum.** Whether through bad luck or poor judgment, one of the PCs comes into possession of a dangerous and destructive cursed object she cannot seem to destroy, perhaps even the Wishing Imp (see Chapter Four). As the heroes attempt to continue with their lives, the object causes intermittent havoc. Eventually, the heroes investigate means of ridding themselves of the object without unleashing any more evils upon themselves or the world. Perhaps with the aid of the Vistani, the PCs learn of a special chamber buried deep within the heart of an ancient vault complex in a distant land. Within this chamber, curses hold no power, and the object can be abandoned with no further harm. The heroes journey to the vault's location.

• **Act II: The Pit.** Having found the long-forgotten vault, the heroes work their way inside. Within, they discover that the vault is still protected by magical guardians. Before they can reconsider their plans, however, the vault's doors seal shut behind them, cutting off their only means of escape. An inscription warns that no curse may escape the vault until all its chambers have been filled. The heroes cannot leave as long as they carry their cursed baggage.

• **Act III: The Vise.** The PCs locate a mechanism to open the inner vaults. However, once the cursed object has been safely abandoned, the massive doors to all seven of the other inner vaults start sliding open, one after another. Each vault is the prison of some accursed, ageless horror, left here long ago. Now that the chambers are filled, the great vault releases its trapped horrors back into the world, all at once. Each entity is more dangerous than the last, and the heroes have a few minutes to deal with each prisoner before the next vault slides open. Even worse, the doors leading outside are the last to open. If the heroes are to survive to see daylight, they must destroy the vaults' damned contents.

The Combined Campaign: The Blood Moon

This example demonstrates how different pacing models can be used to accentuate different stages of a player character's story arc.

• **The Pit: The Attack.** As a PC walks home late one night, a werewolf savagely attacks her without warning. She survives but the blood of the wolf now flows through her veins.

• **The Vise: The First Moon.** Fearing for her fate, the PC somehow confirms that she is indeed afflicted. However, she must immediately race to prepare for the full moon, which triggers her transformation. Perhaps she has days to safely secure herself, perhaps only hours.

• **The Pendulum: Wax and Wane.** Once the initial horror has passed and the PC has established plans to deal with the moon, she sets out to hunt down the beast that damned her. For most of the month, her lycanthropy may be easily forgotten, but the moon always returns.

A Vise adventure might consist of a town slowly being taken over by a plague or an alien force, with the PCs desperately trying to uncover that source before they too are consumed. Alternatively, the heroes might be exploring a tomb where the undead occupants are awakened by their actions. Only a few are roused at first, but as the PCs press on, they garner more and more attention.

Combining Pacing Models

Naturally, adventures don't have to fit neatly into a single system of pacing. In fact, by combining models, you can gain the dual benefits throughout the entire adventure of both keeping your encounters fresh and your players' characters off balance.

Pendulum pacing works best early in an adventure, as the heroes gradually entwine themselves in the horrific events surrounding them. Put Pit scenarios to best use by using them as shocking introductions to your adventures or as bridges between one act and the next. Vise scenarios work best for climactic scenes, when all events are rushing to their conclusion.

Cut Scenes

The player characters have spent the past five game sessions hunting down the vampiric necromancer, Traven the Cold. Traven has been sacrificing young maidens to foul entities in hopes of perfecting a ritual that will bring his daughter back from the dead. At last, the heroes have tracked the vile wizard to his lair, a defiled church.

DM: *All right, you break down the door to the forgotten chapel. You see before you a wrecked church. Barbed and twisted runes mar the walls of this once holy place. Traven's latest victim lies stretched out upon the altar, awaiting sacrifice. Traven himself has his back to you. At his feet lies what could only be the desiccated husk of his dead daughter. He raises his head and speaks. "Ah. You have come at last. Now, you see that I am not evil, as you would label me, but—"*

Patrick: *You mean he's actually here? Marik attacks.*

DM: *What?*

Carissa: *Yeah. Seriah starts casting.*

DM: *Uh, Traven says, "Wait you fools... soon you will see—"*

James: *Vandel rolls initiative... a 22!*

How many times has this happened to you? You have created a perfect villain, ironed out all his game statistics and practiced roleplaying him in your spare time. You have even pulled your bedsheets around your shoulders and posed like him in the mirror (when no one is home and the blinds are closed). Now, at the climactic moment, when you are about to deliver the greatest monologue of your dungeon-mastering career, the players ruin it all by rushing to the attack!

In fact, your players are only being consistent with their characters. Marik the paladin, Seriah the cleric and Vandel the scout would no more talk to a vampiric necromancer than they would sit idly by and watch a village being attacked. But this poses a problem for the Dungeon Master. Assuming the villain cannot adopt a pleasant guise, how does a DM make her villain visible as something more than fodder? How does a DM showcase the character that she has spent weeks designing so that her players see their adversary in three dimensions?

The Dungeon Master has various options to circumvent this problem. The DM could have the villain protected from PC attack, perhaps by spells or mere physical separation, long enough to deliver his dramatic monologue. Alternatively, the DM could arrange for the PCs to be seized and have the villain talk to his captive audience. These tactics, however, often lead to player frustration. Worse, yet, these techniques only work once or twice before they risk getting old and feeling repetitive.

A simpler solution to the problem of showing off your villain in a Ravenloft campaign involves making use of a cut scene. A cut scene is a dramatic technique that allows the players to view parts of the game their characters don't necessarily witness. Once you have perfected this technique, your players may find it one of their favorite parts of each session.

What is a Cut Scene?

A cut scene depicts a moment in the adventure's story that the players may observe even though their characters may not. Similar to a movie trailer, a cut scene is designed to move quickly, giving the audience (your players) a sudden jolt of emotion, whether it be sadness, excitement, mystery or terror.

The cut scene is a technique that is used widely in movies, jumping suddenly from the action surrounding the main characters to show the actions of the antagonists or other characters. Keep in mind that cut scenes aren't for everyone; some players find it jarring to move from a first-person to a third-person view of the world, so to speak.

However, used well, cut scenes can reveal otherwise hidden layers in the tales you tell.

Sample Cut Scene

DM: *You ride up to the farmhouse. As you dismount, you can see that the front door is wide open. It swings back and forth in the dry wind. Beyond the entrance, you see a knocked over chair and table. A single candle burns on a shelf, the lonely flame pitching and twisting in the strong breeze.*

Patrick: *Marik looks around and shakes his head. "We're too late."*

Carissa: *Seriah agrees with him, "This is not good."*

James: *Vandel crouches to the ground. He's looking for tracks.*

DM: *Hold on, James. Cut scene. Somewhere in a chamber, we see an old music box. A slender, pale hand winds it up and opens it. It begins to play a tune both childlike and yet strangely warped. Traven looks up from the music box over to a bed, where a bound farmwoman lies.*

Traven speaks in a sad tone. "This music box once belonged to my daughter. You have a daughter, don't you? Then you must understand why it is that I must do what I do now."

The cold, white porcelain mask that covers her face covers any response the woman might have made. Only her wide, terrified eyes can be seen through the mask. Traven calmly picks up a scalpel from the table and crosses to her. He waves his hand through the air, quietly conducting the bent notes of the music box. Reaching down, Traven gently strokes the woman's hair. "This will take some time," he whispers. "Let us begin, shall we?"

End cut scene. Now, what are you guys doing?

Carissa: *"Vandel, how about those tracks? Marik, we have to find that woman. Now!"*

In the example above, the cut scene has added to the tension of the moment. The heroes already know that another victim has been kidnapped, but by adding the cut scene, the DM has raised the stakes, adding to the drama of the moment. Furthermore, he has helped to characterize his villain and give the characters a closer look at the victim. Now, when the characters finally face Traven, their confrontation means more to the players. They will face an actual character they have come to understand, not just a set of statistics.

Though the players witness this scene, their characters are not present. This little cut scene doesn't spoil any surprise for the players, either, because the PCs are already aware of what Traven does to his victims. The chamber in which the scene takes place could be anywhere. There are no real hints as to Traven's location.

Why Use Cut Scenes?

Cut scenes can play an essential part in a campaign in which drama and roleplaying are important.

Imagine a movie in which only the actions of the hero are shown on screen and in which the villain never appears. The hero constantly defeats his enemy's minions and traps, but the villain remains off-screen and behind the scenes. At the climax of the movie, the villain finally arrives. The drama is completely lost, because the audience has never seen the antagonist until now!

Cut scenes solve this problem by revealing the villain's actions, thus allowing the players to understand the personality of their characters' opponent.

What Makes a Good Cut Scene?

A good cut scene is short and sweet. Long scenes result in players losing interest; they have come to play, not passively listen to you. A cut scene usually takes place during the point of highest action, preceded by a short building of tension, followed by something dramatic.

Cut scenes should serve a specific purpose. You should never throw in a dramatic cut scene just for the fun of it. Here are some of the reasons you might use a cut scene in your campaign.

Characterization

As stated before, you can use cut scenes to show characterization. Showing the nature and personality of your villains is important, because once the jaded adventurers identify their foe, they rarely, if ever, confront the villains without moving in to attack immediately; should they hesitate, they may just be giving the villain an opportunity to draw first blood. Knowing what motivates a villain is especially significant in Ravenloft, where darklords and other opponents often have rich and complex backgrounds. Cut scenes need not be limited to the actions of a villain, but can also serve to focus on the actions and personalities of other NPCs, such as trusted allies. The use of such scenes also helps the players understand and appreciate a special character in the campaign:

DM: *After you leave the tent, Madame Eva turns and looks at the younger gypsy before her.*

"Well, Gregor," she says with a wry tone. "What do you think of those three wanderers?"

Gregor folds his muscular arms and frowns. "They are fools, raunie; *they will be dead within a week."*

Madame Eva chuckles and shakes her head. "Ah, skeptical as always, I see. No, Gregor, I think we shall see our young friends again. Indeed, a great destiny stretches before their path. And we must be prepared for when next we meet them."

In the scene above, the players can see a side of these NPCs that they normally wouldn't be able to witness. While their characters may not see this aspect, it helps the players understand Madame Eva and Gregor a little more and appreciate the relationship between them. This scene also makes the players wonder a bit. What is this great destiny that Madame Eva speaks of? Why must the Vistani prepare for when they next meet the PCs? While these questions may make the players wonder, the scene gives away none of the DM's secrets.

Parallel Action

DM: *You break down the door to the Dark Chapel. Sitting on his throne of bone sits Traven the Necromancer. Behind him stands an entire squadron of skeletons and zombies.*

"You are too late, my dear chosen one," says Traven, sneering at Marik in particular. "I have raised an army to face you and your companions."

Patrick: *Marik stands tall and says, "You could have ten thousand armies. It would not be enough." He unsheathes his sword.*

Carissa: *Seriah displays her holy symbol and attempts to turn the creatures.*

James: *Vandel gives a wry grin and pulls an arrow onto his bowstring. "I always said I would go down fighting an army of undead with you, Seriah. I guess I should be careful what I wish for."*

DM: *Cut scene. Even as you are about to engage in battle, in the nearby village a lone woman stands before a crowd — the very woman you rescued from Traven. Standing before the assembled crowd, she raises a torch in the air.*

"Brethren! Three brave adventurers go to Traven's castle to fight for us. How can we cower here like rats while strangers fight for the soil upon which we were born? My ancestors were buried here. Let my own bones be buried beside them! What say you?"

With that, a cry springs up from the crowd. The horde of villagers charges forth, shaking their pitchforks, torches and staves to the sky. They reach the gates of the castle and a battle ensues.

End cut scene. Back to you guys.

James: *As the cry of the villagers sounds below, Vandel's grin breaks into a smile. He winks at Traven. "Looks like we have an army of our own, necromancer!"*

Showing a scene of parallel action heightens the drama of the situation. While the PCs prepare to engage in a climactic battle, the NPCs of the village make preparations of their own. This scene creates the sense of a larger world in which more is going on than just the PCs' singular battle. The NPCs aren't sitting idly by and letting the PCs do all the work. Also, this scene shows the results of the PCs actions. Because they rescued this woman, she is leading her entire village against Traven's forces, thus demonstrating how the PCs have affected the game universe.

Rewarding the Players

DM: *Cut scene: Traven sits alone atop his throne of bone and sinew. He glares at a tattered tapestry upon the wall. A lone ghoul scampers up to him, his head bowed in supplication.*

"Master," rasps the ghoul. "Master, the sacrifice—"

Traven impatiently snaps at the creature, "Yes, what about it? Is it here? The Dark Ritual must begin tonight."

"M-master," stutters the ghoul. "Our forces were attacked."

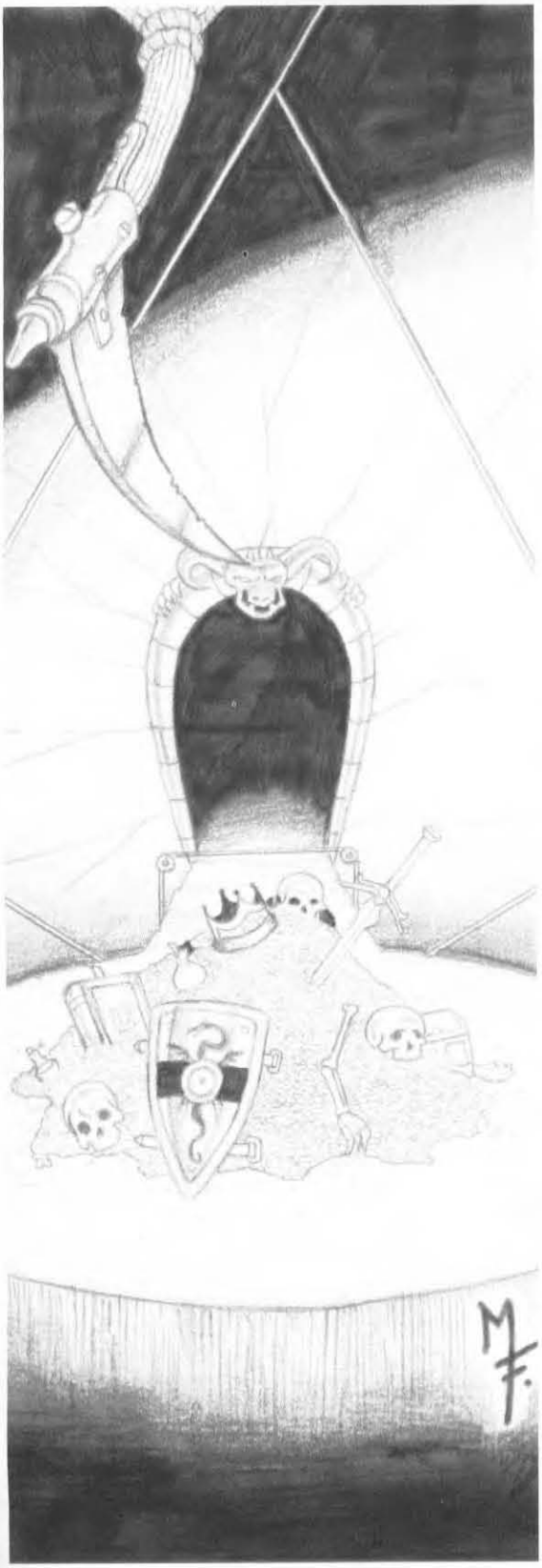
"What?" Traven leans forward, his eyes full of dark fire.

The ghoul's eyes dart about. "Our forces were attacked. Three fleshlings attacked the caravan of undead that accompanied the prize. Our caravan was destroyed. The captive is free."

"Free?" shouts Traven. "Free? I laugh at the word. For while this peasant walks, my daughter is held captive in a dried, rotting corpse!" Traven shoots out his hand and the ghoul screams in agony. The creature bursts into flames, careening in agony about the chamber for a moment before falling apart.

Traven strides from the chamber at a furious pace. His cloak billows behind him as he calls out, "Bring me my generals! Time is of the essence!"

This scene allows the players to see the fruits of their characters' labors. They have defeated Traven's undead caravan that was bringing him his latest victim. Not only do they reap the material rewards of experience points and treasure, but they also reap an intrinsic reward. They get to see how their actions have affected the campaign. Here, the villain is no longer his calm and cool self, but expresses his fury that his plans have gone awry.



Cut scenes such as this allow the players to see that their actions have meaning in your game world. It allows them to see that they can affect things and that their actions have repercussions. Though not all repercussions may be good. Just imagine the players' reactions when they see Traven take his vengeance out on the entire village!

Advanced Cut Scene Techniques

Cut scenes can be used for more than just giving your players a little jolt of adrenaline or even characterizing your NPCs. You can use the scenes to help structure and direct your campaign. Below are some examples of advanced cut scene use.

Justifying Cut Scenes

Despite their uses, you or your players may still be uncomfortable supplying these "independent" scenes without any justification within the world itself. Should that the be the case, there are any number of ways to deliver remarkable cut scenes in a way that even a denizen of the Mists could comprehend. Characters may experience psychic visions, perhaps stemming from their own latent talents or thrust upon them by powerful entities. The Vistani are renowned for their ability to scry the unseen, as this book later details. Ethereal resonance can also capture moments of emotional intensity, mindlessly playing out events over and over for the select few who can see them.

Successive Cut Scenes

DM: *Traven looks down at a small, black coffin. Within, wrapped in a white cloth, lies a tiny, mummified body. Long dark hair barely clings to the flaking scalp of the corpse. The desiccated face of the small body stares up with empty eye sockets. It grimaces with bared teeth.*

"I have made five sacrifices toward the Dark Ritual, my dear," says Traven. "Five souls have been sacrificed in your name. What do you say to that?"

Traven chants ancient words of arcane power over the body. Suddenly, the small husk sits up in the coffin and begins to quiver. The shriveled body writhes and twists. An inhuman scream issues forth from its blackened lips. In horror, Traven recoils and stops his chanting. The body collapses back into the coffin. He grips the edges of the small black box and sighs.

"Not yet," he whispers sadly. "I still need more sacrifices."

Imagine a scenario in which each cut scene progressively builds upon the one before. For ex-

ample, each time Traven claims another victim, he makes a vain attempt to resurrect his dead daughter. Each time we see a new cut scene, showing how Traven gets closer and closer to his goal. At first, the body stirs only a little. Next, it begins to writhe, then to scream. Finally, toward the end of the series of cut scenes, the little body speaks in short, raspy words.

Successive cut scenes raise the stakes each time you show them. They serve to add mounting tension to the campaign. Thus, as the tension rises, so does the nervousness of the players. Successive scenes such as the ones above give players hints, as well. They tell the players that time is running out; the actions of their characters assume a sense of urgency. In this way, successive cut scenes can help push the plot of the campaign along.

Another way to utilize successive cut scenes is to show an NPC's reaction to something the players have done. In this way, the players can see how they have progressively affected the game universe. For example:

DM: *For the third time, Balric pushes open the door to the inn. "Time to pay up!" he roars. "Traven's tax is nigh."*

The innkeeper looks up at him. His lips quiver. "N-no. I'm not g-going to pay you."

"What?" Balric spits on the floor. "You dare defy my will? Traven's *will?"*

The innkeeper takes a deep breath. His voice becomes steady, his gaze, resolute. "No. I'm not going to pay you. None of us are." All around the inn, people stand. Their eyes lock onto Balric, emboldened by his words. "We're through taking orders from you," says the innkeeper. "The adventurers are right. You have no true power over us."

Imagine successive cut scenes where a poor village is oppressed, but through the intervention of the PCs the villagers become more and more defiant. A series of cut scenes used in this manner show how the PCs are steadily influencing the campaign world. The effect the PCs have on the game world need not always be positive. The oppression of the villagers might get worse as the PCs foil more of the villain's plots. The main point of these cut scenes is to illustrate the dynamics of the game world. Circumstances don't stay the same. More importantly, successive cut scenes show the long-term repercussions of the PCs' actions upon the world.

Foreshadowing

Picture a scenario where the party is tracking down a killer that keeps his face hidden within a cloak. During a nasty fight, one of the characters pierces the killer's hand with an arrow. In a series of successive cut scenes, the DM describes the killer's mangled hand, reminding them of this little clue. Finally, the PCs encounter an elder priest who aids them in finding the killer. But as one of the PCs is speaking with the priest, she notices that the priest's hand is mangled, thus revealing that the elder "priest" is really the killer!

In this example, the DM has used successive cut scenes to keep reminding the players of an important clue. He has not told them anything that their characters don't already know. After all, their characters were present when the killer's hand was injured. However, the DM uses cut scenes to keep the memory of this important fact fresh for the players even though several game sessions may have taken place since the fight that resulted in the mangled hand.

Leaving hints and clues of what is to come in storytelling is a technique called foreshadowing. While you don't necessarily need cut scenes to have foreshadowing in your campaign, cut scenes provide a great vehicle for it.

Prologue

Consider starting a game session with a cut scene that sets the tone and mood of the session, much like the prologue of a book reveals the background for the events to come.

DM: *A young man walks down a lonely street. He pulls his cape around his shoulders to keep the damp of the fog from his body. As he turns the corner of the street, he sees a tall figure draped in a long, black cloak. The figure holds a long scythe in one hand. The man's eyes widen. He takes a step back, about to run, when suddenly, another tall, dark figure steps from an alley behind him. The man opens his mouth to cry out for help. But nothing comes from his throat. He tries to scream again, but there is nothing, nothing but silence.*

End cut scene.

Now, your characters are here to investigate the scene of a murder. So far, they know that it took place on a populated street, with a large bladed weapon. Most peculiar of all, the murder took place without anyone ever hearing a sound.

A prologue cut scene comes at the beginning of a game session. In the example above, the action following the cut scene focuses around the investi-

gation of several mysterious murders. The DM doesn't mind that this particular cut scene reveals that the victims are somehow silenced, because she reveals that piece of information to the PCs right away anyway.

Prologue cut scenes are frequently used in television series, where they are appropriately known as "teasers." An episode often starts with an opening cut scene that tells a little about what's going to come next. This prologue draws the audience in, often ending on a minor cliffhanger to ensure that they want to know more. Your own prologue cut scenes should be designed the same way, with the intent of exciting the players about the upcoming game session. They should be intrigued or at least entertained after listening to your prologue.

Finally, remember that the prologue sets the tone and mood for the rest of the game session. If you set up the prologue with a lot of mystery, then your players expect a mystery. If you set up the prologue with a lot of action and combat, your players look forward to a fight. A good prologue can make for an excellent game session, simply because it helps focus your players, creating in them the mindset for the type of game you plan to run.

Epilogue

An epilogue cut scene takes place at the end of a game session. It may be used to tie up loose ends in the game session or hint at upcoming storylines. For instance, picture a game in which the heroes conquer a vampiric nemesis. In an epilogue, the DM shows one of the vampire's minions gathering up his master's ashes. This epilogue hints at a continuation, leaving the storyline open.

Leaving the storyline open is a great way to end any Ravenloft session. Ravenloft is not a world where things always end on a happy note. Evil continues, despite overwhelming victory by the forces of light. The epilogue reminds the players that their characters' work is not yet done; though the battle is won, the war is eternal.

Memorable Cut Scenes

Create memorable cut scenes in your own campaigns by scripting them ahead of time, even timing words and description to music. As the music in the background swells, let your voice become more dramatic in description and movement. As the music softens, drop your voice to a rasp or whisper. Try to make your cut scenes as powerful as possible, to help your players fall into the mood of the game and suspend their disbelief long enough to enter the world of Ravenloft.

It's important to avoid overpowering the story of the game with cut scenes. The players should be the driving force in the game, not the Dungeon Master. The PCs are the stars of the campaign, not the villain or the NPCs. Most cut scenes should be crafted around the repercussions of the actions of the characters in the game. After a game session, think about what the characters did in the game and craft cut scenes around the results of their actions.

Try to avoid giving the players too much out-of-game knowledge in cut scenes. For instance, if players are looking for a killer, don't reveal who the killer is in your cut scenes. Instead, the killer's face should always be mysteriously hidden. Too much out-of-game knowledge places players in a difficult position. If your players know who the mysterious killer is in their game, but their characters do not, the players could be tempted to use the knowledge their PCs don't possess in order to catch her.

For example, if your players know that it is indeed the Baroness that is committing a series of murders, but their characters do not, they might try to "nudge" their characters in the direction of the Baroness. They might begin to question her or even break into her house, even though the characters have no reason to suspect the Baroness yet. In the end, it is best not to give your players this temptation in the first place.

One advantage you have in cut scenes over standard scenes where the heroes are present is that you are freed to indulge in a bit of creative omission. Return to the example of the killer with the maimed hand. Were a player character to spot the killer washing his hands in a marketplace fountain, the player would be perfectly justified in demanding as much information as possible. How tall is he? How fine are his clothes? Does he walk with a limp? Did I see where he came from? In a cut scene, all you need to do is depict the killer washing his wounded hand in the fountain — nothing more. All other details remain mysterious.

A good cut scene sticks with the players, sometimes long after the campaign is over. Such memorable scenes become topics for conversation for months and sometimes years after the game session in which they appeared.

Tying the Threads Together

While good roleplaying, tweaks to the rules, cut scenes, tight pacing and music all help you to evoke an atmosphere of Gothic horror in your Ravenloft campaign, these things do not do the work for you. There are merely tools to aid your own DMing style. If you want to instill a sense of Gothic horror in your players, then you are the one who has to do it. A good place to start is to think about things that scare you and describe them in a way that would scare you. The techniques presented here add to the drama of your game and turn what may be a mundane game into an epic experience.

Chapter Two: The World and Its Horrors

Much have I seen and known; cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments;
And much delight of battle with my peers
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
— Lord Alfred Tennyson, *Ulysses*

The Mists of Ravenloft warp and curl, drawing new souls into the Dark Powers' shadowed realm. The Mists part, revealing new lands. The Mists are ever changing, ever flowing and only you truly know what horrors they may contain. This chapter is devoted to rules you can use to personalize your campaign.

Adventuring in Ravenloft has its own unique potentials. The D&D *Dungeon Master's Guide* (*DMG*) gives general information for creating your own campaign world and populating it with interesting people and exotic places. This chapter provides additional information that, when used in tandem with the *DMG*, allows the DM to flesh out his Ravenloft campaign so that it reflects his own wishes for an intriguing and compelling game. Here you shall find helpful hints on creating your own domains and the darklords that rule them, plus information on designing your own communities and tailoring them to the specific Cultural Level you desire. In addition, sample communities are available for you to drop into your campaign setting or to use as guidelines for creating your own.

Sinkholes, places in the Dread Realms where evil coalesces and takes on physical, tangible form, have their own section. Here you will find everything you need to create your own sinkholes and place them in your Ravenloft campaign.

In addition, the prestige and NPC classes introduced in the *DMG* are presented here with their adaptations for use in a Ravenloft campaign setting.

For DMs and players who wish to use psionics in their game or who want to run adventures featuring the mind flayers of Bluetspur or the yogi of Sri Raji, a section on alterations and adaptations to the *Psionics Handbook* allows you to bring psionics into the Land of the Mists.

Domains of Darkness

Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscrib'd
In one self place; for where we are is Hell,
And where Hell is, there must we ever be.
— Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*

The trio of companions had trekked through the Mists for what seemed like days, though it might have only been a few hours. Demara kept one hand on her sword, the other on her brother's shoulder. She told herself it was to keep from losing contact with him in the white fog that surrounded them, making visibility only a memory. That Timorian was also a priest of Ezra had nothing to do with her need to feel his reassuring presence.

Timorian muttered prayers to keep up his courage. He strained to see the form of Vangelia, the third and youngest member of the company and its scout.

"Do you see anything yet?" he called ahead to the young rogue.

"Not yet," Vangelia's voice came back to him. Though he could see her form faintly through the Mists, she sounded farther away than she appeared.

"Wait!" he heard her say. "I see — something. It looks like a forest...."

Vangelia disappeared, but Timorian and Demara followed the sound of her voice until they, too, came out into a thick, dark land carpeted with trees.

"Where are we?" Demara asked, her eyes scanning their new surroundings.

Timorian shook his head. "I have never seen any place like this, nor have I read any accounts by other Wardens of the church. I was expecting that we would find ourselves back in Mordent, but..." his voice dropped to an awe-filled whisper, "this is someplace new."

Typically, the DM can bring her players to lands of her own creation only if she forges her own game world from scratch or works beyond the margins of the map in an existing setting. The mutable, patchwork nature of the Realm of Dread, however, renders it uniquely amenable to realms created by the DM, no matter what their scale or where they might lie within the Mists. Creating a new domain is one of the most inventive and exciting tasks that a Ravenloft DM can undertake. The enterprise might seem daunting to some DMs. The work involved can be significant, and there are ample pitfalls to avoid. However, the satisfying result, players who relish another adventure in a land of your own creation, is well worth the effort.

Why Create a New Domain?

Many Ravenloft DMs have the urge to craft an original domain and introduce it into their campaign. Within the context of the campaign setting, however, there should be a reason for the revelation of a new realm, beyond just the creative itch of the DM.

New Villains

A compelling villain needs a home, a playground or a prison, and the emergence of such a villain is an excellent reason to create a new

domain. Since most domains derive their character from their respective darklords, developing a domain from the darklord up, so to speak, is highly appropriate. A DM may have a rough concept for a new villain, perhaps only a sketchy tragic history and an array of interesting powers. In a campaign that is already well underway, the DM may wish to bring back an old enemy (or ally) of the PCs as a new darklord. Perhaps a PC has even fallen into unrepentant evil and become a darklord himself! (See "The Most Dreadful Possibility," below).

New Settings

Perhaps the DM is just not satisfied with the backdrops presented by the published domains. None of them may inspire him, or he may have an adventure in mind that does not suit any of them. The published domains cover a wide range of themes and cultural milieus, but there is always room for new landscapes.

New Developments

The shifting nature of the Realm of Dread creates a unique environment for political and supernatural upheavals. Heroes or other villains may depose darklords, vile cataclysms may strike the land and the Dark Powers may rend the whole fabric of Ravenloft for their own inscrutable purposes. Regardless of what sort of epic changes the DM has in mind for his campaign, such changes often precipitate the appearance of new domains.

How Much Detail?

Irrespective of how much work he intends to invest in his new domain, the DM must describe it in some detail. It is the descriptions that the DM provides, of its landscape, people, culture and government, that shape the new setting in the minds of his players. The descriptions of the established domains provided in the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook** are a good guidepost for how much detail the DM needs initially. These descriptions do not dwell on the trivia about life in their respective domains. They merely provide enough detail to establish a tone and seed story ideas in the mind of the DM. The DM need not sketch out his new domain in flowery prose, either. A simple list of natural, cultural, political and supernatural traits — perhaps gathering by an hour's worth of brainstorming — and a rough map may be all the DM needs to bring the domain into his campaign.

However, many DMs may need more substance than this to run adventures properly in their new domain. Some DMs enjoy churning out a hundred pages of vivid descriptive text or producing elaborate maps and illustrations. If the domain is only for the DM's own use, however, such exercises are merely a creative pleasure. Even DMs without such literary or artistic inclinations can flesh out their domain significantly.

The DM should begin with a brief description, perhaps just the domain's vital statistics and some simple concepts. It is difficult to build an elaborately detailed domain from scratch. Once these parameters have been established, the DM can make her domain as detailed as she desires. The **Ravenloft Gazetteers** are an example of how domains for which there are at first only limited specifics can be built up into developed settings, each bristling with detail and steeped in its own unique tone. Again, however, the DM need only put as much work into her domain as she needs for the purposes of her own campaign. An organized notebook filled with handwritten notes probably serves her purpose just as well as a slick computer file with Gothic typefaces, exhaustive illustrations and twenty pages on the grammar of the realm's language.

Core, Cluster or Island?

Most new domains are Islands of Terror, if for no other reason than there is a certain urge to maintain the status quo in the Core and Clusters. There is a tactical advantage to introducing a new domain as an Island as well. Islands tend to be thematically focused and unsullied by complex dealings with neighbors. This works to the DM's advantage when she is attempting to establish the atmosphere of a new setting. Islands also have a frontier aura, despite the lack of any true directions and distance within the Mists. Just as the Core has become the heart of evil and center of civilization in Ravenloft, Islands tend to be regarded as distant Otherlands, exotic and rarely visited by outsiders. This makes them ideal for new settings that are unfamiliar to the PCs.

However, some domains may be suitable candidates for annexation to an existing Cluster or even the Core. The new domain may feature a climate that is suited to a particular Cluster: hot and arid for the Amber Wastes, hot and humid for the Verdurous Lands or bitterly cold for the Frozen Reaches. New domains connected to the Core

should be considered very carefully. The balance of power in the Core is a delicate thing, and the appearance of a new realm could tip the continent into chaos. However, this may be exactly what the Dark Powers (and, by extension, the DM) have in mind.

Newly Revealed or Already Established?

The DM must also decide how to introduce the new domain to his campaign. The first option is to reveal the domain literally, to part the Mists one day and expose a new realm of darkness. If the PCs are blessed with fortunate timing, they may even witness this momentous event. More likely, they begin to hear rumors of a new neighboring realm where none existed before or of an uncharted land that has been discovered beyond the Mists. Another option is to introduce the new domain seamlessly, explaining that it "has always been there." This is an easier approach if the campaign has not yet begun. The DM can provide a customized map of the Realm of Dread beforehand, noting how his campaign setting is different from the published version of Ravenloft. Revealing a "pre-existing" domain during the campaign may create continuity issues, and the players may object if they have already become familiar with the geography of the setting.

Tools to Keep at Hand

Aside from the three core rulebooks — the *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, *Monster Manual* — and the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook** and other game system books, the DM may want to consult other resources while developing his domain. This is particularly the case if the DM has a vision for his domain that borrows from existing cultures, literature or film. Such resources may also be invaluable if the DM has no ideas at all and wants some inspiration!

Encyclopedia: A general knowledge encyclopedia is a vital resource for DMs developing new domains. This is particularly true if the domain in question reflects aspects of a culture in the real world. How can a DM create a domain with the characteristics of, for example, Indonesia, if she knows nothing about Indonesia? Topical encyclopedias may also be helpful, particularly those that deal with geography, culture or mythology.

Atlas: Many DMs find mapping to be one of the most challenging aspects of creating new set-

tings. An atlas that shows topography, natural ecosystems and political boundaries can enlighten the DM significantly regarding the relationship between these elements. How does the presence of mountains affect climate? Where do cities spring up? What landscapes are associated with which natural resources? In Ravenloft, the Mists often reveal realms with bizarre geographies and patchwork landscapes. Nonetheless, the DM should have some concept of how such principles work in the real world, if only so she can recognize aberrance in the Realm of Dread.

Literature and Films: Any new domain the DM creates should reflect the Gothic tradition to some degree. A studious Ravenloft DM should be familiar not only with the themes and imagery of the tradition, but also with the first-hand sources. Many of the existing domains described are influenced, subtly or not so subtly, by specific Gothic stories. Resources such as those in the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Six, can instruct the DM in the Gothic tone or provide ideas for darklords, themes or settings.

The Fundamentals

There are several characteristics of a new domain that are critical for the DM to establish, although not all of them need to be resolved at the outset. These can be thought of as the domain's vital statistics, similar to the concise descriptions provided in the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook.**

Cultural Level

The Cultural Level of a domain (see **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter One) determines not only the technologies and cultural institutions that characters are likely to encounter, but also the tone that Gothic adventure takes in that domain. Ancient Cultural Levels (CuL 0–4) suggest blasphemy, secrets and decay. Cultural Levels of the Middle Ages (CuL 5–7) evoke fear, fanaticism and violence. Relatively modern Cultural Levels (CuL 8–9) deal with revolution, oppression and hubris.

Keep in mind that the Cultural Levels generally reflect the technologies available in Western cultures throughout the dates listed in the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook.** The DM should choose a Cultural Level that accurately reflects the technological and cultural advancement of his new domain, regardless of the real-world dates that are provided. For example, a domain with Aztec character would correspond roughly to 1200–1520 A.D. in the real world (CuL 7–8), but CuL 2 or 3 would more accurately reflect its Cultural Level (with some CuL 1 and 4 elements as well).

The Landscape

The ecology of a domain (full, sparse or none) establishes the nature of the domain's landscape succinctly. Most domains resemble real-world environments, with the usual complement of flora and fauna. Sparse domains tend to be wastelands or subterranean realms. Domains with no ecology are almost always single structures or truly bizarre supernatural environments. Without the details of a rich biological landscape, domains with sparse or no ecologies require other features to lend them a unique atmosphere, such as distinctive manmade structures or natural or supernatural phenomena.

The combination of climate and terrain conjures a plethora of sights, sounds, smells and textures to players almost immediately. Climate and terrain types such as "cold mountains" and "warm forest" come loaded with imagery that establishes the landscape of the domain in two simple words.

Nonetheless, it is essential that the DM provides additional detail concerning the domain's landscape. The landscape is the first element of a new domain that characters experience. What are the sights and sounds that greet them as they surmount a mountain overlooking the new land, or when they wander as outsiders into a village? The descriptions that the DM gives establish the tone for the next adventure or two.

The DM should address the flora, fauna, ecology, architecture, climate and weather of the domain. All should be described in terms of sensory details that leap out at the players. If the domain is based on a real-world culture or region, the DM should seek out photographs and artwork depicting that society or land. Such resources not only provide guidance in determining the "look" of a new domain, but may also inspire vivid settings for particular adventures.

The DM may want to make note of intriguing similes or metaphors that evoke the tone she is trying to establish. Chimney smoke that curls like "lazy cherubs winging their way heavenward" or like "twining serpents, searching the air for warm prey" suggests two very different moods. The thematic elements at the heart of the domain may even be subtly reflected in the domain's landscape. Consider how the harsh weather of Lamordia mirrors the cold rationality of Mordenheim, the terrible

loneliness of Adam and the chilling apathy that both exhibit toward other creatures.

The Folk

Early on in the development of a new domain, the DM should work out how many settlements of what size the new domain holds. The total population of the domain should be roughly double the population in these settlements. This number will be somewhat higher in realms with a more rural character, lower in domains where the cities are densely populated.

In a sense, the proportion of humans to nonhumans in the population determines to what degree the domain reflects the traditional fantasy setting of the Dungeons & Dragons game. Domains with significant populations of nonhumans (such as Darkon) tend to more influenced by the conventions of the fantasy genre. Domains with marginal populations of nonhumans or in which nonhumans are entirely absent are settings that more closely resemble our own world, albeit still tainted by the supernatural forces of the Gothic tradition. Domains with a nonhuman populace need not reflect the typical proportions of the D&D game. The presence of Sithicus in the Realm of Dread suggests that other domains populated entirely by nonhuman races might exist beyond the Mists. Or consider a domain where most nonhumans are absent, but where one of every four human births results in a caliban.

The DM should note whether any significant human ethnic minorities exist in her domain. What is their proportion to the majority and what factors divide them? Tribal warfare, ethnic conflict, genocide and xenophobia are all harrowing backdrops to Gothic stories. The conflicts between ethnic groups may be the setting for adventures or even the principle theme that characterizes the domain.

Details on the populace of the domain are vital, particularly if the DM is going to allow players to create native PCs (see "Characters" below). The DM should describe how the locals look, dress, speak and behave. How do the natives sustain themselves and their families? Through farming, crafts, trade or war? What is the general demeanor of the populace, summed up in a handful of adjectives? Barovians, for example, could be described as "fearful, suspicious and superstitious." The DM should provide a language or two for the natives, either an existing tongue (probable if the domain is located in the Core or a Cluster) or a new one (likely if it is an Island). Religion is a fundamental aspect of daily life in most domains and often the conceptual cornerstone of cleric and paladin characters. If the DM is introducing a new faith or whole pantheon, she should provide at minimum the alignment, cleric domains, favored weapon and statement of dogma for each god.

The Law

The government of a domain determines how PCs can move about the domain, the ways in which they interact with NPCs and perhaps even the attitude that they adopt within the domain. Oppressive domains make life hard on the populace and on the PCs as well, while domains without a strong leader may be dangerous places due to petty lords, bandits and rebels. If the system of government is familiar to the PCs, they have a much easier time adapting to the new realm. Conversely, PCs who run afoul of strange systems of law inevitably stumble into horrible predicaments through breaches of protocol or etiquette. The DM should sketch the flow of power and wealth in the domain and perhaps codify a handful of significant and representative laws that the PCs have to observe.

Most domains from CuL 2 on have an aristocracy whom the ruler must pacify and keep in check. Almost all societies also host a military class of some kind, from a simple village militia that keeps the peace to a restless standing army that must be placated to an outright military dictatorship. More unusual domains might include a powerful priest, scribe, merchant, craftsman, spellcaster or scientist class. If the ruler is the domain's darklord, he may be able call upon supernatural means to enforce his rule. If the darklord lurks in the shadows, he normally has a power base in some mundane segment of the society (priests, criminals, nobles and so on) and some means of influencing the ruler directly or indirectly.

Trade and Diplomacy

Even in the Realm of Dread, where nations are separated by the unpredictable Mists and creatures of darkness control whole governments, economics and politics still persist. The resources that a domain has at its disposal and those it requires from other domains determine much about its place in the broader setting. The DM should look to the domain's landscape and its resemblance to real cultures to determine the form its wealth takes. For example, domains with coastal areas likely have

some dependence on fishing, trade or shipbuilding. A domain with an Incan character would not have access to staples such as wheat, cattle and steel goods, but would possess peppers, llamas, guinea pigs and gold. Often, domains are characterized by a single significant resource, such as the horses of Nova Vaasa or the grain of Falkovnia. Some domains have few native resources and must accrue their wealth through the export of culture, the trade that moves through their realm or the plunder gained from military conquest. Does the domain deal in traditional Dungeons & Dragons coins (gp, sp, cp), a unique currency or a system of barter?

Domains that border other domains (and even some Islands of Terror blessed with reliable Mistways) must contend with their neighbors, who may seek a trading partner, a military ally or a ripe land for conquest. In general, the Realm of Dread is a world of tribalism, factionalism and hatred for the Other. The populace of almost all domains regards its neighbors with suspicion or outright animosity. Domains with significant military, economic or supernatural power tend to throw their weight around significantly, while weak domains must band together or submit to the will of mightier realms.

Characters

The DM should not overlook the ways in which the domain influences the various character options, such as skills, feats, equipment and magic. Such knowledge is valuable to players creating characters native to the new domain, but also to the DM herself for the purposes of local NPCs. An NPC's selection of skills and feats often reflect cultural tendencies as much as personal preference. Feat such as Skill Focus, Weapon Focus and Spell Focus highlight the professional military and magical traditions of the domain. Certain combinations of combat feats can produce a distinctive combat style that players come to associate with that particular domain. Exotic domains may require the DM to develop a custom weapon and armor list beyond the normal Cultural Level restrictions. The DM should also prepare a list of male and female names for native PCs and her own NPCs. Baby name books organized by ethnicity and cultural tradition are a good place to start, but some DMs may enjoy producing their own unique names that more closely reflect the fantasy genre than the real world.

Lay of the Land

Regardless of her ability at mapping, the DM should make an effort to sketch the general layout of her domain. It is usually easiest to begin with the main geographical features. Coastlines, forests, mountain ranges and stretches of plain, once placed, suggest locations for rivers, roads and settlements. An atlas provides invaluable inspiration for the shape and form of these features if the DM is having a hard time developing them from scratch. Great detail is generally unnecessary, but the DM should note the facts that may be relevant for overland travel and game matters. How tall are the mountains? How rugged is the topography? Which way does the wind blow along the ocean? Are the rivers deep enough to support boat traffic? Which areas are well traveled and which are regarded as wild and dangerous?

The DM should select some fanciful or oblique names for some of the prominent geographic features ("The Forest of Screams," "Whitecap Lake," "Mount Marglyblôneka," and so on) She should also place a few points of interest throughout the domain, perhaps in places far from settlements and otherwise bereft of civilization. Such locations might be ruins, strongholds, caves, temples, natural sites or other places of adventure. It does not matter if the DM has no idea what the exact nature of those sites might be at this point. Labels such as "Ruined Chapel" or "Stone Circle" may be sufficient initially. As the campaign proceeds, events probably suggest how these points of interest might be transformed into detailed settings for adventures.

The Darklord

When the DM designs a domain, he often has some notion of the darklord's nature. The domain usually derives much of its character from the history and sins of the darklord. If the domain came before the darklord, however, the DM has to devise a darklord that accurately reflects the tone of the realm. At this point, the DM needs to describe the darklord in condensed format, making note of his name, gender, race, class, alignment and perhaps the abilities granted to him by the Dark Powers. Some basic notes on his history and rule are advisable as well.

The sins of a darklord are perhaps more significant than the darklord's race or class. Any creature can draw the dire attention of the Dark Powers, for it is the darklord's evil deeds that serve as the

unholy spiritual beacon, not his abilities. Effective darklords are utterly beyond redemption, but all of them are also sympathetic villains to some respect. They should not be pitied, for their damnation was by their own hands, but they should be feared for what they represent. Memorable darklords reflect the PCs to varying degrees, calling to mind their own failures and doubts and prompting them to shudder, "There, but for the grace of the gods, go I."

Fleshing It Out

Once the DM has outlined the basics of his domain, he may feel it is sufficient for the purposes of running adventures in the domain. Other DMs may desire more detail, perhaps on the level of the **Ravenloft Gazetteers**. The needs of the DM and the tastes of the players largely determine the depth of detail that is required. If the DM feels that the heraldry of the noble families, the preparation of local cuisine or the style of local woodwork are relevant and enriching to his campaign, he should describe them.

Regardless, additional details are typically necessary in a few select areas. The domain's settlements should be given full statistics blocks according to the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, Chapter 5, "Generating Towns," as well as the section in this chapter on Creating Communities. The DM should feel free to break the rules of the town system when needed. If she needs a 17th-level wizard in a hamlet of 300 souls, she should put him there and not sweat the niceties of level limitations and town size. Besides the settlement's ruler and law enforcement, the DM should provide two to four interesting NPCs in condensed format (gender, race, class, alignment, role in the settlement). She may not have any idea how these characters fit into setting yet, but they provide excellent springboards to adventure when and if the PCs travel to the settlement later in the campaign.

Even if the PCs are not likely to face him anytime soon, the DM probably also wants to describe the darklord in greater detail. Full NPC statistics in a standard format, similar to those provided in **Secrets of the Dread Realm**, are desirable. The DM should not only codify the darklord's abilities, but also expand on his history and motives and provide the mechanics for border closures. If the DM feels that other NPCs are particularly vital to the domain, such as a darklord's foremost minion or enemy or an ally or patron for the PCs, she should give them full statistics and a descriptive treatment.

The Seven Secrets to Memorable Domains

Regardless of which stage of the process currently occupies her, the DM should keep a handful of fundamental guidelines near the front of her mind when designing a new domain.

Details, Details, Details

It bears repeating that the details make the domain. The DM may toil countless hours to produce an exciting domain with a tragic and intriguing darklord, but it will all be wasted if his descriptions at the game table are limp and lifeless. Rich descriptions are the lifeblood of a new setting. They solidify the imagery, theme and tone of the setting in the minds of the players and establish the mood that frightens and thrills them.

This is not to say that the DM should take a verbose, overwrought approach to his domain's details. Dense descriptions are fine for the DMs own notes, but are likely to bore the players when spoken aloud in the context of a game. Good descriptions are concise and crisp, laced with a handful of sensory details that the players are likely to remember. Drowning the players in detail has the same effect as no detail at all: the domain will be featureless in their minds.

Cover New Ground

Before the DM sets about crafting her new domain, she should take a moment to appraise the existing landscape. Many DMs start with a concept that seems original at the time, only to discover that the same territory has been tread by an existing domain. The DM should generally avoid the themes and cultural milieus that have already been covered in the setting. For example, there is little need in the Ravenloft setting for another domain with the character of a medieval Balkan or Slavic kingdom, especially if the new domain has nothing innovative to offer other than its resemblance to such cultures. Similarly, the mad scientist archetype has already received extensive treatment through Victor Mordenheim, Frantisek Markov, Easan and several other darklords.

Instead of rehashing material that has already been covered, the DM should make an effort to seek out the gaps in the setting. For example, there is not yet a darklord who epitomizes the sin of avarice or who resembles the title character of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. There is not yet a domain that echoes the medieval gold empires of West Africa or the pre-Columbian Amazon rainforest. These are untapped veins of potential in the setting, each filled with rich possibilities for tales of Gothic adventure.

Less Is More

Another pitfall in domain creation is the tendency to one-up the existing domains and darklords. Why create a domain less oppressive than Falkovnia when it could be even more oppressive? Why create a darklord who is weaker than Strahd von Zarovich or Azalin when he could be stronger? In the end, such a strategy eventually fails, especially if it is the sole interesting feature of the domain. Furthermore, the uniqueness of setting icons such as Strahd erodes when the DM introduces another darklord who is his equal or superior. Quality, not quantity, is the rule of thumb, not only of the Ravenloft setting, but of the Gothic tradition in general. Any DM can evoke fear with a CR 18 adversary or a realm where every citizen is a vampire. The horror teased from the ordinary is much more potent and requires much more skill.

Gothic Is Good

Almost all DMs know the fantasy genre inside and out. It is the Gothic part of Gothic adventure that is the challenge for many DMs. **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Six, is a good place to start looking for guidance. An even better place is *Dracula* or any of the seminal works of the genre. The DM should understand the elements that define Gothicism and seek to coax them to the surface in her domain. If a domain is not ruled by the Gothic sensibility, it is probably not an appropriate setting for Ravenloft adventures.

Controlled elements of other genres may be appropriate occasionally in some domains. The DM should be aware of the characteristics of epics, morality tales, Shakespearean tragedy, early science fiction, Lovecraftian horror, splatterschtick and modern thrillers, so he can recognize when to use them and when to avoid them. Within certain limits, any setting covered by the Cultural Levels of the Ravenloft campaign setting can be made Gothic through proper emphasis and description, regardless of its cultural milieu.

Darkness Needs Light

There is temptation to create domains in the Ravenloft setting that resemble hopeless pits of horror and damnation, rather than "crucibles of

virtue." A setting without hope is a setting without dramatic tension. Despair is only truly poignant when the possibility of a happy ending exists, however small. For all its evils, the Realm of Dread should still be a place where people smile, sing, dance, embrace and cherish their loved ones and friends. Every domain should feature some landscape that, however forbidding, is breathtaking in its beauty. Similarly, every domain should cradle some refuge of goodness, even it is only in the hearts of those who refuse to submit to the land's horrors.

Plot Hooks Aplenty

Although it may be appropriate in particularly small domains, it is usually unwise to limit the adventure potential to delving into the lair of the domain's darklord. Although the darklord is typically a glowering presence in his domain, all roads do not necessarily lead to him. The DM should sprinkle her domain with potential story hooks, none of which need to be developed beyond a few brief notes initially. The conflicts of various power groups, the goals of key NPCs, the surfacing of lost magic items and sudden supernatural crises all provide reasons to adventure. As the PCs gain power, there may be nobles, churches, spellcasters and monsters that surface with an interest in the party's fate. The DM should outline who in the domain is interested in and threatened by the PCs as they attain glory, wealth and power.

Expect the Unexpected

The most disappointing outcome when creating a new domain is when the DM pours her heart into a domain, only to discover that it is predictable and tired. Regardless of the exotic backdrop, all domains reflect archetypes to some degree and are therefore predictable to a certain extent. However, the DM has the power early on in the creation process to place twists in the fabric of ancient stories. The availability of a spectrum of supernatural elements in the Dungeons & Dragons game makes this task relatively easy. For example, a domain with an oppressive tyrant for a darklord is nothing new, nor is the notion of a group of rebels struggling against his rule. But what if the darklord is a cruel human baron who is struggling to wipe out the evil werebeasts that plague his land's wilds? What if the underground resistance is actually a pack of wolfweres who are allied to the lycanthropes, but preparing to betray them to the baron and seize their hunting grounds? The DM should not be afraid to provide unconventional surprises to traditional adventure structure, particularly if they add the Gothic element of moral dilemma.

The Most Dreadful Possibility

The presence of powers checks in the Ravenloft setting creates the possibility that PCs might stumble down the path of corruption to irredeemable evil. This in turn raises the specter that a PC might draw the attention of the Dark Powers to such an extent that he is granted a domain of his own. Admittedly, such a scenario is quite rare and is entirely at the discretion of the DM. Simply because a character has reached the fifth stage along the Path of Corruption (see **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three), the DM is under no obligation to proceed to the next stage. The introduction of a new domain and darklord is a serious matter that affects the entire campaign and should not be left to the behavior of the PCs.

There may come a time, however, when a PC has failed that sixth and final powers check, and the DM judges that a PC darklord would be a positive addition to his campaign. Although such a twist to the campaign is exciting, the DM may feel a bit overwhelmed by the prospect. A PC darklord holds some of the most compelling dramatic potential in the Ravenloft setting, but missteps in how the matter is handled can be fatal to a campaign. Fortunately, the DM can maximize the positive results of such a development by following a few simple guidelines.

There Are No PC Darklords

It is worth restating the caveat in the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook:** "Player characters who become darklords automatically become NPCs run by the DM." Once a PC has slipped so far down the Path of Corruption, the DM should already be making plans jointly with the player about the character's possible retirement. The DM should dispel any notion that the player might harbor about someday playing a darklord. Some players may enjoy the tragic descent into darkness that they have worked hard to portray and could be reluctant to let go of a beloved PC.

However, the DM should not be despotic about removing the character from play against the player's wishes. She should explain that the very presence of a darklord PC undermines not only the game's balance, but also the fundamental dramatic struggle of the Ravenloft setting. The true terror of

the setting lies in the potential for PCs to become darklords, not in PCs with the power of darklords. The distinction is subtle but critical, and the DM should make an effort to convey it to the player. The player may view the retirement of his character as a punishment. The DM should instead stress that retirement of a PC darklord is the reward for a history of compelling and tragic roleplaying and that the PC is being immortalized in the campaign as an NPC of terrible power and evil. The player should be encouraged to make a new PC, hopefully one quite different from his fallen character.

Involve the Player

Even though the player has turned over the fate of her character to the DM, she may still be involved in the new darklord's development and intrigues. After all, who knows the fledgling villain better than the player who portrayed him for weeks, months or years? Allowing the player to become involved taps the most valuable resource the DM has at his disposal and takes a bit of the sting out of losing a character for the player.

The character should have a hand in developing the darklord's curse and new powers, if any, and perhaps even the domain itself. Because there is a temptation for the player to make her fallen hero as powerful as possible, the DM should approach the player for suggestions rather than allowing her to directly design the new darklord. The player also has a wealth of roleplaying experience related to the darklord under her belt, all exploitable by the DM. The player probably is enthusiastic about providing guidance on the darklord's motivations, demeanor and tactics. Before critical scenes or plot developments during the game, the DM should consult with the player to determine the most suitable and realistic course of action that the darklord would take.

If the DM judges that the player is capable of the challenge, she may wish to allow the player to continue to speak for the darklord or even roll dice for him during combat, even if he is also playing a new PC. After all, the other players have come to associate their fellow player with the darklord's voice and persona. Shifting the darklord to the DM's chair removes some of the dramatic punch of the character's fall. The DM should stress to the player in question, however, that as an NPC, the darklord is ultimately under the DM's control. The player should be encouraged to chew the scenery and make his fellow players squirm, but avoid actions that jeopardize the DM's designs for the campaign. It is wise to establish logistical and dramatic boundaries before the player takes over for the scene.

Exploit the Familiar

As already noted, the horror of most darklords lies not just in their power but in their universal tragedy. A darklord should prompt the PCs to reflect, "That could have been any one of us." The tragedy of a PC darklord is all the more intense for the camaraderie that the other players likely felt with the fallen character. The circumstances of the character's damnation probably determine the manner in which the other players regard the darklord. Was the PC's descent a slow slide into darkness, a corruption of convenience that went unnoticed by the other PCs? Perhaps he struggled mightily against temptation, relying on his companions for strength. Or was the character a sinister force within the party from the outset, perpetually drawing the suspicions of his allies? Most PCs are simply companions in arms, though many become devoted friends or even lovers. The emotional significance of the PC darklord is directly proportional to the connection that the other players felt through their own PCs.

The DM should exploit the emotional history of the party when utilizing the new darklord in his campaign. Though PCs may react to their fallen ally in a variety of ways, from swearing to destroy her to avoiding her and her domain at all costs, an effective DM draws them into the darklord's schemes and strikes at their fears. Conversely, the darklord may make it her mission to destroy or corrupt the PCs or may avoid confronting her allies out of a lingering splinter of affection. She will inevitably be drawn back to them in some fashion, however; such fated confrontations are thoroughly in the Gothic tradition.

The darklord knows his former companions better than anyone, and exploits that knowledge when conflict inevitably occurs. The DM should use every trick in the book, no matter how devious or exploitive, to undermine the PCs and their successes. The darklord should seek to manipulate the party through the motivations that she knows drives them. She should focus her attention on the companions of which she was particularly fond, attempting to seduce them away from their fellows or destroy them utterly as a hated memory of her old life. Perhaps most crucially for the purposes of

terror, she should be malicious in her words to the players, capitalizing on the PCs' fears, values and loyalties.

Where Shadows Dwell: Communities of Ravenloft

Stepping through the Mists, a shaggy fellow dressed in skins with a knobby club over one shoulder sees a wondrous and fearful sight. Before him are masses of people dressed in velvet and satin: some ride forth on glossy ponies from a village of amazing size. Buildings tower above him. The confusion in his eyes leads some to laughter, others to paranoia and a few to pity. Overwhelmed, he screams and raises his club to bash his way through the horrifying throng. A moment later he lies dead, an extra crimson eye in his heavy brow from an expertly aimed pistol shot. Only his wandering ghost remains, trapped in a world beyond his imagination.

This is Ravenloft. You never know where the Mists might take you. Chances are, however, that your player characters end up in a town or village or even a major city in one of the many Ravenloft realms. This section helps you create unique communities or flesh out existing locations. While the **Ravenloft Gazetteers** provide much useful information on major cities in the various realms they cover, they cannot mention every community, nor should they. As a DM, you may prefer to use cities and towns of your own devising that are suited to your Ravenloft campaign.

"All I want is a good hot meal, a bath, if such a thing exists, and a bed that has a mattress that's thicker than my bedroll," Demara said as she led the way down the street of the small village. The companions had just spent the last four days traveling from their last escapade, a foray into an abandoned mine in search of a lost child. They had found the child frightened but unharmed, but had to fight their way through several misshapen things that had seized her for some purpose the heroes could not determine.

Timorian, the priest of Ezra, had seen that the child was no worse for her experience and returned her to her grateful parents, but the thought of those unfortunate monsters, perhaps the results of some mad wizard's experimentations, had remained with him for days. Now, however, he too was longing for something

approaching normality: a mug of ale, the song of a bard and, like his sister, Demara, a bath and a bed.

"I wonder if there's any gambling in this town," Vangelia said, her face hopeful. A few coins still clanked in her pouch and she wasn't happy unless she was spending money or getting it.

Demara stopped suddenly, looking around. The village seemed almost deserted except for a few sullen men and women in drab clothes. She sniffed the air, smelling nothing but horse dung and wood smoke and, from one building that looked like an inn, the odor of boiled turnips.

She turned back to her companions, a look of dismay on her face. "I'm not sure we will find what we're looking for here, any of us. But I think we won't lack for something to do. Something's wrong here, and I think we're going to find out what it is before long."

Building communities in Ravenloft provides a unique challenge for a Dungeon Master. Develop a huge ancient city of the Bronze Age where a pharaoh rules in the shadow of immense tombs or a tiny, paranoid Medieval village where the people come out only at night to worship their werewolf god. One quick trip through the Mists and your adventuring party may stumble into a realm where guns are commonplace or find themselves the only people around with weapons better than clubs. Communities may consist of nothing but xenophobic humans, towns where no one thinks it odd to drink at a table with a couple of calibans, a dwarf and a werewolf bard; or a city of fetid evil, filled with ravening monsters.

Community Creation

Does your population exist as the only city within a dark realm or is it a thriving merchant-filled town with caravans arriving through the shifting sands from faraway oases? What is its cultural level and level of prosperity? What is its history? Who resides there? Do hidden populations exist in the shadows? Who seems to exercise political control? Who really holds the reigns of power? How superstitious/fanatical/xenophobic are the people in the town you build? Who is the darklord controlling the land in which it dwells and how does his tortured destiny distort the lives of those who reside in your community? What do people consider truly valuable there — water, information, safety or souls? Maybe they need something more unlikely.

Answering all these questions, and many others, are just as important for fleshing out your player's surroundings as a PC's hair and eye color, family history and statistics are to building a well-rounded character. In fact, as you build your community, ideas for adventures can arise from the complexities you create here.

For example, consider the realm of Kartakass, built by the Dark Powers to torment Harkon Lukas, a wolfwere darklord who lives for competition. His only challenges are seducing women and keeping the title of Meistersinger of Skald, a position so prosaic and unsatisfying that he continues to compete only to keep others from gaining the post. The Dark Powers warp his imprisoning domain to fit Harkon's subtle hell. Imagine the effect on those living in Kartakass.

Because of their obsession with music and the competition, people come from all over the area to see ambitious bards perform and sometimes mysteriously disappear if they are just a little too good. Music and musical training are as important as learning to read and write might be in other realms. People fear the full moon and wolf howls send a shiver down children's spines, but women wander the woods waiting for a wild and passionate lover who may bring them great pleasure or grizzly death.

No tavern in Kartakass would be complete without a stage. Architectural designs lean toward high ceilings and tiled floors to complement singing voices and tapestry-covered walls to quell echoes. Every town has an amphitheater for that most important event: the election of the Meistersinger. People honor musical-instrument makers, bestowing higher payments upon them than any other craftsmen, including jewelers. Men and women dress seductively in colorful clothing whether or not they are actual performers, equating power with a bardic image. Everything within Kartakass is connected to and colored by the obsessions of its darklord. Sending your players into this realm, especially if you have a competitive bard in the mix, can make for great adventures — or the death of the bard PC.

While basic information on the creation of towns can be found in the Dungeons & Dragons *Dungeon Master's Guide*, this chapter offers suggestions and methods for customizing those towns to reflect the atmosphere of Ravenloft.

Societies and Cultural Levels Revisited

Ravenloft contains myriad cultures with varying levels of complexity and advancement. Running the gamut from the sparse, survival-oriented lifestyle of the Stone Age to the flowering culture of the Renaissance, the Dark Powers bind each domain in creation to continue without advancing past its individual cultural level. Still, different communities even within each dark realm may have varying levels of prosperity or invention.

Some societies follow less complicated lives as proscribed by law, philosophy or religious tenet. Others thrive on change and the exploration of new ideas. Some shrink and die, whether from the horror of the Requiem or by the cursed actions of powerful wizards. As a Dungeon Master, you should remember that society and its civilizations are fluid and growing organisms, even within an environment controlled by the Dark Powers.

Although some villages may seem the same from visit to visit, unchanging through generations of families — people do change, and so do the places where they live. In Ravenloft, this may occur through the machinations of the Dark Powers, through a change in darklords or by the efforts of a successful adventuring party or even by a rebellion within the population itself. Still, each cultural level and each new community from that cultural level can provide a different challenge for you as a DM, as well as many new and interesting adventure ideas. For further information, see the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook** section on cultural levels.

Cultural Level 0: Savage

By its very definition, cultural level zero denotes no organized community. Still, a wilderness may contain more than forests and packs of ravening wolves. Adventurers may travel through or attempt to settle savage lands. Odd and secretive mages or scientists may have hidden labs in a hostile wasteland to discourage visitors. DMs may create the ruins of a past civilization overgrown by trees and twisting vines and filled with incomprehensible magic or design roaming bands of feral madmen caught up in some darklord's ancient experiment. Place your PCs against leaderless crowds of mindless, shrieking undead. The possibilities are endless and invariably disturbing.

Examples: Avonleigh, Bluetspur, Keening, Tímor and The Wildlands.

Cultural Level 1: Stone Age (10,000 BC–5,000 BC)

Stone Age communities are usually quite small, consisting of populations no larger than local hunting and foraging can support. Its residents may be nomadic, moving with transportable tents or using features of the land such as caves or cliff walls for shelter. Since travel is so arduous and people so scattered, tribes and clans rarely see strangers. Language, rituals and customs can change among groups only a few miles distant from each other, and tribes may consider anyone unusual an enemy or a god, a decision usually made upon first sighting the individual or group. Magic is limited to sorcerous, druidic and clerical spells, since these societies have not invented the written word.

Although weaponry is crude and normal treasure is only valued as ornamentation, an adventurer might find himself weighted down with gold once a Stone Age dweller realizes he is interested in that "worthless soft metal." This is especially true if a PC shows an NPC tribesman his "magically sharp" big knife (sword) or a mage performs a spell different from any in their shaman's repertoire. Of course, arrogant PCs may find themselves surprised by spells they have never seen and elaborate rites they do not understand. Imaginative and very complex patterns often decorate common Stone Age items, at times explaining history and heroic deeds through pictographs. Creating a campaign set in this cultural level provides an interesting challenge for a DM, generally calling for themes of discovery, physical challenges and change, superstition and xenophobia — whether coming from the players or their antagonists.

For adventurers arriving from a more advanced culture, misunderstandings, the language barrier, mistaken rituals or religious differences make for dramatic tension. The DM may wish to consider what would happen if a humble knight PC suddenly found himself worshiped as a local war deity. Perhaps the father of an adventurer disappeared through the Mists years ago and now his daughter finds a crudely painted sketch of his shield decorating the leather wall of a tent. Gestures and spells are the only way to speak. Learning to communicate and understand is a very important theme for a Stone Age encounter — although imaginative

tortures, scarification and bloody ritual have their places as well.

Examples: Markovía, Sebua and Saragoss.

Cultural Level 2: Bronze Age (5,000 BC–2,500 BC)

The Bronze Age is defined by an ability to smelt and work bronze. With this development, communities could settle and cultivate land with plows, as well as create superior weapons to defend themselves. This is an age of complex and overwhelmingly rich civilizations. Communities build magnificent structures using newly developed engineering methods that make use of their larger populations as well as slave labor.

Scientific thought develops as communities create the first written languages with hieroglyphics and other pictographs on clay tablets and papyrus. Looking toward the sky, people of the Bronze Age create elaborate methods of enumerating time and the seasons, including high towers and other architectural feats aligned toward dawn and dusk. The wheel calendar comes into being.

Worship grows more prominent and cultural guidelines become more organized as society creates elaborate hierarchies along social and religious lines. This rigid system provides little advancement for those of lesser classes, and may set a child's life path at birth to follow in the craft or state of servitude in which his family has toiled for generations.

Adventures in Bronze Age communities might consist of PC slaves' attempt to break free of their status or involve theocratic political maneuverings among powerful priests in their enormous temples and their PC acolytes and defenders. Mist-led PCs might fight to survive in the hostile environments often surrounding these centers of population or, driven by rumors of incredible treasures, explore mazelike pyramids full of vicious traps and guardian monsters. Scholars from more advanced cultural levels might consider the study of such areas as a life's work, studying what amounts to archeology on a living culture.

Example: Har'Akir

Cultural Level 3: Iron Age (2,500 BC–1 BC)

Iron Age towns are the first communities where buildings and crops do not have to be set according to the vagaries of geography. Aqueducts, windmills, and iron plows lead to burgeoning fields

and populous towns. Trade becomes easier as people develop new ships and crude canals connect waterways. Communities create the first coins, a trade currency more useful in an age of travel than barter. The learned create glass and devise medical theories beyond the whims of the gods while philosophers and theorists develop libraries from the scrolls they collect.

Wizards can now build collections of spells as scholars have refined hieroglyphics into the first true alphabet. New armaments such as siege engines, the breastplate and other elaborate martial devices lead defenders to build the first fortresses and castles. Adventures within this cultural level include exploring other communities for trade possibilities, tracking down weaponsmiths with new forging ideas, wandering sewers inhabited by undead or defending a library from a neighboring hoard.

A DM might create a need for powerful druidical assistance and send his party on a search through the perilous land of Forlorn for the rumored ancient order of druids hidden within. PCs from more advanced societies would consider communities of this age crude but certainly familiar.

Though the realms of Forlorn and Necropolis seem to fall into this category, the tartan-clad goblyns of Forlorn would be considered part of a Stone Age culture if not for their ability to steal weapons from more advanced outsiders and Necropolis has degenerated to this level from its pre-Requiem days.

Examples: Forlorn, Necropolis

Cultural Level 4: Classical (1 AD–500 AD)

During the Classical period, civilization advances to its earliest full flowering. Scientific knowledge embraces alchemy, geometry, astronomy and mathematics. Spellcasters and other gatherers and builders of knowledge create the first bound books, although they still laboriously write tomes by hand. Alchemists and sorcerers create the first golems.

Homes and businesses abound with bright colors and contain murals, sculptures and tiled architectural details. Roads improve, increasing trade and the sharing of cultures, as well as the likelihood of long-range warfare. Societies may follow philosophical paths or live in extreme decadence on the backs of slaves captured from faraway lands. Exploration begins as ships with the ability to travel along the coastlines and undertake short voyages across the sea sail forth into unfamiliar waters.

In Ravenloft, the Mists may cut these explorations short or find Mist-led crews traveling to truly alien lands. Consider sending adventurers to classical Vechor in search of trade goods or on a quest for a spellbook from Easan the Mad. Perhaps someone needs an alchemical cure for a horrible plague, incurable by normal or known magical means. Maybe there has been an astronomical event portending great disaster and your group must seek a scholar of astronomy.

Examples: G'Henna, Srí Rají and Vechor

Cultural Level 5: Dark Ages (500 AD–800 AD)

The Dark Age culture tends to arise from the destruction of war, by inner decadence or other damaging influences of a previous, more advanced civilization. Savage bands of bandits or rogues roam the countryside and the old ways of civilization no longer provide the security they once did.

Remaining pockets of civilization exist behind thick stone walls in fortresses, in monasteries, and in remote or inaccessible foreign lands. Although the term "Dark Age" implies the loss of civilization and the light of knowledge, scribes create beautiful illuminated manuscripts, embellishing ancient knowledge and religious thought. Monasteries ring with newly invented choral harmonies and master craftsmen jealously guard newly developed elegant porcelain finishes.

Populations generally surround one central keep or castle, cultivating the lands outside in exchange for room within the high defensive walls during times of war. Those in positions of power are generally limited to nobility, the church, military leaders and knights.

Although Rokushima Táiyoo falls under the category of a Dark Ages culture in terms of cultural development, it does not follow the European model, existing as a very civilized and cultured society with rules of its own. Vorostokov resembles Viking society in many ways and contains elements of typical Level Five cultures, including feudal settlements, decaying or lost civilizations and despotic rulers.

Typical adventures might include dealing with the latest roving army of mercenaries, seeking a lost spell or ancestral heirloom hidden and forgotten

long ago or stranding a group of Mist-led PCs adrift in the alien culture of Rokushima Táiyoo.

Examples: Darkon, Rokushima Táiyoo, Vorostokov

Cultural Level 6: Early Medieval (800 AD–1,200 AD)

Early Medieval culture begins the process of rebuilding civilization, and the flowering of soaring architectural marvels containing elements such as the Gothic arched ceiling and the artistry of stained and leaded glass. Although temples and public buildings become more complex and beautiful, the average person still sleeps on straw and shivers beside a smoky hearth in the winter.

Towns spread outward from their original protectors, no longer bound to sit surrounding a noble's keep, although most towns surround the populace with high walls and defensible gates. Populations grow again, while efficient methods of dealing with sewage and filth confound most civic leaders, leading to disease and horrible living conditions, especially in the poorer areas of town. Children, orphaned by disease, abandonment or mischance, roam the streets in gangs, sometimes joining the first thieves' guilds. Many towns have organized merchants' guilds and bardic colleges, while wizards and sorcerers begin their first central libraries and schools of magic.

Jousting contests become popular when the lance comes into use and chainmail makes the practice (generally) less than lethal. During this period some nonnoble civic leaders emerge, generally the organizers of various guilds and colleges or councils administrating for a noble liege. Religious leaders also gain power as larger populations support building magnificent temples and vie for positions as servants to the churches.

Dungeon Masters may now have fun beginning their plots of political maneuvering, guild backstabbing and rage against poverty. Try adventures set in a plague-filled village, or run a murder plot surrounding the death of a guildmaster. In Ravenloft, this is the Cultural Level in which darklords often feel threatened by their more independent subjects, and, as is the case of Sanguínía, tighten their grip. Rebellious adventurers may struggle against this control or work to strengthen their guilds as a counter.

Examples: Pharazía, Sanguínía and Tepest,

Cultural Level 7: Medieval (1,200 AD–1,400 AD)

The Medieval cultural level continues the advances begun in the Early Medieval period. Towns grow into cities while civic leaders gain power and guilds organize into powers to reckon with. Gothic castles and ornate temples exist as focal points of sprawling communities that often spill beyond the bounds of their original defensive walls. Craft develop guilds as well, guarding the secrets of their professions with zeal.

Warfare changes again as the piercing strength and far-flung flight of the longbow arrow make chainmail nearly useless. Wealthy noble warriors (knights and paladins) begin using plate armor in response, relegating themselves to fighting battles entirely on horseback with the lance, mace or longsword. As fighters develop more creative ways to damage each other, surgeons dissect bodies, studying the mystery of the human physique and organize the first medical schools. Seeking assistance and alternatives to clerical healing, enthusiastic scholars sometimes develop strange obsessions with the secrets of life.

The first printed books lead to expanded knowledge across the realm, as scribes no longer need to copy each book by hand laboriously, but wizards are disappointed to learn they must still personally inscribe their spellbooks. Clothing becomes more elaborate as the newly developed spinning wheel allows faster work and finer-spun threads for weavers to make into fabrics from delicate linen to plush velvet. Glassmakers develop the first clear mirrors, providing vampire hunters with one more device for their arsenals, while the wealthy grace their buildings with totally transparent glass windows, allowing sunshine into the dark corners for the first time.

Dungeon Masters may design an adventure dealing with the undead created by those mad inventors entranced by dissection and vivisection. Send adventurers on a journey to a glassblower and see how well they manage to keep those fragile, precious panes from shattering in combat on the return trip. Get PCs involved in preventing (or starting) a guild war.

Examples: Barovia, Falkovnia, Hazlan, Kartakass, Nídala, Nova Vaasa, Odíare, Síthícus, Valachan and Verbrek.

Cultural Level 8: Chivalric (1,400 AD–1,550 AD)

The Age of Chivalry continues the advancement to cultured society. Scholars study ancient writings preserved by diligent monks in the Dark Ages and form new theories of health, spirit and the gods. Plate mail, elaborate and more decorative than practical, cannot hold against the crude muskets and precise, graceful sabres that change warriors' fighting styles to emphasize dexterity over strength and heavy armor.

During this period, many wizards and alchemists study clockwork toys and golems. Towns no longer boast defensive walls, instead making do with central gates along well-traveled roads leading into the center of town. Castles become more decorative than fortified in a time of relative peace, with wide glass windows and colorful murals gracing interior walls. Troubadours travel, singing songs of courtly love and brave adventurers. Great nobles, bankers and merchants control cities from positions of power, bowing only to the hidden machinations of their darklords.

Sometimes called the early Gothic period, the romantic ideals of generosity to the poor and weak, belief in love for love's sake and a hero's ultimate fate of self-sacrificial bravery grow to prominence. People value poetry, song and story, often indulging in citywide tournaments and pageants with jousts and swordplay, bardic competitions and merchant fairs. Merchants and clergy travel from town to town regularly, along with those footloose troubadours and wandering mercenaries or knights-errant.

