

BRAVENIOFT



ASHEN

The Ancient Dead

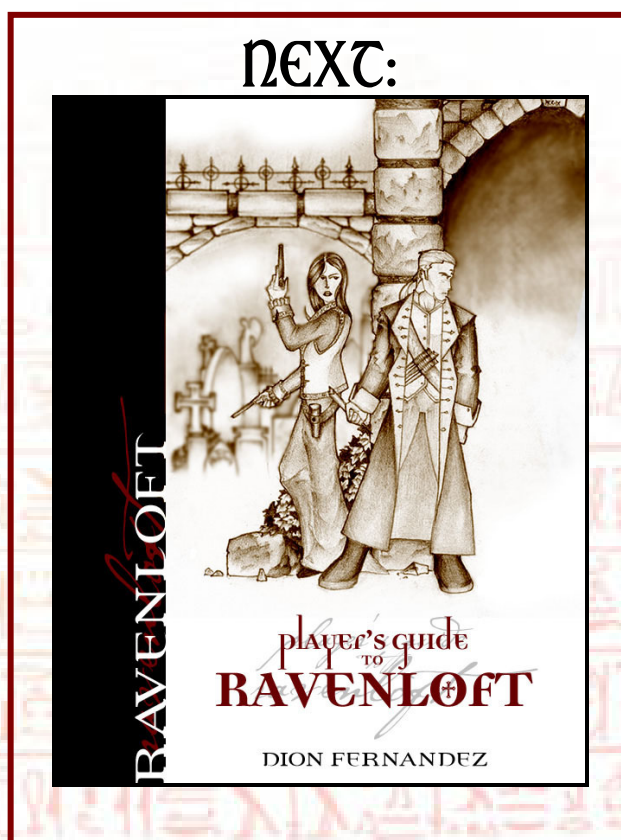
DION FERNANDEZ

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The Ancient Dead

A Netbook for the Ravenloft Campaign Setting
using the Dungeons & Dragons v3.5 Edition Rules

Art and writings by
Dion Fernandez
souragne@yahoo.com



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INTRODUCTION

Far too often, the term “mummy” brings into mind dried out corpses from ancient Egypt, wrapped in rotting linen and shambling with clumsy speed across the barren sands. We occasionally forget the fact that the sophisticated culture of mummies could be found all across the world, from the Nile Valley in Egypt, the snow-capped peaks of Peru, the gargantuan tombs of China, the Capuchin catacombs of Italy and the peat bogs of Denmark. I personally live not more than thirty kilometers from a mummy cave—not uncommon for one who was born in a culture that venerates the dead and gives them the hope of a perpetual afterlife that mirrors their living years. The Igorot ethnic group is one such culture, and it is one which I am proud to be a part of; it is I believe the only mummy-venerating culture in Southeast Asia.

I have always been fascinated with mummies, in history, fiction, popular culture and cinema. Ever since I got to hold a mummy more than twenty years ago at a local museum, I was hooked into gathering information about them, no matter how false or how far-fetched they may be. It was easy to sift the facts from the fallacies, but when I got hooked into D&D and Ravenloft I decided to apply my knowledge into creating unique mummy characters—some of which are presented in this humble online accessory which is a week late.

Mummies in both fantasy and horror are creatures of dread; they represent the distant past and how our own miniscule, even sterile, time pales in comparison to it. In Ravenloft the ancient harbor great power; unlike vampires, who require sustenance from the living to survive, mummies find little to gain from interacting with mortals, and were it not for their potentially higher knowledge of the ways of the world they would have destroyed the living long ago. The creatures in this accessory maximize the rules for ancient dead creation found in the *Ravenloft Player's Handbook*, published by White Wolf. I also made it a point to slightly exploit the rule which states that the ancient dead template could be applied to “any living creature,” but I also had to forego the rule that states ancient dead are “always evil;” thus I included mummies that are morally neutral, and even one with a good alignment.

Ashen: the Ancient Dead requires use of the *Dungeons & Dragons Core Rules* (version 3.5), as well as the *Ravenloft Core Rules* published by White Wolf. I have also thrown in references to at least three other White Wolf Ravenloft accessories and one other D&D accessory, but they are not necessary.

Dion Fernandez
Baguio City, Philippines
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THE BOG TWINS



Perhaps we cannot prevent this world from being a world in which children are tortured. But we can reduce the number of tortured children.

Albert Camus



Modern civilization tends to think of the ancient pagan gods as cruel and fickle; perhaps their tales did in fact hold true. More often than not the ravenous gods were believed to have demanded human sacrifice, usually taken as spoils of war or chattel ready to be disposed. No matter how unwilling the victims were, those who performed these acts nevertheless saw the sacrificed as blessed, ready to seat immortal alongside the gods. But as the denizens of the Realm of Dread know all too well, “immortality” is a term with many meanings, all of them never to be taken lightly.

THE BOG GIRL (CR 7)

Female 2nd-rank ancient dead (human) aristocrat 3
 N Small undead (augmented humanoid)
Init -1; **Senses** Listen +13, Spot +15
Languages Tepestani, Proto-Tepestani
AC 19, touch 11, flat-footed 17
hp 14 (3 HD); rejuvenation; **DR** 5/magic
Immune undead immunities, water-based attacks
Resist +2 turn resistance, Resistant to Blows
Fort +5, **Ref** -1, **Will** +8
Weakness fire vulnerability
Speed 20 ft. (4 squares)
Melee slam +7 (1d4+5)
Base Atk +2; **Grp** +7
Atk Options Improved Grab (hit with slam attack first), Disease
Special Action Fear
Abilities Str 20, Dex 9, Con --, Int 11, Wis 20, Cha 18
SQ Passage
Feats Alertness, Run, Skill Focus (Survival), Toughness

Skills Climb +13, Hide +13, Listen +13, Move Silently +8, Spot +15, Survival +9, Swim +4

Disease (Su) The Bog Girl can inflict a Slimy Doom disease (*DMG*, p.292) through contact with its slam attack (DC 16 Fort save to resist).

Fear (Su) Those viewing the Bog Girl must make a DC 15 Will save or be paralyzed with fear for 6 rounds. The target(s) cannot be affected again for the rest of the day.

Passage (Su) Three times an hour the Bog Girl can create a passage through stone, earth and wood, as the *phase door* spell cast by a 3rd-level sorcerer.

