

# Shairtar Accursed

CROSSOVER



## DARKEST TIDES



MELIOR VIA PRESENTS

# DARKEST TIDES

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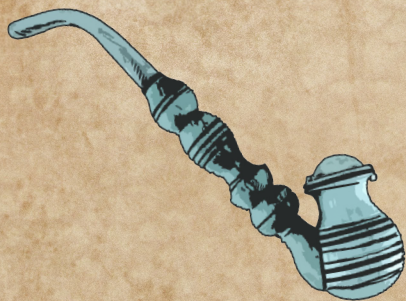
## INTRODUCTION

Accursed and Shaintar both focus upon how the heroes can make a very real difference in the world around them. The backgrounds and tones differ between the settings, but the heroes take center stage. Their decisions and actions drive the world around them, enabling them to determine the way that their world might change.

The world's reaction to their heroes, however, is quite different. In Shaintar, the heroes are generally respected. Their actions become the stuff of legends. In Accursed, only the truly desperate would ever appeal to a Witchmarked. Those who have benefited from their presence are likely to show gratitude begrudgingly at best, ultimately wishing that the heroes would just go somewhere else.

The sharp difference in tone can serve as a powerful framing element. Conventions integral to each setting become more obvious when the two are placed side by side. This contrast made the opportunity to briefly intermingle the settings particularly compelling. We've found that characters from one world are astounded by the nature of the foreign reality when they experience it.

This adventure presents two parallel island nations—Cata'Lasis and Respite—that conceal a link between Shaintar and Morden. A Rules Conversions section offers suggestions for how traveling between these two worlds are likely to be effected by the transition. The included adventure offers one way of connecting them, primarily for characters who are native to Shaintar. Its conclusion presents a number of other ways that a Game Master might use to provide alternative connections to either follow up on this adventure or in other campaigns.



## CATA'LASIS GAZETTEER

For nine generations, the Crysarium Council has ruled the nation of Cata'Lasis. Through good times, when their vast natural resources could be most effectively exploited, to more difficult ones—when the country has come under attack or been called to aid close allies. During the time since the nation's founding, Cata'Lasis has shown marked and steady growth. Even its most severe losses were only enough to blunt the country's continued development for a few years at a time.

This is at least in part due to the culture's direct opposition toward the notion of any sort of debt. As a culture, they are driven to attain a constant level of balance in their relationships. While they expect fairness in their trade relations, they are careful that they repay any debt that they incur in very short order. As a consequence, Cata'Lasis has been able to consistently act in accordance with the nation's needs and decisions, rather than in reaction to the directives of an entity to which its citizens might feel a strong sense of obligation.

In spite of this attitude, however, Cata'Lasis has consistently been generous in their offers of service to others. They have always been willing to commit their military and materiel assets to assist nations during their times of need. Whether the need is due to political disaster or natural ones, the people of Cata'Lasis are proud to serve others. They ask for nothing in exchange for this service, though it is reasonable to suppose that they might expect other nations to extend them this same courtesy if Cata'Lasis were to fall into crisis.

### GOVERNMENT

Cata'Lasis employs a system of rule, which functionally combines a meritocracy with hereditary nobility. The Crysarium Council is a twelve-member body, which oversees the nation, electing an overall High Lord from its membership. Councilors are admitted from the Five Houses, as well as the most powerful trade and teaching organizations within the nation. Those organizations aren't mandated to be magical in nature, but functionally, this is almost always the case. This is due to both the momentum of their existing powerbases as well as the traditions associated with this organization. Because these magically powerful organizations are composed almost entirely of Adepts, this does dictate that the membership of the Crysarium Council is largely, if

## THE FIVE FAMILIES

Members of Five different houses, with long traditions of magical aptitude, migrated to the island of Cata'Lasis to found their nation. Since the time of the country's founding, these houses—which include multiple bloodlines and races—have continued their dominance in the nation's political landscape. All of these houses have strong traditions of aptitude within particular professions as well as areas of magic. Though the houses have interbred with one another and other lesser houses, their traditions have remained strong. They have also continued to hold positions of strong leadership within the nation.

The House of Diamond is renowned for its Adepts. Some have used their abilities to aid and maintain the stability of Cata'Lasis from internal threats, though their detractors view them as little more than secret police.

The House of Ruby has a strong tradition of the military service. They generally believe that a nation's military might encompasses the entirety of its honor and social responsibility. Detractors of the House of Ruby often consider them prone to violence and destruction rather than defense.

The House of Sapphire is proud of their knack for scholarship. While not all of the members choose to apply their skills effectively, they have a near universal knack for such arts. Those opposed to the Sapphire House insist that they spend their time in scholarship while ignoring the realities of the world.

The House of Emerald is known for expertise as craftsmen and merchants. They have a strong knack for commerce, and it is often their vessels that interact with other nations peaceably. Members of other houses often insist that greed is their sole motive.

The House of Pearl is known for diplomacy, but also recognized for a tendency toward bureaucracy. They are strong proponents of legislation and masters of etiquette. Other citizens of Cata'Lasis often consider them to be pedants who focus on the letter rather than the spirit of any discussion.

not entirely, made up of individuals whose bloodlines have strong histories of magical abilities. This does grant those with such abilities a marginally higher standing within Cata'Lasis society.

Cata'Lasis law is founded upon the five pillars of reparation, service, imprisonment, exile, and death. The core of these pillars is the idea of debt. Within the nation, every action is considered to have a price, as well as a consequence. Citizens are expected to assume the responsibility for their debt whenever they undertake an action. In this way, any crime that a citizen commits is essentially viewed as a financial transaction or even a job. When they commit an action, they must expect to pay the necessary price for it—for good or ill.

Reparation is the most common means for resolution to criminal actions within Cata'Lasis. As the citizens recognize the magnitude and consequences of their crimes, many willingly accept those consequences. This means that punishments can be resolved without government interaction. A citizen who recognizes his criminal actions and is willing to negotiate some reparation need not ever face government oversight or judicial intervention. Even in those cases where a judge must be involved, citizens who have the means to repay their debt can do so without facing further consequences, as long as all involved accept the terms.

When a citizen is incapable of providing appropriate reparation, then they must instead commit to providing some other means of compensation to their victims. In general, this requires some form of service. For those without exceptional assets or talents, the service is often menial work, requiring the criminal to enter a life of serfdom to the person that they have victimized. Generally, servitude of this magnitude requires the criminal to liquidate any assets of value prior to entering service, meaning that when they complete their service, they may be destitute, or very close to it.

Criminals who are already in debt and who also live lives of service—including those who were born into lives of serfdom—are incapable of providing either reparation or service. Similarly, some crimes are so egregious that the victim—or the victim's family—are incapable of accepting reparations. In either of these instances, more severe penalties are required. The least severe penalty in this situation is enacting a time of imprisonment for the victim. This period is always assigned by a judge. Penalties for specific crimes are well established, with terms of imprisonment ranging from a few weeks to as much as twenty years. Prisoners, however, are expected to labor throughout their captivity, so as to pay for their food and housing during their term.

In some cases a criminal remains utterly unwilling to accept the consequences of their actions. This could be due to a dispute about the cause of the crime, or it could simply be a dispute where a person insists that they were not the criminal behind an action. Regardless, it is at this point that a judge attempts to mediate the case and resolve the situation. However, this is not always possible, and some people remain utterly unconvinced of their guilt. The most common resolution for such situations is for the guilty party to accept exile from Cata'Lasis in place of making any

reparations for their actions. Notably, the nation's government will never provide transportation to someone who accepts exile. The criminal must provide their own transport, and cannot return to the nation until they accept the necessary reparations.