Create stories surrounding suspicious events at fairs. Follow the trail of a bard whose song leaves clues to some dark secret. Send a knight on his heart's quest, against the wishes of the realm lord.

Examples: Borca, Invidia, Richemulot and Souragne

Cultural Level 9: Renaissance (1,550 AD–1,700 AD)

As the most advanced Cultural Level in Ravenloft, the Renaissance communities contain the seeds of future age adventures. Proud of their social and cultural advances, the people of this age understand such diverse inventions as steam-powered engines, clockwork creations for laborious tasks and guns that don't blow up in their hands (or at least not very often). New lenses lead mages to study microscopic worlds and examine how their magic affects minute living creatures, while others invent "scientific" objects allowing them to detect incorporeal undead and the invisible without casting spells.

Large cities surround grand, sprawling palaces and manor houses, making fortified castles and high walls anachronisms. Officials use city gates to provide a common conduit and, in some small measure, to control merchant travel, often giving them ornate decorations to provide an impressive first view of the city to impress visitors. Ballrooms, salons, gambling halls and theaters line the streets for the public, while discrete private clubs exist for wealthy folks' more exotic amusements. The deadly sport of dueling grows in popularity, with weapons such as the epee and single-shot pistol. Those wearing heavy armor may find themselves laughed out of town, as fast footwork and a sharp eye replace the need for wearing metal for protection.

Some people also believe spells are anachronistic — assuming science one day surpasses the miracles of magic. Moveable type brings written knowledge to the masses, providing the first "newspapers" (generally a double-sided single sheet called a handbill) and the occasional popular pamphlet

Darkness at the Core: Power Centers

When considering power centers in Ravenloft, a Dungeon Master should realize immediately that all communities have, at their core, a "nonstandard" power center called the darklord. However, most inhabitants of Ravenloft have no idea of this overshadowing manipulation of their realm. While in some instances a darklord may take an active leadership role, rarely will he show his full power or take overt control. For the average citizen, a power center consists of the local burgomaster, mayor or nobleman, who may or may not have a darklord pulling his strings. Power center alignments listed in this book and the **Ravenloft Gazetteers** pertain to the most powerful and directly controlling power center in a community.

on the habits of monsters or the latest flirtatious lady. Finding adventurers becomes easier as runners paste notices on building walls and on the first lampposts. The average person travels more, both on scheduled coach lines and aboard schooners sailing to foreign ports. In Ravenloft, the Mists may curtail travel but no matter how many stories exist of ships lost in the fog or carriages never reaching a planned destination, some hardy or ambitious folk travel through their realm on a regular basis.

As Dungeon Master, you may consider adventures that send the PCs seeking lost companions last seen traveling in one of those Mist-led carriages or perhaps a murder mystery, solvable only through the cooperation of a spellcaster and someone believing in the superiority of the "scientific method."

Examples: Dementlieu, Lamordia, Mordent and Parídon.

Atmosphere

Bringing a community to life in Ravenloft requires understanding its mood and atmosphere. If you want your players to feel they are truly a part of the scene, consider adding real life sensory details to your descriptions. For the earliest civilization levels, light candles (making sure you have them securely placed and away from other flammable materials). If your chosen community is a theocracy, burning incense or adding the low hum of recorded chants sets the scene. For adventures set in a Vistani caravan, include recorded violin music, patchouli-scented smoke, multicolored scarves flung about the room or the sounds of barking dogs and rumbling wagons softly playing from your audio system.

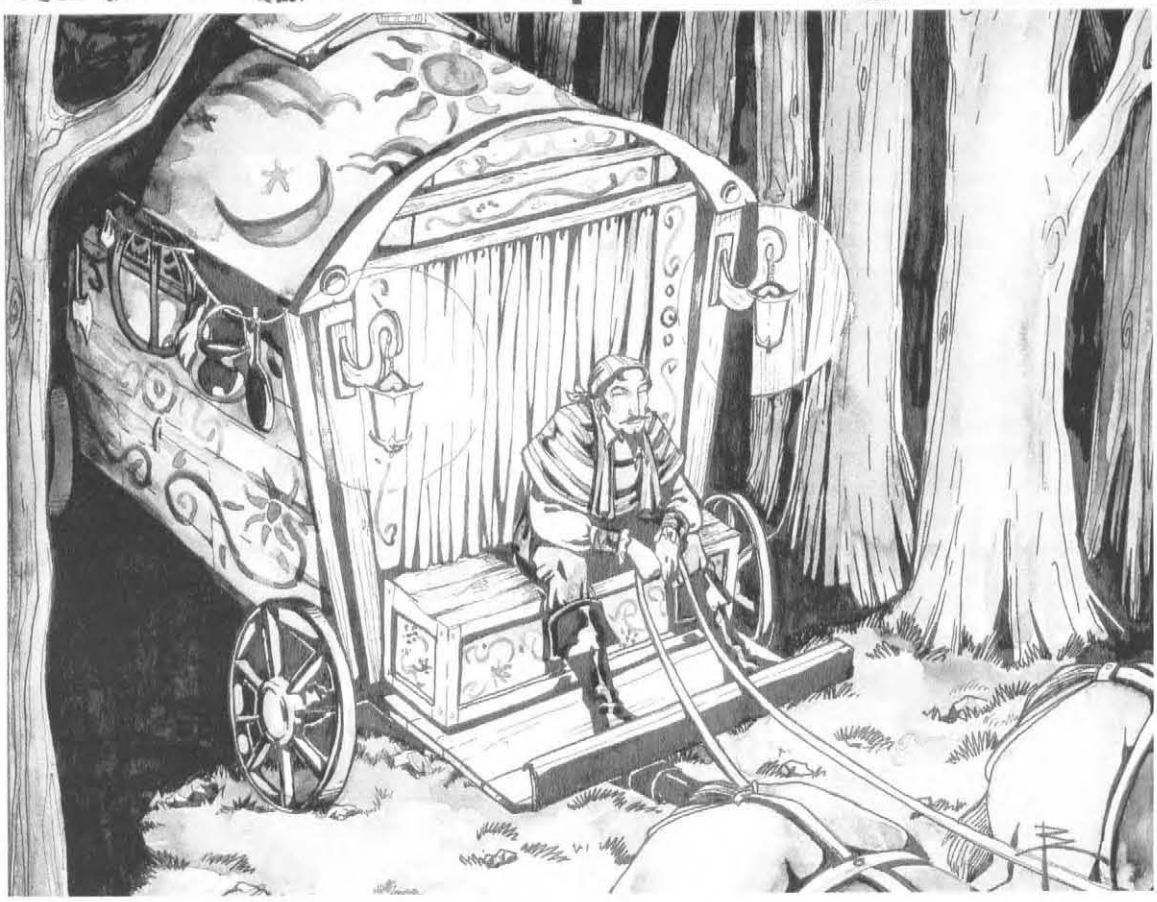
Play the ceaseless sound of the sea near a coastal harbor town. Add a touch of swirling (or screaming) wind in the background to villages set among rocky crags or dismal bogs. Describe the feel of the bracing ocean air in a portside town, the sound of running, screaming children in a farm community or the eerie silence of an abandoned town. Talk about the whispers of suspicion, the watchful eyes and growling dogs as strangers arrive in a tiny, insular peasant village. Dim the lights and describe the distant howls of wolf packs echoing through the deserted streets of a city in terror. If your story is set in Srí Rají, add Indian music, jungle sounds and serve curry with dinner that night to add a warm and exotic scent.

Towns built around trade and merchant routes should have a cosmopolitan feel with people from many places living and working there. Exotic buildings richly decorated with signs in unknown script might sit side by side with familiar wattle and dab cottages. The babble of unknown languages, incomprehensible accents and strange patois in more isolated realms, unusual smells and milling crowds dressed in bizarre garb should lend a sense of exotic adventures waiting to happen. A sense of tranquility might pervade a theocracy built around an ideal of philosophical discussion and peaceful resolution of conflicts. In a place where quiet, gentle people who never raise their voices glide about in white robes, player characters could find a peace they have never known. Alternatively, they may be frightened and suspect that something sinister lies beneath the community's calm exterior, and in Ravenloft, they would generally be correct.

When your heroes enter a new community, the players should find many elements that seem strange and some qualities that remind them of home — a misleading sensation that may lead to trouble later as they relax their watchfulness in familiar surroundings. Send a shiver down their spines, as the heartwarming scene you set becomes a terrifying nightmare from which they must struggle to escape.

Imagine this typical adventuring scene: a friendly tavern set in a small close-knit community. Your party arrives, orders a wonderful, filling meal from a flirtatious barmaid and settles back to hear the latest news and listen to drinking songs from a locally famous bard. An hour later a glorious scarlet sunset paints the sky. As the last rays of the sun disappear from the windows of the crowded bar, silence falls and the formerly amiable people in the bar turn to stare at the suddenly apprehensive strangers just finishing their roast pork and ale. The room darkens, now lit only by the guttering fire at the hearth. The adventurers realize that everyone in the room has red eyes that glow like embers in the shadows. Continue the story from that point by building atmosphere into your creation.

Play CDs of fun folk or drinking songs, describe the camaraderie among the various customers in the tavern, tell jokes or have the characters play a friendly game of darts. When the time has come, use a dimmer switch to bring a creeping darkness or just turn out the lights and describe the glowing, blood-red orbs and weird stillness surrounding your group. As horror filmmakers have discovered, of-



ten the familiar made strange provides the greatest terror. If you have described your community in enough detail and verisimilitude, the effect on your players will be profound.

Always remember that the Dark Powers create each domain to be the prison and playground of its darklord. Camp or city, every community is one more pawn in the Dark Powers' game. A domain where the darklord is actively insane should have a different, and perhaps impossible to interpret, atmosphere: wildly shifting from normalcy to paranoia and violence as the mood darkens and the Dark Powers begin to play. Darklords from unusual societies find themselves in a domain very similar to the world in which they dwelled before, changing only to provide a tormenting sense of familiarity mixed with the knowledge that they are lost. Monstrous darklords live in realms where their kin run free or exist as bogeymen, causing towns to close up tight when darkness falls, building an atmosphere of fear and isolation. In the creative process, a darklord's story should provide the groundwork upon which a Dungeon Master builds the particular atmosphere of a community.

Populace

No matter the architecture, geography or history, it is the people living within a town or affecting it who define its personality. When a Dungeon Master builds a community in Ravenloft, his first concern should be its realm and the darklord influencing it. Is the community close to the lair of the domain's darklord? How much chance is there that he takes a direct hand in running the community? Do people know the darklord as an influential member of the community? Do they know of him at all? Who are the leaders of the town and are they minions of the darklord? If they are not, do they oppose him? Who else might be power centers in the community? Do trade guilds, popular bards, powerful noble houses or kindly priests influence opinion?

Which races live in your community? Societies of elves are very different from a typical Barovian

peasant village, while cities that are more cosmopolitan may have a mixture of many cultures and races living together in relative peace. You might also wish to create a town controlled by monsters.

Imagine a community built for the convenience of its vampire lords and ladies. Businesses come to life as the sun sinks below the horizon. People take turns providing sustenance for their masters and dream of one day becoming worthy of receiving the kiss of eternal life. Rebels plot in the sun while servants of the vampires listen from nearby shadows. Now bring your adventurers there, or better yet, create a group of heroes from this place and send them into a realm where vampires are the enemy.

What motivates the average citizen in your community? How superstitious, xenophobic, snobbish or self-satisfied is he? Are amusements important? What roles do wealth, learning or beauty play? How are marriages arranged and children raised? What are the important holidays? Will the day or time your party arrives mean the difference between friendly greetings and being thrown into the nearest pit by frightened or superstitious townspeople? For many communities in Ravenloft, visitors are not welcome after nightfall. Others may consider one high holy festival a reason to sacrifice the first visitors arriving after sundown.

As a Dungeon Master, you must also consider how dress influences a situation. People arriving in uniform can provide a comforting presence or a looming sense of danger. Vistani can recognize other members of their *tasque* or tribe by the way they wear their scarves, the colors their dancers prefer and the decorations and bells the tribe uses on harnesses and other tack. Depending upon the season and the prevailing fashions, folk may find themselves ostracized from social events or even denied access to certain sections of town if their clothing is too outré. Perhaps a disease that deforms their features has struck all the men in a certain town, leading everyone to wear masks or else. Hags may rule a community, ready to destroy any comely females coming there if the newcomers do not veil themselves from head to foot. In a community of werewolves, wearing silver would be offensive and could lead to violent death.

How powerful are the temples? Members of a theocracy, such as Pharazía, are rarely tolerant of other gods and their worshipers. Certainly, the priests of a theocratic community are rarely ready to forgive breaches of religious law. Those living in such places are often xenophobic and somewhat sheltered, believing all that their priests tell them to be truth, even if that leads to unreasoning fear or hatred of outsiders. Other communities may be very tolerant of different gods and their worshipers, but ready to crush anyone who sets up a business in competition with their guilds. Some communities are very hierarchical; believing nobles and slaves should stay in their preordained places, while others allow advancement dependent upon talent and drive.

Who provides law enforcement in your town? Dependent upon your governing body, you might have groups of clerics roaming the streets seeking blasphemers or dashing guardsmen patrolling the town on horseback, their epees ready to come to the defense of any pretty lady they meet. Does one of the power centers of the community control its defenders, or does the darklord hold their strings? How stringent are the laws? Would a careless thief earn just a few days in a squalid cell or lose a hand when a mark notices his less-than-perfect pickpocketing skills?

When you create a community with a particularly strict lawful alignment, you may wish to create a set of laws and punishments before your hapless party ever arrives in town. Keep the list handy and be ready to follow through with trials, imprisonment or torture if necessary. In Ravenloft, punishments might include flogging, time in the stocks or staking out strangers to feed the hungry ghosts that surround a beleaguered village as well as more conventional forms penalties such as imprisonment or fines.

Build the history of your community. Even though many towns seemingly came into being in an instant, the people within each community truly believe in ancient legends, family tales and old grudges, sometimes echoing back through centuries of conflict. Create noble families or venerable organizations within your community that control situations by the very fact of their long-standing existence. The past of your town can and should influence your NPCs' actions, often in ways your players could not predict.

Also, consider the morality of the darklord controlling the realm in which your community dwells. The people within the domain, within each community, are players participating in the punishment of a tormented soul.

Surroundings

Except for a few very isolated domains, most communities in Ravenloft do not exist in isolation. Many factors influence the flavor of a town including other nearby communities, trading routes or variations in the Mists surrounding the community. Powerful people, monstrous populations in the surrounding countryside or other magical oddities also affect the tenor of a community.

People from many tiny villages travel during daylight hours to take produce to a city down the road, creating the need for inns and taverns along the edges of the trading community. Merchant caravans circle widely around a forest rumored to contain a tormented beast ready to slaughter any who come within reach of his cruel claws. There might be a war, clandestine and unknown to most, involving everyone in both communities in a struggle where the only choices are death or victory. All these things and more influence the personality of your community.

Consider the geography of your town. Is there a wide river running through it or does it exist alone in a hidden valley surrounded on all sides by craggy, impassable mountains? Is it near the sea? Where do the Mists lie in relation to the village? Will poisonous fog kill people if they try to leave from the southern gate, or can they travel for many miles through other communities before reaching the edges of their realm? Does your village exist in the midst of a windswept plain where its inhabitants can see for miles in every direction, or does it skulk in the deep shadows beneath ancient oaks in a primeval forest known for its restless spirits?

How did the Grand Conjunction affect your community? Some places ceased to exist after the Grand Conjunction; others moved or sprang full-grown into the world. Imagine changes in trade routes, power struggles with new and hostile neighbors or transplantation into an entirely new environment. How have those far-reaching changes reverberated through the personality of your city? Do they even notice the difference?

Think of the seasons and the climate. Architecture, social activities, common rituals and habits, as well as laws, may differ depending upon the severity of local climate. In a town set amid polar snows, it might be illegal to forbid a stranger shelter for the night. Communities in hot climes might consider the afternoon to be a time for rest, while night with its cooling breezes, becomes the appropriate time for social events or business. How would temperatures affect the various races in your community? Of course, different beasts would exist in the most extreme climates, but even various humanoids might choose not to live in places those highly adaptable humans exist in quite happily.

Delicate elves would be unlikely to choose harsh, snowy climates high in the mountains, while a dwarf might find forests and sunny meadows to be too warm and open for his liking. In addition, depending upon the various races living in communities nearby, a local populace might have a larger percentage of nonhumans or be more prejudiced than usual about beings they believe to be interlopers.

Many towns have come into being because of businesses or organizations that draw people to an area. Consider local monasteries, asylums, trading posts, spas built around mineral springs or keeps guarding a route through the mountains. Each brings a population to the area, whether to serve others or for themselves. As merchants travel well-known paths and others follow their cleared roads, villages develop along the route to provide shelter, a definite need during the hazardous nights of Ravenloft. In this way, your realm may grow and change, giving you the opportunity as Dungeon Master to create new communities in logical places.

Here again, you should consider the darklord when setting your community in its surroundings. Only those beings that can travel through the Mists and those darklords who allow travel outside their realms provide the opportunity for change from without. Whatever the realm and the community within, the curse placed upon its darklord controls how your community develops as well as the environment in which it exists.

Dark Corners

No community is complete without its dangerous sections: ghettos, squalid slums, tavern districts or areas where the local law has no control. Nor can you build a city without providing some enemies to the status quo, whether rebels, sinister gangs or monsters seeking to creep forth from their sewer homes. When creating a community with depth, a Dungeon Master must consider these beings and organizations, just as an artist builds dimension in his portrait with shadows and darkness. In Ravenloft, these contrasts may be dark indeed.

Consider what areas of your community might contain such unsavory elements. In the first towns

and cities, the most privileged people lived closest to their protection: the keep at the center of the settlement. Farther away from this protection, usually at the ragged edges of town or sometimes outside its sheltering walls, lived those who either had no job or did jobs that were unpleasant or nasty. Tanners, dyers, butchers, renderers (those that collected animal fat to make oil), surgeons, grave diggers, rag-pickers and others in such miserable professions would live and work amid the filth of their jobs outside those high, protective enclosures. The most wretched poor would live in hovels, sometimes setting their homes to lean against the outside wall of the city's fortifications. In Ravenloft, this lack of protection would be extremely distressing, leaving the most unfortunate people exposed as prey to creatures of the night. Guards might learn of a new danger heading for their walls first by hearing cries for mercy echoing through the slums outside or by a mixture of clots of blood and brilliant dyes coloring a stream flowing along city walls.

In more advanced civilizations, the structure of the community changes, with wealthy landowners creating manors in lands near to the city or in a better, less central, part of town. In communities of CuL 8 or beyond, it is just as likely for an undesirable element to exist in the heart of the city as at its edges. Add a ghetto where calibans and halflings live, struggling against prejudice and anathema from those surrounding them. Build a disreputable district where taverns sit side-by-side with brothels and gaming establishments. Create a haunted section near the city's gallows where no one goes at night. Place a deserted area in the heart of the city: no one remembers why the area exists and those who enter don't return. Build an area controlled by gangs, terrorized by mercenaries or exploited by powerful thieves from the local guild. Evil temples might lie in the slums to exploit those living in misery or even masquerade as a shop or gentlemen's club.

Once you have decided where to place the darkest corners of your community, flesh out the

Table 2-1: Random Ravenloft Community Generator

Roll a d10 for each of the columns below. Combine the various factors to create anything from a new city to a crude camp for your adventuring party to find on the other side of a mountain or as they emerge from the Mists. These are variations to the standard *Dungeon Master's Guide* process for creating towns, putting them more in line with Ravenloft. Consider making your own changes if the combination doesn't make sense. For example, if you roll a Stone Age "metropolis," you should consider adjusting the size of your community to a population that cultural level could support — a hamlet, at best). Still, unusual mixes can give players a real surprise, particularly if you can devise a game-connected explanation for the anomaly.

d10	Cultural Level	%Nonhuman	Size/Population	%Monsters	Realm
1	0- Savage	Less than 1%	Ruins/0–5	Less than 1%	Northern Core
2	1 -Stone Age	Less than 5%	Camp/6–10	Less than 3%	Southern Core
3	2- Bronze Age	Less than 10%	Settlement/11–19	Less than 5%	Nocturnal Sea
4	3- Iron Age	10–15%	Thorp/20–80	5–10%	Sea of Sorrows
5	4- Classical	16–20%	Hamlet/81–400	11–15%	Amber Wastes
6	5- Dark Age	21–25%	Village/401–900	16–20%	Frozen Reaches
7	6- Early Medieval	26–30%	Small Town/901–2,000	21–25%	Shadowlands
8	7- Medieval	31–50%	Large Town/2,001–5,000	26–30%	Verdurous Lands
9	8- Chivalric	51–75%	Small City/5,001–12,000	31–50%	Islands of Terror
10	9- Renaissance	76–100%	Metropolis/over 12,000	More than 50%	Other

people inhabiting it. Criminals, from corrupt nobles to petty thieves, add a dimension of darkness. Even rebel organizations (often heroes to the common man) provide conflict and an understanding that not all residents may be content with their town as it stands. Whether a large metropolitan city or a tiny caravan of Vistani, there are usually those who live in discontent. In towns where a despotic ruler controls with an iron fist, create groups of freedom fighters, smugglers and secret societies. Perhaps your village lives in the shadow of a roving band of monstrous mercenaries or is controlled by the Order of the Ebon Gargoyle. Depending upon your PCs, they may help or hinder those struggling in secret to regain control of their homes.

However, not all villains (or rebels) work in groups. The lone deviant — whether perceived as a vigilante, serial killer or hero — provides a source of excitement, fear and perhaps a series of adventures for your players. These characters should be hard to find; they are the subject of whispered rumors and advice to stay inside after dark. Even in small villages, there are black sheep in the best families and those oddities, such as the village madman, known by all to be just not quite right. Others might be mad scientists, necromancers or the cursed. One might even be the darklord of your realm. Place these nemeses in the shadows and wait for your players to bring their mysteries to light.

Places to Go, Places to Be

Below are examples of the kinds of communities a Dungeon Master can build for his players to explore. Use the information below as a guideline to construct your own areas for PCs to explore between adventures or to provide backgrounds for full-scale adventures in an urban setting. Each example discusses the society and atmosphere, the populace, the communities' surroundings, including the local law keepers and the settlement's dark corners. A few adventure ideas are provided to spark your imagination in planning encounters set in the confined limit of your community.

La Rue des Pistolets: A Neighborhood in Port-a-Lucine

Society and Atmosphere

In large cities a neighborhood can become a community all its own, with local gossip, strange characters and customs unlike any along the streets around it. The people living along the Rue des

Pistolets (the Street of Pistols) have a personality all their own, forged by the businesses and inventors along this pleasant avenue. Anyone interested in finding the finest firearms or having one created just for him has only to make his way to the Rue des Pistolets — but only if he is very brave or very nimble.

The Rue des Pistolets consists of one gently winding street near the edge of the merchant's district. Running along its half-mile length are many typical Dementlieu buildings, tall and narrow, made of dull brown stone. However, the facades are irregularly pocked with white scoring and chips from many formerly elegant statues that lie scattered along the cobblestones. Before a traveler reaches the street, he can hear the cracking pop of pistol shots randomly ringing out, along with the occasional small "boom" and a call of "good shot!" The ringing hammer blows of smithies provide a constant accompaniment. Pungent scents of gunpowder and hot metal waft along the line of pleasant buildings where people stroll seemingly unconcerned by the loud noises and strange smells.

Among the narrow, tall brownstone buildings sit several small forges. Nearby, alleys lead to marksmens' galleries, each protected by a tall wooden gate hung with wrought iron hinges. Wooden signs hang from elaborate curlicues of iron, advertising weaponsmiths, ammunition makers and various shooting galleries with differing challenges. Discreet signs point to tutors in firearms skill. Still, the Rue des Pistolets has more than just weaponsmiths, forges and shooting galleries. The street also holds a local tavern called the Bullseye (all pistols are peace-bonded or held in a gun locker to keep dangerous confrontations to a minimum) and a general store for the many inhabitants that live above their shops.

Populace

Like most of Dementlieu, the Rue des Pistolets is primarily populated with humans, with a scattering of half-elves, halflings and others. The most unusual addition is one small family of gnomes. The Gearling family has made this street their home and the design and creation of new pistols (especially those made for people with small hands: halflings, gnomes and so on) their passion. Since, gunsmiths and pistol enthusiasts of all sorts are welcomed in this part of the city, the gnomish family found themselves given a much warmer greeting than they expected. The power center of this community is a brassy young human noblewoman named Renee Delven who watches over and protects "her street" from other nobles in exchange for consistently having the first and best firearm discoveries for herself and her friends. She is a fine shot, although a mysterious stranger has beaten her in marksmanship for the last three years in an annual event called Le Pistolet d'Or.

Although the people on this street see many strangers, the largest influx comes from pistoleers all over the realm hoping to win a contest for an amazing golden pistol, a masterwork weapon chased in gold created by the weaponsmith contest winner of the previous year. This event showcases the latest firearms, ammunition and accessories. It also provides those proficient with pistol an opportunity to show off their skills: accuracy, speed and style. Winners receive a gold medallion in the shape of a pistol, or in the case of the best weaponsmith, the golden pistol from which the event gains its name.

Surroundings

As one might gather, the Rue des Pistolets' businesses are not the favorites of those who live and work nearby. Occasionally, weapons misfire or ammunition or gunpowder explodes. Sometimes people leaving the neighborhood decide to practice their marksmanship as they depart. Still, the craftsmen have gained a reputation as the finest makers of firearms in Dementlieu and their yearly contest draws people from far and near to test out their skills, providing business for inns and shops throughout Port-a-Lucine.

The Council of Brilliance keeps a watchful eye on the people and their inventions. When a new pistol or ammunition is especially powerful or well wrought, the Council convinces the baron of Port-a-Lucine to tax the weaponmakers into providing them for their spies — finding the small (easily hidden) pistols of the Gearling family to be extremely useful, as well as various special ammunition types. Outside Dementlieu, the Falkovnians have heard of the incredible weapons found along the Rue des Pistolets and weapons are sometimes smuggled across the Musarde River to be sold at double what they might bring in Dementlieu.

Dark Corners

The Rue des Pistolets attracts more than innocent enthusiasts to the sport of marksmanship and one person controls much of the darker side of the Street of the Pistols. Hugues Maigny, a taciturn caliban ammunition maker, plays a dangerous game.

He provides information to the Council of Brilliance while gaining profit from smuggling interesting weapons and ammunition to Falkovnia. Hugues is very talented. He sells (and smuggles) silver ammunition to use on werewolves, ammunition meant to burst into flame for use against the undead and bullets containing poisonous substances so that usually nonlethal wounds may cause death to anyone who suffers them. He, along with a small gang of thugs, also is more than willing to do a little "cleaning up" if someone is willing to pay enough for an assassination. His greatest amusement involves coming masked to Le Pistolet d'Or and beating Renee each year in the marksmanship contest.

Adventure Ideas

Roll 1d4 to choose randomly.

1. One of the Gearling children has been taken, along with the plans for Abernathy's latest pistol: a gun with two barrels.

2. An explosion rips open the back of one of the ammunition shops. It looks like just another accident until a corpse is found inside, obviously murdered before the explosion happened.

3. A gunsmith has set up shop outside town. He claims his weapons are better than any found on the Rue des Pistolets and is beginning to take business away from the locals.

4. Between one day and the next a weapon shops' contents and its owner disappears.

Port-a-Lucine Neighborhood (thorp): Nonstandard; AL NG; CuL 9; 40 gp limit; Assets 160; Population 80; Mixed (80% Human, 10% Halfling, 5% Half-elf, 5% Other).

Authority Figures: Renee Delven, female human Ari6.

Important Characters: Abernathy O. Gearling (weaponsmith), male gnome Exp8; Hugues Maigny (ammunition maker/spy), male caliban War8/Exp7.

Krofburg: A Barovian Village

Society

The village of Krofburg lies nestled amid the rocky slopes of Mount Ghakis; it's a small but prosperous settlement known for its longhaired goats and a very sweet reisling wine made from plump white grapes. Cottages in Krofberg are usually painted in deep russet with their decorative leaded windows showing curling vines and vibrant bunches of grapes scattered among bright green leaves. Windows have sturdy shutters carved with various designs — a practical necessity where winter winds are strong.

The center of Krofberg lies in a tiny valley through which a tumbling stream of mountain water flows. Businesses that line the main road include one small inn and tavern called the Wandering Billy, a weaver and dyer's shop called Luftan's Wool Works, a small temple to the Morninglord, two wineries, each named for their owner, and a general store called Daily Wares. Village herders bring their wool to Luftan's Wool Works where the fine soft wool from their goats is carded, dyed and rolled ready to be woven or knitted by the ladies of the village each winter. Daily Wares contains supplies the villagers cannot make or grow for themselves.

The burgomaster of Krofberg, Milos Yehven, owns the larger of the two wineries in Krofberg. The majority of growers bring their harvest to him to be processed into the latest vintage, but most also produce at least a few casques of wine from old family recipes to be served at the home table. Each fall Krofberg has a Harvest Day celebration and the latest and best from the last year's vintage are served, along with a strong black beer, locally known as Stout Heart, and roast pig stuffed with black bread, apples and nuts.

Populace

Mainly of Barovian stock, the people of Krofberg dress in somber tones, enlivened by elaborate embroidery made from silken strands of goat hair. The women compete over who can make the most intricate and colorful patterns on their aprons and kerchiefs, while the men show off their fancifully embroidered vests and their luxurious goatees. Taciturn and quiet around strangers, families in Krofberg are very close and usually rather large, with the average family having five or more children and at least one grandparent sharing the same house. Goats are often an important part of the family as well, providing wool, milk, goat carts for

transportation, and extra warmth within the home on the coldest winter days.

Power centers in Krofberg include the burgomaster, Milos Yehven and the priestess of the Morninglord, Pavla Oleynyk. Pavla and Milos have found that they work well as a team and often are called together to settle disputes between the inhabitants of Krofberg. Some believe there is a romance between the two although neither addresses the rumors.

A Vistani caravan makes regular stops in Krofberg during the months when the passes are clear. This caravan of the Kamii tribe provides knives, pots, jewelry and other metal goods to the people of Krofberg in trade for wine and their intricately patterned wool scarves and shawls. Unlike many others, the villagers of Krofberg (including the few merchants) look forward to the Vistani's arrival, as a way to ease the isolation of their community and discover what news comes from down the mountain.

Surroundings

A pass around Mount Ghakis lies within a few leagues of Krofberg. Because of the brisk trade between Nova Vaasa and Barovia, occasionally a lost traveler finds his way to the village and discover its excellent wines and beer. The few ponies the people of Krofberg use are also of Nova Vaasan stock and a couple of merchants now make a detour each year to trade for wines and woolen goods.

Dark Corners

Some few people in Krofberg are discontented with their lot. One family, the Badunas, has begun its own winery and seeks to compete with the burgomaster for the finest wine in the valley. Rumors suggest that the troubles Milos has had this year with leaks in his casques and tainted barrels can be laid at the doorstep of the Badunas' youngest son, Nikolai. Nikolai Badunas was a mischievous boy who always managed to get out of trouble with his charming dimples and innocent eyes. Now a teenager, Nikolai has been caught pulling much more harmful pranks, some of which seem to stem from his attraction to Pavla, others from his jealousy of Milos.

More goats than usual died in recent years from predators and some villagers seeking the beasts haven't been seen again. No one knows that a young lycanthrope has taken residence in a cave a few miles from Krofberg and has begun visiting the

town during the day in the guise of a half-Vistani merchant looking for bargains in wool. Teodor Dymtrus is most definitely a wolf in sheep's clothing, crafty and cruel in his choice of victims, he seeks those who will be the most missed by others in the village — and often helps search for them by leading parties far from his cavernous home.

Adventure Ideas

Roll 1d4 to choose randomly.

1. One of the grape growers has discovered a beautiful old vine half-hidden beyond a hill. Its rich deep red fruit produces an especially intoxicating wine, but also seems to attract hordes of the huge black bats that swirl above the mountains each evening. Now word has come of Count Strahd's interest and his impending arrival.

2. The Vistana Madam Leyna has given word of a prophecy. An evil darkness comes to Krofberg — in what form she cannot tell.

3. A pack of ravenous wolves has carried off an especially prized goat and scattered the rest of the herd. Their owner begs for someone to go find her kids and their nannies before a threatening snowstorm arrives or the rest die under the cruel teeth and claws of the pack.

4. A strange bluish fungus is threatening the entire grape harvest in the fields outside Krofberg. Legends tell of an ancient remedy known only by the Vatraska Vistani. A group is gathered to find one of their caravans before the harvest is lost.

Krofberg (village): Conventional; AL N; CuL 7; 200 gp limit; Assets 5,000 gp; Population 500; Isolated (98% Human, 2% Half-Vistani).

Authority Figures: Milos Yehven, male human Ari5; Pavla Oleynyk female human Clr6.

Important Characters: Nikolai Badunas (merchant), male human Rog3; Teodor Dymtrus, male half-Vistani werewolf War6/Rog4.

A Vistani Caravan: the Tekash Family

Society

Not all communities settle in one place. For the Vistani, communities are built around family groups and the wagons in which they travel. Their home is the open road. The Tekash caravan consists of one large family from the Manusa *tasque* and Canjar tribe. As most of the members of the Canjar tribe, they are naturally secretive and hard to find if they do not wish to be located. Their greatest claim to fame is as makers of potions. Some of the most powerful and rare are created by their *raunie*, Madam Isla. Others in the family find their place gathering the various components necessary to make these wondrous magic items, guarding the campsite or making the lesser potions they occasionally sell to those brave enough to ask for them when they travel by villages and towns on their way to another realm in search of a rare ingredient.

Legends have grown up around the Tekash family. Bards sing of their potions that make the dead talk or a werewolf lose his curse. Others speak of liquids made of gold and ruby dust that provide immortality to those clever or wealthy enough to convince the Vistani to sell it. One thing is clear, however, wealth, no matter how grand, is not enough to gain such things from the family Tekash. Only secrets and magic are enough for them. Do not think to steal from the family for they have a great proficiency with curses and there is not enough gold in the world to convince them to remove one once it is placed.

Populace

Three family groups travel in the Tekash caravan, all with the physical stamp of the Manusa tribe — long, straight disheveled black hair, intelligent black eyes and high cheekbones. The women wear colorful full-skirted dresses with scarves and shawls in clashing colors while the men usually dress in long, dark woolen robes and peaked caps. Small pouches dangle in the folds of the women's skirts and hang in profusion from wide leather belts gathering the men's robes. These pouches contain the tools of their trade and always at least one healing potion, as well as various other useful tinctures. Unlike many Vistana, the women of the Tekash family do not tell fortunes with either a crystal ball or the *tarokka*, instead they use tea leaves, brewed from their own special mix. Madam Isla, great grandmother to some, grandmother to most, rules her family well with a firm hand and a steady wit that belies her near 100 years of life. Her

grandson, Radu, is Captain to the group. He and his wife, Mirela, their three strong sons and one daughter keep everything organized and safe from those who might have the temerity to steal. Two of Radu's sons have married and each has four children. It is their responsibility to watch the animals and keep the caravan in order. His sixteen-year-old daughter, Reluca, works with Madam Isla, both as aide and apprentice to her vast knowledge. The caravan of the family Tekash consists of four *vardos* and several pack animals, which carry their supplies and harvested components.

Surroundings

The caravan of the Tekash family travels through all the realms of Ravenloft searching for the rarest and most delicate of ingredients for their various potions. Oddly enough, when someone truly needs one of their potions, the family can be found nearby: one of the prophetic gifts of Madam Isla. Moving more often than most other Vistani, they still have favorite lands to visit, including Barovia and Verbrek, places where they know they will be treated with fear and respect.

Dark Corners

The family Tekash has had its tragedies. Madam Isla's children all died in one foolish man's attempt to take a potion from their stores. Since that time she raised her grandchildren well, with an understanding of the wariness they needed and a sense of how greed and desperation can take someone to his doom. Unfortunately, one of her grandsons has not listened. Alin Tekash is the youngest son of Radu and lives for his own pleasures. He feels that their potions should be sold to whoever has the gold to pay and that they should advertise their coming to gain as much as possible from the foolish *giorgio*. In fact, he maintains that they should make up fake potions with simple ingredients so that the caravans would not have to travel to so many dangerous places to gather components. Unbeknownst to his family, he has begun taking such useless potions into town with him when the caravan stops for the evening and squandering the money he gains on wine, fine clothing and the many women he flirts with.

Adventure Ideas

Roll 1d4 to choose randomly.

1. Insanity has taken the mind of the local baron. A wise woman remembers a certain potion purported to clear the mind of madness, but the only people who might have it are Vistani.

2. Alin Tekash has given out one false potion too many. A child died after being given something listed as a healing potion. Her distraught family seeks the Tekash caravan, and the mother has a powerful curse already forming in her mind.

3. Reluca falls in love with a *giorgio*, a warrior from a nearby town, and seeks some way to make him hers without losing her life as Vistana and sorceress.

4. A powerful vampire has heard rumors of a potion that can return him to life and seeks the help of the Tekash family — or their doom.

Tehkash Family Caravan (settlement): Conventional; AL N; CuL 6; 30gp limit; Assets 30 gp; Population 17; Isolated (99% Vistani, 1% Half-Vistani).

Authority Figures: raunie Isla Tehkash, female Vistani Sor10/Clr7; Captain Radu Tehkash, male Vistani War6/Sor3.

Important Characters: Reluca Tekash, female Vistani Sor3; Alin Tekash, male Vistani War3/Rog2.

An Oasis in the Amber Wastes: Tawiel Akhdar

Society

Deep within the desert wasteland of Sebua lies the lush oasis known as the Long Green, or Tawiel Akhdar. This deep pool surrounded by tall date palms and scrub grass sits sheltered by tall dunes and sandstone outcroppings, safe from most of the terrible sandstorms that plague the area. For many years, this was a treasured stopping place for the nomads of Pharazía, used each year on their trek to Har'Akir for trade. Merchants, too, stopped in this place for the clear, deep water and, in certain seasons, the plump dates that fall from the palms like rain. Grazing is good for camels and goats as well, and low sandstone buildings, carved deep into the tallest outcropping, provide shelter from the sun.

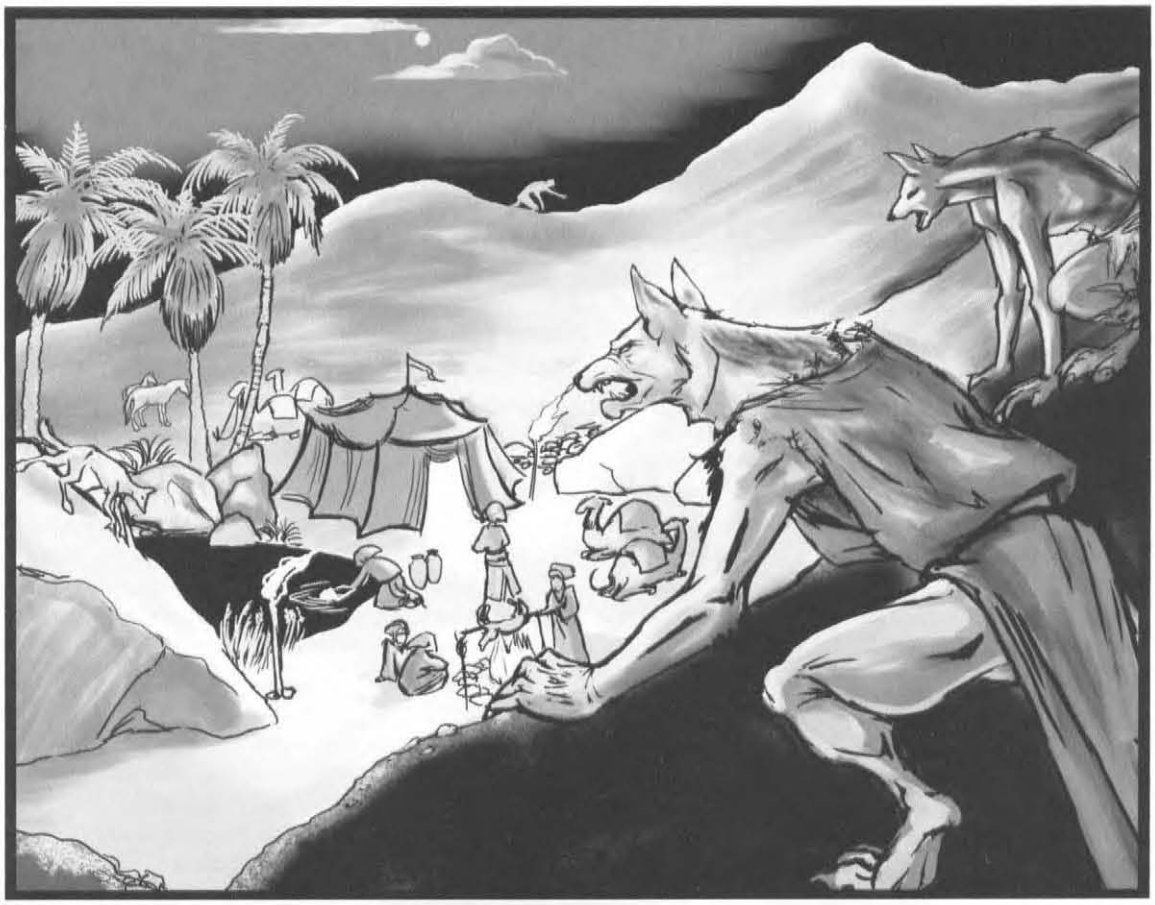
However, for the last few years, rumors have flown with the desert winds of a danger at the oasis and those who have traveled there do not always reach their destination. Those who do tell of the people living there: stern and forbidding, who follow the ways of hospitality only grudgingly and shrink fearfully from any shadow. Only their new

leader, unknown by anyone until the last two turns of the seasons, still shows a generous heart and calm demeanor but more than one young woman has looked into his eyes and seen lust beyond that which is proper.

Populace

For more years than any can remember, the Oasis of the Long Green has been a jewel in the desert, her people welcoming and ready to provide a generous hospitality to all that came to partake of her riches. Unfortunately, her wealth led one monstrous being to conquer her for his own and subjugate her proud people. Mukhtar el Wafid was a cunning warrior and thief of the desert nomads, known more for his manipulations than his bravery. One evening as he traveled alone deep in the desert he heard the high-pitched yaps of jackals and soon saw a pack of them following him. He was frightened, but thought to bring them down into a pit. He planned to shoot them as they tried to climb up through the treacherous sand — dependent, as usual, on trickery for victory. However, one of the jackals was cleverer than Mukhtar. The pack of jackals hamstrung his horse and Mukhtar was mauled and left for dead within sight of the oasis. One of the children of Long Green found him and brought him in. A healer, Johara bint Kalila al Asima, gave him comfort and watched as his wounds healed quickly without the favor of the gods. Her devotion was repaid at the time of the next full moon. Mukhtar rose up and changed into one of the cursed creatures of the desert, a werejackal, and took her for his own, killing her husband, the sheik of the oasis.

Since that time, Mukhtar has created more of his accursed kind, gradually taking over with his evil pack. None dare to defy him openly; those who do are either staked in the sun with their guts open or torn to bits in a late night hunt through the sands. Still, several families exist there, now slaves to him and his pack. The women of the Long Green are constant victims of his lust and some young ones have killed themselves for fear of receiving his "love," or worse, becoming one of his wives. Johara is his first wife. She is one of only two female werejackals in the pack and lives only for a time



when she may find a way to kill her husband, then herself. She is still the healer of the oasis and spends much of her time salving wounds caused by the whips and sharp fangs of her husband and his lackeys.

Mukhtar is very crafty and knows if he wishes to gain more followers and wealth that he must make the oasis seem to be as it always has been — a place of welcome for merchants and other travelers. Some of his pack watch the oasis at all times, making certain than none of his slaves have the opportunity to speak with anyone in secret. He is a jovial host, although unable to entirely keep his lustful nature in check. Sometimes when a particularly wealthy caravan comes through or an especially toothsome and graceful young woman, he sends his jackals out to follow them. When they have gotten far enough away from the oasis the werejackals attack and destroy any witnesses and bring him his new treasure — taking what they wish for themselves.

Surroundings

Tawiel Akhdar is an isolated oasis in the wastes of Sebua. Still, there are a couple of merchant trails through the rugged outcroppings there and at least one caravan comes through the oasis each month, with more coming during the rainy season and none at all during the times when sandstorms blanket the desert. Sheikh Rashaan of Pharazía knows of this oasis, and knew the former sheik, Omar ibn Qadir, well. His suspicions have been raised, but other things have occupied his time recently, making him put off a trip to investigate.

Some merchant groups have begun to suspect something is wrong as well, noting that caravans traveling along one route are more likely to suffer some misfortune. They do not yet know why, only that the caravans disappeared. In truth, the werejackals ate the bodies and took goods and some of the pack animals and riding beasts back to the oasis.

Dark Corners

As one might guess in a community where evil rules, those living in the darkest corners will often be heroes. Johara plots each day for new ways to bring her husband to his deserved fate. Few have the courage to listen to her schemes, but there is a small group of rebels, ten in all, mostly among the young. Badra, body servant and slave to Johara, works as her messenger to others in the oasis. Each time a new caravan comes through, the rebels look for someone or something that might destroy their usurper sheik and for one lapse of the watchful eyes of his pack to give them time to communicate their plight.

Mukhtar el Wafid has another, more powerful enemy as well: the werejackal that created him. Abbas ibn Naddim did not mean to create a rival for himself and his pack. Each time Mukhtar rides out with his pack he shows his disdain for Abbas' territory — at least in the mind of Abbas.

Adventure Ideas

Roll 1d4 to choose randomly.

1. A new merchant comes into the oasis telling tales of herbs from other lands that drive away evil things — which he has and is willing to sell.

2. Badra catches Mukhtar's eye as she takes a message to one of the other rebels. She is now held in chains and will be questioned by torture soon.

3. Abbas decides to attack and take over the oasis.

4. The beautiful daughter of a merchant charms Mukhtar and seems ready to become his second wife, but there is something oddly familiar about her to Johara, and her father reminds her of someone as well.

The Shadowed Eye Oasis (hamlet): Monstrous; AL LE; CuL 6; 100 gp limit; Assets 1,750 gp; Population 350; Isolated (98% Human, 2% Other).

Authority Figures: Mukhtar el Wafid, werejackel War7/Ari5; Johara bint Kalila al Asima (healer/herbalist), female werejackal Ari7/Clr3.

Important Characters: Badra (servant), female human Exp2; Abbas ibn Naddim, male werejackal War8/Rog6.

Table 2–2: Street Builder for Communities in Ravenloft

Roll d%. Depending upon the Cultural Level of the community, different shops and organizations will be available along a street. Often, if one temple or shop appears in an area, others of the same type exist nearby so consider keeping repeated numbers and possibly making that road a "temple row" or "tanner's alley." Businesses have a range of possible Cultural Levels listed beside them. If you are building a community with a lower or much higher CuL, reroll if you roll an anachronistic business.

d%	Result
1–10	Inn (CuL 3–9)
11–21	Tavern/Restaurant (CuL 2–9)
22–25	Tanner (CuL 1–9)
26–30	General Store (CuL 6–9)
31–32	Tailor (CuL 2–9)
33–34	Alchemist (CuL 4–9
35–39	Leatherworker (CuL 2–9)
40–44	Armorer (CuL 2–8)
45–49	Blacksmith/Farrier (CuL 2–9)
50–54	Weaponsmith (CuL 1–9)
55–56	Butcher (CuL 4–9)
57–58	Surgeon (CuL 3–9)
59–60	Toymaker (CuL 7–9)
61–65	Guard post (CuL 2–9)
66–70	Herbalist (CuL 1–9)
71–76	Temple/Shaman (CuL 1–9)
77–81	Jeweler (CuL 3–9)
82–83	Bank (CuL 6–9)
84–85	Glassblower/Glazier (CuL 6–9)
86–90	Stable (CuL 2–9)
91–92	Carpenter (CuL 2–9)
93–94	Shoemaker (CuL 2–9)
95–96	Chandler (Candle-maker) (CuL 2–9)
97–98	Baker (CuL 3–9)
99–100	Mystery business (your choice)

Sinkholes of Evil

I know not how it was — but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible... There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart — an unredeemed dreariness of thought that no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime.

— Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher*

Timorian approached the moss-covered well carefully. He moved steadily, one step at a time, assessing the feel of the place with each footfall. Behind him, Demara, her sword held at the ready, and Vangelia, daggers in her hands, looked about them for anything that might give solid form to the danger they felt.

Timorian grasped his holy symbol to his chest.

"This place has the feel of something old and angry," he said at last. "Whatever malice dwells here centers around this well." He steeled himself to approach the stone structure, stepping onto the tangled brush that grew up around it as if holding it rooted to the ground.

"Watch out!" Vangelia cried, and launched herself at Timorian, catching him about the waist and rolling with him away from the well just as a watery tentacle snaked up from inside the well and grasped at the priest.

Demara stood just outside the tentacle's grasp, studying the spectacle before her. "I think we need more than weapons to fight this, brother," she said to Timorian.

The priest rose to his feet and steadied himself. "You saved my life, Vangelia," he said. "Now we shall see what the power of Ezra can do to rid this place of that watery demon."

The crooked tree where a lynched villain sputters his last breath. The ragged bordello where countless souls act on deceit and desperation. The silent manor where a miser lies slowly dying, surrounded by riches. The musty closet where a child hides in terror from an abusive father. The profane shrine where zealots relinquish their humanity. The medical laboratory where genius crumbles into madness. These are the Bad Places, where the air is so thick with suffering that it claws at the edges of reality itself. These are the places best left forgotten, but whose malice is such that they can

overwhelm memory and time. These are the Sinkholes of Evil.

Sinkholes riddle the Realm of Dread like a spiritual cancer, arising wherever foul passions boil over with such strength or frequency that they begin to seep into the essence of the surrounding area. More than mere backdrops for tales of Gothic adventure, Sinkholes are the symptoms of a sickness. When a character steps into a Sinkhole of Evil, he enters an echo of the past, a malevolent vibration that persists long after the evil that created it has faded. Simply put, Sinkholes are the legacy of evil, an unwelcome bequest to the generations to come.

The Nature of Sinkholes

Sinkholes of Evil occur when evil deeds at a Material Plane locale accrue sufficient power or recur often enough to create ethereal resonance. At the corresponding site in the Ethereal Plane, the spiritual landscape becomes warped by the negative emotions generated by these deeds. Not only does the resulting resonance reflect its nefarious origins, but the spiritual burden of the ethereal echoes can affect events in the Ethereal or even in the Material Plane.

Not all sites of misery spawn Sinkholes. Graveyards, hospitals, asylums, battlefields, and natural hazards all evoke fears and suffering typical to humanity but are not necessarily tainted by willful acts of malevolence. Even generations of anguished mourners do not automatically create a Sinkhole at an ancestral family mausoleum. Generally, the mourners' grief reflects only the horror of mortality, an appropriate and natural response to death. The site of a bloody battle may not sow a Sinkhole if, despite their fear, the warriors held honor, duty or sacrifice in their hearts. Such sites may hold potent ethereal resonance, but do not become Sinkholes. Even the most solemn locale, however, can become a Sinkhole if evil has left its mark there. The same mausoleum might serve as the hunting ground of a vampire that preys upon the mourners as they come to pay their respects. The blood-soaked battlefield might be the progeny of a demented general and his schemes of conquest, vengeance or genocide.

Sinkholes rarely arise in places where circumstantial, subjective evils occurred. The sins that spawn them tend to be acts of terrible cruelty, worthy of epic notoriety. In game terms, Sinkholes are generally created only by deeds that require a

powers check with a 5% or greater chance of failure. The frequency of malicious acts may augment this somewhat as petty sins accumulate, forming a hoard of evil. For instance, the alley behind a dockside tavern, where thugs beat drunken patrons for their coin every night, may grow into a Sinkhole of unexpected strength, especially if sadism or racism simmers beneath the violence.

Not every brutal murder of a stranger or similarly heinous act spawns a Sinkhole, however. Sinkholes require a potent emotional component, a sour note to create the discord within the ethereal resonance. Generally, the more powerful the negative emotional consequences of an act of evil, the more powerful the Sinkhole that erupts from the resonance. Sins that cascade over numerous lives, creating unforeseen misery for whole lives or generations, are archetypal seeds for Sinkholes. Conversely, a monstrous crime may not spawn a particularly strong Sinkhole if the attendant passions were fleeting or if resolute righteousness followed them. For example, the temple where a paladin breaks a sacred vow may not become a Sinkhole if the lapse was temporary and the individual resolves to shoulder the consequences and atone for her crime.

On the other hand, even petty acts of wickedness can give rise to a Sinkhole if they are sufficiently charged with emotion. Consider a naïve young bride who stumbles upon her attentive, adoring husband in the arms of another woman, and is then mocked maliciously by the adulterous couple. The bedchamber may become a minor Sinkhole if, in the ensuing years, the bride becomes a bitter old maid, never able to enter the room again for fear of the hated memories it recalls. The power of the Sinkhole would be even greater if the woman subsequently took her spite out on others, crushing purity at every opportunity.

The Effects of Sinkholes

Sinkholes of Evil have two types of effects in the game world. First, Sinkholes have a deleterious effect both on the wills of creatures and on attempts to turn undead, an effect that applies to creatures in the Material as well as the Ethereal Planes. Second, Sinkholes warp the landscape of the Ethereal Plane, creating telltale signs of past events or spawning vistas of anguish. Though primarily aesthetic, these alterations can have ramifications for those who journey into the Other Side. All the effects of Sinkholes are extraordinary.

• **Will Saves:** The negative emotion that dominates a Sinkhole of Evil is referred to as its *taint*. When a character is compelled to experience an emotion that matches the taint of a Sinkhole (as in the spells crushing *despair*, *fear*, *rage* or other spells that affect the character's emotional responses), he finds the change in mood almost natural, as if the air itself were suffused with raw emotional energy. For any effect that compels an emotion that matches a Sinkhole's taint, the Will save DC for creatures within the Sinkhole's boundaries is increased by the modifier shown on Table 2–3. The DC is higher for creatures in the Ethereal Plane than those in the Material Plane, who may not feel the influence of a minor Sinkhole.

For example, if a character is standing in a rank 3 Sinkhole tainted with rage and is on the Material Plane, his Will save DC to resist the spell's effect would be increased by +1. If the character is on the Ethereal Plane and at the same location, his Will save DC would be increased by +2.

• **Turning and Rebuking Attempts:** For any turning or rebuking attempt that occurs within the boundaries of a Sinkhole, the turning check suffers a penalty equal to the modifier shown on Table 2–3.

For example, if the character above attempted to turn undead, his turning check would suffer a –1 penalty. The undead themselves are not bolstered by the Sinkhole's power. Rather, the terrible spiritual weight of the locale drags down the character's resolve, afflicting an otherwise firmly stated command with a slight tremble and a note of uncertainty. Note that this penalty increases for characters attempting to turn or rebuke undead on the Ethereal Plane, just as Will save DCs increase in the Ethereal.

Table 2–3: The Effects of Sinkholes of Evil

Sinkhole Rank	Ethereal Modifier	Material Modifier
1	0	0
2	+1	0
3	+2	+1
4	+4	+2
5	+6	+3

• **Ethereal Resonance:** Though less perilous to the average character than the above effects, the ethereal resonance of a Sinkhole is no less significant. In fact, the significance is perhaps greater, for the resonance speaks to the Sinkhole's essential nature, reflecting its taint and perhaps even its origins. In Sinkholes of Evil, as in all sites of ethereal resonance, the objects and structures of the past persist in spiritual form, long after their physical counterparts have been destroyed. The resonance of Sinkholes, however, is typically twisted to reflect its taint. The ethereal sights, sounds, smells and textures all suggest the Sinkhole's nature to various degrees. Imagine a Sinkhole tainted with despair. In the Ethereal, the scenery is colored only in shades of gray, and a damp, ashen haze clings to everything. Groaning winds and snatches of mournful violin music echo in the distance. The ethereal air is thick with the smell of withered vegetation, mold and the mustiness of a crypt. Everything that the ethereal traveler touches seems frigid, hard and smooth, like a tombstone on a chill night.

Powerful Sinkholes (ranks 4 and 5) can hold more than ethereal ambiance, however. Resonance created by the misery of numerous souls, or by a single soul of remarkable strength, can warp the fabric of the Ethereal Plane into forms never seen on the Material Plane. Such landscapes still reflect the taint of the Sinkhole, but in bolder, more metaphorical fashion.

All Work and No Play...

At the DM's option, the malevolence of a rank 5 Sinkhole of Evil may be so intense that living creatures can actually be driven mad if they linger there too long. For every 24 cumulative hours that a creature spends within the boundaries of a rank 5 Sinkhole, she must make a Madness save (DC 15). This is an extraordinary effect, and can affect any creature with both Intelligence and Wisdom scores. The DM may even select a Madness effect of the proper severity as appropriate to the Sinkhole's taint. Paranoia, delusions, and schizophrenia are particularly common effects.

For example, a dungeon where fanatic clerics routinely torture heretics might resemble a grotesque, poetic vision of the netherworld, a sulfurous pit of torture stretching down into the earth. The ghosts of clerics might acquire the shape of hideous ethereal fiends, while the ghosts of heretics appear as doomed prisoners. Such extraordinary resonance tends to be treacherous for those who venture into the Ethereal Plane, especially if they cross over expecting a scene similar to its earthly counterpart.

Creating Sinkholes

A Sinkhole of Evil is much like a monster to which a template has been applied, except that the Sinkhole "template" is applied to a location. Just as a monster with a template requires extra work, a Sinkhole of Evil requires the DM to put a bit more effort into his locale, beyond just mapping it and stocking it with monsters and treasure. Sinkholes of Evil are best built from the Sinkhole up, so to speak. If the DM determines a locale's tragic history and character before she begins sketching corridors and placing encounters, the site's spiritual traits can influence the more concrete characteristics.

Rank

The rank of a Sinkhole corresponds to the rank of its accompanying ethereal resonance. A Sinkhole's rank is directly related to its negative effects on Will saves and turning or rebuking attempts (see above). More fundamentally, the rank of a Sinkhole indicates the emotional significance of the evil acts that seeded it. This is not to say that minor Sinkholes are trivial; all Sinkholes are monstrously wicked places, where someone likely suffered terrible anguish at some point. Rank is simply a convenient means to describe the relative potency of Sinkholes.

The DM should avoid the temptation to make every dungeon, castle, and crypt in his campaign a rank 4 or 5 Sinkhole. Though Ravenloft is host to many Sinkholes, their effect is diminished if the characters encounter yet another rank five festering pit of evil at every turn. Sinkholes only acquire meaning when surrounded by normal, uncorrupted landscape. Similarly, major Sinkholes only acquire meaning when surrounded by lesser Sinkholes. The DM should strive to put as much thought into the character of a nasty little rank 2 Sinkhole as she does into the rank 5 Sinkhole in a darklord's abode. After all, player characters are much more likely to

encounter the lesser Sinkholes in the course of their adventuring careers than they are to beard the darklord in his own lair.

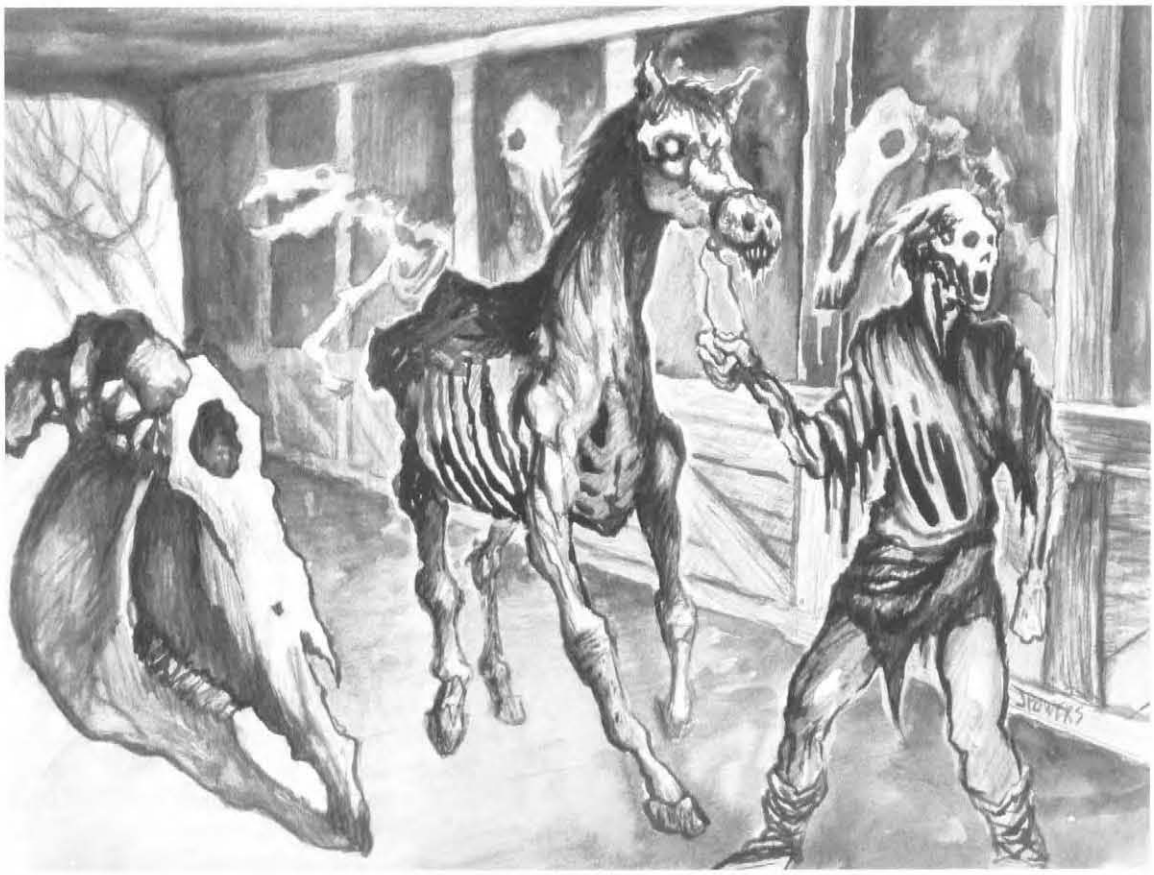
Rank 1: The vast majority of the landscape in the Ethereal Plane contains rank 1 emotional resonance. Upsetting everyday events — such as arguments, accidents, embarrassments, and the like — may, however, create fleeting remnants of ethereal resonance in such places.

For example, if a man has a heated quarrel with his estranged brother, the surrounding room might begin to coalesce dimly in the Ethereal Plane, complete with black scorches on the walls and echoes of hoarse shouting. After the quarreling brothers leave to regain their composure, the resonance fades within moments. Events of this caliber lack the monumental spiritual weight necessary to forge a Sinkhole of Evil. They do, however, mark the site in ways that make it more likely to become a rank 2 or greater Sinkhole if emotionally twisted events continue to occur there.

Rank 2: Rank 2 Sinkholes occur when the attendant evil act is relatively brief, and its emotional consequences touch only the direct participants. Such Sinkholes are created in moments of extreme emotion, prompted by or resulting from some vile deed. Either the sinner or a victim (or both) may be the source of the negative emotion, but rarely does it extend further. However, those that remember the event and speak of it in the years to come may perpetuate the Sinkhole, sustaining its rank even though the individuals involved may have moved on.

For example, horse breeder touched by greed and madness brutally murders a rival in the stalls of his country stable. The murderer's hate and avarice, as well as the terror of his surprised victim, spawn a rank 2 Sinkhole in the stable. Though the murderer is eventually captured and hanged for his crime, the stables acquire a haunted reputation among the locals, who speak fearfully of the gruesome murder, perhaps embellishing it with tales of a ghostly groomsman or rider who seeks revenge.

Rank 3: Rank 3 Sinkholes are spawned by misdeeds that are sustained in duration or whose emotional repercussions touch numerous lives. Multiple acts of evil may be involved, perhaps committed by or victimizing several individuals.



Such tragic events may affect those not directly involved in unforeseen but profound ways. The emotions of an individual can create rank 3 Sinkholes, but only if they are intense and sustained over time.

For instance, a captured revolutionary is brutally tortured on the rack for many days. Despite the agony dealt on him, the rebel responds only with vitriol toward his captors, refusing to give up the identities of his comrades and spitting in the faces of his torturers to the end. When he finally expires, word of his death spreads among the revolutionary movement, fanning their anger and their resolve. The suffering and hatred of the martyred rebel, the frustration and sadism of his captors, and the vengeful rage of the revolutionaries transforms the torture chamber into a rank 3 Sinkhole.

Rank 4: Rank 4 Sinkholes arise due to emotions of great significance, which, in turn, arise from the gravest crimes. Only gruesome murder, monumental betrayal or unspeakable blasphemy typically creates such spiritual blights. The events surrounding rank 4 Sinkholes either affect considerable numbers of people or involve a strong personality who is consumed with dark thoughts for a significant period of time.

As an example, consider a normally upstanding citizen who secretly begins worshiping an unholy deity in a search for supernatural power. He gathers a cabal of disciples about him and makes plans to offer his family as a sacrifice to his vile master during a terrible ritual. Revealed at last before his wife and children as a heathen and monster, he slays them himself as an act of twisted loyalty. The man's coldness and lust for power, the fear and betrayal felt by his family in their last moments, and the unholy zeal of the disciples in attendance all contribute to the creation of a rank 4 Sinkhole at the ritual circle.

Rank 5: Rank 5 Sinkholes only result from the foulest deeds imaginable. Generally, only Acts of Ultimate Darkness can spawn such Sinkholes, and then only if they affect vast numbers of people or absorb the twisted emotions and vile deeds of a strong personality for years or even decades. Torture and murder on a vast scale and the worst acts of spiritual desecration are often the black seeds at the heart of rank 5 Sinkholes. Sites where terrible crimes are repeatedly committed can sometimes spawn rank 5 Sinkholes.

For example, a king weary of constant border raids, launches a campaign against a neighboring kingdom. The conflict drags on, tearing the king's empire apart. Half the nation's men, hundreds of thousands of souls, have been sent to die in distant lands, yet victory has not emerged. As his advisers plead with him to call an end to the war, madness grips the king, who is determined to destroy his enemy at any cost. He imposes martial law and a brutal reign of terror at home to silence dissenters. At the front, he orders the slaughter of women and children, seeking to annihilate the enemy nation. Paranoia seizes him, and he has his family and courtiers executed for treason. The now-empty castle, where the tyrant seethes over the war he cannot win, becomes a rank 5 Sinkhole, spawned by his hatred and bloodlust, and by the despair and fear of countless countrymen.

Taint

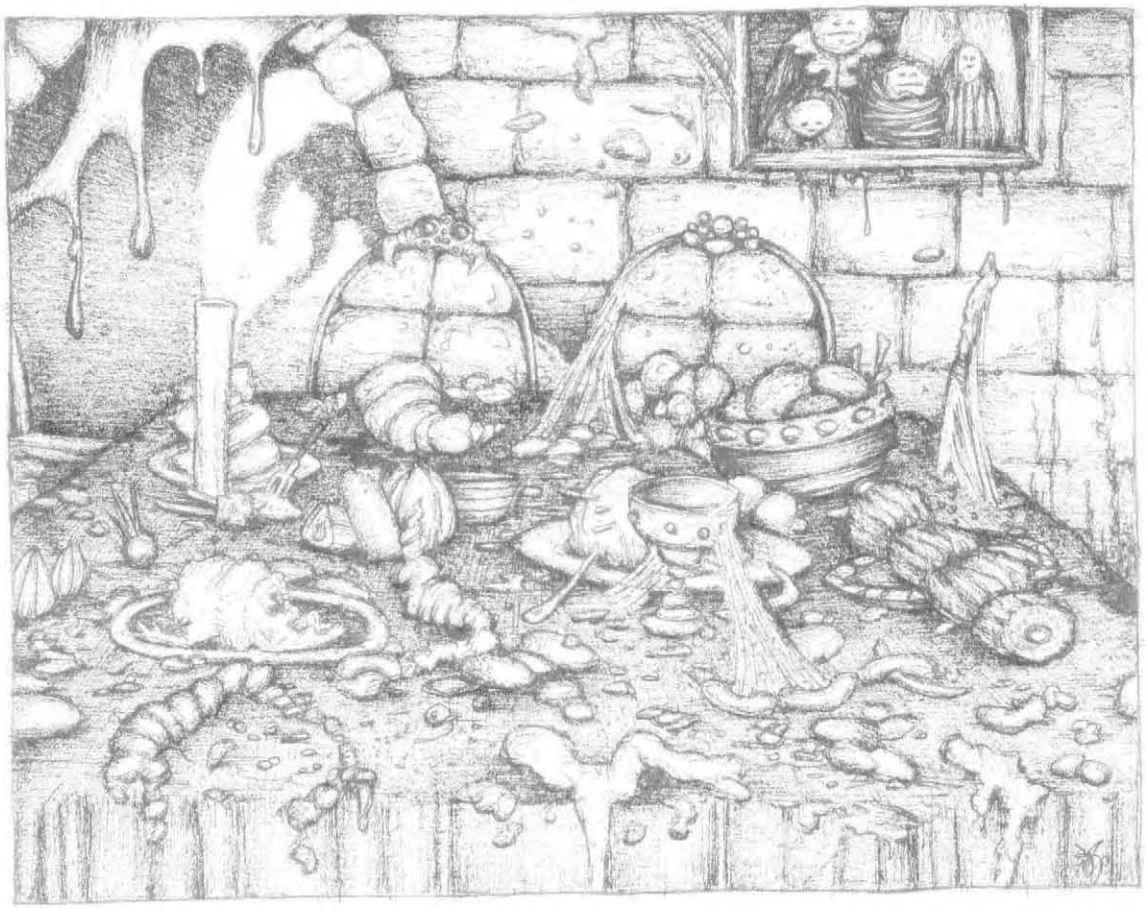
The emotion that sows a Sinkhole of Evil is its taint. Though it gains particular significance if the characters have the ability to look or step into the Ethereal, the taint of a Sinkhole is always a crucial element. Taint determines not only the flavor of a Sinkhole's resonance, but the whole site's mood and theme. The Sinkhole's taint can recommend window dressing in the Material Plane, the passions of the resident restless dead and the sort of creatures that are drawn to the site.

Each of the taints below includes a selection of suggested sensory themes for the Sinkhole's ethereal resonance. These are symbols, ways in which the resonance of the Sinkhole might become twisted to reflect its taint.

Agony: Sinkholes of agony are overwhelmingly tainted by pain, either physical or psychological. Such Sinkholes tend to be sites where the deliberate infliction of suffering has been routine, such as torture chambers. The taint of agony may come from a brutal maiming, an agonizing death, a terrible betrayal or a traumatizing paradigm shift. Sinkholes of agony are relatively rare; typically, the emotions that accompany dreadful suffering create resonance more readily than the suffering itself.

Resonance: Screaming faces or voices; shards of metal, glass or bone; gruesome, pulsating colors, diseased or rotting flesh; the sound of squealing metal and cracking bone; the sound of weeping; the scent of burning flesh; mountains or badlands; objects that seem to tremble or writhe.

Despair: Auras of gloom distinguish Sinkholes of despair. In such places, the emotions that



colored the original acts of evil are typically less significant than the misery that followed. Despair often characterizes the aftermath of evil on the part of the victims or even the perpetrator. Solitary crimes of passion, followed by years of despondent brooding, are frequently the stuff of Sinkholes of despair. Though villains may be consumed by regret and self-pity, perhaps even succumbing to suicide, their despair rarely constitutes true remorse. Despair can also accompany crimes of desperation, which in turn generate further despair, creating a wretched cycle.

Resonance: Dead trees; skulls; black voids; thick, heavy cloth; mists, fog or overcast skies; grim statuary; ash or dust; lifeless, muted colors; gentle, moaning winds; the sound of sobbing or forlorn singing; dry, musty scents; labyrinths or tombs; deserts or wastelands; objects that crumble away when touched.

Fear: Sinkholes of fear arise throughout the realm. The victims of crimes often feel fear in their last moments, and their dread motivates the legends that perpetuate a Sinkhole's ill repute. Fear can serve as a powerful motivation for evil. For example, fear of an individual or a group of people may secretly provoke a murderer, though "mere" crazed bloodlust may seem the only apparent motive. Fear of powerlessness, aging or death can motivate evil deeds as well.

Resonance: Frozen, screaming faces; gleaming blades of metal; sharks, dogs, insects or spiders; cold beads of sweat; the color white; tattered or ragged cloth; the sound of screams, creaking, breathing or footsteps; closets, cellars, chasms or caves; rooms or corridors that seem to warp; objects that lash out suddenly when touched.

Hatred: Whether provoked or not, hatred provides an overpowering source for Sinkholes. Long after moments of fear or rage have faded, seething hatred can persist, consuming its host utterly. Negative emotions directed toward other individuals or groups can mature into hatred with time, perhaps even obscuring the original motive. Hate can be a response as well as a passion, consum-

ing the victims of crimes and exacerbating the Sinkhole's corrupt aura even further.

Resonance: Ice; the color black; broken bones; poison, acid or boiling oil; whips, scourges or razors; crushing weights; burning trees, houses or religious symbols; hail, tornadoes or meteors; the sound of crackling flames or grinding stone; chemical odors; towers or fortresses; war machines.

Lust: Sinkholes of lust are spawned by desire, whether for pleasure, power, wealth or even something as ostensibly pure as the heart of another. Lust acts as a powerful impulse and has an unsettling ability to distort or obliterate rational thinking. Even normally upright folk quickly surrender to misdeeds when their lusts consume them. Sinkholes of lust tend to be sites where the crimes themselves are less significant than the overwhelming desires of their perpetrator.

Resonance: Beautiful or grotesque humanoid figures; luxurious cloth, lace or leather; glittering or corroded metal; undulating colors; oozes or slimes; a crimson or green haze; the sound of rioting or chanting crowds; the sound of a beating heart; the scent of perfume, rich food or strong liquor; beds, thrones, cages, vaults; swamps or oceans; objects that change from exquisite to hideous.

Rage: The fire of wrath characterizes Sinkholes of rage, where crimes of anger smolder for years. Rage is not always unfounded; righteous wrath has provoked all too many acts of evil. Passionate acts of murder and blasphemy frequently find their roots in feelings of rage. Rarely do careful, premeditated crimes spawn Sinkholes of rage, but when they do, the deeds are chilling indeed. Rage can also be a response to wickedness among the victimized, perhaps motivating further evils.

Resonance: Fire; blood, teeth or hair; the color red; scorched or shattered objects and buildings; boiling water or steam; mangy, snarling animals; swords or axes; the sound of shattering glass, explosions or maniacal laughter; lightning, wind, waves, earthquakes or volcanoes; objects that burn, shock or explode when touched.

Multiple Taints: More than one negative emotion colors most Sinkholes. In fact, Sinkholes without at least some tinge of agony, despair or fear are extremely rare. Evil deeds, after all, create suffering among others by their very nature. Nevertheless, a single taint tends to dominate most Sinkholes. Rare Sinkholes may feature two or even three taints with equal significance. The DM should bear in mind, however, that each additional taint splits the potential emotional weight of the Sinkhole. Each taint also makes it that much more challenging to evoke the appropriate atmosphere.