Rejuvenation (Su) The Bog Girl can draw on the Positive Energy Plane to heal damage at a rate of 6 hp an hour. The Bog Girl needs to rest for 1 day in the bogs before the rejuvenation process can begin, and is inert for one more day after the process completes. During rejuvenation the Bog Girl is helpless and cannot move.

Resistant to Blows (Ex) Physical attacks only deal half damage to the Bog Girl, applied before Damage Reduction.

THE BOG BOY (CR 7)

Male 2nd-rank ancient dead (human) aristocrat 3
 N Small undead (augmented humanoid)
Init +0; **Senses** Listen +12, Spot +12
Languages Tepestani, Proto-Tepestani
AC 21, touch 13, flat-footed 20
hp 15 (3 HD); rejuvenation; **DR** 5/magic
Immune undead immunities, water-based attacks
Resist +2 turn resistance, Resistant to Blows
Fort +5, **Ref** +2, **Will** +9
Weakness fire vulnerability
Speed 20 ft. (4 squares)
Melee slam +8 (1d4+5)
Base Atk +2; **Grp** +7

Atk Options Improved Grab (hit with slam attack first), Disease, Animal Command (2d6+7, 3rd, crows only)

Special Action Fear

Abilities Str 20, Dex 10, Con --, Int 12, Wis 19, Cha 18

SQ Animal Command

Feats Alertness, Animal Affinity, Lightning Reflexes, Iron Will, Toughness

Skills Climb +14, Handle Animal +8, Hide +7, Listen +12, Move Silently +7, Ride +2, Spot +12

Disease (Su) The Bog Girl can inflict a Slimy Doom disease (*DMG*, p.292) through contact with its slam attack (DC 16 Fort save to resist).

Fear (Su) Those viewing the Bog Boy must make a DC 15 Will save or be paralyzed with fear for 6 rounds. The target(s) cannot be affected again for the rest of the day.

Rejuvenation (Su) The Bog Boy can draw on the Positive Energy Plane to heal damage at a rate of 6 hp an hour. The Bog Boy needs to rest for 1 day in the bogs before the rejuvenation process can begin, and is inert for one more day after the process completes. During rejuvenation the Bog Boy is helpless and cannot move.

Resistant to Blows (Ex) Physical attacks only deal half damage to the Bog Boy, applied before Damage Reduction.

APPEARANCE

The Bog Twins are children, seemingly just entering adolescence, never seen separately and always traveling hand-in-hand. The Bog Boy is taller than the Bog Girl, but perhaps due to the ravages of time and dirt the Bog Boy seems thinner than his partner. For ancient dead they look remarkably well-preserved, although the compact earth of their first resting place has distorted some of their features. Their spiral tattooed-skin is as dark and as hard as peat, and on closer inspection they smell of such as well. Though no records of their names, lives, ancestry or descendants exist, what remains of their clothes and what ornaments they wear on their bodies seem to suggest they were the children of nobility.

BACKGROUND

Surrounded by on all sides by bleak and barren landscapes, the relatively fecund realm of Tepest is home to countless swamps and peat bogs, created by continuous fog and rainfall. Unknown to most of the Tepestani themselves, the bogs hide a frightening secret best-kept hidden: beneath them lurk countless well-preserved corpses of people from civilizations past.

Back when Tepest was of a larger realm, or so folklorists recount, the gods and their minions filled all aspects of their followers' lives with bloodthirst. Fierce battles were fought in their name, and not a day went by that death was on the lips of many a warrior whose corpses littered the lush landscape. The passage of seasons and the planting and harvesting of crops were marked with sacrifices, often human in nature. Rituals were formed around these offerings, and the gods, savage as they are, seemed to accept them. Slaves and nobles, men and women, the young and the old—no one was spared the altars. Unbeknownst to many, the sacrificial corpses eventually sank beneath the earth, claimed by the compact swamps that preserved their flesh and bones.

It is perhaps in this hostile environment that the children that would be known as the Bog Twins were raised and eventually sacrificed. The reasons for such are unknown—perhaps the twins were offerings of appeasement for a season of famine, or maybe even used as blood omens for the fate of a battle, no one can say. Whatever the reasons, the Bog Twins were first sighted walking from beyond their murky graves in 741, when a Tepestani farmer saw them standing still on a peat bog not far north of the town of Viktal, surrounded by scores of mad crows. Every year since then they have been seen all around Tepest's swamps, with no clear reason for their return to the lands of the living.

PERSONALITY

Inwardly the Bog Twins know nothing of their undead state. They believe they have awakened from a deep and dreamless sleep, protected by the warm peat that had embraced them for so long. They have never been known to speak, but they nevertheless understand anything that is spoken to them. The Tepest that they have awakened to is sordidly different from the war-torn world they knew. Knowing not that their ancient village has long crumbled to dust and their loved ones are long dead, the Bog Twins wander Tepest in search of home, fearful of the realm's inhabitants as they are of them. In their futile journey, they find solace in only three things: each other, the wilderness where the bogs protect them, and the strange powers that they have acquired as ancients.

COMBAT

As children, the Bog Twins avoid combat as much as possible, creating crafty diversions to escape hostile situations: while the Bog Boy throws off pursuers (especially ranged attackers) with crows from his Animal Command ability, the Bog Girl uses her Passage ability for both of them to escape, perhaps to rejuvenate. When faced with no other choice, however, especially if any of them drop below half their total hit points, they would not hesitate to use their Disease ability on their attackers.

STORY SEED

MEMENTO MORI

A middle-aged Tepestani woman named Mirraen had awoken from three consecutive nightmares on three consecutive nights, and all of them never ended well: before she awoke screaming in terror, she would see two children in her dreams, their skins dry as cracked earth yet dripping with water. And always on the following morning, tiny footprints would be found on the dirt around her house. The local clergy suspect the work of “wee folk,” but have insufficient evidence to prove it so. They ask the PC’s for help in finding

the supernatural culprits and destroying them if necessary.

Meanwhile, about fifteen miles away, workers unearth from the peat a large altar to an ancient warrior goddess whose worshippers have long since abandoned her. At the foot of the altar lies a gruesome discovery: a fully preserved yet distorted female bog mummy, no doubt sacrificed to the goddess in times forgotten. Word of the find reaches town, just as Mirraen’s nightmares worsen: filled with fire and war she now sees herself kneeling before an altar to a bloodthirsty deity while being bludgeoned to death, as the two mysterious children watch from behind. Mirraen wants the dreams to end, but neither she nor the PC’s know how—unless they somehow learn of the find miles away, and summon the Bog Twins.