There is only one acknowledged means of reparation for the most egregious of crimes, and that is death. Capital punishment is rarely exercised in Cata'Lasis, but it does remain an option for the most unrepentant and unsavory criminals. The use of this punishment is considered the tacit explanation for the Cata'Lasis truism, "Don't perform an action unless you're willing to pay the debt."



## MEMBERSHIP

Cata'Lasis has a cultural drive for belonging to something greater. The nation fulfills this function in one way, but most also seek something that offers a more intimate and direct connection. While extended family fulfills this for some, religious and professional—including magical—organizations also provide a solution to this for many. In addition to providing an outlet for community, such organizations can also provide an outlet for community service. This provides a mechanism for helping stabilize a community and providing a support network for those who need it.

## SOCIETY

Members of the Five Houses—as well as the nation's charter and laws—insist that Cata'Lasis lacks true nobility. Essentially, blood is intended to only matter in the sense that it grants an individual magical power. Instead, the ability to utilize essence along with service to the nation determines each individual's rights and responsibilities. In reality, advancing among the ranks is far easier for those who come from an affluent background, particularly those who belong to the Five Houses.

The lowest rank among society is that of a serf, but people only earn this title as a punishment, due to prior crimes. When they reach the age of majority for their race, individuals without magical ability are considered freemen. Freemen who perform military (or other) service to Cata'Lasis attain the preferred title of freeman citizen. Wielders of magic, in contrast, are preferentially granted the rank of mystic, which is considered equal to the rank of freeman citizen, simply by the right of their abilities. Those who also perform a service to the nation are then elevated to the mystic lord class.

Freeman citizens can attain ranks of authority and responsibility within the nation's civil service and government, but they seldom attain the most important ones. Instead, these titles and responsibilities are reserved for mystic lords. This is partly due to the nation's cultural respect and reverence for magical talent, but it is also due to a strong tendency of the mystic lord class to promote members who share their status. This functional exclusivity causes a substantial amount of resentment and among the nation's residents without magical aptitude. Recently, a group of Bards has led an effort to change this attitude. Only time will tell if their efforts meet with success.

## RESPIITE GAZETTEER

Centuries ago, the Sakurada Shogunate established a colony near the coast of Morden. The island had not been explored in centuries, and its founders appreciated its relative isolation. For the founders belonged to a religious cult. It was their intention to explore ancient lore that was forbidden within Sakurada traditions. Over the course of hundreds of years, they researched matters associated with traveling between different realities—legends similar to those associated with the Lightning Bridge that had originally brought humanity to Morden.

The name of this colony—as well as its inhabitants—has been lost to the ages. This is in part because a long ago apocalypse devastated the nation. Some legends of the crisis—as recounted by the descendants of the few survivors—insist that the disaster was a natural one, or possibly even a punishment from the gods for their forbidden research. This is not, strictly speaking, true. The colony was destroyed when the research there went horribly awry. As they breached the barrier between different realities, the explosion transformed the one island into three smaller ones, obliterating everything else. This new form was not, however, coincidence. The geography of the three new islands perfectly matched the natural boundaries of the islands that make up the nation of Cata'Lasis on the planet Starfall.

For centuries, the island cluster remained completely uninhabited. Those who survived the disaster fled the surviving islands, spreading word of the crisis across Morden. No others dared to travel to the forsaken place, fearing that they might invoke the wrath of the gods.

It was only with the tragedy of the Bane War that people began to venture back to these dread islands. The threat of the Witch Armies was far more immediate than the legends of an ancient explosion. Desperate refugees decided that the myths of a livable land were a prospect that might offset any potential dangers. After all, centuries had passed, which seemed like ample time for even the gods' anger to have cooled.

The new arrivals committed fully to establishing a colony—no matter how small—that was isolated from the Witches. Scavenging from the ruins of the ancient city and using the raw materials they could salvage from their ships, the colonists hastily built a town that could withstand the brutal storms of the

Discordian Sea. They soon found that the island chain housed a range of marine plants and animals. While there was little arable land on the island cluster, the sea life was capable of sustaining the colony.

Over only a few seasons, word of the new colony spread among the various pirates and privateers that traveled near the Western coast of Morden. It earned a reputation as a viable location far from the influence of the Witches. However, its isolation and relatively restricted supplies ultimately limited Respite's growth. A series of disappearances among the colony's inhabitants also reestablished the legends of the danger presented by the island chain. While some remained willing to join the colony, others shunned it. Only the promise of trade—particularly for artifacts recovered from the ancient Sakuran colony or for supplies from the fertile portions of the ocean continued to draw visitors.

### TYRANNY OF MIGHT

Respite has no organized or structured government. Without a recognized authority, it also lacks any codified system of laws or even a standard currency. Trade is conducted strictly by bartering, though theft is also a common occurrence. Consequences represent the core of the cultural ideal. Respite's inhabitants recognize that the actions they undertake may draw the gratitude or the ire of one another. They expect generosity to be repaid, but they assume that malfeasance may have consequence—at least from those who are strong enough to inflict their will upon another. Often, the only effective means of enforcement is through the actions of the mob. Individuals who have assembled followers—or family—represent the greatest power on the islands. Working together, these small groups are far more capable of benefiting one another than are individuals who value their independence.

The assembled crews of visiting vessels are at a significant advantage over local trading partners for this precise reason. When negotiating a trade, the crews are likely to bring a significant number of armed shipmates to the discussion. The implicit threat frequently skews the terms of any deal. Respite's fishermen seldom come out ahead on these deals, typically receiving only enough in trade to maintain their basic livelihood. Some fishermen and scavengers have attempted to assemble a guild, but this has had little lasting success to date. Most often, arriving ships avoid dealing with the guild, preferring to leverage their advantage over the remaining independent fishermen. In a few cases, the fishing guild has attempted to force independents into joining their group, but disdain for authority is ingrained into Respite's culture. The guild has been more fractious than organized.

Since the conclusion of the Bane War, Respite has survived but never thrived. It is most commonly a port of call for those who seek to avoid government interference. Some criminals have stored or even created contraband on the island cluster. Others have used Respite as a dumping point for criminals as well as desperate refugees. The colony is both smaller and less desperate than Port Sorrow, but it is not a place for the faint of heart. Those who dwell here must constantly toil to find adequate food and supplies to maintain life in the face of the harsh weather of the Discordian Sea.

## DISAPPEARANCES

The islands are not huge, but they are largely untamed. The locals must work constantly to maintain what little they have, so few have the time or inclination to explore more thoroughly. A number of disappearances—both of long term inhabitants and newer arrivals—have occurred in recent months. Legends are spreading that someone—or something—is abducting townsfolk. To date, the primary consequence is that the islanders have closed up and barred their hovels at night, trying to secure themselves from whatever might exist. However, none of the disappearances have happened at night. Rather, people have vanished from the edge of town, most while caring for domesticated wildlife or the small farms near the edge of town.

Fear has taken hold of the remaining inhabitants. Many now give credence to the ancient legends of the island's disastrous fate. They fear that the ghosts of those who once dwelt here may have returned, or that some alien gods, spirits, or Fey have begun to punish those who intrude upon the forsaken land.

Some of the islanders have tried to leave, but there is little wood to build ships, and few of the inhabitants are competent sailors. Visiting vessels are more prone to abandoning passengers here than they are retrieving them. Even those who manage to find their way aboard a ship have no safe destination. There are no other islands where life is better, and the mainland is home to the Witches. The quandary is creating an air of utter desperation among Respite's residents.