Setting

The physical backdrop of a Sinkhole can take almost any form imaginable. Often, the DM has some notion of the Sinkhole's setting before she even begins to select its rank and taint. Is it a castle, a graveyard or a temple? Perhaps a dungeon, laboratory, inn, manor, ruin, labyrinth, asylum or even a home or shop serves as the location for the Sinkhole. Evil deeds are often committed behind the protection of closed doors, so structures are particularly prone to spawn Sinkholes. Natural sites may become Sinkholes as well. Perhaps the Sinkhole occupies a mountaintop, a glade, a cave, a beach, a thicket, a bend in the river or even a stretch of ocean. In the Realm of Dread, no place of natural beauty, however serene, enjoys complete immunity from the touch of evil.

When selecting a setting for a Sinkhole, the DM should consider the domain that hosts the Sinkhole. Sinkholes that reflect the cultural milieu or theme of the domain are ideal, as they heighten and exploit the atmosphere that the DM has already worked so hard to evoke. For example, a haunted mansion is a highly appropriate Sinkhole in Mordent, but has less impact in Lamordia, Nova Vaasa or Sri Raji. A scientific laboratory, squalid orphanage or jungle temple, respectively, would be much more suitable Sinkholes in these domains. Nonetheless, the DM should not be afraid to break the mold occasionally. If every Sinkhole in Mordent is a haunted mansion, the characters rapidly become jaded, undermining the notion of Sinkholes as unique locales.

Size

Though intuition might suggest that the size of a Sinkhole is proportional to its rank, this is not necessarily the case. Emotional connection and symbolism define the boundaries of a Sinkhole, rather than its overall power. When an act of evil spawns a Sinkhole, the natural boundaries of the site become the borders of the Sinkhole, defining it in relation to its surroundings. For example, if a violent murder occurs in a room, the walls of the room logically form the limits that contain the resulting Sinkhole. Structures and natural interior spaces, such as caves, are clearly delineated by their nature. More open, natural sites may have boundaries that are nebulous to the human eye.

The borders of a Sinkhole are distinct, however, and the DM should always clearly delineate precisely where the negative effects of a Sinkhole begin. Obvious boundaries tend to be reinforced by the emotions and legends that propagate Sinkholes. An "area 50 feet in diameter" is hardly prosaic, and is unlikely to be the way that folk speak of a Sinkhole. When folk repeatedly whisper of "that room in the house that is always kept locked," however, the spiritual reality of the Sinkhole tends to accommodate their expectations.

The rank of a Sinkhole can play a role in a Sinkhole's size, in the sense that deeds with powerful emotional significance create broad repercussions. Though a lord may have committed murder in a particular room of his manor, the Sinkhole may fill the entire structure if his deed drives others away and provokes the murderer to years of obsessive brooding. Sinkholes rarely cover more area that a large building and its surrounding grounds. Though a tyrant's oppression may touch every corner of his kingdom, the whole nation rarely spawns a Sinkhole. The emotional significance of the tyranny, however appalling, is too diffuse when spread over tens of thousands of square miles. However, the tyrant's fortress, glowering on a mountain overlooking a hapless village, is probably an object of fear and loathing and would make a potent Sinkhole of Evil.

The Scent of Evil

At the DM's option, undead tied to the Negative Energy Plane (i.e., most undead except for the ancient dead) and outsiders with the Evil descriptor may be able to detect Sinkholes of Evil. If the creature suspects that a Sinkhole is nearby, it may make a Wisdom check (DC 20 – the Sinkhole's rank). If successful, the creature can detect the Sinkhole up to (Sinkhole rank x 100) yards away. If the check succeeds, but the creature is not yet close enough to detect the Sinkhole, it may retry when it is closer. If the check fails, the creature may only retry for that particular Sinkhole once per week. Once the creature detects a particular Sinkhole, it thereafter always knows the site's location and boundaries.

Denizens

Sinkholes of Evil tend to draw the minions of darkness like moths to a lamp. Ghosts may be lured by the ethereal resonance of the site, which pulses like a dark beacon in the Ethereal Plane. Sinkholes often provide anchors for ghosts tied to the site's history. These ghosts may even be the perpetrators or victims of the evil deeds that spawned the Sinkhole. Sinkholes lure other creatures for a variety of reasons. Like any dungeon or other setting with a fearsome reputation, Sinkholes draw monsters seeking prime hunting territory, a lair where they will not be disturbed or simply surroundings befitting their twisted tastes. Some undead seem to sense the corruption of a Sinkhole, and gravitate to it unconsciously.

Obviously, any monsters that inhabit a Sinkhole should be appropriate to the domain and Sinkhole environs. However, the DM may also wish to make an effort to select creatures that subtly reflect the Sinkhole's taint. Much like ethereal resonance, encounters can unconsciously suggest certain themes to the players. The lists below offer a selection of creatures from the *Monster Manual*, *Monster Manual II* (*) and **Denizens of Darkness** (**) that are thematically suited to certain taints.

Agony: **CR 0** — beetle, grave scarab**; **CR 1/2** — stirge; **CR 1/3** — razorback**; **CR 1** — subdweller**; **CR 2**— carrion stalker**; crimson bones**; goblin**; vargouille; **CR 3** — allip; baobhan sith**; broken one**; elemental, Medium, blood**; head hunter**; meenlock*; **CR 4** — arak, powrie**; backwards man**; **CR 5** — arayashka**; gibbering mouther; nightmare; salamander, average; wraith; **CR 6** — belker; lamia; **CR 8** — living wall**; **CR 9** — braxat*; **CR 11** — devourer, radiant spirit**.

Despair: **CR 1/3** — skeleton, Medium; **CR 1/2** — geist**; zombie, Medium; **CR 3** — allip; bowlyn**; drownling**; elemental, Medium, grave**; mummy; remnant, aquatic**; shadow; **CR 4** — mist ferryman**; **CR 5** — arak, sith**; wraith; **CR 6** — zombie lord**; **CR 7** — ghost; grim reaper**; spectre; vorlog**; **CR 8** — bodak; **CR 10** — dhampir**; **CR 14** — nightshade, nightwing; **CR 16** — demon, nalfeshnee.

Fear: **CR 1/3** — gremishka; **CR 1/2** — geist*; **CR 1** — bakhna rakhna**; carrionette**; plant, fearweed**; krenshar; **CR 2** — animator**; hound, phantom**; marikith**; skin thief**; worg; **CR 3** — doppelganger, dread**; hell hound; impersonator**; yeth hound; **CR 4** — gargoyle; mimic; wolfwere**; **CR 5** — cloaker; shadow mastiff; **CR 6** — bastellus**; devil, kyton; devil, osyluth; plant, doppelganger

plant**; troll, dread**; **CR 7** — invisible stalker; **CR 8** — golem, doll**; treant, dread**; **CR 9** — rakshasa; **CR 15** — nightmare beast*.

Hatred: CR 2 — animator**; devil, imp; **CR 3** — bowlyn**; demon, quasit; shadow; wight; **CR 4** — imp, assassin**; unicorn, shadow**; **CR 5** — odem**; **CR 6** — corpse candle**; hag, annis; **CR 7** — akikage**; spectre; **CR 8** — genie, efreeti; mind flayer; mohrg; **CR 9** — treant, undead**; **CR 10** — golem, clay; **CR 11** — bone naga*; devourer; **CR 12** — kraken; **CR 17** — deathbringer*.

Lust: CR 1/2 — stirge; **CR 1** — ghoul; homonculus; **CR 2** — assassin bug, giant**; choker; lycanthrope, wererat; **CR 3** — boowray**; cat, midnight**; ghoul, ghast; lycanthrope, werewolf; mummy; **CR 4** — otyugh; vampire spawn; vampyre**; wolfwere**; **CR 5** — cloaker, shadow**; hag, green; ooze, ochre jelly; paka**; **CR 6** — emordenung**; red widow**; **CR 7** — kizoku**; vampire; **CR 8** — ghoul lord**; **CR 9** — demon, succubus; naga, dark or spirit; night hag; rakshasa; tenebris**; **CR 13** — lich; **CR 15** — demon, glabrezu; **CR 16** — gravecrawler*; hebi-no-onna**; jahi*; **CR 19** — famine spirit*; flesh jelly*; **CR 21** — bone ooze*.

Rage: CR 2 — animator**; hearth fiend**; **CR 3** — arak, teg**; elemental, Medium, pyre**; lycanthrope, wereboar; scarecrow, dread**; **CR 5** — lycanthrope, werebear; salamander, average; **CR 6** — corpse candle**; **CR 7** — devil, barbazu; ghost; golem, flesh; slaad, red; **CR 8** — rushlight**; **CR 9** — valpurleiche**; **CR 12** — rampager*; **CR 17** — banshee*; **CR 19** — ragewind*.

The Death of Sinkholes

Sinkholes of Evil are not eternal. As with any ethereal resonance, the resonance of a Sinkhole requires a steady supply of emotion to sustain itself. If this emotional sustenance is cut off, the Sinkhole begins to fade, eventually melting away into the rank one resonance that dominates the Ethereal Plane connected with the Dread Realm. In game terms, the Sinkhole loses one rank each month in the absence of living or undead creatures that remember the event that spawned it, to a minimum of rank one. Once a Sinkhole is forgotten, the arrival of those who do remember, and thus the salvaging of the Sinkhole, is highly unlikely. Few Sinkholes, therefore, last longer than a few months once they have been forgotten.

Evil is an insidious force, however, and Sinkholes are notoriously persistent. For various reasons, negative emotions are much easier to sustain than positive ones. Often, the culprit is the notoriety that grows up around Sinkholes long after the originating events have passed into history. The power of rumor and myth can sustain a Sinkhole for years, decades or centuries. For whatever reason, humanity fixates on the negative all too easily. Particularly in the Realm of Dread, tales of murder, betrayal and unholy pacts are much more common, and popular, than tales of love, friendship and morality. Doomed love is more enthralling than ordinary love, shattered happiness more compelling than ordinary happiness. Rumors of kindness and joy from the distant past do not draw children to old houses. Rather, rumors of treachery and madness repel them — while attracting the bravest, most eccentric and most foolish.

While there is nothing that characters can do directly to promote the demise of a Sinkhole, they can certainly prepare the funeral pyre, so to speak. Destroying a structure that hosts a Sinkhole of Evil can help speed the process of forgetting, particularly for minor Sinkholes. However, burning an entire castle to the ground and scattering its stones may not ensure that the worst sorts of crimes are forgotten. The locals may remember the site and its history for generations to come, even if all that remains is a scorched field of rubble. In fact, the act of destroying the site may add further notoriety to the Sinkhole, ensuring that more people remember and talk about it.

Purging a Sinkhole of ghosts and other creatures of darkness can go a long way to mitigate the Sinkhole's malevolent reputation. The fame of the characters and their valor in braving the Sinkhole may in time outweigh the ancient sins. If a creature responsible for those sins still occupies the Sinkhole, the character may even have the opportunity to end the evil outright. For example, if a cruel noble lord is oppressing his people, the characters may decide to assault his fortress and force him to answer for his crimes. Such heroism can compete with the evil of even powerful Sinkholes.

Eradicating all traces of the past, however, is not always enough. In the example above, the characters may topple both the noble and his fortress, but the locals may still regard the fortress's ruins with fear. Prevailing against the power of memory and myth requires stronger legends of righteousness. Perhaps, instead of destroying the fortress, the characters help the locals transform it into a hall of justice, a temple to a merciful deity or a seat of peaceful governance. With the mandate of the grateful locals, the characters may even take up residence in the fortress themselves, becoming the just rulers that the region so desperately needs. See the *Stronghold Builder's Guidebook* for more on strongholds owned and managed by PCs.

Revisionist History

With their ability to sway public opinion and popular myth through performance, bards can serve as valuable allies in the effort to eradicate a Sinkhole of Evil. Once a Sinkhole has been cleansed by the destruction or expulsion of all ghosts and evil creatures, a bard can attempt to convince the locals that the stain of evil has been erased. The bard must spend at least two continuous weeks performing in the streets and taverns of the local community, with breaks only for eating, resting and sleeping.

At the end of the two-week period, the bard makes a Perform check (DC = 30 + the Sinkhole's original rank – the bard's class level). Apply any appropriate modifiers from Table 2–4. If the check is successful, the Sinkhole's rank is decreased by one. The bard can attempt to reduce the Sinkhole's rank again by spending another two weeks on the task, though the rank can never be reduced below 1. The Sinkhole's rank prior to cleansing is always used to calculate the Perform check DC. If the check fails, the bard cannot attempt to reduce that Sinkhole's rank again. Another bard, however, may take up the task.

While the characters may hire bards to perform this service for them, low-level commoners or experts are not adequate (*DMG*, Chapter 4, "Friends," *Hirelings*). The performer must have levels in the bard class. Such characters can be hired for 1 gp x bard levels per day, though the community's size may determine the highest-level bard available (see *DMG*, Chapter 5, "World-Building," *Generating Towns*).

Table 2–4: Perform Check Modifiers

Modifier	Circumstance
–2	The Sinkhole is still standing (if a structure)
–2	The bard was not involved in the Sinkhole's cleansing
–1	Every century that the Sinkhole existed
–1	The Sinkhole's residents injured or killed locals long ago
–3	The Sinkhole's residents injured or killed locals recently
+2	The PCs or other good-aligned NPCs now occupy the site
+2	*Hallow* was cast on the site following cleansing

Phantasmagora

All rank 5 Sinkholes of Evil are places of mythic wickedness. The aura of corruption in these dread locales is palpable and creatures of good heart never feel entirely at ease when intruding on such unholy ground. Very rarely, however, the accumulated evils of a rank 5 Sinkhole become so terrible that something even more monstrous comes into existence. In these extraordinary cases, the ethereal resonance of a Sinkhole becomes so strong that it gains a kind of malevolent awareness. Spiritualists who study the Other Side call this phenomenon a *phantasmagorum*. For those who have stumbled upon such places and lived to tell the tale, a phantasmagorum is not so much a phenomenon as a living nightmare.

Phantasmagora are typically created when the legends and emotions surrounding a rank 5 Sinkhole feed off one another in a dreadful cycle. The notoriety of powerful Sinkholes inevitably draws those to the site who feel that they can triumph over the evil within. When madness, treachery or the minions of evil cuts down these souls, the emotions that feed the Sinkhole swell, and the sinister legend of the place grows more powerful. This process can occur over and again, creating a feedback loop of evil. Eventually the ethereal resonance, swollen on a black bounty of evil and suffering, may gain a glimmer of malign sentience. This entity, the phantasmagorum, is the twisted spirit of the Sinkhole, the ghost of a place rather than a person. Its only goal is to force creatures to experience its taint before leading them to their deaths.

Powers of Phantasmagora

Phantasmagora have no substance, and have no ability to physically affect the Material Plane. Though ethereal creatures or those with the proper feats or spells can interact with a Sinkhole's resonance, such actions do not affect the phantasmagorum. The phantasmagorum is a diffuse entity spread throughout the Sinkhole in the Ethereal Plane, and cannot be affected or detected in any way. Nonetheless, phantasmagora have a host of tricks at their disposal, all aimed at tormenting trespassers. All a phantasmagorum's powers function as though cast by a 20th-level sorcerer, and all have save DC 25 unless otherwise noted.

Detect Thoughts (Sp): The phantasmagorum can read the minds of every creature with an Intelligence score within the Sinkhole's boundaries. This ability functions as if the phantasmagorum had examined the entire area of the Sinkhole with *detect thoughts* for 3 rounds. Creatures receive a Will save when they enter the Sinkhole, and every 6 hours thereafter that they remain within. Once a creature fails its saving throw, its thoughts open to the phantasmagorum for scrutiny as long as the creature remains within the Sinkhole's boundaries. Stone, metal, wood, dirt or other substances cannot block this ability.

Mind Games (Sp): The phantasmagorum can create any number of *persistent images* at will. These illusions are identical to the spell except that they are phantasms rather than figments, they last as long as the phantasmagorum desires, and they do not become translucent if disbelieved (though creatures can no longer be directly affected by them if they successfully disbelieve). Phantasmagora are fond of creating phantasms in the minds of a single character, leading others to believe that the poor soul is going mad. Often, phantasmagora recreate scenes from the past: sometimes pristine, sometimes horribly twisted.

Phantom Shift (Su): The phantasmagorum can replace the physical world with ethereal resonance in any portion of the Sinkhole's area for as long as it desires. The Material Plane fades from view, and the characters may interact with the reality of the Ethereal Plane, just as if they were ethereal themselves. The characters are still on the Material Plane, but for a time they can sense the resonance as if it were in the Material. The resonance seems to have normal substance, rather than the somewhat hazy quality it would have in the Ethereal. This ability extends to any ethereal creatures, such as ghosts, that happen to be in the affected area, rendering them visible and seemingly solid for a time. Given that the resonance of a rank 5 Sinkhole is often extremely horrific, the experience of a phantom shift can be harrowing.

***Suggestion* (Sp):** The phantasmagorum can implant a *suggestion* in any creature within the Sinkhole's boundaries, though it requires an illusion with an auditory component to do so. The suggestion lasts until fulfilled or until the character leaves the Sinkhole. Suggestions usually attempt to convince a character to commit treachery or violence against his companions for seemingly sensible reasons.

Phantasmagoric Tactics

Phantasmagora do not want to frighten creatures away. On the contrary, they want nothing more than to draw out their victims' stay for as long as possible, feeding off their negative emotions. They often lull their victims into a sense of security, concealing their presence for some time before they begin to reveal themselves in subtle yet disturbing ways. The entity knows that a solitary creature is much more vulnerable than a group. By seeding their potential victims' minds with fear and paranoia, the phantasmagorum seeks to drive a wedge between its victims, perhaps even goading them to turn on one another.

A phantasmagorum targets characters with weak wills (low Wisdom or Will saves) first, particularly if they have failed Fear, Horror or Madness saves in the past. Once it has discerned their fears and insecurities, the phantasmagorum applies judicious use of its *mind games* and phantom shift abilities to slowly fray their sanity. Gradually, it increases the intensity of its tactics, targeting more characters and creating more frightful illusions. Characters predisposed to the Sinkhole's taint are targeted for suggestions, as the phantasmagorum attempts to distract the characters with emotional confrontations and dilemmas. The phantasmagorum ultimately seeks to drive creatures to murder or even suicide, although it can endure the escape of a victim or two. After all, someone must live to relate the tragic events that took place, thereby expanding the Sinkhole's infamy.

As with all rank 5 Sinkholes, lingering in the abode of a phantasmagorum may drive characters to madness if the DM wishes (see the sidebar "All Work and No Play"). Given the awareness and powers that a phantasmagorum has at its disposal, the entity is capable of actively assaulting the characters' sanity, rather than simply waiting for the Sinkhole's evil aura to break their minds. In game terms, the presence of a phantasmagorum increases the Madness save to DC 25. The entity can suspend the Madness saves at any time or increase their frequency to up to 1 time every four hours. Particularly harrowing uses of the *mind games* or phantom shift abilities that play on a character's existing frailties (i.e., failed Fear, Horror or Madness saves) may call for Madness saves at any time.

Sample Sinkholes

The following Sinkholes serve as examples of the principles discussed above. Each site's description, history and residents have been provided in rough detail; the DM should flesh out these locations to suit her campaign. Though they are described within the context of the Realm of Dread, these Sinkholes could easily be dropped into any campaign setting in need of a sinister site.

The Black Willow

Sinkhole Rank 2

Taint: Hatred (Agony, Lust)

Description: The Black Willow is one of the most notorious sites in Souragne. It stands near the eastern shores of Lake Noir, rising out of a marshy hillock. The tree is free of tangled bayou vegetation, as if nature herself were shrinking from the Willow's evil. Massive and twisted, the tree is scarred by lightning, its bark permanently scorched. A muggy breeze seems to constantly blow through the Willow's branches. Brave Voodan have left a collection of jujus at the base of the Willow, though to what end, other Souragniens can only speculate. In the Ethereal Plane, the tree is midnight black, and its leaves are like jagged razors. Distantly, the Ethereal traveler can hear a drone that sounds alternately like a woman's wail and the harsh buzz in the air that follows a lightning strike.

Historical Notes: Long ago, the Black Willow stood on the sugarcane plantation of Nazaris Verret, a cruel and devious landowner. Fellow plantation nobles despised Verret, who they regarded as a drunkard and a boor, but the man's wealth ensured his status. Among Verret's weaknesses was his desire for one of his slave girls, a beauty named Marguerite. When Marguerite discovered that she was with child, Verret became enraged, fearing for his eminent position in Souragnien society.

Verret sent word one night for Marguerite to meet him beneath a willow tree. When the slave girl arrived, Verret unsheathed a gleaming machete and explained that neither she nor her baby could be allowed to live. When poor Marguerite's remains were found, the locals assumed it was the work of bayou denizens or corrupt Voodan, as Verret had intended.

However, in the months that followed, lightning struck the willow where Marguerite was slain on three occasions. Each time the willow survived, though its bark turned as black as soot. Verret

regarded this as an evil omen, convinced that Marguerite's spirit thirsted for vengeance. His behavior became erratic, and the servants often heard him pleading with Marguerite late at night. Few folk lamented when Verret was found near the slave quarters, hanging from a noose tied by his own hand. The Souragniens insist that the swamp swallowed the Verret plantation within a year, and the Voodan came to regard the willow as a site of necromantic power.

Special Effects: The Black Willow is immune to electricity and fire effects.

Residents: The ghost of Marguerite (*female human rank 3 ghost Com2, NE*) haunts the Black Willow to this day. Though her murderer has long passed on, Marguerite remains in a curious fugue, obsessed with her unborn child. Convinced that she somehow lost the child, she is consumed with self-loathing, an echo of Verret's hatred. She manifests when travelers approach the willow, pleading for any news of his missing babe. If no word is offered, she attacks relentlessly, shrieking of vengeance and stained innocence. Her salient abilities include corrupting gaze, corrupting touch and telekinesis. Though they give the willow a wide berth, alligators (use crocodiles from the *Monster Manual*) lurk in the swamp near the tree, and attack men with little provocation.

Marguerite can be put to rest only by untangling her past, a suitable challenge if the party includes as Stygian attendant (see **Van Richten's Arsenal**). This may require delving into the ruined and flooded Verret plantation nearby. If she can be convinced of the truth of her circumstance, Marguerite finally moves on.

The Balduska Foundling House

Sinkhole Rank 3

Taint: Despair (Fear, Hatred)

Description: Glowering at the edge of Kantora in Nova Vaasa, the Balduska Foundling House evokes a sinking dread in the urchins who gaze upon it. The structure's façade is constructed of smooth stone the color of light ash, and decorated with friezes depicting bedraggled, grateful orphans. The interior is a somber succession of austere, communal sleeping quarters, dining areas and workshops. Crowds of haggard Nova Vaasan children scurry about the corridors and rooms, harshly reprimanded by loutish thugs dubbed "tutors." Kantorans assume that Balduska House occupies itself with the futile mission of sheltering and educating the children of the city streets. The reality is that the House is a horrific sweatshop that exploits children as if they were an expendable resource. In the Ethereal Plane, Balduska house is a damp, tomblike labyrinth, suffused with creeping fog and echoing with the sobbing of children.

Historical Notes: The Balduska Foundling House is the creation of Headmaster Henryk Vilkule, a deceitful monster of a man. Years ago, Vilkule was an unscrupulous merchant with underworld allies, notorious for his miserly character. Vilkule underwent a sudden conversion to the Church of Ezra, whereupon he made a pilgrimage to the Great Cathedral and requested a seed donation to found an orphanage in Kantora. He persuaded the Praesidius that such an institution could do much good in destitute Kantora, and could also provide a toehold for the Ezrans deep in the heartland of the Church of the Lawgiver. On returning to Kantora with his endowment, Vilkule rebuilt the toppled Balduska Manor to house his orphanage.

Vilkule's conversion and earnest philanthropy were a farce, a screen for a scheme that has burgeoned into a chattel slavery ring in all but name. The House's tutors round up urchins in Kantora on midnight hunts, raiding the alleys and tenements where street children gather. Under the guise of providing food, shelter and education, Vilkule forces his charges to work sixteen hours a day at grueling tasks. His sweatshops produce a fortune in linen, hemp and leather goods for him, all crafted with child labor.

Headmaster Vilkule demands that the tutors maintain joyless discipline among the children, whose natural boisterousness he believes must be crushed into submission. Beatings at the hands of the tutors or more unspeakable punishments in the chambers of the Headmaster himself are meted out with shocking regularity. The Balduska House children have been utterly broken by the unremitting brutality of their existence. They rarely resist their captors, and viciously turn on those whose misbehavior brings down the wrath of the Headmaster.

Special Effects: None.

Residents: Though Headmaster Vilkule (*male human Ari2/Exp7, LE*) assumes that he, the tutors (*human Ftr1/Rog1, LE*) and the children (*human Com1* with 1–2 hp) are the only occupants of Balduska House, the children know better. When the tutors have extinguished the lanterns at night, strange noises echo through the orphanage. Some

children have seen shades wandering the halls, ancient statuary moving of its own accord and horrible things slithering just out of sight in the cellars.

The truth of the matter is that Vilkule had the misfortune of selecting a site already haunted by unnatural creatures; events since the orphanage was erected have only strengthened the fell atmosphere. The children that perished at Balduska House over the years have returned as animators, geists and shadows. Some children have become spirit waifs and are vainly attempting to lead other youngsters to their remains, abandoned in the hidden catacombs beneath the orphanage. The House is also infested with gremishkas, which commit much of the theft, vandalism and destruction for which the children are inevitably blamed.

The Oasis of Apep

Sinkhole Rank 4

Taint: Lust (Agony, Rage)

Description: The Oasis of Apep lies hidden deep in the deserts of Har'Akir, a lethal enticement that claims many an unsuspecting desert traveler. The Oasis is no mere stagnant water hole shaded by a lone palm. Rather, it is a dense copse of verdant, thorny vegetation, rising miraculously from the sands to shelter a haven of crystalline springs, pools and cascades. Tropical birds shriek in the trees, while wily predators stalk through the cool shadows. The apparent salvation of the Oasis is as fleeting as a mirage, however. The waters of Apep burn with the hatred of the serpent demon, and the villain who made them so still stalks the Oasis in search of cruel amusements. In the Ethereal Plane, the vegetation of the Oasis glows with a sickening luminescence of red, green and violet. Viscous, corrosive sap oozes from the plants, and the ground is a morass of abrasive sand and bubbling pitch.

Historical Notes: When its water ran pure, the Oasis of Apep was the Oasis of the Scattered God, and was a blessing for travelers in Har'Akir's sandy wastes. That all changed when dread omens foretold of the birth of Am-khaibitu, a pureblood

among the yuan-ti of Har'Akir. The yuan-ti whispered that the child was the progeny of Apep himself, the serpent demon of Akiri legend, and that he was destined to be a great deceiver and destroyer. Due to his perfect human appearance, Am-khaibitu was preened from a hatchling to infiltrate and topple the priesthood of Osiris.

The young Am-khaibitu exhibited remarkable discipline and patience, remaining in deep cover within the clergy of Osiris for decades. He rose through the ranks of the priesthood, honing his divine powers and refraining from any contact with his true masters. His scheme finally unfolded, however, when the entire temple made a pilgrimage to the Oasis of the Scattered God. As the priests and laity ritually bathed themselves in the waters of the Oasis, Am-khaibitu offered a blessing that unleashed a horrific spell. Hundreds of the clergy and worshipers were slain in moments as the water burned their flesh from within.

Am-khaibitu reveled in his victory, but was now overcome with hubris and madness. Forgetting his origins and his reptilian kin entirely, he settled at the Oasis to ensnare and devour desert travelers. The pureblood now believes that he is Apep trapped in mortal form, and that each soul he consumes draws him closer to his true, demonic might.

Special Effects: The waters of the Oasis of Apep are now poisonous to humanoid creatures, due to Am-khaibitu's spell. Ingested, Fortitude save DC 22; initial damage 6d6 fire damage, secondary damage 2d6 temporary Constitution damage. This is a supernatural effect. The waters lose their poisonous quality if taken more than one hundred yards from the edge of the Oasis before being ingested.

Residents: Of course, the principal resident of the Oasis is Am-khaibitu himself (*male fiendish pureblood yuan-ti ghoul lord Clr13, CE*) who has been cursed with a burning hunger for his crimes. The undead cleric lies in torpor in a decrepit vault beneath the forest, until the presence of desert wayfarers stirs him. His cleric domains are Destruction and Evil. Though most of the wildlife is natural, the Oasis has attracted nests of fiendish snakes, while assassin vines and red sundews (see *Monster Manual II*) hide among the mundane vegetation. Some whisper that the unholy priest of the Oasis commands other strange creatures, such as cockatrices, salamanders and spirit nagas.

The Butcher Street Boarding House

Sinkhole Rank 5

Taint: Agony (Fear, Lust)

Description: The Butcher Street Boarding House stands at the edge of the former slaughterhouse district in Paridon. Tucked away in a quiet stretch of dilapidated storefronts, the towering brick structure features a gated courtyard, garden and carriage house. A façade of fine, dressed granite stonework conceals the building's shabby brick construction. At eight stories, the House is among the tallest buildings in Paridon. Within, guests find clean and welcoming surroundings, the rooms decorated with knickknacks from local craftsmen and filled with clever conveniences. Despite its inviting appearance, the Butcher Street Boarding House is an elaborate and supremely monstrous deathtrap. It was built to serve the demented proclivities of its master, Sir James Hedgewood. In the Ethereal Plane, the House is a ghastly sight. It appears as a heaving tower of flesh and steel, gurgling and moaning pitifully. Ethereal travelers mad enough to enter discover a hellish, living labyrinth of bone, metal, gristle and blood.

Historical Notes: The Butcher Street Boarding House was once a tenement, housing the penniless roughnecks who worked in Paridon's slaughterhouses. The significance of that bloody trade tapered off when Paridon was drawn into Ravenloft, and uttered its last breath when the Mists closed in around the city. With locals now subsisting on a handful of rooftop chicken coops and hog pens, most of the slaughterhouses and butcher shops stand vacant. Local physician and financier Sir James Hedgewood, however, saw a financial opportunity where others saw economic ruin. He bought the old tenement and spent over a year renovating it with his own hands, much to the amusement of the Paridon aristocracy.

To the chagrin of his detractors, however, Hedgewood has since built a modestly successful business and a peerless reputation out of the decrepit building. The Butcher Street Boarding House caters to foreign visitors of all classes, though the steep room rates at the House primarily attract artisans, merchants and nobles. Hedgewood has retired from medicine and investment, preferring to see to his guests' comfort personally.

In truth, Sir James Hedgewood is a homicidal madman and cannibal. The Butcher Street Boarding House is a macabre funhouse built to allow him to indulge his proclivities on a terrifying scale. He

has murdered scores of people in his time at the House, though he is sufficiently cunning to be judicious and patient with his crimes. Obsessed with a delusional perversion of the Divinity of Mankind, Hedgewood believes that a detailed study of anatomy, agony and death will enable him to ascend to a mystical state of awareness. His motive matters little in the end, however, particularly to the victims he has slain through myriad, gruesome methods.

Special Effects: None.

Residents: The Butcher Street Boarding House has no significant residents apart from the succession of guests, a handful of servants and its lunatic master, James Hedgewood (*male human Ari6/Exp7, NE*). The servants know nothing of Hedgewood's madness, though many suspect that something peculiar is going on at the House. The walls of the House hold an endless cache of fiendish surprises. Secret passages, chutes and winch-driven elevators honeycomb its halls. Lethal booby traps riddle the guest rooms, though Hedgewood can arm or disarm them at whim from a mechanical control center. In subbasements and cellars that wind deep beneath the House, Hedgewood carries out experiments in pain and creates perverse artwork in gore. Torture devices, cremation ovens, vats of acid and boiling oil, fiendishly modified barber chairs and operating tables are among his playthings. The true secret of the Butcher Street Boarding House, however, is that Hedgewood's obsession and crimes are on the verge of birthing a phantasmagorum. After another atrocity or two, the House may begin to stir of its own accord.

Expanding the Mists

Vangelia crested the hill and looked out at the expanse of impenetrable fog that stretched before her.

"I can't see anything beyond the fog!" she called back to her companions, Demara and Timorian. "Should we turn back?"

Demara strode up the hill to stand behind the young scout. Together, they waited for Timorian, hampered somewhat by his priestly robes, as he clambered up the rise to stand with them and stare outward at the rolling bank of white mist.

"Something's happening," he said, pointing to a place in the fog that seemed to grow thinner. A dark shape loomed behind the whiteness

As the trio watched, the Mists parted and a strange figure emerged from its depths. Tall and angular, with vestigial wings and a hawklike, humanoid head, the creature fell forward onto the ground, bleeding from a wound in one of its sticklike legs.

"Shall we help... whatever it is?" Vangelia asked.

"It's wounded, maybe even unconscious," Demara said. "I don't think it can be much of a threat."

"We can at least go closer and investigate," Timorian said. "Who knows to what purpose it has been delivered to this place."

The latest edition of **Ravenloft** was designed to provide DMs with the fundamental concepts of the setting so they could then build their own creations upon the book's foundation. That said, since its introduction in 2000, the d20 system has produced a steady stream of new options for players and DMs to incorporate if they wish. The following sections offer basic systems and advice you can use to pull any new PC race or class into the Mists.

Adding Races

Ravenloft is a distinctly humanocentric setting, but virtually any race or creature can play a role in a Gothic adventure. Your players may want to try running unusual PCs; this might range from the relatively mundane, such as a nonhuman subrace, to the exotic, such as a true werewolf struggling to overcome her inner beast or a flesh golem trying to forge its own humanity. As long as you approve, there's nothing inherently wrong with playing such oddities, and you may want to add unusual NPCs of your own.

The Wizards of the Coast sourcebook *Savage Species* presents detailed, balanced rules for playing monstrous heroes. If a race has unusual abilities, refer to the General Guidelines for classes, below, to see how the Dark Powers may affect those gifts.

In most cases, however, the primary concern when adding a new race is determining its Outcast Rating (see **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Two), the measure of how much social ostracism the creature likely faces from Ravenloft's xenophobic residents.

Determining Outcast Ratings

To assign an Outcast Rating, simply compare the creature to the categories in Table 2–5 below. All creatures begin with OR 0, which then rises as applicable modifiers are added. Remember that members of the same race ignore their own base OR; two goblins would thus consider each other OR 0. Also, OR only counts when NPCs are aware

of an individual's "otherness." A doppelganger may have OR 6, but this comes into play only when the doppelganger reveals its true form or otherwise deals with folk who know the truth.

The higher a creature's Outcast Rating, the more aghast strangers will be upon seeing it. If a creature has OR 6 or higher, witnessing the sudden revelation of its presence (be it bursting from a grave or transforming from an innocuous shape) may warrant a Horror save. As a general guideline, such Horror saves have DC 8 + creature's OR, or DC 10 + creature's OR if it has the frightful presence ability.

Table 2–5: Outcast Rating Modifiers

Size	Modifier
Tiny	–1
Small	+0
Medium	+1
Large	+2
Huge	+4

Appearance	Modifier
Slightly inhuman	+1
Distinctly inhuman	+2
Monstrous	+3

Reputation	Modifier
Angelic	–2
Good	–1
Evil	+1
Predatory	+2
Fiendish	+3

Other Factors	Modifier
Beyond the pale	+1
Culture shock	+1
Scarring	varies
Unnatural powers	+1

Size

This rating is simply based on the creature's size category; the larger a creature is, the more physically intimidating it becomes.

Appearance

When dealing with shapechangers such as doppelgangers or lycanthropes, use the creature's most monstrous form to determine its OR. Even if a werewolf is currently a harmless human, an onlooker aware that a seven-foot, slavering werebeast could emerge at any moment will be no less on edge.

Slightly Inhuman: The creature has physical characteristics that are not found in humans, but are small and not immediately noticeable. This could include pointed ears, strangely colored eyes or the fangs of a vampire. Most nonhumans are considered slightly inhuman in appearance.

Distinctly Inhuman: The creature has a physical trait that is immediately noticeable and may be cause for alarm. This could include bright scarlet skin, small horns or the hairless, distorted face of a moor man. Such features can usually still be concealed with some effort.

Monstrous: The creature's strikingly inhuman appearance is immediately noticeable and likely to evoke fear in humans. This can include the warped physique of a goblin, the bestial features of a rakshasa or the obviously decayed or spectral appearance of most undead.

Reputation

Reputation refers to how the race as a whole is viewed by humans. Individuals may not accurately reflect their race's general nature, but an evil halfling still benefits from his people's good name, while a kind and noble caliban would still be shunned.

Angelic: The creature is considered to be inherently good and decent, incapable of malice by its very nature. This reputation is extremely rare in Ravenloft, and is usually reserved only for the few celestials that find themselves trapped in the Mists. On occasion, a paladin or particularly saintly cleric may benefit from this reputation as well.

Good: The creature is seen as generally amiable and harmless, as with halflings and small children.

Evil: The race is considered to be inherently malicious but generally content to avoid humanity unless provoked. Most folk would treat a creature such as a rabid dog, going out of their way to avoid it but unafraid that it will burst into their homes at night. Calibans, who are generally misunderstood, and shambling undead such as mummies and zombies, who are not, share evil reputations.

Predatory: Not only is the creature inherently evil, it is generally considered an active menace. Creatures with this reputation are usually bloodthirsty, rampaging predators or creatures that can

only survive through murder, such as werebeasts, ghouls, serial killers, skin thieves and vampires.

Fiendish: The creature is considered hideously malevolent. Not only do these creatures actively abuse innocent folk, they may wish harm upon the world itself. This reputation is usually reserved only for monstrously evil entities from the lower planes.

Other Factors

Beyond the Pale: The creature's origins obviously lie completely outside the natural world. This includes all elementals, constructs, fey, outsiders and undead, and may include creatures with bizarrely alien physiology, such as aberrations and oozes.

Culture Shock: Some cultures simply disdain folk from certain lands or who follow certain customs. Most people in the domains surrounding Falkovnia are wary of people bearing the Falkovnian brand, for example. The **Ravenloft Gazetteers** include notes on regional biases.

Scarring: The creature is hideously deformed — perhaps having been badly burned or subjected to goblyn feasting. This rating can vary depending on the degree of the scars dealt.

Unnatural Powers: This can include any inherent magical or otherwise inexplicable abilities the creature is known to have. Elves' near-immortality and immunity to some magic count as unnatural powers, as would any overt supernatural or spell-like abilities. In some regions, the innate spellcasting ability of a sorcerer may also count.

Adding Classes

While the core adventuring classes presented in the D&D *Player's Handbook* embody a remarkably wide spectrum of personas, particularly when used in conjunction with multiclassing, including new core classes or prestige classes in your campaign can be a quick and easy route to the creation of distinctive heroes and memorably challenging foes. However, the Dark Powers can insidiously reshape people's abilities just as easily as they manipulate the magic cast within their realm. In conjunction with the general guidelines for magic presented in the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook,** this section provides a framework to help you adapt new character classes to the Ravenloft setting without draining them of their essential flavor.

Table 2–6: Sample Outcast Ratings

Creature	OR
Bakhna rakhna*	5
Beholder	8
Broken one*	6
Demon, succubus	7
Demon, nalfeshnee	12
Devil, imp	7
Devil, kyton	9
Dhampir*	+1
Doppelganger	6
Drownling*	3
Eladrin, ghaele	2
Elf, drow	5
Ermordenung*	+2
Ghost	+5
Ghoul	7
Ghoul lord*	+7
Goblin	4
Goblyn*	6
Golem, flesh	7
Hag, sea, annis	7
Hebi-no-onna*	6
Hobgoblin	5
Kizoku*	4
Lebendtod*	+6
Lich	+6
Lycanthrope, loup-garou*	+8
Lycanthrope, wererat	+6
Lycanthrope, werewolf	+7
Medusa	6
Mind flayer	7
Minotaur	6
Moor man*	5
Mummy	7
Naga, spirit	7
Ogre	6
Paka*	5
Planetouched, aasimar	2
Planetouched, tiefling	7
Quevari*	3
Rakshasa	9
Ravenkin*	3
Red widow*	7
Spectre	7
Troll	8
Vampire	+6
Vampire spawn	6
Vampire, vrykolaka*	+7
Vampyre*	6
Wight	7
Wolfwere*	7
Zombie lord*	+6

* Creatures marked with an asterisk are detailed in **Denizens of Darkness**.

General Guidelines

Rule 0: Many classes have unique abilities that may interact with Ravenloft's tenets in unforeseeable ways. Whenever introducing new classes in your campaign, feel free to tweak unusual abilities to enhance the Gothic atmosphere. See the altered requirements for the blackguard below, for an example. If a class is unlucky enough to be riddled with restrictions, you may want to add or enhance an ability to restore the class's balance. Remember that the goal is to reshape characters to fit the Gothic paradigm, not to spoil players' fun by robbing their characters of all their empowering abilities.

Extraordinary Abilities: Most extraordinary abilities are unchanged in Ravenloft. The Dark Powers have little interest in the mundane trivialities of weapon proficiencies, combat tricks or rousing speeches.

Magic: All mortal magic, be it a spell, spell-like ability, psionics or supernatural ability, must adhere to the general guidelines for magic detailed in the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook.** If a class ability mimics an altered spell, then it is usually altered the same way. If the class ability mimics a spell that is unchanged in Ravenloft, then it too is usually unchanged.

Impossible Abilities: Due to the restrictions Ravenloft places on magic, on occasion a class ability, such as the ability to detect evil, may be rendered completely useless. Because class abilities are often central to a character's concept (much more so than a single spell on a list of many), you should replace these negated abilities with powers that are similar in scope but do not violate the Dark Powers' mandates. A few example replacements follow.

Detecting Moral Alignment: No mortal magic can detect moral alignment in Ravenloft. One option is to introduce an element of uncertainty, such as requiring a "blind" Sense Motive check (DC 30) to determine a subject's alignment. If the character fails the check, give an erroneous result, perhaps off by one or two steps. (CE might be confused for CN, for example.) Alternatively, replace the ability entirely with the ability to detect some other aspect of the subject's psyche. This could be the ability to detect law, chaos, fear, anger, whether the subject follows the character's religion and so on

Planar Travel: A few prestige classes offer the ability to hop from plane to plane. If Ravenloft renders this impossible, such as an astral projection ability, you may want to allow the character to travel from domain to domain instead, treating each domain as a separate plane. Even so, no mortal magic can cross a closed domain border.

Summoning: Ravenloft's restrictions on magic can severely hamper prestige classes that rely heavily on summoning allies. You may want to offer these characters the chance to take the Entities from the Id feat (see sidebar) to restore their lost prowess.

New Feat: Entities from the Id [Metamagic]

You can conjure forth creatures from the recesses of your mind.

Prerequisite: Ability to summon creatures; must have failed at least one Madness save.

Benefit: When summoning creatures, whether by using a summoning spell, class ability or other means, you have access to your full summoning list. These summoned creatures emerge from the Mists themselves, and thus automatically have the Mists descriptor. If the creature succeeds at its Will save when it first appears, then not only do you lose control, its alignment automatically shifts to evil.

Normal: You can summon only creatures already present in the domain. (See **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three, "Altered Magic," *Conjuration.*)

Immunities: Many classes grant immunity to certain types of energy, magic or attack forms such as poison, fire, compulsions and so forth. These supernatural immunities are usually unchanged, but they may falter in the face of the monstrous powers that control the Realm of Dread.

Immunity to Fear: As mentioned in the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook,** playing a character immune to fear in a game of Gothic adventure is really missing out on the fun. Replace a character's immunity to fear with a "free" +4 bonus on Fear saves. If this is a supernatural ability, only apply the bonus on "natural" fear saves; the character's immunity to magical fear generally remains intact. If this is an extraordinary ability, the +4 bonus applies to all Fear saves.

Other Immunities: These immunities cannot protect the character from the effects of a darklord's attacks or a closed domain border. When resisting a darklord's attacks, the immunity is reduced to a +4 bonus to the character's saving throw. Immunities granted by mere supernatural abilities falter entirely in the face of closed domain borders. For example, a druid with venom immunity is still vulnerable to Ivana Boritsi's lethal kiss and the closed borders of Borca.

Dread Companions: If a class grants a character an empathic or telepathic link with an animal companion (or an even stranger creature) then the companion automatically becomes a dread companion (see the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Two). If the character and her companion do not share a mental link, then the ability remains unchanged. Dread companions with unusual creature types (such as elemental, outsider, undead or construct) do not change their type to magical beast. Outsider dread companions lose their reality wrinkles entirely, having bound themselves to a mortal.

Turning and Rebuking: Any class that grants the ability to turn or rebuke the undead suffers the penalties detailed in the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Two, "Turning and Rebuking Undead." If the class can turn or rebuke other types of creatures, such as elementals or demons, the ability is typically unchanged.

Luck: Some classes may grant a character fortuitous luck, allowing her the ability to retry failed die rolls. This usually goes unchanged in Ravenloft, but no ability allows a mortal to reroll a powers check.

Outsider Heroes in Ravenloft

Within the paradigm of a Ravenloft campaign, outsiders are immortal entities from beyond the earthly realm. They are living philosophical concepts, not lowly creatures of mere flesh and blood. When they are composed of essential Good or Evil, outsiders' intense spiritual purity can even disrupt the planar fabric of the Realm of Dread, creating reality wrinkles. All outsiders adhere to a few basic rules.

Fiends: Any outsider in Ravenloft with the Evil descriptor can be considered a fiend. As detailed in the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook,** fiends that enter Ravenloft gain reality wrinkles and phylacteries. They can perform power rituals to acquire land-based powers, but this accumulates corruption points and reduces the size of their wrinkles. When a fiend reaches 22 corruption points, it loses its reality wrinkle entirely and is subject to powers checks as normal.

Celestials: Any outsider in Ravenloft with the Good descriptor can be considered a celestial. Celestials also gain reality wrinkles and phylacteries when they enter Ravenloft, but their wrinkles slowly degrade Ravenloft's planar fabric. Unless the celestial exerts itself to suppress these effects, creatures cannot naturally heal within a celestial's wrinkle, and over the course of days or weeks, all matter gradually degenerates into hideous forms before dissolving entirely into Mists. Celestials can perform power rituals to acquire corruption points and reduce their wrinkles, but they cannot gain land-based powers.

Ascended Outsiders: When a mortal's creature type permanently changes to "outsider" (such as a 20th-level monk), the character is said to have ascended. A nonneutral ascended outsider gains type descriptors (Chaotic, Evil, Good, Lawful) matching its ethical and moral alignment. A lawful evil monk would gain the Evil and Lawful descriptors, for example, and would thus be considered a fiend. The reality wrinkles of ascended fiends and celestials are half the radius (1,000 feet per HD) of those emitted by outsiders that were never mortal.

Native Outsiders: Outsiders that were spawned within Ravenloft itself (such as most ascended PCs) do not gain phylacteries; if destroyed, their spiritual essence simply disperses into the Mists.

The Mists Descriptor: When a hero ascends to become an outsider within Ravenloft, she can take the Mists descriptor if she wishes (see **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three, "Altered Magic," *Conjuration*). In terms that would concern a PC, such outsiders can pass through any closed domain border without harm, but they do not gain reality wrinkles, they cannot perform power rituals, and they can never leave the Realm of Dread. Indeed, they are literally just an extension of the Mists.

Poison Use and Sneak Attacks: Though these tactics may generally be considered underhanded, they are not evil in and of themselves and thus do not require powers checks.

Otherworldly Movement: Some classes provide unusual methods of travel, such as shadow walking, ethereal jaunts or a druid's woodland stride. None of these methods can cross a closed domain border. If a hero attempts to use mortal magic to do so, the magic is automatically dispelled at the border.

Changing Creature Type: Some prestige classes eventually change the character's type, permanently transforming her into a dragon, elemental, outsider, and so forth. These changes are seldom affected by the Dark Powers, and in some cases may offer immunities to the effects of domain border closures. A hero who has utterly transformed into a fire elemental, for example, can pass through the walls of flame that close Hazlan's borders without harm. See the sidebar "Outsider Heroes in Ravenloft" for more details.

Sample Prestige Classes

The prestige classes used here are taken from the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. All prestige class features altered by the Mists are listed below. Assume that any features not listed function normally in Ravenloft.

Arcane Archer

Arcane archers are unsurprisingly and exceedingly rare in the human-dominated Land of Mists. Most arcane archers serve as respected guardians for the elven cities of Sithicus or northeastern Darkon.

Altered Class Features

• **Imbue Arrow:** All spells imbued into arrows must follow the guidelines for altered magic in the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook.**

• ***Seeker Arrow:*** A *seeker arrow* cannot track its target across domain borders.

• ***Phase Arrow:*** A *phase arrow* may be blocked by ethereal resonance. Compare the arcane archer's Charisma to the rank of the resonance (see **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Five, "Ethereal Resonance") to determine if the arrow can pass through the resonance.

• ***Arrow of Death:*** Creatures immune to attacks requiring Fortitude saves (such as constructs and undead) cannot be slain by the enchantment of an *arrow of death*, but they do suffer standard damage.

Arcane Trickster

Most realms of Ravenloft are well-acquainted with arcane tricksters. This combination of roguery and arcane ability particularly appeals to half-Vistani.

Altered Class Features

• **Spells:** Some spells function differently in Ravenloft. See the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three, "Altered Magic."

Archmage

Archmages are rare in Ravenloft. Darklords tend to look askance at those who might acquire enough power to challenge them. Nonetheless, some do exist, mostly in realms where higher arcane learning is available. While there are few changes to the class beyond the spell alterations common to Ravenloft, the power levels archmagi can reach definitely draw the attention of the Dark Powers, who watch with more interest than normal to see if such power leads to corruption (as it does all too often).

Altered Class Features

• **Spells:** Some spells function differently in Ravenloft. See the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three, "Altered Magic."

Assassin

Sadly, Ravenloft is home to more than its fair share of assassins. These silent killers are thought to be especially prevalent in the upper ranks of the Kargat, Darkon's secret police. In Rokushima Táiyoo, the four *shujin* all keep assassins (called *ninja*) in their employ. Many assassins in Ravenloft have failed one or more powers checks, making them all the more unpredictable and dangerous.

Altered Class Features

• **Requirements:** Killing a victim solely for prestige is a particularly vile act; increase the chance of failing the powers check for this murder by half. (The premeditated murder of a good NPC would thus carry a 9% chance of failure.)

• **Spells:** Some spells function differently in Ravenloft. See the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three, "Altered Magic."

Blackguard

Blackguards are thankfully rare even in the Realm of Dread. Most blackguards, particularly

those who were once paladins, quickly come to the attention of the Dark Powers and are sealed away in their own domains. Lady Elena Faith-hold and the late Black Rose of Sithicus are Ravenloft's two most notorious examples of these fallen souls.

Altered Class Features

• **Requirements:** The Dark Powers pay special attention to paladins who fall from grace and remain unrepentant of their sins. Ex-paladins who have failed at least one powers check can become blackguards much more easily than members of any other class. In effect, the Dark Powers remove all obstacles from the fallen paladin's descent into darkness. The only criteria an ex-paladin must fulfill to qualify to become a blackguard are the following:

Alignment: Any evil.

Base Attack Bonus: +6

Knowledge (religion): 2 ranks

• ***Detect Good:*** No mortal magic can detect moral alignment in the Realm of Dread. In Ravenloft, this ability usually duplicates the effects of the spell *detect law*. Many blackguards have failed multiple powers checks; if so, the Dark Powers may replace this ability with some twisted equivalent. Elena Faith-hold believes she can *detect evil* when, in fact, she detects any strong emotion directed toward her.

• **Poison Use:** It is possible for an ex-paladin in Ravenloft to become a blackguard without consciously knowing it, as with Elena Faith-hold, who still believes that she is a true paladin. "Unwitting" blackguards are not skilled in the use of poison. When a blackguard accepts her true status, however, she gains this ability as normal.

• **Spells:** Some spells function differently in Ravenloft. See the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three, "Altered Magic."

• **Command Undead:** See the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Two, "Turning and Rebuking Undead."

• **Fiendish Servant:** A blackguard's fiendish servant is a dread companion (even if it were not, however, its behavior would hardly be less sinister).

Dragon Disciple

This prestige class does not exist in Ravenloft, as the background that would make it viable is incompatible with the world.

Duelist

This prestige class is most common in lands that have a cultural level of Renaissance such as Richemulot. Some important leaders keep duelists in their employ to fight challenges for them. Others act as mercenaries.

Altered Class Features

• None; as *Dungeon Master's Guide* duelist.

Dwarven Defender

Even less common than the arcane archer, dwarven defenders are rarely seen beyond Darkon's Mountains of Misery, where they typically serve as elite guards in dwarven strongholds. Dwarven defenders encountered elsewhere in Ravenloft are usually Darkonian soldiers traveling abroad to complete specific missions.

Altered Class Features

• None; as *Dungeon Master's Guide* dwarven defender.

Eldritch Knight

Eldritch Knights find employment both as valued henchmen and in adventuring groups. They are drawn to those realms where there exists the promise of learning new arcane spells to augment their weapons prowess.

Altered Class Features

• **Spells:** Some spells function differently in Ravenloft. See the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three, "Altered Magic."

Hierophant

These high level clerics are scarce in Ravenloft, but not unknown. Those who serve evil deities may attract the attention of the Dark Powers more quickly than those who ostensibly serve good, but all come under scrutiny for their use of certain of their powers.

Altered Class Features

• **Blast Infidel:** Use of this power requires the hierophant to make a Powers check as it employs negative energy to cause harm.

• **Mastery of Energy:** See the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Two, "Turning and Rebuking Undead." Again, those employing negative energy must make a Powers Check when utilizing this power.

• **Spells:** Some spells function differently in Ravenloft. See the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three, "Altered Magic."

Horizon Walker

Though horizon walkers exist anywhere people desire to see what's over the next hilltop, this class is limited by the very nature of the Dread Realms. Nonetheless, their reputation for adaptability to many terrains makes horizon walkers natural as explorers – and sometimes spies.

Altered Class Features

• **Terrain Mastery:** Although horizon walkers may achieve a mystical union with the terrain they are in, they find it no easier to cross from one realm to another than anyone else. Further, they cannot use their attunement to cross a border closed by a darklord.

• **Planar Terrain Mastery:** Horizon walkers are unable to progress beyond 5th level in this prestige class so long as they remain in Ravenloft. Leaving Ravenloft is as difficult for horizon walkers as anyone else.

Loremaster

Because they focus on knowledge and subtle magic over overt displays of arcane power, loremasters often face less hostility than other spellcasters in Ravenloft. This reputation can be deceptive, however, for loremasters are no less dangerous than any other powerful spellcaster. Many loremasters are humble sages, but some turn their studies toward dark and forbidden subjects. These loremasters often spread terrible suffering before they succumb to madness or fall prey to their own experiments.

Altered Class Features

• **Class Skills:** Hypnosis (Cha) is a class skill for the loremaster.

• **Spells per Day:** Some spells function differently in Ravenloft. See the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three, "Altered Magic."

• **Secret:** Loremasters in Ravenloft often delve in mysteries better left forgotten. If the character focuses on the Realm of Dread's secrets, she can extend Table 6–13 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* with the following three entries:

• **Lore:** Loremasters suffer the same circumstance penalties to lore checks as bards do to bardic knowledge checks. (See the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Two, "Bard.")

Mystic Theurge

The mystic theurge can be found in any realm where clerics and arcane spellcasters flourish. As with many powerful spellcasters, the versatility of these practitioners can lead them into arrogance, leading to the need for Powers checks.

Altered Class Features

• **Spells:** Some spells function differently in Ravenloft. See the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three, "Altered Magic."

Red Wizard

The Red Wizard prestige class is not available in Ravenloft, as the class belongs only in the *Forgotten Realms* setting, published by Wizards of the Coast. If a Red Wizard finds his way into Ravenloft, he is unable to gain any more levels as a Red Wizard until leaving the setting. He cannot access any powers from circle magic. Finally, the Dark powers are almost certain to be immediately interested in a Red Wizard's doings.

Altered Class Features

• **Spells:** Some spells function differently in Ravenloft. See the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three, "Altered Magic."

Shadowdancer

Shadowdancers in Ravenloft often work as spies or assassins. Having tied themselves so closely to the dangerous Plane of Shadow, most shadowdancers have a reputation for insanity or recklessness and are seldom trusted even by their masters. Shadowdancers are rumored to be relatively common among the Arak, however.

Altered Class Features

• **Shadow Illusion:** See the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three, "Altered Magic," *Illusion (Shadow)*.

Level + Int Modifier	Secret	Effect
11	Morbid arcana	+1 effective cleric level to turn or rebuke undead
12	Hidden past	+1 bonus on all saves against a specific darklord's attacks
13	Unseen path	location and method of opening one portal out of Ravenloft

• **Summon Shadow:** If a shadowdancer dies, any shadows she has summoned immediately become chaotic evil. These shadows are under the control of the slain shadowdancer's shadow (see below).

• **Shadow Jump:** This ability does not allow the shadowdancer to cross a closed domain border.

• **Death's Shadow:** When a shadowdancer dies, within 1d4 rounds her shadow animates as a chaotic evil shadow (see the *Monster Manual*) with Hit Dice equal to the character's shadowdancer levels. Remember that advancing in Hit Dice also affects the shadow's other combat qualities. The character cannot be *raised* or otherwise restored to life until this shadow is destroyed.

Thaumaturgist

The thaumaturgist prestige class does not exist in Ravenloft. The nature of the class, with its emphasis on summoning extraplanar creatures, precludes its usefulness since such creatures cannot return to their home planes and inevitably attack their summoner when they discover this.

NPC Classes

The NPC classes (*Dungeon Master's Guide*, Chapter 4) are all present and widespread in the Land of Mists. The vast majority of Ravenloft's population is, after all, just normal folk trying to live their lives in peace.

In game terms, the aristocrat, commoner, expert, and warrior have no remarkable abilities, so all remain unaltered in Ravenloft. The following changes apply only to the spellcasting adept:

Altered Class Features

• **Spells:** Some spells function differently in Ravenloft. See the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three, "Altered Magic."

• **Familiar:** An adept's familiar is a dread companion. See the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Two, "Dread Companion."

The Everyman Hero

NPC classes are far less proficient at adventuring than are the core classes found in the *Player's Handbook*, though the expert and aristocrat can make viable player characters in campaigns that focus on investigation and social interaction rather than combat. That said — and if your players are willing — having the players run adept, warrior or even commoner heroes can make for an interesting change of pace. Having your players use NPC classes for their characters is particularly effective if your goal is to accentuate the menace inherent in Gothic adventures. Indeed, if you want to reduce the power of the PCs in your game, this route is much more straightforward, and often much less frustrating for the players, than overly restricting the rewards or abilities of the standard adventuring classes.

Unless your campaign is steeped in horror and helplessness, however, these everyman heroes usually work best in limited doses. Your group might enjoy playing NPC classes for a single, stand-alone adventure, for example. Unlike standard Gothic adventure scenarios, where the heroes usually try to overcome menacing situations, everyman heroes usually have to concentrate much more on simply surviving them. The cut scenes concept presented in Chapter One offers an excellent technique for incorporating everyman heroes into an ongoing campaign. For example, you might arrange for the players' usual adventurers to discover a scrawled diary in an old, forgotten watchtower. The heroes skim through its last entries, reading about the final hours of a group of merchants who took shelter there during a raging storm. As they waited through the night, spectral creatures emerged from the darkness to pick them off one by one....

Except, rather than merely reciting this account to your players, you might have them use the expert and commoner classes to create the merchants, then let them play out the story themselves. The more the merchants can learn before they're wiped out, the more information the characters can gain. Eventually, the last everyman is surrounded by the seething darkness, protected only by faltering light of her lantern. As she pens her final words, the tale ends — and the players' regular heroes realize that the sun has set and the evil is emerging once more.

When determining Encounter Levels for these "NPC adventures," keep the limitations of the NPC classes in mind. A party of 3rd-level clerics might have no trouble defeating a single, CR 3 ghast, but a party of 3rd-level commoners could well be slaughtered. As a rule of thumb when determining the effective level of an everyman hero, three levels of aristocrat or expert is roughly equal to two levels of any adventuring class. For adept and warriors, the ratio is two NPC levels to one adventuring level. For commoners, the ratio is three to one.

When setting the appropriate EL for an encounter, for example, the effective level of a 4th-level fighter or wizard is roughly on par with a 6th-level aristocrat or expert, an 8th-level adept or warrior or a 12th-level commoner.

Sample Everyman NPCs

Despite how life may appear from the average adventurer's point of view, both heroes and horrors are societal aberrations in the Land of Mists; most of Ravenloft's denizens are entirely normal folk. Most heroes interact with countless humble bystanders during their exploits, ranging from eccentric hermits to suspicious librarians to eager blacksmiths. Because these NPCs are so vital to the setting, this section presents pregenerated NPCs for all levels of the five NPC classes detailed in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Notes on NPC Design

The following NPC statistics are organized along the same lines as those found in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, Tables 4–12 through 4–22. These NPCs represent the "mundane" individuals the heroes frequently encounter in their adventures. As such, unlike the sample NPCs presented in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, these characters have average (rather than elite) ability scores and hit points.

Some class and level combinations are presented here for convenience rather than logic. Unlike adventuring heroes, most folk are quite comfortable with an uneventful life, and thus few reach the higher levels. The person who reached 20th level as a commoner would be a rare creature indeed.

Skills: Skill abbreviations are Alch (Alchemy), Blu (Bluff), Con (Concentration), Crft (Craft [any]), Dipl (Diplomacy), Intim (Intimidate), Prof (Profession [any]), S Mot (Sense Motive), and Spellc (Spellcraft).

Wealth: NPCs using NPCs classes use the *Dungeon Master's Guide* Table 4–23 to determine the value of their gear. Note that the typical commoner receives one-tenth of the listed amount by level.

Table 2–7: NPC Adept

Lvl	hp	AC	Init	Spd	Dagger (1d4)	Light Crossbow (1d10)	F/R/W	Alch	Con	Spellc	Spells per Day
1st	3	10	+0	30 ft.	+0 (+0 damage)	+0 (+0 damage)	+0/+0/+3	+3	+3	+3	3/2
2nd	7	10	+0	30 ft.	+2 (+0)	+1 (+0)	+0/+0/+4	+4	+3	+4	3/2
3rd	10	10	+0	30 ft.	+2 (+0)	+1 (+0)	+1/+1/+4	+4	+4	+5	3/3
4th	14	10	+0	30 ft.	+3 (+0)	+3 (+0)	+1/+1/+5	+5	+4	+6	3/3
5th	17	10	+0	30 ft.	+3 (+0)	+3 (+0)	+1/+1/+5	+5	+5	+7	3/3/1
6th	21	10	+0	30 ft.	+4 (+0)	+4 (+0)	+2/+2/+6	+6	+5	+8	3/3/1
7th	24	10	+0	30 ft.	+4 (+0)	+4 (+0)	+2/+2/+6	+6	+6	+9	3/3/2
8th	28	10	+0	30 ft.	+5 (+0)	+5 (+0)	+2/+2/+8	+7	+6	+10	3/4/3
9th	31	10	+0	30 ft.	+5 (+0)	+5 (+0)	+3/+3/+8	+7	+7	+11	3/4/3/1
10th	35	10	+0	30 ft.	+6 (+0)	+6 (+0)	+3/+3/+9	+8	+7	+12	3/4/3/1
11th	38	10	+0	30 ft.	+6 (+0)	+6 (+0)	+3/+3/+9	+8	+8	+13	3/4/4/2
12th	42	10	+0	30 ft.	+7/+2 (+1)	+7/+2 (+0)	+4/+4/+10	+9	+8	+14	3/4/4/2
13th	45	10	+0	30 ft.	+7/+2 (+1)	+8/+3 (+1)	+4/+4/+10	+9	+9	+15	3/4/4/2/1
14th	49	10	+0	30 ft.	+8/+3 (+1)	+9/+4 (+1)	+4/+4/+11	+10	+9	+16	3/4/4/2/1
15th	52	10	+0	30 ft.	+8/+3 (+1)	+9/+4 (+1)	+5/+5/+11	+10	+10	+17	3/4/4/3/2
16th	56	11	+0	30 ft.	+9/+4 (+1)	+10/+5 (+1)	+5/+5/+13	+11	+10	+18	3/4/4/4/2
17th	59	11	+0	30 ft.	+9/+4 (+1)	+10/+5 (+1)	+6/+6/+14	+11	+11	+19	3/4/4/4/2/1
18th	63	11	+0	30 ft.	+9/+4 (+0)	+10/+5 (+1)	+7/+7/+15	+12	+11	+20	3/4/4/4/2/1
19th	66	11	+0	30 ft.	+9/+4 (+0)	+10/+5 (+1)	+7/+7/+15	+12	+12	+21	3/4/4/4/3/2
20th	70	11	+0	30 ft.	+10/+5 (+0)	+11/+6 (+1)	+9/+9/+18	+13	+12	+22	3/4/4/4/3/2

NPC Adept

Starting Ability Scores: Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Increased Ability Scores: 4th, Wis 13; 8th, Wis 14; 12th, Wis 15; 16th, Wis 16; 20th, Wis 17.

Feats: 1st, Scribe Scroll; 3rd, Brew Potion; 6th, Craft Wand; 9th, Empower Spell; 12th, Enlarge Spell; 15th, Extend Spell; 18th, Maximize Spell.

Class Features: 2nd, Summon (dread) familiar.

Armor: None (1st–20th).

Dagger (Melee): Normal (1st), masterwork (2nd–11th), *+1* (12th–18th), *+1 ghost touch* (19th–20th).

Light Crossbow (Ranged): Normal (1st–3rd), masterwork (4th–20th).

Bolts: 10 normal (1st–12th), 50 *+1* (13th–20th).

Potions: *Vision* (3rd–10th), *cat's grace* (5th–9th), *delay poison* (6th–10th), *invisibility* (7th–14th), *neutralize poison* (9th–17th), 2 *cure serious wounds* (10th–17th), 2 *bull's strength*, 2 *cat's grace* (11th–16th), 2 *fire breath* (16th–18th), 2 *heroism* (16th–20th)

Scrolls: 4 *cure light wounds* (1st–5th), 2 *cure moderate wounds* (6th–9th), 2 *see invisibility* (8th–20th), 6 *cure moderate wounds* (10th–15th), 3 *polymorph other, stoneskin* (14th–20th), 2 *break enchantment, raise dead* (20th)

Wands: *Invisibility* (15th–20th), *bull's strength* (17th–20th), *lightning bolt* (18th–20th)

Other Gear: *Ring of protection +1* (16th–18th), *cloak of resistance +1* (17th–19th), *hand of the mage* (17th–20th), *ring of protection +2* (18th–20th), *candle of truth, cloak of resistance +3* (20th).

Table 2–8: NPC Aristocrat

Lvl	hp	AC	Init	Spd	Longsword (1d8)	Comp. Longbow (1d8)	F/R/W	Blu	Dipl	S Mot
1st	4	14	+0	30 ft.	+0 (+0 damage)	+0 (+0 damage)	+0/+0/+2	+5	+7	+4
2nd	9	16	+0	30 ft.	+1 (+0)	+1 (+0)	+0/+0/+3	+6	+8	+5
3rd	13	16	+0	30 ft.	+3 (+0)	+2 (+0)	+1/+1/+3	+7	+9	+8
4th	18	17	+0	20 ft.	+4 (+0)	+3 (+0)	+1/+1/+4	+8	+10	+9
5th	22	17	+0	20 ft.	+4 (+0)	+4 (+0)	+1/+1/+4	+9	+11	+10
6th	27	17	+0	20 ft.	+5 (+0)	+6 (+0)	+2/+2/+5	+10	+12	+11
7th	31	17	+0	20 ft.	+6 (+0)	+7 (+0)	+2/+2/+5	+11	+13	+12
8th	36	19	+0	20 ft.	+7/+2 (+0)	+8/+3 (+0)	+2/+2/+6	+13	+15	+13
9th	40	19	+0	20 ft.	+7/+2 (+0)	+8/+3 (+0)	+3/+3/+6	+14	+16	+14
10th	45	20	+0	20 ft.	+8/+3 (+0)	+9/+4 (+0)	+3/+3/+7	+15	+17	+15
11th	49	20	+0	20 ft.	+9/+4 (+0)	+10/+5 (+0)	+3/+3/+7	+16	+18	+16
12th	54	20	+0	20 ft.	+11/+6 (+0)	+11/+6 (+0)	+4/+4/+8	+17	+19	+17
13th	58	20	+0	20 ft.	+11/+6 (+1)	+11/+6 (+0)	+4/+4/+8	+18	+20	+18
14th	63	21	+0	20 ft.	+12/+7 (+1)	+12/+7 (+0)	+4/+4/+9	+19	+21	+19
15th	67	21	+0	20 ft.	+13/+8/+3 (+1)	+13/+8/+3 (+0)	+5/+5/+9	+20	+22	+20
16th	72	23	+0	20 ft.	+14/+9/+4 (+1)	+14/+9/+4 (+1)	+5/+5/+10	+21	+23	+22
17th	76	23	+0	20 ft.	+15/+10/+5 (+2)	+14/+9/+4 (+1)	+5/+5/+10	+22	+24	+23
18th	81	24	+0	20 ft.	+16/+11/+6 (+2)	+15/+10/+5 (+1)	+6/+6/+11	+23	+25	+24
19th	85	24	+0	20 ft.	+18/+13/+8 (+3)	+16/+11/+6 (+1)	+6/+6/+11	+24	+26	+25
20th	90	24	+0	20 ft.	+19/+14/+9 (+3+1d6)	+17/+12/+7 (+1)	+6/+6/+12	+25	+27	+26

NPC Aristocrat

Starting Ability Scores: Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 11, Wis 10, Cha 12.

Increased Ability Scores: 4th, Int 12; 8th, Cha 13; 12th, Wis 11; 16th, Wis 12; 20th, Cha 14.

Feats: 1st, Skill Focus (Diplomacy); 3rd, Skill Focus (Sense Motive); 6th, Leadership; 9th, Mounted Combat; 12th, Weapon Focus (longsword); 15th, Ride-By Attack; 18th, Spirited Charge.

Armor: Studded leather, small wooden shield (1st), chain shirt (2nd–3rd), large steel shield (2nd–5th), masterwork chain mail (4th–7th), masterwork large steel shield (6th–15th), masterwork half plate (8th–9th), masterwork full plate (10th–13th), locked gauntlet (11th–20th), *+1 full plate* (14th–17th), *+1 large steel shield* (16th–20th), *+2 full plate* (18th–20th).

Longsword (Melee): Normal (1st–2nd), masterwork (3rd–12th), *+1* (13th–16th), *+2* (17th–18th), +3 (19th), *+3 flaming* (20th).

Composite Longbow (Ranged): Normal (1st–4th), masterwork (5th–15th), *+1* (16th–20th).

Arrows: 20 normal (1st–5th), 20 masterwork (6th–13th), 20 *+1* (14th–20th).

Mount: None (1st–3rd), light horse (4th–6th), light warhorse (7th–8th), heavy warhorse (9th–20th).

Barding: None (1st–6th), studded leather barding (7th–8th), masterwork studded leather barding (9th–10th), masterwork chain mail (11th), masterwork half plate (12th–14th), masterwork full plate (15th–17th), *+1 full plate* (18th–20th).

Potions: 8 *cure light wounds* (9th–20th), *cure moderate wounds* (10th), 3 *cure moderate wounds* (11th), 4 *cure moderate wounds* (12th–20th), *delay poison* (13th–20th), *cure serious wounds* (15th–20th), *neutralize poison* (18th–20th), 4 *heroism* (19th–20th).

Other Gear: Signet ring (1st–20th), courtier's outfit (2nd–3rd), noble's outfit (4th–6th), bit and bridle (4th–20th), riding saddle (4th–8th), royal outfit (7th–20th), military saddle (9th–20th), *ring of protection +1* (16th–20th).

Table 2–9: NPC Commoner

Lvl	hp	AC	Init	Spd	Dagger (1d4)	Sling (1d4)	F/R/W	Crft	Prof
1st	2	10	+0	30 ft.	+0 (+0 damage)	−4 (+0 damage)	+0/+0/+0	+6	+4
2nd	5	10	+0	30 ft.	+1 (+0)	−3 (+0)	+0/+0/+0	+7	+5
3rd	7	10	+0	30 ft.	+1 (+0)	−3 (+0)	+1/+1/+1	+8	+8
4th	14	10	+0	30 ft.	+2 (+0)	−2 (+0)	+2/+1/+1	+9	+9
5th	17	10	+0	30 ft.	+2 (+0)	−2 (+0)	+2/+1/+1	+10	+10
6th	21	10	+0	30 ft.	+3 (+0)	+3 (+0)	+3/+2/+2	+11	+11
7th	24	10	+0	30 ft.	+3 (+0)	+3 (+0)	+3/+2/+2	+12	+12
8th	28	10	+0	30 ft.	+5 (+1)	+4 (+0)	+3/+2/+2	+13	+13
9th	31	12	+0	30 ft.	+6 (+1)	+4 (+0)	+4/+3/+3	+14	+14
10th	35	12	+0	30 ft.	+7 (+1)	+5 (+0)	+4/+3/+3	+15	+15
11th	38	14	+0	30 ft.	+7 (+1)	+5 (+0)	+4/+3/+3	+16	+16
12th	42	15	+1	30 ft.	+8/+3 (+1)	+7/+2 (+0)	+5/+5/+4	+17	+17
13th	45	15	+1	30 ft.	+8/+3 (+1)	+7/+2 (+0)	+5/+5/+4	+18	+18
14th	49	15	+1	30 ft.	+9/+4 (+1)	+8/+3 (+0)	+5/+5/+4	+19	+19
15th	52	17	+1	30 ft.	+9/+4 (+1)	+8/+3 (+0)	+6/+6/+5	+20	+20
16th	56	17	+1	30 ft.	+10/+5 (+1)	+9/+4 (+0)	+6/+6/+5	+21	+21
17th	59	17	+1	30 ft.	+10/+5 (+1)	+9/+4 (+0)	+6/+6/+5	+22	+22
18th	63	18	+1	30 ft.	+11/+6 (+1)	+10/+5 (+0)	+7/+7/+6	+23	+23
19th	66	18	+1	30 ft.	+11/+6 (+1)	+10/+5 (+0)	+7/+7/+6	+24	+24
20th	70	19	+1	30 ft.	+13/+8 (+2)	+11/+6 (+0)	+7/+7/+6	+26	+25

NPC Commoner

Starting Ability Scores: Str 11, Dex 11, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10.

Increased Ability Scores: 4th, Con 12; 8th, Str 12; 12th, Dex 12; 16th, Int 11; 20th, Int 12.

Feats: 1st, Skill Focus (Craft or Profession); 3rd, Skill Focus (Craft or Profession); 6th, Simple Weapon Proficiency; 9th, Armor Proficiency (light); 12th, Endurance; 15th, Shield Proficiency; 18th, Weapon Focus (dagger).

Armor: None (1st–8th), leather (9th–10th), masterwork chain shirt (11th–17th), masterwork large steel shield (15th–19th), *chain shirt +1* (18th–20th), *large steel shield +1* (20th).

Dagger (Melee): Normal (1st–4th), silvered (5th–8th), masterwork silvered (9th–18th), *+1 silvered* (19th–20th).

Sling (Ranged): Normal (1st–12th), masterwork (13th–20th).

Bullets: 10 normal (1st–3rd), 10 silvered (4th–15th), 10 masterwork silvered (16th–20th).