The undead children see in Mirraen’s form a reincarnation of their own mother from an untold number of years ago, and even if that might prove to be false the PC’s have to bring them and Mirraen to the ancient altar to find out the truth. With Tepestani Inquisitors all around, however, the PC’s may have to deal the wrath of the zealous Church of Belenus first.

COSTANZA FARINA



Take honest pleasure in meditation and prayer,
I will make you happy if you will.
But if the powerful molest the weak...
Your prayers are not for them,
Or for anyone who deceives the others on this earth.
Simone Martini, "La Maesta" (1315)



For hundreds of years now, the anchorites of the Church of Ezra have provided guidance and protection for countless faithful against the Legions of the Night. Many find solace in the fact that even if they perish battling the Legions, they have at the very least done their part in Ezra's Grand Scheme. A curious few, however, continue to fight that battle even beyond their mortal lifespan, becoming the very things that they were supposed to confront—endorsed by the Church itself.

COSTANZA FARINA (CR 12)

Female 3rd-rank ancient dead (human) cleric
5/anchorite of the Mists* 3
LN medium undead (augmented humanoid)
Init +6; **Senses** Listen +16, Spot +16
Aura Law
Languages Balok, Mordentish
AC 24, touch 12, flat-footed 22
hp 37 (8 HD); rejuvenation; **DR** 10/magic, Shield of Ezra
Immune undead immunities, sonic-based attacks
Resist +4 turn resistance, cold 10, Resistant to Blows
Fort +7, **Ref** +2, **Will** +12
Weakness fire vulnerability
Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)
Melee slam +10 (1d6+8), or
Melee mwk short sword +11 (1d6+8, 19-20/x2)
Base Atk +4; **Grp** +10
Atk Option Disease
Special Actions Fear, rebuke undead 7/day (+4, 2d6+9, 5th), turn Mists creatures 7/day (2d6+7, 3rd), spontaneous casting (*cure*

spells)

Combat Gear masterwork short sword, 2 scrolls of *protection from chaos*, 2 scrolls of *obscuring mist*, 1 scroll of *solid fog*, 1 tanglefoot bag

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 8th):

4th—*control water*, *freedom of movement*, *solid fog*^D
3rd—*continual flame*, *gaseous form*^D, *speak with dead*, *water breathing*
2nd—*darkness*, *fog cloud*^D, *silence*, *spiritual weapon*
1st—*bless water*, *entropic shield*, *obscuring mist*^D, *protection from chaos*, *sanctuary*
0—*create water*, *detect magic*, *guidance*, *light*, *mending*, *read magic*

D: Domain spell. Domains: Law, Mists

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 8th):

1/day—*nondetection*
At will—*alter self*

Abilities Str 23, Dex 14, Con --, Int 20, Wis 22, Cha 19

SQ Mist Navigation

Feats Alertness, Blind-Fight, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Scribe Scroll, Skill Focus (Concentration), Silent Spell, Toughness

Skills Climb +14, Craft (alchemy) +5, Concentration +7, Decipher Script +5, Diplomacy +9, Heal +12, Hide +10, Knowledge (arcana) +13, Knowledge (planes) +7, Knowledge (religion) +11, Listen +16, Move Silently +10, Sense Motive +6, Spellcraft +9, Spot +16

Possessions Combat gear plus +2 *amulet of natural armor*, 4 scrolls of *control water*, 4 scrolls of *solid fog*, 3 scrolls of *silence*, 3 scrolls of *darkness*, 3 scrolls of *detect magic*, 2 smokesticks, 1 holy symbol of Ezra

Disease (Su) Costanza can inflict Mummy Rot (*DMG*, p.292) through contact with her slam attack (DC 23 Fort save to resist).

Fear (Su) Those viewing Costanza's true form must make a DC 18 Will save or be paralyzed with fear for 8 rounds. The target(s) cannot be affected again for the rest of the day.

Mist Navigation (Su) Costanza can travel with eight other creatures through a Mistway, with a 15% decreased chance of drifting lost within the Misty Border.

Rejuvenation (Su) Costanza can draw on the Positive Energy Plane to heal damage at a rate of 12 hp an hour. She needs to rest for 1 day in her lair before the rejuvenation process can begin, and is inert for 1 hour after the process completes. During rejuvenation she is helpless and cannot move.

Resistant to Blows (Ex) Physical attacks only deal half damage to Costanza, applied before Damage Reduction.

Shield of Ezra (Su) Once a day Costanza can call upon a film of luminous mist that surrounds her form for 5 rounds. This grants her Damage Reduction 15/magic against all physical attacks.

*detailed in *Van Richten's Arsenal*, published by White Wolf

APPEARANCE

In her true form, Costanza is a dried-out husk, her skin dripping with water yet as tough as leather. Her disheveled black hair is maintained in a neat bun, while her fingernails are long and sharp. In contrast, the white and green robes of her office are often pristine and new, regularly given to her by those who know of her existence within the Church of Ezra. She rarely reveals her ancient form in public, instead using her *alter self* ability to appear as a woman in her early forties.

BACKGROUND

The Church of Ezra was rather young when Costanza Farina was initiated as an anchorite. As a missionary for the fledgling religion, Costanza was not necessarily the most zealous of its followers, but nevertheless her faith and philosophical knowledge merited her to become chief advisor to Donella Borovsky, second Praesidia of the Church. Unfortunately her promotion to Sentire came at a time of turmoil, when the aristocratic Dislisnyas were hated by their own subjects, and when the first great schism of the Church between Levkarest and Mordent was antagonistic.

Costanza knew the tenets of the Church inside out, and she viewed the philosophies of Felix Wachter and his followers as nothing short of heresy. In her mind Costanza knew that she

had to defend the Home Faith from divergent thoughts, and she knew that the only way to preserve the integrity of the faith was to present it in tangible form, something that would last the ages. Costanza herself was not much of a physical combatant, but she nevertheless was a skilled writer, and during her time as advisor she was responsible for drafting not less than forty encyclicals, proclamations and dogmas for the defense of the Church of Levkarest. Even when the forensic hostilities between Levkarest and the new Mordentish sect eventually ceased, Costanza was firm in her resolve to strengthen the resolve of the "Home Faith" through writing.

Many of the Home Faith's most ardent hierarchs were not willing to let such a treasure go, but Costanza herself had refused the title of Praesidius; she believed herself "unworthy" of such a lofty title. After Praesidia Borovsky's death, Costanza retired to a nearby convent, continuing her religious writings. She died at the age of 70, and her body was interred in the damp catacombs beneath the Great Cathedral.