The situation is exacerbated by a number of anomalies that have been observed on Respite over the past several years. These include bizarre and inexplicable lights arcing across the sky, reports of visitors appearing in the town when no ship was in

the harbor, stories of unspeakable terrors roaming the island, and even tales of people who were clearly not human—or even Accursed—visiting the city. Most blame spirits or the Fey, but the signs do not match up with ancient legends. Individually, none of these incidents would be enough to spark panic, but the town was already on the verge of uproar with the disappearances. Now, outsiders are feared and the city is constantly on the verge of panic and a mass riot.

## TURRIS ATRA

The Chimera is directly responsible for at least some of the disappearances and many of the monsters roaming across the island cluster. Her tower has appeared there almost once a month, each time leaving behind some of her foul creations, often abducting locals for use in her experiments. Survivors—both human and animal—have returned horribly transformed, and the island is believed to have a number of her creations roaming freely upon it. Legends have begun to circulate that the abominations may even have established a colony on one of the islands.

Though none outside of her most devoted banes know this, the Chimera has come to Respite to uncover the ancient legends. She believes the stories of traveling between realities may hold credence. It is her intent to uncover the truth to those legends, and possibly seize whatever power she can for her own purposes. It is for this reason that her banes remain on the island. Some search its uninhabited areas, particularly the collapsed tunnels beneath the surface, which remain from the Sakuran colony. Others abduct and question the local residents, hoping to find some who know more of the place's secrets than they wish to admit. All hope to uncover new information for their blasphemous mistress.



## RULES CONVERSIONS

The laws of reality in Morden are different from those in Shaintar, the only portion of Starfall currently known. Characters who travel between these two settings encounter unexpected issues, particularly those associated with different Arcane Backgrounds. Some of the powers and equipment that work reliably in one world simply fail in the other. Worse yet, the abilities do not fail immediately. Instead, they gradually stop working, at an inconsistent rate for different individuals.

### ARCANE BACKGROUNDS

While Starfall and Morden are both magic-rich worlds, their specific magics are largely incompatible. Thanks to some unexplained inherent qualities of these worlds, traditional arcane and divine magics do not work in Morden. This means that Priests, Druids, Sorcerers, and Adepts, as well as those vile devotees of Ceynara with thaumaturgic magics, lose access to their powers not long after setting foot in Morden. (See *Time and Failure*, page 8, for how this works.) While the loss of psionic or arcane magics can be worrisome and frustrating for Adepts and sorcerers, the loss of powers for a Priest or Druid can be positively debilitating, given that those magical abilities are granted by Archanon or the Ascended.

As with most rules, there is an exception to the rule that states that magic native to Shaintar does not work in Morden. Those twisted souls who have forsaken the Light, Necromancers, and others who have been corrupted by Darkness, find common cause among the courts of Morden's Witches. Necromancy and powers provided by Darkness function normally when in Morden, and Necromancers suffer no penalties when using their powers there.

Interestingly, witchcraft, Morden's most powerful magic, translates to Shaintar in odd ways. Player characters with Arcane Background: Witchcraft may travel to Shaintar easily enough, still empowered. As time passes however, the witches who follow their dark mistresses see their abilities translate completely to the Darkness of Shaintar, while White Witches see their abilities become infused with Life. Once this happens for White Witches, their powers will never again work in Morden.

### TIME AND FAILURE

Any character that possesses an Arcane Background (or equivalent Professional Edge) must make a test for each day that he spends in a different reality—generally the first time that he attempts to use that Arcane Background. The test is made using the attribute associated with the Arcane Background. On success, the character can continue to use his Arcane Background as usual. On failure, however, he loses his connection to the Arcane Background. Usage is not restored until he returns to his native reality.

Disconcertingly, Alchemy is like Necromancy in that it is a magic that does work across both realities. Any Shaintar alchemists can continue to practice their craft within Morden without issue. Alchemists from Morden, like their Shaintar counterparts, can continue to make use of their abilities without issue in either realm.

### TECHNOLOGIES

As a high fantasy setting, Shaintar is, by its nature, less technologically advanced than Morden. The basics of technology are the same between the worlds—a sword is sharp, a lantern is bright, and a cartwheel rolls in both places. Where they diverge is in the development and use of advanced technologies. Much of the modern technology sweeping across Morden simply does not work when taken into Shaintar, likely because of that world's integration of magic into all things. Simple technologies such as wheels, hinges, forges and furnaces—even a basic printing press—can be taken from Morden to Shaintar and still retain their usefulness. The trouble starts when anything more complex is taken to Shaintar. Clockwork devices and steam engines are as complex as will function, but the electric fluid loses its powerful charge.

Firearms are a particularly prominent example of this inconsistency. The chemicals used to make gunpowder, and the natural laws that govern its potential destructive power, do not function in the same way in the two lands. A cask of gunpowder from Morden is little more than black sand when transported between worlds. No amount of engineering expertise can enable a firearm to work properly in Shaintar.



## THE ACCURSED IN SHAIN TAR

If any Accursed travel to Shaintar, it establishes some connection between that place and the Witch who inflicted the curse. While the Witches cannot monitor all of their Accursed at all times, the power they have infused in their Witchmarks grants a constant connection. When a Witchmark travels beyond the boundaries of Morden, the Witch becomes aware of the new draw upon her power. Some of the Witches are certainly interested in the possibility of expanding their influence into another place—particularly one so blessed by potent magic as Shaintar.

Of particular note is the fact that many Accursed are no longer alive. Their existence has gone beyond mortality into something else, with their souls bound under the influence of Witchcraft. Dhampir, Golems, Mummies, Revenants, and Shades fall into this category. While Witchcraft does not normally work within Shaintar, these entities are capable of still existing. However, within Shaintar, all of these Witchmarked gain the Anathema to Life Special Ability. They cannot benefit from magical healing, except that coming from Necromancy or Alchemy. Natural healing that relies upon the use of plants, herbs, and similar techniques won't work for them, either.

### INFLECTING A WITCHMARK

Only a Witch of the sundered Grand Coven—or possibly one of her most senior banes—is capable of inflicting a Witchmark. Characters could not earn one through their actions or inactions when traveling in Morden or dealing with mere mortals or typical banes. The heroes of Shaintar have a tendency to be particularly proactive. Some of them may choose to take a more direct hand in the aftermath of the Bane War. A few might even undertake actions that could draw the direct attention of one or more of the Witches.

For as long as the characters remain in Morden, such actions are extremely ill-advised. The Witches are veritable forces of nature. They act at a level of existence that is disassociated from the one the player characters recognize. A Witch who takes note of one of the heroes can effortlessly inflict a Witchmark upon them. In doing so, she binds a portion of the character's soul to her, and gains some degree of influence upon them. Most individuals would consider this a very bad thing.

In addition to their newfound connection to a Witch, the character becomes transformed into one of the Witchbreeds. The transformation is both physical and magical. In the process, the character gains the Witchbreed package, associated with the new Witchmark (see *Accursed* pages 50–65). The character also acquires a Fate Track, which is initially set to 0 (See *Accursed*, page 100). These abilities are applied atop the character's existing racial packages. In some cases, there can be conflicting abilities. Game Masters must work with players to adjudicate any such confusion.

### SKILL CHANGES

There are a few minor differences in the skill lists between the two settings. For the sake of simplicity, Game Masters should decide which skill list they wish to use and stick with it for the duration of any adventure that integrates the settings. There are five skills that are particularly notable:

Guts is not normally used in Shaintar. Characters from Shaintar who travel in Morden temporarily gain the Guts skill at their Spirit attribute until they return to their home reality.