Potions: 2 *cure light wounds* (10th–15th), *cure moderate wounds* (13th), 2 *cure moderate wounds* (14th), 3 *cure moderate wounds* (15th–16th), 4 *cure moderate wounds* (17th–18th), 2 *cure moderate wounds* (19th–20th).

Other Gear: Artisan's tools (2nd–20th).

Table 2–10: NPC Expert

Lvl	hp	AC	Init	Spd	Dagger (1d4)	Light Crossbow (1d10)	F/R/W	Skill I	Skill II	Skill III	Skills IV–
1st	3	10	+0	30 ft.	+0 (+0 damage)	+0 (+0 damage)	+0/+0/+2	+7	+5	+5	+4
2nd	7	13	+0	30 ft.	+1 (+0)	+1 (+0)	+0/+0/+3	+8	+6	+6	+5
3rd	10	13	+0	30 ft.	+2 (+0)	+1 (+0)	+1/+1/+3	+9	+9	+7	+6
4th	14	14	+0	30 ft.	+3 (+0)	+2 (+0)	+1/+1/+4	+10	+10	+8	+7
5th	17	14	+0	30 ft.	+3 (+0)	+3 (+0)	+1/+1/+4	+11	+11	+9	+8
6th	21	14	+0	30 ft.	+4 (+0)	+4 (+0)	+2/+2/+5	+12	+12	+12	+9
7th	24	14	+0	30 ft.	+4 (+0)	+5 (+0)	+2/+2/+5	+13	+13	+13	+10
8th	28	14	+0	30 ft.	+5 (+0)	+6 (+0)	+2/+2/+6	+15	+15	+15	+12
9th	31	14	+0	30 ft.	+5 (+0)	+6 (+0)	+3/+3/+6	+16	+16	+16	+13 (+2)
10th	35	15	+0	30 ft.	+6 (+0)	+7 (+0)	+3/+3/+7	+17	+17	+17	+14 (+2)
11th	38	15	+0	30 ft.	+6 (+0)	+7 (+0)	+3/+3/+7	+18	+18	+18	+15 (+2)
12th	42	15	+0	30 ft.	+7/+2 (+1)	+8/+3 (+0)	+4/+4/+8	+19	+19	+19	+16 (+2)
13th	45	16	+0	30 ft.	+7/+2 (+1)	+8/+3 (+0)	+4/+4/+8	+20	+20	+20	+17 (+2)
14th	49	16	+0	30 ft.	+8/+3 (+1)	+9/+4 (+1)	+4/+4/+9	+21	+21	+21	+18 (+2)
15th	52	17	+0	30 ft.	+8/+3 (+1)	+9/+4 (+1)	+5/+5/+9	+22	+22	+22	+19 (+2)
16th	56	17	+0	30 ft.	+9/+4 (+1)	+10/+5 (+2)	+5/+5/+10	+23	+23	+23	+20 (+2)
17th	59	17	+0	30 ft.	+10/+5 (+2)	+10/+5 (+2)	+5/+5/+10	+24	+24	+24	+21 (+2)
18th	63	18	+0	30 ft.	+11/+6 (+2)	+11/+6 (+2)	+6/+6/+11	+25	+25	+25	+22 (+2)
19th	66	18	+0	30 ft.	+11/+6 (+2)	+13/+8 (+4)	+6/+6/+11	+26	+26	+26	+22 (+2)
20th	70	18	+0	30 ft.	+13/+8 (+3)	+14/+9 (+4)	+6/+6/+12	+28	+28	+28	+27

NPC Expert

Starting Ability Scores: Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 11, Cha 10.

Increased Ability Scores: 4th, Int 13; 8th, Int 14; 12th, Wis 12; 16th, Int 15; 20th, Int 16.

Skills: Skill packages vary widely from one expert to the next. The scores above reflect a scholar trained in a wide range of Knowledge skills; all skills are thus modified by Intelligence. Other experts may specialize in different areas; insert whatever skills are most appropriate and adjust the statistics accordingly. The (+2) notations next to skills IV–VII represent the Skill Focus feats below; apply them as appropriate.

Feats: 1st, Skill Focus (skill I); 3rd, Skill Focus (skill II); 6th, Skill Focus (skill III); 9th, Skill Focus (skill IV); 12th, Skill Focus (skill V); 15th, Skill Focus (skill VI); 18th, Skill Focus (skill VII).

Armor: None (1st), studded leather (2nd–3rd), masterwork chain shirt (4th–9th), *chain shirt +1* (10th–14th), *chain shirt +2* (15th–20th).

Dagger (Melee): Normal (1st–2nd), masterwork (3rd–11th), *+1* (12th–16th), *+2* (17th–19th), *+3* (20th).

Light Crossbow (Ranged): Normal (1st–4th), masterwork (5th–13th), *+1* (14th–18th), *+2* (19th–20th).

Bolts: 10 normal (1st–6th), 10 masterwork (7th–15th), 10 *+1* (16th–18th), 10 *+2* (19th–20th).

Potions: 2 *cure light wounds* (8th–11th), 3 *cure moderate wounds* (11th–13th), *delay poison* (11th–12th), 2 *delay poison* (13th–20th), 6 *cure moderate wounds* (14th–20th).

Other Gear: Artisan's tools (1st), magnifying glass (1st–20th), masterwork artisan's tools (2nd–

20th), hourglass (2nd–20th), healer's kit (2nd–20th), alchemist's lab (6th–20th), mantle clock (8th–20th), pocket watch (9th–20th), *ring of protection +1* (13th–17th), *lens of detection* (16th–20th), *ring of protection +2* (18th–20th), *universal solvent* (18th–20th), *Keoghtom's ointment* (20th).

Table 2–11: NPC Warrior

Lvl	hp	AC	Init	Spd	Longsword (1d8)	Comp. Longbow (1d8)	F/R/W	Intim	Ride
1st	4	14	+0	30 ft.	+3 (+1 damage)	+1 (+0 damage)	+2/+0/+0	+2	+2
2nd	9	14	+0	30 ft.	+4 (+1)	+2 (+0)	+3/+0/+0	+3	+2
3rd	13	14	+0	30 ft.	+6 (+1)	+4 (+0)	+3/+1/+1	+3	+3
4th	22	14	+0	30 ft.	+7 (+1)	+6 (+0)	+5/+1/+1	+4	+3
5th	27	14	+0	30 ft.	+8 (+1)	+8 (+0)	+5/+1/+1	+4	+4
6th	33	15	+0	30 ft.	+9/+4 (+1)	+9/+4 (+0)	+6/+2/+2	+5	+4
7th	38	18	+0	30 ft.	+10/+5 (+1)	+10/+5 (+0)	+6/+2/+2	+5	+5
8th	44	18	+0	30 ft.	+11/+6 (+1)	+11/+6 (+0)	+7/+2/+2	+6	+5
9th	49	19	+0	30 ft.	+12/+7 (+1)	+12/+7 (+0)	+7/+3/+3	+6	+6
10th	55	20	+0	30 ft.	+13/+8 (+1)	+13/+8 (+0)	+8/+3/+3	+7	+6
11th	60	21	+0	30 ft.	+14/+9/+4 (+1)	+14/+9/+4 (+0)	+8/+3/+3	+7	+7
12th	66	21	+0	30 ft.	+16/+11/+6 (+3)	+15/+10/+5 (+0)	+9/+4/+4	+8	+7
13th	71	21	+0	30 ft.	+17/+12/+7 (+3)	+16/+11/+6 (+1)	+9/+4/+4	+8	+8
14th	77	22	+0	30 ft.	+18/+13/+8 (+3)	+17/+12/+7 (+2)	+10/+4/+4	+9	+8
15th	82	23	+0	30 ft.	+19/+14/+9 (+3)	+18/+13/+8 (+2)	+10/+5/+5	+9	+9
16th	88	24	+0	30 ft.	+20/+15/+10/+5 (+3)	+19/+14/+9/+4 (+2)	+11/+5/+5	+10	+9
17th	93	24	+0	30 ft.	+22/+17/+12/+7 (+4)	+20/+15/+10/+5 (+2)	+11/+5/+5	+10	+10
18th	99	25	+0	30 ft.	+23/+18/+13/+8 (+4)	+22/+17/+12/+6 (+3)	+12/+6/+6	+11	+10
19th	104	25	+0	30 ft.	+24/+19/+14/+9 (+4)	+24/+19/+14/+9 (+4)	+14/+8/+8	+12	+11
20th	110	26	+0	30 ft.	+27/+2/+17/+12 (+6)	+25/+20/+15/+10 (+4)	+15/+8/+8	+13	+11

NPC Warrior

Starting Ability Scores: Str 12, Dex 10, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10.

Increased Ability Scores: 4th, Con 12; 8th, Str 13; 12th, Str 14; 16th, Str 15; 20th, Str 16.

Feats: 1st, Weapon Focus (longsword); 3rd, Weapon Focus (longbow); 6th, Power Attack; 9th, Dodge; 12th, Cleave; 15th, Great Cleave; 18th, Mobility.

Armor: Studded leather (1st), small steel shield (1st–5th), masterwork studded leather (2nd–6th), masterwork large steel shield (6th–10th), masterwork banded mail (7th–8th), masterwork half plate (9th), masterwork full plate (10th–13th), *large steel shield +1* (11th–17th), *full plate +1* (14th–15th), *full plate +2* (16th–20th), *large steel shield +2* (18th–20th).

Longsword (Melee): Normal (1st–2nd), masterwork (3rd–11th), *+1* (12th–16th), *+2* (17th–19th), +3 (20th).

Composite Longbow (Ranged): Normal (1st–3rd), masterwork (4th–12th), *+1* (13th–17th), *+2* (18th–20th).

Arrows: 20 normal (1st–4th), 20 masterwork (5th–13th), 20 *+1* (14th–18th), 20 *+2* (19th–20th).

Potions: *Cure moderate wounds* (6th–7th), 3 *cure moderate wounds* (8th–13th), 2 *bull's strength* (9th–20th), 5 *cure moderate wounds* (14th–17th), 2 *heroism* (15th–19th), 3 *cure serious wounds* (16th–20th).

Other Gear: None (1st–14th), *ring of protection +1* (15th–19th), *cloak of resistance +2* (19th–20th), *ring of protection +2* (20th).

Table 2–12: NPC Class Gear Value

NPC Level	Value of Gear
1st	150 gp
2nd	300 gp
3rd	600 gp
4th	900 gp
5th	1,200 gp
6th	1,600 gp
7th	2,000 gp
8th	2,600 gp
9th	3,400 gp
10th	4,500 gp
11th	5,800 gp
12th	7,500 gp
13th	9,800 gp
14th	13,000 gp
15th	17,000 gp
16th	22,000 gp
17th	28,000 gp
18th	36,000 gp
19th	47,000 gp
20th	61,000 gp

Altered Psionics

Not Chaos, not
The darkest pit of lowest Erebus,
Nor aught of blinder vacancy, scooped out
By help of dreams — can breed such fear and awe
As fall upon us often when we look
Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man.

— William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*

The crowd grew silent as the barefoot, bearded old man, his robes barely covering his scrawny body, approached the fire pit, its coals glowing white-hot. Vangelia and Demara pushed their way to the front of the crowd, followed by Timorian, who feigned disinterest but watched closely nonetheless.

The old man paused at one end of the fire pit, closed his eyes and brought his hands to his chest, palms together and fingers pointed upward in a "v." For a few minutes, all he did was breathe. Timorian recognized a meditative trance, not very different from his own mindset when he began his daily devotions to Ezra.

A gasp went up from the crowd as the old man opened his eyes and stepped forward onto the hot coals. Step by step, he trod upon them, his face registering no pain. When he reached the other side, Vangelia let her breath out in one long sigh. "I don't smell any burnt flesh," she said, her voice echoing the awe expressed by many others in the crowd. "How did he do that?"

Timorian shook his head. "I could sense no magic about him," the priest said, "nor the work of any god."

"He says it's the power of his mind," a townsman said to the three companions. "Whatever that means."

A clairvoyant sets his mind adrift in the astral void, seeking the creature that left a bloodied glove at the scene of grisly murder. A yogi traces his *chakras* on his body in his mind's eye, and his flesh hardens against the touch of blades. The alien synapses of an illithid crackle with eldritch fire, and its fragile mammalian foe crumble to their knees. Like magic, psionics grants mere mortals the power to bend reality to their will. And like magic, psionics does not escape untouched from the corrupting hand of the Dark Powers.

This section details the alterations to the rules presented in the *Psionics Handbook* that apply in the Ravenloft campaign setting. These alterations may also be useful to any DM who wishes to utilize psionics in a horror campaign or to simply lend psionics a more sinister tone in a traditional fantasy campaign.

The rules presented in this section assume that you are not using the psionics rules variants (see *Psionics Handbook*, Chapter 4, "Psionics are Different").

Classes

Psion

Psions are a rarity in the Realm of Dread. Hidden among the population of most domains, there have always been a select few who discover a perplexing talent for psionics. These are generally hermits who develop their powers in secret, perhaps not fully understanding their nature. Among the Thaani of Immol, such talented individuals are slightly more common, although many in their community speak of dire repercussions from tapping this alien gift.

A true psionic tradition is only found in Sri Raji, where psions, known as *yogis*, pass their knowledge on to selected disciples. Rajian psions teach that the hellish reality in which all mortals dwell is an illusion, and that one can sidestep the parameters of that illusion by altering one's perceptions. In this way, the delusions of self, space, and time become meaningless, and anything becomes possible.

Powers: Some powers function differently in Ravenloft. See "Altered Powers" below.

Psicrystal: Although they are not creatures, psicrystals encoded in Ravenloft are considered dread companions (see **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Two, "Dread Companions"). The personalities of dread psicrystals are malicious exaggerations of the personality types described in the *Psionics Handbook*, Chapter 1. A dread psicrystal exhibits the worst traits of its personality type, and denigrates all other creatures who do not share its outlook.

A dread psicrystal is less concerned with acting on its master's suppressed desires than in stoking its master's ego. The psicrystal seeks to bring out its own overwhelming personality type in its master, to feed the splinter that formed its own consciousness until it swells to dominate the master's personality. In effect, the psicrystal wishes to convince its master to think like it does. The most powerful dread psicrystals thoroughly brainwash their masters, steering them toward the megalomaniacal fringes of their personality type.

The strategy that a dread psicrystal pursues to subvert its master's thoughts varies according to the psicrystal's personality. The suggestions given below correspond to the personality types listed in the *Psionics Handbook*, Chapter 1.

Artiste: The psicrystal offers endless praise for its master's achievements and talents in a certain field, suggesting that its master's allies are jealous rivals or slack-jawed unsophisticates.

Bully: The psicrystal lauds its master's strength, while pointing out weaklings and outsiders whom the master might coerce, threaten and terrorize. Such suggestions are couched in reasonable terms, and are designed to play on the master's own sense of vulnerability and fear.

Coward: The psicrystal urges its master to protect his own hide at all costs, and to let others take all the risks. It points out the easy way out of every situation, even if the path involves betrayal and violence.

Friendly: The psicrystal goads its master to approach all creatures openly and honestly, no matter what their disposition. It urges peaceful solutions beyond the bounds of rationality and prefers smiles and apologies to justice.

Hero: The psicrystal perpetuates a vicious cycle, at first admonishing its master to take dangerous risks in the name of glory and sacrifice. It then rebukes her with guilt, chiding her for not doing more. The process repeats itself.

Liar: The psicrystal urges its master to bend the truth — at first only a little — to his own advantage. It looks down on those who are scrupulously honest, regarding them as weak.

Meticulous: The psicrystal obsesses over trivial details, reminding its master to follow a certain behavior in a certain manner at a certain time. It becomes agitated when the master attempts to take shortcuts, reminding him of the consequences of such oversights.

Observant: The psicrystal points out every detail of its master's surroundings, then congratulates her on her powers of perception. Eventually, the psicrystal starts at every sight and sound, and deluges its master with nervous second-guessing. "Did you hear that?"

Poised: The psicrystal praises its master's perfect appearance and *savoir faire*. It constantly points out, right or wrongly, those who it believes are staring in admiration or jealousy, and sneers disdainfully at the ugly and the unwashed.

Resolve: The psicrystal urges its master to be firm in his convictions, whether they are religious, ethical or social, and regardless of how sensible they truly are. The psicrystal further suggests that all who do not share its master's beliefs must be made to "see the light."

Sage: The psicrystal extols its master's knowledge in particular matter or perhaps in all matters. It suggests that all others are dimwits who could only benefit from its master's wisdom.

Single-minded: The psicrystal is obsessive to a fault. It constantly brings up a single subject out of anxiety or yearning, and urges its master to ignore all that is not directly related to that subject.

Sneak: The psicrystal admonishes its master to remain silent about all her motives and thoughts. It fills its master's head with paranoid delusions, urging her to suspect everyone and keep her secrets close.

Sympathetic: The psicrystal urges empathy and mercy for every creature its master encounters, even the most depraved villains. It suggests that its master reserve judgment and avoid difficult choices. "Everyone makes mistakes, right?"

Psychic Warrior

Like psions, psychic warriors tend to be rare, gifted individuals who must develop their powers alone and in secret. While most of these aberrant

individuals focus on the mastery of their powers, the psychic warrior instead turns to the application of those abilities to battle. Psychic warriors are rare in the Realm of Dread except for in Pharazia, where they are called *murabits*. They gather in secluded desert *qal'ats*, or fortresses, to hone their abilities, and are willing to sell their swords to the highest bidder. Most Pharazians regards these cloistered warriors as blasphemous warlocks.

Powers: Some powers function differently in Ravenloft. See "Altered Powers," below.

Metamind

Given the rarity of psions and psychic warriors in the Realm of Dread, focused masters of psionic power such as the metamind are nearly unheard of. The yogis of Sri Raji regard metaminds as hasty and undisciplined. Some psychic warriors among the Thaani, however, pursue the metamind path in the hopes of drowning the Silent Masters in a psychic onslaught.

Powers: Some powers function differently in Ravenloft. See "Altered Powers," below.

Power Psicrystal: See "Psicrystal" under the psion class entry, above.

Psychic Vampire: Using this ability to deal ability damage requires a powers check.

Pyrokineticist

Few psions or psychic warriors in the Realm of Dread walk the path of the pyrokineticist. Rarely, a Rajian yogi discovers an affinity with flame, demonstrating the illusion of pain by walking over coals, devouring embers, and piercing his flesh with white-hot iron brands. Alienists in the Chivalric and Renaissance domains of the Core have begun to record the occurrence of seemingly normal folk who can manipulate heat and flame by will alone.

Powers: Some powers function differently in Ravenloft. See "Altered Powers," below.

Fire Adaptation: See the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three, "Closed Domain Borders."

Firewalk: See the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three, "Closed Domain Borders."

Fear No Fire: See the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three, "Closed Domain Borders."

Heat Death: Using this ability requires a powers check.

Slayer

The mind flayers of Ravenloft are a hidden foe, lurking beneath the blasted landscape of Bluetspur and sending their tendrils beyond the Mists into other realms. Few folk in the Realm of Dread even know that such creatures exist, let alone commit their lives to their destruction. Among the Thaani, however, a handful of psychic warriors remember the tortures of the Silent Masters, and can only find peace in vengeance for their race. These slayers are frightening souls, fanatical and nearly suicidal in their pursuit of the illithid.

Powers: Some powers function differently in Ravenloft. See "Altered Powers," below.

Brain Nausea, Cerebral Blind, Blast Feedback: In Ravenloft, mind flayers receive a +2 profane bonus on their saving throws against these abilities.

Soulknife

Soulknives are exceedingly uncommon in the Realm of Dread. Few individuals with psionic ability tread the sinister path of the soulknife; most psychic warriors eschew the mind-blade as a cowardly weapon befitting a murderer. Rajians whisper, however, that clerics of Kali have been known to dispatch corrupts yogis wielding "ghost *katars*" when mundane assassins fail.

Powers: Some powers function differently in Ravenloft. See "Altered Powers," below.

Imbed Power: If a power normally requires a powers check, the check is required when the soulknife successfully attacks a creature with the power imbedded in his mind-blade.

Imbed Psionic Attack: If an imbedded psionic attack successfully affects a creature, this counts as mental contact for the purposes of prompting a Madness save (see the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three).

Sever Life: Using this ability requires a powers check (see **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three).

Knife to the Soul: Using this ability requires a powers check (see **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three).

Skills

Autohypnosis

You can use an Autohypnosis check to resist fear in response to a Fear save, though only once for each scene that prompted the Fear save.

Psionic Combat

A successful psionic attack against a darklord, aberration, elemental, ooze, outsider, plant or insane mind is considered mental contact for the purposes of prompting a Madness save (see the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three).

Psionic Powers

Psionics generally follow the same guidelines as magic in the Realm of Dread, as detailed in the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**. Many of the psionic power alterations refer to topics covered in Chapter Three of that book, under "Altered Magic." These are noted in quotes ("). Other details noted, such as closed domain borders, powers checks, and Madness saves, are also found in Chapter Three. In addition to these existing references, note also the guideline regarding Ectoplasm, below.

Some power alterations reference spells in the *Player's Handbook*, while others refer you to other power listings in this section. Any power not noted in the following listings functions just as described in the *Psionics Handbook*.

Ectoplasm

In Ravenloft, creatures formed out of ectoplasm, such as *astral constructs*, have the Mists descriptor (see the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three, "Altered Magic," *Conjuration*). When ectoplasm is created in the Realm of Dread, it appears as wisps of white vapor before is coalesces into the usual translucent jelly. When an ectoplasmic creation dissipates, you must attempt a Will save against your own power. If you fail the saving throw, a mist elemental (see **Denizens of Darkness**) is created where each ectoplasmic creature dissipated, with Hit Dice equal to the power's effective level. These elementals are free-willed.

Altered Powers

Adapt Body: See "Closed Domain Borders."

Anchored Navigation: See "Teleportation." An anchored starting point cannot be set within the Mists. Furthermore, if you set a starting point and then enter the Mists, this power ceases to function until you reemerge from the Mists.

Astral Construct I–IX: See Ectoplasm, above.

Astral Projection: See "Astral."

Astral Steed: See Ectoplasm, above.

Attraction: See "Enchantment."

Aura Alteration: See "Mind-Affecting." See "Enchantment" if you attempt to free a creature from the influence of a darklord. If you use this power to dispel a curse, the subject must make a Will save to temporarily be rid of the curse's effects; the duration of relief is only 10 minutes per caster level. This is enough time to discard cursed magic items.

Aura Sight: See "Detecting Alignment."

Aversion: See "Enchantment."

Banishment: See "Abjuration" and "Extraplanar." Any outsider or elemental targeted by this spell makes its Will saving throw with a +4 bonus.

Body Adjustment: Manifesting this power prior to being wounded by a lycanthrope has no effect on the Fortitude save to resist the lycanthropic infection.

Body Equilibrium: See "Closed Domain Borders."

Call Cohort: See "Teleportation."

Call Weaponry: A weapon cannot be called if it is not available at the Cultural Level of the current domain. This power does not function at all in the Wildlands or any other Savage domain.

Charm Monster: See "Enchantment."

Charm Person: See "Enchantment."

Clairaudience/Clairvoyance: See "Divination." This power cannot be used across domain borders. A "familiar" place is one you have visited personally. If you have only seen or heard the location through indirect means, including scrying, there is a 50% chance that the spell fails. A darklord is considered familiar with the entirety of his or her domain.

Clairtangency: See *clairaudience/clairvoyance*.

Claws of the Vampire: Manifesting this power requires a powers check.

Confidante: See "Mind-Affecting."

Contingency: If a power normally requires a powers check, the check is required when the power is triggered.

Control Air: See "Weather."

Control Flames: See "Closed Domain Borders."

Control Shadow: See "Illusion (Shadow)."

Control Sound: See "Closed Domain Borders."

Crisis of Breath: See "Enchantment." Manifesting this power requires a powers check.

Daze: See "Enchantment."

Detect Remote Viewing: See "Divination" and "Teleportation."

Detect Thoughts: See "Mind-Affecting."

Dimensional Anchor: The target of this power is unable to cross any domain borders or enter the Mists for the power's duration.

Dimension Door: See "Teleportation." If you arrive in a place that is already occupied by a solid body, you are trapped in the Mists, not the Astral.

Dimension Slide: See "Teleportation."

Disable: See "Enchantment."

Dismissal: See "Abjuration" and "Extraplanar." If the extraplanar creature fails its saving throw, there is a 50% chance that the creature is teleported to a random location in Ravenloft. Otherwise the power has no effect.

Dismiss Ectoplasm: If you dismiss a creature using *ectoplasmic form* and do not destroy it outright, the creature is transported to a random location in the Mists.

Divert Teleportation: See "Teleportation."

Divination: The base chance of a correct divination remains unchanged, but you are not made aware if the dice roll fails. Instead, the Dark Powers provide an answer that is purposefully misleading and possibly malicious.

Domination: See "Enchantment" and "Mind-Affecting."

Dream Travel: See "Teleportation." If you bring along a creature with an alien mind, all other creatures participating in the *dream travel*, including you, must make a Madness save. This ability does not function if the borders of the current domain are closed. If the borders of the domain you are traveling to are closed, you cannot enter it from the region of dreams, but are free to travel elsewhere.

Every hour you spend in the region of dreams, there is a 20% chance that you run afoul of an ennui dream spawn (see **Denizens of Darkness**), which attempts to spirit you and your fellow travelers away to the fell nightmare realm of its dread masters.

Ectoplasmic Form: Throughout the duration of this power, you have the Mists descriptor. When the power's duration ends, you must succeed at a Will save against your own power. If you fail this saving throw, a mist elemental (see **Denizens of Darkness**) with Hit Dice equal to your own is created 10 feet from you in a random direction. The

elemental immediately attacks you until one of you is destroyed. Manifesting this power requires a powers check.

Ectoplasmic Shambler: See Ectoplasm, above.

Ecto Puppet: See Ectoplasm, above.

Empathic Transfer: You cannot use this power to transfer lycanthropy to yourself from another individual.

Empathy: See "Mind-Affecting."

Emulate Power: If you emulate a power that normally requires a powers check, manifesting this power requires a powers check.

Energy Barrier: See "Closed Domain Borders."

Energy Conversion: See "Closed Domain Borders."

Ethereal Jaunt: See "Ethereal."

Etherealness: See "Ethereal."

False Sensory Input: See "Mind-Affecting."

Fatal Attraction: See "Enchantment." Manifesting this power requires a powers check.

Fate Link: If either of the creatures linked have an alien mind, the other creature must make a Madness save.

Fission: Your duplicate follows your orders as normal, but its alignment is always evil, and it is considered a dread companion (see the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Two). When the power's duration ends, you must succeed at a Will save against your own power. If you fail the saving throw, the duplicate does not rejoin you and becomes a free-willed creature obsessed with destroying and replacing you.

Forced Mindlink: See "Mind-Affecting."

Foresight: The warnings you receive when this power is used on another creature can cross domain borders, but not if they are closed.

Freedom of Movement: See "Closed Domain Borders."

Genesis: In Ravenloft, this power cannot create a demiplane or an *antigenesis* wave, but instead grants the manifester a reality wrinkle that grows as described in the power's description. If the manifester fails any powers checks, consider them failed power rituals; each failed check adds 1d4 corruption points to the manifester's total and halves the wrinkle's radius. See the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Five, "Reality Wrinkles."

Graft Weapon: If you graft an evil, intelligent weapon to yourself, you must make an immediate Will save as if a personality conflict had occurred. If you fail this saving throw, the weapon becomes dominant until removed. A dominant weapon never allows the manifester to remove the weapon himself through *graft weapon* again.

Greater Emulation: See *emulate power*.

Hypercognition: This power does not allow you to determine the identity of a domain's darklord.

Improved Anchored Navigation: See *anchored navigation*.

Improved Clairtangency: See *clairaudience/clairvoyance*.

Improved Etherealness: See *etherealness*.

Incarnate: If you make a power permanent that normally requires a powers check, the check is required when you manifest that power.

Inflict Pain: Manifesting this power requires a powers check.

Insanity: See "Enchantment" and "Mind-Affecting." Add a +1 bonus to the effective power level. The Open Mind feat is effective in the Will save against this power. Manifesting this power requires a powers check.

Intrusive Sense Link: See "Mind-Affecting."

Know Direction: This power does not function within the Mists.

Know Location: This power does not function within the Mists.

Lesser Body Adjustment: See *body adjustment*.

Lesser Domination: See "Enchantment" and "Mind-Affecting."

Lesser Mindlink: See "Mind-Affecting."

Mass Domination: See "Enchantment" "Mind-Affecting."

Mass Suggestion: See "Enchantment" "Mind-Affecting."

Metaconcert: If one of the creatures in the *metaconcert* has an alien mind, all other creatures participating in the *metaconcert*, including you, must make a Madness save.

Metafaculty: See "Detecting Alignment." This power cannot be used across closed domain borders. When you use this power to gain insight on a darklord, the darklord also gains insight about you and learns your exact location.

Microcosm: If you target a darklord with this power, you must succeed at a Will save (DC = 10

+ 1/2 darklord's Hit Dice + darklord's Charisma modifier). If you succeed at the saving throw, the power simply fails. If you fail, however, it is you that becomes catatonic, retreating into a nightmare world fashioned from the darklord's fell dreams. Manifesting this power requires a powers check.

Mindlink: See "Mind-Affecting."

Mind Probe: See "Mind-Affecting."

Mind Seed: See "Enchantment" "Mind-Affecting." If you target a darklord with this power, you must succeed at a Will save (DC = 10 + 1/2 darklord's Hit Dice + darklord's Charisma modifier). If you succeed at the saving throw, the power simply fails. If you fail, however, the power's effect is reversed — your mind takes on the qualities of the darklord's mind. Manifesting this power requires a powers check.

Mind Store: Once you use this power to regrow your body, you acquire the Mists descriptor until you are again killed or destroyed. There is a 10% chance that when you attempt to regrow your body, you are instead permanently transformed into a mist elemental (see **Denizens of Darkness**) with the same Hit Dice as you at the time you manifested *mind store*. Manifesting this power requires a powers check.

Mind Switch: See "Mind-Affecting." If your new body is slain, your life force does not necessarily return to your original body. You must succeed at a Will save or be bound to your new body's corpse. If the save succeeds, the power works normally. Otherwise, you become an undead monster occupying your new body's corpse. You acquire the undead type (see the *Monster Manual*). In addition, you receive special powers depending on the previous HD of your new body:

Hit Dice	Special Powers
4 or fewer	None
5–7	Enervating Touch (Su)
8–11	Fast Healing (Ex)
12+	Aura of Fear (Su)

Enervating Touch (Su): This touch attack performs just as the *enervation* spell.

Fast Healing (Ex): You recover 1 hit point of damage per round.

Aura of Fear (Su): This power performs as the spell *fear*, except that the area affected is a sphere surrounding you at all times, not a cone.

These special powers are cumulative. Hence, a 12 HD monster would enjoy all three. If your new body's corpse is not destroyed within 24 hours of death, it animates with your life force. If the head or torso has been destroyed, you die. Manifesting this power requires a powers check.

Mindwipe: Manifesting this power requires a powers check.

Monster Domination: See "Enchantment" "Mind-Affecting."

Negate Psionics: See "Closed Domain Borders."

Null Psionics Field: See "Closed Domain Borders."

Object Reading: See "Detecting Alignment." If you use this power on an object previously owned by a darklord or evil outsider, you must make a Madness save (DC 10 + 1/2 creature's Hit Dice + creature's Charisma modifier) or suffer Obsession (as the failed Horror save effect).

Painful Touch: Manifesting this power requires a powers check.

Plane Shift: See "Teleportation."

Precognition: The base chance of a correct precognition remains unchanged, but you are not made aware if the dice roll fails. Instead, the Dark Powers provide an answer that is purposefully misleading and possibly malicious.

Probability Travel: See "Astral."

Psychic Chiurgery: See "Mind-Affecting." See "Enchantment" if you attempt to free a creature from the influence of a darklord. This invaluable power is one of the quickest and most foolproof ways to remove the effects of a failed Madness save. However, you must make a Madness save yourself (DC of victim's original Madness save – 5) when using this power in such a manner.

Psychic Vampire: Manifesting this power requires a powers check.

Recall Agony: Manifesting this power requires a powers check.

Recall Death: Manifesting this power requires a powers check.

Recall Pain: Manifesting this power requires a powers check.

Remote Viewing: See "Divination" and "Teleportation." This power cannot be used across closed domain borders.

Retrieve: See "Teleportation." This power cannot be used across domain borders, even if the target is within sight.

Schism: When the duration of this power ends, you must make a Madness save against your own power (DC = 13 + your manifesting ability

score modifier). If you fail this saving throw, you suffer Multiple Personalities (as the failed Madness effect).

Sending: See "Teleportation." This power cannot be used across closed domain borders.

Sense Link: See "Mind-Affecting."

Sensitivity to Psychic Impressions: If you use this power in an area with ethereal resonance of rank 3 or higher, you must make a Madness save (DC 15 for rank 3, 17 for rank 4, and 19 for rank 5).

Sequester: This power cannot conceal the disruption of a paladin from a darklord.

Sever the Tie: Undead receive a +2 profane bonus on their Will save against this power in Ravenloft.

Shadow Body: When this power's duration ends, there is a 10% chance that you are permanently transformed into an undead shadow (see the *Monster Manual*) with the same Hit Dice as your original form. Manifesting this power requires a powers check.

Suggestion: See "Enchantment" "Mind-Affecting."

Tailor Memory: See "Mind-Affecting." You can use this power to force a creature to make a Horror save based on a false memory. The DC of the save is equal to the result of an Intimidate check made by you. Using tailor memory in this fashion requires a powers check.

Telempathic Projection: See "Enchantment" and "Mind-Affecting."

Teleport: See "Teleportation."

Teleportation Circle: See "Teleportation."

Teleport Without Error: See "Teleportation."

Thrall: See "Enchantment" and "Mind-Affecting." Manifesting this power requires a powers check.

Time Regression: If you use this power to prepare a creature psychologically for an imminent scene of fear, horror or madness, that creature receives a +2 circumstance bonus on its relevant save.

Trace Teleportation: You cannot trace the teleportation if the creature teleported from another domain.

True Domination: See "Enchantment" and "Mind-Affecting."

True Seeing: This power functions as described in the *Psionics Handbook*, with the following clarifications. You can use this power to see ethereal creatures and resonance (see **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Five). Unless these objects have an obviously ghostly appearance, however, you do not automatically sense that they are ethereal. The power states that the subject sees the true form of polymorphed, changed, and transmuted things. In Ravenloft, this generally refers only to changes created through spells or spell-like powers, not supernatural or extraordinary abilities. Thus, natural shapechangers such as vampires, lycanthropes, and doppelgangers always appear in their current form, whatever their true form may be.

Undead Sense: Undead creatures receive a Will save to avoid detection.

Psionic Items

As with spells and magic items, any alteration that applies to a psionic power also applies to a psionic item that duplicates that power.

Special Abilities

Body Feeder: Crafting a weapon with this ability requires a powers check.

Coup de Grace: Crafting a weapon with this ability requires a powers check.

Dislocator: See "Teleportation."

Greater Dislocator: See "Teleportation."

Mind Feeder: Crafting a weapon with this ability requires a powers check.

Power Storing: If a stored power normally requires a powers check, the check is required when the power manifests.

Soul Feeder: Crafting a weapon with this ability requires a powers check.

Teleporting: See "Teleportation."

Altered Psionic Items

Crystal Mask of Fear: The Courage feat is effective for the Will save against this item.

Third Eye Conceal: This item cannot conceal the disruption of a paladin from a darklord.

New Monster: Psilich

Just as arcane and divine spellcasters may use blasphemous magic to extend their own lives, powerful psions may attain a state of undeath through their psionic abilities. In the Realm of Dread, they are most common in Sri Raji, where reckless yogis sometimes forsake the cycle of reincarnation in favor of eternal self-mastery. Rajians call these lost creatures *hushyaar lash*, which roughly

translates as "corpse that is aware" and fear them terribly.

Psiliches are megalomaniacal abominations. Although they share the lust for power that characterizes other liches, they tend to be much more introspective and aware of themselves and their surroundings. They prefer to spend their time perfecting their powers and developing psionic artifacts rather than ruling as tyrants. Many psiliches spend decades or even centuries in contemplative meditation, only to emerge and wreak havoc in the pursuit of some grand scheme when they deem themselves or the world ready.

Psiliches are physically indistinguishable from their arcane or divine kin. They speak whatever languages they knew in life.

Creating a Psilich

"Psilich" is a template that can be added to any humanoid creature (referenced hereafter as the "character"), provided it can create the required phylactery (see The Psilich's Phylactery, below). The character's type changes to "undead." It uses all the character's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Hite Dice: Increase to d12.

AC: The psilich has +5 natural armor or the character's natural armor, whichever is better.

Damage: Psiliches without natural weapons gain a touch attack that uses negative energy to deal 1d8+5 points of damage to living creatures. A successful Will save with a DC of 10 + 1/2 psilich's HD + psilich's Charisma modifier reduces the damage by half. Psiliches with natural attacks can use their natural weaponry or use the touch attack, as they prefer.

Special Attacks: A psilich retains all the character's special attacks and gains those listed below. Saves have a DC of 10 +1/2 psilich's HD + psilich's Charisma modifier unless noted otherwise.

Aura of Screams (Su): Psiliches are continually surrounded by a haze of horrific psychic feedback so intense that it mentally scars even nonpsionic creatures. All creatures within a 60-foot radius of a psilich must succeed at a Will save or be shaken for as long as they remain within that radius of the psilich. This is a mind-affecting fear ability.

Powers: The psilich can manifest any power it could manifest while alive. Psiliches use Charisma as the key ability for Psychokinesis powers. Psilich savants substitute Charisma for Constitution to determine their bonus power points.

Psychic Drain (Su): Any creature with psionic power points that the psilich touches must succeed at a Fortitude save or be drained of a number of power points equal to twice the physical damage dealt. The psilich cannot gain more power points that it would normally have available in a day. The stolen power points remain in the psilich's reserve until used normally.

Psionic creatures without power points and nonpsionic creatures must instead succeed at a Fortitude save or suffer 1 point of temporary Intelligence, Wisdom or Charisma damage (psilich's choice). The psilich gains 1 power point from a successful use of this attack.

Special Qualities: A psilich retains all the character's special qualities and those listed below, and also gains the undead type (see the *Monster Manual*).

Damage Reduction (Su): A psilich has damage reduction 15/magic bludgeoning.

Immunities (Ex): A psilich is immune to cold, electricity, polymorph, and mind-affecting effects.

Turn Resistance (Ex): A psilich has +4 turn resistance.

Abilities: The psilich gains +2 to Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma, but being undead, has no Constitution score.

Skills: Psiliches receive a +8 racial bonus on Hide, Listen, Move Silently, Search, Sense Motive and Spot checks.

Climate/Terrain: Any land and underground.

Organization: Solitary or troupe (1 psilich, plus 2–4 psionic wights and 2–4 intellect devourers.)

Challenge Rating: Same as the character +2.

Treasure: Standard coins; double goods; double items.

Alignment: Any evil.

Advancement: By character class.

The Psilich's Phylactery

Like a traditional lich's phylactery, a psilich's phylactery stores the character's life force. Unless the phylactery is located and destroyed, the psilich reappears 1d10 days after its apparent death.

Each psilich must make its own phylactery, which requires the Craft Wondrous Item feat. The character must be a psion of at least 11th level. The phylactery costs 120,000 gp and 4,800 XP to create

and has a manifester level equal to that of its creator at the time of creation.

The most common form of phylactery among psiliches is a smooth, oblong stone called a *linga*, often carved with an elaborate mandala. Such a phylactery is Tiny and has a hardness rating of 8, 60 hit points, and a break DC of 30.

Sample Psilich

This example uses an 11th-level nomad as the base character.

Psilich

Medium Undead

Hit Dice: 11d12

Initiative: +3 (Dex)

Speed: 40 ft.

AC: 22 (+3 Dex, +5 natural, +4 armor [Inertial Armor])

Attacks: Touch +6 melee or punching dagger +7 melee or dart +9 ranged

Damage: Touch 1d8+5 and psychic drain; punching dagger 1d4+1, dart 1d4

Special Attacks: Aura of screams, damaging touch, powers, psychic drain

Special Qualities: DR 15/magic bludgeoning, immunities, turn resistance +4, undead traits

Saves: Fort +3, Ref +6, Will +11

Abilities: Str 12, Dex 17, Con —, Int 16, Wis 19, Cha 14

Skills: Autohypnosis +9, Balance +7, Climb +10, Concentration +12, Escape Artist +12, Hide +11, Intuit Direction +14, Jump +10, Knowledge (psionics) +13, Knowledge (religion) +7, Listen +12, Move Silently +11, Psicraft +13, Remote View +13, Search +11, Sense Motive +12, Spot +12, Use Rope +12.

Feats: Craft Crystal Capacitor, Craft Universal Item, Inertial Armor, Quicken Power, Speed of Thought.

Climate/Terrain: Any land and underground

Organization: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 13

Treasure: Standard coins; double goods; double items

Alignment: Neutral evil

Advancement: By character class

Powers: 6+d/3+d/3+d/2+d/2+d/1+d; 61 power points/day; 0 — *burst, catfall, detect psionics, far hand, float, know direction, missive*; 1st — *feather fall, know location, identify, spider climb*; 2nd — *detect thoughts, brain lock, levitate, recall pain*; 3rd — *dimension slide, lesser domination, time hop*; 4th — *aura sight, dimension door, forced mindlink*; 5th — *baleful teleport, teleport*.

Psicrystal: Single-minded; Int 11; Abilities: Empathic link, PR 16, self-propulsion, sighted, speak with other creatures, telepathic link.

Psionic Attack/Defense Modes: All/All.

Possessions: Masterwork punching dagger, 10 masterwork darts, *crystal capacitor* (3), *ioun stone* (dusty rose prism), *power stone of teleport, psionnatrix of Psychoportation, third eye penetrate*.

Aura of Screams, Damaging Touch, Psychic Drain: The save DC against a psilich's abilities is 17.

Chapter Three: Structuring the Campaign

Violence upon the roads; violence of horses;
Some few have handsome riders, are garlanded
On delicate sensitive ear or tossing mane,
But wearied running round and round in their courses
All break and vanish, and evil gathers head;

— William Butler Yeats, "Meditations in Time of Civil War"

The road stretched on endlessly before the three companions. Demara thought about her brother Timorian's earnest plea to her and young Vangelia that they accompany him on a journey through the countryside.

"We owe this land a debt," Timorian had said. "We are trained warriors, priests and," he looked at Vangelia, "scouts. We have heard rumors that things are not as they should be in the world outside our comfortable town. I have spoken with my superiors and they agree that I would do more good by seeking to put to right those things that are wrong."

Demara agreed with her brother in part. While she was under no illusions that she could make a difference in the world, she had been more than willing to use her sword in her brother's defense. There were worse things in the land than making a reputation as a warrior, even a hero. They had traveled together now for many months, doing what they could where they could, but she suspected they had only begun to fathom the vastness of their world.

As she had always been, Vangelia seemed unconcerned about the hard road that lay ahead of them. She walked confidently, a perpetual smile on her face and an eager spring to her step. Thoughts of money earned and spent, of new places and strange creatures filled her head. Perhaps, she thought, she might even meet some of the legendary Vistani fortunetellers.

The road beckoned, and they followed it to their future.

As discussed in the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook,** the Land of Mists is a setting that combines several traditional concepts — horror, isolation, suspense and the eternal struggle of good and evil — with the traditional elements of adventure fiction and fantasy roleplaying. The result is a campaign world that differs in many significant ways from what players and DMs have come to expect in other games. While there certainly is room for the usual sort of dungeon crawling and wilderness exploration that typify most fantasy campaigns, Ravenloft adds many elements to this mixture. It challenges players to come up with unique solutions and reactions to the many dark, grim and Gothic situations in which their characters find themselves.

How, for example, does a paladin behave in a world where evil is rampant and, in fact, rules? Barbarians are traditionally suspicious of magic and the supernatural; how is this affected by the almost universal presence of the supernatural and its obvious power? A rogue in a teeming city must normally worry about the authorities, but what if the authorities also include a powerful darklord who does not like lawbreakers? How are characters and settings different in the Dread Realms? How does one create a successful campaign without either boring players with inaction or forcing them into mindless action and unending violent encounters? What challenges need to be delivered to keep a campaign interesting and fresh? How should the DM structure a campaign, set its power levels, find suitable foes and give appropriate rewards?

The answers to these questions are as varied as the vast range of game master styles. The most important aspect of structuring your campaign is to know your players.

Getting to Know You

One of the most useful things a DM can do is get together and work with players, preferably in a group, before the campaign begins. Often, an aspiring DM labors for weeks putting together a subtle, intrigue-laden campaign with exciting midnight trysts, tension-laden meetings with potential foes, elaborate diplomacy and interactions only to find that his players want something more action-oriented — they want to play vampire-hunters while he expects them to become suave diplomat-spies.

Obviously, this can be avoided by simply talking to the players. Find out what they want. If there is conflict over the flavor of a campaign, try to find some middle ground that satisfies as much of each requirement as possible. At least one pregame session in which the theme and mood of the campaign is discussed and established is advisable. If possible, use this opportunity to create the players' characters.

Campaign Scope

Another factor in creating your campaign is its scope. How big is your campaign? Does it include a simple woodland village and the horrors that lurk in the forest beyond? Does it encompass an entire domain, its people, ruler and evil denizens? Will it span several domains and include conflict and interaction with a wide range of foes and allies?

Again, style of play and personal preference are the watchwords here, but as a rule the more powerful the characters, the greater the campaign's potential scope. Many campaigns start out in a small region and expand as the heroes become more powerful, but it's important to understand what represents a good starting point. Low-level

characters probably do best in a limited area, at least in the beginning. Mid- to high-level characters have the option of covering much of a single realm, and possibly some neighboring domains as well. Very high-level characters doubtlessly draw the attention of a realm's darklord, and their actions affect the entire region, and possibly many others besides.

The more territory your campaign covers, the more varied skills your characters need, and the greater the challenge to the DM. A desert scout from Har'Akir will be lost in the forests of Barovia, and a savage barbarian from Vorostokov might have a hard time dealing with the subtle politics of Dementlieu.

Such conflicts and confusion are rich ground for plot development and roleplaying. They also provide great opportunities for expanding characters' skills and abilities. An experienced party who has seen many different realms has a worldliness and sophistication that is lacking in newer adventurers or those who have dwelt in the same spot all their lives.

Building Around the Characters

Ravenloft is a world steeped in mythology and atmosphere, with much opportunity for character-building. Find a character race and class that appeals to each player, determine a homeland and at least a sentence or two of background and history for that character, keeping in mind background and motivation helps enormously in roleplaying situations.

Also at this point, determine the power level of the campaign. Some players want to start from scratch. In this case, create starting characters or characters up to 4th or 5th level. This is best if the players want to explore and discover the horrors of Ravenloft for themselves. If players want to portray established, veteran adventurers with some experience under their belt, and who already know much of the background and setting information, then a party of mid-level (5–9) would be appropriate. Those who want to be major movers and shakers in their chosen realm or travel through many realms without having to claw their way to high level first would be happiest in a high-level (10–15) campaign. Players who want their characters to confront evil (or good) directly and perform epic deeds such as freeing a realm from its dark master, leading great wars of conquest or liberation,

founding their own dynasty or creating a dread realm for themselves might want to start at 16th level or higher. This is only recommended, however, with players who have considerable experience and know what they are doing with such characters.

Once you have a good idea of what your players want, and your respective playing and DM styles have been established, along with power level and character background, you're ready to proceed to creating your campaign.

Starting Realm

Where to begin your Ravenloft campaign? This depends on you and your players' styles, and what you're looking for in a campaign. Cultural level is one of the first criteria — do players want to battle hordes of skeletons with swords in hand or with pistols blazing? Do they want lots of magic and spells or should magic be limited or absent altogether? Do they prefer sword-and-sorcery adventure or Victorian horror?

Your chosen power level and style should help determine the starting realm. The following are guidelines for each realm, along with suitable character levels and styles of play.

Core Realms

Many core realms are well-suited as starting points for your campaign. Some, due to their isolation, violence, the power of their darklord and the like, are less appropriate. The following gives an overview of the domains and their relative suitability.

Barovia: This prominent realm is an excellent starting point for any group of adventurers. Its infamous darklord, Count Strahd von Zarovich, is a powerful and deadly foe, but takes little interest in the day-to-day running of his domain, noticing only those powerful enough to be a threat. This makes him an ideal ruler for a DM, who can involve the count or not as appropriate to the campaign. The realm is full of traditional monsters of Gothic horror, and can be used to create some very atmospheric and evocative adventures. The ongoing conflict between the Barovians and the oppressed Gundarakites can also be a great source of story hooks.

Borca: A realm that has become an almost literal expression of the poisons used by its rulers, Borca is a rough and dangerous place, not likely to be kind to beginning adventurers. Even experienced characters may find this place challenging, as their presence does is noticed before too long, and prominent or powerful visitors either find themselves poisoned or recruited to participate in the endless political power games that go on between Ivana Boritsi and Ivan Dilisnya.

Darkon: Vast and powerful, Darkon would seem to be one of the best realms in which to start a Ravenloft campaign. In fact, the memory-leeching ability of Darkon makes is entirely unsuitable for anything other than brief visits by outsiders, for within a maximum of three months, they believe that they have always lived in Darkon. The lich-king Azalin's control of the realm is absolute, and he knows the identity of every inhabitant. It is unlikely that any Darkonian ever troubles this powerful creature, for he can freely change and modify a foe's memories, and thus manipulate his entire existence. But he also cares little for events that don't damage his hold on power, and as long as adventurers do not directly challenge or impede Azalin, Darkon is a good base for adventures.

Dementlieu: A sophisticated and decadent realm bubbling with intrigue and politics, Dementlieu is a place for subtle roleplaying. Its true ruler, Dominic D'Honaire, delights in manipulating others with his powers of mental domination, and works behind the scenes to control the realm: few, if any, know of his true position as the realm's darklord. Beginning characters may be out of their depth in Dementlieu unless they are of noble birth or have some other reason to be involved in the elaborate courtly games and subtleties of this realm.

Falkovnia: A harsh realm, Falkovnia nonetheless harbors numerous opportunities for adventures in its dark and teeming cities and in its wild and forbidding forests. Beginning characters should be careful not to draw attention to themselves, for military press-gangs often roam the land, impressing capable "recruits" into Vlad Drakov's military. Overall, Falkovnia is a far better place to visit than to live in, but battling Drakov's tyranny might be a suitable pursuit for especially powerful (and possibly suicidal) good-aligned adventurers.

Forlorn: The chaotic and inhospitable home of the goblyns, Forlorn is best as a setting for an adventure or series of adventures, rather than the focal point of your entire campaign, and is not appropriate as a starting point.

Hazlan: A sophisticated realm ruled by wizards, Hazlan is a good base for a starting campaign, especially one that involves spellcasting charac-

ters. Wizards were once oppressed here by the darklord, Hazlik, but since that time he has relaxed his attitude somewhat, and periodically inspects ranks of wizards for potential apprentices — a situation that might make for interesting roleplaying opportunities.

Invidia: Much of Invidia is isolated wilderness, independent and untouched by either the realm's ruler, Malocchio Aderre, or its darklord, the rebel Gabrielle Aderre, who leads an army of wolfweres against her son. These pastoral, isolated regions make good starting points for lower-level campaigns, while the remainder of the realm, enmeshed in civil war, has opportunities for higher-level adventurers.

Kartakass: Another good starting point, Kartakass is home to a friendly and outgoing race of humans, who fear only the wolves and lycanthropes that dwell in the shadowy forests. Characters who start in Kartakass should expect to confront shapechangers and wolves on a regular basis.

Keening: Home only to the dead, Keening isn't a good place for anyone to be, let alone starting adventurers.

Lamordia: Scientifically advanced and rational, Lamordia is one of the more sedate realms, and in some ways, that makes it less appropriate for starting a campaign. The realm's ruler, Baron von Aubrecker, is a rationalist with little stomach for the supernatural, while the infamous Victor Mordenheim is mostly concerned with his experiments into the nature of life and death, and the people are (for Ravenloft at least) a surprisingly enlightened lot. Monsters such as undead, lycanthropes and other threats exist, but the people deal with them quickly and efficiently. The primary threat in Lamordia comes from the monsters created by Dr. Mordenheim, and from the realm's real ruler, the darklord Adam, who dwells on the distant Isle of Agony.

Markovia: This mysterious realm is unsuitable as a base for adventurers or as a starting point for your campaign. Its monstrous darklord, Frantisek Markov, is a worthy and evil foe, but his control of the realm precludes any outsiders from beginning their adventuring careers there.

Mordent: The gloomy coastal realm of Mordent is, surprisingly enough, an ideal starting point for a campaign, especially one that involves monster-hunters or avengers who battle the supernatural. Here, the famed monster hunter Rudolph van Richten lived and began his career, and here as well, the twins Gennifer and Laurie Weathermay-Foxgrove carry on van Richten's work, publishing his writings and managing his herb shop, while continuing the battle against darkness. New characters can easily use the twins and their associates as resources or even allies, possibly going so far as to join with them in their crusade.

Necropolis: A vast city of the undead — ruled, in fact, by an entity known as Death — Necropolis is (unsurprisingly) not suitable for starting a campaign.

Nocturnal Sea: The isolated islands of this vast, dark stretch of water may make good origins for new characters or a setting for a starting campaign, for the limited geography is easy to map. After a while, however, such a setting proves confining, and players may want to move to more challenging and varied realms.

Nova Vaasa: This old and squalid nation is one of the places where the gulf between rich and poor is most obvious. The teeming, filthy cities are lawless and well suited to gritty urban adventures, while the countryside is plagued by poverty, repression and disease. Creatures stalk the poor, while the nobles dwell in decadent opulence. In short, Nova Vaasa has many adventuring opportunities, and the very qualities that make it such an unpleasant place provide numerous roleplaying challenges. Characters should be tough and self-reliant in this realm, but it is a good starting point for campaigns of any power level.

Richemulot: Ideal for those players who revel in playing the ruthless game courtly intrigue, Richemulot is actually one of the most dangerous of the realms. Players should expect a wide range of challenges, and also should be on the lookout for corrupt, treacherous and downright evil nobles, taking care to avoid becoming enmeshed in their complex schemes. Jacqueline Renier, the wererat darklord of the realm, is one of the land's supreme schemers, and this, coupled with her sadistic love of dealing pain and suffering, makes her a most challenging foe.

The Sea of Sorrows: Like the Nocturnal Sea, the Sea of Sorrows harbors several islands of varying sizes, most of which might make good starting points for your campaign. The same considerations as those for the Nocturnal Sea apply to the Sea of Sorrows.

The Shadow Rift: This realm of darkness and evil fey is unsuitable for starting a campaign.

Sithicus: The sad remnant of an ancient elvish state, Sithicus is today a crumbling, tragic place. As such, it is the likely home of most elves in Ravenloft. It is a great starting point for an all-elven campaign, and the realm also harbors half-elves and a handful of humans, so a mixed-race party could conceivably be based in this realm. The domain's most dangerous and wily inhabitant is the werebadger, Azrael Dak, who currently holds some control over Sithicus in the absence of its darklord, Inza Kulchevich.

Tepest: A realm of dark forests, isolated villages and lonely fisherfolk, Tepest has many of the elements of a successful campaign of Gothic horror. Low-level characters can explore the woods around their village, battling goblins and lesser fey, while higher-level adventurers can challenge the forests' more potent denizens, such as the hags, undead, lycanthropes and evil fey that dwell there. The Three Hags, who secretly rule the domain, eventually come into conflict with any good-aligned adventurers, for the darklords despise beauty and happiness and do everything they can to crush it where they find it.

Valachan: The unexplored wilderness of Valachan, covered in dense, temperate rainforest, is ideal for adventurers, explorers and heroes. The folk are a race of somewhat superstitious barbarians, known for their strength and bravery, but also for their distrust of magic and the written word. Valachan's forests harbor numerous beasts, from predatory animals such as black panthers and dire beasts, to more deadly dangers such as ogres, trolls and xenophobic humanoids. These threats can be adjusted based upon your adventurers' power level, and the realm is most suited to adventure and exploration-based games. The realm's darklord, the vampire Baron Ulrik von Kharkov, generally lets his people do as they choose, as long as his power is never challenged.

Vechor: Confusing, chaotic, and constantly changing, Vechor seems infused with the madness of its darklord, Easan the Mad. While the randomly transforming land makes for interesting (and possibly frustrating) adventures, its instability makes it less suited than other realms as a starting point for your campaign.

Verbrek: Distant and isolated, Verbrek is home to barbarians and hardy human tribesmen. Its lonely villages might make good places to begin your campaign, though after a time, players may wish to expand their PCs' horizons. Foes include evil animals of all sorts, especially wolves, and the wicked bands of lycanthropes who terrorize the land. Good characters, barbarians and rangers all can find adventure here, fighting against the servants of the Wolf God.

Clusters

Many clusters make good settings for limited campaigns. Each has its own local feel, and provides much local flavor and color. The realms within these clusters are related, and generally, each cluster can be considered separately as a setting for adventure.

Amber Wastes: This cluster is suitable for players and DMs who like desert adventures with a strong Egyptian flavor. Characters should expect to explore tombs, survive harsh climates and confront mummies and other powerful ancient undead. Characters who originate here might have a hard time in the outside world, reconciling their Bronze Age cultural level with the medieval, chivalric or renaissance cultures of the remainder of Ravenloft, but this can also translate into an interesting roleplaying challenge for experienced players.

The Frozen Reaches: A place for barbarians, rangers and other outdoorsy-types, the Reaches are suitable for a campaign setting or starting point as long as everyone is expecting the same thing: a wilderness-based campaign that features challenging weather conditions, bitter cold and the creatures of the frozen north. This is not the place for those who want to play at power politics.

The Shadowlands: Savage and sinister, with much of its land controlled by a ruthless theocratic regime, the Shadowlands have numerous opportunities for exploration and adventure, especially in the tangled wilderness that claims Avonleigh. The Shadowlands might represent a good destination for an established band of adventurers, but probably doesn't make a good place to start your campaign.

The Verdurous Lands: These hot, humid lands have a distinctly south Asian feel to them, and are suited to campaigns set in exotic, tropical lands. The jungle plateau is alive with animals, monsters and humanoid tribes, as well as the ruins of ancient civilizations, ready made for adventurers and explorers. The rigid social structure of the land's single civilized nation, Sri Raji, again presents challenges for characters who originate in this cluster. For outsiders, the Verdurous Lands stand out and may present difficulty for those unused to strange foreign cultures.

Zherisia: Grim, but actually full of roleplaying possibilities, Zherisa boasts a single city, the vast and crumbling metropolis of Paridon, where crime is rampant and bloody-handed killers stalk the night, providing many opportunities for urban-based adventurers. Beneath the city lie even greater opportunities, for the subterranean realm of Timor harbors everything from creeping vermin to hulking, slime-coated monstrosities. Timor remains a frightening place of deadly danger, more suited to mid- or high-level adventurers than beginners. Residents of Paridon are worldly and sophisticated and are usually able to travel to other realms without difficulty.

Islands of Terror

Most islands of terror are just that: isolated places of unbelievable danger and horror. Most are unsuitable for starting adventurers, but can be adapted, depending upon your tastes

Bluetspur: Another realm that is best visited and never stayed in, Bluetspur harbors monstrosities such as mind flayers and similar evil creatures, and has no means of supporting beginning adventurers.

G'Henna: Among the most desperate of the realms, G'Henna really doesn't have much to recommend it as a place for your adventurers to begin their careers. The ruthless priest class keeps the populace under its thumb, and all live under the constant threat of an evil deity who seems to live only to kill and destroy. Again, G'Henna is better for higher-level adventurers, and those who come here expecting a challenge.

Odiare: Here, a single village lives in fear of an evil, malevolent toy and its army of murderous playthings. While Odiare can serve as a starting point, its limited adventuring possibilities make it unsuitable overall.

Rokushima Táiyoo: Unlike the other islands of terror, Rokushima Táiyoo is a reasonable place to start or set a longer campaign. With a Japanese flavor, it is good for players and DMs who like horror with an east Asian feel and who enjoy mixing their ghosts and lycanthropes with samurai and ninja. The constant warfare of the region

allows fighters and other combat-oriented classes to find employment and diversion, while the esoteric culture encourages monks, druids and more arcane-inclined characters to practice their trade. Rogues are always in demand in the cities or wilderness. The only drawback to setting a campaign here is its relative isolation from the rest of Ravenloft and the utter exoticism of characters from Rokushima Táiyoo who happen to venture into other realms.

Souragne: This swampy domain provides numerous opportunities for adventure, and, like Rokushima, makes a good starting point for your campaign. The mood of the place is tropical, with lush bayous harboring deadly animals and hideous swamp-creatures, while the Maiden of the Swamp and the other loa pose a constant threat — a fear that lurks in the heart of all Souragniens. The decadence and vice of Port d'Elhour are rich sources of income and challenges to rogues and other city-dwelling types, while the horrors of the bayou can also provide adventurers with rich rewards. Souragniens visit other realms without experiencing too much culture shock, and so make good starting characters for multirealm campaigns.

Creating Your Campaign

So you have gathered together your players, discussed your campaign with them, and gotten a feel for what kind of adventures they like. You have generated the characters, created backgrounds, decided how they met or what brings them together and even selected an appropriate domain in which to begin your campaign. Now, taking into account the desires of your players, as well as your own style as a DM, you can start mapping out the trials and tribulations that you inflict on your tormented player characters.

Previous volumes such as **Heroes of Light** and **Champions of Darkness** have mapped out potential adventures and guidelines for both good and evil parties, respectively. The guidelines here provide the DM with more general ideas, focused on parties with a wide range of members, alignments and goals. Some of the following ideas fit neatly into the niches already created in the two previous volumes. The addition of shades of gray in the form of neutral-aligned characters, and those who might be corrupted by the fell nature of the Dark Powers makes these guidelines more flexible, for any can fall into the camp of good or evil depending upon the party's actions. Each description is followed by a list of appropriate classes, suitable levels and party alignment best suited to the campaign. Some are generic, leaving the DM to fill in the details, such as the domains and individuals involved, while others are specific but can be changed to suit your tastes.

Secrets

Everyone has secrets. In the realms of Ravenloft, however, secrets take on an even greater significance. Gothic fiction is full of hidden guilt, ancient curses, secret ancestry and the like, and creating such secrets for your player characters can enhance your campaign enormously. Listed below are some suggested secrets; DMs are encouraged to scour the pages of Gothic literature and the images of classic motion pictures for more.

• **Lost Heritage:** The character is heir to an old bounty. This may be lands, a title, a valuable heirloom or something similar. Claiming this heritage may form part of your campaign but, as might be expected in a campaign of Gothic horror, this heritage comes with a price: a curse, an enemy or perhaps a terrible responsibility.

• **Family Curse:** Curses are important in Gothic fiction, and are similarly prominent in a Ravenloft campaign. A family curse, however, isn't something that is picked up while adventuring. Family curses are more subtle — a character might not even know that she has one. She may have been informed of the curse in childhood, and grown up fearing that it would show itself. The curse may take a number of guises: sickness, madness, the death of loved ones, the failure of every enterprise, a tendency toward undeath or lycanthropy (see below) or it may be a more mundane curse that simply deals the character with bad luck or minuses on certain rolls.

Uncertainty is an important part of any curse. Did the family curse take effect or was the character unlucky? Is a bad incident a sign that the curse is taking effect or just a normal part of life in Ravenloft? Is there a curse at all? Could it be that past disasters and mishaps are only thought to be a curse, but are simply due to chance or a self-fulfilling prophecy? Is there a way of breaking the curse: righting old wrongs, settling with family enemies, doing good? All these questions can be involved in your game, and the curse itself may form the centerpiece for an entire campaign.

• **Lycanthropy/Vampirism:** Legend holds that such foul conditions as lycanthropy and vampirism

can be inherited, and may be contracted as a result of past evil, rather than the conscious actions of a vampire or werecreature. This is a variation on the family curse that can lead to very intriguing and intense roleplaying. Are the vampiric attacks that plague the countryside actually the work of the party's lawful good leader? Does the friendly bard stalk the countryside in wolf form on the nights of the full moon? If a prominent ancestor was said to be a weretiger, is it possible that his descendants display the same characteristics? Once more, uncertainty and fear are crucial to this plot element. Once a character is revealed as a werecreature or vampire, the tone of the campaign changes from one of mystery to one of determination. The character must then be confined, destroyed or cured (this, too, makes for an excellent campaign, but it is best not to reveal the truth too soon).

• **Madness:** A beginning character may be the victim of madness. It may not immediately manifest itself, but slowly as the campaign progresses, the dementia rears its ugly head, interfering with the adventurer's intentions, driving him to more and more aberrant actions.

The **Ravenloft Player's Handbook** has guidelines regarding madness. Like curses, these may also be imposed on beginning characters. Madness may be inherited, the result of a curse or the result of childhood trauma. In such cases, a good reason for the madness should be provided. A character with an irrational fear of the dark may have been locked in a dark cellar when she was a child. Another, who goes mad at the sight of blood, might have witnessed a bloody murder and repressed the memory. Discovery of the reasons for madness can form a useful subplot for any campaign.

• **Secret Relative:** One of the most popular family secrets in Gothic literature is the presence of a lost relative. In the attic, kept in a tiny room away from the rest of the world, lives a mad old woman who has not aged mentally since the day she murdered her own brother, sixty years ago. Chained in the basement is a twisted, evil creature, whose mother died of fright after seeing him for the first time. Somewhere on the vast, rambling estate is a filthy, babbling man, who witnessed unspeakable horrors when he was a child. All these are family members, kept alive by doting parents, family tradition or simply due to the fact that they cannot be killed by normal means. The young heir to the estate, the new master of the manor, the lost relative who returns to claim his heritage — all must deal with this strange turn of events — often their very role as master of the household requires the maintenance of this mad or malformed relative. The secret relative must never escape, nor must he ever be killed, lest a terrible curse descend on the family.

Vendetta

One or more characters are out for revenge. Perhaps they're all from the same village, which was destroyed by a powerful monster, warlord or even a darklord. They have lost friends, family or lovers and now live only to avenge themselves upon the evil perpetrators. In Ravenloft, of course, such villains are even more powerful and influential than in normal fantasy campaigns, and those who pursue them are at a built-in disadvantage.

Vendetta campaigns are suitable for all classes, though they could be combat-heavy. This type of campaign is also ideal for beginning adventurers, providing a common origin, goals and a reason to work together from the beginning. It is also a potentially powerful story, for the adventurers may be forced to confront the roots of their own hatred, and if their desire for vengeance becomes all-consuming, they risk becoming worse than the monster they hunt.

The Crimson Reaver

In the lands of southern Darkon, Baron Arcus controls his lands with an iron fist. His most feared minion is the armored monstrosity known as the Crimson Reaver, who leads a band of fiendish warriors and dread hounds. When the village of Vasira defies Arcus's rule and refuses to yield up its crops to his tax collectors, the baron unleashes the Crimson Reaver, who attacks at the head of his murderous fiends and destroys the village. A handful of young villagers survives and swears vengeance against both the Reaver and his master, the Baron.

Focused on this goal, the young adventurers must first see to their own survival, for their home has been destroyed, and the wilds of southern Darkon are known for their dangers. After battling undead and lycanthropes who seek to feed off the survivors of the massacre, the characters are befriended by wandering Vistani, who have also suffered at Arcus's hands. For a time, they accompany the Vistani in their meanderings, gaining experience and learning more about their foe. The Crimson Reaver, they learn, is actually a powerful vampire-warrior who serves Arcus unwillingly.

The Crimson Reaver campaign is, of course, focused on the characters gaining vengeance upon the individual who hurt them and destroyed their home. Along the way, they face many decisions and opportunities to understand their own hatred. For example, the inhabitants of an innocent village may hold an artifact that helps them to defeat the Crimson Reaver or break the bond that ties him to Baron Arcus. Fearing that they will be attacked if they reveal the existence of the artifact, they refuse to yield it up to the party, forcing the adventurers to choose between giving up the one item that might aid them and assaulting a settlement of innocent peasants.

The final act of the campaign could involve the confrontation with either the Reaver, Baron Arcus or both. If the characters succeed in defeating their nemeses, they may continue on, possibly becoming mercenaries or defenders of the innocent, leading into a Military or Monster Hunters campaign.

Monster Hunters

Heroes of Light describes a heroic campaign in which characters stalk the forces of evil and seek to free the common people from the tyranny of darkness. A Monster Hunters campaign is similar, but the party's motivation is a bit less… selfless. They hunt for profit, hiring themselves out as mercenary stalkers, learning the ways of their wily foes, hunting down increasingly challenging prey and reaping rich rewards from patrons. While monster hunters may be of good alignment, their primary concern is their own welfare, or at least the welfare of their friends and companions, rather than the liberation of Ravenloft in general. All classes are allowed here, for each has different abilities that aid in dealing with the various monstrosities of the Dread Realms. Low-level characters may find this type of campaign tough at first, but once they have gained some experience, the rewards can be rich.

The Circle of Steel

A disparate group of adventurers find themselves besieged at an isolated inn, when a local vampire-lord and his followers attack. Banding together, they help the locals defeat the attack, and are asked to stay on and aid in the defense of the town, which happens to be located near an especially notorious Sinkhole of Evil.

The adventurers agree, forming the Circle of Steel. Some join out of affection and desire to defend the townsfolk. Others are pure mercenaries, seeking gold, knowledge or power. The conflict between these different motivations might trigger arguments or open hostility between members of the Circle, but all must stay together since their activities have made powerful enemies.

After a time, the Circle's reputation spreads, and folk from other communities begin to call upon their services, asking for aid with especially dangerous creatures. Eventually, the Circle kills an especially powerful creature that was closely associated with the realm's darklord. Seeing the Circle as a threat to his power, the darklord takes a personal interest in their downfall. This confrontation may force the characters to flee to another realm or fight the darklord directly, possibly defeating him and liberating the realm.

Military

Ravenloft is full of violence, much of it of a military nature. The power-hungry darklord, Vlad Drakov of Falkovnia, constantly covets surrounding domains and regularly sets his troops on the path of conquest, usually ending in catastrophe. Gabrielle Aderre, darklord of Invidia, fights a civil war with her son, Malocchio. The werebadger Azrael Dak fights with the elves of Sithicus. And everywhere, individual villages, warlords or nobles fight each other or the forces of darkness that surround them. Ravenloft is a rich source of employment for those with military skills, and the participants in this campaign can be the members of a single domain's armed forces or, better still from an adventuring standpoint, a band of tough, veteran mercenaries. Combat-oriented classes are most appropriate to this campaign, which can start at low level with the adventurers as green, callow beginners, eventually rising in level until they are feared throughout their realm and beyond.

The Black Dragons

When the legions of Falkovnia are defeated, many young and inexperienced recruits are left behind or captured. Stranded in Richemulot, the characters enter service with a well-known mercenary captain, and are taken to Invidia where they are hired by Malocchio Aderre in his civil war against his mother, Gabrielle. Combined into their own unit, the characters are ordered to scout, raid behind the lines and harry Gabrielle's wolfweres whenever they can.

When their commander and his unit are destroyed, the characters are left on their own with the equipment and booty that they seized from the enemy. Now, they are contacted by Gabrielle and asked to change sides. Whether they do, their reputation begins to grow — due to their insignia, they are known as the Black Dragons, and after a few missions they find themselves very much in demand around the Ravenloft domains.

After service in such diverse domains as Darkon, Tepest and Sithicus, they are finally contacted once more by Vlad Drakov of Falkovnia, who wishes them to serve his land on another war of conquest. He does not, of course, recognize the raw recruits that he sent to their deaths years before. How do the adventurers respond to this? Will they serve their old master, turn on him or ignore his pleas and continue their adventures elsewhere?

Seekers of Forbidden Knowledge

Scholars and quiet researchers don't seem the type to engage in heroic adventures, but in Ravenloft, the meek and intelligent are often called upon to face the shadows, or conversely, to join them.

Characters in this campaign may be priests, students, academics or dilettantes, possessed of curiosity about the unknown or possibly be assigned to delve into the secrets of Ravenloft. As is common in works of horror fiction, such characters do not remain isolated in their ivory towers for long — unspeakable horrors lurk in Ravenloft's shadows, and are certain to take notice of those who dig too deeply into their secrets.

Intellectual and esoteric characters such as clerics, monks and wizards are best suited to this type of campaign, though fighters, rogues and the like can provide muscle to defend the less-physical types from the horrors they might awaken. The **Heroes of Light** supplement includes the dilettante, metaphysician and scholar prestige classes, all of which are appropriate for this type of campaign.

The Book of Darkness

At a prestigious university in Port-a-Lucine in the heart of Dementlieu, a small group of scholars seeks answers to many questions about the realm of Ravenloft and the nature of the forces controlling

it. Charged with finding a certain lost tome by the higher authorities at the university, the scholars must research much of the history of their realm, learning many things not known to the common people. Eventually, the book is discovered in a ruined castle in the wild lands of Mordent. A hazardous journey south ensues, and the scholars, along with their guards — fighters, rogues, barbarians, rangers and the like recruited from among the student body — cross into Mordent and retrieve the book from its ghostly guardians.

Charged with translating and transcribing the book, the investigators now make several frightening discoveries. Not only does the so-called *Book of Darkness* reveal much about Ravenloft's true nature and history, it appears to have much more information than expected, including the truth about many contemporary darklords. The most dangerous revelation is that the obscure nobleman, Dominic D'Honaire, is actually the darklord of Dementlieu! The book also contains numerous spells and powerful incantations that would cause much havoc were they to fall into the wrong hands.

Powerful forces begin to converge on the university, from outsiders who wish to steal the secrets in the book to mind-controlled minions of Dominic D'Honaire, seeking to prevent knowledge of his powers from spreading. The characters are forced to flee, but for some reason the book comes with them, drawing the foes along. The characters must escape from the clutches of the creatures that would take the book and figure out how to destroy the dread volume forever.

Explorers

Another traditional fantasy element given a special Ravenloft-oriented twist, explorers may be adventurers seeking new vistas, young villagers eager to see the outside world, scholars on expeditions for institutes of higher learning, tribes-folk on quests and so on. Many of Ravenloft's domains (such as the Wildlands, Avonleigh and Sithicus) are largely unexplored, places of forbidding wilderness, lost ruins and subterranean labyrinths. All await exploration by intrepid player characters, but the risks of such adventures are even greater among the mists of Ravenloft. Unknown things slumber or lurk to avoid attention, ancient artifacts and treasures carry monstrous curses and the darklords of many realms do not take kindly to outsiders blundering around, discovering things that are better left undisturbed.

Along the Misty Paths

The more civilized and educated inhabitants of Ravenloft know much of its geography, history and environment. The mysterious and sometimes-unreliable Mistways are often the only way of reaching such distant realms as Pharazia and Rokushima Táiyoo. The advantages of understanding the Mistways or of discovering and mapping new ones are obvious, and the few adventurous souls who have successfully done so are often rewarded with fame and wealth. On the other hand, most of these adventurous souls vanish into the mists, never to return, but this does not seem to deter more eager souls from volunteering to explore the Mistways.

The adventurers are veterans or experienced travelers who are employed by a university, wealthy merchant, power-hungry noble or other patron to enter, map and investigate an unexplored or newly discovered Mistway. Alternatively, the characters may be hired to investigate disappearances or unusual happenings in a known or normally reliable Mistway.