Her story would have ended there had it not been for the same Ezran clerics who wanted her to continue her work against the Legions of the Night. Five months after Costanza's demise, five being a sacred number to them, they awakened the revered Sentire as one these same Legions, one of the ancient, to continue her apologetics in service of the Grand Scheme.

Beyond her death Costanza indeed continued her writings, this time hidden under the name of a contemporary, which changes through the generations. In the immediate years after her return she contented herself to serve the Church in the shadows, hiding in a large and well-hidden underground chamber provided to her by those who knew of her existence. As those who remember her living face slipped away through the years, however, she slowly shook off her isolation and began wandering the Cathedral's cavernous halls once more. Now she walks unnoticed among the pious throngs of worshippers, a Sentire continuing a silent quest beyond death to fulfill Ezra's Grand Scheme.

PERSONALITY

When Costanza returned to the lands of the living, she knew not if her return was a blessing or a curse. She was now a Legion of the Night, but she was under Ezra's service, a paradox almost unheard of. Costanza eventually got used to her undeath; in her mind she believes that her reawakening by the hierarchy might seem

selfish, it nevertheless serves a greater purpose in the Grand Scheme.

Not even the current Praesidius knows of Costanza's true nature; to him and many others, she is "Sentire Anza Rienna, Caretaker of the Sacred Library," though she herself is rarely seen there; the other anchorites take great care to cover any transaction regarding her identity and position, and she prefers it that way. She rarely leaves the Great Cathedral, and has never left Levkarest since her reawakening. In times when she seeks solace, Costanza retreats to a large underground chamber beneath the Great Cathedral, accessible only through a tunnel filled with water that she can lower, raise, part or even walk through at her whim. The chamber itself is a cross between a chapel and an office, where she can perform her duties undisturbed.

Costanza is an apologetic: she defends the Home Faith zealously through her writings. She barely tolerates the beliefs of the three other sects which have emerged within the Church of Ezra, and is averse to other religions. The idea that other religions coexist with her own, no matter how benevolent they are, irritates her and drives her to write more treatises in defense of the Home Faith.

COMBAT

Costanza cares less for physical combat, instead using her divine magical abilities to the fullest, but she makes it a point to exhaust her reserve of defensive spell scrolls first before resorting to personal magic. Only when any hostile target discovers Costanza's true form does she dispense her supernatural powers as an ancient, never hesitating to use her Fear ability to weaken her opponents' resolve before striking back. When reduced to 1/3 of her hit points, she immediately casts *solid fog* or *darkness*, whichever she deems appropriate, then retreats to her catacomb sanctuary.

STORY SEED

MANDATE OF HEAVEN

Despite her increased security, Costanza Farina is not without enemies. For nearly a decade now, the apocalyptic Nevuchar Springs sect has speculated on the existence of a "powerful negative being" working within the highest ranks of the Church of Ezra. In the fall of 753 BC, Bastion Teodorus Raines of the aforementioned sect sent a delegation of anchorites to Levkarest. Officially, the delegation presented themselves

as long-term representatives of the sect in matters of Church unity. In secret they were also tasked to discover the identity of the high-ranked undead. Needless to say, within a year the delegation succeeded in discovering Sentire Rienna's grim secret, and wasted no time reporting the "blasphemous infiltration" back to Bastion Raines.

The Bastion himself could not simply reveal the ancient's existence within the Church's midst, knowing all too well that other high-ranking anchorites guard Costanza Farina well. Skilled in the intrigues of both Church and Politics, he now instead uses a slow and steady process of stealth, infiltration and research to find and destroy Costanza Farina, and he has within his midst an impressive weapon: Costanza's great-great-great-great-grand niece Sophia l'Saltire, Anchorite of the Nevuchar Springs sect of the Church of Ezra.

SOPHIA L'SALTIRE (CR 7)

Female human fighter 4/cleric 3

LE medium humanoid (human)

Init +6; **Senses** Listen +4, Spot +4

Aura Law

Languages Balok, Darkonese

AC 14, touch 12, flat-footed 12

hp 56 (7 HD)

Fort +8, **Ref** +4, **Will** +6

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee +1 *longsword* +9 (1d8+3, 19-20/x2) or

Ranged +1 *heavy crossbow* +9 (1d10+1, 19/20/x2)

Base Atk +6; **Grp** +8

Special Actions Rebuke undead 4/day (2d6+4, 3rd), spontaneous casting (inflict spells)

Combat Gear +1 *longsword*, +1 *heavy crossbow*, 2 potions of healing, 35 crossbow bolts

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 3rd):

2nd—*fog cloud*^D, *hold person*

1st—*doom*, *hide from undead*, *obscuring mist*^D

0—*guidance* (x2), *resistance* (x2), *virtue*

D: Domain spell. Domains: Law, Mists

Abilities Str 14, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 13, Wis 15, Cha 13

SQ Shield of Ezra

Feats Agile, Alertness, Blind-Fight, Improved Initiative, Quick Draw, Quicken Spell, Two-Weapon Fighting

Skills Balance +4, Climb +5, Concentration +5, Craft (weaponsmithing) +5, Diplomacy +3, Disguise +4, Escape Artist +4, Heal +2, Hide +7, Intimidate +5, Jump +3, Knowledge (religion) +5, Listen +4, Move Silently +2, Open Lock +2, Sense Motive +3, Spot +4, Use Rope +2

Possessions Combat gear plus masterwork

longsword, masterwork dagger

Shield of Ezra (Su) Once a day Sophia can call upon a film of luminous mist that surrounds her form for 5 rounds. This grants her a +10 bonus to all Will saves vs. mind-affecting spells and effects.

Sophia arrived along with the 753 delegation, and she has been studying Sentire Rienna's movements ever since. Though Sophia herself knows nothing about her familial relations with Costanza, let alone the ancient's real name and identity, she knows of the Sentire's undead state, and patiently bides her time to destroy her. Sophia abhors the "unclean" presence of undeath within a Church that claims to fight it, and when the time is right, regardless of the consequences,

she would use everything in her power to eliminate Costanza Farina.

The PC's will have to wound their way through Levkarest's religious and political intrigue before they would finally know of Costanza's secret; they are sure to face a complex dilemma when encountering either Sophia or Costanza, or even both. Will the PC's side with Sophia to "cleanse" the ranks of the Church of Ezra, or will they choose Sophia and bring the Sentire to her final rest? Or will the PC's take matters in their own hands and destroy both characters? How would familial dynamics enter when one of the PC's discovers that he or she is related to both Sophia and the ancient?