Accursed combines Lockpicking and Stealth into Subterfuge. Characters from Morden who travel to Starfall gain both of those skills at the same rank as Subterfuge for the duration of their travels.

Athletics is a combination of Climbing and Swimming for characters from Morden. When they travel to Starfall, they gain those two skills at their Athletics skill rank until they return.



## PREPARING FOR DARKEST TIDES

*Darkest Tides* begins from the assumption that the heroes are members of Grayson's Grey Rangers, and native to Shaintar. The adventure begins in earnest with their arrival at Cata'Lasis (see page 3). Ranking members of the organization have sent the characters to the island in response to a request for aid. The aid requests are in response to numerous sightings of unusual creatures that have taken place in the area. These are generally accredited as being entities of Darkness, though many were not of immediately recognizable types.

Upon their arrival, the characters soon confirm that there are a variety of recognizable creatures of Darkness active in one region of the country, including troglodytes and trolls. Tracking down the source of the corrupted beings uncovers a larger tunnel complex. Examination of the caverns reveals that they are the remains of an ancient Builder complex.

When the characters investigate the complex they initially encounter more of the corrupted. However, deeper within they discover that things are more complex than they initially appear. After fighting through the forces of Darkness, they encounter a Mongrel (an Accursed Witchbreed) using Witchcraft in battle with a party of Accursed. The Mongrel is accompanied by several of the Chimera's banes. The heroes must decide whether to work with these strangers—many of whom appear to be agents of Darkness.

Shortly after their battle, the tunnels begin to collapse. This might be an indication of the tenuous link between realities, or a consequence of the magics unleashed during the battle. In any case, the heroes must decide if they wish to continue exploring, traveling to the realm of their new contacts, or returning from whence they came.

Depending upon the outcome, the player characters may have an opportunity to explore an entirely new world. In fact, they might even be trapped in a place completely foreign to their previous experiences. Alternatively, they could acquire allies who soon desire to return to their home reality. Returning to their home—or helping their allies to return—requires the use of powerful magic. The adventure offers several suggestions for follow-up scenarios, though a few are also implicit in the *Rules Conversion* section above.

## THE OTHER SIDE

Some groups may be starting with characters from Accursed and wish to use this adventure as a gateway to incorporate elements from Shaintar into their campaign. *Darkest Tides* can also work well for that approach. The catch is that the adventure basically needs to be run backwards. Sidebars in each of the scenes offer some insights into the tweaks that need to be done. The big assumption, though, is that the characters are starting in Respite, instead of Cata'Lasis. As such, they'll need to work their way past the Chimera's banes prior to encountering the beings that dwell in the space between worlds. Finally, they can meet with a party of Grey Rangers, before having the opportunity to cross into Shaintar.

## SCENE I. REACHING CATALASIS

In this scene, the characters have their first opportunity to investigate recent events in Cata'Lasis. It begins as they disembark their vessel and meet with Councilor Aryel de Chevalier (see page 12). She is happy to offer detailed reports on the recent sightings of creatures of Darkness within the nation. After meeting with her, the characters can pursue the sightings, traveling to the area where they took place. They also have an opportunity to investigate scenes where damages have taken place as well as interview survivors of the encounters. To open the scene, game masters should read or paraphrase the following, adapting as necessary to group:

*A ship's whistle squeals, and almost simultaneously you hear and feel the dull thud of a gangplank crashing down on a harbor dock. The bosun shouts out, "All ashore!" and you know it's time to depart from the vessel. The trip was uneventful. The crew was respectful of you, recognizing the cloaks of Grayson's Grey Rangers. The time provided an opportunity to reflect upon your recent adventures, while reviewing the notes the commander gave you about Cata'Lasis and the current situation. Knowing that creatures of Darkness have intruded upon this ostensibly peaceful place could be a very real threat to a valuable resource. It's critical that you work with the locals to quickly find and eliminate these monsters.*

Because the adventure opens with the heroes in a new country, they are certain to have spent time traveling prior to the opening scene. Game masters may wish to offer the characters a brief opportunity to spend experience or acquire mundane equipment

prior to the beginning of the adventure. This is particularly relevant due to the possibility of an outcome where the characters are trapped in another reality. Goods that they are accustomed to, including foods, herbs, and alchemical components could soon be in extremely short supply.

For Shaintar natives, Cata'Lasis is still a very new discovery – an entire nation, once hidden by the Mists of the Veil, recently revealed during the events of the Godstrike Tempest. Early diplomatic missions from the Southern Kingdoms met with great success, which is why the Rangers are dispatched to aid the Crysarium Council with this crisis.

The Councilor meets the characters with her entourage on the deck. She is immediately recognizable as a personage of some authority, based upon the guards and servants in her retinue. Councilor de Chevalier (see below) cheerfully greets the characters, and conducts them to a private meeting room at a guard station near the docks. When she meets with them, she initially addresses any wielders of magic, assuming that such personages lead the group. She provides them with information about the current situation in extraordinary detail. The Councilor is also prepared to give the Rangers maps and even a guide to reach the area where the sightings have occurred. Her biggest concern is that Cata'Lasis soldiers are simply not prepared for a major encounter with a sizable force of corrupt creatures. The troops readily at hand just lack the experience and training for a meaningful encounter.

## THE THREAT OF DARKNESS

Cata'Lasis has never faced a significant threat from either Darkness or Flame. There have been minor conflicts, but the nation's geographical isolation has always represented its own defense. Recently, however, reports have begun to come in from an area a day's travel north of Dar'Roe Tes—the capital city, where the Councilor meets with the characters. Several farms, a mine, and a logging camp have all been abandoned. Survivors indicate that a number of their fellows vanished without explanation. Searches of the area turned up tracks, though none of the residents recognized them.

When the mine came under an organized attack, its surviving workers fled. Rather than trying to mount a concerted resistance, they sent word to their neighbors who dwelt in the area. Almost everyone fled the area—locally called the Fair Dales—and

## IN REVERSE

If running *Darkest Tides* for characters from Morden, then the Witchmarked begin their adventure in Respite, likely as agents of the Order of the Penitent seeking out rumors of the Chimera in the region. Time spent in Cata'Lasis could represent one potential ending for the scenario. Fear and loathing for the inhuman Accursed—particularly those who appear to be agents of Darkness—should be a strong theme here. Attempts to interact with Rangers or even Cata'Lasis authorities are likely to go badly. Conversely, agents of Darkness may attempt to recruit the Accursed.

On Respite, the desperate tone of the locals parallels the refugees. They are terrified that gods might be coming to take vengeance upon them. However, they have fewer resources and nowhere that is safe. Instead of waiting patiently for help, they are willing to take extreme measures to escape what they view as certain doom. Many humans who would normally shun Witchmarked are now offering whatever it might take to garner their assistance.

took up residence in impromptu refugee camps, outside of Dar'Roe Tes. When city guard heard the stories and descriptions that the refugees presented, they concluded that the attackers were creatures of Darkness. The Crysarium Council then sent a formal request to Grayson's Grey Rangers for assistance.

Refugees from the region are available to talk with the heroes about their encounters. However, most of the people fled the region without actually seeing anything. They trusted the miners who gave the warning. The residents are all anxious to return but are unwilling to risk their lives to do so. Their current living conditions are poor, but the city has shown enough compassion that they are not desperate or in squalor. Consequently, they are willing to give the government—or the Rangers—more time to resolve the problem before they return to try to salvage their homes and lives. A few admit to hearing loud noises at night and seeing dark shadows in the nearby forests. The few miners that can meet with the heroes—including Magnor Shieldstorm (see page 12)—describe creatures that could be troglodytes or trolls, but they also describe giant worms on dog legs, a description that offers no point of reference for the heroes unless the Rangers in question fought maggot hounds during the Chimera's incursion into Shaintar.