Another motivation for the characters has nothing to do with wealthy patrons at all. They may discover a map or document describing a lost or unknown Mistway and choose to investigate it themselves.

The possibilities of such exploration should be obvious to the DM. The Mistway may lead to a new or unknown domain or it may contain strange pathways or detours. It might have been purposely diverted to a small pocket domain or Island of Terror ruled by a ruthless darklord who seeks to escape into Ravenloft or expand his domain. This island in the Mists may also harbor even more dangerous foes, such as a sleeping deity or demon that is either awakened by the adventurers or objects strenuously to being disturbed.

This campaign has roles for all classes, and is probably best for at least mid-level characters, possibly even more experienced adventurers.

Diplomats

Even in the world of Ravenloft, nobles and darklords sometimes have to talk to one another. When the rulers and nobles themselves cannot visit, they turn to diplomats. These diplomats need guards, aides and assistants: spellcasters to create protective magic, warriors to defend them, rogues and rangers to scout and sneak where necessary. Ravenloft diplomacy, complicated as it is by the

secrets of the darklords, the presence of supernatural creatures and the constant manipulation of the Dark Powers, is an even more hazardous undertaking than in a traditional fantasy campaign. The courts of rulers and darklords throughout Ravenloft, especially in those nations such as Richemulot, Dementlieu and Darkon, are seething with intrigue. Those who join the diplomatic service of nations are certain to learn or see things that they should not, and complications are certain to ensue.

The characters will be at the heart of power politics in Ravenloft, and are sure to run afoul of opposing nobles who seek to thwart their missions, local rulers who want to learn their secrets and even the realm's darklord intent on using them to gain leverage over his foes.

House of Secrets

After performing a valuable service for the ruler or darklord of their domain, the characters are recruited as members of an important diplomatic mission. They may not want to go, for such missions invariably get their participants involved in deadly intrigue and secret politics, but the wishes of a powerful king or darklord cannot easily be ignored. Probably with misgivings, the adventurers set off on their mission, accompanying their kingdom's diplomats and functionaries.

The foreign court proves as tricky as expected. Many different factions are at work — some favor the presence of the characters and their diplomatic efforts, others despise the characters' domain and seek to discredit the heroes any way they can. The realm's diplomats may be the object of assassination attempts, the characters may be accused of espionage, framed for crimes or be the object of bribery attempts. Throw in the elements of a Ravenloft campaign — ghosts, secrets, ancient curses and hidden evils — and the characters have their hands full.

Spies

Even more dangerous than diplomacy, espionage is the realm of the most daring (and foolhardy) adventurers in Ravenloft. They may work for their ruler or for the darklord of their domain. The forces of good may also employ spies, as scouts or observers in an opposing domain or to infiltrate the camps of the enemy. Espionage is a perilous game, however, and characters may end up betrayed or abandoned by their employers, framed for crimes, pursued by opposing authorities, imprisoned or tortured for the information they carry.

Spying is a risky business, and is a rough game for beginners. Such campaigns are best suited to mid- or higher-level characters, though beginning characters can do low-end espionage work on behalf of their domain or faction before moving on to more challenging assignments. Rogues excel in this type of campaign due to their stealth abilities and their high number of skill points. Fighters and other combat-oriented types are good should the party be drawn into open confrontation with their foes, but this is not desirable in most espionage-based campaigns. Spellcasters have access to a wide range of magic, much of which provides invaluable support to any intelligence mission.

Alone Against the Shadow

Azalin Rex, ruler of Darkon the largest domain in Ravenloft, seeks power and a way of restoring his lost humanity. Rumors have reached him of a potent artifact that lies in the heart of the neighboring realm of Nova Vaasa. This artifact is said to be able to restore the dead to life, and even, it is rumored, transform undead creatures into living beings. Desiring this artifact above all else, he has begun to plan an invasion of the realm, knowing that its darklord (whose identity he has not yet discovered) cannot seal the borders and doesn't have the strength to resist him.

Nova Vaasa's ruler, the vain Prince Othmar Bolshnik, becomes aware of Azalin's plans, though he does not know exactly what the lich-king seeks. He calls upon a group of subjects who have proved useful in the past — the player characters — to secretly enter Darkon and discover what they can.

This is a taller order than it initially seems. Visitors who linger in Darkon invariably lose memories of their old lives and believe that they have always lived there. Azalin Rex, one of the most powerful darklords in Ravenloft, is able to see the thoughts and memories of anyone within his borders and replace or modify them at will. Unless the characters are exceptionally careful, they eventually run afoul of Azalin and are easily controlled. If this happens, the campaign is not over — the characters may be turned against their old masters, given false information and told to report back to Prince Othmar.

This campaign has the potential to become an especially pointed exercise in psychology, deception and madness. Are the characters' memories

accurate? Have they been controlled by Azalin all along, and are their past adventures mere false thoughts planted there by the lich-king? Who is their friend, and who is their enemy?

This campaign may end up frustrating players used to a lot of autonomy; the DM should inform them that it may involve some heavy-duty mind-games, and make sure that such things are acceptable to the players. It represents a considerable challenge for the DM, but should prove a "memorable" experience.

City Guards

The most ubiquitous of fantasy jobs takes on new significance in the misty realms of Ravenloft. The crowded urban centers of the region are quintessential homes of horror — foul creatures creep through the sewers, intelligent creatures such as vampires and lycanthropes control the legions of the night, and demented killers stalk the innocent. Into all of this are thrust the city guards: underpaid, overworked and unappreciated. Characters may be forced to take employment as guards when facing economic hardship, they might be drafted into service by a crisis such as a plague, crime wave or invasion or they might simply volunteer to serve out of a sense of civic duty. They then face the day-to-day challenges of enforcing the law in Ravenloft, from mundane crime to supernatural opponents wreaking havoc among the common people.

City guards deal with the dregs of society, lurking in shadows, delving into the sewers and catacombs, creeping into the lairs of deadly criminals or monsters. It's a thankless task, of course, but complaining guards are often told that virtue is its own reward. A pragmatic city guard disagrees, claiming that the gold and valuables looted from wrongdoers is better compensation than the abstract satisfaction of doing good.

Suitable characters include fighters, rogues and clerics. Wizards, druids, sorcerers and monks don't normally gravitate toward such mundane jobs, but might if circumstances warrant, and if so can provide some much-needed firepower or magic backup to the beleaguered guardsmen.

The City Beneath

There are few tasks more thankless than service in the city guard of Paridon, the single urban center of the bleak Island of Terror called Zherisia.

Though culturally and scientifically advanced, this dark, crumbling city is nevertheless a cesspool of poverty, crime and violence. Adventurers trapped in Zherisia may have no choice, however, for service with the city guards may be their only way of avoiding the squalor and disease of Paridon's teeming slums.

The narrow, foggy streets of Paridon are a labyrinthine wilderness even on the brightest of days, but in the dark of night (when newly recruited guardsmen are invariably expected to serve), it becomes positively hellish. Crime is rampant, and the poorer sections of the city are ruled by criminal bosses and gangs, some of which are actually monstrous creatures such as vampires, shapechangers or outsiders. While most affluent or middle-class inhabitants hide behind barred doors after dark, the poor often have no choice but to spend nights on the street, prey to whatever creatures may stalk them. The city sewers are a gateway to the realm of Timor (see below), but periodically they heave up horrors that stalk the streets and terrorize Paridon's inhabitants. Killers and robbers, both mundane and supernatural, are common, and the infamous killer known as Bloody Jack is said to be on the prowl once more.

Beneath the city streets, however, the world is even more terrifying. The subterranean realm of Timor lies in wait like a predatory beast, and those who enter its endless passages rarely return. The guards may be drawn into this world, however, in pursuit of criminals or monsters or while looking for missing persons or property. The authorities of Paridon, in fact, may decide that Timor has existed as it is for too long, and call for a crusade to push back the foul creatures that live there. By this time, the characters will be veteran guards, and will be expected to participate in the operation. As might be expected, the assault probably ends in disaster, leaving the guardsmen isolated and forced to escape the sewers, lest they lose their lives and souls.

Detectives

Detectives also seek to solve crime. They do not need to be members of any official law enforcement agency, but may instead be occult investigators, freelance operators or consulting detectives in the mold of Sherlock Holmes. The gloom of Ravenloft lends itself well to gritty adventures in the style of traditional hard-boiled, problem-plagued private eyes, and the setting's fantasy elements add a new twist to this familiar character type. Ravenloft is full of challenges and opponents for such "tough guy" adventurers — kidnappings, disappearances, mysterious murders, stolen inheritances, shadowy stalkers and lost legacies are at the heart of much Gothic adventure. Characters employed to get to the bottom of such events are likely to open a Pandora's Box of trouble, but are nonetheless driven to find the answers once the challenge has been delivered.

Detective work is somewhat more rewarding than city guard gruntwork, if for no other reason than the fact that the pay is better. But in many ways it's more hazardous, for while ordinary guards face thugs, killers and robbers, detectives have to face wilier, higher-ranking foes, as well as the dangers of crossing paths with greedy nobles or corrupt superiors. Don't be afraid to look into the pages of pulp fiction for ideas — a seedy private eye with a .45 could just as easily be a tough investigator with sword and crossbow.

Suitable classes include rogues, due to their high skill points, fighters, clerics, wizards and sorcerers. In general, the leaders should be the most intelligent of the bunch, with skills such as Spot, Search, Sense motive and the like. Combat-oriented classes such as barbarians can act as the investigators' guards or sidekicks, and can take over once the fighting starts. The **Heroes of Light** supplement contains rules for developing the detective as a prestige class.

Lord of the Secret Paths

While they are nowhere near as foul as the fog-bound streets of Paridon, the rougher parts of Port-a-Lucine in the modern nation of Dementlieu are nevertheless a challenge to the authorities. Smuggling, gambling, prostitution, assault and murder are all widespread. In the center of this web of crime lies a mastermind known only as *Le Seigneur des Sentiers Secrets*, or Lord of the Secret Paths.

Characters may begin as guardsmen, visitors, nobles or ordinary citizens and find themselves recruited into Dementlieu's police force, expected to go undercover to infiltrate the Lord's criminal organization and discover the master's true identity. The investigators can expect to participate in crimes and even be drawn into the heart of this secret crime family, and may even be tempted by the evil that lies there, forcing powers checks and other tests of their resolve.

In the end, the Lord of the Secret Paths may have any number of identities. He may not exist at all, but be a convenient fiction to divert suspicion from the real leaders of the gang, he may be a mere figurehead, a powerful wizard, demon, undead creature or other monstrosity. He may even be a relative of lord-governor Marcel Guignol or even an Obedient — a mindless servant in thrall to the realm's real ruler, the darklord Dominic d'Honaire. Discovering the Lord's actual identity may only be the beginning, however, for the investigators may now know too much, and be pursued by those who want to keep their secrets hidden.

Bandit-Lords

The characters are, to put it bluntly, robbers and rapscallions. They may prey on passing travelers, rob the caravans of the wealthy or try to build their own wild, lawless realm, where all pay them homage and tribute. They may be outlaws driven from their homes by destructive forces of darkness, innocents accused of crimes they did not commit by corrupt local officials or they may genuinely be criminally minded bandits who simply want to get rich off the innocent. Bandit campaigns are best suited to characters with somewhat ambiguous moral codes, for even those who intend to do good are often forced to engage in activities that they themselves might find distasteful — a perfect opportunity for powers checks and corruption of once-good characters.

Characters who participate in this campaign will certainly be chaotic, often evil. Chaotic neutral characters would be in it for themselves, while chaotic good adventurers may use banditry to fight the tyranny of an evil darklord or local ruler, as Robin Hood did. Lawful evil bandits often see their career in crime as a stepping-stone to greater conquests.

The power level of opponents grows as the bandits' notoriety increases. Initially, characters face individual victims or foes who seldom fight back: lone travelers, small caravans or carriages full of wealthy travelers. As time goes by, and the authorities become more aware of the characters' activities, travelers begin to travel in packs, hire seasoned guards or even gain the aid of local rulers. In the end, especially powerful bandits may attract the attention of the realm's darklord. Those who successfully build their power to the point that they can defy the domain's rulers might gain the favor of the Dark Powers and possibly be granted their own domain.

Masters of the Wilderness

Driven from their home village by a greedy nobleman or by the realm's ruler, falsely (or truthfully) accused of crime, a band of adventurers seeks shelter in the forest. They are hungry, broke, without equipment or shelter. Who could blame them for turning to crime to fill their bellies and purses?

The dark forests are alive with foes and these would-be bandit chieftains have to contend with tribes of humanoids, woodland monsters and bands of hunters sent by the authorities to track them down. Eventually, they may find or build a lair deep in the woods, hidden and well defended, from which their empire can continue to spread.

At last, these new masters of the wilderness attract the direct attention of the realm's darklord. Depending upon his attitude, the land's ruler may seek to recruit them and turn their considerable resources to aiding him in controlling the domain. He may see them as a threat and move against them. Either way, the characters need to make a decision, and the result may govern their fate and the fate of the entire realm.

Crime Bosses

While there may be a good side to banditry, the life of a criminal leader is less easy to justify. In some cases, criminals may represent a rebellious faction that breaks the official law while fighting for the rights of the poor and downtrodden or secretly uses its criminal activities to battle corrupt or evil authorities. This is rare in Ravenloft, however, for crime is a natural avenue for corruption, and few outlaws are able to maintain any kind of moral compass.

Characters in this campaign have joined the lowest ranks of criminal society, and embrace the opportunity to commit acts of mayhem, robbery and violence for profit. Starting as low-level functionaries in a crime family, these individuals can rise through the ranks and be granted more authority. They may make enemies in other crime organizations or within their own, and eventually be forced to step into a leadership role, either by the absence or retirement of the original boss or after engaging in a coup to topple older leaders. In any event, a crime bosses campaign is not for the faint of heart or the squeamish.

Of course, rogues are a natural for criminal campaigns, but there is plenty of room for other classes as well. Fighters and barbarians provide combat capabilities, wizards and sorcerers give magical support, clerics add divine grace, healing and considerable fighting skills. Druids and rangers, being wilderness-based classes, are less likely to thrive in an intensely urban environment. Paladins are, of course, right out.

Rogue's House

In the heart of one of Ravenloft's most crime-ridden urban centers, young thieves and roughnecks struggle to survive. Often the only way to do so is to join one of the many criminal organizations that thrive in the squalor and corruption of the cities.

Caught brawling or robbing a passerby, the characters are informed that they must join up or be severely disciplined for all crime in the region is under the control of a single entity, the local thieves' guild. Eventually, possibly with some persuading, the characters agree and are immediately taken into the organization. At first, they are apprentices, trained in the arts of thievery, taught the secret language of the streets and given minor jobs to prove their worthiness. As time goes by, however, the characters begin to distinguish themselves and grow to be noteworthy, even infamous, criminals.

As is common in such cases, they are sure to make enemies. In such an organization, these enemies are even more numerous and powerful than usual. Wizards, nobles and merchants who have been robbed may desire revenge on the thieves' guild in general and the adventurers in particular. The authorities may become frustrated that the characters remain free and no amount of bribery can satisfy them. Rival guilds or up-and-coming rogues within the guild may be jealous of the party's success and try to betray them to the city guard, draw them into ambush or frame them for offenses against their guild master.

Eventually, if the characters manage to survive these plots, they may find themselves in positions of authority within the guild, possibly even leading it. This adds another dimension to

the campaign, as the adventurers struggle to continue their careers, while overseeing a complex criminal organization.

Escape from the Domains

Sometimes, outsiders are transported into Ravenloft by magical mishap, the malevolent magic of the mists or for their own bizarre reasons. Other Ravenloft denizens might learn of the existence of other worlds, where the darklords and their evil do not hold sway. Both may plot to escape from the clutches of the Dark Powers, seeking *gates* or other ways of leaving the shadows of Ravenloft behind. The more varied the adventurers' classes are the better, given the incredible challenges faced by would-be escapees.

Normally, only capable and high-level characters can hope to flee from the Dark Powers. Most good characters find Ravenloft horrifying and want to leave, but evil characters may find Ravenloft to their liking, though they may also object to darklords and other powerful entities getting all the glory. Ultimately, those who try to escape Ravenloft must do so against the opposition of one of the darklords. Worse, the Dark Powers themselves may take notice of the fleeing characters, and try to stop them using their most deadly abilities.

The Argent Gate

The adventurers in this campaign may be outsiders who were trapped in Ravenloft by the Mists, long-time residents or even native-born inhabitants. In any case, they learn that there is a way to leave the shadows of Ravenloft behind. They might escape to another world where the Dark Powers do not hold sway and where the likes of the darklords cannot exist, or if they do, are opposed by the forces of light with at least some chance of success.

An ancient book or manuscript describes something called the Argent Gate, a mysterious artifact that is said to control travel to other worlds. Chroniclers tell of wondrous journeys to new universes, and the marvels that can be found there. Sucked up by the Mists, the Argent Gate was rendered inactive by the Dark Powers and placed in the keeping of an especially trusted darklord. The characters eventually find information that might allow them to reactivate the Argent Gate and allow them to escape. All they need to do is find out what darklord has the gate, how to get to his domain, enter his fortress, avoid him and his minions, reach the gate and see if the enchantment works. That done, they find out if the Argent Gate works as promised or whether there is more to it than they suspected.

This nature of this campaign depends upon its length and intent. It may be the climax of a normal Ravenloft campaign, the beginning of a series of multiplanar adventures as the party attempts to find its way home or it may be a campaign in itself, beginning with the characters as established Ravenloft inhabitants. They may even begin as starting characters, and devote their entire careers to finding and activating the Argent Gate.

Mixing Campaigns

Obviously, you don't want your campaign to fall into a rut. A Monster Hunters game may begin to grow stale after a while, resembling a "monster of the week" television series, in which the heroes encounter a new threat, defeat it and move on to the next with little character development or real excitement.

Some campaigns lead naturally to one another. City guards become detectives, for example, while spies may find themselves as bandits when they are cut off from their patron nation. A good campaign is organic and dynamic, living and growing from small beginnings to something bigger and more interesting. The Monster Hunter campaign described above could easily expand into something more. As the characters develop a reputation, the evil forces in the surrounding countryside may combine forces to wipe them out or they may band together into an army, and sweep over the countryside seeking revenge, forcing the adventurers into a more Military-oriented game. A particularly powerful monster might defy the heroes' might, committing atrocities and daring the characters to pursue him, thus moving the game into Vendetta territory. Conversely, a group of evil or amoral characters who start in a Bandit campaign may have to defend themselves against the authorities or would-be heroes, making the same conversion to Military or Vendetta-style gaming.

Foes

Hush, Demara," Timorian's voice was gentle, the touch of his hand on her clammy brow soothing. "You have come through the worst of it."

Demara opened her eyes. She lay wrapped in her bedroll near the fire. "How long have I been...."

"Unconscious?" Vangelia finished for her. The rogue held a tin cup of meaty smelling broth in her hand and helped Demara take a sip of the hearty liquid. "About two days. Your wounds were bad, but Timorian healed the worst of them. It was the poison that took so long to leave your system."

"I prayed to blessed Ezra to take the poison from you," Timorian said. "You should feel better by the morning."

"He got away again, didn't he?" Demara said, her voice weak but filled with bitterness.

Vangelia nodded. "That's the third time he's bested us. We can usually defeat whatever creatures he sends after us, orcs, ghouls, those ugly things with all the teeth—"

"Goblyns," Timorian said. "At least I think that's what they were."

"But he always manages to elude us," Demara said again. "Why can't we ever best him?"

"Because he's better than we are?" Vangelia offered, her voice a little too bright.

"Each time we meet him, we learn more about him," Timorian said. "This time we learned that he's not above using poison against his worst enemies — us."

Demara laughed. "I guess that's comforting in a way, to know that he fears us enough to fight dirty."

"That's what enemies are for," Vangelia said, holding the broth up to Demara's lips once more.

Every campaign needs enemies, but enemies in the Ravenloft setting are more subtle and challenging than normal. They may indeed be the violent, bloodthirsty monsters familiar to most fantasy gamers, but there is also room for less obvious foes — enemies who work by guile and stealth, always behind the scenes, lurking in shadow, their presence felt but rarely if ever seen. Mad wizards, powerful outsiders, intelligent and diabolical undead, cunning shapeshifters, murderous criminals, cursed nobles, corrupt priests and more can all play a role in your campaign of Gothic horror.

What kinds of foes are best suited to your characters? That depends upon their levels, classes, and what sort of campaign you want to run. Monster hunters want several different foes, some of which will take several sessions to defeat. Characters who have a vendetta have one or two especially powerful enemies, who are in turn served by minions of many different power levels. Nefarious nobles and courtiers, well experienced in the ways of backroom intrigue, oppose diplomats in the party. Detectives and city guards have to face the horrors that lurk in dark corners of the city, as well as the mundane threat of ordinary criminals and crime bosses.

Ravenloft is a setting that runs on villains — in fact, much of the world is actually administered, ruled and controlled by them. The following section expands upon guidelines for creating villains, giving GMs an extensive toolkit for making up memorable antagonists. **Champions of Darkness** provides more information on motivating and playing evil characters as well.

Many campaigns feature a single continuing foe, one who constantly confronts and foils your characters. Some may include a series of several villains, each of increasing power to provide your characters with greater and greater challenge. The following section discusses the nature of villainy, motivations, minions, suitable classes and levels.

Motivations

What makes a villain a villain? In many ways, he has the same motivation as the characters. He is a fully rounded individual with a background, history, loves and dislikes, hopes and fears. He is, in fact, developed in much the same way as player characters. Learn about your villains, create a story for them, make them live and breathe and they will be just as vivid and deadly for your players.

Note also that the term "villain" is used here, though the party's foes need not all be evil (see sidebar). The following paragraphs discuss a villain's motives and why he does what he does. Use them as guidelines for creating your party's foes or as inspirations for creating your own motivations.

Greed

Many of these motivations can be chalked up to greed — greed for power, greed for knowledge, greed for money. But the truly greedy villain lusts after all these things; he wants them all, and he wants them now. Why? Was he denied the things he wanted most as a child? Conversely, was he

spoiled and every wish granted, and did he grow up expecting everything from everyone?

Greedy individuals can come from almost every walk of life, from rich merchants and powerful kings to conquering generals, decadent wizards and grasping thieves. Always on the lookout for new acquisitions, the greedy are frequently broke or on the ragged edge of catastrophe, having gone through their riches as soon as they obtained them.

Personal Loss

Tragedy affects different people in unexpected ways. Some emerge determined to avenge their loss, others to learn and grow from it and to honor the memory of lost loved ones. Others, however, seek to take revenge on the rest of the world, and make others suffer as they have suffered. Sometimes this motivation is entirely understandable, such as the victim of a brutal crime swearing revenge on an entire thieves' guild. Others such as that of a man whose wife perished while in the care of a drunken doctor, who then causes agony to all those whom the doctor knew and associated with, are less so, and are nothing more than a psychotic reaction to the stress of tragedy.

These villains are among the most poignant and interesting foes, for the same thing that motivates the characters and their players motivates them. The loss of a beloved wife, child or parent in tragic circumstances is a situation that most can understand, or at least empathize with, and the desire to lash out at the world that may have helped contribute to that loss is equally understandable. Such villains are also often tragically romantic, and may even stir the hearts of your more sensitive characters.

Driven to Evil

A variant on the tragic motivation, the villain who is driven to evil is one of the most sympathetic and complex of foes. Villains don't always start out as evil — and some do so only with the greatest of reluctance and self-loathing. A foe who was driven to evil sees the path of darkness as the only way to accomplish a cherished goal, save a threatened loved one, help a beleaguered friend or preserve his nation or people. Evil is necessary for his goal, and rather than force someone else to do the dirty work, he

does it himself. It might seem noble if it didn't cause so much pain.

A foul undead lord may kidnap the family of a troublesome noble, threatening to kill them or make them like him, unless the noble serves him in every way. The noble, basically good, is forced to perform the tasks of his undead master or lose what he values most. The leader of an enslaved people must transform himself into a cruel military despot in order to raise an army and liberate his nation. A gentle scientist must experiment on the innocent in order to find the cure for his terminally ill daughter.

In a rare change for a Ravenloft campaign, the characters may well be able to provide the reluctant villain with a means of escape from his fate. Perhaps they can help him liberate his people, find a cure for his daughter or rescue the kidnapped family. In such cases, the foe may be beyond redemption — he may have committed unforgivable crimes or may be unable to live with the evil he has created — but he will be grateful that his goal has been accomplished, even at the cost of his own life.

Insanity

The mad scientist, the crazed killer, the demented priest, all are popular staples in the pages of Gothic fiction, and all are tailor-made for inclusion in your Ravenloft campaign. The many manifestations of dementia are exaggerated and enhanced by the malevolent presence of the Dark Powers, and often a normal, good-hearted ruler or adventurer may be seized in the grip of madness, descending into diabolical evil. Fallen player characters and such normally admirable individuals as paladins, clerics and scholars can all serve as potent insane villains, their maddened state contrasting horrifically with their former gentleness and kindness.

Madness takes many forms, as well. The split personality is especially popular in Gothic fiction — in Ravenloft, the darklord Malken (a.k.a., Tristen Hiregaard) is an example of this type of villain. Paranoiac villains believe that everyone else is against them, and suspect even their closest associates. Megalomaniacs believe that they are destined to rule the world, and are willing to take any risk or destroy anyone to achieve their goals. See the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three, "Fear, Horror, and Madness" for details; any of the forms of madness described therein in can be adapted for use in a villain.

Desire

Again, many of the motivations listed here could be considered manifestations of desire. Desire differs from greed. The desirous want to possess things, to lock them away, to keep whatever the desire for themselves. They are collectors, hoarders and misers, individuals who cannot stand to see another possess what they themselves want. Villains who are motivated by desire are usually powerful, wealthy individuals who can afford to buy what they want or take it when they can't. They are typically raised in privilege, told that they can have anything and usually get it.

The objects of desire are as varied as those who desire them. They may range from beautiful or ancient works of art, rare plants or animals, books, weapons, magical artifacts, and beautiful or unusual individuals of every race and sex. The items or individuals stolen may be important to the player characters as well: loved ones or friends, family heirlooms, items important to a character's quest or even magical artifacts that may aid in escape from Ravenloft.

Fear

Everyone is afraid, even villains. In fact, many villains are especially afraid, and this results in greater evil or antagonism. They may fear death and seek to suck the life from the innocent in order to prolong their own. They may fear poverty and steal whatever they can get. They may fear old age and decrepitude and look for ways to extend their youth and beauty. They may fear obscurity and being forgotten and try to gain notoriety, whether by becoming famously powerful and influential or by committing the most horrible crimes imaginable.

The fears of a villain can be used against him, but most hide their fears quite well behind fortress walls or legions of minions. A villain's greatest fear may be your heroes' greatest weapon, but the fearful foe rarely allows those who know his secret to live in peace.

Knowledge

The quest for knowledge usually begins innocently enough, with the scientist or scholar seeking to unlock the secrets of existence. A scientist who has lost a loved one may seek a way of breaking the bonds of death (such as Dr. Victor Mordenheim, who also has to contend with the ravages of personal tragedy). A scholar may seek to unlock the

key to an ancient language, while an explorer may wish to find a new trade route or delve into the wilderness of a lost continent.

But with knowledge comes danger, especially in Ravenloft. The Dark Powers invariably corrupt those seeking knowledge, and their quest for enlightenment begins to take on a life of its own. Family, friends, personal loyalties all fall before the increasingly fanatical pursuits of the villain. When he is confronted with evidence of obsession, he lashes out, driving off those whom he once cared for or destroying what he once loved. Isolated, obsessed, driven and utterly ruthless, a once kind and caring individual has become something else — a villain.

Power

Few motivations are more potent than the quest for raw, unadulterated power. For a wizard, it may be magical power in the form of lost or especially high-level spells. For a merchant, it may mean creating a trade monopoly, where he can charge anything he wants and control the fates of nations through their purse strings. For a king, it may be the absolute control of his nation or the conquest of all neighboring lands. All seek power and may do anything to get it.

The power-monger may start out small: a simple foot soldier who rises through the ranks to become a skilled general, a low-ranking nobleman who systematically slays those who stand between him and the throne, a petty criminal with aspirations for a continent-spanning empire of vice and violence. Invariably, the adventurers in your campaign stands between this villain and the power he desires.

Cursed

Curses are common in Ravenloft, and often end up dragging a nonevil individual down the path of wickedness until they too are servants of the Dark Powers. Many foes are decent people who are struggling to overcome a curse and who hate themselves for the dark deeds that they must perform. These are among the most interesting villains to inflict on your players, for defeating them is rarely a pleasure. Rather, the best that the characters can hope for is to free the cursed villain of mortal suffering and pray that the curse does not pass to his killers.

A cursed villain doesn't want to hurt anyone. Perhaps he has been dealt with an evil side that rises at nightfall and commits terrible crimes (or, more obviously, is a lycanthrope). Maybe he unintentionally harmed or killed a loved one and must forever reenact the crime. Perhaps he was once good, but bent the rules one too many times in the pursuit of justice or knowledge and now is lost to the light.

Cursed villains sometimes appear initially as friends, individuals asking for help in freeing them from their fate. Such individuals only reveal themselves as enemies slowly (and usually reluctantly) and turning against them may prove difficult for characters who consider them friends.

Benevolence

Possibly the most intriguing of the motivations listed here, the benevolent villain genuinely thinks he is doing good. He may be a lawful warrior who seeks to rid the land of evil, including those innocents who inadvertently aid evil. He may be a ruler who sees a group or faction in his kingdom — the mysterious Vistani, for example — as a threat and, motivated by ferocious race-hatred coupled with misguided patriotism, seeks to rid his kingdom of his supposed foes, eventually resorting to genocide and brutality. A benevolent villain may be a scientist or doctor who kidnaps the innocent to suffer at his hands in bizarre experiments whose eventual goal is the good of humanity. "The end justifies the means" is the battle cry of the benevolent villain.

Good Foes

In Ravenloft more than most campaigns, there is a distinct possibility that your characters' foe will be of good alignment. This could be due to mistaken identity or misplaced motivation. A chaotic good avenger may have sworn a vendetta against the characters, believing them to be guilty of a crime they did not commit. A justice-loving paladin may pursue them in the belief that they have broken the law or that their rebellion against the "rightful" king (actually an evil darklord) is a crime that needs to be punished. Such individuals cannot accurately be referred to as "villains," for they are (at least initially) on the side of light and goodness.

Such situations are the stuff of tragedy (or even dark comedy, though a little humor goes a long way in Ravenloft), and can go in almost any direction. Even though their good-aligned foe might wish to do good, his actions may result in harm or death to the characters, and they may swear ven-

geance in turn. A lawful seeker after justice may go too far or may be enforcing the will of an evil ruler in the mistaken belief that he is helping the cause of good. A misguided, good-aligned foe might even be convinced that he is wrong, and eventually change sides, becoming an important ally of the player characters.

In Ravenloft, however, morality and justice are often twisted. The characters may actually be the evildoers that their foes believe them to be. In this case, anything they do to defend themselves is certain to increase their wickedness and estrangement from the forces of light.

In fact, the Dark Powers of Ravenloft revel in the corruption of good. A particularly fanatical good-aligned character may find himself drawn into acts of evil and end up as bad as the foes he pursues. Such events are filled with drama and roleplaying possibilities and are also potential pitfalls for player-character adventurers, for corruption that can affect NPCs can affect your campaign's characters as well.

Power Level

Determining the power level of your villain can be a tricky prospect, especially if you're starting your game with beginning characters. A weaker villain can be a challenge early on, but advanced characters deal with such challenges easily, while an especially powerful foe brutally destroys any low-level characters. There are several ways to deal with this.

Advancing Foes: As the characters increase in power, so do their foes. The low-level defenders of a small village may initially deal with weaker creatures and threats, such as a single crimson bones that terrorizes the region, raiding undead pirates or troublesome local predators. As they gain notoriety, their area of operations grows, along with their foes' power level. Eventually, powerful parties may rise to threaten the darklord himself.

Minions: There is a single villain, such as a mad scientist who seeks to transform villagers into mindless zombie slaves, a demon who uses innocents to do his dirty work, a distant decadent nobleman who takes little notice of his outlying possessions and so on. This villain won't spare his most powerful servants to deal with every little irritant (such as player characters). Adventurers deal only with the villain's lowest-ranking henchmen initially, but as they become more prominent, the villain dispatches more potent servitors. This approach may culminate in a direct confrontation with the villain, or he may simply remain a distant threat, always on the horizon but never appearing.

Villain in the Background: A similar approach, this villain remains vague and unspecified, without a definite character, level, statistics or power level. This leaves the DM with the flexibility to make the villain anything he wants, should he ever show up in the campaign. It also preserves a sense of mystery and menace that is important to a good Ravenloft campaign. Is the enigmatic being known as The Hooded One actually a ghost? Perhaps he is a powerful sorcerer who uses illusion to confuse his foes, a vampire-lord who wants to keep his true identity secret or a powerful noble in disguise. Perhaps he is actually a she. All these rumors help keep the players in a state of uncertainty, while preserving your ability to provide them with a challenging foe.

Villain Types

Villains are a varied lot, coming in all shapes and sizes, with all the motivations listed above and more. Below are listed several archetypal villains, along with appropriate minions, skills, feats and examples.

The Warlord

Utterly self-assured and arrogant, the military leader, especially in the realms of Ravenloft, is among the most ruthless man or woman imaginable. Military conquest is a brutal and violent thing, and those who are good at it have to be without mercy, compassion or pity. The warlord conquers, slays and burns, driven by his own desire for power. Many are haunted or cursed, plagued by the spirits or memories of lost loved ones or pursued by the shades of those they killed.

A warlord is almost like a force of nature. Perhaps characters hear rumors of a ruthless and unstoppable general who seeks to bring all lands under his control and is willing to defy even the Dark Powers of Ravenloft to do so. As time goes by, they encounter the evidence of the warlord and his quest for power, and confront his forces directly. They either serve him, in which case they eventually are seen as a threat to the warlord's power, or oppose him, in which case the warlord sees them as foes to be ruthlessly exterminated.

Classes and Races: Obviously, fighters and barbarians are most commonly associated with the warlord archetype, but greedy or power-hungry

spellcasters can also fall into this category. Warlords might be wicked wizards who wish to expand their ranks of potential experimental subjects or slaves, evil priests seeking more sacrificial victims or bent on spreading their faith by the sword. Even such normally good character types as paladins may become warlords, suppressing everything that they see as evil and lawless, until at last the Dark Powers have corrupted them and transformed them into the opposite of everything they once stood for. Any race is appropriate for selection as a warlord, and normally good races such as elves and dwarves make excellent choices, since the nature of their calling is so at odds with players' normal perceptions. Warlords can also be monsters, including intelligent undead such as liches, outsiders or shapechangers. Fiends, half-fiends and even half-dragon warlords are among the most deadly and challenging of this frightening breed.

Feats and Skills: All combat feats are, of course, quite appropriate for a powerful war-leader. Other suitable feats include Iron Will, Toughness, Courage, Voice of Wrath and, most importantly, Leadership. Skills such as Bluff, Intimidate and Sense Motive are all of obvious importance. Most warlords like to conquer by threat alone, making Diplomacy an important skill. When combined with the other skills listed, this can make the warlord a crafty and deadly opponent, even beyond the battlefield.

Minions: Warlords are famous for their minions: the faceless legions of foot soldiers, supernatural followers and companions who are almost as ruthless and ambitious as they are themselves. Ordinary followers — usually considered utterly expendable and given only the most minimal of support — can include such ubiquitous races as orcs, goblins, gnolls, kobolds, humans (especially popular as officers and leaders of other races), undead and such Ravenloft creatures as broken ones, goblyns, moor men and reavers (for sea-going warlords). Elite units may be made up of lycanthropes, higher-powered undead such as wights, wraiths or mummies, and intelligent minions with levels in player-character classes and skills in leadership and tactics. Constructs such as golems, giants, ogres, magical beasts such as manticores and the like make up the warlord's most potent striking forces.

A warlord's most important and deadly followers are companions, whose loyalty is often questionable and who sometimes use the warlord as a stepping-stone to their own increased power. These may be especially powerful undead such as ghosts, liches, vampires and Ravenloft undead such as nosferatu and vrykolaka, or high-level NPCs such as fighters, wizards and clerics. Characters may be able to foil the warlord's schemes by turning his followers against him or by offering to aid ambitious minions to overthrow the master, but this is a dangerous game.

Bandit Chief

Some warlords began life as bandit chieftains — petty dictators who rule the wilderness and exercise brutal control over their followers. In many ways, the bandit chief is the warlord in miniature, and many of the same qualities that can be applied to one applies to the other. A bandit chief is most often a cunning (but not necessarily intelligent) individual, who has risen to the top of a fractious and violent group of outlaws by luck, strength and ruthlessness.

A bandit chief is usually be encountered in the wilderness, lording over a small fortress or settlement, usually with followers ranging from a few dozen to a few hundred. He preys upon passing travelers, demands hefty tolls and tribute for passing through "his" lands and openly defies any authorities who try to claim the region. Bandits are particularly common in the woodlands and wild regions of Ravenloft. The very barrenness of the land makes chieftains even more greedy and demanding, for without a steady stream of victims, income and supplies, a chieftain's followers inevitably turn on him and depose him in the most brutal fashion imaginable. A bandit chief's position is always precarious, and the appearance of outsiders who may tip the balance against him is a reason for him to viciously strike back, or in the case of especially intelligent bandits, try to recruit player characters as followers or minions.

Classes and Races: Most bandit chiefs have at least some levels in rogue, though fighters and barbarians are also common. Spellcasters usually aren't terribly interested in such things, but rangers' wilderness skills are often a distinct advantage, especially when the chief's territory is far from civilization. Chiefs are sometimes nobles, warriors or refugees from other lands, driven out by conquest or exiled and forced to make a living through violence. They can be of any race, though in Ravenloft, most are humans.

Feats and Skills: Any feats that help the chieftain maintain control of his followers are appropriate. All combat feats, of course, and related feats such as Toughness, Iron Will, Great Fortitude and Leadership, are useful. Skills that aid the chief in combat and in keeping minions in line are similarly good, including Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, Sense Motive and Survival.

Minions: A bandit chief is invariably surrounded by utterly loyal thugs who owe their positions to him, and know that if he falls, they fall with him. These thugs may have some PC class levels, but are often NPC classes such as warriors or commoners. In general, a chief's followers will be of the same race, and his inner circle lords it over those beneath them — usually NPC-class followers without player-character levels. Like the thugs, these are commoners or warriors, with a handful of adepts and experts. Occasionally, one finds a player-character type among the chief's subjects and their families, but such individuals either become members of the chief's inner circle or strike out on their own.

Crime Boss

As the warlord is to the battlefield and the bandit chief is to the wilderness, so the crime boss is to the city. In many ways, he is the most dangerous of the three, due to the subtlety and secrecy required; the crime boss must always divert attention from himself, whether with false identities, complex lairs, multiple layers of minions or other forms of deception. He may be a much-beloved priest, a civic-minded noble, a gentle scholar or a wandering madman or vagrant that no one would ever suspect of such things. Sometimes this deception hides a deeper secret — that he is the lost sibling of the ruler, a shapechanger or undead or bears a terrible curse from which that he is seeking to free himself.

The criminals of Ravenloft must contend with each other, their realm's darklords and rulers, and the world's supernatural forces. They are therefore an especially deadly and merciless bunch, and anyone who rises to the top of a criminal organization has to be the most vicious and wicked of all. Someone who succeeds in seizing the leadership of a thieves' guild, criminal syndicate or rogues' network, or who has created such a group himself, does not share power and will not give it up easily. City

guardsmen, detectives, rival rogues, those who seek the lost and missing, who pursue forbidden knowledge or simply disrupt his organization will be targeted for vengeance and destruction.

Classes and Races: A crime boss can be of any race. Once more, members of peace-loving races such as halflings and elves might make excellent choices, for the evil of a powerful crime lord is completely at odds with players' perceptions of halflings as gentle peasants or defenders of justice or of elves as kindly nature-worshipers. Racism and the intolerance of most Ravenloft cultures may also drive nonhumans to crime, and such races as calibans and half-elves might easily find themselves drawn into the shadows. Some even hide a deeper secret — that they are vampires, liches, lycanthropes or even demons. Some may actually be the darklords of their realms.

Rogue is the most obvious class for a crime boss, though some come from humble beginnings and may have commoner, expert or similar NPC class levels. The rough-and-tumble nature of Ravenloft's streets make many other classes appropriate as well, usually in combination with the crime boss' rogue and NPC classes. Spellcasting crime bosses add even more challenge, and a fallen priest, who can cast some divine spells, makes for an especially interesting foe, with an extensive backstory that your characters can discover.

Feats and Skills: Skills and feats of a crime boss are surprisingly varied, and are similar to those of warlords and bandit chiefs. Feats such as Iron Will and Toughness are a natural, and skill ranks in Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate and Sense Motive serve a crime boss well. A crime boss must also be talented in less violent areas such as Diplomacy and Gather Information. Traditional rogue skills such as Search, Spot, Disable Device and Move Silently are also common.

Minions: Thugs, rogues, low-lives, beggars, confidence artists, corrupt officials and city guards, even the occasional respectable nobleman or merchant, all serve the crime boss, usually with loyalty enforced at the point of a sword or the head of a club. As crime bosses usually rule the streets in their chosen territory, many of their followers are commoners, warriors or other NPC-types. Street urchins, transients and the homeless also serve, in exchange for protection from the crime bosses' legbreakers, passing on information or messages for their master.

As discussed above, many crime bosses hide their identity behind elaborate fronts. Sometimes they create imaginary characters, who all but the most intimate associates believe run the business. Others have a series of followers, each of whom has successively increasing authority, often diverting the authorities or investigators from the organization's true leadership. Still others discourage the notion of any kind of organization at all, letting investigators believe that all criminals operate independently.

Crazed Killer

The demented murderer who stalks the narrow alleyways or dwells in the tangled wildernesses of Ravenloft is one of the most favored servants of the Dark Powers. Delivering fear, mayhem and uncertainty, a madman on the loose keeps the common people in a constant state of barely restrained terror, relieved only briefly when the killer strikes again.

Demented killers may be cursed, truly insane or may even be entirely sane and rational individuals who are searching for a certain individual, body part or magical effect that can only be achieved through the deaths of the innocent. This may be the worst alternative of all, for the string of seemingly random and senseless crimes could be part of a greater scheme for power, and may end in even greater horror and darkness.

A crazed killer is best kept in the background. Start with rumors and stories, and slowly allow the killer to get closer to the characters, victimizing acquaintances, friends or even loved ones. Normal adventures can take place, but evidence or rumor of the killer's work can show up, especially in places or at times when the characters believe themselves to be safe or their work completed. Most disturbing of all, the killer may end up taking a personal interest in one or more of the characters, leaving players with the terrifying possibility of being stalked by a mad, and possibly supernatural, homicidal creature.

Classes and Races: All classes and races are appropriate here. Madness may interfere with the spellcasting ability of wizards, sorcerers and clerics; insanity makes fighters and barbarians even more deadly, and rogues even more skilled at their sneak attack ability. Those who are "rational" killers retain all their normal character levels and use their abilities to best advantage.

This particular type of villain is well suited to a nonhuman, monstrous or supernatural creature. It is especially effective to let the characters believe that they face a flesh-and-blood foe — a simple human murderer, for example. Slowly, however, it becomes obvious that their stalker is neither human nor simple. Murderous spirits, powerful outsiders, undead who must feed on the living or even nonhumanoid monstrosities all are suitable to the role of crazed killer. The notion of an undead cloaker that has taken up residence in a city and preys on its poor, then begins to follow a player character, for example, is one such terrifying possibility.

Feats and Skills: A killer's feats and skills are going to be suitable to its race, class and experience. A former fighter has combat feats and skills. A monster such as a demon has the skills and feats listed for that type of creature, plus a few more that the DM adds for flavor and additional power. Ravenloft feats such as Lunacy and Haunted add to a killer's power and mystery.

See the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three, "Fear, Horror, and Madness," for ways to further enhance and explain a killer's motivations.

Minions: Crazed killers do not usually have minions — a handful have followers or admirers who may carry out their wishes, but such individuals often fall victim to the killer's madness and are themselves made victims.

Mad Scientist

Of course, the pages of Gothic fiction are filled with misguided scientists or scholars who unleash horror while in the pursuit of truth. The message is always the same: there are things that humans are not meant to know and doors that should never be opened. While this may be true in the real world, it is absolutely true in the world of Ravenloft.

Mad scientists (who may not actually be mad) usually start out with the best of intentions. Dr. Mordenheim originally wanted to transcend the barrier of death, and deliver immortality to the common people. Like most of his ilk, Dr. Mordenheim was punished for his presumption — immortality is reserved for the gods and the Dark Powers, and ordinary humans can never hope to achieve it. He rejected the notion of a power higher than himself, and through the agency of his monster, Adam, was punished for his arrogance.

Other scientists are similarly tormented, cursed individuals. A gifted doctor who seeks a medical cure for madness may create a serum that turns its victims into insane murderers. A professor who wishes to investigate the secrets of the natural world may end up cultivating plants or breeding animals that kill or control their victims. A priest searching for a cure to a plague may accidentally create an army of flesh-eating zombies or worse. Inevitably, keeping their work secret, hiding any crimes that were committed in its pursuit or violence created by their experiments drives these scientists farther from their original kindly intent, until, without knowing it, they have become creatures of Ravenloft.

Mad scientists usually begin the game in the background, and player characters are called in to clean up the scientists' messes — slay or capture a marauding monster, stamp out an eruption of undead, find out why so many villagers have been disappearing and so on. As time goes by, the characters learn of the scientist's work and how much he is feared by the common people, eventually making their way into the depths of his lab to confront the scientist and his most fearsome creations.

Classes and Races: Many scientists and researchers begin as nonadventuring types. Experts, nobles or even commoners may become mad scientists. As time goes by, they may add levels in other classes, such as wizard, sorcerer or cleric or prestige classes such as loremaster (an especially appropriate class), but in the end they are distinctly different from the adventurers who populate your Ravenloft campaign. Mad scientists invariably have their own isolated lair where they perform their unnatural experiments and visiting them in their bleak and distant homes is usually an invitation to disaster.

Humans are by far the most common race for mad scientists, simply due to the fact that humans are overwhelmingly common in Ravenloft. Most scholars, nobles and scientists who populate Ravenloft's universities, palaces and cities are human, though from time to time, nonhumans can overcome common prejudice and rise high. Elves, dwarves, halflings and others often have their own motivations for delving into forbidden secrets. Elves may wish to learn about their gods and how they got to Ravenloft, dwarves may seek to improve ways of creating wealth, and halflings may work to improve the health and wellbeing of their people.

Feats and Skills: Mad scientists are rarely combat types and usually have very esoteric and unusual skills. Knowledge skills are all common, as are languages, Appraise, Craft (alchemy) and Gather Information. Persuasion skills such as Diplomacy, Intimidate and Sense Motive can be used to keep pitchfork- and torch-wielding hordes of commoners at bay when they storm the laboratory demanding that the monster be given up to them for justice. Feats of a scholarly or arcane nature, such as Item Creation and Metamagic are common, as are Skill Focus, Iron Will, and Alertness.

Minions: Mad scientists typically dwell and work in isolation, having alienated those who love and respect them the most. They have left numerous family members, loved ones, colleagues and coworkers behind, all of whom are happy to tell of how great and kind their former associate was. Mad scientists sometimes use the results of failed experiments as servants or guards and often have at least one favored servant, who is often an outcast from society in general. Broken ones, and races normally not welcomed in common society (calibans or monsters such as ogres and goblins) are often found in these roles. These minions also often resent their masters, and have been known to turn on the scientist at inopportune moments, spoiling experiments with their anger or ineptitude.

Evil Noble

In a distant castle, perched high atop a craggy cliff, accessible only through a long and tortuous mountain pathway, lives the lord of the realm. The villagers kiss their holy symbols and mumble prayers when his name is mentioned. Animals never venture near his demesne, while creatures such as bats, spiders, scorpions and all forms of vermin seem drawn there. Occasionally, a child or lone traveler disappears, or an entire family vanishes overnight. No one speaks of such things, for to do so would bring the curse of the realm's ruler down upon the speaker and his loved ones.

The evil noble has tentacles that extend throughout his territory. His servants roam the countryside, often in disguise, searching for new victims or for those who may be a threat. He may control the monsters and beasts of the countryside. His lusts — for blood, for flesh, for souls or for the virtue of the innocent — are well known,

but no one openly speaks of them. The characters are advised to leave the place, forget it exists and never speak of it again. But night is falling, and the warnings come too late.

The evil noble is possibly the most familiar of Gothic villains. She is the unnaturally beautiful vampiress who feeds on the young men and women sent to her as servants. He is the ghost- or demon-haunted sorcerer who gives up his victims to the spirits that plague him, hoping that one day they will at last be satisfied. She is the cursed lady of the manor, who must keep her insane brother chained and confined, occasionally fed with the blood of kidnapped commoners. He is a half-breed monster, who must conceal his secret legacy lest the people of the land descend upon him and destroy him. He is like the darklords — cursed, tormented and irredeemably evil. He may be a darklord himself or be on the path to such a fate.

All these possibilities and more are suited to the archetype, and all involve the player characters, whether they are originally from the realm, simply passing through or called upon for aid by a relative, friend or former lover.

Classes and Races: Obviously, the aristocrat is the most obvious class for the evil noble, and all have at least a few levels. Aristocrats often train and study other things as well, so levels in PC classes will be common. Distant and isolated, nobles dabble in the arcane arts or discover early on that they have an aptitude for magic or worship dark gods and cast divine magic.

Again, humans will be the most common nobles in Ravenloft, though in such regions as Sithicus, other races are powerful enough to rise to high social level. Like the crazed killer, the evil noble is especially suitable as nonhuman. The classic evil noble is, of course, the vampire-lord, dwelling in his crumbling fortress with his subordinate vampires and monstrous servants. But other types are equally useful: a lich or other undead creature who disguises his true nature, a demon or ghost, a dangerous outsider who can shapechange into human guise and so on. The true nature of a noble ruler may be its key weakness and learning it may form an important part of your campaign.

Feats and Skills: Evil nobles are capable in a fight, but their power derives from fear and the level of control that they exercise on the surrounding countryside. An evil noble has many skills such as Diplomacy, Sense Motive and Intimidate, intended to deal with foes or to negotiate if the need arises. Many are dilettantes and amateur scholars, so knowledge skills are common. Noble pursuits such as riding, game playing and research provides Craft, Performance and scholarly skills such as Gather Information.

Feats such as Leadership, Iron Will, Great Fortitude, and combat-related powers such as Cleave, Power Attack and the like are common among evil nobles, who have trained from birth to take their role and defend it. Many Ravenloft feats such as Dead Man Walking, Ethereal Empathy, Haunted, Jaded, Lunatic and Voice of Wrath are also good to add to an evil noble.

Minions: The evil noble does not tolerate disloyalty. Those who follow him must do so without question. The noble possesses skills and powers that enable him to see any disloyalty or thoughts of rebellion, and any followers who think such things are dealt with swiftly and mercilessly, possibly even returning to serve the noble, more loyal in death than they ever were in life.

Any villager, farmer or peasant may be a secret minion of the evil noble. No hamlet or stretch of countryside is safe. Even the vermin of the fields may be the noble's secret eyes and ears. In the territory that is directly controlled by the noble, matters are even worse, for many can see everything and everyone that approaches, through magical devices, inherent supernatural abilities and the like. The noble's lair may seem unoccupied and crumbling, but it actually harbors an army of verminous minions, traps and tricks to misguide the unwary. Ghosts, spirits, hidden pits and deadfalls — all these and more guard the evil noble in his home, sapping the strength of intruders, leaving them vulnerable and helpless when at last the master of the manor makes his appearance.

Corrupt Priest

Priests are the embodiment of their chosen god. The priest of good watches out for the welfare of his people, seeing to their livelihood and giving comfort in times of trouble. The evil priest, however, is the opposite, and revels in the pain and suffering that his deity represents. In ordinary fantasy gaming, these two roles are separate and usually inviolate.

In Ravenloft, however, corruption lurks in the hearts of the purest and kindest. An evil priest may truly represent an evil deity such as the Lawgiver or Zhakata — the motives of such individuals cannot be questioned. Their deity decrees that they do

evil, and they do it, terrorizing the folk of their land as they carry out the wicked faith's wishes.

Even more fascinating and useful as a villain is the corrupt priest of a good- or neutral-aligned god. The kindly, fatherly priest of the Morninglord, for example, may speak to his flock on holy days, exhorting them to acts of mercy and charity, while stalking the night, hiding in alleys with a hidden dagger, emerging to take the lives of the very congregants that he normally protects. The stern warrior-cleric of Ezra may have been corrupted to the worship of a dark, alien god, and the powers that he displays on behalf of the Guardian of the Mists may actually serve another, far more evil cause.

Normally, their gods punish priests who stray from the path with curses or the loss of the ability to cast divine magic. Not so in Ravenloft, where evil often festers undetected until it is too late. A fallen or corrupt priest's abilities may seem to come from his deity, but may actually originate from the Dark Powers, who have successfully drawn him from the road of righteousness.

A corrupt priest is never the object of suspicion, at least not initially. He may be a supporting character who gives aid and comfort to the commoners while a mad killer stalks the streets, or he may even be an ally of the characters in their quest to discover the source of a terrible plague or rash of disappearances. The characters may eventually guess the fallen priest's secret, but sometimes this happens too late, and the foe might escape to continue his career of evil or may have grown too powerful to oppose directly. Accusing a beloved cleric of being evil is a dangerous game in the best of times, and a corrupt priest always wants to protect himself.

Classes and Races: Obviously, a corrupt priest has at least some levels in cleric. He may have levels in other classes, such as rogue or an arcane spellcasting class as a result of his corruption, but he keeps these carefully hidden. Any race is suitable for this role, and as with many of the other archetypes discussed here, nonhumans can be especially effective due to preconceived notions of the players.

Feats and Skills: A priest has many skills, most related to his role as a guide and protector of his flock. Knowledge (religion) is of course necessary, Diplomacy, Sense Motive and Heal are all common clerical skills. Less obvious, and better hidden are the subtle skills of Intimidate and Bluff. Leadership is an especially appropriate skill for a priest, and can be used for defense, to call up followers should characters get too close to the priest's secret or openly confront him. Combat feats are suited to more martially oriented faiths, while feats such as Metamagic and Item Creation feats will be seen in less-violent religions. The priest's "secret" classes (fighter, rogue, and so on) have their own feats and abilities that the priest hones, though he hopes never to use them in defense of his hidden life.

Minions: Acolytes and lower-ranking priests of the church, who are often subtly manipulated into doing the corrupt cleric's evil work, serve the high priest. In addition, most of the cleric's flock rushes to his defense if he is accused of wickedness, unless the evidence against him is overwhelming. Few corrupt priests openly maintain evil minions or servants, for fear of attracting too much attention.

Rewards

The tangible rewards of fantasy roleplaying — experience, gold, magic items, and the trappings of notoriety — are well-known to the average player. Ravenloft campaigns should provide other, subtler rewards that are more than just names. A character who is knighted by a darklord isn't just a knight in name, the darklord expects something in return. He provides rewards and helps guide the character down the paths of darkness and corruption. A grant of lands may come with a comfortable manor house, but it also comes with a resident ghost, marauding werewolf, demon-worshiping townsfolk, corrupting servants, secret labyrinths and the like.

Some common rewards are listed here. They can come as gifts from grateful nobles, as a result of notoriety or simply because a character is in the right place at the right time. All can carry penalties; none are to be won easily.

Noble Title: Most Ravenloft domains follow a traditional system of nobility. Titles are granted by birth, as a reward for distinguished service or are available for purchase from cash-strapped monarchies. In some realms, only the ruler or darklord can grant titles, while in others, lower-ranking nobles such as dukes, earls or barons can arrange to have titles granted to friends or allies. Some titles are landed (see below), while others simply allow the character to use the title without penalty. In their home realm, nobles gain advantage for their titles — they can claim hospitality from other

nobles, ask for armed guards, requisition supplies "in the name of the crown" and so on. The most common title is knight, but this implies a debt to the noble granting the title — a knight who is called upon to serve his lord must obey or lose his title. Nobles often receive a stipend from their lord or ruler, though many are too poor to afford such things. Some nobles have the right to name their own knights and men-at-arms, but are expected to provide for their own retainers.

A noble title is a mixed blessing, for some are considered jokes, especially when they are purchased or granted in exchange for political favors. This often leads to a superfluity of titles. In some realms, in fact, it is said that the nobles outnumber the peasants. Also, the nobles of one realm may be unpopular in another, and the title itself may prove a magnet to those who bear grudges against the noble's lord or his realm.

Note also that characters may not want a noble title from a lord who is known to be evil or corrupt. Turning down such an honor is a terrible slight and might earn the characters the lord's enmity.

Lands: The best titles are supposedly those that come with lands, but once more, such awards can be two-edged swords. Land may come with peasants who work it, who must be cared for and protected or exploited. Note too that ,while Ravenloft is a place of cruel oppression and wicked rulers, a noble who faces too many peasant revolts gains unwanted attention from his superiors. Those who repress the local people must also make sure that they are kept quiet and docile — this usually involves the hiring or recruitment of minions and thugs to keep the peace, thus setting the new noble on the path to corruption and evil.

Troublesome domains are sometimes awarded simply to pass the problem on to someone else. A ruler who wants to expand his realm may claim a neighboring haunted wood, then find suitably willing dupes (the player characters) to administer the district. They are then responsible for exterminating the hordes of goblins, the local hag coven, the lurking mind flayers or other annoyances.

Followers: Fame has many rewards; young and enthusiastic would-be adventurers flock to the famous, offering their services and asking to take part in a character's adventures. As with peasants on a noble's lands, these followers require upkeep and care. They are not disposable hirelings who can be cast away once the party returns from the local dungeon. They are real, living individuals, with histories and personalities. Followers can essentially be "given" to players and played as supplementary characters, but the DM always has the option of overruling a player's decisions. The fresh-faced young aspiring ranger who wishes to be the paladin's groom and scout balks when ordered into a dark castle swarming with bats and crawling with venomous snakes. A wizard's apprentice won't necessarily be willing to taste-test the new potion. These individuals must be treated with care, especially in Ravenloft, where discontent can turn to hatred and hatred can turn to evil with all the ease of a falling leaf.

Followers are useful, but they can be a source of enormous trouble (and, for the DM, much interesting character interaction). A maltreated page may sell his master's secrets to the character's enemies or an overworked cook may be bribed to poison food. In addition, some followers may not be what they seem — the Ravenloft adventurer who trusts too easily is likely to regret it. A prominent adventuring party who has frustrated the schemes of a darklord may be visited by a number of young apprentices — happy, eager, loyal and seemingly as good as the day is long. Of course, at least one of these serves the angry darklord, his true nature concealed by magic or secret instructions. When the characters least expect it, a happy-go-lucky squire may slam and lock a crucial door, open the gates to a horde of undead or tell the local circle of wererats exactly where the characters are planning on dining.

Notoriety: Followers arrive because of fame, titles are granted because characters made a name for themselves, gold is lavished on conquering heroes by a grateful populace. Fame and notoriety are themselves rewards, but with intangible results. Famous warriors are asked to add their swords to a rebellion against a cruel warlord. Rogues are offered rich rewards for stealing well-known treasures. Wizards are asked to lecture or teach their techniques to others. Everyone wants to be friends with the famous. Dinners are free. Lodging is always in the most luxurious suites. Potential foes flee at your mention. Fame is a wonderful thing, isn't it?

In Ravenloft, even more than in the real world, the answer is "no." As the gunslinger of the Old West had to face numerous challengers, so do famous adventurers have to deal with those who want to knock them from their pedestals. The public loves to see the powerful brought low, and

no one who rises to prominence is without those who resent her fame. Everyone wants a favor, and most expect famous adventurers to respond at a moment's notice, racing to save the innocent, retrieve the lost treasure, fight the hordes of evil or overthrow the wicked king. And if an adventurer is too busy, if she has other things on her mind, if there simply isn't time or energy enough to react, she is called "arrogant" or "thoughtless." Fame quickly turns to dust, and glory is forgotten even more quickly than it was earned.

Darklord's Favor: The most unwanted reward of all is probably the favor and friendship of a darklord. Mind you, many darklords are not known for what they are, and the favor of Dominic d'Honaire, chief adviser to Dementlieu's lord-governor, may not seem like a bad thing, until his true nature is revealed.

The darklords give their favors for a wide range of reasons. Some grant it as a reward for services rendered. Others do so in order to keep potential rivals under control. Still others do it for uncertain, often madness-induced, reasons. In all cases, the darklord's favor comes with many benefits, but in the end none are worth it. Even worse, a darklord's friendship is not to be refused without dire consequences.

This favor may take many forms, it may simply be jolly, hand-clasping friendship, disdainful politeness or a tangible reward such as one of the gifts listed above. After favor is given, however, the beneficiary is considered one of the darklord's minions, and is under constant observation. Gold, magic, servants, treasure and assistance arrives as needed. The darklord may help eliminate some of the characters' foes. He may force his people to accept a character as ruler, send powerful minions to the characters' aid, give advice or reveal secrets. But in all cases, there is a price.

A favored character must serve. There is no other way. Service to a darklord is mandatory, and refusal is not an option. Should the darklord call, the favored respond instantly and enthusiastically, granting whatever boon the darklord requires, no matter how dark, violent or twisted. To fail is to be destroyed, or worse, reduced to a mindless minion and replaced by a less troublesome successor.

Escape from such an arrangement is almost impossible. Only fleeing the realm can save the favored, and the darklord is aware of a favored servant's every move. Those who try to escape find the borders closed and every resource at the darklord's disposal turned to their capture. If caught by a disappointed darklord (as is almost inevitable in such situations), the consequences are unthinkable.

Chapter Four: Parting the Mists

To be fulfilled, a prophecy needs lots of flexibility.

— Mason Cooley, *City Aphorisms, Seventh Selection.*

A wizened Vistana crone leans forward as her gnarled fingers slowly turn over another painted card. With a hiss of breath she looks up at an eager young adventurer and, muttering of dark prophecies and evil omens, dashes the stylized pattern from the table.

A dusky figure wrapped in white robes sits in the dust, the sound of clinking bones rattling in the hollow of his hands. Brightly colored cubes spill forth to bounce and settle within the circle inscribed in the sandy soil. He smiles, explaining to those who wait eagerly for his words, that the treasure they seek lies in the mountains and with compassion all signs point to success

Foam spills from the mouth of a madman as he raises his arms beseechingly to the frightened cleric and locks his gaze with hers.

"Death rides for those who wait too long! Seek the heart of shadow!"

Prophecy and fortune-telling have been an integral part of the world of Ravenloft since Strahd first stalked through the Mists into Barovia. Dungeon Masters in the realm of Ravenloft have access to creative props not found in other game worlds: the *tarokka*, a set of fortune-telling cards very similar to the tarot, and the *dikesha*, dice used as a prophetic tool. You, as a Ravenloft DM can take full advantage of the many creative ways these devices can build mood, add foreshadowing, and set up encounters in a vivid and exciting way.

This chapter explores various methods of using the tarokka and the dikesha as part of the Ravenloft d20 system, as well as how you can use prophecy to enhance and advance your Ravenloft adventure or campaign.

Telling the Future: Tarokka and Dikesha

Come, grandmother, tell me what the fates have in store for me." Vangelia tossed her brass-colored curls and smiled at the Vistana crone who sat by the campfire. She had wandered into the adventurers' camp just as the sun set, her tired face speaking of long journeys and little food or sleep. Demara had consulted with her brother Timorian, a priest of Ezra, before reluctantly offering the old woman a place at their fire and a spare bedroll for the night. But Vangelia had no qualms about their visitor. Everything about the Vistani fascinated her.

"Are you sure you wish to see your fate, little one?" The old woman said, putting down her bowl of stew and shuffling through a pouch at her side to draw out a worn deck of cards, wrapped in faded silk.

"Be careful, Vangelia," Timorian cautioned. "Some things are not meant for us to know or, knowing, prove misleading."

"Besides, it's all fakery," Demara muttered to herself from her place near the camp's periphery, where she had elected to take the first watch. She shrugged at Vangelia's obvious enthusiasm. The scout was still new at this. Give her a few more battles under her belt and she would be less eager to see what lay ahead.

"Here's silver," Vangelia said, crossing the old woman's palm. "Tell me what the cards have in store for me."

No campaign in Ravenloft is complete without at least one trip to a mysterious Vistana seer or a white-robed wise man who rolls the bones to seal your party's doom. Both the tarokka and dikesha are useful random adventure generators, character history creators, and tools to manipulate your players and the situation. Try readings to divine past adventures. Roll the dice and send your PCs charging down the road to save the day.

How can a DM manipulate card readings or the tumble of dice across a table so that she creates the illusion of a prophetic reading? How do you, as DM, convince your players that they are part of a mysterious and potentially ominous future that lies before them in the spread of the cards or the toss of the dice? The secret is to control the situation from the beginning.

Tarokka: The Turning of a Card

In the realms of Ravenloft, few beings are more useful and powerful in shaping a DMs adventure than the Vistani. These perpetual wanderers are some of the few beings able to navigate the Mists — both literally at the borders of realms, and figuratively, as the vessels of prophecy. The one item most often identified with the Vistani is a divination tool called the tarokka deck.

History and Creation

In the mysterious past of the Vistani one thing is certain — the Vistani have always used the tarokka cards as tools of divination. The card images, although as different as the skill and artistry of each creator may make them, follow traditional symbolism and interpretation.

The oldest known tarokka deck within the Dread Realms belongs to Gabrielle Aderre, the

darklord of Invidia. This deck, rumored to have been created by Madam Eva herself, was passed down from mother to daughter until Gabrielle looted it from her mother's werewolf-torn corpse.

The tarokka deck contains fifty-four cards, including forty cards in the Lesser Deck of Fate and fourteen in the *Fortuna Magna* or High Deck. According to Vistani custom and ritual, each tarokka deck is a personal creation of its user. The artisan desiring to create a tarokka deck mixes her own blood with her paints to form a unique set of pigments. This creates a unique and mystic bond between the deck and its creator.

The creator may form her tarokka deck from any suitable material. A diviner in Pharazia might choose to use stiffened papyrus and delicate inks, while someone from Richemulot would paint the deck on slices of translucent horn. Only someone with Vistani blood may create a deck with mystical abilities; the purer the blood, so rumors say, the more powerful the deck. None may sell a deck, although especially talented artists have gained much gold preparing them.

Since the tarokka must be painted by the light of the full moon for its arcane powers to manifest, a Vistana spends months or even years working on her deck. Although normal use does not harm the prophetic power of the deck, if one card is damaged or destroyed, the rest of the deck becomes useless and must be burned before a new deck can be created. When the owner of the deck dies, the cards become useless to any but another in the artist's bloodline.

Traditionally, Vistani keep their personal decks wrapped in silk painted with warding symbols. The Vistani place the cards within a carved wooden box made especially for them. If someone leaves the deck out of its warding silk and guardian box until the next full moon, the powers of the deck disappear and cannot manifest again.

Roleplaying a Tarokka Reading

Roleplaying a tarokka reading is challenging for the DM and exciting for players. By creating the illusion of impossibly accurate fortunes and omens of future adventure, you as the DM can build a sense of fate interweaving through your story. However, it does require some preparation.

To begin, you must first decide which sort of deck to use. Tarot cards are colorful and provide more of the feel of the tarokka, but the images on them can be distracting and your players may feel uncomfortable using something that some consider a real fortune-telling tool. Tarot cards do have an upright and reversed image, unlike playing cards and the deck contains enough cards to build a tarokka deck with some to spare. If using playing cards, which are inexpensive and easier to find, remember to get a deck with two jokers. Otherwise, there are not enough cards in the deck to represent the tarokka. Playing cards must be marked so that one end is "upright" and one of the jokers marked to differentiate it from the other. Once you have decided upon and prepared the deck you plan to use, consider various methods of performing a reading and the best pattern for the information you wish to provide.

If you are truly ambitious, you may wish to create your own tarokka deck based on the descriptions given later in this section by making a rough sketch of each card and labeling it with the appropriate name and suit pattern.

Creating a Sense of Mystery

When performing a reading the first thing to consider is building the right atmosphere. Many fortune-tellers use an age-old technique and follow a similar pattern. If you have space, layer a tabletop with bright scarves, darken the room and light a few candles. Incense adds to the feeling of mystery too. Lay the cards out slowly and spend time studying them even if you already know exactly what you plan to say. To increase suspense lay all the cards out face up before beginning your interpretation. This allows the players a chance to take note of the darker cards, while you have the opportunity to decide what to say about each card and the finished pattern. Ominous and mysterious phrasing instead of direct answers allows your players the chance to recognize connections later — possibly discovering some you may not have noticed yourself through the power of their own associative imaginations!

Cheating Fate

The next thing to consider is how you plan to provide the information you need to give your players. There are four methods provided below. Two involve a great deal of Dungeon Master flexibility — either mental or physical. One requires lots of preparation time. Learn all of them for maximum flexibility. You may need to come up with a reading at the last minute. You may decide that you have to get information they need to them clearly and concisely and you have the time to

work out your reading to make it perfect for the plot. Each method has strengths and weaknesses depending upon its purpose.

Dealing Fortune's Hand

For a Dungeon Master who knows how to think on her feet, it is possible to deal out a reading as your NPC Vistana quite randomly and end up with adventure ideas, another mysterious character to torture or assist as needed and a group of suitably impressed players. When following this method remember two things: one, emphasize only what you feel is important in the reading; and two, no card or dice's meaning is sacrosanct. You can always shade or distort what you say as the situation requires. Most tarokka cards have several related meanings. In fact, since every deck is individually created, images may be as crude or complex as you choose to describe them and may contain different symbolism depending upon the creator (i.e., your Vistana NPC).

When you need a little more time to build a story from the diverse elements in a tarokka reading, plan it to occur at the end of an evening. Lay out the reading but ask time to interpret the shadowy future. Write down the cards and their sequence. By the next week's gaming session, you should have the beginnings of an interesting new story and characters eager to hear what the tarokka deck prophesies. If no story ideas come to mind consider muttering dark tales of ill omen and say the reading was fouled by something left undone — crossing the fortuneteller's palm with silver maybe? Your next random reading should turn out better, and if it doesn't, adjust the meanings of the cards to suit the desired outcome. ("This card usually means ruin and failure, but considering the surrounding cards, a secondary meaning comes to mind....")

Changing the Odds

When a player character seeks out a Vistana for a particularly focused reading, it's time for you to stack the deck. Ravenloft Dungeon Masters have used several methods over the years. The simplest method is looking through the cards and extracting those that might be an awkward fit in the reading you hope to give. Remember that you can manipulate card interpretations, so there might be fewer cards to remove than you think. Once you have removed any plot-destroying cards, you can perform a "random" tarokka reading, this time confident that you can creatively fit all the cards left into your story and answer the characters' questions.

Stacking the Deck

If you are good at sleight-of-hand, and still a little afraid of random weirdness in your reading, create the layout you want ahead of time and stack those cards in the order of your chosen pattern. Shuffle the deck, being certain to keep the special cards at the top and don't shuffle that section into the mix. Allow your players to place their hands on top of the "shuffled" deck and concentrate on the question they wish to ask. Do the layout and read the cards. If you have chosen well and kept those cards on top, your players will be astonished.

Multiple Choice

Another method, the one used in the original Ravenloft setting, requires a great deal more Dungeon Master preparation and is only useful when you know way ahead of time that the PCs are planning to visit the Vistani. With this method, the written interpretation of each card doesn't matter. You assign a different answer for each suit of the cards, including one for any cards from the high deck. When a character asks his questions (and you must know these ahead of time), you have already decided upon one of five answers, depending upon whether a star, glyph, sword, coin or high deck card turns over. For example:

The question: Who was that mysterious dark rider we saw along the road last night?

The answer:

Coins — a highwayman leaving the scene of a robbery

Glyphs — a messenger from the Kargat

Stars — a child on a runaway horse

Swords — Lord Strahd in a foul mood

High Deck — long-lost Uncle Fenster

This sort of manipulation allows for some flexibility in a game, (although it is unlikely most lists of answers would deviate quite as wildly as this one) but still gives the Dungeon Master the control he needs to write the framework of an adventure ahead of time. When the characters announce they are going to visit the Vistani, the Dungeon Master can lay out the cards, turning over each one and announcing as he does the layout, which question it answers. Although useful in a single adventure or when casting the tarokka as a rare event, for long-running Ravenloft campaigns the mystery of the deck pales over time as players realize cards have completely different meanings in each reading.

Dealing with the Unexpected

We all know how hard it can be to divine the outcome of an adventure in a roleplaying game. With dumb luck, an unseen hole in your story or just plain idiotic behavior, characters can take a carefully planned plot and turn it into a PC bloodbath or a complete rout for your fiendish NPCs (who were supposed to be recurring villains). When your reading seems to turn out completely wrong, remember that the mysterious future never ends. Work elements from your reading into later story lines. Your players gradually realize that they had gotten the right answer, just not for the questions they asked or for the time period they expected the reading to cover.

Tarokka Patterns

Choose the complexity of your tarokka pattern depending upon the time you wish to spend on a reading, and what information you intend to give. Remember when describing the layout of the cards, the upright position (picture right side up) is the one facing the person having the reading—not the reader. This can be very important when you interpret a reading, the difference between disaster and victory. Use any method and pattern, including simply turning over one card and making your decision based on that card. Below are two tarokka patterns. One is more complicated and should be reserved for times when you wish to draw out the reading or give lots of information. For simple readings, especially those that players decide they want on at the spur of the moment, you might wish to use the basic cross — a five-card pattern with four possibly random cards. This set up works well for stacking the deck since you only have to control a few cards.

The Basic Cross

Card 1 — *The Focus:* This card represents the person asking the questions or the question he asks. The reader should choose the most appropriate card and place it on the table in the central position of the layout.

Card 2 — *The Past:* This card represents any past influences on the focus of the reading.

Card 3 — *The Present:* This card Indicates the situation as it is now or any current influences.

Card 4 — *The Future:* This card provides an indication of future events, including possible allies or enemies.

Card 5 — *The Outcome:* This card gives a general indication of the outcome of the focus' situation.

The Divergent Cross

The divergent cross allows for more flexibility in a reading. By providing three different possible outcomes of the divergent future, the Dungeon Master can select which paths will be most accurate in the plot and still keep options open. However, it can be difficult to use if you wish to stack the deck.

Cards 1 through **5** hold the same significance as those in the basic cross pattern.

Cards 6 — *Beginnings:* This card indicates the root cause of the current situation.

Card 7 — *The Far Past:* This card designates an event or person in the distant past that has relevance to the situation.

Card 8 — *The Near Past:* This card illuminates recent events or persons pertinent to the situation.

Cards 9 through **11** provide three distinct future possibilities. Alternate futures may occur depending upon the actions of the heroes. This pattern can add a sense of urgency, especially if you stack the deck with death as one of the options.

A Sample Reading

Evan, the Dungeon Master, wants to set his next adventure in Richemulot. He also needs to impart a lot of information to his players and wishes to do it in a dramatic fashion. His players have no idea where they need to go. As the party discusses various options, they hear the sound of violins playing through the fog-filled forest. When they investigate, they find a Vistani encampment and a tarokka reader willing to illuminate the shadows surrounding their fate.