HYREL ALIRAX AND THE GROVE OF MOURNING



And oftentimes excusing of a fault
Doth make the fault the worse by the excuse.

William Shakespeare



Guilt is a potent emotion, emerging only as a consequence to certain acts we have done in the past. Most believe that it is guilt which kindles the divine spark within each of us, reflecting our sins and prodding us to commit them no more. Somewhere deep in the mist-shrouded forests of Sithicus, an ancient druid perpetuates a cycle of guilt triggered by the death of a loved one. Only in his hidden grove could he find the solace and perhaps the redemption that eludes him ever so often, but his desires always get the best of him and the victims who fall for his charms.

HYREL ALIRAX (CR 11)

Male 3rd-rank ancient dead (elf) druid 7
NG Medium undead (augmented humanoid)

Init +2; **Senses** low-light vision, darkvision
+60 ft., Listen +18, Spot +18, Intruder
Sense

Languages Sithican, Druidic

AC 25, touch 12, flat-footed 23

hp 32 (7 HD); **DR** 10/magic

Immune sleep, undead immunities, wood-
based attacks

Resist +4 turn resistance, cold 10, Resistant
to Blows

Fort +9, **Ref** +6, **Will** +11 (+13 against
enchancements); +4 against spell-like
abilities of fey

Weakness Fire vulnerability

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares) (armored 20 ft.),
woodland stride

Melee slam +10 (1d6+3) or

Melee +1 keen quarterstaff +11 (1d6+6; 19-
20/x2)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +5; **Grp** +10

Special Actions spontaneous casting
(*summon nature's ally* spells), wild shape
1/day (7 hrs, Small or Medium animal up to
7 HD), Fear, Kiss of Guilt

Druid Spells Prepared (CL 7th):

4th—*control plants*, *dispel magic*

3rd—*plant growth* (2), *sleet storm*

2nd—*gust of wind* (2), *spider climb*, *warp
wood* (2)

1st—*entangle* (2), *obscuring mist*, *pass
without trace*, *shillelagh*

0—*create water*, *detect magic* (2), *light* (2),
mending

Spell-like Abilities (CL 7th):

At will—*alternate form* (outside the Grove of
Mourning only)

Abilities Str 21, Dex 15, Con--, Int 12, Wis
23, Cha 20

SQ wild empathy +7 (+9 magical beasts),
trackless step

Feats Alertness, Endurance, Lightning Reflexes, Skill Focus (Bluff), Toughness

Skills Bluff +12, Climb +13, Craft (carpentry) +4, Diplomacy +12, Disguise +5, Heal +10, Intimidate +7, Knowledge (nature) +10, Listen +18, Move Silently +10, Sense Motive +6, Spot +18, Survival +11

Possessions +1 *keen quarterstaff*, masterwork hide armor

Fear (Su) Anyone viewing Hyrel's true form in the Grove of Mourning must make a DC 17 Will save or be paralyzed with fear for 7 rounds. The target(s) cannot be affected again for the rest of the day.

Intruder Sense (Su) Hyrel can innately sense any being that ventures within 15 feet of the Grove of Mourning. He can automatically identify the number of creatures intruding, their creature type and gender (if any).

Kiss of Guilt (Su) Hyrel can inflict an emotional disease through his kiss. This is similar to Red Ache disease (*DMG*, p.292), but the incubation period is 12 hours, it deals Strength as well as Wisdom damage, and it requires a DC 20 Fort save to resist. As an added effect, the victim is attacked by general weakness and overwhelming feelings of guilt over a past action, giving him or her a -1 penalty on all attack rolls, skill rolls and saves. Only a *remove disease* spell can cure this affliction.

Rejuvenation (Su) Hyrel can draw on the Positive Energy Plane to heal damage at a rate of 12 hp an hour. He needs to rest for 1 day in the Grove of Mourning before the rejuvenation process can begin, and is inert for 1 hour after the process completes. During rejuvenation he is helpless and cannot move.

Resistant to Blows (Ex) Physical attacks only deal half damage to Hyrel, applied before Damage Reduction.

APPEARANCE

In public, Hyrel appears as a devastatingly handsome elven druid in the apex of his youth, with cropped brown hair, a face with angular but rugged features, and a lean yet firm body. In times of solitude, or while within the Grove of Mourning, Hyrel is instead a bone-dry ancient with greenish-brown skin and moss-covered bones, draped in the greenish-black robes that druids use in mourning.

BACKGROUND

Hyrel Alirax found his druidic calling even as a young elven man, which was not uncommon among a race that was by itself deeply connected in spirit to the power and cycles of nature. As a loner, however, Hyrel felt tied down to the

groves that other druids had crafted for themselves; he constantly lived in the present, and he chose to wander free, to experience nature to the fullest. Wanderlust gripped him and he ventured out into the world and learned his craft the long and hard way: a little knowledge from contemplating a waterfall, a little more knowledge from balancing on the rim of a volcano. All the while he felt himself incomplete, yearning more than just the druidic way—he felt he wanted someone to share this knowledge with one who had fledgling yet similar interests.

From town to town and grove to grove, Hyrel searched for the woman whom he could share his life with, to no avail. The elves of these foreign lands kept to their own, while humans cared only for themselves and little for the slow tides of nature. Things were to change when he befriended a young and carefree human male named Aaron, who spent most of his time basking in the natural beauty of the countryside than in the cities that humans had constructed for themselves. Finding too many commonalities, their friendship grew until one night they found themselves naked within each other's tight embrace, spent yet content. Hyrel never thought that he would ever fall in love with a human male, but then and there he decided that his quest was over.

The elf, however, could not easily be satisfied. A few years into his relationship with the human, he yearned to experience more of what the world had to offer. Though they had built an elm grove for themselves, Hyrel would on occasion sneak out of their haven and venture into nearby towns, trysting with other men; his innate charm as an elf would almost always get him what he wanted. He had never stopped loving Aaron, though; perhaps, Hyrel just wanted to enjoy more. Word finally went around, and news of Hyrel's secret escapades reached his lover. No matter how much he accepted his own errors and still loved the very angry human, Hyrel had to bid Aaron goodbye, venturing off from the grove they had built together.

Hyrel rarely felt the passage of years; as an elf he aged slower than humans. His personal journey had proven that he never was good at commitments, and that he could not go further than having short yet torrid and intimate pleasures with men he knew little of. For almost everyone he slept with, however, his thoughts would always turn to Aaron, the first man he had loved. None of these men had shared anything more with him than a handsome face or a sinewy

body; too many times he had tried to introduce his druidic interests, but too little did they even care. After another night with a random person, Hyrel then and there decided to return to the grove.