When the characters head into the wilderness to get a first hand view of the site, proceed to *Scene 2: The Fair Dales*.

## COUNCILOR ARYEL DE CHEVALIER

The councilor is a decorated military veteran, but she is many years past her time of service. For the past several decades, she has worked the halls of political power, until assuming a seat on the Crysarium Council. She is a cheerful and talkative woman, happy to recount tales of her time in the military as a framing point for the discussion about this current threat. She is also very curious about the heroes that represent Grayson's Grey Rangers on Cata'Lasis. She diplomatically questions them about their previous actions, trying to make sure that they have faced creatures of Darkness previously. While she is relatively easy to appease in this regard, she becomes far less cooperative if they convince her that they are poorly prepared for the upcoming conflict.

The Councilor is legitimately concerned about her people. She wants to make certain that the heroes are capable of defeating the threat that has been reported. Assuming the characters reassure her concerns with tales of triumph and daring, then she is lavish in her praises and support of them. She is ready and able to provide any routine equipment and basic sundries, including mounts, foodstuffs, ammunition, and similar goods. Game masters must use their discretion as regards items that are more difficult to acquire.

## MAGNOR SHIELDSTORM

Magnor is a foreman among the dwarven miners who have taken refuge outside Dar'Roe Tes. He is ashamed that he and his people had to seek outside assistance to deal with the creatures that threatened the mine. However, this is not his first encounter with such monstrosities, as he served in the military during his youth, just 80 years ago. Magnor is brave and stalwart and willing to risk his life to help his people. He just wants to make certain that whatever threatens the mine can be expelled and that his people can resume control of it, even if it costs him everything to do so.

Magnor saw trolls, troglodytes, and maggot hounds before his people fled the mines. However, he had never observed any of these creatures before, so he does not know what names to give them. He tries ably to recognize descriptions, but he wants to be more helpful than he is capable of being, so he consistently tells the heroes what he thinks they want to hear. Magnor has dwelt in the region and worked the mine for the decades since his military service ended. He knows it well, and is familiar with the native environment and capable of recognizing things that do not belong.

## SCENE 2: THE FAIR DALES

Characters travel to the location from which the refugees have fled during this scene. They have an opportunity to search the area. In the process, they discover some unusual tracks and have an opportunity to confront a few creatures of Darkness. Ultimately, all signs point to the creatures having emerged from within the mine. Once they enter it, Magnor reluctantly admits that some portions of it predate his people's mining efforts—and use construction techniques that he has never seen elsewhere. When the characters proceed to the area where the creatures of Darkness were seen, read or paraphrase the following:

*It only takes a few hours travel to leave Dar'Roe Tes far behind and to enter the surprisingly serene forests of Cata'Lasis. Magnor leads the way through the woods, recognizing the route by eye, never reaching for a map. As you traveled, in spite of the peaceful appearances, the foreman endlessly nagged you to stay steadfast and observant. He seemed certain that the creatures that invaded his precious mine were waiting just over the next hill. In spite of his warnings, the half day trip was uneventful, and as you've begun to descend into the Fair Dales, you can see the structures of the town, logging camp, and mine. From the lip of the valley, all looks peaceful, but you do notice that no smoke emerges from any of the chimneys, and there are no signs of civilized activities.*

There are three prominent outposts within the Fair Dales. Characters may choose to search the village, the logging camp, or the mine if they want to look for evidence of the Darkness near inhabited places. Alternatively, they might decide to explore the less civilized forests, hoping to find a base of operations. Assuming the characters departed the capital in the morning, then they are likely to only have a few hours of daylight remaining before the night arrives. Game masters may wish to point out that heroes would probably want to establish a camp—or make use of the structures at one of the facilities—for the night, particularly in light of the fact that there might be creatures of Darkness roaming the area.

## THE WOODS

The Fair Dales is a temperate forest. Broad-leaved trees dominate the region, with the exception of those places that have been cleared for civilized use. The trees grow densely together. During the summer, direct sunlight seldom reaches the forest floor so much of the ground is littered with decaying plant matter. Scrub plant growth is interspersed with fungus feasting on the remains of fallen branches. There are many signs of animal life, including the sounds of native species. With a successful Survival check, characters notice that the wildlife seems to be roughly normal. They also find humanoid tracks, consistent with troglodytes. These tracks lead from the mine to the village and logging camp. On a raise, characters also notice evidence of slightly increased predation, including canine-like tracks that are not familiar to them (Maggot Hound tracks). These are consistently contaminated with a slimy mucous.

## THE VILLAGE

The village included a general store, a smithy, and a temple to the Ascended—which doubled as the town meeting hall. There are just over a dozen homes in the central town area, and another fifteen within a few miles of the village, interspersed throughout the woods. Refugees left the Fair Dales in a remarkably orderly manner. They recognized the imminent danger but took the time to pack their necessities and most important items with them before they left. All of the buildings have been pillaged and show signs of forceful entry. A successful Knowledge (Darkness) test identifies that the scavenging looks troglodyte activity. Nothing is destroyed, but consumables have been used up and the place is a mess. The villagers will need to spend a significant amount of time cleaning things up upon their return.

## THE LOGGING CAMP

The logging camp is not a large facility. Roughly twenty lumberjacks worked together to fell old growth trees and prepare the wood for transport back to Dar'Roe Tes. There the wood is used for a variety of purposes, including shipbuilding. The camp did not have any permanent structures, though they have left behind several semi-mobile structures, used to section a fallen tree. The path of the camp's travels over the years is obvious to

follow, as they have left behind a series of stump-filled or stump- and sapling-filled clearings. The open spaces radiate out from the village. Some of the oldest ones have become large gardens or small farms adjacent to the village's more distant homes. With a Tracking check, characters find tracks similar to those mentioned in the Woods above. There is evidence of pillaging the camp, as the lumberjacks did not leave anything behind to scavenge.

## THE MINE

Magnor is most concerned with leading the Rangers to the mine. He knows that it was the reason for the evacuation. He also fears that there are many dangerous creatures within its murky depths. If consulted, he favors having the group proceed directly to the mine, ignoring any of the other areas, though he cheerfully acts in accordance with the heroes' plans.

As soon as the characters approach the mine, the signs of recent activity are immediately apparent—no test required. There are recent tracks indicative of many creatures exiting and entering recently. A Knowledge (Darkness) check recognizes the prints of both troglodytes and trolls. With a raise, they can estimate this more closely at roughly twenty troglodytes and five trolls. A Tracking check reveals that—assuming it is daytime—the most recent tracks make it likely that all of the creatures have returned to the mine.

Darkness creatures emerge from the mine on a nightly basis to explore the area, seeking prey. They return to their homes within the depths of the mine before each dawn. Three troglodytes (see *Shaintar: Legends Arise* page 161) rest about five hundred feet back from the entrance to the mine, guarding it even during the daytime. They have a rotating watch with one awake while the other two sleep. If a troglodyte spots the heroes entering the mine, it wakes its companions. One is sent to summon reinforcements (the forces from *Nighttime Encounters*, below), while the other two attempt to delay the heroes.

When the characters proceed into the depths of the mines, past any encounter with the guards and their reinforcements, proceed to *Scene 3: Deep Beneath the Surface*.