Now that Evan has the player characters where he wants them, he can feed them the information he wants them to know. Since he knew what he planned to do from the end of the last game session, he has already stacked the deck the way he wants it. Since he isn't entirely sure how the game will go once they get there, and he doesn't want to spend a lot of time doing the reading, he chooses to do the basic cross pattern instead of something more elaborate.

Clearing off a table, he dims the lights and places a couple of candles nearby to increase the atmosphere. Pointing to one of his players, he mutters, "You are first, come here little one." Heather, in the guise of Antoine the "acquisitions specialist," steps forward. Since Evan (in his role as Marta the Vistana) wants to do a set reading right now, he has already built his stack of cards. The first card in the reading is the focus card, and since the reading involves Antoine, he pulls out the 7 of Coins, otherwise known as "The Thief." He places this card in the middle of the table, explaining its significance as he does so. Cards 2 through 5 have already been stacked together in the order he planned. Placing his stack on the pile, he makes a big show of shuffling the cards, absolutely certain that his cards never leave the top. Evan sets the stack down and asks Antoine to place his hand on the deck and concentrate on the future. After a moment of quiet, Evan slowly lays out the tarokka pattern.

The second card in the reading reveals the past. Again a 7 shows up, this time the 7 of Stars. Indicating someone is a dupe and doesn't realize it, Evan wants Antoine (and his player) to start feeling paranoid about some recent "business" dealings. Later Antoine will discover that the villain at the center of the plot in Richemulot has been using him.

The third card indicates the present; this time the card is one of the Fortuna Magna — The Mists, reversed, indicating an unexpected journey or a hidden path to success. This should convince the characters to start moving, although they have yet to gain a direction.

The fourth card in the in the reading is the 10 of Coins. This card signifies the future; the image on the card matches a description of one of the nobles of Richemulot, Jacqueline Renier. Oddly enough, as Evan explains, Antoine recognizes her though he has no memory of ever meeting her.

The final card of this pattern provides an outcome. Tempting them to follow this possible future, Evan pulls out another card from the Fortuna Magna, the Artifact, indicating a very important and valuable object. After studying the reading for a moment, he announces that Antoine must begin on his journey now and search for the Mistress of Coins. He also warns Antoine to watch himself and be certain he is not duped again, implying that it has happened before.

Now Evan has given the party all the information they need to get to the next part of his story. They shall meet Marta again. It is prophesied in the cards.

Simple Tarokka Rules for d20

This section details the steps necessary for creating a personal tarokka deck and also provides information on d20 methods of reading the cards. For Dungeon Masters and players who wish to simplify a reading, those who have no cards prepared or in instances where time prohibits elaborate layouts, there is an easier way to provide "prophetic" storytelling hints using the d20 system.

Any character claiming to have Vistani blood may attempt to design a tarokka deck. If the PC has the Craft (painting) skill, she may make a Craft check (DC 25) and dedicate a block of time in the deck's creation (3d8 months minus her Craft (painting) modifier, with a minimum of one month). No one with less than one quarter Vistani blood can create a true tarokka deck, and the more pure the bloodline, the more powerful and useful the deck becomes. (Remember that the Vistani consider any male Vistana with the gift of prophecy a terrible omen and he will be cast out if not automatically killed when discovered within the tribe.)

A quarter-Vistana who makes her own deck or receives it as a blood-related inheritance receives a +6 bonus on any Intelligence checks to notice whether or not she is being scried as well as the ability to do *augury* with a reading three times per day. For a half-Vistana, the same deck allows her to perform all the above as well as *divination* three times per day as though cast by a 10th level cleric (80% chance of success). If the inherited deck is from a Vistana of a stronger bloodline (1/2 instead of 1/4 Vistani for instance), the cards' abilities degrade until they match their new master. Any full Vistana NPC may learn as much from the deck as she wills — or at least as much as the Dungeon Master wishes to disclose to the players.

Images and Meanings of the Tarokka Deck

The tarokka deck consists of two sections: the Lesser Deck of Fate, consisting of 40 cards in four suits; and the Fortuna Magna containing a total of 14 cards of greater symbolic power. A Tarot deck or simple deck of playing cards may substitute for the tarokka deck. The tarot cards contain symbolism similar to tarokka cards and other gypsy fortune-telling cards. Playing cards are easier to find and are perfectly suitable for those who prefer not to use Tarot cards. Each card is described as it would be in a standard tarokka deck. We also include lists of playing card and Tarot substitutions to be used to roleplay readings.

The Lesser Deck of Fate

There are four suits of cards within the lesser Deck of Fate: coins, swords, stars and glyphs. Each suit corresponds symbolically with one of the four elements, the four basic character classes (warrior, priest, rogue and mage) and to either the mystical or the physical world. Within each suit are 10 cards. The final card of each suit provides an image of a Master of the class controlled by that suit.

Coins

The suit of Coins has the primary aspect of the rogue, either thief or bard, whose life is controlled by wealth or popularity. It is also the suit of the simple man — anyone from an assassin to a guildsman or laborer working primarily for material concerns. Its secondary aspect is that of Earth, corresponding to the metals coins are made from as well as the wealth they represent. Coin cards in tarokka are generally connected to the basest emotions: greed, avarice, jealousy, gluttony and obsession, although they may also foretell the generosity of a wealthy patron or a charitable friend. It is the suit most closely connected to the physical world. The animal allied with Coins is the rat — a creature that crawls through holes in the earth and is known for its silence and ability to move with stealth.

For those wishing to use regular playing cards, substitute the suit of diamonds. Coins are a normal suit in Tarot decks as well.

Ace of Coins: The Swashbuckler

This card indicates good-hearted rogues or highwaymen, those who rob from the rich to give succor to the poor. It represents someone who seeks money not out of greed, but as a means to help others. The swashbuckler escapes any taint of avarice, disregarding the law of possession in the face of another's need.

Reversed, it indicates someone controlled by a need for wealth, also envy.

Description: A smiling young woman dressed in the clothes of a dandy brushes past a scowling rotund merchant dressed in rich, but food-stained clothing. One of the merchant's many sashes

dangles, obviously cut, and the mischievous rogue has a fat purse in one hand, while her other hand is flipping a gold coin into a beggar's bowl on the street. A small black rat watches the exchange.

Two of Coins: The Philanthropist

The philanthropist is one of the most positive cards of the tarokka. It is a card of unselfish devotion and love, acts of charity and giving without thought of reward. In the right pattern, the tarokka reader may see it as a card of the ultimate act of giving — perhaps the ultimate sacrifice.

Reversed, the card has a darker meaning. The negative side of philanthropy is opportunism, providing gifts with an ulterior motive. This can include anything from bribery to hide criminal activity to the pretense of friendship for eventual reward.

Description: Two barefoot beggars dressed in rags huddle against a stone wall in the snow. The smaller, a tiny bone-thin girl with an angular face, holds in her palm two coin-shaped pieces of bread. With love in her eyes, she is giving both pieces to the elderly woman in rags who hugs her close.

Three of Coins: The Trader

Commerce in all its aspects is the meaning of the Trader card. Whether caravans, auction houses, market places or illicit smuggling in abandoned boathouses, this card represents haggling to arrive at a fair-exchange.

Reversed, the Trader means treachery and bad dealings in commerce. This card in its negative aspect indicates bad bargains of any sort.

Description: The face of this card shows a man standing beside a Vistani wagon and a Vistani trader. He has obviously just finished a bargaining session and looks quite satisfied with himself. The Vistani man is half smiling as he exchanges a tightly tied sack for three coins from the other man's hand. The coins are in mid-air on the card, representing the exchange of currency and goods that is at the heart of the card's meaning.

Four of Coins: The Merchant

Unlike the Trader, the Merchant card represents shady dealings and deceit. A card of someone seeking profit over all, its appearance warns, "let the buyer beware." Goods are not as promised, an agreement is not be kept, a customer is only there to steal or the proprietor has raised his prices beyond reason. Reversed, it indicates an unseen bargain or a rare and unexpected find.

Description: Two men stand in silhouette making an exchange in the shadows. One holds out a small chest while hiding a dagger behind his back, the other hands over a bag with a hole in its bottom. Four coins are falling to the ground from the bag as they make the trade.

Five of Coins: The Guildsman

As with all cards in the suit of Coins, this card deals with commerce, but is concerned with cooperative efforts for mutual profit. It invokes the image of mercantile and crafting guildsmen working together to share both gain and loss. Within the organization, members are supported and given assistance whenever there is trouble or need. Representing fraternity and partnership in business, the card shows loyalty, but only to other members of a certain group. In the upright position, the card indicates a fair and just organization.

Reversed, the organization may be neutral or utterly dishonest and treacherous — but only to those outside its sphere.

Description: Five bards in chorus, their arms linked, are singing in complete harmony. Five gold coins gleam in a hat on the floor at their feet.

Six of Coins: The Beggar

The world of commerce is a risky one. The six of Coins deals with radical changes in fortune. A poor man might become rich, whether through sudden circumstance or hard work and perseverance. A wealthy merchant might suddenly see his shop burned, his ships destroyed or gradually lose his fortune through bad investments, finding himself and on the streets. As one might guess, the positive aspect of this card involves gaining wealth, although this wealth might also take the form of increased knowledge or wisdom.

Reversed, this card indicates loss and possible ruin.

Description: A beggar and a wealthy man stand in mirrored stance. Other than their clothing, they look exactly alike. The wealthy man drops six coins into the bent tin cup the beggar holds. Their similarity warns of the fickle nature of fortune.

Seven of Coins: The Thief

This card represents all aspects of thievery and all thieves, whether a simple pickpocket, an ac-

complished cat burglar, a cutpurse or a violent thug. In a reading, it indicates either an actual thief or the loss of something important to the individual. This loss could be anything from a stolen magical heirloom weapon to the disfigurement of a handsome man. Whatever is most valued is at risk.

Reversed, it indicates an important or long hoped-for gain, although usually through unfortunate circumstances. This might be wealth gained through the loss of a loved one or a gift given of stolen goods.

Description: A female thief crouches over a murdered noble. She is removing a signet ring from his hand and has more jewelry spilling from a pouch at her waist. Seven coins lie scattered on the bloodstained stones.

Eight of Coins: The Tax Collector

Corruption and deceit, especially within government or among nobility, is at the heart of this card. Treacherous influential officials might perform covert actions such as embezzlement or treason. Others might expect bribes for certain favors or bully those below them within the organization.

Reversed, this card indicates a trustworthy and just person in a position of power — even inside a corrupt organization.

Description: A cowering peasant woman dressed in patched clothing looks beseechingly up at a mounted man, his face hidden in the shadow of a hooded cloak. He grasps eight coins, which he has obviously just taken from her. The doorway of a humble hut behind her indicates the peasant woman's obvious inability to afford such an amount.

Nine of Coins: The Miser

This card indicates someone keeping a vast horde of wealth to the benefit of no one but himself. Whether a true miser hoarding gold and living in abject poverty or a wealthy young noble interested in nothing beyond his own pleasure and decadence, those represented by the nine of Coins are entirely self-centered. In its upright aspect, it is the card of false or unusable wealth.

Reversed, a sudden fortune may be in the offing or someone attains an important goal.

Description: The image on the card is of a wrinkled, ugly old man counting nine coins by the light of a guttering candle. His nightclothes are patched, but piles of gems and other treasures sit on shelves behind him. A rat sits on the table near him, holding one of the coins in its paws.

Ten of Coins: The Master of Coins (Jacqueline Renier)

This card represents someone who is the epitome of the rogue — bard, pickpocket, banker, merchant or taxman. All those who manipulate wealth, whether toiling to earn it, crafting for it, performing for it, stealing it or begging for it are connected to the Master or ten of Coins. In a

reading, the upright position indicates a positive reaction.

Reversed, this card indicates immediate antipathy or danger from the being represented by this card.

Description: An elegant well-dressed woman with sleek dark hair, streaked gray at the temples, stands with her face hidden in the shadows. On one shoulder sits a well-fed black rat, its eyes gleaming. On the table in front of her lies an ornate dagger, a bag of gold with ten coins spilling forth, and a silvery flute.

Visions of Power

Some cards contain images that might, if the reader wishes, represent powerful entities with the world of Ravenloft. Descriptions given match these personalities and may provide useful pointers for your players, even if the characters have never met their dark nemeses. Each master card is represented by one of the darklords, while others, as well as one nondarklord, are scattered among other images in the deck.

When one of these is intended, you see the name of the character in parenthesis beside the title of the card.

Swords

The suit of Swords primarily follows the path of the warrior — one whose life is dominated by battle. Whether physical or mental, hidden or blatant, the conflict, aggression and violence inherent within the suit of Swords consistently appears within the dark domains of Ravenloft and within readings. Its secondary aspect is the elemental symbol of Air, as the element most closely connected to storms — conflicts in air, water, earth and fire. Swords are also closely connected to the physical world. The animal of Swords is the raven — a creature of the Air who seeks out bloodshed and profits by it.

For those wishing to substitute playing cards for the tarokka, the suit of spades most closely symbolizes the Sword. The suit of Swords is also part of the Tarot.

Ace of Swords: The Avenger

Those of chaotic good alignment are connected to the ace of Swords. The card, in its positive aspect indicates the need to right wrongs and deal swift judgment to foes without thought of danger. Grand quests to fight ancient vampires or rid the realm of lupine foes are some of the deeds done by the wandering avenger — a knight who owes allegiance to no one and nothing but his own sense of honor and justice.

Reversed, the card indicates foolish choices or a hopeless battle.

Description: A young man stands, his arms raised above his head, holding a blazing sword that glows blue with electricity. His armor drips with blood, but his handsome face is triumphant. Sprawled on the ground around him are his many foes — including lycanthropes and other monstrous creatures. A raven sits perched on one of the bodies, a gobbet of flesh in its beak.

Two of Swords: The Paladin

Unlike the reckless nature of the avenger card, the card of the paladin indicates victory through justice and strict adherence to codes of law. Symbolic of all those who pursue the cause of ultimate good, the two of Swords provides the hope of good truly triumphing over evil.

Reversed, the card portends treachery in the name of good deeds or hubris destroying a chance for victory.

Description: A paladin in full plate kneels, his uncovered head bowed, holding a sword, point down, in front of him. An unseen figure has tapped the paladin's shoulder with another sword, knighting the obviously noble and courageous warrior. Beyond the figure is a wall hanging with an ornate rose embroidered on it.

Three of Swords: The Soldier

For a soldier, the morality of and motivation for a battle are often unclear. Although the three of Swords indicates the war between good and evil, it does not foretell the eventual outcome, nor is either side clearly recognizable. Indicating an uncertain future, the usual interpretation denotes that chance or fate will be the deciding factor. Reversed, the card indicates a definite ending, although it also illustrates a need for hard work, with no quick victory.

Description: A swordsman reaches for a weapon on a rack. There are three swords hanging there, one white, one gray and one black. It is impossible to guess which sword he chooses, and his face shows his uncertainty.

Four of Swords: The Mercenary

Although representing a sell-sword or mercenary, the four of Swords indicates someone who follows a professional code of conduct and deals fairly within this code. Willing to work for either good or evil in the pursuit of personal gain, the people represented by this card still honor their commitments. The four of Swords also represents endurance, stamina and strength in the face of physical adversity.

Reversed, the card indicates people who are altruistic but rigid in their beliefs. It also indicates physical weakness or illness.

Description: Four brawny warriors in battered armor have gathered around an open chest filled with treasure. They have their swords raised so that the weapons touch point to point over the overflowing box. Their free hands rest over their hearts in a sign of solemn oath taking, fists clenched.

Five of Swords: The Myrmidon

The five of Swords illustrates the fickle nature of fate. This card indicates battles won or lost in an instant, by chance, sudden upheaval or unlikely victory by an underdog in the chaos of war. No plan is secure, no victory certain under the power of the myrmidon. The destruction of a darklord by a simple farmer or the cruel machinations of the Dark Powers foiling a brilliantly conceived plan might come about when this card appears in a reading.

Reversed, situations become static and change is difficult or impossible to implement.

Description: A young and beautiful Vistana, wearing broken manacles, stands at a border of the Mists. Five figures come through, obscured by the fog, their swords piercing the Mist. From the illustration, it is impossible to know if they have arrived to defend or destroy her.

Six of Swords: The Berserker

The six of Swords represents all that is barbaric and brutal in battle. Those people or creatures indicated by this card perform chaotic maneuvers in combat without thought of consequence. Action, challenge and adventure are all that count. This card often represents evil lycanthropes. Their bestial nature leads them to chaotic and bloody deeds.

Reversed, the card shows thoughtful and well-planned actions or compassion in the midst of war.

Description: A full moon lights the image of a savage werewolf, his muzzle bloody and teeth bared. Although foes have mortally pierced him with five silver swords, he raises his own sword in triumph. Around him are pieces of his slaughtered enemies.

Seven of Swords: The Hooded Man

The seven of Swords symbolizes deceit and evil actions through stupidity, bigotry, intolerance or xenophobia. It indicates situations when violence seems the only answer — although quite probably the wrong one. Sometimes the card represents a suspected and feared stranger, outcast or outsider.

Reversed, this card indicates unlooked-for understanding and tolerance or an unexpected visit from an important or beloved person.

Description: A crowd of peasants carrying smoky torches stands behind a threatening hooded figure with skeletal hands. In front, a caliban cowers caged within a circle of seven swords, each point deep in the bloody soil.

Eight of Swords: The Dictator

This card represents nobles, government officials, clerics or generals who are corrupt leaders. It is the mark of the tyrant or despot tormenting those under his protection. Oppression, domination and acts of terror are all symbolized by the dictator who wields power unjustly or captures leadership through treacherous means.

Reversed, it indicates a good and just ruler, someone who wishes to protect the weak and helpless or freedom from imprisonment.

Description: A man in the throes of despair lies pinned beneath heavy chains. Eight swords anchor the chains to the ground. The sky above along the horizon is stormy and filled with dark clouds.

Nine of Swords: The Torturer

One of the most ominous and feared images of the tarokka deck, the nine of Swords represents all-consuming evil. This card symbolizes creatures of darkness, sadists, demonic beings and the violently insane. The torturer indicates any that revel in suffering and torment. Vistani shudder with dread when the positive aspect of the nine of Swords shows up in a reading.

Reversed, the card symbolizes a chance for redemption — even for those who have followed the seductive call of the path of corruption.

Description: Nine swords glow red hot on a brazier. Behind the brazier a man hangs in chains, his spirit obviously destroyed, his body broken and scored. It is certain he has no more information to give, yet, the torments continue. The shadow of a raven can be seen on the wall beside him.

Ten of Swords: The Master of Swords (Count Strahd)

This card symbolizes those living their lives in battle. Whether general or slave-gladiator, the master of Swords marks the warrior in all his guises.

It also indicates the power of government and other leaders, whether in the guildhall, in court or on the battlefield. As a focus card, the reader may use it for any soldier, for those in physical or mental conflict or anything tied to the element of air. In its upright aspect, it represents a positive reaction — a truce or alliance.

Reversed, the card represents a negative response, such as assassination or war.

Description: An older, armored man with broad shoulders, black hair and streaks of white at the temples stands on the battlements, his dark cloak whipping behind him in the stormy breeze. His face is shadowed in profile. At his side, he wears an elegant sword with a large ruby in the pommel. Nine other swords lie scattered on the stones, as though dropped by surrendering foes. A moon is in the sky, half obscured by clouds. A raven flies in the light of the moon.

Stars

Those following the Stars have desire for control and power over what is beyond the comprehension of mortals. Wizards, sages and others seeking hidden knowledge find connection to the suit of Stars. Whether an altruistic search for knowledge or the overwhelming urge to gain power at all costs, the suit of Stars symbolizes the fire of the intellect and the blaze that can overcome or deepen the shadows of ignorance. Its secondary aspect is Fire, an element that may enlighten or destroy. Stars connect most closely with the mental world. The animal corresponding to this suit is the serpent, a creature of knowledge seeking all that's hidden within the smallest and darkest spaces, a being whose presence may be either beneficial or deadly, whose larger cousin is the fire-breathing dragon.

A card reader wishing to use regular playing cards may substitute the suit of clubs. For a Tarot reader, the closest allied suit is the Rod, representing a wizard's magical device.

Ace of Stars: The Transmuter (Dr. Victor Mordenheim)

Sometimes in the eager pursuit of knowledge, a mage may make discoveries that are unexpected or dangerous. The ace of Stars represents someone who has made such a find or the disastrous results coming from it. Examples include the creation of a new spell with horrifying side effects, the mixture of two alchemical potions to create an unexpected poison or the discovery by a scholar of an ancient magic item with deadly and uncontrollable powers. Sometimes the card indicates one who has been successful while losing sight of his original goals or values. Other times it indicates unhealthy obsession, perhaps obsessive love.

Reversed, the card portends a happy failure or a beneficial and long awaited ending to an endeavor.

Description: A wiry middle-aged man with a scarred face and prematurely gray hair sits looking wearily through a book propped up on a table. A needle, a spool of thread and a scalpel sit next to the open tome. A candle shines light on his book, its flame a star in the darkness. Behind him stands a tall threatening figure, its shape distorted in shadow, hands outstretched toward his throat.

Two of Stars: The Diviner

The two of Stars symbolizes solid understanding of consequences and meticulous preparation. Science, the healing arts and benevolent magic are all a part, as well as honesty and truth. This card represents those who seek vital knowledge for the benefit of all. Unlike most tarokka cards, even in reverse, this card indicates something positive — compassionate deception, such as a protective white lie.

Description: An elderly wizard stands while a younger one kneels at her feet presenting a large, open white tome for her to read. The elder wears a crown capped with flame to show her nobility and pride while the younger looks up at her in open admiration. Two stars shine in the sky, evincing the radiant glow of knowledge and the warmth of compassion and understanding. A small snake coils about the younger wizard's throat like a necklace.

Three of Stars: The Enchanter

The enchanter strives to enchant and make magical the mundane around him. The card of the enchanter indicates challenge in magic or research and eventual success. Determination is the watchword of this card as it leads to illumination and victory through overcoming hardships.

Reversed, the three of Stars indicates failure, but hope is encouraged.

Description: A wizard struggles through a terrible windstorm along a narrow, arched bridge. In the distance, at the other end of the bridge a

small hut sits, its open door sending a bright shaft of light along the path. In the sky, the clouds are breaking up and three stars show through.

Four of Stars: The Abjurer

The four of Stars is the card of the investigator, whether studying crimes or the supernatural. It symbolizes the need to check facts, to analyze data and use logic in the pursuit of knowledge. Warning against assumptions and hasty interpretation, the abjurer must sort through confusion and chaos to make progress. Indicating neither defeat nor success, this card most often denotes a need to rethink or review, as an important clue or facts may have been overlooked.

Reversed, it represents inspiration and sudden understanding without conscious reasoning.

Description: An elderly Vistana looks deep within a flawless crystal ball. Four stars light the interior of the ball, illuminating her face and hands, as well as the darkness around her. The stars symbolize knowledge, understanding, truth and logic.

Five of Stars: The Elementalist

In its most basic interpretation, this card represents Nature in all its aspects — a gentle waterfall, the raging storm, a baby rabbit or a snarling tiger, the moon and stars. The five of Stars also indicates the mastery of Nature or the eventuality of Nature's success. In its positive aspect, the Elementalist portends good luck in natural endeavors such as hunting or harvesting, even heralding the birth of twins to a barren family.

Reversed, it is indicative of a negative natural event such as a blizzard, forest fire or a rampaging herd of wild elephants.

Description: A sorcerer stands with his arms wide above his head. Five stars form an arc between his hands much like a rainbow. The bright sun shines above him in the sky. Lush greenery surrounds him. Within the greenery, a snake sits coiled at his feet, looking up.

Six of Stars: The Evoker (Tatyana)

The six of Stars denotes temptation leading to possible disaster. Trespass into the forbidden, grave robbing or researches into dark arcane lore are all indicated by this ominous card, as well as confrontation with evil beyond the researcher's ken. In game terms, this card may be a sign of a Horror save in the near future.

Reversed, it denotes returning sanity to one who has gone mad or resisted a nearly overwhelming yearning.

Description: A redheaded young woman in a long white gown stands beside her bed looking out a window. One hand is up and reaching. Her face is pensive and apprehensive. She is obviously yearning for what is outside. Beyond the window stands a shadowy figure dressed in a dark cloak. His handsome face is pale and his ruddy mouth dis-

torted by fangs. Six stars decorate the leaded windowpane surrounding the clear central portion. The window is slightly open.

Seven of Stars: The Illusionist

Beware of deceit when this card appears. Someone has hidden much, told lies or formed dark conspiracies beyond the notice of a dupe for the cause. The seven of Stars may indicate trickery or information gathered by evil means. At worst, the focus of the reading may become a sacrifice to a cause he does not yet, and may never, comprehend.

Reversed, this is a card of secret societies, whether organized for good or ill.

Description: A figure in dark robes gestures at a blindfolded man caught within a fiery complex diagram. Behind the robed figure are seven standing stones. Each is inscribed with a star, which glows faintly in the light of the fire beyond.

Eight of Stars: The Necromancer

The eight of Stars denotes power turned against itself or someone sowing the seeds of his own destruction. In its upright position, it may also indicate a keen and learned mind in pursuit of dark power or the presence of undead.

Reversed, the card gives hope of turning against evil or defeating a powerful undead creature, perhaps through newly gained knowledge or intelligent and morally upstanding choices.

Description: A hooded figure with skeletal hands makes arcane gestures over eight tombstones. Each tombstone is marked with a dark star. Rotted corpses reach from the graves.

Nine of Stars: The Conjurer

Although many cards within the suit of Stars indicate a fascination with forbidden knowledge, the nine of Stars is the ultimate card of evil knowledge put to terrifying uses. Often called the card of summoning, it denotes those who gain their power from fiends and other malevolent beings from beyond. It may indicate one who is a master of these beings or one who has become a pawn of their evil schemes.

Reversed, the card still carries negative connotations, indicating repression of truth or someone purposefully withholding vital information.

Description: An alluring sorceress writhes in a passionate dance with a shadowy fiend. Upon her scantily clad body appear nine tattooed stars. She wears an armband in the shape of a snake. Behind them, a curtain of flame indicates the pure element of fire as a source of destruction.

Ten of Stars: The Master of Stars (Azalin Rex)

The Master of Stars represents all who hunger for knowledge and mystical power. The card of sages, scholars, intellectuals, wizards and necromancers, the ten of Stars is the focus for anyone who follows the path of a wizard or sorcerer. It may indicate riddles or a mystery, the supernatural or the unknown. For the Vistani, the card gives warning of the presence of secrets or hidden knowledge that the focus of the reading must gain to find success.

Reversed, the card indicates the presence of an evil master of the arcane arts or reveals a misleading clue.

Description: A dark figure stares outward as though desperately searching for something. His face lies shadowed beneath a hooded cloak decorated with ten stars, yet his eyes show as two stygian holes with pupils of flame.

Glyphs

Priests, monks and all holy beings are most closely allied with the suit of Glyphs. Connected to their gods by a tangible holy symbol, they receive their abilities to heal or harm through this symbolic device. The suit of Glyphs corresponds to all that is spiritual, both the abiding faith of a good cleric seeking only to heal and the insane devotion of a fanatical despot wanting to draw all under the shadow of his evil god. Water, which nurtures and heals as well as drowns, reflects the power of the suit of Glyphs. The animal allied with Glyphs is the wolf, a loyal and devoted creature to his pack, which can be vicious to unwary strangers.

In standard playing cards, the heart, a symbol of emotion and spirit, represents the suit of Glyphs. In the Tarot, the suit of Cups also corresponds with Water and so provides a suitable substitution.

Ace of Glyphs: The Monk

This card represents self-reliance and inner strength. Physical and mental improvement is indicated, transcending the abilities of the average man. The monk lives for contemplation and tranquility, yet firmly understands the evils of the world and makes certain his body, mind and spirit are strong enough to meet the challenge. In readings, the positive aspect indicates a need for self-reliance or that contemplation is an important factor in solving a problem.

Reversed, it indicates rash decisions or someone with a debauched mind and body.

Description: A wiry man, his head shaved, sits with his legs folded on a wooden bench. His dusky skin and dark eyes show that he is from Sri Raji. Dressed in a simple breechcloth, he contemplates a plain bowl filled with water lying cupped in his hands. One ear is pierced, the lobe long, with an earring hanging from it in the shape of a Glyph — similar to the symbol for eternity.

Two of Glyphs: The Missionary

The two of Glyphs indicates those who spread the teachings of their gods. In its positive aspect, these teachings bring enlightenment and wisdom. Sadly, in the realms of Ravenloft, this card is most often seen in its negative aspect: spreading ignorance and fear.

Reversed, this card prophesies dark days to come.

Description: A woman in clerical robes stands at a podium preaching to a mesmerized crowd of worshipers. She holds two books, one black and one white, each inscribed with a Glyph on the front cover. It is impossible to tell whether she teaches good or evil although the grim look on her face threatens darkness.

Three of Glyphs: The Healer

Any who practice the healing arts are represented by this card, whether physician, herbalist or cleric of a holy order. Those seeking a cure find the three of Glyphs to be a positive omen.

Reversed, it indicates illness or diseases, possibly even a malevolent curse.

Description: An elderly invalid lies in bed. Beside him, a young priestess wipes his brow with a cloth as she looks tenderly at him. A glow emanates from her healing hands. On the wall behind them, three carved Glyphs ward off evil influences to the patient's health. A wolflike dog lies at her feet.

Four of Glyphs: The Shepherd

Dedication, loyalty and devotion are the watchwords of the four of Glyphs. This card indicates devoted followers, loyal companions and trustworthy friends — those who would protect and defend the focus of the reading just as a shepherd watches his flock.

Reversed, the card becomes a dark sign of betrayal or the failing of a trusted friend, whether accidentally or on purpose.

Description: A young shepherd boy watches his flock carefully, but his loyal dog lies curled up asleep and a wolf lurks among the sheep. Four Glyphs decorate the length of his shepherd's crook.

Five of Glyphs: The Druid

Reflecting the balance of nature and the neutrality of animal kind, the five of Glyphs shows the value of allowing events to happen without attempting to control them. As a sign of good, it indicates a release of emotions or mental domination.

Reversed, it becomes a sign of an inner turmoil disturbing the natural serenity of the mind. It may also warn of mental illness or obsession.

Description: A druid stands in a grove of five trees. A raven sits on his shoulder, while a wolf and a rat look on. A snake coils on the branch of another tree. Each tree has mark in the shape of a Glyph on its trunk. A stream flows along one side of the grove.

Six of Glyphs: The Anarchist

The six of Glyphs marks change, whether immediate or gradual, for good or ill. In its positive aspect, it signals growth and improvement. All seeking to better themselves or their situation find favor with the upright position of this card. The Anarchist in its most basic form also indicates those who rebel against a static situation.

Reversed, it indicates entropy, decay and destruction, but never stagnation.

Description: A figure stands within a twisted wire framework decorated with six Glyphs. Lightning crackles across the cage, lighting the laboratory, as the figure transforms into something yet unseen.

Seven of Glyphs: The Charlatan

Malevolence where none is expected is the mark of the Charlatan. The card of spies, unbelievers and tricksters, at its worst it cautions against believing in the wrong person or god. In a reading, it indicates a need to watch carefully and understand the motivations of others, especially those taken for granted or generally unnoticed.

Reversed, this card is at its most positive and denotes the possibility of meeting a long-forgotten friend or finding an ally among enemies.

Description: An androgynous figure stares outward, eyes closed, indicating something unseen or hidden. Its face is masked and each eyehole decorated with three Glyphs. A larger Glyph marks the forehead of the mask.

Eight of Glyphs: The Bishop

The eight of Glyphs identifies a schemer. Anyone who devises intricate plots or develops plans to manipulate those around them may be linked to this card. No matter the motive, this person has a stern and unrelenting will and strict

adherence to some code of honor or loyalty — whether good or evil in nature. In its upright aspect, it indicates the possibility of a controlling presence behind a seemingly unrelated series of events.

Reversed, it indicates someone of lawful good alignment — or anyone who follows a strict moral code.

Description: A regal priest sits proudly on a throne. On his lap is a scroll, which he reads intently, although his hand is raised in a commanding gesture and his mouth open in mid-command. Above a banner hangs decorated with eight Glyphs. Two wolves, one white and one black, stand at heel on either side of his chair.

Nine of Glyphs: The Heretic

Otherwise known as the traitor, the nine of Glyphs marks heresy to the gods or betrayal in the secular world. It might warn of a paladin about to betray his order and his god, a cheating spouse or a turncoat providing damaging information to an enemy. The Heretic symbolizes anyone deliberately turning against those who depend upon or believe in him.

Reversed, the traitor works on the side of the reading's focus as a friend or ally.

Description: A skulking figure, face concealed by a dark hooded cloak, crouches behind an elderly cleric. The cleric is pouring water from a jeweled ewer into a bowl. Obviously performing a ritual, he has no idea the traitor is there. The sneaky villain is stealing an ornate holy statue that sits on a table near the priest. The statue, the robes of the priest, and the dark figure's cloak are all decorated with Glyphs, for a total of nine.

Ten of Glyphs: The Master of Glyphs (Alfred Timothy)

The patron card of all who follow a deity, the ten of Glyphs indicates worshipers or adherence to a set of rules and a moral code of behavior, whether of good or evil intent. This card represents religious servants including all clerics, priests and druids. Upright, it symbolizes those who worship good or neutral gods.

Reversed, it denotes an evil deity or worshipers.

Description: A young priest kneels, his head bowed, before a huge wolf. He is naked to the waist. Above him is a full moon; around him a wolf pack is gathered. Each of the eight wolves is marked with a Glyph as is the giant lupine and the priest himself.

The Fortuna Magna

All cards in the high deck, or Fortuna Magna, are powerful and significant to the Vistani. These 14 cards have special importance to any reading and may contradict other cards or change the meaning of a prophetic reading in an instant.

When a reading is marked by a great number of the Fortuna Magna the Vistani know Fate truly wishes to communicate something of dire need or significance. When all cards within a reading are from the high deck, the fortune rendered may change the shape of realms. (See Table 4–1 for the Tarot and playing card substitutes.)

The Dark Master

Although the actual existence of darklords as such is unknown by the denizens of Ravenloft, this card signifies someone of great power. Foreboding, it symbolizes a person in command of others, evil and tyrannical in nature. His actions may bring a great defeat or destroy hope, but in any case will be a powerful force of darkness within the focus of the reading's scope. When upright the Dark Master is in a position of strength.

Reversed, the Dark Master may show some significant weakness.

Description: Crowned with a spiky iron circlet, a man with cruel and imperious features stares forth. He sits upon a tall throne, one hand clutches a scepter, and the other rests on the head of a noble wolf standing by his side. A raven perches on the edge of the throne's back, while a snake coils about his wrist and a rat sits upon his lap. The animals signify the dark master's power over all cards in the lesser deck.

The Artifact

Also known as the Key card, the Artifact indicates a physical object of supreme importance. Whether an arcane tome of evil rituals or a prized golden necklace, the last memento of a lost love, the Artifact represents something of ultimate necessity to the focus of the reading. It might provide the final defeat of a long hated rival or be the only weapon able to destroy a horrifying beast.

Reversed, it indicates a falsely important object, something given unneeded significance.

Description: A golden bejeweled crown gleams on a velvet pillow. It is decorated with symbols for Glyph, Star, Sword and Coin, indicating the card's rule over all other cards outside the high deck.

The Horseman

The most darkly ominous card within the tarokka, Vistani often refuse to continue a reading if this image appears. A symbol of Death or complete irredeemable loss, this card signifies calamity of terrifying dimensions.

Reversed, The Horseman indicates a somewhat less permanent fate, although still predicts a crippling accident or major defeat in battle.

Description: A skeletal horse rears, its skull-faced rider wrapped in a black cloak. The horse snorts fire, illuminating the scene. The rider carries a wicked scythe. Beneath the horse's feet lies a headless corpse. Behind him is a field full of tombstones.

The Hangman

The card of the Hangman denotes exposure of a guilty man. It may indicate the capture of a murderer, a wife's discovery of her unfaithful spouse or a thief caught in the act. No matter the situation, the person is definitely guilty.

Reversed, the card portends someone being punished for a crime he did not commit or who has been falsely accused.

Description: A muscular hooded figure in black leather stands on the gallows. Beside her, a hangman's noose swings, ready for its next victim.

The Spirit

The Vistani say that past, present and future are all one. The Spirit card indicates times past reaching forward to influence the present and future. It may warn of the return of an ancient curse, an old debt or a forgotten enemy. In its most literal symbolism, it may indicate a ghost or other incorporeal spirit. Reversed, the image of the card speaks of a positive influence from the past. An old friend may return or the focus of the reading might rediscover a family heirloom.

Description: An old man kneels, head bowed, within a mausoleum. Beside him a young warrior dressed in knightly armor lies in state, on a bier. The young man's spirit rises from the corpse, one hand reaching down to comfort or perhaps harm the old man kneeling below.

The Broken One

This card symbolizes those given horrifying shapes or those broken in mind or body by circumstances outside their control. Some power either has destroyed or will destroy or distort something vital belonging to the focus of the reading. Also indicative of evil supernatural beings, it denotes unknown or unseen malevolent forces. It may also indicate someone broken by failure or lost in despair.

Reversed, the Broken One denotes healing of something or someone broken, perhaps curing madness or healing a deformity.

Description: The distorted figure of a Broken One sits alone, his lopsided face shadowed, shoulders hunched, obviously distraught. Around him swirl the Mists.

The Raven

One of the more positive cards within the Fortuna Magna, the Raven indicates a source of information or a potential ally. It also foretells of beneficial forces coming to someone's aid, perhaps even magical assistance or a holy blessing, although the source might even be an unrecognized wellspring of talent within the focus of the reading himself.

Reversed, it indicates betrayal by a trusted source for information or an unexpected weakness.

Description: A raven-headed Vistani man stands, arms outspread like wings as though to embrace or show he means no harm.

The Innocent

Also called the Victim, this card indicates a pure or defenseless person of great importance. Generally denoting someone who cannot handle a situation or may be unaware of a significant danger, the Innocent is not always completely helpless, but needs assistance in some life-threatening situation.

Reversed, it indicates a person with hidden strengths. Perhaps one whose talents may be important or necessary to the focus of the reading's cause or quest.

Description: A gentle young woman dressed in white with long golden hair sits in a beautiful garden. A hand is up, a butterfly alight on one finger. A cobra lurks in the grass at her feet.

The Marionette

The Marionette symbolizes a minion or pawn of someone more powerful. Warning of divided loyalties or that an ally or friend may be strongly influenced by another, the Marionette indicates a hidden agenda. The card can also indicate mental domination or possession by outsiders or the incorporeal undead.

Reversed, the minion may be a dupe — not knowing the powers that influence his decisions, perhaps his very thoughts.

Description: A simple marionette dangles, taut strings move from an unseen master above. The puppet's only decoration is a paper crown resting lightly on its head.

The Prison

One of the most ominous cards for the Vistani, the Prison also known as the donjon, symbolizes imprisonment, banishment or isolation. Whether the self-imposed isolation of a hermit or a prisoner locked deep within a dungeon, the Prison indicates confinement or seclusion. Such confinement might denote someone with a closed mind or the chaining of an inmate alone within a dank cell. For the Vistani, it can denote a darkling, someone banished from his tribe for evil deeds.

Reversed, it signifies freedom, breaking out of closed thought patterns, return to family and tribe or literally breaking out of jail.

Description: A silhouetted man looks out of a high tower window. The window is barred and no other lights show except the cold light of the crescent moon in the starry sky above.

The Temptress

Symbolic of all physical temptation, the Temptress indicates one whose values are compromised by desire or seduction. Generally, yielding to temptation is a subconscious act, however some may deliberately choose to give in, succumbing to passion or surrendering to a dark need. As a werewolf needs flesh and a vampire blood, this card shows hidden yearning and need. Its upright image denotes someone subconsciously drawn to the temptation that rules him.

Reversed, it indicates deliberate surrender.

Description: A voluptuous Vistani woman with long, curly hair strikes a seductive pose, one hand stretched out as though to draw the viewer forward, the other down along her thighs. She is dressed in silky scarves, one golden earring and little else.

The Mists

For the Vistani, the Mists are mystically connected to Fate and seeing the future through the tarokka. Only the Vistani may safely traverse the Mists. Only the Vistani have the ability to interpret the images of their prophetic tool. The Mists warn of mystery and the unexpected. An important event is destined to take place — one coming as a surprise, no matter what foreknowledge anyone gains.

Reversed, the card indicates an unexpected journey or a heretofore hidden path leading to success.

Description: Faintly a Vistani wagon's lamps shine through the thick fog, illuminating a path leading onward into the Mists. The destination is unknown.

The Beast

Calling forth animal impulses and passions, the Beast card indicates their influence within a reading. Often heralding rash acts or decisions, it denotes using instinct over reason. Called the patron card of shapechangers, it symbolizes werecreatures of both good and evil alignment, as well as others who can change their shape, whether through alchemical means or magic.

Reversed, the card is a steadying influence, denoting someone or something that is stable and dependable.

Description: A deer lies on the forest floor, its throat ripped out. Above it stands a wolf or perhaps werewolf, muzzle still bloody from the kill, snarling at an unseen interloper.

The Hero

Considered a "wild card" by the Vistani, the Hero is a powerful and unexpected ally. Symbolic

of all who strive to do good within the realms of Ravenloft, it may indicate a virtuous paladin, an honest thief or anyone working to defeat darkness and evil. This card indicates an influential ally, a loyal friend or the hand of the gods working in one's favor. When this person arrives, victory is certain, although it may not come as expected. The Vistani also call it Good Fortune.

Reversed, ill luck is certain.

Description: The hero stands confidently, sword at ready to defend or attack as needed. The sun's rays gleam on his golden hair and silvery plate mail. A wolf's head, raven, snake and rat decorate his quartered shield.

Table 4-1: Tarokka Substitution List

The Lesser Deck

Tarokka Suit	Tarot Suit	Playing Card Suit
Swords	Swords	Spades
Stars	Rods	Clubs
Glyphs	Cups	Hearts
Coins	Coins	Diamonds

Each suit in the lesser deck runs ace through ten (Master).

The Fortuna Magna

Tarokka Suit	Tarot Suit	Playing Card Suit
Dark Master	Emperor	King of Spades
Artifact	Empress	Queen of Spades
Horseman	Death	Jack of Spades
Hangman	Hanged Man	King of Clubs
Spirit	Moon	Queen of Clubs
Broken One	Devil	Jack of Clubs
Raven	World	King of Hearts
Innocent	High Priestess	Queen of Hearts
Marionette	Magician	Jack of Hearts
Prison	Tower	King of Diamonds
Temptress	Lovers	Queen of Diamonds
Mists	Chariot	Jack of Diamonds
Beast	Strength	Marked Joker
Hero	Sun	Unmarked Joker

Rolling the Bones of Fate: Dikesha

"What are they doing?" Demara asked Timorian as the brother and sister watched the stranger in desert robes sit on the ground and smooth out a circle in the dirt in front of him.

"He's reading the bones," Vangelia said, coming up behind her companions, a satisfied look on her face. The three adventurers had stopped at the open-air market to sample the wares, separating to pursue their individual interests. Now they were all together again.

"Bones?" Timorian asked? "They look like dice to me."

"No, they have another name," Vangelia said confidently. "Dikesha, they call them in his homeland. He can use them to tell fortunes."

Timorian shook his head. "I take it you discovered this first-hand," he said.

Vangelia smiled secretively. "Perhaps I did," she admitted. "Or perhaps not. Why don't you let him cast the dikesha and ask him yourself?"

Another method of fortune-telling comes from the Amber Wastes in the mysterious land of Har'Akir. According to legend, the gods gave the first dikesha set to the founding pharaoh of Har'Akir to assist him in his rule. The dikesha consists of five differently colored six-sided dice. The faces of the dice are marked with unique hieroglyphs. When tossed as a set, a skilled reader can divine something of the future by studying the symbols.

Creation

Each die is dedicated to one of the gods of Har'Akir's pantheon and linked to a different phase of the moon. They are carved from the bones of a sentient creature that died or was killed during a different phase of the moon for each die. Thus, to create the red die, or *rakesha*, an intelligent being must have ended his life under the light of the new moon. When the die is finished, the artisan places it in a brass bowl filled with inks made from plants found only in the Amber Wastes. It charges in the light of the appropriate moon until a complete cycle has passed. If the gods approve, the dikesha then changes color and gain the power of prophecy. This process is repeated for each die in the set, and must be handled personally by the one who wishes to use them.

Using the d20 system, the creator must make a Craft (carving) check (DC 20) and spend at least 1d4 months working on the set. How you handle the acquisition of sentient creature bones is up to you as DM, but gaining them should add some time

to the process — not to mention a few enemies for the character.

Once created, the dikesha cannot be passed along to another without the intercession of a high priest and the approval of the Akiri gods through a series of ceremonies taking place during the course of a lunar cycle. When the month has ended, the priest hands over the dikesha to their new owner. If the gods approve, the dice retain their color and power, if not, they fade in power and hue until nothing is left but useless bone.

Casting the Future

It is very easy for a Dungeon Master to prepare to use the dikesha. Find 5 six-sided dice, one of each of the following colors: red, white, orange, yellow and green. Roll them on a flat surface and consult "The Many Sides of the Dikesha," below. You do not have to read the dice rolled in any particular order. Just put them in some logical sequence for your prophecy, taking time to study how they fell to increase player suspense.

Since "stacking the deck" is impossible with dice, consider assigning different elements of the plot to each die and deciding before the reading what the various outcomes will be.

For instance, the question is, "How do we find the kidnapped girl?" A player rolls the dice. The red die comes up as "The Warrior" (4); the white die as "The Road" (4); the orange die as "The Gem" (3); the yellow die as "Creation" (2); and the green die as "Curiosity" (5).

Your answer might be: "Curiosity will lead you to a forgotten road. To gain the help of the warrior, give him a globe of fire. His creation will find the way."

In your subsequent plot, have the characters notice a grown-over path that was previously overlooked. Subsequent investigation leads the characters to a gnome with a taste for rubies and knowledge of the girl's whereabouts. If the PCs are willing to give him one or two rubies, he gladly leads them to the hidden cave where the youngster is being held.

If the yellow die had rolled "Stasis," you could have decided that the girl was turned to stone inside the cave. If the orange die's result was "The Chariot," consider a scene with the gnome's pony running away with his master's newly invented wagon. He is willing to help because the heroes saved his life.

If you keep the answers suggestive of your plot, but are willing to adjust details of what you've planned to accommodate the dice roll, you should be able to extrapolate a suitable fortune that fits well with the story.

The Many Sides of the Dikesha

Each of the dikesha is marked with six glyphs, one on each side. The glyphs signify concepts both simple and complex. Only a skilled fortune-teller can understand the prophecies revealed. Below is a list of the dice and the meanings for each side.

The Red Die

This first die, created during the time of the slender new moon, is known as *rakesha* or "die of Ra." Its six sides represent the aspects of Man, whether warrior, babe, beggar or king.

1. The Pharaoh: a respected (or feared) leader of men.

2. The Commoner: Sometimes interpreted as "The Slave," it indicates a willing follower.

3. The Magister: Magic or someone who can cast spells.

4. The Warrior: Someone totally nonmagical, living by physical prowess alone, also a rogue.

5. The Fiend: Dark and sinister evil, a raging beast or corrupted being.

6. The Innocent: Naiveté or someone about to be victimized, also someone unaware of pressing danger.

The White Die

Second of the set, it gains power from the waxing moon. Known as *horakesha* or "die of Horus," its six sides symbolize that which is enduring in the world — structures of man and works of nature.

1. The Tomb: Places of the dead, including shrines and other holy places of worship.

2. The Town: Any organized place where people gather, from campfires to great cities.

3. The Mountain: Not only a large pile of rock, but any large obstacle one might meet along the way.

4. The Road: Something to aid travel or speed the voyager along.

5. The Cave: Represents the realms beneath the earth, also dwellers below.

6. The Mists: Uncertainty and mystery, also misdirection or an unfamiliar or wrong path.

The Orange Die

Bringing the light of the full moon into power, the third die is called *thothakesha* or "die of Thoth." Dedicated to the deity of knowledge, it brings clarity of vision to prophets of the dikesha. This die governs all "things" of the world, from crowns to sweet cakes.

1. The Sword: All weapons of war, whether axes or plague.

2. The Shield: Protective and defensive devices, whether magic ward, castle wall or buckler.

3. The Gem: Items of great monetary, personal or historical value.

4. The Ring: Magic items, from minor potions to great artifacts.

5. The Chariot: Vehicles or conveyances of any sort, from feet to sailing ships.

6. The Key: Something of vital importance, also something used to make something else complete.

The Yellow Die

Known as *shukeesha*, for the goddess Shu, this die represents change and transformation in all its forms. Its power comes from the light of the waning moon.

1. Destruction: Something will be broken or destroyed, also death.

2. Creation: Symbolic of artists and craftsmen, also something newly made.

3. Metamorphosis: Undergoing transformation, from butterflies to werewolves.

4. Stasis: Survival and stability in the midst of chaos and destruction.

5. Illusion: A mirage or untrustworthy image, also something overlooked, disloyalty.

6. Transience: Something temporary, something created only to be destroyed.

The Green Die

This fifth and final die, called *setakesha*, is guided by the hand of Set, deity of death. Drawing its power from the *lutra*, or dark of the moon, it symbolizes the fiery emotions within the heart of man, as well as controlling spirits of the dead.

1. Passion: Desire and longing, whether pure love or great avarice, devotion or terrible lust.

2. Anger: All-consuming hatred and rage, sometimes controlled or hidden.

3. Terror: Dreadful fear and horror, also phobias or fear of the unknown.

4. Mercy: Kindness, compassion, tenderness and sympathy, also those who are good or chivalric.

5. Curiosity: Desire to learn new things, gain new experiences or find new paths, also foolishness.

6. Courage: Bravery and valor, also successful inner struggles to quell fears and phobias.

A Final Note

Fortune-telling has existed throughout history. Some still pore over horoscopes, read Tarot cards and put on a lucky shirt before going to an important meeting. This does not mean that the tarokka or dikesha are real tools of prophecy. They exist to add excitement and atmosphere to Ravenloft campaigns and to provide a sense of mystery, foreboding and horror to your game. Believe what you will. Enjoy these accessories simply as part of the game. Let your players have fun with them. That's what we're here for, isn't it?

Prophecy in a Campaign

Below the ground he waits.
Above the ground she cries.
Three winds, three moons, three falling stars
Before the waiting ends, the crying stops."

A chill ran down Warden Timorian's spine as the blind man whispered in his ear, then fell to the ground in a faint. The priest bent over the man to ascertain that he was still breathing. A crowd started to gather around the priest and the prone prophet.

Timorian looked up, searching for the familiar faces of his sister Demara and their companion, the scout Vangelia. Finding them, he composed himself, banishing from his heart the terror he felt when the prophet singled him out of the crowd.

"Give the old man room to breathe," he said sternly, holding up his hand and gesturing for the onlookers to back away. "He's just overcome by the heat."

After a few minutes, the blind man moaned and held out a hand for Timorian to help him up. Without another word, he wandered off thought the streets, the crowd making room for him to pass and making signs against the evil eye.

"What did he say?" Demara wanted to know as she and Vangelia gathered around the priest and steered him toward the inn where they had just rented a room.

"Nothing important," the priest said. He looked up at the sign above the inn as the trio entered the building, noticing for the first time, the painting of three

falling stars against a midnight blue sky. "Nothing at all."

Horror relies on the sensation of realization. It's when we suddenly become aware of some new and terrible truth that we become afraid or terrified. Prophecies also rely on this sensation of realization. Thus, prophecies and horror go hand in hand. This section gives the DM some ideas on how to use prophecy in a Ravenloft campaign as well as provide some examples of prophecies and their interpretation.

The Formula of Prophecy

All prophecy works in two simple formulas. The manner in which they function can be expressed as follows:

Formula One: If X occurs, then Y shall follow.

Formula Two: When X occurs, then Y shall follow.

The "If" Prophecy

These types of prophecies depend upon a certain series of events. Should the events occur, then the prophecy comes true. If the events do not happen, the prophecy remains unproven, awaiting the day that it can be fulfilled. Only when the aligning stimuli are in place will the reaction occur, and thus this is a prophecy that may be prevented.

For example, in Danielle's campaign, she might design a simple prophecy that determines the weakness of a particular villain. For this she uses an "if" prophecy:

"If ever should the Heart of Mirgish be burned, so shall Mirgish himself burn, to the very bones that make him."

This prophecy indicates that if ever the Heart of Mirgish is found and burned, then Mirgish himself would perish. Mirgish is a powerful wizard who has actually removed his heart and placed it somewhere else in the realm. This prophecy is one that may or come true. Mirgish's heart may one day burn, or it may lie buried forever.

The "When" Prophecy

The "when" prophecy indicates an action of destiny. It is a powerful prediction that means that events have been set into motion that cannot be turned back. The purpose of the "when" prophecy is to predict an eventual occurrence.

For example, Danielle may wish to give her players a hint about an upcoming event. To do this, she designs a simple "when" prophecy:

"It shall be upon the night in which the bright star of the Raven's Eye sits below the moon, when the Red Hand sits on the left of the Eye, and when the evening star has left the sky, then shall the way into the Tomb of Vyngir be opened."

This prophecy is meant to describe an astrological conjunction. The Raven's Eye is a star in the sky, while the Red Hand, or Strahd's Glare, is supposed to be a red untwinkling star that sits in the sky from time to time. The time of this occurrence takes place later in the evening, after the evening star has left the sky. This conjunction signals the opening of the Tomb of Vyngir, the ghost knight.

Since an astrological conjunction cannot be prevented, this is a "when" prophecy. No matter what the players do, it will happen. Danielle's players want to prepare for Vyngir's eventual arrival.

Direct Prophecy

Most prophecy is not as clear cut as those examples presented above. These clearly defined prophecies are called "direct prophecies." Direct prophecies, ones that do not hide themselves in riddles, are often well protected in the realms of Ravenloft. Most direct prophecies are in the possession of great powers, such as fiends, liches or the Vistani. The reason they are so well guarded is obvious. For one, they are rare. Also, since the information they offer is so potent, those that possess these bits of insight often keep them to themselves.

The Riddle of Prophecy

Symbolism as Prophecy

Most prophecy relies on the use of symbols. These symbols may consist of any number of things. Primarily, the words of the prophecy represent other concepts, either through association or metaphor. For example:

"When the Ivlis River runs with blood, when the Silver Sickle cuts through the Mountain, when you stand at the ancient crossroads, then shall the Misty Walk to Darkon be open.... "

The prophecy above is supposed to refer to the opening of a permanent Mistway from Barovia to Darkon. When first looking at this passage, one may ask, when would the Ivlis River ever run with blood? When could a single sickle cut through a mountain? Here's what the symbols mean:

The passage actually refers to the Ivlis River at sunset. At sunset, the sun's dying rays give the entire river a warm, rich red glow. Thus, the river "runs with blood." As for the sickle, this refers to the new moon, hanging over the horizon, just behind Mount Baratak. From a certain vantage point, it appears to be "cutting" into the mountain. As the DM, Danielle could dictate that to get the best view of all this is from an ancient crossroads east of the Village of Barovia. There, upon these timely conditions, a Mistway opens into the land of Darkon.

In your own games, you may determine that certain phrases or objects within a piece of prophecy may represent other things. This is perhaps the best way to disguise prophecy so that your players cannot easily interpret it or to give the prophecy a sense of mystery.

Signs as Prophecy

A prophecy of signs makes references to actual things that can be seen or experienced. Sometimes these prophecies are direct, such as the one that points to the opening of the Tomb of Vyngir. Other times these signs may be cryptic. Cryptic signs are usually hard to identify until one actually sees or experiences them. For example, Danielle designs the following prophecy for his new campaign in Richemulot:

"When the Dove of the Tree should ever be painted red, when the shadow of a woman should ever be cast upon the highest bell, then shall come the Failing Horde. Then shall come the plague of the thousand. And all those who tread upon the ground shall fall for the plague shall devour all before it.... "

In the example above, this prophecy is meant for the city of Port-a-Museu. Danielle determines that the first sign occurs at an inn, called the Dove's Nest. At some point in the campaign, a duel takes place upon the doorstep of the establishment, and the battle results in the inn's sign being sprayed with blood. The inn's sign, ironically, was a dove nesting in a tree. Thus, the dove of the tree is painted red.

Danielle determines that the next sign will be seen when Madame Jacqueline Renier stands upon the bell tower of the city, looking out over the city. Those who see her doing this also see that a woman's shadow is indeed being cast upon the highest bell. It is in this moment that the

Falkovnian army invades Port-a-Museu, the "Failing Horde" so predicted by the prophecy.

As the Falkovnian army begins to invade the city, Danielle's players already know of the prophecy. They take to higher ground, not wanting to tread upon the ground as the prophecy states. It's a good thing, too, for the Falkovnian army is shortly devoured by a swarm of rats!

The DM should be careful with these sorts of prophecies, because they provide a potential danger of locking a campaign onto a linear path. Instead of being about the players, the campaign becomes about the prophecy.

The best way to use "sign" prophecies is to use them as background material, not the central focus of the campaign. Imagine a scenario where Danielle's players are looking for a killer who has escaped to Richemulot and has nothing to do with the prophecy. They are determined to find the killer and escape the city before the prophecy becomes true. As the signs for the Richemulot prophecy begin to take place, the players realize that their time is growing short!

Using Prophecy in Your Campaign

When running your game, try to use "if" prophecies more than "when" prophecies. "If" prophecies are contingent on the actions of the players, and thus focus the story around the players. "When" prophecies outline predetermined events and may discourage players because it means that they can do nothing to stop it.

"When" prophecies may be effective if you use them carefully. For instance, they might foretell of the coming of a great force of good, but it is the PCs' duty to stay alive until that force of good arrives. Alternatively, a "when" prophecy might foretell of events that merely serves as background for the story.

For example, the DM might have the "Failing Horde" prophecy come true in Port-a-Museu while the PCs are there on a totally unrelated mission. While they are trying to fulfill their mission, they find the city thrown into chaos by a horde of soldiers and another of rats!

Allowing Players to Decipher Prophecy

When you design a prophecy, you must consider whether it will be direct prophecy or indirect prophecy. Direct prophecies should be exceedingly rare and well-kept. A book in a lich's library, for instance, might contain passages with direct prophecy. Indirect prophecy may be more common, but it is wrapped up in symbols and riddles.

When designing indirect prophecy, do so understanding that your players probably will not be able to figure out the symbols or signs you use right away. Often, what seems an obvious symbol to you may be completely obscure to another person. If your PCs cannot figure out the prophecy that you have set up, you may be able to give them some hints.

Deciphering Prophecy

Allow the party to make Intelligence checks to interpret the symbols or signs of the prophecy.

DC	Result
DC 15	A small hint; you may tell the party if their guess is closer to the truth or farther from the truth.
DC 17	A subtle hint; you may place the party "on track" by telling them generally what your prophecy is about, whether it concerns a specific domain, a great tragedy or the weakness of a hated opponent
DC 19	A solid hint; you may tell the party exactly what one of the symbols or signs means
DC 21	A major hint; you may tell the party exactly what one of the symbols means and how they might interpret another.
DC 23	You may tell the party what half of the prophecy means.

Normally, there are no retries for such a check, nor can someone take 10 or 20 on it. A retry may be made only if a player character can conduct research to find out new information. Allow players to make a Gather Information check (DC 15–20) to see if their research pays off. If the check succeeds, the player character is allowed another Intelligence check.

The DC of the Gather Information check should vary upon the availability of the information. Sometimes, a Gather Information check may have a significantly high DC or even be impossible

if it is difficult or impossible to gain the information needed. For instance, if the prophecy is about Barovia before its absorption in the Mists, the DM may determine that the DC is extremely high or that the task is impossible.

If a player should use bardic knowledge to decipher a prophecy, allow bardic knowledge check using the unadjusted DCs above.

The DM may also allow players to use skills to help them figure out the prophecy. A successful Knowledge (history) or Profession (fortune-telling) check (DC 15) may aid in figuring out the prophecy by giving a +2 circumstance bonus on their Intelligence check.

Using Prophecy to Structure your Campaign

Prophecy may be used to structure a campaign or series of adventures. If, for example, the party discovers an "If" prophecy that speaks of a series of artifacts being discovered that leads to the coming of a great evil, the characters may then spend the next couple of game sessions attempting to destroy these artifacts.

Alternatively, the DM might set up a "when" prophecy, detailing the events that lead up to a dramatic catastrophe in the end. It is up to the players to protect the innocent and prepare for the dramatic end. Throughout the campaign, the DM may have certain signs appear, letting the players know how close they are toward the end.

Setting up a Memorable Prophecy

Most prophecies are not simply riddles that hide events or items or even people. Most prophecies involve history, a sense of mystery, and a sense of destiny.

For example: Danielle wants to create a series of adventures around three powerful relics in the Dread Realms. She wants the party to go looking for these relics, in order to bring them together. She wants the relics to be capable of great evil and good.

After jotting down some ideas, Danielle decides to make this prophecy about three swords wielded by powerful warriors. She also likes the idea of the party having to bring these swords together.

Danielle then crafts a history behind the relics. Each sword was once wielded by a great knight who fell from grace. The element of tragedy is too good for Danielle to pass up. Each knight murdered his beloved for one reason or another. Since their time, the swords have been lost in various domains, and the PCs have to go to three different domains to find the swords.

But why would the PCs take up such a dangerous quest? Danielle decides to make the swords key in defeating three major villains in her campaign. Each of these villains can be permanently destroyed only by one of the swords. This makes the journey two-fold. First, the PCs must find the swords, and then they must find the villains, who surely do not wait around for them to do so.

With these campaign ideas in mind, Danielle comes up with this prophecy.

Three knights with three swords
Three dooms, three loves,
Three houses no more
By the shedding of blood
Three swords thrown wide,
To three corners of land
Three swords that hide
Beneath a tyrant's hand
Three swords once found,
Three victories told,
Three swords unbound
Will darkness unfold
Three swords with no knights
Three dooms, three loves,
Three evils take flight
In the skies above

Here, Danielle has set up a long prophecy that does a number of things. First, it establishes a history of the items in question. It tells a bit about the past of each item. The first stanza tells of "three dooms, three loves" referring to the three doomed romances that revolve around the swords. It also refers to the fallen houses of each of the knights who once possessed these items.

The second stanza gives a hint as to the location of the swords. In three different lands, beneath a tyrant's hand. While any darklord might be a tyrant, three stand out in Danielle's mind as particularly significant despots: Hazlik, Vlad Drakov and Azrael Dak. So, Danielle places the swords in the castles of those three darklords. Danielle's players need to break into each castle and steal the sword from each darklord, a daunting task indeed.

The third stanza tells what happens if the swords are found. Three victories occur once the swords are found and used. The fourth stanza refers to the three villains that the PCs will be trying to destroy — three creatures that are capable of flight, each worse than the next. The first is a werebat, the second a vampire, and the third a fiend.

Notice how this prophecy doesn't give away exactly where the swords lie. Not only that, the prophecy is incredibly vague. It will be almost impossible for Danielle's players to figure out what the prophecy means on their own. Danielle is prepared for that, however, and makes sure that the PCs start the campaign in a place where they can easily gather information, so that they can have plenty of Decipher Prophecy checks.

Danielle also plans to spell out exactly where the swords are for the PCs, because the exact location of the swords is not in the prophecy. She determines that certain NPCs know the location of the swords and reveals this information to the party when they start asking the right questions.

As you can see, structuring a campaign or game session around a piece of prophecy can be fun, but it can also be challenging. Remember, don't use your prophecy like a campaign script, otherwise your players will feel trapped on the linear path you have set out before them.

The Prophet NPC Class

The prophet is an NPC class similar to the ones found in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Like those NPC classes, the prophet is a character meant for NPCs only and would make a poor, underpowered PC class.

A prophet is a person who, like a sorcerer, is born with certain innate abilities. No one studies to become a prophet. It simply happens. Prophets are known in the villages and hamlets in Ravenloft as soothsayers, fortune-tellers, and wise men and women. They spin cryptic yarns about upcoming events. They foretell the future. Some tell the future of individuals; others tell the future of entire towns or regions.

Almost all prophets are marked in some way by the Mists. Because they are privy to the Fate of the Things to Come, their minds and bodies become marked by the Dark Powers that control that Fate. Thus, all prophets are readily identifiable as such.

Good-aligned prophets are struggling seers who vainly attempt to get people to see upcoming dangers. "Please! You must see what is happening! Don't you understand?" Neutral-aligned prophets are detached sages who stay in the background, advising from a distance. Evil prophets are those who use their foresight to better their own positions, and are often the leaders of foul cults and heresies.

Hit Die: d4

Table 4–2: The Prophet (Pro)

NPC Level	Base Attack	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Class Feature
1st	+0	+0	+0	+2	Mark of Fate
2nd	+1	+0	+0	+3	Augury
3rd	+1	+1	+1	+3	Prediction
4th	+2	+1	+1	+4	
5th	+2	+1	+1	+4	
6th	+3	+2	+2	+5	
7th	+3	+2	+2	+5	
8th	+4	+2	+2	+6	Divination
9th	+4	+3	+3	+6	
10th	+5	+3	+3	+7	
11th	+5	+3	+3	+7	
12th	+6/+1	+4	+4	+8	
13th	+6/+1	+4	+4	+8	
14th	+7/+2	+4	+4	+9	
15th	+7/+2	+5	+5	+9	
16th	+8/+3	+5	+5	+10	Scry
17th	+8/+3	+5	+5	+10	
18th	+9/+4	+6	+6	+11	
19th	+9/+4	+6	+6	+11	
20th	+10/+5	+6	+6	+12	

The prophet's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are: Alchemy (Int), Bluff (Cha), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Decipher Script (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Knowledge (Int), Perform (Cha), Profession (Wis), Scry (Int), Spellcraft (Int), Use Magic Device (Cha).

Skill Points at 1st Level: (4 + Int modifier) x4.

Skill Points at Each Additional Level: 4 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All the following are class features of the prophet class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Prophets are proficient with all simple weapons. They are not proficient with any type of armor or shield.

Spells: A prophet casts arcane spells as a sorcerer does. The saving throw for any spell the prophet casts is 10 + the spell level + the prophet's Wisdom modifier. In order to learn a spell, she must have a Wisdom score equivalent to 10 + the level of the spell.

A prophet need not prepare spells ahead of time. Each day, just like a sorcerer, the prophet's spells are renewed. The prophet's spell choice, however, is very limited. She may only know up to the number of spells indicated on the table above. Furthermore, she must choose spells only from her specialized list of prophet spells. Her Wisdom score does not modify the number of spells she is able to know. It does modify the number of spells she is able to cast per day.

Table 4–3: Prophet Spells per Day

Level	0	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
1	—	—	—	—	—	—
2	2	0	—	—	—	—
3	3	1	—	—	—	—
4	3	1	—	—	—	—
5	3	2	—	—	—	—
6	3	2	0	—	—	—
7	3	2	1	—	—	—
8	3	2	1	—	—	—
9	3	3	2	—	—	—
10	3	3	2	0	—	—
11	3	3	2	1	—	—
12	3	3	2	1	—	—
13	3	3	3	2	—	—
14	3	3	3	2	0	—
15	3	3	3	2	1	—
16	3	3	3	2	1	—
17	3	3	3	3	2	—
18	3	3	3	3	2	0
19	3	3	3	3	2	1
20	3	3	3	3	2	1

Table 4–4: Prophet Spells Known

Level	0	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
1	—	—	—	—	—	—
2	4	2*	—	—	—	—
3	6	3	—	—	—	—
4	6	3	—	—	—	—
5	6	4	—	—	—	—
6	6	4	2*	—	—	—
7	6	4	3	—	—	—
8	6	4	3	—	—	—
9	6	4	4	—	—	—
10	6	4	4	2*	—	—
11	6	4	4	3	—	—
12	6	4	4	3	—	—
13	6	4	4	4	—	—
14	6	4	4	4	2*	—
15	6	4	4	4	3	—
16	6	4	4	4	3	—
17	6	4	4	4	4	—
18	6	4	4	4	4	2*
19	3	4	4	4	4	3
20	3	4	4	4	4	3

The prophet's spell list resembles a blend of arcane and divine spells, but the spells come from the prophet's personal energies. Most of the prophet's spells focus on protection, divination and warding. Most prophets are not powerful offensive spellcasters. Some claim that the Dark Powers grant prophets their spells, but there is not current evidence that gives credence to their rumor.

Mark of Fate: All prophets are touched by the Dark Powers in some way, as a result with their union with the Mists. It is the Dark Powers that allow the prophets to see into the future in the first place. All prophets begin their career with one of the following disabilities:

Blind: The prophet is permanently blind. No cures, spells or enchantments alleviates the prophet of this disability. Not even *heal* or *wish* cures this form of blindness.

Madness: Choose a moderate or major madness effect (see **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three). The prophet suffers from the form of madness chosen. Unfortunately, this madness may never be broken. No spell, enchantment, hypnosis or sanitarium will ever free the prophet from the madness that plagues her. Her mind is forever marked by the Mists.

Wandering: Like the Vistani, the prophet with this disability cannot remain in any one place for too long. The prophet with this disability suffers static burn just like a Vistani. (See **Ravenloft Player's Handbook,** Chapter Five, "The Vistani," *Vistani Powers and Weaknesses*.) The result of the static burn, of course, causes the prophet to lose of his class abilities.

Seizures: The prophet suffers from severe seizures, losing control of his body and conscious mind. During this time, the prophet is considered helpless. After any seizure, the prophet must make a Fortitude save (DC equal to the prophet's level) or slip into a coma for 1 week. If the prophet actually goes into a coma, then he must make another Fortitude save with the same DC or die. The seizures that a prophet suffers from last for 2d4 rounds. During any time of stress (such as combat), the prophet must make a Will save (DC equal to the prophet's level) or have a seizure. If the Will save is successful, the prophet is in no danger of having seizures for the rest of the encounter.

Ethereal Sight: The prophet gains the ability to see into the Ethereal Plane, and can see all forms of ethereal resonance (see **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Five). While this may seem like a benefit, the prophet can never turn this ability "off." Thus, their world is one that is constantly filled with spirits, ghosts and traces of intense emotions. Often, these individuals cannot tell the difference between what is ethereal and what is "real." The prophet perceives all things ethereal as "real" and vice versa. Despite their perception, prophets have no special ability that allows them to touch ethereal objects or beings. Thus, these objects and beings are as intangible to them as they are to any other material being.

Augury (Sp): Once per day, starting at 2nd level, the prophet may cast *augury* as spell-like ability. This ability functions as if it were cast by a cleric of the same level as the prophet.

Prediction: Once per day, starting at 3rd level, the prophet may make a prediction about an event in the future. The prediction may be something as vague as: "You shall encounter an enemy on the road." Alternatively, the prediction may be very specific and clear: "When the moon rises in the half, the lost heir of the Ionescu family will return to you by horse at the town of Vallaki." The prediction's nature, accuracy and specifics are left entirely up to DM's discretion. This ability is mean to be used as a tool for the DM to add atmosphere or plot to his campaign.

Divination (Sp): Once per day, starting at 8th level, the prophet may cast *divination* as spell-like ability. This ability functions as if it were cast by a cleric of the same level as the prophet.

Scry (Sp): Once per day, starting at 16th level, the prophet may cast *scrying* as spell-like ability. This ability functions as if it were cast by a cleric of the same level as the prophet.

Starting Gear

2d4 x10 worth of equipment

Prophet Spell List

0 level — *arcane mark, dancing lights, detect magic, ghost sound, guidance, light, mage hand, message, open/close, read magic.*

1st level — *command, comprehend languages, deathwatch, detect secret doors, detect undead, detect*

chaos/law, erase, hypnotism, identify, obscuring mist, protection from chaos/evil/good/law, random action, sleep, unseen servant.

2nd level — *animal messenger, blindness/deafness, calm emotions, charm person, darkvision, detect thoughts, enthrall, fog cloud, hold person, locate object, magic mouth, misdirection, obscure object, shield other, see invisibility, undetectable alignment, whispering wind, zone of truth.*

3rd level — *clairvoyance/clairaudience, dispel magic, explosive runes, glyph of warding, helping hand, illusory script, invisibility purge, locate object, magic circle against chaos/evil/good/law, nondetection, obscure object, phantom steed, sepia snake sigil, suggestion, slow, speak with dead, summon swarm, Tasha's hideous laughter, tongues.*

4th level — *arcane eye, bestow curse, charm monster, confusion, detect scrying, discern lies, dimensional anchor, divination, emotion, fire trap, hallucinatory terrain, locate creature, rainbow pattern, remove curse, sending, scrying, solid fog, speak with plants.*

5th level — *break enchantment, commune, dimension door, dominate person, dream/nightmare, feeblemind, geas, greater command, hold monster, insect plague, mark of justice, phantasmal killer, Rary's telepathic bond, scrying, teleport, true seeing.*

Chapter Five: Magic in Ravenloft

Magic items are the stuff of legend. The discovery of wonderful and terrible items of power, the knowledge of their history and forging, the inherent possibilities in using or misusing them all add to the flavor of a campaign. In the Dread Realms, magic items tend to be in short supply. The Dark Powers do not enjoy the competition brought about by individuals who possess powerful magic treasures and seem to single out those who do for their special attentions. Nevertheless, such treasures do exist and bold adventurers inevitably find them and use them.

When designing a campaign in the Land of the Mists, you, as a DM, should decide what part magic items play in your game. You'll find full lists of available magic items as well as comprehensive rules for making new ones in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, Chapter 7.

This chapter does not attempt to duplicate the information in the *DMG*. Instead, it provides Ravenloft DMs with information on how to make magic items, both beneficial and cursed, more meaningful and effective in their games. In addition, magic items specifically designed for Ravenloft are presented here to use as described or to spark your imagination and give you ideas for creating your own wondrous trinkets and treasures.

Note that some prices may differ from the costs given in the *DMG*. This reflects the greater cost due to the scarcity of magic items in the Dread Realms.

Magic Items

The battle was long and arduous, but finally Demara and her companions proved victorious. The young warrior stood over the body of her vanquished opponent, his wolf-like body swiftly recomposing itself into the shape of a man, a look of repose on his face. Warden Timorian knelt by the corpse, speaking words of peace and commending the fallen creature's soul to the mercy of Ezra. Vangelia, her eyes alert for anything out of the ordinary, saw something glimmer near the body. A ring, half-buried in the bloodstained grass, lay near the corpse. She picked the item up and held it to the sun, watching the light glint of the shiny metal.

"What's that?" Demara asked, noticing her companion's movement.

"Something I found near the corpse," Vangelia said. "It must have fallen out of his pocket or something. I don't think it slipped off his finger. Besides, it's too small."

She lowered the ring and made to place it on her middle finger.

"Stop!" Timorian said, his thunderous voice a command as he finished his prayers in time to catch Vangelia's graceful motion. "You don't know what the ring does."

"He's right," Demara said. "It might be tainted by this foul creature." She nudged the werewolf's corpse with her foot.

Vangelia shrugged and placed the ring ostentatiously in her pocket. "All right," she said, "but the next town we come to, I'm looking for someone to tell us what it does."

The trio set off down the road, headed for what they hoped would be a hospitable town. Timorian pulled Demara aside as Vangelia took the lead. "Watch her carefully," he said. "What she doesn't know can hurt all of us."

Here for your amusement and edification — and perhaps your heroes' inexorable corruption — is an assortment of magic items, a little shop of horrors above and beyond the *DMG* and the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook.** They're intended as devious and delightful creations to hide in the lairs, mansions and catacombs of the Domains of Dread.