When he returned, however, he found Aaron aged and dying. The human had pined for him all these years, but to see him age caused Hyrel inexplicable remorse. For the next two months Hyrel stayed in that grove, giving the best care to Aaron until he breathed his last breath one unusually cold summer night. With deep sorrow Hyrel buried Aaron within the grove and capped his grave with a small dolmen made of basalt rocks; on it he vowed to protect the grove and the memory it had held for him.

Up to the end of his life, Hyrel felt nothing but sorrow and regret. So deep was his remorse that he never noticed how the Mists came to clutch the grove from his world. He cared little for why the faint Ring of the Dragon Above had suddenly been replaced by an inconstant black moon, why black roses began to grow around his grove, or even why he had to repeatedly sing a song of guilt. And when a maddened dwarf riding a chariot of elven bone finally came thundering into the forest straight to his grove, Hyrel found little spirit to resist, numbed even when an axe struck him dead.

Hyrel awoke on the ground in what he believed was the next morning. Instantly he was horrified to find his body dried and overgrown with weeds, fungus and moss, skin rotten and bones exposed to the elements. Three years had actually passed, and he had joined the ranks of the undead, creatures that disrupted the balance of nature. Crawling out of the overgrown grove, in his mind Hyrel instinctively wished to be alive, and in a few quick moments he felt his body reform into what he desired to be. He felt himself dead still, but some unseen power in the land had given him the ability to mask his dead form and walk amongst the living. Overjoyed with his strange new gift he quickly left the grove and ventured into the nearest town which he knew only as Mal-Erek, seducing an elven man. By the end of their quick encounter Hyrel felt a sudden rush of guilt, and without even saying goodbye he left the unknown elven man alone, severely weakened and naked in his room, as he rushed back to the grove. Reverting back to his undead form he fell to his knees in front of Aaron's grave. He wanted to cry, but in his undeath the tears of remorse would not flow.

Now the elves of Mal-Erek speak in hushed tones of a large and enchanted druidic

grove somewhere just outside of town, surrounded by elms and overgrown by vines—but no one ever goes there. At its center stands a small dolmen of black stones, surrounded by rose bushes constantly filled with fresh spring blooms of red and white—but no druid worships nature there. The grove is best left alone, for as the stories say, it is the resting place of two druids who found love, lost it, and found it again. Though the story might seem romantic to those who hear it, therein lies why it is best left to nature—both druids may be dead, but one walks the surface still, mourning his first love who rests beneath the earth, and woe to whoever disturbs his eternal mourning.

PERSONALITY

Even in death Hyrel is plagued by guilt over the mistakes he has done against the person he has ever truly loved. Even if Aaron had already forgiven him, Hyrel could not get over his own misery, and perhaps that is where his weakness lies. Nevertheless, as a druidic guardian, Hyrel is steadfast in the protection of Aaron's tomb. He makes sure that absolutely no one enters his grove without his permission.

Hyrel however still commits the mistakes which caused him his misery in the first place; his wanderlust has never left him. Often he takes his living elven form, adopts an alias, and wanders the towns and villages around his grove in Sithicus to seduce men and sleep with them, only to feel his guilt return once his sexual passion has left him. Once memories of Aaron flood back into memory Hyrel flees back to the Grove, leaving his one-night lover weakened in body and spirit and wallowing in personal guilt—until the next time his wanderlust returns. Thus the cycle repeats itself, and though he does not want to cause any harm and truly wishes to change his ways, he is convinced he does not know how to do so.

COMBAT

Hyrel has impressive expertise with his quarterstaff, and is not afraid to use it when faced with hostile opponents. He uses the full array of his druidic magic as a stern warning for intruders not to disturb Aaron's grave, and combines them with his awesome ancient abilities when defending the grove itself. While rejuvenating, Hyrel uses *plant growth* and *obscuring mist* to hide the grove and thus protect it from hostile intruders.

THE GROVE OF MOURNING

Hyrel's grove is a large druidic circle with a 100-foot radius, surrounded on all sides by twelve large elm trees, their massive trunks thickly twined with vines, moss and fungi. Though brambles and thistles grow about, and dried leaves and other natural debris litter the grove, the place appears tended enough for rose bushes to, curiously, bloom white and red flowers all year round.

At the center of the grove is Aaron's grave, a mound about two feet high and fifteen feet in diameter. On top of this mound is a small dolmen made of black basalt, which also serves as an offering table. The entire grove allows Hyrel to cast druidic spells as if he were a 10th level druid, for as long as he stays within the grove. Additionally, Hyrel cannot use his *alternate form* ability inside the grove itself.

SCORY SEED

SORROWS OF SITHICUS

The PC's spend the night in Mal-Erek or in any other nearby village. In living elven form, Hyrel, in one of his hunts, becomes enamored of one of the male PC's, particularly one he thinks is pleasing to the eye, and begins using his charms on him. If the male PC has the same sexual disposition, the two engage in a night of passion, but Hyrel leaves immediately afterwards.

The next morning grim news arrives: Azrael Dak's lackeys are in town, and though the self-proclaimed Ruler of Sithicus is not with them, they want all elven druidic groves within the area destroyed to "preserve" the dwarf's rule. Tales of the Grove of Mourning surface amongst the natives, and though the elves warn about its undead caretaker, its "corruptive influence" and the consequences of intrusion, Azrael's lackeys are bent on finding it and destroying it—they forcibly hire the PC's to help them out, but for some reason one of the PC's is too weak and morose to even get out of bed. The lackeys give them one night for him to recover. That night Hyrel visits the PC's once again, and without revealing his true nature pleads for them not to venture to and destroy the Grove of Mourning, despite its so-called "corruptive nature." He also visits his "love interest" a second time, and with his torrid kiss he once again unknowingly inflicts on the PC another wave of inconsolable guilt.

When dawn finally arrives, will the PC's go through with the lackeys' mandate and face the ancient that guards the grove, or will they confront the lackeys instead? If they choose the former, can they face the full fury of Hyrel the ancient, even with the help of Azrael's henchmen and even if perhaps their strongest PC is plagued by supernatural guilt? If they choose the latter and leave the grove alone, will they have enough willpower to face Azrael Dak if and when he arrives?

THE LAST HORDESMAN



Be convinced that to be happy means to be free and that to be free means to be brave. Therefore do not take lightly the perils of war.