## NIGHTTIME ENCOUNTERS

At night, the creatures of Darkness depart from the Mine and explore the Fair Dales. They are split into two evenly sized groups, each consists of a dozen troglodytes led by a troglodyte fearmonger and accompanied by three trolls (see *Shaintar: Legends Arise* pages 161–163). The groups are focused primarily on finding any goods that they can steal, for the use of their larger city within the depths of the mine. By the time the characters arrive, though, they have largely depleted the region of easily accessible resources. Consequently, unless the characters have taken measures to conceal their presence, the new tracks they have left behind are of great interest to the monsters.

Game Masters should construct the encounter based upon any measures the heroes have taken to conceal their presence and activities. If they have set up an obvious, but well defended camp, then the two groups of corrupt creatures are certain to work together against the heroes. If the heroes have concealed themselves, then one of the groups of monsters is likely to attack them only after they stumble across them. Alternatively, particularly sneaky heroes might completely avoid detection and have an opportunity to ambush the monsters.

If questioned, the troglodytes and trolls are not privy to any high level plans. They have a subterranean village, in an area of ancient caverns. Recent mine expansion connected the Fair Dales mines to those ancient caverns. When that happened, they started to encounter creatures that they had never seen before (from Morden). They attacked the Fair Dales to stop that, but have found little evidence of the monsters. When asked for specifics, they mention the worms with dog legs (Maggot Hounds) that the refugees had also described. If the characters get a raise with their interrogation efforts, the creatures also mention the ancient and forbidden city. They do not talk about it any further, save to mention the purple light.

When the characters proceed into the depths of the mines, proceed to *Scene 3: Deep Beneath the Surface*.

## IN REVERSE

When the Witchmarked first enter the tunnels on Respite, they are likely to encounter comparable numbers of the Chimera's creations. A Mongrel leads Cauldron Born who are exploring the caverns, and attempting to find the legendary connections to other worlds. Maggot Hounds are used as scouts, to explore the depths more quickly than the Cauldron Born, with the expectation that they should report back with any discoveries. Later, if they escape the mine on the Shaintar side, the characters encounter monsters of Darkness prior to reaching the Fair Dales.

## SCENE 3: DEEP BENEATH THE SURFACE

This section of the adventure presents the recently uncovered Builder structures that recent excavation connected to the Fair Dales mine. As the characters search through here, they encounter crystal-powered metal golems that the Builders created in past eons. While investigating, they encounter a group of Accursed in battle with banes loyal to the Chimera. The characters must decide if they wish to join the battle and uncover these foreign beings—whom they may assume are creatures of Darkness. After the characters have begun to explore the depths of the Fair Dales mine, read or paraphrase the following:

*Clearly, Magnor knows where he's going, as leads you ever deeper through the mine, following a seemingly endless series of tunnels and ladders. He's been humming tonelessly for the past half hour, and you're starting to suspect it might be a show of nerves—it's gotten louder and more off-key. He stops when you ask him to, but he starts up again seemingly unconsciously. You haven't seen or heard any new signs of Darkness creatures, but you have heard unsettling noises from side tunnels. You haven't seen any light other than those you've carried for the past several hours. Just ahead, that seems to have changed. At first it looked like a trick of the light, but now you're certain of it. There's a faint purple glow coming from up ahead. It looks like there's a break in the tunnel, and glow is from just beyond it.*

The heroes might have decided to explore other portions of the mine before proceeding to the site of the disturbance. Game masters must use discretion in creating other encounters within the mine. These are most likely to focus around any of the Chimera's banes (see *Accursed* pages 120–121), but might also include a few troglodyte or troll stragglers that missed the battle at the mine entrance. Characters who are particularly determined to explore could even find

unstable sections. Magnor is accommodating of the heroes' whims as always, but does point out that he really would like them to see the break through site that triggered the evacuation. He also knows the portions of the mine that are structurally unsound and warns the heroes before they enter such places.

## THE BUILDER COMPLEX

When the characters look through the break in the tunnel, it's immediately apparent that this is unlike anything they have seen elsewhere in the mines. The passage opens up broadly into a massive cavern, which looks to be hundreds of feet in height, and may be miles across in all directions. In the distance, the ruins of a complex architectural structure—a city, or possibly a temple—occupy much of a large hill. The entire cavern is dimly lit with a faint purple light. The source of the light appears to be crystals, which are interspersed unevenly throughout the entire complex—on walls, in the floor, and even integrated into the buildings.



## LAWS OF REALITY

Within the confines of the massive cavern that represents the builder complex, characters can disregard the earlier setting conversion notes. In here, everything works for characters as though they were in their native realities. So, gunpowder weapons and Witchcraft work perfectly well for Witchmarked from Morden, while Priests, Druids, Adepts, and Sorcerers' powers are fully functional for heroes from Shaintar.

With a Knowledge (History) check, characters recognize that these structures are unspeakably old, likely predating anything but legends associated with ancient cultures. With a raise (or if the heroes have previously been in a Builder citadel), they think some of the buildings resemble ancient Builder styles. However, there are a number of elements, which are foreign even to those.

Success on a Tracking check reveals troll and troglodyte tracks that follow the edge of the cavern. If the characters choose to track these back, they discover that a similar break in the cavern wall leads to tunnels filled with a substantial troglodyte and troll city. Creatures of Darkness from that area had stumbled into the Fair Dales mine while exploring the cavern. The monsters were too superstitious to actively explore the Builder complex, so chose instead to fight their way through the mines.

A Notice check shows limited tracks disturbing the dust and loose dirt between the main part of the Builder structure and the crack leading back to the Fair Dales mine. Characters also recognize that these tracks don't look like they were made by humanoids. In fact, they most closely resemble dog tracks (Maggot Hounds, again).

Characters who enter the complex soon discover that it is ruined, but not entirely abandoned. Crystal-powered Warrior Golems (see *Shaintar: Legends Arise* page 151) monitor the city. They are not communicative, nor are they particularly aggressive guardians. Their role is simply to protect the city from further damage, and to attempt to make whatever repairs they can. The automatons engage the characters if they try to damage the city or if they attempt to take anything from it—including glowing crystals, loose stones, or the remains of books or artifacts located within the structures. Four automatons stand guard at each entrance to the complex. They do not obstruct the heroes, but do follow them at a discrete distance throughout—observing to make certain the characters do not damage the ruins further. If combat is joined, the

automatons are capable of summoning more of their kind, with up to twenty of the constructs joining a single conflict over time.

The ruins are vast. There are nearly one hundred buildings in the complex, ranging in size from small residences to buildings that seem analogous to large temple complexes. All are crumbling. There is evidence of habitation, but it took place many thousands of years earlier. There are ruins of scrolls and even inscriptions on the walls. However, the scrolls crumble at a touch and the language of the inscriptions is incomprehensible.

If the players use magic or extraordinary measures to attempt to translate or interpret the writings, it becomes clear that this facility was used to research extremely complicated magic. A raise on a Knowledge (Magic) check is necessary to even begin to understand the concepts or terminology. The core revelation is that the facility was working to uncover a means to breach the boundaries between different realities. The writings they find all indicate that the researchers were on the verge of a major breakthrough. The heroes do not uncover anything to reveal the precise nature of the cataclysm, though it's easy to infer that it was a result of something going awry in the research.