The wide variety of realms available in this setting requires some additional detail for magic items. In addition to the usual statistics for caster level and prerequisite spells, each item also includes a rating for a suggested Cultural Level. The listed item may be available in an environment of the listed Cultural Level (CuL) or higher. Some are included expressly for inclusion in a low-tech campaign (usually Stone Age or Bronze Age) or a more technologically advanced realm (including stories set in the Renaissance realms).

In some Dungeons & Dragons settings, lists of magic items are typically made available to the players, particularly when they're generating high level characters from scratch. Since horror thrives on mystery, we recommend concealing these items' descriptions from your players. Let your heroes experiment with what they find... and pay the price for greed or foolish curiosity.

These treasures usually aren't for sale; instead, they should be strategically placed in a campaign to aid in the fight against evil, reward virtue or tempt heroes. A few are expressly designed for adversaries and villains... or characters who become villainous. Most are designed to further stories, not improve statistics. Each one can carry a tale of its own, and

each should encourage further stories once they fall into the characters' hands.

Heroic and Villainous Items

Three types of magic items exist in **Ravenloft**: items heroes use, items villains use, and items useable by anyone, regardless of ethics or morality. Because of this, we have included two designators to help make these distinctions.

A few of the magic items listed below have the villainous designator; these typically force the user to make a powers check when using some of the item's abilities. Any character can use a villainous item, but it may carry risks to the user's body, mind or soul.

Only a good character can use an item with the heroic designator. **Heroes of Light** introduced additional rules for virtue and morality. A character's state of virtue may add additional abilities to a heroic magic item. No item should be dependent wholly on virtue, so every virtuous item has a "default" mechanic for DMs who aren't using those extra rules.

Armor

In a campaign set in a Stone Age or Bronze Age realm, most types of armor listed in the *Player's Handbook* or the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook** are not available. Thus, you need some rules for alternatives.

Barkskin Furs: In primitive societies, metal armor is nonexistent. Fortunately, druids with the proper magical skills can enchant armor made of furs and hide. Like other magical armors, *barkskin furs* adjust to fit the humanoid wearing them. The cost of the item depends on the strength of the enchantment; the armor listed below provides a +2 or +4 natural armor bonus.

Faint transmutation; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *barkskin*; Price 4,000 gp (+2) or 16,000 gp (+4); CuL 1.

Chieftain's Furs: In primitive societies, a great warrior or chieftain may possess exceptional magical armor. A powerful druid who crafts armor of this sort for anyone less significant may find himself hunted by an angry tribe. This armor bestows a +5 natural armor bonus to Armor Class; it's suitable for a chieftain of at least 8th level.

Strong transmutation; CL 12th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *barkskin*; Price 25,000 gp; CuL 1.

Magic Vest: In realms beset by intrigue, treachery can be deadlier than combat. When a noble or adventurer can't wear armor, a *magic vest* provides a modest amount of protection. The clothing does not have to be a vest, of course. This enhancement can be cast on an artisan's outfit, entertainer's outfit, explorer's outfit, monk's outfit, peasant's outfit, scholar's outfit or traveler's outfit. A nobleman's version should cost an extra 200 gp.

Faint (+1), moderate (+2) or strong (+3) transmutation; CL 5th (+1), 9th (+2), 14th (+3); Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *magic vestment*; Price 1,000 gp (+1), 4,000 gp (+2), 9,000 gp (+3); CuL 2.

Resilient Bronze Armor: In Ravenloft's Bronze Age cultures, most warriors wear padded cloth or studded leather armor. With powerful magic, the most adept craftsmen may attempt to shape bronze into a simple breastplate of masterwork quality. This *+1 bronze masterwork breastplate* has a +1 enhancement bonus and a +5 armor bonus for an AC total modifier of +6, and a –3 armor check penalty.

Faint transmutation; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *mending*; Price 1,350 gp; CuL 2.

Resonant Armor: When hunting ghosts, the ability to become ethereal is a definite advantage. Once per day, the wearer of this armor can whisper a command word to gain the benefits of *ethereal jaunt*. The user enters the Near Ethereal Plane of the Domains of Dread, taking his ethereal weapons, armor, and equipment with him.

Strong transmutation; CL 13th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *ethereal jaunt*; Price 49,000 gp; CuL 4.

Warrior's Studded Leather: For most guards and soldiers in Bronze Age societies, studded leather is the finest type of armor available. The cost of the armor depends on the strength of the enchantment; the examples listed below provide an enhancement bonus between +1 and +3, in addition to the leather's +3 armor bonus.

Faint (+1) or moderate (+2 or +3) transmutation; CL 3rd (+1), 6th (+2), 9th (+3); Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *barkskin*; Price 1,175 gp (+1), 4,175 gp (+2), 9,175 gp (+3); CuL 2.

Shields

Like the ancient heroes of our own world, any investigator of the supernatural knows he must return from battle "with his shield or upon it." Unfortunately, when seekers after horror are careless, they fall into the latter category all too often.

Sun Shield: This shield displays a depiction of the sun, although some versions show other stars arranged in the shapes of astrological signs. When its command word is spoken, the shield shines brightly, casting *daylight* in a 60-foot radius. Creatures who suffer penalties in bright light are affected by this spell, but the *sun shield* does not radiate true sunlight through this effect. To compensate for this, the wielder can cast *searing light* once per day. The beam of light then blazes outward from the picture of the sun or stars.

Faint evocation; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *daylight*, *searing light*; Price 18,000 gp; CuL 4.

Weapons

Picking up a magical sword may give a hero the surge of confidence he needs to fight evil in its many forms or trick the wielder with false promises of power, luring him down a path of corruption. Too many would-be heroes are quick to slay the evil wielder of a magic weapon. When a character chooses to pry a magic weapon from his enemy's dead fingers, he should suffer a powers check for looting the dead. Feel free to arm your villains with some of the weapons detailed below; then let your heroes pay for the consequences of stealing them.

Avenger's Sword (Heroic): In the hands of anyone other than an avenger (from **Van Richten's Arsenal**) or righteous avenger (from **Heroes of Light**), this sword performs as a *+2 longsword*. If the sword wounds a creature in combat, the wielder can use *locate creature* three times that day to find it. The sword can only track one creature at a time, and its abilities do not extend beyond domain boundaries. In the hands of an avenger or righteous avenger, the weapon gains an additional +1 attack bonus.

Moderate divination; CL 7th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *locate creature*; Price 44,900 gp; CuL 4.

Azalin Dagger: These daggers were made for elite agents of Azalin Rex's secret police, who were then commanded to hunt each other down as a test of their loyalty. The Domain of Darkon suffered, but the darklord was amused. After the first blow is struck, the attacker and this weapon immediately gain the effects of *greater invisibility*. This effect works once per day.

These blades are legendary in Darkon. Anyone with bardic knowledge or Knowledge (Darkon) who actually sees one may attempt a skill check (DC 15) to recognize it. Some have been looted from the tombs of their former owners. Various murderers and assassins have killed for others.

Moderate illusion; CL 7th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *greater invisibility*; Price 11,200 gp; CuL 4.

Blessed Blade (Heroic): In the hands of a good character, this sword has a +1 attack and damage bonus. The wielder also gains a +1 morale bonus against fear effects. In the hands of a Blessed character (see **Heroes of Light**), the blade is more powerful when used against characters who are not Virtuous (as defined in that same book). The weapon then has an additional +2 attack bonus and deals an additional +2d6 points of damage.

Moderate enchantment; CL 7th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *bless*; Price 18,000 gp; CuL 2.

Club of Bashing: Stone Age clubs typically lack the sophisticated magical enhancements of more advanced weapons. The most popular weapon quality is *bashing*, dealing an additional 1d6 points of damage. This weapon has a +1 attack bonus; see the Primitive Masterwork Weapons sidebar for more details.

Faint transmutation; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *bull's strength*; Price 8,000 gp; CuL 1.

Divine Sword (Heroic): This weapon normally functions as a *+1 longsword*. In the hands of a good character from another realm, it can also bestow the benefits of *divine power*. The user must shout the name of a good deity from his home realm (as a command word) to activate this enhancement, which lasts for seven rounds.

Moderate evocation; CL 7th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, creator must be good, *divine power*; Price 18,000 gp; CuL 4.

Gray Matter Blade (Villainous): This *keen* intelligent longsword thirsts for the brains of its victims. When used in combat, it has an unusual affinity for dealing head wounds. This increases the weapon's threat range (to 18–20) and its damage multiplier (to x4), but only if the victim has a head. (Apply the same conditions as for properly using a *vorpal sword)*. Any critical hit the weapon scores

strikes the victim's head. The weapon then attempts to lodge itself in the victim's skull and consume its fill of the brain matter inside. Removing the sword requires a Strength check (DC 10).

Wielding the *gray matter blade* does not force a powers check, but leaving the blade in the skull of its dead victim does. In 1d6 rounds, it can consume about a pound of the victim's brain matter, and then "digest" the victim's thoughts. Witnessing this rapacious feast forces a Horror save (DC 15). Afterward, the blade can use *speak with dead* once a day to interrogate the soul of a victim it has slain within the last 24 hours. When the wielder draws the sword from its victim's skull, he can access those same secrets, making a powers check for each one.

Moderate necromancy; CL 10th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *speak with dead*; Price 32,000 gp; CuL 4.

Carrion Blade: This *+1 guisarme* feeds on the flesh of the victim it wounds through its sawblade teeth. If it scores a critical hit, it attempts to burrow into its victim's flesh. The victim must make a Strength or Escape Artist check to rip the impaling blade from his flesh; the DC is (10 + the wielder's base attack bonus). If the victim cannot escape, the blade attempts to burrow deeper. It continues to attack (using the base attack bonus of the one who wielded it) for four rounds.

The weapon also deals continuous damage each time it hits: one point of damage each round until the victim is healed (Heal check, DC 15) or treated with a *cure* spell. This is cumulative; thus, if a carrion blade hits five times, the victim continues to bleed for five points of damage each round until he is healed. The weapon closely resembles a guisarme, but within Tepest, it is also known as a *carrion ear spoon*.

Moderate transmutation; CL 10th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *Mordenkainen's sword*; Price 72,000 gp; CuL 4.

Courageous Blade: This *+1 rapier* grants a +2 equipment bonus on Will saves, including Fear and Horror saves. The wielder feels a surge of courage when he first grips the hilt. If he ever needs to make a Madness save while holding the blade, however, he automatically drops it before making that saving throw. Most wielders don't know of this last effect until they actually face insanity. Bards know a tale of a great swashbuckler who used one of these blades to save his lover from a horrible villain; when he saw the monster she had become, he went mad.

Faint enchantment; CL 4th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *bless*; Price 3,300 gp; CuL 4.

Deadly Vengeance Bone Weapon (Villainous): The dead hate the living, particularly in realms such as Necropolis. This type of bone weapon deals an additional +2d6 points of damage against living humanoids. It functions as a *+2 dagger* when used against the living, but only undead creatures (and characters) can wield it.

A skilled necromancer usually crafts this weapon from a bone taken from the undead creature that wields it. A master craftsman can actually graft the weapon back onto the body of the hateful creature. That creature cannot be disarmed unless the bone the weapon is grafted to is broken. If the weapon is Tiny, the wielder can make attacks with it as though unarmed.

Using the weapon does not inflict a powers check, but a living humanoid holding the severed weapon suffers its damage each round. At the DM's discretion, any character who is degenerating into an undead can use it, but in that case, it forces a powers check each time it is used against the living.

Faint transmutation; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, creator must be undead, *make whole*; Price 8,000 gp; CuL 2.

Deception Blade: The wielder of this *+1 short sword* gains a +5 competence bonus on Bluff checks, including skill checks for feinting. The blade writhes and twitches in the hands of anyone who is not a rogue, dealing a –4 penalty on attacks made with it.

Faint transmutation; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *glibness*; Price 5,000 gp; CuL 3.

Ghoul Gloves (Villainous): The flesh of a ghoul's hands is flayed to provide the raw materials for this weapon. According to bards, it's often seen on the fists of evil monks. The wielder can paralyze a victim with a touch attack, as per the spell *ghoul touch*. The wielder is immune from the effects of the carrion stench that results. Using this weapon requires a powers check each time the paralyzing attack succeeds. If the powers check fails, the wielder begins to degenerate into a ghoul, acquiring the creature's flaws and special qualities one by one (in an order determined by the DM). This item has 50 charges, which is more than enough to ensure the user's inevitable degeneration.

Faint necromancy; CL 3rd; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *ghoul touch*; Price 6,000 gp; CuL 2.

Greater Magic Longsword: The wielder of this blade must dedicate it to himself by coating it with a thin sheen of his own blood. At the end of this sacrifice, the wielder permanently loses one point of Wisdom. Once per day, the penitent wielder may speak the blade's name to gain an enhancement bonus equal to a third of his character level (up to a maximum bonus of +5) for his next attack.

Moderate transmutation; CL 7th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *greater magic weapon*; Price 5,700 gp; CuL 4.

Hell Scythe: This *+1 scythe* normally deals 2d4 points of damage. When the user screams a command word, the blade deals an additional 3d8 points of sonic damage to the target for the duration of the combat. With each blow, the blade screams like a thousand souls in torment. If the victim fails a Fortitude save (DC 14), he is deafened permanently. Until he is cured with magic, he can only hear the screams of the damned.

Primitive Masterwork Weapons

If you plan on setting an extended campaign in a Bronze Age or Stone Age culture, you may need a few additional rules for masterwork weapons.

Masterwork Bronze Weapons: Masterwork bronze weapons are lighter and more resilient than ordinary weapons crafted in Bronze Age cultures. A masterwork bronze weapon doesn't suffer a penalty on attack or damage rolls because of its craftsmanship. Instead, it becomes as resilient as ordinary steel (hardness 10, 15 hp per inch of thickness). If an enhancement bonus is added, the weapon gains the full enhancement bonus on the weapon's attack and damage rolls. The masterwork bonus eliminates the weapon's natural penalties, so the enhancement bonus can be applied normally.

Masterwork Stone Sword: With a few simple spells, a masterwork stone weapon can be made more resilient. Although the weapon has hardness 8, it has the same hit points as its metal counterpart. Because of its craftsmanship (and masterwork quality), it does not suffer a penalty on attack or damage rolls, even if it is a piercing or slashing weapon. An enhancement bonus can be added to the weapon normally; it does not have to stack with the masterwork bonus.

Faint necromancy; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *blindness/deafness*; Price 8,300 gp; CuL 2.

Lash of Stigmata (Heroic): This weapon combines the versatility of a whip with the continuous damage of a *wounding* weapon. When wielded by a good character, this *+1 whip* deals an additional 2d6 points of holy damage against an evil character on a hit, plus an additional 2 points of damage each round until the victim is cured (as per the *wounding* enhancement). When an evil character willingly picks up this weapon, he suffers 2 points of damage each round he holds it. As with *protection from evil*, the victim must be proven evil; it does not serve as a test if the victim is evil.

Moderate evocation; CL 10th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *Mordenkainen's sword*; Price 18,000 gp; CuL 4.

Living Saw: This heavy, saw-tooth great axe has hundreds of tiny edges around the blade. The weapon normally deals 1d12 points of damage, but when the command word is shouted, the blades "come to life," vibrating rapidly with a horrible sonic scream. The blade then shrieks in triumph with each hit, dealing an additional 2d8 points of damage. If the blade strikes a living target for more than 20 points, the results are brutal enough to force a Horror save (DC 15).

Faint evocation; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *sound burst*; Price 6,600 gp; CuL 5.

Pistol of Accuracy: This pistol unerringly strikes its target. The price depends on the enhancement bonus. Alchemists have devised a wide array of unusual ammunition for this item; see the Magical Ammunition Cheat Sheet for more details.

Faint (+1), moderate (+2 or +3) or strong (+4 or +5) divination; CL 3rd (+1), 6th (+2), 9th (+3), 12th (+4), 15th (+5); Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *true strike*; Price 1,600 gp (+1), 4,600 gp (+2), 9,600 gp (+3), 16,600 gp (+4), 25,600 gp (+5); CuL 9.

Pistol of Speed: When making a full attack action with any weapon, the user may make one extra attack with the *pistol of speed*. The attack uses the wielder's full base attack bonus, plus any appropriate modifiers. This benefit is not cumulative with similar effects, such as a *haste* spell, and requires the user to have the pistol in hand. This weapon holds a single shot and otherwise reloads as a normal pistol (see the *DMG*, Chapter 5, "Technology").

Moderate transmutation; CL 7th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *haste*; Price 24,000 gp; CuL 9.

Questing Sword: Ordinarily, this weapon functions as a *+1 bastard sword*. If the owner dedicates the blade to a cause or quest, it gains an additional enhancement bonus. The blade's new owner must dedicate it to himself by speaking the name of the wizard who crafted it and dripping the tip of the blade into a chalice of his own blood. This sacrifice deals one temporary point of Wisdom damage to the owner. Once each day, the owner can ask one question about the fulfillment of his quest. The answer is revealed as a successful *divination*.

Moderate divination; CL 7th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *divination*; Price 11,500 gp; CuL 4.

Sacred Greatsword: In the hands of a good character, this is a *+1 holy greatsword*. In the hands of a paladin, the wielder can shout the name of his deity to infuse the weapon with the spell *holy sword*, which lasts for 14 rounds. An evil character who willingly picks up this blade temporary loses one character level for as long as he holds it.

Strong evocation; CL 14th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, creator must be good, *holy sword*; Price 32,000 gp; CuL 2.

Sacrificial Dagger (Villainous): When the villain plunges this blade into the flesh of a sacrificial victim, he triumphantly shouts the name of his god. The victim must then immediately make a Fortitude save (DC 15) against a *slay living* spell. If the check fails, the slain victim immediately reanimates as a zombie. Each of these spell effects requires a separate powers check. The weapon has 50 charges for both spells, but it is unlikely any one sane person could discharge all of them without going mad. Thus, it's often passed from one cultist to the next or one cult to the next.

Moderate necromancy; CL 11th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *create undead, slay living*; Price 94,500 gp; CuL 4.

Sun Axe: This great axe is the size of a handaxe. Its enchantment allows it to be wielded as if it were a Small axe with respect to weight and ease of use. Anyone able to use an axe with proficiency can use the *sun axe*. Weapon Focus and Weapon Specialization with axe or great axe apply equally.

Once per day, the user can speak a command word while swinging the axe vigorously over his head. The axe blazes like fire, illuminating its surroundings in a 20-foot radius (as per the spell *continual flame)*. For the next 6 hours, the light burns brightly, and the axe carries the effects of a *consecrate* spell.

Faint transmutation; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *consecrate*, *continual flame*; Price 10,200 gp; CuL 4.

Sylvan Short Sword: This *+1 short sword* crafted by the dark elves of Sithicus can be wielded only by elves. Against any non-elf humanoid, it deals an additional 1d6 points of damage. A non-elf who willingly grasps the hilt takes this damage each round.

Moderate conjuration; CL 8th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, creator must be an elf, *summon monster I*; Price 8,300 gp; CuL 7 (Sithicus).

Vampiric Axe (Villainous): This weapon normally functions as an *axe of wounding*, dealing the victim cuts that continuously bleed. If the name of the spellcaster who crafted it is spoken (as a command word), the blade bites more deeply the next time it strikes; invoking this effect requires an immediate powers check. Legends tell of vampiric necromancers who have crafted such insidious weapons; bards know many of their names.

If the wielder can succeed with a melee touch attack (or a regular attack), the victim suffers the effects of *vampiric touch:* He takes 3d6 points of damage, and the wielder gains the same amount of temporary hit points. The temporary hit points disappear in one hour. Since this weapon exists in the Domains of Dread, the victim also takes 3 points of permanent hit point damage as part of the attack (**Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three, "Altered Magic," *Vampiric Touch*).

Unless preventative measures are taken, a victim slain by a *vampiric axe* reanimates as a fledgling vampire three days later. If the wielder is in the same domain when this happens, the victim makes a Will save (DC 15). Failure means the creature falls under the wielder's control; success means that the creature is now controlled by the weapon's creator, as long as it is in the same domain. If the wielder or creator isn't in the domain when the victim is "turned," the vampiric victim has (relatively) free will.

Strong necromancy; CL 15th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *create greater undead, vampiric touch*; Price 32,300 gp; CuL 4.

Vistani Dagger of Divination: Three times per day, a Vistani or half-Vistani using this weapon can cast *divination*. If it is used to wound the subject of the divination (dealing at least one point of damage), the spell's caster level is effectively one higher.

Moderate divination; CL 7th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *divination*; Price 18,300 gp; CuL 4.

Magical Ammunition Cheat Sheet

The presence of firearms in a magical world presents opportunities for magical ammunition.

Energy Ammunition

Flaming ammunition deals an additional 1d6 points of fire damage.

Frost ammunition deals an additional 1d6 points of cold damage.

Shock ammunition deals an additional 1d6 points of electrical damage.

These types of pistol ammunition cost 200 gp for 10 shots.

Burst Ammunition

Flaming burst ammunition deals an addition 1d0 points of fire damage.

Frost burst ammunition deals an additional 1d10 points of cold damage.

Shock burst ammunition deals an additional 1d10 points of electrical damage.

Thundering ammunition deals an additional 1d8 points of sonic damage.

These types of pistol ammunition cost 350 gp for 10 shots.

A high threat rating for the weapon can increase the amount of damage from burst ammunition. For a ranged weapon with a x3 multiplier, roll damage twice; for a x4 multiplier, roll damage three times.

Potions and Lotions

In the Domains of Dread, potions can be as treacherous as people. Every time a character drinks an unknown potion, there is a chance he may risk a powers check from an unknown spell. Neither *detect evil* nor *identify* can predict whether the

potion's effect carries a taint of evil. Thus, this relatively inexpensive type of magic item can bestow enhancements and rewards, but always with a degree of risk. Not all the items listed below are actually potions, although they do use variants of the same mechanics.

Fog Juice: When the contents of this jug are poured out, a swampy, fog-filled terrain envelops the surrounding area. The fog quickly becomes dense enough to obscure vision beyond five feet. The jug can only be used once.

Faint conjuration; CL 3rd; Brew Potion, *fog cloud*; Price 300 gp; CuL 2.

Oil of Enslavement: When rubbed on an intelligent humanoid, this oil influences the victim with *charm person*.

Faint enchantment; CL 1st; Brew Potion, *charm person*; Price 50 gp; CuL 2.

Paints of Arcane Mark: The paints in this small vial glow a slightly fluorescent shade of blue or green. When applied with a brush and a successful Craft (painting) check (DC 15), the paints can create an *arcane mark*.

Faint universal; CL 1st; Brew Potion, *arcane mark*; Price 25 gp; CuL 4.

Potion of Gentle Repose: The fluids within this flask are poured on the recently deceased to preserve a body for *resurrection*. Necromancers sometimes pour this same fluid on the recently dead immediately after animation, ensuring that their minions maintain a lifelike appearance.

Faint necromancy; CL 3rd; Brew Potion, *gentle repose*; Price 300 gp; CuL 2.

Potion of Lies: This potion grants the user a +30 bonus to Bluff checks for one hour, but only for the purpose of telling lies. Magical investigation, such as a *detect lies* spell, cannot register the speaker's words as untrue.

Moderate transmutation; CL 7th; Brew Potion *glibness*; Price 400 gp; CuL 2.

Sphere of Night: This glass sphere holds a black, viscous, syrupy fluid. When the sphere is broken, it spreads *deeper darkness* in a 60-foot radius. The sphere counts as a grenadelike weapon and can be thrown like one.

Faint evocation; CL 5th; Brew Potion, *deeper darkness*; Price 750 gp; CuL 2.

Taste of Darkness Potion (Villainous): This potion is sealed in an opaque black cylinder. If it ever comes into contact with sunlight, it is automatically useless. The user must immediately make a Will save (DC 20). If the check fails, the user's skin becomes pale, granting him the same vulnerability to sunlight as a vampire. The first powers check follows.

The imbiber's teeth then become sharp, capable of dealing 1d6 points of damage during a successful grapple. He immediately enters a rage as potent as that of a 1st-level barbarian. Some of the immoral actions that result may force further powers checks. The imbiber has an unquenchable thirst for blood, and must make a Will save (DC 20) to resist attacking the weakest humanoid present. If the victim cannot deal a successful bite attack by the time the rage ends, he must make a Fortitude save (DC 15 + character level) or fall unconscious.

Moderate transmutation; CL 7th; Brew Potion, must be created in a realm with a vampire darklord, *polymorph*; Price 100 gp; CuL 2.

Taste of Evil (Villainous): Like *taste of darkness*, but it does not grant the equivalent of a barbarian's rage. When the user makes a successful bite attack, he gains the benefits (and drawbacks) of *vampiric touch*. Drinking the potion does not require a powers check, but strangely enough, gaining hit points by drinking someone's blood does.

Faint necromancy; CL 5th; Brew Potion, must be created in a realm with a vampire darklord, *vampiric touch*; Price 750 gp; CuL 2.

Tentacle Aquarium: This three-inch-wide, liquid-filled cube contains an undulating organism of unknown aquatic origin. The object can be thrown as a grenadelike weapon. When it smashes against a solid surface, the organism bursts into a wrathful undulating mass of tentacles 15 feet in diameter. Its rubbery appendages immediately attack any opponents the user designates, with effects that mirror *Evard's black tentacles*. If the user doesn't clearly designate a target, it attacks the nearest target — possibly the user.

Moderate transmutation; CL 7th; Brew Potion, *Evard's black tentacles*; Price 1,400 gp; CuL 3.

War Paint of Natural Armor: This one-use item contains crude paints crafted by primitive goblin alchemists. Each mixture includes the blood of slain humans. When painted on the user's face and body, the item bestows a natural armor bonus

for 10 minutes. The cost of the item depends on the bonus (+3, +4 or +5). Goblins may lurk in their caves for months to brew this substance, giving them ample time to plot schemes against humanity.

Faint (+3), moderate (+4) or strong (+5) transmutation; CL 2nd (+3), 6th (+4), 12th (+5); Brew Potion, *barkskin*; Price 300 gp (+3), 900 gp (+4), 1,800 gp (+5); CuL 2.

Wine of Questing: Like the *wine of suggestion* (see below), but the Will save is DC 21, and the consequences involve a *lesser geas*.

Moderate enchantment; CL 11th; Brew Potion, *lesser geas*; Price 3,300 gp; CuL 4.

Wine of Suggestion: The user pours this wine; the imbiber drinks it. The user is immune to the effects of her own wine. While both individuals drink at least one glass, the user can make one *suggestion*. If the imbiber fails his Will save (DC 12), he succumbs to the *suggestion*.

Faint enchantment; CL 4th; Brew Potion, *suggestion*; Price 400 gp; CuL 4.

Zombie Blood (Villainous): The imbiber of this cursed potion must make a Fortitude save (DC 16) or fall into a zombie-like trance for 24 hours. The victim is still alive, but Intelligence and Charisma both effectively drop to 1. The victim ignores her surroundings and is immune to all fear, horror and madness effects. The victim obeys any order, but if a person stirs the potion with a finger prior to feeding it to the imbiber, the victim only obeys the orders of that person. *Zombie blood* is clear, tasteless and odorless, and can easily be slipped into a victim's food or drink.

The victim can be turned or rebuked as an undead creature, but if a turning result would destroy the victim, the effects of the potion are instead immediately dispelled. Crafting or using this item (by feeding it to a victim) requires a powers check.

Faint enchantment; CL 5th; Brew Potion, requires fresh blood from a zombie, *enthrall, feign undeath*; Price 1,250 gp; CuL 1.

Rings

The circular design of a ring may be taken as a symbol of eternity. It's fitting, then, that some of the rings listed below may bestow eternal corruption.

Crimson Zombie Ring (Villainous): When placed on the hand of a dead body, this ring reanimates the corpse as a zombie ten minutes later. Placing this ring on a slain victim's hand forces a powers check. The skin of a "crimson zombie" crumbles away, revealing bright red musculature. The ring can only be used once.

In the treacherous lands of Borca, a murderer may place this ring on the hand of his slain victim. The zombie usually lies in wait until it is found, then attacks the first person who discovers it. In this way, a murderer may manage to slay many members of a household by choosing his first victim carefully.

Faint necromancy; CL 5th; Craft Ring, *animate dead*; Price 2,000 gp; CuL 8 (Borca).

Hasted Crimson Zombie Ring (Villainous): Some variants of the *crimson zombie ring* enhance the zombie's first attack. For instance, an expensive (yet deadly) variant of this ring grants *haste* on the zombie for 5 rounds when it first attacks.

Faint necromancy and transmutation; CL 5th; Craft Ring, *animate dead, haste*; Price 4,000 gp; CuL 8.

Ring of Swarm: Once per day, the wearer of this ring can summon a horde of 1d4+1 dire rats to enact her bidding for 3 rounds. The ring summons rats from the domain where it is activated.

Faint conjuration; CL 5th; Craft Ring, *summon monster III*; Price 2,000 gp; CuL 4.

Ring of Enduring Swarm: Like a *ring of swarm*, but the rats stay as long as needed. All the rats must be dismissed or die before more can be summoned. Every 3 rounds, the wearer must use the ring (as a move action) to convince the rats to stay; otherwise, they scurry away.

Faint conjuration; CL 5th; Craft Ring, *summon monster III*; Price 3,750 gp; CuL 4.

Ring of Wolf Summoning: This silver ring displays a signet in the shape of a wolf's head. The ruby eyes faintly glow when it is activated. Using the ring summons 1d3+1 wolves; the animals are summoned from the surrounding domain (unless the local darklord takes actions to the contrary). Every 3 rounds, the wearer must use the ring (as a move action) to control the wolves; otherwise, they either run off or act on their basest urges (at the DM's discretion). The ring has 50 charges.

Moderate conjuration; CL 7th; Craft Ring, *summon monster IV*; Price 25,200 gp; CuL 4.

Rods

A hero does not casually acquire a rod. Because these items are expensive, they work ideally as equipment for powerful villains or as goals for difficult quests. In the right hands (or the wrong ones), a rod's ability to bestow "at will" abilities can bolster the reputation of the wielder, for better or for worse.

Rod of Mists: This rod allows the owner to cast *obscuring mist* and *expeditious retreat* at will.

Faint conjuration and transmutation; CL 2nd; Craft Rod, *expeditious retreat, obscuring mist*; Price 5,000 gp; CuL 4.

Rod of Stalking: This rod bestows a +10 competence bonus on Hide and Move Silently checks and confers *improved invisibility*.

Moderate illusion; CL 7th; Craft Rod, *improved invisibility*; Price 112,000 gp; CuL 2.

Rod of Teleportation: A handful of these rods have been stolen from the Church of Ezra. The user can cast *greater teleport* at will. Anyone who owns one will be hunted by the nearest sect of the order, since each of the four sects wants to take these items from the other three. The rod does not work against closed domain borders. In fact, the darklord of the domain has a +5 bonus on the Intelligence check for any attempt to determine the location of the user holding this rod.

Moderate conjuration; CL 7th; Craft Rod, *greater teleport*; Price 182,000 gp; CuL 2.

Scrolls

Knowledge man was not meant to have is not always contained in musty old tomes. If a wizard or sorcerer wants to bestow magical knowledge quickly and easily, she inscribes it on a scroll instead. Some of the examples listed below exist as much for the benefit of the crafter as the caster.

Clay Tablet: Papermaking in Bronze Age or Iron Age cultures is often too expensive or beyond

spellcasters' means, so they are known to inscribe their spells upon clay tablets rather than upon vellum or paper. A clay tablet has hardness 1 and 1 hit point, making it somewhat more fragile (and less portable) than parchment or vellum. A clay tablet scroll otherwise functions like any other scroll.

Earful Scroll: This scroll always contains a message of some kind, usually in reference to the wizard who crafted it. It is intended for a wizard or sorcerer; if the recipient is not an arcane spellcaster, he cannot read the scroll. If the recipient is not an arcane spellcaster, but is at least 5th level, he must make a caster check (DC 6) when reading the scroll to activate it.

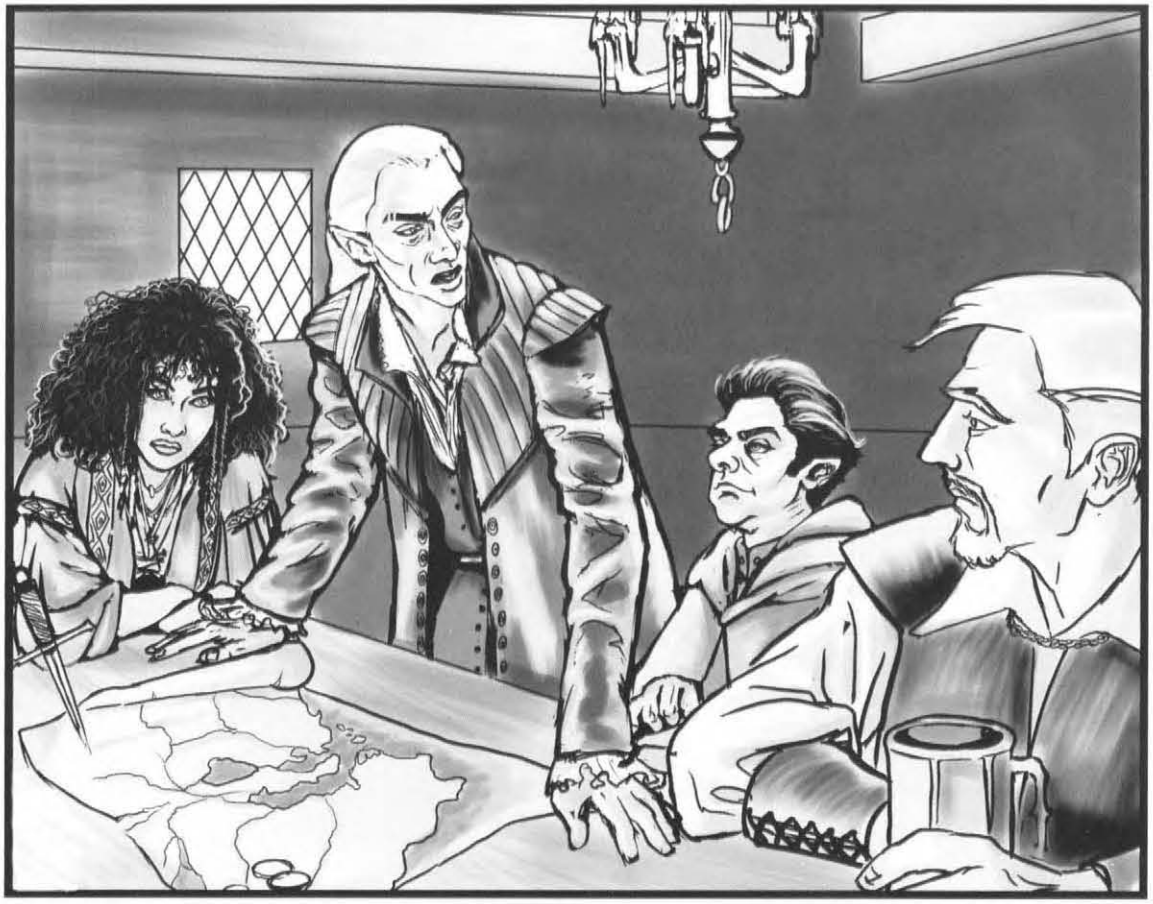
When the scroll is activated, a *magic mouth* forms on the parchment to intone the message. Immediately afterward, a ghostly form resembling an ear forms in the center of the parchment, and a silent *alarm* alerts the caster that the scroll is being read. The reader can then give a response directly to the caster by speaking to the ear. The reader has 5 minutes to respond to the message. An *earful scroll* can be used once. Unless other spells are used, it must be delivered by hand (or claw, as the case may be).

The price given below is for buying the scroll; receiving a message has no cost. The DM may choose to apply these statistics to a small item other than a scroll, such as a tiny statue, a figurine of the caster or even a small dead animal alchemically treated with *gentle repose* (for messages sent by madmen and necromancers).

Faint divination; CL 5th; Craft Scroll, *clairaudience/clairvoyance*, *erase*, *magic mouth*; Price 585 gp; CuL 4.

Teleporting Message Scroll: Like an *earful scroll*, but it can be delivered anywhere within the same domain by *greater teleport*. The reader has 10 minutes to respond to the message. Obviously, the cost prevents individuals from sending them without good reason.

Strong conjuration; CL 13th; Craft Scroll, *clairaudience/clairvoyance*, *erase*, *magic mouth*, *teleport*; Price 4,800 gp; CuL 4.



Geographic Scroll: This one-use item contains a map showing a specific location in the Domains of Dread. If the caster and scroll are in the same domain, the reader is teleported (as per *greater teleport*) to that location. The reader must be an arcane spellcaster capable of casting the spell; otherwise, the arcane spellcaster must make a caster level check (DC 14). The reader can look at the picture of the destination before reading the words, giving him time to prepare for his journey. Sometimes the crafter of this scroll uses a *teleport* spell to send it to a chosen recipient; other versions contain a second *teleport* spell (costing an additional 1,500 gp) for sending the scroll to the recipient.

Strong conjuration; CL 13th; Craft Scroll, *greater teleport*; Price 2,500 gp; CuL 4.

Geographic Circle: The circle remains for three hours (180 minutes). The arcane spellcaster reading this spell must make a caster level check (DC 19) to activate the scroll, unless he is at least 18th level. If he succeeds, this item functions as a *geographic scroll*, but it begins the spell by drawing a circle at the reader's feet. The reader, or anyone else who steps into the circle, is teleported to the place shown on the scroll. The reader can choose to dispel the circle after he passes through it, but if he doesn't, it remains for its full duration.

Strong conjuration; CL 18th; Craft Scroll, *arcane mark*, *teleportation circle*; Price 4,850 gp; CuL 4.

Scroll of Literacy: This scroll is marked with a variety of unusual, primitive pictograms. If the reader who examines it is illiterate, he is suddenly able to read any language for ten minutes. Despite its name, it functions as a wondrous item, not a scroll. However, it may have additional spells on it the reader can suddenly understand, so it's often found with scrolls.

Faint divination; CL 1st; Craft Scroll, *comprehend languages*; Price 50 gp; CuL 4.

Scroll of Musical Key: This scroll is marked with musical notation. If the reader can sing the melody (Performance [singing] check, DC 15), the spell on the scroll is activated. The most common variant of this scroll contains a *knock* spell.

Strong transmutation; CL 2nd; Craft Scroll, *knock*; Price 150 gp; CuL 4.

Staffs

Where would a spellcaster be without his staff? Probably trapped in the Domains of Dread. If he's diligent, though, he may find one crafted from the twisted trees of tainted lands.

Deception: This gnarled wooden staff is ideal for a wizard investigating supernatural activity. Few question his activities when he successfully casts the following nonlethal spells: *color spray* (1 charge), *hypnotism* (1 charge), *hypnotic pattern* (1 charge) and *suggestion* (1 charge).

Faint enchantment; CL 5th; Craft Staff, *color spray*, *hypnotic pattern*, *hypnotism*, *suggestion*; Price 17,250 gp; CuL 2.

Devastation (Villainous): The wood of this staff is blackened and burned, no doubt because someone was trying to incinerate the last spellcaster wielding it. It contains: *harm* (2 charges), *death knell* (1 charge) and *slay living* (2 charges). A cleric who picks up this staff does so in defiance of life and reason — each of these spells forces a powers check.

Moderate necromancy; CL 11th; Craft Staff, *death knell*, *harm*, *slay living*; Price 87,750 gp; CuL 2.

Observation: When seeking the unknown, heroes may feel safer knowing their spellcaster wields this crimson wooden staff carved with dozens of vigilant eyes. It allows the casting of the following spells: *clairaudiance/clairvoyance* (1 charge), *arcane eye* (1 charge) and *prying eyes* (2 charges).

Moderate divination; CL 9th; Craft Staff, *arcane eye*, *clairaudience/clairvoyance*, *prying eyes*; Price 66,000 gp; CuL 2.

Virtue: Chaos opposes the lawful and virtuous, and evil takes subtle forms in the Domains of Dread. The white willow wood of this staff is supple and light, but not easily broken. It grants the following spells: *detect chaos* (1 charge), *detect evil* (1 charge), *magic circle against chaos* (1 charge) and *magic circle against evil* (1 charge).

Faint abjuration; CL 5th; Craft Staff, *detect chaos*, *detect evil*, *magic circle against chaos*, *magic circle against evil*; Price 28,000 gp; CuL 2.

Wands

In most fantasy worlds, a wand might look like a willowy branch, a slender baton or simple "magic stick." But why stop there? A wand is a magic item that allows a wizard or sorcerer to cast a spell he

knows again and again, usually up to 50 times. Just as any living human form can hide a taint of evil, wands get more interesting when you can disguise them as other items.

Flask of Courage: This hip flask holds a modest amount of slightly intoxicating liquor, but the potables it produces taste and smell odious. Each sip intoxicates the imbiber for one minute; the flask has 50 sips. The abhorrent and unnamable fluid carries a slight enchantment. While intoxicated by the flask, the imbiber suffers a –2 temporary penalty on Wisdom, but gains a +2 morale bonus against Fear and Horror saves. Although the flask looks like a wondrous item, it functions as a wand.

Faint enchantment; CL 1st; Craft Wand, *bless*; Price 750 gp; CuL 5.

Hammer of Animate Object: Creating an animated object doesn't force a powers check, so empowering an army of furniture and living weapons is a quick way to provide a distraction in combat. A hero may turn the accoutrements of a villain's mansion against him, while a villain may use this to cover a quick escape from the same estate. The user can animate up to 50 items, and each one is active for 11 rounds. This item does not work in a *hell house* (see below).

Moderate transmutation; CL 11th; Craft Wand, *animate objects*; Price 49,500 gp; CuL 4.

Knock Key: This stores 50 charges of the *knock* spell. It resembles a skeleton key, which magically changes shape to fit within any lock of reasonable size. It functions as a wand.

Faint transmutation; CL 3rd; Craft Wand, *knock*; Price 4,500 gp; CuL 4.

Magician's Wand: Unlike other items in this section, this one looks exactly like you would expect it to be. It's a slender black-and-white wand that's popular in the theaters of Renaissance realms. Stage magicians employ it with flair. The user can perform fifty tasks of *prestidigitation*.

Faint universal; CL 1st; Craft Wand, *prestidigitation*; Price 375 gp; CuL 4.

Scalpel of Animated Skin (Villainous): When this scalpel is used to peel the flesh off a dead body, the user can animate the empty flesh. Flaying the skin off a body requires a Craft (leatherworking) check against DC 15 and ten minutes of work (for the purposes of this spell, at least). Using a charge from the scalpel requires a powers check. The statistics for a humanoid's animated skin are the same as a Small or Medium animated object made of leather. If the owner enacts this scene enough times to fully degenerate, he typically goes on a killing spree to create as many animated skin constructs as he can.

Moderate transmutation; CL 11th; Craft Wand, *animate objects*; Price 44,550 gp; CuL 1.

Severed Spectral Hand: When activated, this severed hand becomes incorporeal. It can then scurry up to 130 feet to deliver a low-level, touch range spell. The item has fifty charges of *spectral hand*. Although this scurrying dead thing depends on a necromancy spell, using it doesn't force a powers check. In all other respects, the item functions as a wand.

Faint necromancy; CL 3rd; Craft Wand, *spectral hand*; Price 4,500 gp; CuL 2.

Taxidermy Needle: This needle has enough enchanted thread for fifty charges of *gentle repose*. The body must be sewn back together. It can also reattach severed body parts, if necessary. It functions as a wand.

Faint necromancy; CL 2nd; Craft Wand, *gentle repose*; Price 4,500 gp; CuL 1.

Zealous Sacrificial Object (Villainous): This cult item can transform a recently slain human into an undead creature; each use forces an immediate powers check. Madmen use it in desperation, and few have managed to discharge all fifty charges. Thus, it often passes from one madman to the next.

Magical Bayonets

When magic and technology exist side-by-side, strange and deadly ideas are made possible. With this device, the user can mount a wand on the barrel of a musket or rifle. It isn't as fragile as an ordinary wand, however. Its steel construction is as resilient as a bayonet, and deals the same damage in melee combat. Any spell requiring a melee touch attack can be "delivered" by an attack from a magical bayonet. For wands of this type, add the cost of a masterwork bayonet.

It functions as a wand, but for the purposes of the cult, it looks like a demented handheld *object d'art* displayed with mania and reverence. It must somehow make physical contact with (or inside) the victim.

Moderate necromancy; CL 11th; Craft Wand, *create undead*; Price 11,250 gp; CuL 4.

Wondrous Items

The devices below may be considered wondrous by some and horrific by others. There's a thin line between fear and fascination, after all. Don't reveal to your players what these odd items do; instead, include them as "treasure" for their characters and watch them recoil in horror (or shout exaltations of triumph) when they figure out what they actually do. For added drama, we encourage you to be inventive with command words and activation routines. A wondrous item becomes a disturbing item when you have to coat it in human blood.

Amulet of Death Ward: The wearer is immune to all death spells and magical death effects. The spell does not protect against other sorts of attacks, such as hit point loss, poison, petrification or other effects even if they might be lethal. Using this item does not force a powers check.

Moderate necromancy; CL 7th; Craft Wondrous Item, *death ward*; Price 56,000 gp; CuL 2.

Animated Painting: This item is typically placed in a room the owner wants to observe. It is invariably a portrait of some kind. When someone enters the room, the owner is notified by a silent *alarm*. He may then, if he chooses, watch what occurs in the room through the painting. When he speaks the name of the painting, the eyes of a figure within it come alive to show what is occurring in the room where the painting rests.

Faint divination; CL 5th; Craft Wondrous Item, *alarm*, *clairaudience/clairvoyance*; Price 32,000 gp + the price of the painting; Weight 10 lb.; CuL 4.

Bagpipes of Inharmonious Vengeance: The owner must make a Perform (wind instruments) check (DC 15) to activate this item, and he must be proficient with bagpipes. By playing an atonal melody, he can summon an illusion that terrifies one listener within 170 feet. The conditions are the same as for *phantasmal killer*. In Lamordia, a bizarre serial killer stalked the northern wastes with this accursed item for almost a year, creeping up to the window of a sleeping victim each time before unleashing a terrible, murderous cacophony.

Moderate illusion; CL 7th; Craft Wondrous Item, *phantasmal killer*; Price 50,400 gp; Weight 5 lb.; CuL 3.

Bomb Sack: This pouch is large enough to hold one bomb. It closes completely with a drawstring. The pouch absorbs the first 5 points of fire damage from any attack that would damage the bomb. Thus, a character carrying a bomb may not need to make a Reflex save to avoid prematurely detonating a bomb when he catches fire. The device does not extend the same protection to the person holding the bomb.

Faint abjuration; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *endure elements (fire)*; Price 2,000 gp; Weight 1/2 lb.; CuL 5.

Bomb Satchel: Like the bomb sack, but it absorbs the first 12 points of damage, and the satchel can carry up to three bombs. The device still does not extend the same protection to the person holding the bombs.

Faint abjuration; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, *resist energy (fire)*; Price 12,000 gp; Weight 2 lb.; CuL 5.

Candle of Nightmares (Villainous): Vengeance is nigh. Light this candle, and the person whose name the user whispers has terrible dreams. Unleashing this nightmare counts as an evil spell, so using the item requires a powers check. The item has unlimited uses, so it's the sort of keepsake that may be passed down through corrupt generations.

Moderate illusion; CL 9th; Craft Wondrous Item, *nightmare*; Price 12,000 gp; CuL 2.

Cloak of Stealth: This garment grants a +5 bonus on Hide checks or Move Silently checks. The wearer chooses which bonus he receives when he dons it each time.

Faint illusion; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, *invisibility*; Price 2,750 gp; Weight 1 lb.; CuL 2.

Crest of Alarm: This Tiny seal can be affixed to any surface. The person who places it immediately gains the effects of casting *alarm* on that area.

Faint abjuration; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *alarm*; Price 4,000 gp; CuL 2.

Spectacles

Characters from the Renaissance realms can use one additional type of magic item: spectacles. A character can only wear one pair of spectacles at a time. Wearing spectacles does not preclude the use of a helm or hat, but it does reduce the total number of items a character can use by one. Spectacles cannot be used along with any sort of goggles or other eyewear, though they *can* be used along with lenses such as Eyes of Charming and Eyes of the Eagle.

Darkshades: The wearer of these tinted spectacles gains the equivalent of *true seeing*.

Moderate divination; CL 9th; Craft Wondrous Item, *true seeing*; Price 90,000 gp; CuL 9 (see "Spectacles" sidebar).

Death Shades (Villainous): Necromancers of the Renaissance realms craft these sinister spectacles. The wearer sees most of the world in black and white. Within 30 feet, living things show up in color, dead things show up as pitch black, and horrible things "in-between" register in shades of gray. Fragile creatures (alive and wounded, with 3 or fewer hit points left) appear as dark shades of color, while creatures fighting off death (alive with 4 or more hit points) appear as light shades of color. Undead creatures appear fluorescent. Flickering nimbuses of flamelike energy surround the images of creatures neither alive nor dead (such as constructs). At the DM's discretion, interpreting these weird perceptions may require a Knowledge (arcana) check.

Wearing *death shades* constantly can drive the wearer insane. Each time the wearer puts them on, he must make a powers check. Wearing them for more than an hour forces a Horror save; wearing them for more than six hours forces a Madness save.

Faint necromancy; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *deathwatch*; Price 2,000 gp; CuL 9 (see "Spectacles" sidebar).

Desk of Deceased Scholars (Villainous): This roll-top desk locks with a key. Perhaps it should, because its compartments typically hold up to ten severed heads. Each head is kept preserved, and anyone opening the desk can ask the heads questions. Seekers after knowledge should choose their questions carefully: each consultation forces a powers check, as does placing a head in the desk.

Faint necromancy; CL 5th; Craft Wondrous Item, *gentle repose*, *speak with dead*; Price 30,000 gp; Weight 80 lb.; CuL 3.

Detective's Magnifying Glass: When employing this ridiculous apparatus of spectacled headgear, the owner of this magnifying glass gains a +10 competence bonus to Search and Spot checks when peering through it.

Faint divination; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, *true seeing*; Price 8,000 gp; CuL 9.

Dog Whistle of the Spectral Hound: By blowing this silent whistle, the user can issue a silent summons to a gigantic hound. The faithful beast then watches over the gentleman or lady holding the dog whistle as per *Mordenkainen's faithful hound*.

Moderate conjuration; CL 9th; Craft Wondrous Item, *Mordenkainen's faithful hound*; Price 90,000 gp; CuL 3.

Finger of Commanding: This item appears to be a simple humanoid finger bone adorned with jeweled knuckles. Once per day, the wielder can animate and command up to 6 HD of skeletons or zombies for one hour. The wielder cannot use the finger to usurp control of existing undead. Crafting or using this item requires a powers check.

Moderate necromancy; CL 6th; Craft Wondrous Item, finger bone from an intelligent undead creature, *animate dead*; Price 5,400 gp; CuL 2.

Goblet of Gossip: In the intrigue-laden courts of Richemulot, it was once considered fashionable to hold a banquet in which the participants could gossip about each other without being overheard — which led to the creation of this unusual item. Anyone holding the goblet can cast *message* at will. The item's ornamentation includes a thin copper wire (a material component of the spell).

Faint transmutation; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *message*; Price 2,000 gp; CuL 3.

Ghost Sound Drums: By pounding this small instrument, the user can create the illusion of footfalls far away from him. The drums play silently.

Faint illusion; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *ghost sound*; Price 1,000 gp; Weight 2 lb.; CuL 2.

Grave Robber's Shovel: With ten minutes of digging, the user of this item can unearth a 150-foot-square area. The shovel is primarily used for creating holes (usually graves), but it can also change the contours of terrain before a battle or dig a moat. Tunnels created with it collapse.

Moderate transmutation; CL 11th; Craft Wondrous Item, *move earth*; Price 132,000 gp; Weight 10 lb.; CuL 2.

Guardian Amulet: The cleric who owns this amulet can present it to a willing recipient. With a thought, the cleric can use *status* to ascertain the wearer's condition.

Moderate divination; CL 7th; Craft Wondrous Item, *status*; Price 56,000 gp; CuL 2.

Hell House (Villainous): This device resembles a miniature edifice 6 inches square with tiny, dark windows and a steel door that closes tightly. When the door is pried open, mists roil from within, obscuring the formation of a vast mansion. Within minutes, the mists dissipate to reveal a 100 foot by 100 foot house. If the surrounding area is smaller than those dimensions, at least the doorway and surrounding walls are visible. The mansion itself becomes a pocket domain, secure from the ambitions of the darklord of the surrounding area.

Only persons designated by the owner may enter the *hell house*. When the owner steps inside, he must make an immediate powers check. If he fails, he immediately becomes the darklord of this pocket domain. (The user may choose to willingly fail this check.) Villainous sorts may welcome the unwary into a *hell house* for their own sinister purposes.

Once observers have passed beyond the entrance, they are surrounded by a magnificent foyer with archways and doorways leading to numerous chambers beyond. The atmosphere is clean, fresh and warm. The DM devises the actual floor plan of the house (she should already have one ready). The

mansion is furnished and contains sufficient foodstuffs to serve a nine-course banquet for everyone inside (up to 156 people).

A staff of ghostly servants waits upon all who enter. Each functions as an *unseen servant*, except that each appears vaguely humanoid and can go anywhere in the mansion. Twenty of these "ghosts" enact the bidding of the new darklord. When a visitor dies in a *hell house*, one of these servants changes its appearance to resemble the deceased victim. Viewing this transformed servant for the first time usually forces a Horror save, since its appearance usually reveals how the victim was killed.

Truly devious sorts leave this type of wondrous item active far from civilized lands, welcoming guests into their private hells. However, the darklord of the surrounding domain can also enter the house to challenge this usurper. An hour after the owner is killed, the item shrinks back to its former miniature shape. Otherwise, the *hell house* remains for 24 hours. Ten minutes before this duration expires, phantasmagoric events presage the house's destruction. Anyone inside the house at the end of this time is trapped inside in a state of limbo until the *hell house* is activated again.

Strong conjuration; CL 13th; Craft Wondrous Item, *Mordenkainen's magnificent mansion*; Price 182,000 gp; Weight 1/2 lb.; CuL 5.

Heinfroth's Contemplative Davenport: This piece of furniture replicates the effects of *mind fog*, although it does not actually summon mists. Any patient reclining or sitting on this object is more receptive to psychological manipulation when the doctor utters the item's command word. The subject has a –10 competence penalty on all Wisdom checks and Will saves. The effects last for 30 minutes, plus 2d6 rounds if the subject fails an initial Will save (DC 19). The alienist employing this device should sit at least 20 feet away; otherwise, he is also caught in the spell's effects.

Moderate enchantment; CL 9th; Craft Wondrous Item, *mind fog*; Price 81,000 gp; Weight 30 lb.; CuL 9.

Horn of Feasting: Three times a day, the owner of this horn can blow it to summon a *heroes' feast* for six people, including a magnificent table, chairs, service, food and drink. The feast takes 1 hour to consume, and provides many beneficial effects at the end of that time (as described in the spell description).

Moderate conjuration; CL 11th; Craft Wondrous Item, *heroes' feast*; Price 71,300 gp; Weight 2 lb.; CuL 3.

Horn of the Red Death: This sinister object resembles a *horn of feasting*, but its most dangerous effect is only used once. At the feast's conclusion, a "host" appears as a skeletal figure dressed in red. If the person who blew the horn has at least one level of divine spellcaster, he can then attempt to use the horn to cast *lesser geas* on each guest attending. This may require a caster check for each person. The horn has 50 charges of *lesser geas* — up to six are used for the initial feast, and the rest cannot be used until the feast is over.

The owner who activates the horn chooses the geas, and he is immune to its effects. Note that the horn does not actually need to be visible or openly displayed to work. A nobleman could easily hold this feast in his home while keeping the horn in the kitchen, a cupboard or in another room within his own personal *hell house*. Killing the host does not cancel the effects of the geas, but it does offer them a chance to take what is essentially a *horn of geas*. The charges of *lesser geas* are then used like a wand's charges.

Moderate enchantment; CL 11th; Craft Wondrous Item, *heroes' feast, lesser geas*; Price 60,500 gp; Weight 2 lb.; CuL 3.

Hypnotism Disk: This coin-sized object displays a spiral pattern on one side and a wide-open eye on the other. One side grants a +10 bonus on the Hypnotism skill; the other can cast *hypnotic pattern* once per day.

Faint illusion; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, *hypnotic pattern*; Price 6,200 gp; CuL 9.

Lute of Hypnotic Pattern: A bard must make a Perform (stringed instrument) check (DC 15) as a full-round action to activate this item. For as long as he plays, he summons swarms of illusory color to surround him. These patterns may hypnotize anyone present (as per *hypnotic pattern*). The patterns are like those created by poisonous St. John's Wort, the madness of St. Vitus's dance or the surrealism of dreams.

Faint illusion; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, *hypnotic pattern*; Price 9,700 gp; CuL 3.

Johann's Ladder: Two towering spires of metal fork away from each other, conducting a massive arc of electricity from the base to the apex every few seconds. When the command word is triumphantly

shouted, a madman can use *polymorph* to change a nearby victim into a monster of his choice (as defined by the spell). The finished creature must then make a Will save (DC 17) to resist *charm person*. The ladder works once per day, so the subject must be chosen carefully.

One traditional use of this scientific horror involves creating a construct before the ladder is activated, then changing it into a diabolical creation. Another involves transforming a captive from a party of adventurers and turning it against his former companions.

Moderate transmutation; CL 7th; Craft Wondrous Item, *charm person, polymorph*; Price 25,500 gp; Weight 500 lb.; CuL 9.

Magician's Top Hat: This stylish chapeau grants a +10 competence bonus on Sleight of Hand checks.

Faint transmutation; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, *mage hand*; Price 2,000 gp; CuL 9.

Magician's Hat of Summoning: With a little showmanship, the owner of this hat can summon various Tiny creatures with less than 1 HD. If a magician can make a Sleight of Hand check (DC 15), he can actually pull the animal from within the hat. This magical feat can be performed thrice a day, enough for three performances. Common choices include rabbits and pigeons. Exotic choices include rats, badgers and hawks, which enact the user's bidding for three rounds.

Faint conjuration; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, *summon monster I*; Price 3,600 gp; CuL 9.

Magical Compass: This device instantly shows which direction is north. Although it is commonly used in technologically primitive cultures, it is a superfluous and expensive item in a Renaissance realm, since making a nonmagical compass is much easier than crafting a magic item.

Faint divination; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *know direction*; Price 1,000 gp; CuL 4.

Mask of the Dead: The wearer of this gruesome disguise becomes invisible to undead. The mask is elaborate enough that it covers half of the wearer's head; he cannot benefit from an additional helm, hat or similar headgear. The mask functions for only ten minutes at a time and is usable thrice per day.

Faint abjuration; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *hide from undead*; Price 2,000 gp; CuL 3.

Mirror of Reflecting: These mirrors can be crafted in different styles, such as a hand mirror or a freestanding looking glass. Unlike a normal mirror, the image in the glass is an illusory double of the reflected scene, not a true reflection. Although the effect is undetectable to most folk, a *mirror of reflecting* does cast a vampire's reflection. If she wishes, at the time of the mirror's creation, a creator can slightly alter the reflections the mirror casts. As examples, a mirror might reflect creatures as more beautiful or more sinister than they actually appear. These cosmetic changes do not affect the base creation cost. The style of the mirror and the materials that compose it differ according to Cultural Level.

Faint illusion; CL 5th; Craft Wondrous Item, *mirror image, silent image*; Price 27,500 gp; CuL 3.

Pipe Organ of Villainous Motivations: When the stops and pedals of this pipe organ are operated in a particular combination, it can radiate the effects of any spell that specifically affects emotions (such as a *charm person* spell). The organist chooses the mood of his music. The sounds can carry throughout a mansion, but the effects only drift up to 120 feet — more than enough room for a desecrated chapel, madman's drawing room or underground sanctuary. Playing the organ requires a Perform (keyboard instruments) check (DC 15).

Strong enchantment; CL 13th; Craft Wondrous Item, *calm emotions, charm person, crushing despair, enthrall, fear, good hope, remove fear, scare* or other pertinent spells; Price 25,800 gp + 3,000 gp for each spell beyond the first; Weight 1,000 lb.; CuL 9.

Quill of the Mark: This feather quill can indelibly trace a pattern on the forehead of a humanoid. When the mark is made, the user utters the word "criminal." The subject is then subjected to the *mark of justice*. In Falkovnia, the judges who wield these quills may actually punish criminals for virtuous behavior.

Moderate necromancy; CL 9th; Craft Wondrous Item, *mark of justice*; Price 8,100 gp; CuL 3.

Repose Rack (Villainous): This massive device resembles a hat stand, but a large hook on the end is sharp enough to bear the weight of a dead body. A humanoid corpse can be placed on the *repose rack* like a slab of meat, a profane practice requiring a powers check. The body is preserved perfectly and indefinitely.

Moderate necromancy; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, *gentle repose*; Price 12,000 gp; Weight 25 lb.; CuL 3.

The Scroll of Return: This vellum scroll measures 8 1/2 inches wide and 10 feet long. According to legend, the scroll was made from the skin of a celestial that sacrificed itself for this very purpose. Many outlanders have spent their lives searching for it.

The scroll contains the long and bizarre formula for a powerful variant of the *plane shift* spell that ignores Ravenloft's limits on teleportation magic. The spell requires 10 full minutes to cast. If the caster is interrupted, she can start again from the beginning without penalty. When the spell is cast, the *scroll of return* bursts into flame. The embers float skyward and momentarily tear open the planar fabric of Ravenloft, allowing the caster and up to seven other creatures to *plane shift* to any location on any plane of the caster's choice, as per the spell. The *scroll of return* does not function for darklords; they are too tightly bound to their domains.

Any character able to use a *plane shift* scroll can recite the incantation, but any attempt to learn or copy the spell automatically fails. Needless to say, this may very well be a unique item. Certainly finding it requires a long and arduous quest at the very least.

The *scroll of return* appears to destroy itself when used, but some occult scholars believe that the scroll's embers reform in a new, hidden, random location somewhere in the Land of Mists.

Strong universal; CL 18th; Craft Wondrous Item, *plane shift, wish*; Price 175,000 gp; CuL 3.

Severed Mage Hand: This item is typically a wooden fist with one finger outstretched (if the owner is good) or a fistful of skeletal digits (if the owner is evil). When the command word is spoken, the person holding the hand can point it at an object to be manipulated.

Faint transmutation; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *mage hand*; Price 1,000 gp; CuL 1.

Shroud of Levitation: The wearer of this mortuary garment can perpetually hover, as per the *levitate* spell.

Faint transmutation; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, *levitate*; Price 12,000 gp; Weight 1 lb.; CuL 2.

Snowshoes of Alacrity: When walking on snow or ice, the user gains a +5 competence bonus on Balance checks as well as the ability to use *freedom of movement* and *expeditious retreat*. Each spell can only be used alone. The wearer cannot use both at the same time. Some spellcasters prefer to place these same enhancements on ice skates instead.

Moderate abjuration; CL 7th; Craft Wondrous Item, *expeditious retreat*, *freedom of movement*; Price 58,200 gp; Weight 2 lb.; CuL 1.

Spray of Nausea: This alchemical substance is kept in a small atomizer. Using the spray automatically affects one target within 30 ft. The victim's vision is obscured for 3 rounds, hampering him with the effects of full concealment (as per *fog cloud*, but targeted on one person). The victim must also make a Fortitude save (DC 20); if the check fails, the victim is also nauseated for 3 rounds. The atomizer produces one charge of mist per day (and thus is only useable once per day). Many wealthy aristocrats regard it as a useful self-defense item.

Faint conjuration; CL 5th; Craft Wondrous Item, *stinking cloud*; Price 5,400 gp; CuL 9.

Spirit Eye: This meticulously crafted tiny glass orb is kept in a leather pouch. When the pouch is opened, the eye can float up to 60 feet in front of the owner, who can see through it.

Moderate divination; CL 9th; Craft Wondrous Item, *prying eyes*; Price 90,000 gp; CuL 6.

Spurs of the Phantom Steed: The wearer of this device can whistle up a *phantom steed* to carry him for up to 3 hours each day. When 3 hours have passed or when the command word is spoken, the *phantom steed* vanishes. Paladins may prefer a more expensive version, where the *phantom steed* has no time limit to usage each day. The user cannot wear magic boots while wearing the spurs.

Faint conjuration; CL 5th; Craft Wondrous Item, *phantom steed*; Price 5,400 gp (3 hours/day) or 27,000 gp (no time limit); CuL 2.

Stirrup of Horsemanship: This golden stirrup can be attached to any saddle. It bestows a +10 competence bonus on all Ride checks made by the user.

Faint conjuration; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, creator must have 5 ranks in the Ride skill, *mount*; Price 2,000 gp; CuL 4.

Van de Voor Generator: This glass sphere hums with electricity, which arcs from the center of the sphere to the surrounding glass. When activated in a laboratory, it disguises supernatural activity as perfectly mundane pursuits. Any viewer ignores any supernatural or unusual activity present unless he makes a Will save (DC 13). This effect is a mind-affecting illusion.

Faint illusion; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, *Nystul's magic aura*; Price 12,000 gp; Weight 1 lb.; CuL 9.

Vistani Wagon: The driver of this wagon has a 75% chance to successfully navigate a known Mistway (**Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Four, "Charted Mistways"). Its value and utility ensures that the Vistani tries to steal it back from the adventurer who acquired it.

Moderate conjuration; CL 9th; Craft Wondrous Item, *teleport*; Price 90,000 gp; Weight 1,000 lb.; CuL 3.

Cursed Items In Ravenloft

Demara pulled Vangelia back from the body of the man the scout had just killed.

"Let me go!" Vangelia cried, struggling in the warrior's grip. "He has something more to say to me." Her eyes looked dazed and unfocused. She had been that way for days, ever since putting the ring on her finger.

"He has nothing to say, child," said Warden Timorian, Demara's brother and a priest of Ezra. "His soul has fled this plane and gone to its just reward."

"No, his soul belongs to me, and so do his secrets," Vangelia said, her struggles becoming fiercer.

Demara looked at her brother beseechingly. "Can't you do anything to help her?" she asked.

Timorian shook his head. "We need to find someone who can tell us how to lift the curse. Otherwise, I fear that she becomes like that thing we slew four days ago — a werewolf."

Although cursed items are a part of many different campaign worlds, perhaps nowhere beyond the Domains of Dread are host to quite as many items of such malevolent nature. Indeed, relics with bizarre and tragic curses have long been a staple of horror stories, so it comes as no surprise that DMs preparing a Ravenloft campaign should

take time to consider including such accursed items in their games.

Dungeon Master's Guide, Chapter 7, "Cursed Items" has a wealth of material on the nitty-gritty game mechanics of creating cursed items. Rather than repeat that information here, this chapter instead focuses on the uses and benefits of introducing cursed items into your game. Ideally you will finish this chapter with a strong sense of the kind of item you want to include and why, and then consult the *DMG* in order to work through the actual design mechanics.

Why a Cursed Item?

Before you do anything else, ask yourself exactly why you want to introduce a cursed item into your campaign. If the immediate answer that comes to mind has nothing to do with making your story better or enhancing the excitement of the adventure, you may wish to reconsider including a cursed item in the first place. It may seem like an especially devious trick to pull on the players to place items that make the characters regret finding them in that shiny treasure hoard. If, however, the only reason you want to add a cursed item to your game is to prove how clever you are or to "punish" your players in some way, then you're better off finding a different way to prove your ultimate power.

On the other hand, if you are looking forward to a harrowing tale of power and temptation, sacrifice and nobility, a cursed item can be just the way to bring all these elements into your game and give the players a memorable campaign to talk about for years to come. This isn't to say that you can't include it to teach newcomers the value of caution or keep grizzled veterans on their toes, merely that if you're going to include a cursed item in the game, make sure that you're doing so to build up the campaign as a whole.

What Will the Cursed Item Achieve?

Hand in hand with why you wish to include a cursed item in your game should be a sense of what you want the item to accomplish or foster for the campaign as a whole. This can be a bare thread of an idea: "I want to make the players paranoid," or it can be something much more specific: "I want the players to have to choose between saving their village or destroying the cursed Medallion of Everlasting Death." Achieving this relies as much on the presentation of the item as its actual powers. Even the most insidious of cursed items loses some of its mysterious value if the players figure out what it is within half an hour of picking up. Likewise, the most fearsome of cursed berserker swords won't have much of an impact if it is revealed in a positive light. On the other hand, even fairly minor cursed items can have a profound impact on the game if they are presented in suitably clever fashion and their powers allowed to work to their fullest insidious effect before discovery or action by the players.

Employed in this fashion, cursed items can become an extremely interesting and innovative way of underscoring the basic themes and moods you have constructed your campaign around. A cursed berserker sword can serve as a powerful symbol for a campaign about the perils of bloodlust and aggression. Tracking down an artifact that inspires greed and ruthless ambition in all those who touch it can give the players a palpable way of interacting with the themes behind a campaign concerned with the price of such vices. If nothing else, including a cursed item — and the subsequent adventures centered around destroying or disposing of it — allows you to take players to places and introduce them to NPCs you might otherwise have trouble justifying encountering during your campaign. This enables you to mold your campaign more precisely into the story you want to tell.

So when choosing cursed items, think carefully about how you can use them to bolster and expand on the themes and ideas you already have mapped out for your campaign. In this fashion, cursed items can work toward what you're looking to create rather than sending the game off on a tangent or even going against what you want to empathize.

What is the Item's Backstory?

No magic item is simply dropped fully formed from the heavens, absent of any dreams or desires; cursed items, especially, have a *raison d'être* that goes beyond the creation of normal magic items. Before there was the cursed object, there was someone or something that desired its creation, for better or worse. Who forged it? Where? Why? Try to get a sense of what drove its creator to craft an item of such lingering malevolence.

After all, even before one begins to consider magic and curses, a simple bone dagger made by a shaman from ancient Verbrek is very different from a finely crafted pearl necklace from modern Richemulot. While the possibilities remain yours to define, these items naturally seem to attract

different types of magic as well. Make sure your item's origins suit the powers it has and more importantly the kind of story you want it create. While you can certainly surprise the players with things that go against their expectations (such as a cursed necklace that compels them to go berserk, as opposed to the more traditional cursed weapon), once they know more about the item, its powers should make sense in the context of its history.

Once you have decided where the item was forged and who crafted it, try to think of where it went from those original hands. Unless your characters are the first to come across it since its creation, chances are it has left a number of legends and tragic tales in its wake. All this knowledge can provide valuable clues and information to the characters as they seek to find out how to rid themselves of their cursed possession. Likewise, creators of cursed items have a nasty tendency to linger on as undead of one kind or another, whether bemoaning the downfall of their noblest creation or greedily seeking after the item in which they invested so much of their wicked power. This provides another possible challenge or surprise for your players to encounter later in their quest. Quite often you find that the more you think about the origin of your cursed item, the more hooks for adventures you can draw from it, not to mention adding a wealth of ominous and evil details for your players to encounter as the campaign goes on.

Still more factors exist to consider: Has the item lain dormant, waiting for a new owner to come along for it to shape into its own image and restore it to glory? Has it started cutting a swath of destruction through the nearby area, requiring the characters to confront the item directly to take it from the current owner? Is the original owner still out there searching for it or has he finally found peace (or damnation)? Is the object tied to the land where it was created or has it traveled far beyond its place of origin? Must it be returned to its place of origin to be destroyed once and for all? Who else is seeking the item, if anyone? Why?

All these are questions you should have answers for before you introduce the cursed item into play, if for no other reason than they are likely to be some of the first questions the characters want answered as soon as they realize what they have on their hands.

Three Laws of Cursed Items

Their Curses Are Poetic

Like any other kind of curse, the best cursed items make a twisted kind of sense, either relative to the nature of the object or to the history of the item itself. Examples include a sword that demands blood every time it is drawn or a mirror that was crafted for a lover but now transforms those who look at it into a clone of the original owner, down to her memories and personality.

Their Curses Are Lingering

Although they can have very dramatic instantaneous effects, the most terrible part of many cursed items is generally something much more sinister and slow-acting. After all, many cursed items seem to feed on the misery and suffering of their owners, either literally or figuratively; it makes sense, then, that they naturally try to prolong the agony as long as possible. A dagger that instantly and fatally poisons the user when he picks it up isn't really a cursed item — it's more like a trap of sorts, albeit a very nasty one. On the other hand, a dagger that grants great bonuses to a rogue's abilities but causes him to slowly poison those he cares about every time they touch him is much more sinister and ultimately much more devastating as well.

Their Curses Are Inevitable

Last but certainly not least, once the item is in the possession of a character it reacts to, nothing short of fulfilling the specific and exacting requirements necessary to break its hold or destroy the item saves the character from the ultimate doom of the item's curse. Some spells or items may allow a temporary reprieve, especially if necessary to set up the adventure where the unfortunate character tries to rid himself of the item. Ultimately, the characters should know that unless they find out what needs to be done and do it, they fall victim to the item's curse.

How Was It Created?

Although the main work of designing a cursed item relates to game statistics, before you start number crunching take time to envision just how the item was created and why it bears the particular powers and drawbacks that it does. As a general rule, the more time you spend on figuring out where the item came from and how it came to be imbued with the powers it has, the more completely you will be able to portray it to the players when they finally take possession of it.

What follows is a listing of some of the more common ways that cursed items are created, as well as the different advantages and drawbacks of each in terms of incorporating them into your adventures.

Malevolent Design: This item was deliberately designed to cause suffering and destruction, most likely by a wicked spellcaster of the highest order or perhaps something even more exotic such as a lich or a rakshasa. Some malevolent beings craft cursed items of power as "gifts" for rivals, knowing what happens to them in the end. Others simply forge such items for their own use, imbuing them with dark gifts in order to have those powers at hand when desired, but then lose the items to accidents or outside intervention. On one hand, players who encounter these items (if not actually fall victim to them) have a fairly clear-cut choice when it comes to what must be done with them — destruction or imprisonment of some kind is mandatory. Of course, the villain hasn't gone to such great lengths in crafting such an insidious, evil item only to let the heroes do away with it so easily.

On the positive side, this generation story makes for a minimum of conflict when the true nature of the item and its history is discovered — a plus if you're worried that your players might start getting ideas about doing some less than heroic things with it. You must ensure, however, that they also don't feel they're simply being led around by the nose with such items either. If you use a cursed artifact to manhandle them into following the path you have created, much of the adventure you're trying to craft loses its power as the players can tell from day one where it is going to go. This isn't

always a bad thing — if the players are ready for an epic, then it can even add to the excitement — but if they were looking forward to a more freewheeling type of campaign, then they may feel a little constrained regarding their ability to adventure as they choose.

Tragic Accident: On the other end of the spectrum are items that were created with the proverbial best intentions, but which have since come to haunt all who come across them. Perhaps the creator made a fatal mistake when concocting a crucial alchemical mixture, realizing only too late the foul substance she had created. Perhaps a wizard unknowingly used the bones of a murdered man instead of an animal's as a component of his wand of power, giving him terrifying control over the undead instead of the forces of nature. Maybe a crucial phase of the item's forging was interrupted, leading to a mystical imperfection that escaped notice originally, only to widen into a gaping magical wound as time went by.