Thucydides



The art of war has always trumped the prospects of peace in directing the ways of the history. To the victor go the spoils, they say, but sometimes the spoils themselves are unclear in form or figure; history, though written by the victors, will ultimately tell if the vanquishers have succeeded or failed in their mission. Nova Vaasa is host to one such man who thinks himself the victor: though he has been rewarded unlife as a warlord, he plunders the land in a quest that may never end for as long as the Mists hold sway.

THE LAST HORDESMAN (CR 17)

Male 4th-rank ancient dead (human) barbarian
10/fighter 3

CE medium undead (augmented humanoid)

Init +7; **Senses** Low-light vision, scent,
Listen +17, Spot +29

Languages Ancient Vaasi, Vaasi

AC 30; touch 14, flat-footed 26; Dodge,
Improved Uncanny Dodge

hp 157 (15 HD); rejuvenation; **DR** 15/+2

Immune undead immunities, fire, flanking

Resist +6 turn resistance; **SR** 20

Fort +18, **Ref** +10, **Will** +10

Weakness water vulnerability

Speed 60 ft. (10 squares)

Melee slam +25 (1d6+8) and

Melee hoof +10 (1d6+8), or

Melee +2 *scimitar* +22/+17/+12/+7
(1d6+10, x2)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +15/+10/+5; **Grp** +19

Atk Options Ride-By Attack

Special Actions Rebuke undead 10/day
(shadows only; +1, 2d6+10, 15th)

Abilities Str 31, Dex 17, Con --, Int 19, Wis
22, Cha 25

SQ trap sense +3

Feats Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Improved
Initiative, Leadership, Lightning Reflexes,
Mounted Combat, Ride-By Attack, Run,
Toughness, Trample, Weapon Focus
(scimitar)

Skills Balance +5, Climb +22, Concentration
+8, Craft (weaponsmithing) +9, Handle
Animal +16, Hide +11, Intimidate +21,
Jump +17, Knowledge (nature) +13, Listen
+17, Move Silently +11, Ride +22, Spot
+29, Survival +18, Swim +10, Tumble +10,
Use Rope +7

Possessions +2 *scimitar*, +2 *banded mail*,
masterwork dagger, assorted treasure
worth 12,940 gp

Fear (Su) Those viewing the Last
Hordesman's true form must make a DC 22
Will save or be paralyzed with fear for 12
rounds. The target(s) cannot be affected
again for the rest of the day.

Flame Shroud (Su) The Last Hordesman is
constantly surrounded by a bluish *continual*
flame, as the spell.

Perpetual Rage (Ex) The Last Horseman is
treated as if in a constant state of rage,
which is reflected in the abilities above.

Rejuvenation (Su) The Last Hordesman can
draw on the Positive Energy Plane to heal
damage at a rate of 1 hp an hour. He needs
to rest for 1 hour beneath the earth before
the rejuvenation process can begin, and is

inert for 1 hour after the process completes. During rejuvenation he is helpless and cannot move.

Resistant to Blows (Ex) Physical attacks only deal half damage to the Last Hordesman, applied before Damage Reduction.

APPEARANCE

As a proud warrior the Last Hordesman looms over the flat landscape, his perpetually raging form enveloped in a constant glow akin to blue fire. Both he and the horse are fully clad in exotic armor, and even in undeath they appear nimble and muscular. The Last Hordesman always appears riding his steed, and both are never seen apart.

BACKGROUND

Once in the trackless past, or so the stories of old say, the endless plains of Nova Vaasa were home to a mighty army of mounted warriors known only as the Horde. They called these plains home, and the hooves of their powerful horses created a frightening din that seemed to rumble on forever. Though their land was empty and their resources thin, the Horde was feared throughout the world. Even their ruler the Khahan was a nomad at heart, his opulent, tent *yurt*-palace always at the center of this rumbling army.

Though the Khahan was considered the greatest warrior of the Horde, his generals were formidable warlords as well, always at the forefront of every invasion. Nothing, not even the harshest of weather, stood in the way of these horselords for as long as the generals spoke of the strategies of war, but even between them the call of power was too great a temptation, for the Khahan was old, and he had no heir. An empire, no matter how strong its army, meant nothing without a strong leader.

The time finally came when the Khahan passed away, and with his death the Horde scattered across the plains. The vast land was theirs, and most of the hordesmen literally turned their swords to ploughshares. A mighty army no more, they became mere mounted plainsmen, content to live their lives as quietly as the sun arcs over the unbroken horizon. Frustrated over the fate of their empire, however, and refusing to stand down from their lofty positions, the generals resorted to futile tactics in hopes of resurrecting the army that terrorized half the known world. A once-united army split itself along allegiances to power-hungry generals, and

one by one they fell, until two remained. One mustered enough of his honor to call out his rival in mounted combat. While their own armies watched on, the two fought for the title of Khahan in a one-on-one battle that raged from dawn till well after dusk. Formidable as they were, the other, younger, general saw imminent defeat against his older rival; only something devious would help him prevail. A simple dagger did the trick for him as he stabbed the old man on his hip. But almost immediately, in an unguarded moment as the younger general pondered on his ill-gotten victory, the older general wielded his scimitar with all the might he could muster and slashed both his foe and the horse he rode on. The younger general died instantly in the fatal blow, still mounted on the steed that died with him. Nevertheless, both generals died that night, their blood spilt on the battle-bled plains. Knowing of the treachery that the younger general had done, the armies left both his body and that of his steed where it lay, to be picked clean by the vultures that had begun circling above.

But the vultures never came. For an untold number of days the decaying corpses lay bare, exposed to the merciless elements. One cold night a thick haze had begun settle on the flat earth, and suddenly both bodies came to life in a bout of blue fire that seemed to combust within their rotting frames. Pulling himself out of the earth, the general felt himself bonded to his steed, as if he and it were now one creature sharing one mind. Whatever he was now, he thought himself the victor in that fateful battle, and the plains were now his to control.

The plains around him, however, felt different. The earth was drier, as if the bitter soil had a mind, a soul of its own.—as if it belonged to someone else, a lord, so to speak. Curiously, though the earth bore the marks of endless equine footprints, he sensed no hint of a vast mounted army. Wherever he was, and whatever powers put him here, he saw himself the new Khahan, the last of his own kind. The broad expanse of the land he would come to know as Nova Vaasa would be his and his alone. Here he would begin a new empire and create a new conquering army under the banner of restless, raging undeath—and no general would ever stand in his way again.