## BANE ENCOUNTER

As the heroes near the end of their exploration, call for a Notice check. On success, the characters hear the sounds of battle. With a raise, they can tell that it's a small fight, with probably about ten people total involved. They also know the direction and distance—about a block from their current locale. If the characters choose to investigate, read or paraphrase the following to suit their approach:

*Following your eyes to the sounds of battle, you quickly survey the fight. Your first inkling is that it is a power play between agents of Darkness. On one side, you see a corpse golem, a werewolf, and a wraith battle against a dozen skeletons led by a man who appears to have the arm of an over-sized crab. The wraith is wielding a magical staff, which keeps letting out loud blasts, damaging the skeletons and the surrounding buildings when he misses his target. It's hard to tell which side currently has the upper hand, but it seems likely that the battle could soon draw the attention of the automatons.*

## IN REVERSE

For the Witchmarked, the Builders' construction is even more of a mystery, as it does not correlate to any of Morden's legends. During their exploration, they come across a party of Grayson's Grey Rangers in conflict with a party of Trolls and Troglodytes. In this case, the villains might be easier to identify, though not necessarily—particularly if some of the Rangers are non-human. The cavern collapse is likely triggered by a stray blast of magic, though it could also be from a massive troll colliding with a support column.

As described, there are twelve cauldron born skeletons (see page 21) led by Jorge Leonardo, a Mongrel loyal to the Chimera (see page 17). Zeke Drakos, Pavel Shostak, and Maria Pietro (see page 17–18) are respectively a Golem, a Vargr, and a Shade who belong to the Order of the Penitent. For the heroes from Shaintar, there are no obvious clues about the intentions or allegiance of the combatants. All of these characters appear to be creatures of Darkness. If they wish to immediately join in the conflict, they may do so freely. If the heroes engage one side, the other will assume that they are allies of their foes, and fight back in keeping with their current allegiance. If the heroes engage characters from both sides, the Order of the Penitent attempt to avoid attacking the heroes—and try to explain themselves (see *The Penitents*, below). Creatures loyal to the Chimera continue the conflict.

Characters who wait and listen to the battle, can infer a bit more information with success on a Perception check. It's immediately clear that the skeletons are silent and determined in their battle. They seem to be simply automatons. The other creatures all speak with accents that are unfamiliar to the ears of people from Shaintar, but their language is recognizable. The members of the Order of the Penitent accuse the Mongrel of treachery and evil, insisting that they will stop him from spreading his foul mistress's dark deeds any further. The Mongrel, in turn, accuses members of the order of being naïve, simplistic, and foolish.

If the heroes do not intervene, the battle concludes when the Mongrel and cauldron born slay the last of the Order of the Penitent. In the conflict, all of the skeletons are destroyed and the Mongrel badly injured. However, a stray blast—at the Game Master's discretion this could be a spell cast by Jorge or a shot from Maria's rifle shatters one of the glowing crystals. When that happens, the ground begins to sway, and some of the nearby structures shake in a foreboding manner. Unless the heroes intervene, crystalline automatons soon arrive and slay the Mongrel for daring to damage their area.



## THE WITCHMARKED

During the battle, the heroes have little opportunity for discussion with any of the characters from Morden. After its conclusion, the cavern begins to collapse—damaged by the magic and technology employed during the fight. With that in mind, immediate opportunities for interaction with these characters are limited. However, the characters may shout a few words to one another, and this section should help to clarify their motivations as well.

Once the fight is complete, give the groups a few minutes to interact. This is basically enough time for guarded introductions and brief explanations. Before any resolution is achieved, proceed to *Scene 4: Escaping the Dig*.

### JORGE LEONARDO

Jorge is a Mongrel Witchmarked, who retains his loyalty to the Chimera, a witch whose specialty involves recombining life into new forms. The hallmark of his transformation is the limb of a giant crab, which replaces his right arm. Jorge is fiercely loyal to his unholy mistress, and willing to go to any extreme to expand her reach. He expects everyone he deals with to immediately recognize his authority as an envoy of the Chimera, and to show him the utmost respect, heeding his every wish.

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

**Skills:** Athletics d8, Fighting d10, Guts d8, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Witchcraft) d10, Notice d6, Taunt d8, Witchcraft d10

**Charisma:** 0, **Pace:** 6, **Parry:** 7, **Toughness:** 8 (3)

**Hindrances:** Obligation (Major, Chimera), Stubborn

**Edges:** Arcane Background (Witchcraft), Dodge, Hard to Kill, Power Points, Quick

**Witchbreed Traits:** Claw Arm (Str d12 on that limb), Natural Weapon (Claw, Str + d4, Reach +1)

**Powers:** *blast, blind, puppet, slow*

**Gear:** Reinforced Great Coat, Rope, Lantern (Bullseye), Oil (Lantern), Rations

## ZEKE DRAKOS

Though he fought in the Bane War, Zeke has struggled to put his memories of the atrocities he committed during that time behind him. Loyal to the cause of the Order of the Penitent, he is driven to purge his sins by stopping the activities of the Witches and their Agents. He has led his team to this place in pursuit of agents of the Chimera. Zeke does not know why they are here or what they want, but he does know that her scheme must be stopped before it could further damage Morden—or any other place.

Zeke is blunt and direct in any discussions. He wants to know what's going on, and he prefers a simple explanation. He sees the world in black and white. In spite of all appearances, he knows that he is on the side of justice and right, and he wants to see those who oppose those ideals eliminated.

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

**Skills:** Fighting d8, Guts d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d6

**Charisma:** 0, **Pace:** 6, **Parry:** 6, **Toughness:** 10 (2)

**Hindrances:** Obligation (Major, Order of the Penitent), Code of Honor (Major)

**Edges:** Officer of the Alliance, True to its Origin, Quick

**Witchbreed Traits:** Constructed, Hulking, Weakness (Fire)

**Gear:** Scythe (Str + d6, Parry -1, Reach 1, 2 hands), Brigandine Armor



## PAVEL SHOSTAK

A Vargr from Steppengrad, Pavel is the least experienced member of the trio. He is committed to the cause of the Order, but he does not completely trust his companions. In fact, Pavel is suspicious of everyone, and suspects deception as a matter of course. He tries to hedge the Order's commitment in any discussion, and repeatedly reminds Zeke and Maria to not mention things. He suspects that the heroes are already familiar with Morden, and that they might be agents of one of the Witches—he's just not sure which one.

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

**Skills:** Athletics d6, Fighting d8, Guts d6, Notice d8, Tracking d6

**Charisma:** 0, **Pace:** 6, **Parry:** 6, **Toughness:** 10 (2)

**Hindrances:** Obligation (Major, Order of the Penitent), Jingoistic (Steppengrad)

**Edges:** Alertness, Dodge, Level Headed

**Witchbreed Traits:** Bestial Form (Str and Fighting increase by two die types, Charisma decreases by -4, Gains +2 to notice, dark vision, and Str +d6 Natural Weapons), Weakness (Silver)

**Gear:** Knife

## MARIA PIETRO

The Shade is the expert on the Witches and their banes within the trio of Penitents. However, she is at a loss to explain the origins or meaning of this place. She wishes to return to her home as soon as possible, to report to the Order about their findings. She believes that bringing the heroes from Shaintar with them would provide the best possible report. However, she is hesitant to share any of the secrets about her own home with them. For, she fears that they could be agents of one of the Witches, who seek to infiltrate the Order.