Maybe the fault lies not in the creation itself, but in the creator. Even just a fleeting surge of wrath or hubris at the wrong moment during its manufacture can cause even the noblest effort to go awry, especially when working with the kind of primal forces necessary to forge most magic items. It's also possible that the item itself was initially fine, but came to be tainted following some great accident or murderous betrayal that it was involved in later on. This is particularly common with items that came from divine origin but were later used in blatant violation of the tenets of the faith, such that not only do they have their divine status stripped but a mighty curse levied on them as well. However, even items of wizardly origin can acquire these properties as well, depending on how they are handled and the intentions of those who wield them subsequent to their creation.

This premise has the advantage of being a real turnaround from what the players are likely to expect regarding a cursed item. It's not so easy to condemn those who forged it when their intentions were as good as could be hoped for. Likewise, the players can probably expect to have a natural ally or allies in those good-aligned characters who were present at the item's creation or who have tracked its evil over the years, seeking to right what was made so very wrong long ago. It's even possible that the item's true nature may yet be undiscovered; the characters receive it as a reward from a grateful ally, only to find out that all is not what it seems. This discovery leads to an exciting follow-up adventure as the characters try to track what happened to this legendary item. At the same time, however, you must remember that the characters are still the center of the campaign, not the NPCs who may also be seeking the item's destruction. What's more, no matter how tragic the circumstance surrounding the item's fall must have been, remember that it is just that, a fallen thing, and almost certainly incapable of redemption. Thus, it's best that characters who think that they can avoid the item's curse just by using it only for what it was originally intended are in for a nasty surprise or the item loses all its menace in one move.

Overwhelming Power: Not so much cursed as perhaps "more than mortal man was meant to know," these items are not inherently evil, but the sheer power they offer their wielder inevitably brings about some catastrophic change for the worse (at least as far as the character is concerned). PCs still seek to undo the curse or lay the item to rest, but they need not see the item as quite the enemy that an outright cursed item is. For example, suppose that while traveling through the ruins of an ancient castle a fighter finds a enchanted sword that at first offers him benefits such as increased resistance to elemental attacks, then later on damage reduction against ordinary weapons as well. Unfortunately, it's around this time that he also discovers he is gaining these benefits because he is slowly transforming into some sort of guardian creature for the castle the blade was taken from (which he feels increasingly drawn to return to as well). The sword was originally passed down from one protector of that site to another, and reacted to being found by a character of that same alignment and heroic disposition. The fighter hasn't been targeted by a malevolent curse, but he's cursed all the same, and now the group must find some way to relieve him of the item before it's too late.

Perhaps the strongest advantage of this origin is the fact that it calls into question the motivation for dealing with the item in the first place. While the item and its curse must still be dealt with, it's not as simple as it would be with an outright evil item. In the case of the aforementioned fighter, after lifting the curse the character may very well find himself searching for a descendant of the original protectors so that the line does not die out.

At the same time, you must be cautious that the characters do not find some way to turn this kind of item into something manageable after all.

You might consider a sword that transforms a character into a living statue or powerful elemental to be a curse that would naturally remove them from play. What happens if the player tries to keep playing the character after the transformation or the group insists on keeping the altered character on as a henchman? Be cautious that the overwhelming power is just that. Let the players know early on that the item rapidly becomes too much for their characters to handle regardless of whatever contingency plans or number crunching of their own they try to come up with in order to keep their powerful advantage.

Twist of Fate: Not every cursed item owes its existence to dread magic or an earth-shaking battle. Some simply seem to arise on their own over time. A common knife may develop a taste for killing as it passes from owner to owner. A wizard's staff may be unwittingly whittled from the wood of an old hanging tree or a wedding ring acquires a curse when the wearer sheds the blood of the one who wore its mate. Many such items can be found near Sinkholes of Evil or other areas of strong ethereal or magical residue, leading some scholars of the arcane to theorize that the items somehow absorb the energies in a way that results in the curse they carry. However, these theories are plagued by equally common reports of "uncreated" cursed items arising from perfectly normal circumstances, leaving researchers confused and searching for a common cause. Perhaps it is no less than the Dark Powers themselves, keeping everyone on their guard.

The advantage of this origin is that it goes against traditional notions of cursed items as the cliché creations of ranting arch-wizards or fearsome lich-kings bent on global domination. These items can appear just about anywhere, requiring only the arcane and tragic twist of fate that brings them into being, and thus are perhaps one of the best examples of the insidious nature of the Dread Realms that one can find. What's more, these items can often slip beneath the characters' notice as first. Any group with half a brain carefully scrutinizes an ornate dagger taken from the hoard of the Ancient Skeleton King, but few pay that much attention to an ordinary-seeming dagger they find on the trail one day. However, you must also walk a fine line with ensuring that the item is not so good at escaping notice that the characters sell it, throw it away or otherwise divest themselves of it before its true nature is apparent. If this happens, a lot of the surprise is lost as you hastily explain how the item comes back into their possession, much to their amazement.

How Do the Characters Find It? (And Why Do They Keep It?)

Of course, even the most sinister artifact in the realm won't do much for your story if the players leave it behind in the dungeon, and once they know they have a cursed item on their hands, you had best have some preparations ready to deal fairly and consistently with their inevitable attempts to rid themselves of it. Otherwise, you risk putting the Necklace of Ultimate Corruption in their hands only to have them toss it in the sea and be done with it. Knowing how you intend to incorporate it into the story and why the players should keep it once you do is perhaps the most important thing to know aside from the design of the item itself. If this is lacking, the players quickly sense if you have weak reasons and feel they are being treated unfairly.

Once again, the key to bringing these items into the game and then making sure the players keep them is consistency. Players should never feel as though you have introduced a cursed item just because you felt like it or that the only reason their various clever ideas for getting rid of it aren't working is because you don't want them to yet. Even with cursed items acquired "accidentally," they should feel that you intended to bring them in, not just rolled on a table and came up with a cursed item to give them. Unless the artifact is supposed to be a total enigma, try to show them through logic or folklore why their attempts to destroy it or throw it away aren't working, rather than just provide them with flat denials. For instance, if they find out from a wizened old bard that the Accursed Blade of Insatiable Bloodletting cannot be destroyed or removed until it has tasted the blood of a creature not of this world, the players are likely to take their predicament much more in stride than if you simply state: "It doesn't work" every time they attempt to get rid of it.

Accident: Especially in such a wicked place as the Domains of Dread, it's possibly only a matter of time that sooner or later the players run across a cursed item as part of one treasure hoard or another. Of course, simply slipping it into the latest haul is only one way to have the players "accidentally" acquire it. Perhaps they buy the item from a too-eager merchant or sly Vistani trader, only to find out that they have received far more than they

initially bargained for. Maybe one of the group is exceptionally lucky at cards in the tavern one night and receives a special payment from a stranger for his good fortune. Only when its curse becomes apparent do the characters realize exactly what they have on their hands. By then, it's too late — only by receiving powerful magical intervention or fulfilling the requirements to lift the curse do they have any chance of ridding themselves of the item and its burden.

Naturally, these items tend to be indestructible, except against the one rare material or situation that is destined to destroy them, and they have an equally nasty way of returning to their hapless owners no matter how hard these beings try to get rid of them before the curse is lifted. The only caution for DMs regarding cursed items dropped "accidentally" into the campaign is that it is best for them not to be fatal for the owner. There are few things worse than feeling that a favorite character has been horribly disfigured, magically warped or irrevocably slain just because he happened to be the one to pick up that particular item from the treasure pile. Rather, such items are generally better suited for embarrassing curses such as berserking weapons, rings that induce uncontrollable kleptomania or addictive tomes of forbidden knowledge; none of these are in themselves fatal to the character, but they make life increasingly unpleasant until they are disposed of somehow.

Obligation: Rather than springing a cursed item on your players through some strange trick of circumstance or luck of the draw, why not turn the tables on them and confront them with an obviously cursed item that they must nonetheless take possession of in the name of the greater good? A certain ring comes to mind, just as an example, but there are other ways to handle cursed items as obligations. Maybe it's an inherited burden, the result of an old curse or an ancestor's fateful mistake that a character now must nobly (or not so nobly) bear. Perhaps it is no fault of her own, but she has accepted the responsibility for the dread item in order to spare others (her family, her village and so on) from the horror it represents. It does terrible things to the character, but she must keep it or face the knowledge that it could do far worse in the hands of another. Some such items can eventually be destroyed, though only at the cost of great risk and long years of adventure. Others, more terrible still, cannot be obliterated by any known means, and could haunt the owners for their entire lifetimes unless they have a chance to pass the grim burden on to others.

This type of item is excellent because you do not have to give it any particular "boomerang" powers as with many other cursed items, because perversely enough, the characters do their best to keep track of it or face the consequences. What's more, since it is probably built into the story at the beginning of the campaign that the characters take up this burden, you can feel free to make it do all kinds of horrible and terrifying things if not handled properly. This makes certain that the characters worry at the thought that it might be taken from them before such time as it is destroyed (if that is possible). As with accidentally acquired items, exactly how deadly and debilitating you want the item to be depends on how long you wish to keep it in the game. If it's something that cannot be destroyed, it is best to keep its powers and drawbacks fairly moderate for the owner, unless the player knows and agrees in advance for a rather dark fate for her character by having the item consume her in the end. On the other hand, if the item can be destroyed, then its evil should get steadily worse in proportion to how long it takes the characters to destroy it, especially as far as the owner is concerned.

Compulsion: Perhaps most horrifying of all are the cursed items that can draw others to them. These objects are typically crafted for just such purpose, to ensure that even if the original owner dies, the item's evil lives on, although some cursed items that arise from a simple twist of fate also exhibit this talent for bringing potential owners to them. They are thus very similar to parasitic organisms, biding their time even as they subtly call to those they can feed on, waiting until a proper host comes within range to take possession of them. Some use dreams or false memories to entice their targets, while others employ illusions of various kinds or even appear to be magic items of completely different (and beneficial) origin. Others are more direct, starting out by nudging the weak-willed into seeking them out and then gradually increasing the pressure until the drive to own and use the cursed item is overwhelming.

Regardless of the means (though they should be carefully detailed for story purposes), the result is the same: the item is capable of summoning others to it, whether they are aware of the call or not. Most of these items call to those of similar class to the one who originally owned or created them,

although ones that prey upon a particular race, alignment or even natives of a specific domain are not unheard of. What's more, once they have found a suitable victim, they are perhaps the most persistent of all cursed items to dislodge, as the very nature of their seductive powers makes the owner likely to defend his prize from those who would seek to destroy it. Not long after receiving the object, the owner finds himself locked in a battle of wills

Cursed items with this capability are interesting in that they serve a very different campaign purpose from their more straightforward brethren. These items are just as interesting when dealing with characters of neutral or evil alignment as they are with characters of good disposition, since these characters are equally likely to try to resist the crushing mental onslaught of such an object as those of upright ethical standing. After all, just because a character may have a certain "moral flexibility" about some things doesn't mean she aspires to carve out a brutal empire of oppression and tyranny. Thus, the fight against the item's call becomes just as dramatic for that character as it would be for a paladin or other good-aligned character.

How Powerful Is It?

Last but not least, before you go about assigning the item's specific powers, think about the overall level of power you want it to have. Not only does this help you determine how easy the item should be for them to dispose of or destroy, but it is also an excellent guide for how immediately the players have to deal with the presence of the item in the game. In general, the more powerfully and directly it affects them, the faster the PCs change their plans to deal with it.

Minor: This is generally the smallest category of cursed items in number, second only to artifacts. When most beings go to the effort to create a malevolent item of lasting power, they aren't invoking minor forces to do so, nor are minor magic items of good nature likely to go so bad as to become

cursed items. Rather, cursed objects at this stage are generally early in their "career," perhaps just created or only recently fallen from grace, and their powers reflect this. Their drawbacks are equal to or slightly less powerful than the benefits they offer, and if the players are even aware that something is wrong with the item, they are likely to either accept it as a reasonable cost to the power it provides or perhaps a minor design flaw.

Minor items can often be cast aside with relative ease if they prove problematic, although good characters should be reminded that it is morally remiss of them to simply leave such an item lying on the side of the road for someone else to find. The best way to approach adding such items into a greater part of the campaign is to view them rather like an addictive substance, downplaying its negative aspects in light of the power it provides until the players have come to rely on its abilities. By this time the item has gained power of its own, and it gradually starts increasing the cost until it graduates to an item of the next category and its drawbacks are suddenly greater than the payoff.

Moderate: Cursed objects of this level begin demanding more immediate attention; their positive powers are either barely equal to their drawbacks, if not less, and these negative aspects have moved from embarrassing to outright dangerous. The means of their disposal have likewise moved from easy to difficult, though not as esoteric as the strong- or artifact-level items. While not anywhere near the raw power of the objects in the next category, these items make up for it with their relative subtlety. While it won't take PCs long to realize that these items are bad news, chances are that unless the items reveal their true nature during a downtime between adventures, the characters accept the drawbacks as the lesser of the two evils they are facing. Like their minor counterparts, these items can thus mature into stronger cursed items over time, particularly if the characters try to use other means to offset the penalties from these items rather than investigating how to get rid of them.

Strong: Generally the "default" level of most cursed items, only those ignorant of the item's true nature mistake these items for anything but the malevolent creations they are, and certainly no one will once they are active. While they might have some small usefulness, their drawbacks far outweigh their benefits, no matter what steps the character might take. They are incredibly difficult to destroy, and almost always attach themselves to their target until their powers have run their course or some powerful magic is used to remove them. Many of the ones that aren't as immediately deadly instead slowly change the alignment of their owner until it matches that of themselves, leading them to greater heights of malfeasance until they are either put down or manage to free themselves from its influence. About the only thing that separates these items from artifacts is that they can still be conventionally created (though usually only by the most powerful magic) and that the means of their destruction is not quite so singular, though still very difficult to achieve.

Artifact: Although these items make up the smallest number of cursed items (or any other kind of item, for that matter), the impact these fearsome creations have on anyone who so much as comes near them is nothing less than life changing — and never for the better. Utterly indestructible except for one esoteric weakness that is near-impossible to locate, these are frequently possessed of vast, malevolent intelligence and often destined to return to their accursed owners until one or the other is consumed. Such items have no limits except your imagination and what you are willing to incorporate into your game.

These are the cursed items that legends and nightmares are made of, whose very presence should send shockwaves through even the mightiest kingdoms and give pause to even the most powerful characters. Never, ever introduce such an item into your game lightly, because by doing so you're essentially putting your characters on a collision course with the item, where only one will walk away. Unlike other cursed items or regular campaign scenarios, the odds are that without some incredible adventures and powerful roleplaying, it won't be the characters. These items do not request as much as demand the characters' immediate attention, not to mention the full attention of anyone else who realizes what the adventurers have stumbled across. Such items can form the crux of several high-powered adventures if not an entire campaign as the characters struggle against the titanic power they have confronted.

New Magic Item Descriptors

The following are several new properties that can be used when creating magic items. While not innately indicative of a cursed item, these descriptors can certainly be the starting point for all manner of unique items.

Wailing: Only bladed weapons may have this descriptor, and they are most commonly longswords, although axes or even scythes are not unheard of. Always pale and slightly cool to the touch, the true properties of the wailing weapon become apparent once it is wielded in combat. The blade begins emitting an eerie, ululating wail, which rises in volume and intensity for each opponent the wielder kills, as though the voices of the fallen were added to its unearthly keening. The wielder receives a fear bonus equal to the weapon's magical bonus on any Intimidate and Gather Information checks made against anyone who witnesses the use of the weapon; in addition, all opponents in melee combat suffer a morale penalty equal to the weapon's magical bonus on their attack rolls. Creatures normally immune to morale considerations such as oozes or mindless undead do not suffer this penalty. More terribly, for each opponent slain, the wielder may add either an additional +1 bonus to his ability checks or an additional –1 penalty to their foe's melee attack rolls. Bonuses to ability checks last until the next time the wielder enters combat with that opponent or until the next new moon. Penalties to opponents' attack rolls begin to fade at a rate of one per round if the wielder fails to slay any opponents for three rounds, until they return to the item's starting level.

Moderate necromancy; CL 9th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *fear*; Price +2 bonus.

Hot-Blooded: These weapons can be of any style, but always appear slightly ruddy in coloration and warm to the touch; some users swear they feel a pulse in the weapon when combat is joined. They do not display any special properties, however, until they are drawn to avenge an insult or when the wielder is in a state of extreme anger. When either condition occurs, the wielder gains the weapon's magical bonus as a rage bonus to his Strength and Constitution scores (so a +3 weapon adds +3 to Strength and to Constitution). They also deal an additional die of damage to anyone who has directly injured or gravely insulted the wielder in the current scene. However, the wielder also suffers a like penalty equal to the weapon's magical bonus to his Wisdom and Charisma scores while enraged, as anger makes it difficult for the character to see beyond the short term and even more unpleasant to be around while it lasts. These benefits and drawbacks stack with those of a barbarian's rage special ability. Once the wielder enters a wrathful state, he must make a Will save (DC 20 – 1 for each opponent slain) to leave it before such time as he is unable to fight or all his enemies have been slain. There is no risk of accidentally attacking allies while in this state as with a barbarian's rage ability.

Moderate transmutation; CL 10th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *bull's strength*; Price +3 bonus.

Regenerative: Armor with this property at first seems nothing more than a "mere" suit of magical armor, until it suffers damage in combat. It then magically begins repairing itself, even to the extent of healing the wearer in its efforts to knit itself back together. The armor receives a +10 durability bonus on all saving throws to resist damage or destruction of any kind, and those who attempt Heal or Herbalism checks on the wearer receive a bonus on their check equal to the armor's magical bonus. In addition, once per day per magical bonus the wearer may take a standard action to receive a *cure light wounds* spell from the armor, as if cast by an 6th-level cleric. Thus, a suit of *regenerative leather armor* +2 can cast two *cure light wounds* per day, each as if by a 6th-level cleric. Lastly, as long as even one scrap of this armor remains intact, it eventually reconstructs itself, though such near-total destruction typically requires one week for each magical bonus the armor had to begin with. Armor forced to reknit itself in this fashion permanently loses one point of its magical bonus; should this reduce it to zero, it reverts to an ordinary suit of nonmagical armor upon restoring itself. Only hide, leather, studded leather and other forms of armor composed primarily of organic material can have this property.

Moderate conjuration; CL 11th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *heal, mending*; Price +3 bonus.

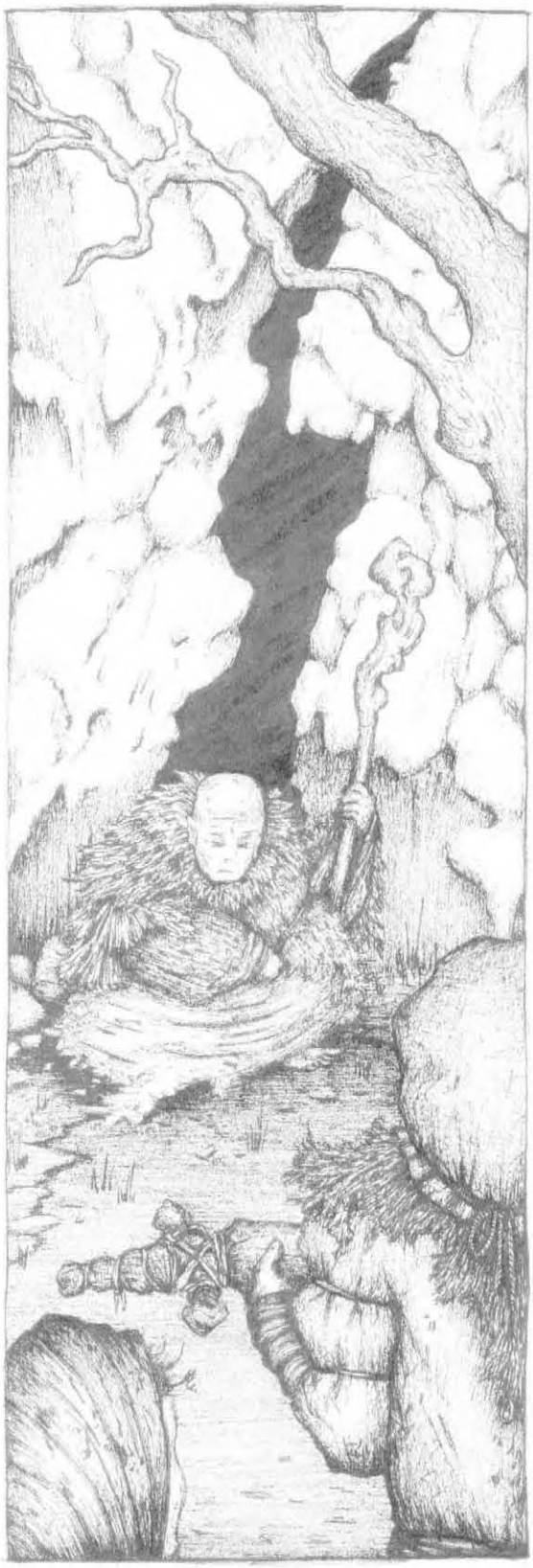
Troubleshooting Cursed Items In Play

Now that you have finally introduced the wicked little gem you have worked so hard on creating, having spent time on its history, its powers and (most importantly) what it's doing in the hands of your adventuring party, there are still a few common concerns to bear in mind when it comes to running cursed items. This section elaborates on some of these topics and explains some easy ways to keep these setbacks from occurring in your game or how to handle "damage control" once these problems have already arisen in your campaign.

The End Is Near!

It's all too easy to lose sight of the fact that cursed items are supposed to be there to offer a challenge to the heroes and enhance the adventure, and instead try to design ones that are "PC-proof" and destined to cut a wide, bloody swath through the party before they are destroyed. Even if you make an effort to balance the corrupting power of the item with the ways the players can deal with it, never underestimate how serious a cursed item, even a minor one, can still appear to the players. Remember, they don't know all that you do about where it came from or even mostly what it can and cannot do to them. All they generally know is that the item is seriously bad news, that it cannot be easily destroyed or disposed of and that it has started doing terrible things to one or more characters in the party. That kind of situation can discourage the party if you're not careful to balance setbacks with moments of hope. While it is a DM's natural instinct to pile on the nasty effects and plot reversals when unleashing a cursed item on the group, remember that the characters still have to feel they have some chance to overcome this obstacle. Otherwise, they become spectators to their own demise, and that's a situation bound to lead to some serious dissatisfaction. After all, you wouldn't enjoy it if your favorite character got handed a cursed artifact that started warping her horribly, then had every effort to try to remove it foiled without any means of salvation in sight.

Therefore, once you have incorporated a cursed item into the campaign and begun revealing its powers to the PCs, don't surrender to the temptation to deny all their attempts to find its weakness. Rather, after an early nasty shock or two, let them



feel that it is possible to uncover what they need to know, but only after some hard work, diligent investigation and old-fashioned adventuring. A way to remove the *ring of cursed misfortune*? Well, it's said that deep in the heart of Sithicus, there's a well with water so pure it melts the ring from your finger without harm, but to get there the party has to pass through treacherous forests and battle any number of hideous foes. Sure there's a wise old sage who knows all about how to lift the curse on the Broken Blade, but he just happens to live in the heart of the Bluetspur mountains. In return for his help with their dilemma, he would like their help with this little problem he has with the local illithids. You get the idea. The key is to balance the rising desperation of the party to remove the item with the level of challenge this requires, always keeping the party afraid of what happens if they fail but never making them feel like it's utterly hopeless.

Don't Worry, I have Plenty of Con Points Left

At the same time, there are some cursed items you introduce into a campaign, confident that the characters will fall all over themselves in their haste to destroy them, only to find that the items are largely ignored or circumvented. Maybe the players find a way you hadn't figured on to legitimately delay the object's worst effects, or perhaps, they simply figure they can live with its unfortunate properties — the latter is especially true if the item happens to offer some powerful benefits as well as its drawbacks. ("So what if it makes us all look like walking corpses and compels woodland creatures to attack us on sight? I take pasty skin and squirrel bites for a ring that casts *energy drain* 6/day as an 18th-level wizard!") Suddenly, the players are cavorting around the countryside with their new possession, waiting for their next regular adventure, while you're stuck with a handful of item-related encounters that they don't have much interest in.

Regardless of the reason, before you add some devastating new powers to the item to compel their interest in destroying it, first review what you have done to try to alert them of the real dangers inherent in their new possession. Perhaps some aspects of the item's curse haven't been brought to their attention strongly enough, or maybe you made the in-game drawbacks too mild compared to the benefits (or just too weak in general). Maybe you have tacitly condoned their use of the item by not having NPCs react to it as negatively as they should or by downplaying the object's negative effects early on. Sometimes it's possible that you have overlooked a few of these basic things, and thus you can set the PCs back on track with a minimum of fuss just by incorporating those missing elements.

Even if you have done your best to alert them to the malevolence of the curse and they're still ignoring it, there are other ways to steer them in the direction of destroying it than just upping its power level. Threaten characters of good alignment with alignment shifts or even powers checks for letting an object of such great evil exist without doing what they can to destroy it (or at least remove it to where it cannot hurt others).

If the players belong to a church, society or other formal organization, have a higher-ranking member order them to get rid of it before they taint the group's reputation as a whole. You can even employ a wandering member of the Order of the Guardian (see **Van Richten's Arsenal**), who informs the group of the evil the item represents and possibly offers to help them get rid of it as well. If the group is of a less than upstanding alignment composition or simply refuses to see reason another way, start having evil creatures and NPCs drawn to the power of the cursed item. Each such person tries to claim it until the players understand that they are forced to deal with such challengers indefinitely as long as they keep the item.

Try to save adding new corrupting powers onto the item for an absolute last resort; most of the time the players see that you're only adding these really negative effects to force them to give up the item, and they tend to resent being so forcefully directed. Most of the time, the other ways work just fine to nudge the characters back to treating the cursed item as an evil thing in need of destruction as opposed to just a regular magic item with a nasty price tag.

Oh No, Not Another Cursed Something-or-Other

Last, but certainly not least, make sure that cursed items of all kinds are not overused. While they have the potential to create a great deal of drama and excitement in your campaign, they also have the ability to steal a lot of the stage from the heroes as well. This is especially true with newer players or lower-level characters who have no

choice but to get rid of it for survival's sake. Remember, even in the accursed lands of Ravenloft, true cursed items are still relatively rare, and characters should react to them accordingly. Unless you have a party with one or two Guardian Seekers in it, after all, chances are that no group is going to go searching out these malevolent creations, so their presence will be limited at best. As noted before, even what you might consider a minor cursed item can very easily change the direction of your campaign. Throwing two or three more such items into the game can make it start to seem like a reverse treasure hunt as the players scramble to rid themselves of their latest malevolent acquisition. Each cursed item has its own tragic and twisted history of how it came to be and why it offers the tainted power that it does — including a laundry list of them cheapens their effect immensely.

Although it should mostly go without saying, never inflict an additional cursed item on the players just because they figured out how to get rid of the first one you gave them more quickly or easily than you desired. If the PCs manage to find some loophole or shortcut that you didn't foresee but is perfectly plausible, take the defeat gracefully and move on. If there is some equally legitimate way to keep the item in play even after the shortcut, then feel free to do so, otherwise let it go. Giving the players another cursed item just because they circumvented one of your planned adventures punishes them for being creative. This not only sets a bad precedent but also makes them feel as though they are at your mercy until you feel they have suffered enough to get rid of this new cursed item.

Sample Cursed Items

Now that you have seen what goes into the creation of a proper cursed item, here are sample items suitable to be included in just about any campaign. While methods of removal or destruction have been included for several of these items, these are just examples of the kinds of things that might be necessary to rid oneself of a cursed item. If you have ideas that work better for your campaign, use them. Note that these items are more complicated and dramatic than what is generally required to rid the world of a cursed item. Such is the nature of these objects in Ravenloft, where the Dark Powers enjoy forcing heroes to go to great lengths and suffer great hardships in order to succeed in banishing these malevolent items.

Minor Cursed Items

+1 Dagger, Shrieking: Although it registers to detection magic as nothing more than a simple *+1 dagger*, this irritating item has a habit of making it virtually impossible for its wielder to sneak up on others. Whenever the wielder attempts to deliver a sneak attack or otherwise surprise a foe in combat, the dagger immediately begins vibrating rapidly and emits a loud, piercing wail. This alerts the target to the attacker's presence and ruins the surprise, as well as putting all attacks with it that round at a –2 penalty. This is the case even if the attacker isn't wielding the dagger at the time, and no known means (including a *silence* spell) is sufficient to muffle the noise or still the vibrations.

A *shrieking dagger* may be cast aside only by using it to remove one's own ear while under the effects of a *silence* spell or after successfully surprising and defeating a foe that is somehow not alerted by its sounds or vibrations. It may only be destroyed by exposure to a natural banshee's wail after being targeted by a *dispel magic* spell, which causes it to shatter into pieces.

Moderate evocation; CL 10th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *alarm*, *shout*; Price 7,500 gp; CuL 2.

Beacon of Ill Omen: This item at first appears to be little more than a sturdy black iron lantern with a *continual flame* spell cast on a small crystal inside, thus making a handy light source for any adventuring group. The light inside dims or focuses on command, making it a versatile tool indeed. However, its true nature becomes apparent with usage. While the *beacon* emits regular light to most eyes, to evil creatures of one specific type (undead, aberrations, beasts, and so on) its light appears far brighter. It is visible up to 5 miles away in the right circumstances, thus making it very easy for them to track a group bearing such an item.

It should also be noted that this light gives such creatures no penalty — it simply makes it easy to track the *beacon* and does not interfere with other activities. What's more, this unnatural light remains visible to them even when the lantern is apparently dimmed on command. Unintelligent evil creatures of this type are naturally drawn to the lantern and attempt to attack those bearing it whenever possible. Intelligent evil creatures of this type may choose when and how to strike, but are still naturally inclined to attack those bearing this beacon in an effort to recover it.

To what end such creatures seek to recover these items is a mystery. It is known that only once the *beacon* is melted down on the funeral pyre of one of the chosen creature type — or some important link to one, in the case of an incorporeal creature — and its crystal smashed with one of the creature's bones, will its light finally be extinguished. Certain brave (or foolhardy) adventurers have been known to seek out these lanterns in an effort to help them hunt the creatures they attract, but such efforts always seem to backfire somehow, with nothing but bare bones left behind and the *beacon* gone again.

Moderate evocation; CL 6th; Craft Wondrous Item, *continual flame*; Price 2,500 gp; Weight 3 lb.; CuL 3.

Book of Idle Thought: Bane of studious and time-conscious wizards everywhere, at first this leather-bound tome seems to be nothing other than a regular if somewhat ornate wizard's spellbook — if tested, it radiates faint alteration magic. It functions as a normal spellbook in all respects, except that wizards gradually begin to notice that it takes them longer and longer to prepare their spells each time they do so. For each spell level inscribed in the spellbook, increase the time required for the wizard to prepare her spells by double that number of minutes. Thus, if a wizard inscribes 9 1st-level spells, 6 2nd-level spells, 4-3rd level and 2 4th-level spells in the book, the time it takes to prepare them is increased by 82 minutes. In addition, each new spell inscribed later on increases the amount of time by a like amount. This delay is not noticeable to the wizard herself, though others may alert her to her habits, especially if they become truly severe.

The *book of idle thought* cannot be destroyed unless the wizard throws it onto a fire and manages to copy all the spells she knows into another spellbook before the book has finished burning — no mean feat, especially for higher-level wizards! Otherwise, the book simply reforms, as dangerous as ever. Once disposed of, the wizard may use other spellbooks normally; however, the delay in her studies remains in effect until removed by *remove curse* or similar magic.

Moderate transmutation; CL 10th; Craft Wondrous Item, *detect thoughts, slow*; Price 16,000 gp; Weight 1 lb.; CuL 2.

Revolting Unguent: This small clay jar contains a sticky, foul-smelling green substance that when rubbed into a wound helps staunch the bleeding and promote recovery. Subjects treated with this unguent immediately recover 1d4+1 hp. This unguent may be used up to 3 times per day, after which time it is inactive until it magically replenishes itself the following nightfall. Each time this cream is used, however, the recipient has a cumulative 10% chance of permanently acquiring +1 to their Outcast Rating as the unguent gives their skin an unhealthy greenish tinge, an odor of faintly decaying vegetable matter and absolutely loathsome breath. After the OR has increased, the percentage reverts to 0% and begins rebuilding again with each use. A Wisdom check (DC 18) may be made to attempt to notice this transformation before it becomes permanent, provided the character has sufficient reason or presence of mind to make such an inspection. Once the hero's OR has been increased, a *heal* spell temporarily returns the OR to normal for a day's time. Only taking a ritual bath in the purest natural springs of the domain the unguent originated from and spending seven days' time fasting and in continuous prayer and meditation permanently cures the subject.

There is no known way to destroy a jar of this disgusting stuff short of a *wish* or a *miracle* spell. Jars have been blasted to dust and their contents poured into the ocean from a high cliff, and still managed to slither themselves back together on a store shelf in some distant town.

Moderate transmutation; CL 8th; Brew Potion, Craft Wondrous Item, *contagion*; Price 3,500 gp; CuL 2.

Moderate Cursed Items

+2 Cutlass, Morbid Jester: This appears to be little other than a *+2 cutlass*, except for an elaborate, grinning silver skull worked into the guard, which seems to leer out at all those facing the wielder. Its curse remains dormant until the wielder is struck by an attack that reduces him to one-quarter or less of his regular hit points. At that time, the wielder must make a Will save to resist *Tasha's hideous laughter* as if cast by a 8th-level wizard. What's more, any time one of the wielder's friends or allies is struck down (reduced to 0 hit points or below), that being must make an identical save or suffer the same effect.

It is said that this blade can only be disposed of if the character receives the blessing of an entire crew of a ghost ship to toss it over the side. Perversely, the wielder may also be rid of it if he uses it to deliver a coup de grace to a trusted friend or ally

(or even himself!). Likewise, destroying it is thought to require immersing it in the brine found in the belly of a sea spawn master that is brought to boiling with the tears of a green hag.

Moderate enchantment; CL 7th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *Tasha's hideous laughter*; Price 7,500 gp; Weight 4 lb.; CuL 4.

+3 Sword, Venomous Loyalty: To all outward inspection, this blade is nothing more than an ordinary *+3 longsword*, except for the twin fanged serpents that coil together to form its decidedly sinister-looking hilt. However, it naturally adopts whoever slew its last owner as its new master (or failing that, the first hands to wield it if it has been dormant for more than a year). Once it has done so, it seeks jealously to guard him from those who would steal the blade — even if its new owner cannot wield the blade with any skill himself!

Should anyone else wield the sword in combat for more than a single round, attempt to clean or repair it or even just hold it for over a minute, the serpents come alive. They bite at the target, scoring an automatic hit each round until the blade is returned to its owner. They even uncoil from the weapon and chase down offenders until they are "slain" or until the blade's owner picks up the blade and wills them to return. If the victim holding the blade is aware of the curse, he may make a Reflex save (DC 20) to cast the weapon aside before receiving damage.

Treat these serpents as vipers (see the MM) for all normal purposes, except that all saves against their venom receive a –4 penalty and slaying them merely causes them to materialize back on the sword in their inanimate state for 1d6 hours. Unscrupulous characters might use the blade's curse as a means of poisoning their foes, but such a dastardly act is deserving of a powers check.

Once the sword has bonded to an individual, the only way to sever the link is with the character's death — or, luckily, by imbibing a special mixture. The draught must be a mixture of snake venom and holy water prepared by a skilled apothecary (minimum of 10 ranks in Craft [alchemy] or Herbalism).

To destroy the sword, the owner must bathe in a basin full of viper venom while the sword is melted down over a ritually consecrated flame. The vipers attempt to slay those involved in this destruction all the while, of course.

Strong enchantment; CL 14th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *Tasha's hideous laughter*; Price 12,500 gp; Weight 4 lb.; CuL 4.

Cloak of Ghastly Imprisonment: This finely spun gray woolen cloak seems to be a regular *cloak of etherealness*, and indeed it has the abilities of such an item. However, with each trip the character makes, there is a 3% cumulative chance that he — and anyone traveling with him via the cloak — become trapped on the Ethereal Plane when the cloak suddenly ceases to function.

What's more, characters trapped on the Ethereal Plane are faced with a terrifying transformation the longer they stay there. Each day they must make a Will save (DC 10 + 1 per day trapped on the plane) to avoid fading away and becoming a malevolent ghost of a rank appropriate to their Charisma rating. This transformation continues even if the character divests himself of the cloak while on the Ethereal Plane, as it is part of the item's curse. Once a character has transformed, nothing short of a *wish* or a *miracle* spell, followed by a *resurrection* spell, has any hope of bringing him back to life.

Other spells or items may be employed to retrieve characters trapped on the Ethereal Plane before it is too late. Should the cloak still be worn during this time, all such spells or items have a failure chance equal to the percentage the character had when initially imprisoned, as the cloak seeks to keep its captive.

A character may rid himself of this cloak without penalty at any time before its curse takes effect. Once its curse has activated and stranded him on the Ethereal Plane, it may also be disposed of (though not destroyed) normally. In this case, it gradually crosses back into the physical realm in search of another victim. This item can only be destroyed on nights of the new moon, and it must be on the Material Plane — those seeking its destruction must somehow convince or compel an animator spirit to enter into it, then soak it completely in holy water and burn it in a consecrated flame.

Strong transmutation; CL 15th; Craft Wondrous Item, *ethereal jaunt*; Price 58,000 gp; Weight 2 lb.; CuL 3.

Ring of the Predator: When activated, this tiger's eye ring alters the wearer's scent to that of a dangerous predatory creature, causing most non-aggressive animal species to flee automatically. Predatory beasts whose HD is equal to or less than the character's level must make a Will save (DC 10 + character level) or be unable to approach the wearer with hostile intentions. This ring has no effect on intelligent species, though those with an especially keen sense of smell may note a disturbing tinge to the character's scent.

Should the predatory beast make the save indicated above, or if a predatory beast has more HD than the wearer's level or if it witnesses the wearer bleed or observes him flee a combat in which both are involved, the ring's scent reverses to that of an extremely attractive prey creature. In this case, the beast focuses its most powerful attacks on that character and attempts to devour him. Such creatures are not heedless of attacks from other sources; they are simply focused on their chosen target.

The restriction regarding intelligent species has one exception: lycanthropes. They must battle transformation as though confronted by a meal of fresh blood while in the presence of someone wearing the *ring of the predator*.

The wearer is at a –5 penalty on all skill checks used to try to escape his pursuers, as the ring instills a prey creature's sense of panic that interferes with his efforts to escape.

Once the ring's negative aspects are triggered, it may only be removed by allowing an angry attacking creature to bite the affected finger off (requiring a *regeneration* spell to regrow the finger). A second method of removal involves receiving a *remove curse* spell while soaking the afflicted hand in a mixture of blood from one predator species dangerous to the character and one prey creature that the character hunted and killed himself. The ring may only be destroyed by single-handedly slaying a dire animal with one's bare hands (no spells or other magic items allowed) and forcing the ring down the beast's gullet before it is dead. The death of the animal is the shock that finally destroys the ring's magic and causes it to crumble harmlessly to pieces.

Moderate necromancy; CL 9th; Craft Wondrous Item, *scare*; Price 10,000 gp; CuL 2.

Strong Cursed Items

Amulet of Wicked Darkness: At first, this ornate silver necklace and obsidian setting appears as little more than an expensive piece of jewelry; when tested, it reveals a strong aura of alteration and evocation magic. The wearer soon finds that the amulet grants darkvision to 120' (this distance is added to his regular range if he already possessed darkvision). What's more, he can even see nor-

mally in areas of magical darkness, with no saving throw or other check required.

However, the amulet exacts a heavy price for this benefit. First, no magical light sources function within 60' of the wearer, and are immediately extinguished upon entering that radius. Permanent effects such as those generated by *continual flame* are suppressed, and resume function once outside the amulet's radius. Second, those attempting to cast light-based spells — *daylight*, *sunbeam*, and the like — while within this radius instead find themselves generating *deeper darkness* (for which they enjoy no immunity), at the same character level. Third, the wearer develops a severe allergy to sunlight for a number of hours equal to each hour he employs its darkvision or each spell converted to *deeper darkness* in its presence. While suffering this allergy, exposure to sun's light deals 2d4 points of temporary Strength damage, which cannot be healed while the wearer remains exposed to daylight. Should this reduce the wearer to 0 Strength, or should the wearer die while wearing the amulet, he immediately rises as a shadow and defends the amulet violently against any who come near his remains. Lastly, this amulet naturally attracts shadows and other creatures of darkness. Each night its powers are used, there is a 2% cumulative chance that the wearer attracts the attention of 1d4 shadows, who attempt to drain the wearer and force him to join them. This percentage chance resets after each encounter is resolved.

The character may remove this necklace at any time, but find it returns to him upon the following nightfall — even reappearing around his neck! Final removal or destruction of this hateful item is possible only by walking to the edge of the Shadow Rift and hurling the necklace in, along with the eyes of one creature born to darkness or the earthly remains of a previous owner that has now become a shadow. Other possibilities are said to exist if one is willing to bargain with the Arak. If such deals even exist, the details of them are unknown at present.

Strong evocation; CL 14th; Craft Wondrous Item, *deeper darkness*; Price 25,000 gp; CuL 2.

Gauntlets of Ghoulish Appetite: These heavy leather gloves grant the wearer the same benefits as *gauntlets of ogre power*, as well as the ability to produce long curving nails on command. The nails are considered natural weapons inflicting 2d4 points of slashing damage, and the wearer is considered to have proficiency with them.

However, the first time the wearer slays an opponent while wearing the gauntlets, they fuse to his skin and are impossible to remove. Each time thereafter that the wielder slays a foe that inflicted damage to the gauntlets' wearer, the wearer must make a Will save (DC 15) to avoid dropping what he has in his hands, deploying the claws and spending the next round ripping at his downed enemy in a gruesome, atavistic display. The hands seemingly act on their own in this instance, tearing apart the enemy and attempting to force the wearer to eat the chunks of raw meat they tear from the body. Whether or not a character resists, a Horror save (DC 20) is required due to the intense trauma of the experience. (Prolonged exposure to this effect calls for Madness saves as well.)

In addition to enemies that have harmed the wearer, this effect may also be generated when fighting particularly hated foes (such as a ranger's favored enemy or an avenger's nemesis) or those who have otherwise taunted, humiliated or punished the character in the past, at the DM's discretion. Powers checks may be involved for those characters who remain afflicted by these gauntlets for any length of time, especially if they give up fighting these urges or actually come to enjoy their properties.

Removal of these gauntlets requires that a character first succeed at no less than five straight Will saves to resist the urge to cannibalize a foe. At that point, a *remove curse* spell must be cast, accompanied by anointing the gauntlets with a small quantity of the character's own blood mingled with the blood of at least five friends or relatives present at the ceremony. The gauntlets may only be destroyed by removing them through the above means, and then casting *dispel magic* on the gauntlets while boiling them in the offered blood mixed with holy water and sacred herbs.

Moderate transmutation; CL 10th; Craft Wondrous Item, *bull's strength*, *ghoul touch*; Price 18,000 gp; Weight 1 lb.; CuL 4.

Helm of Hateful Whispers: This finely wrought steel helm at first appears to act as a *helm of light fortification*. It behaves as such for no less than three cycles of the moon, the better to lull its target into a feeling of security.

After this time it begins whispering paranoid and hateful ideas into the wearer's ears. This slowly but inexorably turns him against his friends and allies with suggestions that they are bent on stealing his most prized possessions and ultimately doing

away with him. Each week that a character wears the helm, he must make a Madness save (DC 15) at –4 to avoid suffering from the paranoia effect; each save failed adds an additional –2 penalty on subsequent saves. Once the wearer has failed three straight saves, he is considered permanently insane and should be removed from the player's control until the helmet is disposed of and the character manages to recover his sanity. This is most likely to occur only after a long period of rest, healing (magical and otherwise) and a great deal of soul-searching.

Removing the helmet once it has started working does not slow the curse — indeed, the wearer becomes increasingly dependent on the helmet, seeing it as the voice of truth and all implications otherwise as more hateful lies. Actually severing the link between the helm and its victim requires that the target remove the helm physically and receive a *remove curse* spell once per day for an entire week. During that time the wearer must make a Will save (DC 15) each day to avoid succumbing to the temptation to use the helmet again. Removing the helmet from the owner's presence doesn't matter; if the desire to avoid its effects falters, it appears by the owner's side.

Permanently destroying the helmet requires that it be boiled in a viscous and foul-smelling stew of illithid brain matter and a number of cleansing oils for no less than 6 hours. It must also have *feeblemind*, *insanity* and *remove curse* cast upon it during this time to ensure that the malevolent intelligence residing inside the helm is banished for good.

Strong abjuration; CL 15th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *detect thoughts*, *insanity*; Price 1,000 gp; Weight 2 lb.; CuL 4.

+3 Platemail, Victory's Bane: This elaborate suit of platemail features a fearsome, howling face carved into the breastplate, but is otherwise a normal suit of magical armor. Its true properties become apparent during any pitched battle the wearer is involved in. At a dramatically appropriate moment — typically when the character's forces are on the brink of triumph or utter annihilation — the face on the breastplate gives an unearthly wail. This causes *fear* in all the wearer's allies and companions in a 30' radius as though cast by a 16th-level wizard. Enemies are unaffected, as is the wearer himself.

While it is entirely up to the DM to determine when the armor chooses to activate, it rarely does

so during anything less than a difficult or climactic battle. It seems as though it is aware of the need to reserve its powers for a moment that truly devastates its wearer.

Disposing of this armor seems easy enough, at first — the character may remove it and cast it away at any time after it has been activated, assuming he survives the experience. However, he finds that the face reappears on whatever armor he wears during the next pitched battle. This continues any time he wears armor in battle.

To be rid of the curse, the character must track down the original armor that first bestowed it (if he doesn't still have it), and take it to a master armorer. That individual must have at least 12 ranks in Craft (blacksmithing) and must melt the armor down and re-forge it on magically *hallowed* ground under the light of the full moon. The re-forged armor must be anointed with holy oils, *remove curse* and *remove fear* spells must be cast upon it and the surface on which the face previously appeared coated with a special alchemical mixture (cost 400 gp). It must be completely remade and treated in the span of that night, or the face appears on the armor again and the attempt is wasted. Should this process be successful, the armor's cursed properties vanish forever.

Strong transmutation; CL 11th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *expeditious retreat*, *fear*; Price 12,000 gp; Weight 50 lb.; CuL 4.

Cursed Artifacts

The Apparatus: Little is known about the legendary alchemist who created the *Apparatus*. Many Mordentish folktales confuse him with Count Strahd von Zarovich, who is also said to have visited the region at the time. The alchemist came to Mordentshire when it was still part of the Material Plane. Troubled by inner darkness, the alchemist sought to cleanse his soul of corruption. His experiments resulted in the *Apparatus*. By some accounts, the Mists snatched up Mordent at the very instant the alchemist activated his grand creation. The original *Apparatus* was destroyed, but the alchemist's notes survived and have surfaced several times since.

This towering machine is over 30 feet tall and is 20 feet wide at its base. A glass globe with a 15-foot diameter is supported 15 feet above the floor by a massive tripod of wood and steel. The globe encases a large, spinning ball of sulfur. A network of cold-forged steel rings tops the sphere. Two lesser glass globes, each with a 6-foot diameter, are suspended below. A narrow neck connects the lesser globes, like an hourglass on its side. A 3-foot trapdoor in the bottom of each lesser globe allows entry. A hollow steel arch links each lesser globe to the mother sphere above. A ring of small glass spheres, each ranging from 1 to 3 feet in diameter, surrounds the base of the tripod. A convoluted network of metal and glass rods, wires, tubes and plates joins the small spheres to the two lesser globes.

To use any of the *Apparatus*' powers, it must first be fully charged by receiving at least a dozen lightning strikes within a span of three hours. This must be natural, nonmagical lightning, so the *Apparatus* is usually connected to numerous lightning rods. This electrical energy is then converted into arcane power.

The *Apparatus* has several powers. The most basic of these is *transpossession*. A creature must be placed in each of the lesser globes. On the 12th lightning strike, the spirits of these subjects are exchanged (no saving throw). This functions like *magic jar* for the effects of switching psyches. Both subjects fall unconscious (as though affected by a *sleep* spell) for 1d3x10 minutes.

A second ability ascribed to the *Apparatus* also requires the use of a *Rod of Rastinon*, a minor artifact created by the alchemist as a form of key for his machine. If a *Rod of Rastinon* is inserted in the *Apparatus*, then on the 12th strike of lightning a single subject in one of the lesser globes is split into two separate creatures (no saving throw), one evil, the other good. The creatures have identical game statistics and are nearly identical physically, though their appearance may subtly reflect their inner nature. Both creatures are always true to their moral alignment. If the original subject was already good, then its "light side" is considered Innocent. If the original subject was already evil, then its "dark side" is immediately affected as though it had failed a powers check. The evil creature typically wants to destroy its better half to ensure its own survival.

If two subjects are placed in the lesser spheres when the crystalline *Rod of Rastinon* is used, then the *Apparatus* merges their psyches in a single body. If the *Apparatus* had previously split the subjects, then the original creature is restored. If two individuals are merged, then both minds occupy the body of the subject with the more forceful personality (determined by an opposed Will save). The

body of the weaker subject is reduced to a lifeless shell. The DM should use her discretion when creating the effects of a merged psyche.

The alchemist's notes include obscure references to other *Rods* that may have the power to split or merge subjects in different ways.

Unlike most artifacts, the *Apparatus* is actually extremely fragile. Each time it is used, its builder must make an Intelligence check (DC 18). If the builder fails this check, the *Apparatus* explodes, dealing 10d6 points of electricity damage to everything within a 30 ft. radius. Those caught in the blast radius can make a Reflex save (DC 20) for half damage. *Rods of Rastinon* cannot be destroyed, but are useless without the *Apparatus*. Many occult scholars believe that the tome containing the alchemist's schematics is the true cursed artifact, not the *Apparatus* itself. (See **Ravenloft Gazetteer Vol. III** for more information on the *Apparatus*.)

Black Stones: Occasionally an adventurer stumbles across (sometimes literally) one of these small magic items. Each is about the size of a grown man's palm, and feels smooth and slightly cool to the touch, as though it had recently been taken from a riverbed. Although on casual inspection it appears to be jet black, closer investigation (with jeweler's tools or exceptional eyesight) reveals that it is actually slightly translucent, like obsidian, and that a dim red glow emanates from deep within.

An individual who picks one up instinctively recognizes the powerful magic within — magic that gives the owner amazing luck. He steps out of the way just seconds before the *fireball* explodes, barely takes a sip before spilling his poisoned glass or even happens to think about his greatest triumph just as his will is assaulted by an outside force.

He also learns of the *Stone*'s other power, namely that it can exert its magic to reweave events to save the character from danger three times... but at a cost. Each such use saps some of the owner's strength, and causes the luck contained in the *Stone* to fade. Upon the third such use, the luck is gone for good. At that time, the *Stone* imparts its last request — command, really — to its owner: that he take it to the shores of the Lake of the Shrouded Moon in central Invidia and cast it into the waters. Most consider such a pilgrimage to be a small price to pay for all the narrow escapes and lucky breaks they've enjoyed, and hurl it into the dark, glassy waters without a second thought.

No single adventurer has ever encountered more than one of these curious rocks in his career (for the *Black Stones* are careful to stay hidden from such observation). Not long ago, however, an elderly member of the Order of the Guardian stumbled across several different accounts of these smooth obsidian "lucky" stones while reading the journals of famous adventurers. Each was convinced they had found a curious and unique item, but their descriptions were too similar to be coincidence. More unsettling still was the single-minded devotion these adventurers had demonstrated in carrying out their *Stone*'s "wish" in return for the luck it granted them. He knew the signs of corruption when he saw them, and after sending off several letters to his fellow Guardian Seekers explaining his findings, he set off to the Lake of the Shrouded Moon. He vanished less than two days after arriving there, and has not been seen since.

The *Black Stones* were originally part of a dark temple of a forbidden faith whose name has been lost to history. This faith practiced all manner of foul human sacrifices and other sinister rites in the name a great destroyer deity. Eventually their excesses grew too great, and a group of heroes gathered to destroy the headquarters of the cult. The temple was destroyed in a costly battle and much of its enchanted structure was shattered and the pieces scattered across the realms. Only the foundation remained, and even that was submerged deep beneath a lake magically created to conceal its presence. The temple and the foul faith it housed were thought defeated forever, but the *Black Stones* themselves remember. With each one cast into the lake, they come closer to reassembling the temple.

In game terms, a *Stone* grants three *wish* spells to its owner, who suffers 1d4–2 (minimum 1) temporary Constitution damage each time. This damage cannot be healed until all three *wishes* are used. If this reduces an owner's Constitution to zero, he dies and reforms at the temple site as a ghost under the sway of the faith. Once the three *wishes* are used up, the owner must make a Will save (DC 30) or be compelled as per the *geas* spell to travel to the lake and throw the *Stone* into its waters. At that time another Will save (DC 25) is required to avoid wondering why this might be an odd thing to do.

The *Black Stones* have a limited form of intelligence; if one feels its current owner is too suspicious, it may even allow the owner to go unaffected by any compulsion and hope that the next target is less wary of what they require from him. After all, the *Black Stones* have been patient

for a long time. If a few more years are the price of reaching the ultimate goal, they gladly wait. What exactly occurs should they all be reassembled is unknown, but is certain to have dire consequences for the domain of Invidia and beyond.

The Fang of the Nosferatu: The true origins of this dagger are somewhat controversial. By one widely held account, the *Fang of the Nosferatu* was created a century ago for the vampire lord Urik von Kharkov. Von Kharkov offered the blade as a gift to an assassin named Mordal. When Mordal later betrayed his master, von Kharkov imprisoned him and allowed the dagger to slowly drain away his life over the course of many months. However, other accounts insist that the blade has been in the clutches of the darklord of Paridon for more than a century and a half. Few scholars agree on whether these conflicting accounts speak more to the unreliability of legends or to the strange twists of time in the Mists.

The *Fang* is a *+3 dagger* of hardened steel. Flowing runes are etched into its curving blade and filled with ruby dust, making them glisten like wet blood. The hilt is wrapped in strange, coarse leather, thought to be the hide of a mind flayer or doppelganger. The pommel features a large ruby in a steel setting. The side of the guard facing the blade is forged to resemble the face of a hissing vampire. With a critical hit, the dagger drinks some of the victim's blood, dealing 1d4 points of temporary Constitution damage. Each lost point of Constitution restores 1 hp to the blade's wielder, if she is wounded. If the blade is left in a victim, it eventually drains the body dry.

The *Fang* is intelligent and malevolent (Int 17, Wis 15, Cha 16, Ego 25, CE). It communicates telepathically with its owner, and immediately informs her of its powers and its bloodlust. While the *Fang* is in the owner's physical possession, she can transform at will into a wolf or bat, as per the spell *polymorph*, except that changing shape does not restore hit points. While the dagger itself becomes part of the transformation, the owner's other equipment does not transform to match the new form.

The *Fang* also acts as a conduit for the fear and pain of its victims. Most characters who land a successful attack with the blade must make a Horror save (DC 15) as if they were the victim. For sadists and other creatures that enjoy inflicting fear and pain, however, this is nothing less than a banquet.

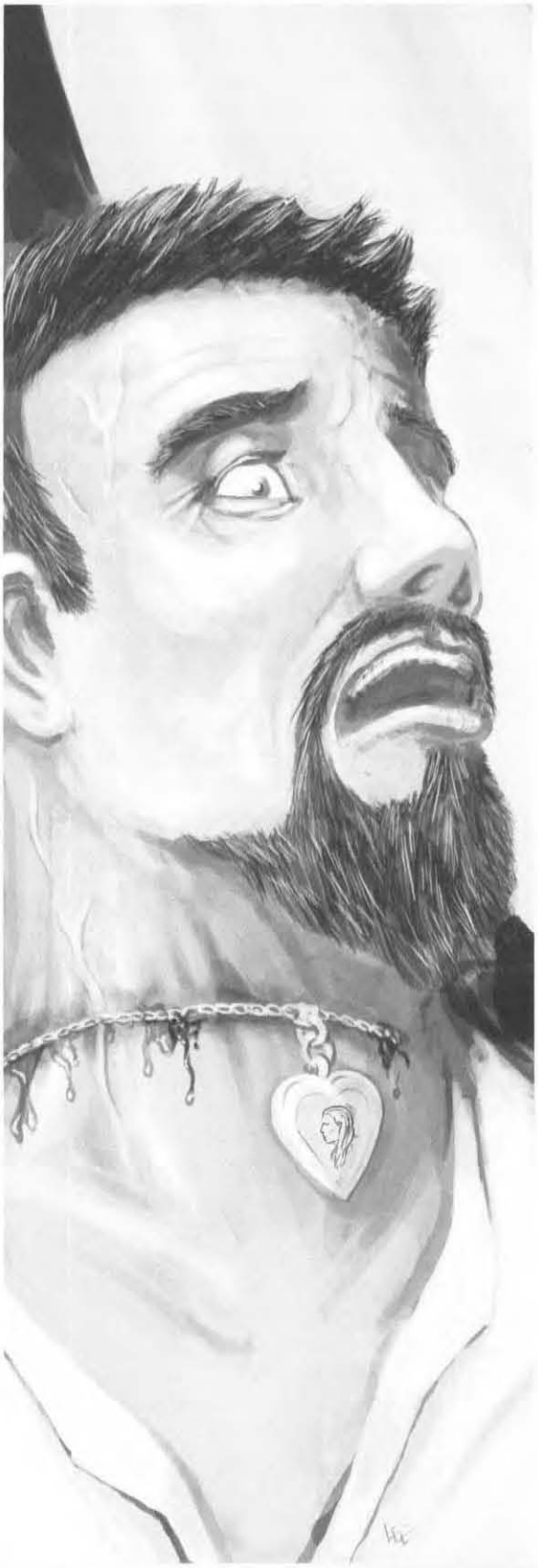
The *Fang* can subtly alter or enhance its powers to suit the desires of a specific owner. For example, if the *Fang*'s owner already has innate shapechanging abilities, then the dagger grants the ability to use *polymorph* (with the limitations listed above) into any Small, Medium or Large animal.

The *Fang* thirsts for blood just like the vampire for which it is named. Each point of Constitution the dagger drinks slakes its thirst for one day, but it can only be sated for a maximum of seven days at a time, regardless of how much blood it drinks. This blood can usually be taken from any living creature, but the *Fang* must drink humanoid blood at least once per month. On any day that the dagger is not sated, it permanently drains 1 hp from its owner. Lost hp can be recovered only through *greater restoration*.

The Blood Rite: If the *Fang* is used to slay six humanoids, with each murder taking place at the stroke of midnight on six consecutive nights, the *Fang of the Nosferatu* offers an immense boon: For the next 13 years, the owner gains SR 20 and damage resistance 30/magic. The owner does not age during these years as long as she retains physical possession of the dagger. The *Fang* can offer this boon to only one creature at a time. Performing the *blood rite* is an Act of Ultimate Darkness.

No method has yet been discovered to destroy the *Fang of the Nosferatu*.

Rotham's Jealous Necklace: Legend tells that this item was given by the Mordentish noble, Lady Constance Rotham, as a wedding present for her beloved husband, Sir Henry. At first a symbol of their undying love, the necklace turned into a bitter present as the years passed and the lady watched her husband pursue a number of younger mistresses while still pretending to care for her. As her looks withered away and her husband spent less and less time with her, her hatred and jealousy consumed her. One night they argued, and she cursed him that she should have strangled him when she was younger, before he had caused her such heartbreak. The necklace constricted suddenly and choked him to death, the portrait inside grinning malevolently as it strangled the life from him. Lady Rotham was shattered utterly by the shock of the incident, never to recover. The role the necklace played in Lord Henry's death remained a secret Lady Rotham took to the grave. It was later passed on to relatives. It has not had its fill of murder, however, and has haunted a number of doomed romances.



This innocuous item is a thin golden chain with a heart-shaped locket attached. Close inspection reveals that the cover bears the profile of a lovely young woman. If worn by a woman, this necklace has no ill effect, though it dislikes female owners and seeks to leave their presence by subtly altering its appearance to look unattractive no matter what else the wearer has on. It does the exact opposite to men, appearing very fetching to the eye — indeed most swear that the profile looks exactly like that of the person whom they most desire. Upon opening the locket, a man sees a miniature portrait of his beloved inside, smiling and radiant. A Will save (DC 30) is required to puzzle at the coincidence; otherwise, the finder thinks nothing of slipping it on.

The wearer hears the whispered voice of his beloved at moments of doubt or hesitation, telling him encouraging things and urging him on to greater acts of heroism and nobility. When he is in the presence of his love, the bond grows even stronger, such that he knows what his love is thinking without effort. The wearer receives a +4 magical bonus on all Fear and Horror saves while wearing the *Necklace*, as well as +2 magical bonus on all saves against enchantment spells.

These gifts come with a price. First, the voice the owner hears is truly the malevolent essence of Lady Rotham inhabiting the *Necklace*. She reads the wearer's mind and tells him what he wants to hear, even passing on the thoughts and feelings of the beloved when nearby — but only those it chooses to. The amulet eliminates thoughts that would make the owner grow suspicious... or waits to share them until the time is ripe for suspicion. Second, even as it spurs the owner on to greater acts of heroism, the *Necklace* also poisons his mind against the many "rivals" for his beloved's affection. This continues until the owner becomes paranoid of all others and seeks to deal with his "competition" as swiftly and brutally as possible. Women are seen as jealous harpies, out to slander and discredit the character's love and win his heart away. Other men are nefarious would-be suitors, just looking for a chance to cast the character in a bad light — or worse, do away with him altogether!

In time, the wearer is warped enough to turn his suspicion against his beloved. Love sours as the character feels as though his beloved doesn't appreciate him and what he does for her, which further curdles into downright hostility. Each time the character encounters a situation where this irratio-

nal jealousy and paranoia might come into play (and there are many), the character must make a Madness save (DC 15 + 1 per prior incident encountered) or suffer temporary paranoia and obsessive conditions until the next dawn (**Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, Chapter Three, "Fear, Horror, and Madness").

All the while as this paranoia progresses, the picture inside the locket slowly twists into a leering, hateful countenance, eyes wide with anger and teeth bared in a hideous grin. The character does not notice this shift, but it's easy enough for others to see, if they have the opportunity to look inside the locket. Still, the wearer is oblivious to the change, even if others point it out — and doing so is a good way to provoke a fight. This madness escalates until the character fails three Madness saves in a row. At that time, he attacks his beloved in a fit of jealous passion, stopping at nothing until she is dead.

Should the character become aware enough of the madness to resist it, the *Necklace* tries to reason and plead with him in the voice of the beloved. This requires a Will save (DC 20) to avoid falling in the grip of paranoia, at which time the *Necklace* urges the character to indulge in the murder of his beloved — the source of his paranoia. If that fails, the *Necklace* constricts with impossible strength, strangling the character until either he is slain or the magic is overcome somehow. Treat the strangulation as an automatic grapple attack that deals 2d10 points of constriction damage each round. A successful Strength check (DC 25) removes the item.

Remove curse grants the character a +10 circumstance bonus on any checks noted above, but offers no other benefits. Whatever the eventual outcome — either the wearer is slain or he murders his love — the *Necklace* slips off his neck (though still with a horrifying grin on the face of the portrait inside). There is a cumulative 10% chance per hour that it simply disappears, even if attended, off to seek another victim.

The Wishing Imp: This malevolent statuette seems to draw its power from the Dread Realms themselves. The 1 foot-tall figurine is carved from jet-black stone and resembles a cherub with a beatific face, batlike wings, a pair of small horns and a barbed tail.

The *Wishing Imp* is intelligent and malevolent (Int 12, Wis 17, Cha 16, CE). It communicates telepathically with its owner, appealing to her greed. The *Imp* has one power: it can grant one *wish* (as the spell) per day. These wishes are always horribly twisted, however, regardless of how painstakingly they are worded. The owner typically gets what she wished for, but at a dire cost. If an owner wishes for love, for example, the *Imp* may make the object of her affection a living zombie, utterly devoted and equally mindless. If an owner wishes to undo a grievous wound suffered in combat, the *Imp* may transfer that misfortune to an ally or loved one — preferably one who suffers all the worse for it. The *Imp* always reminds its owner that the damages caused by a *wish* today can be remedied by a *wish* tomorrow.

The *Imp* recognizes only one owner at a time. The owner can rid herself of the *Imp* only by giving or selling it to another person. The new owner must first be told the complete, terrible truth about the *Imp*'s wishes and must then willingly accept it. If an owner tries to rid herself of the *Imp* by any other means, it always reappears among her belongings within a day. If the owner dies, the next intelligent creature to touch the *Imp* becomes its new owner.

If the *Wishing Imp* is attacked, it can animate to defend itself. It fights as an imp (see the *Monster Manual*) except that it is considered a construct, has 19 hp, and is chaotic, not lawful. The *Imp* is immune to all magic effects and can be damaged only by weapons made of stone. If the *Imp* is destroyed, it reforms within a day with no lasting harm done. To permanently destroy the *Wishing Imp*, it must be reduced to 0 hp with stone weapons under the effects of a *bless weapon* spell.

The *Imp*'s power is limited to the Land of Mists. It cannot grant escape to other worlds. If its owner somehow leaves Ravenloft, the *Imp* stays behind.

Index

Campaign 126, 127
Creation 133
Secrets 133
Structure 126
Clusters 14, 57, 132
Communities 66
Core 10, 57, 129
Crossover Campaigns 22
Cultural Levels 68, 69, 70, 71, 72
Dark Powers 4
Darklords:
Adam 12, 130
Aderre, Gabrielle 11, 130
Anhktepot, Pharaoh 15
ApBlanc, Tristen 11
Arijani 17
Azalin Rex 10, 129
Boritsi, Ivana 10, 129
Crocodile 18
d'Honaire, Dominic 10, 129
Death 12, 130
Diamabel 15
Dilisnya, Ivan 10, 129
Draga Salt-Biter 17
Drakov, Vlad 11, 129
Easan the Mad 14, 131
Ebonbane 17
Faith-hold, Elena 16
Godefroy, Lord Wilfred 12
Gwydion 13
Hazlik 11, 130
Hive Queen 18
Illithid God-brain 18
Kulchevich, Inza 13, 131
Lukas, Harkon 11
Maligno 19
Malken 13
Markov, Frantisek 12, 130
Meredoth 12
Mindefisk, Laveeda, Leticia and Lorinda 14
Mircea, Prince Ladislav 15
Misroi, Anton 19
Morgoroth 16
Petrovna, Yagno 19
Renier, Jacqueline 13, 130
Shinpi Haki 19
Sodo 18
Timothy, Alfred 14
Tiyet 15
Tristessa 12
van Riese, Pieter 13
von Kharkov, Baron Urik 14, 131
von Zarovich, Count Strahd 10, 129
Zolnik, Boyar Gregor 16
Dikesha 159, 180, 181
Creation of 180
Green Die 182
Orange Die 182
Red Die 181
White Die 181
Yellow Die 182
Domains:
Amber Wastes 15, 132
Avonleigh 16, 132
Barovnia 10, 129
Bluetspur 18, 132
Borca 10, 129
Darkon 10, 129
Dementlieu 10, 129
Falkovnia 11, 129
Forlorn 11, 129
Frozen Reaches 15, 132
G'Henna 19, 132
Har'Akir 15
Hazlan 11, 129
Invidia 11, 130
Kartakass 11, 130
Keening 12, 130
Lamordia 12, 130
Markovia 12, 130
Mordent 12, 130
Necropolis 12, 130
Nidala 16
Nocturnal Sea 12, 130
Nova Vaasa 13, 130
Odiare 19, 132
Paridon 18, 132
Pharazia 15
Richemulot 13, 130
Rokushima Taiyoo 19, 132, 133
Sanguinea 15
Saragoss 17
Sea of Sorrows 13, 130
Sebua 15

Shadow Rift 13, 130
Shadowborn Manor 17
Shadowlands 16, 132
Sithicus 13, 131
Souragne 19, 133
Sri Raji 17, 132
Tepest 14, 131
Timor 18, 132
Valachan 14, 131
Vechor 14, 131
Verbrek 14, 132
Verdurous Lands 17, 132
Vorostokov 16
Wildlands 18
Zherisia 18, 132
Domains, Creation of 56
Dramatic Techniques 42
Atmosphere 26
Cut Scenes 48
Optional Rules 25, 28
Pacing 42
Portraying NPCs 23
Scaling Encounters 43
Using Music 36
Everyman Hero 110
Feats, New 105
Firearms 79, 199
Foes 144
Horror 5, 26
Islands of Terror 18, 132
Languages 25
Magic Items 193, 221
Armor 194
Artifacts 230
Cursed Items 212, 214, 224, 225, 227
Miscellaneous 206
Potions 199
Rings 202
Rods 202
Scrolls 203
Staffs 204
Wands 205
Weapons 195
Mists 22, 24, 102, 158
New Races, Adding 102
NPC Classes 110
Adept 112
Aristocrat 112
Commoner 113
Expert 114
New, Prophet 187
Warrior 115
Outcast Ratings 102
Phantasmagora 97
Prestige Classes, alterations 107
Arcane Archer 107
Arcane Trickster 107
Archmage 107
Assassin 107
Blackguard 107
Dragon Disciple 108
Duelist 108
Dwarven Defender 108
Eldritch Knight 108
Hierophant 108
Horizon Walker 109
Loremaster 109
Mystic Theurge 109
Red Wizard 109
Shadowdancer 109
Thaumaturgist 110
Prophecy 182
Psionics, Altered 116
Metamind 118
Psion 116
Psicrystals 117, 118, 125
Psilich 123
Psychic Warrior 117
Pyrokineticist 118
Slayer 119
Soulknife 119
Realm of Dread 4, 5, 22, 24, 25
Rewards 155
Sinkholes of Evil 86
Creation of 89
Tarokka 159
Fortuna Magna 176
History and Creation 159
Lesser Deck of Fate 165
Patterns 162
Roleplaying a Reading 160
Techniques of Terror 21
Villain Types 148
Bandit Chief 150

Corrupt Priest 154
Crazed Killer 151
Crime Boss 150
Evil Noble 153
Mad Scientist 152
The Warlord 148
Vistani 159, 160, 161, 164, 166, 169, 170, 172, 174, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 183, 190

List of Tables:

Table 2–1: Random Ravenloft Community Generator 78
Table 2–2: Street Builder for Communities in Ravenloft 86
Table 2–3: The Effects of Sinkholes of Evil 88
Table 2–4: Perform Check Modifiers 96
Table 2–5: Outcast Rating Modifiers 103
Table 2–6: Sample Outcast Ratings 104
Table 2–7: NPC Adept 111
Table 2–8: NPC Aristocrat 112
Table 2–9: NPC Commoner 113
Table 2–10: NPC Expert 114
Table 2–11: NPC Warrior 115
Table 2–12: NPC Class Gear Value 116
Table 4–1: Tarokka Substitution List 180
Table 4–2: The Prophet 188
Table 4–3: Prophet Spells per Day 189
Table 4–4: Prophet Spells Known 189

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Ravenloft®

Ravenloft Tarokka Deck
August 2003

Ravenloft Player's Handbook
October 2003

Ravenloft Gazeteer, Vol. 4
November 2003

It is the Year of our Lord 1230.

This new age is a time of war.

A time to take up arms in the darkness
against those who would rob you
of your dark birthright.

Draw your sword,
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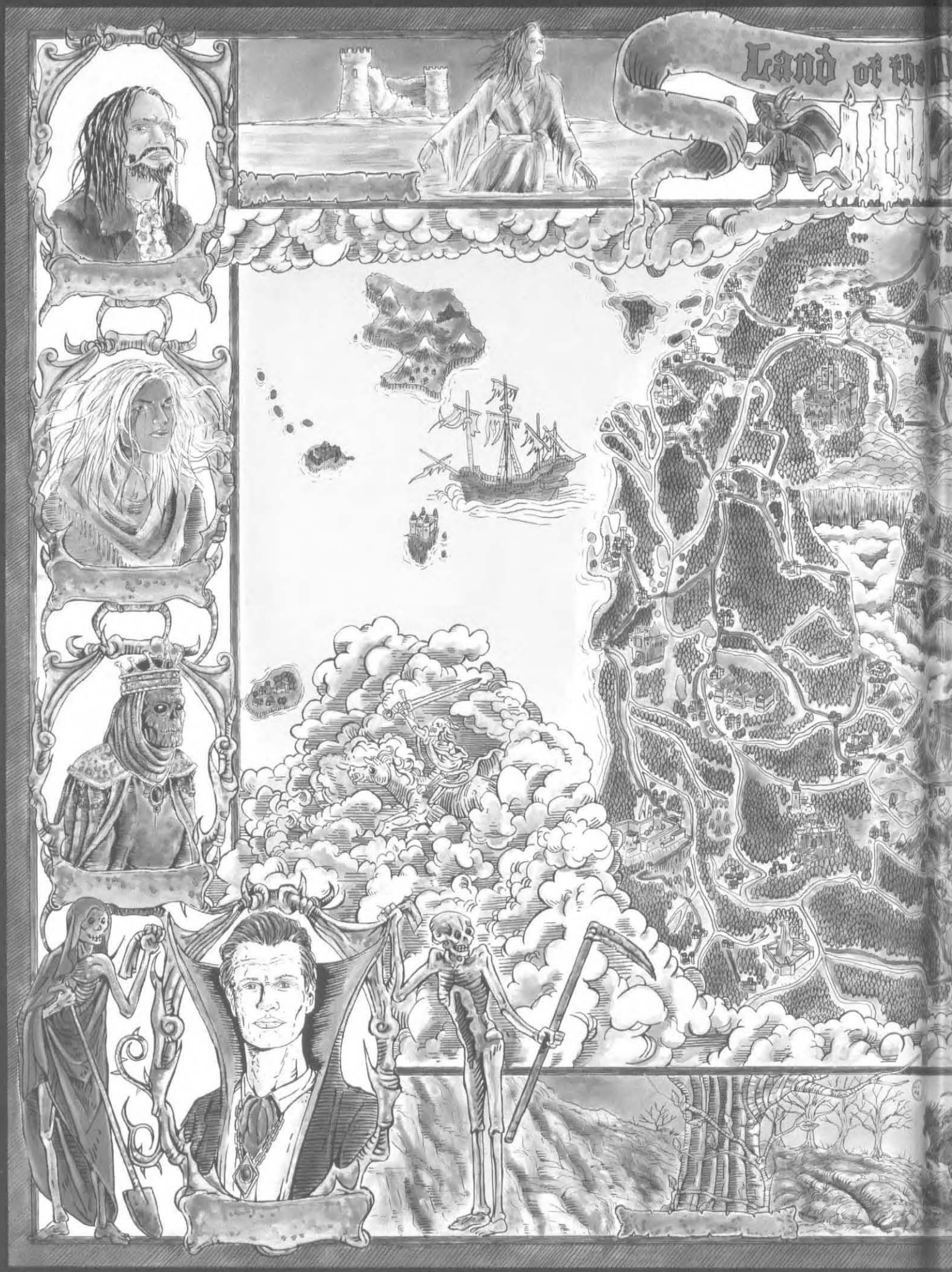
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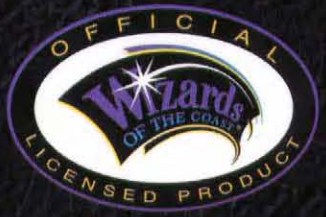

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