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d4, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Athletics d4, Fighting d8, Guts d6, Investigation d6, Knowledge (Witches) d6, Notice d6, Shooting d10, Subterfuge d6

**Charisma:** 0, **Pace:** 6, **Parry:** 8, **Toughness:** 7 (2)

**Hindrances:** Obligation (Major, Order of the Penitent), Overconfident (Major)

**Edges:** Spectral Flight, Dead Shot

**Witchbreed Traits:** Phasing (Pass through solid objects, immune to physical attack while phased, must become corporeal again to attack), Weakness (Salt)

**Gear:** Brigandine



## SCENE 4. ESCAPING THE DIG

The battle between the beings from another world has badly damaged the cavern containing the Builders complex. The ground rumbles, and the roof begins to collapse. The heroes must decide if they have time to return the way they came, or if they should follow their new-found allies through another tunnel exit. Even once they clear the cavern, they are hunted by banes of the Chimera, until they finally escape into the wilds of either Morden or Shaintar. When the scene begins, read or paraphrase the following modifying it to suit the current situation as needed:

*You hear a sharp snapping sound, followed by a rumble. A massive stone pillar that ran from the ground to the roof of the cavern collapses away from your small group. The ground rattles a bit, then dust and smaller stones start to fall from the cavern ceiling. In a moment, you hear more loud snapping sounds, and massive cracks radiate out across the ceiling, from the point where the pillar had once attached. More gravel rains down, but it looks like far larger pieces are certain to follow. Magnor shouts the obvious, "We have to go! This cavern won't last long."*

The heroes have only a few minutes before the cavern roof collapses, triggering an avalanche that likely buries the Builder complex forever. A Knowledge (Mining) check confirms that, but the critical nature of the situation is abundantly obvious. Their dwarf guide is in a hurry to leave the area. He is likely the most knowledgeable miner in the group, and he recognizes the imminent threat. The heroes may wish to discuss matters or devise a plan, Magnor tries to persuade them to move now, and discuss plans later. If they do not leave, he flees on his own, hoping to find the entrance to Shaintar.

The Penitents from Morden know the way back to their entrance. They marked a trail and Pavel's nose is also a reliable guide. They can get there quickly, and offer to lead the Rangers back that way. The heroes may have traveled from the troglodyte cave or explored the complex. Their route is likely much less direct. With a raise on a Notice check, the heroes know a direct route back to the Fair Dales mine, which they can use to escape. Without that, they know that following the Penitents is the surest way to escape the cavern before it completely collapses. (Game Masters who are hesitant to run a

## THE OTHER SIDE

Characters from Morden may be more interested in traveling to Shaintar than Rangers in visiting Morden. Some might even hope that crossing the boundary could be enough to break the curse of their Witchmark. This final scene should invert cleanly, as at least one of the Rangers is certain of the route back to Shaintar and is happy to guide the Penitent to safety.

story arc in Morden following this adventure may wish to let the heroes spend bennies to re-roll after explaining the effects.)

No checks are required to escape the cavern collapse. This is largely a matter of time. Unless the heroes deliberately proceed slowly, they escape before the roof gives out. If they delay needlessly, then it collapses before they exit, trapping them beneath infinite tons of rock, at the center of a nexus between realities. Further escape at that point is improbable at best.

In the interests of drama, the cavern ceiling collapses just as the last members of the party exit into the cave or mine entrance connecting to it. Dust and gravel spray over them, producing a coughing fit, but few other effects. The route to the surface is only disturbed when the characters finally encounter a pack of six Maggot Hounds (see page 21). The banes were drawn to the sound and feel of the collapse, and attempt to swarm and devour the heroes. Note that this encounter can take place on either side of the cavern, as the banes were exploring both sections for the Chimera.

The adventure concludes when the characters emerge into the sunlight once more, finally departing the mine (or the caves). Depending upon their interactions with the Witchmarked, they may have arrived in Morden with no plan for returning to Shaintar. Alternatively, they may now have a party of Accursed in their company, who do not know how they might return to their homes in Morden.

## REWARDS AND CONSEQUENCES

In the wake of this adventure, the heroes have experienced extraordinary things, including confirmation of the existence of a completely alien world. At the same time, they have confirmed evidence that, at some point, the Builders may have been able to connect Shaintar with such places. The heroes might even have individuals from another world in their company. How they proceed with that information could have a significant impact on their future adventures.

Collapsing the Builder cavern—whether they intended to do so or not—effectively seals off the complex as well as the troglodyte village from the Fair Dales. A few straggling creatures of Darkness and banes of the Chimera may remain, but the village is largely secured. The refugees can return to their homes in relative safety. The Rangers have completed their task and earned a reward of 5 XPs.

Heroes who took the time and effort to search the Fair Dales before (or after) their adventure through the mines earn an additional 2 XPs.

Restoring the connection to the Builder cavern would take months of concerted work by a large team of miners. Even then, the magic involved might not restore properly. Game masters must decide if they want the connection between worlds to remain viable beyond the scope of this adventure. If they do, then it can certainly be possible. If not, then the collapse damaged some of the Builder machinery irreparably, leaving this connection sundered.

Characters who have traveled to the world of Morden are likely left with limited powers (see *Rules Conversions*, page 8) as they seek their way back home. Traveling from Morden to Shaintar is not a trivial matter. Even a potent White Witch or Warlock is unlikely to know of any means of breaching the barrier between the worlds. Ancient legends speak of the Lightning Bridge that brought humanity to Morden. Tracking down those legends—likely in the tunnels beneath Hyphratian Tombs could provide valuable leads. Caves nestled among the foreboding the Darkwall Peaks might connect with alien places—which could explain some of the horrific creatures that come from those places. Alternatively, one of Manreia's scientists, including Von Nachtmachen himself, might have created a device that could breach the barrier.

If the characters brought the trio of Witchmarked with them, the heroes might try to break their curse or to return the Accursed to their homes. Unfortunately, their mere presence here is enough to have alerted the Witches of Shaintar's existence. This could set in motion a chain of events where the Witches reassemble the Grand Coven with the intentions of invading at least some portion of Shaintar. This world is rich in magical energies, which they would crave for their own dark purposes. The Witches could not act quickly, but time is meaningless to these immortal beings. How could Shaintar prepare for an attack from an enemy traveling from beyond the boundaries of existence? Skilled sorcerers could learn to penetrate the barrier between worlds, providing a way for the Accursed to learn home as well as gaining an opportunity to send scouts to Morden.



## BESTIARY

These creatures are included for Game Masters that do not have *Accursed*.

### CAULDRON BORN, SKELETAL

Little remains of these Cauldron born but bones, animated by the Morrigan's necromantic witchcraft. Their empty eye sockets glimmer with sinister crimson light, and they move with unnatural speed.

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d4, Strength d8, Vigor d6

**Skills:** Fighting d6, Notice d4, Shooting d6

**Pace:** 8, **Parry:** 5, **Toughness:** 7

#### SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Bony Claws:** Str+d6; AP 1
- **Fearless:** Cauldron born are immune to Fear and Intimidation.
- **Undead:** +2 Toughness; +2 to recover from being Shaken; called shots do no extra damage unless targeting the head; Immune to disease and poison.
- **Weakness (Cold Iron):** Cauldron born suffer +4 damage from weapons made from cold iron.
- **Witchline (Morrigan):** Banes of the Morrigan can be sensed by Revenant Accursed within 25 feet.

### MAGGOT HOUND

Maggot Hounds combine the body of a large hunting dog with the head and neck of a massive maggot. It is clear that these banes – which often swarm in packs – gain a voracious appetite from their insect components. However, it is unclear if they have any other benefits from the combination

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d4 (A), Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

**Skills:** Fighting d8, Notice d10

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

#### SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Bite:** Str+d8
- **Fear:** Maggot Hounds are unnatural and disturbing.
- **Fleet-footed:** Maggot Hounds roll d10 instead of d6 when running.
- **Low Light Vision:** Maggot Hounds ignore penalties for Dim and Dark lighting.
- **Witchline (Chimera):** Banes of the Chimera can be sensed by Mongrels within 25 feet. The Free City of Eastport