PERSONALITY

His name lost to time and the Mists, the Last Hordesman's nature can be described in one

word: ruthless. His ashen thoughts are filled with nothing but the drive to conquer and rule over all the plains that stretch out before him. He believes himself to be a new Khahan, worthy of the land gifted to him by whatever powers there may be. Both he and his steed have fused in undeath to become one creature, harboring supernatural speed and unspeakable dread. Meanwhile, Nova Vaasans take note to watch the horizons at night for blue fire—its presence heralds the arrival of the undead horselord.

The Last Hordesman's power, however, means nothing when the sun rules high in the sky; when dawn arrives, the earth yawns open to receive him and his steed, and there he sleeps until nightfall. When indeed that dreaded moment arrives, he summons forth shadows from the earth, serving as an undead army in his nocturnal conquests.

One thought bothers the Last Hordesman: he knows that the plains of Nova Vaasa are not entirely his, that they truly belong to "an unseen lord" that could never die. Throughout his existence as an ancient he has used his power and influence as a warlord to "extract" information as to the true ruler of the plains, but he has so far not succeeded. Though he knows nothing of the true nature of the Dread Realms or the concept of darklords, the Last Hordesman believes that he could never truly achieve true domination of the land unless he has defeated Nova Vaasa's unseen lord. Malken on the other hand cares little for the ancient warrior, but he watches events closely.

COMBAT

With an impressive array of feats that involve mounted combat, the Last Hordesman uses his skills as a barbarian and a horselord to full capacity. He simply uses his steed's hooves to trample easy targets, while using his weapon skills against much powerful foes. His ability to rebuke shadows serves as a useful diversion against foes with the ability to turn the undead (such as clerics and paladins). Since he does not experience fatigue, retreating from formidable odds is not a problem for him—he can simply flee until either his opponents tire of chasing him or the earth swallows him when dawn arrives, allowing himself to regenerate.

SCORY SEED

A SINGLE BLADE OF GRASS

On one of his nocturnal raids, the Last Hordesman pillages a small Nova Vaasan village and takes away an orphan, a little street child with no familial relations with any of the villagers. With no parents to call her own, and with very little charity coming from the rest, her being taken away comes as a relief to the villagers, grateful that whatever is left of their homes is spared the wrath of the undead rider. They themselves don't know why she was taken, and many of them couldn't care less about a street urchin.

The PC's were present when the Last Hordesman attacked, and perhaps they saw the girl taken away. Herein now lies a moral dilemma, of one soul sacrificed for the benefit of many. If the PC's plan a search and rescue, they would expect no help from the village—a girl had spared their homes from utter annihilation, and that should be considered as a blessing.

Of course, the Last Hordesman has plans for the girl, for he sees in her the reincarnation of one of his wives from when he was still a living, breathing human being. "Join me," he tells the terrified girl, "and together we shall see a new dawn on the burning plains." But there is more to her than a simple recognition: even at such a young age she holds a large torrent of untapped divine power, the likes of which she still could not yet understand.

GERMAINE (CR 4)

Female human druid 4

N Small humanoid

Init -1; **Senses** Listen +0, Spot +6

Languages Druidic, Vaasi

AC 10, touch 10, flat-footed 10

hp 25 (4 HD)

Fort +5, **Ref** +0, **Will** +2

Speed 20 ft. (4 squares)

Melee unarmed +2

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +2

Druid Spells Prepared (CL 4th):

2nd—*animal messenger, gust of wind*

1st—*faerie fire, goodberry, speak with animals*

0—*create water, cure minor wounds, purify food and drink, resistance, virtue*

Abilities Str 8, Dex 9, Con 12, Int 8, Wis 7, Cha 7

SQ animal companion, wild empathy, woodland stride

Feats Agile, Alertness, Animal Affinity

Skills Concentration +4, Knowledge (nature) +5, Sleight of Hand +2, Spot +6, Survival +3

Germaine never knew her parents, nor do any of the villagers. All her life she has relied on herself and the so-called charity of others, but the earth itself provided her with the strength she needed to survive. It was in the vast plains where she began to have strange, frightening dreams, of fire, blood and steel, of a man wreathed in blue and filled with rage. Germaine could not explain these recurring dreams until that night when the Last Hordesman arrived, whisking her away into a node of earth deep underground. He was to be his wife, he said, though in her innocent mind she could not understand why a dead man would need a bride as young as her.

The PC's have three nights before the Last Hordesman sacrifices Germaine and turns her into a powerful shadow, an undead child-queen in utter subservience to the Hordesman's barbaric whims. Looking for her is a difficult task, and only a plains heron, Germaine's animal companion, knows of her whereabouts, but the PC's may not even know of this. And if indeed the PC's succeed in rescuing Germaine from the Last Hordesman's gruesome clutches, they could face the unrelenting anger of both the ancient himself and the village that was spared his wrath.

LYSANDRUS THE VILEKEEPER



Why didst thou leave the trodden paths of men
Too soon, and with weak hands through mighty heart
Dare the unpastured dragon in his den?
Defenseless as thou wert, oh, where was then
Wisdom, the mirrored shield...?
Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Adonais"



Would you accept the burden of keeping a great evil from destroying the world? Would you accept it still if you knew that you had to do it even beyond your mortal lifespan? Would you allow yourself to be corrupted by this evil just so the world need not be so? Somewhere in the far reaches of northern Darkon, one person did these all, and does them still. His heroism is unknown and his duty is thankless, but as the merciless years trudge by, Lysandrus knows that as long as he has the *Book of Vile Darkness* within his cold embrace, the world and its power-hungry denizens would remain safe from its corrupting power.

LYSANDRUS THE VILEKEEPER (CR 19)

Male 5th-rank ancient dead (caliban) sorcerer
10/guardian seeker* 4

LN medium undead (augmented humanoid)

Init +11; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., Listen +16, Spot +16

Languages Darkonese, Draconic, Vaasi

AC 30; touch 13, flat-footed 27

hp 76 (14 HD); rejuvenation; **DR** 20/magic

Immune undead immunities, cold

Resist +8 turn resistance, fire 10; **SR** 20

Fort +8, **Ref** +7, **Will** +20 (+22 against mind-affecting effects)

Weakness electricity vulnerability

Speed 60 ft. (10 squares), climb 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 20 ft. (4 squares, clumsy)

Melee slam +18 (1d6+10) or

Melee mwk quarterstaff +19/+14/+11/+11 (1d6+10, 20/x2)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +8/+3; **Grp** +18

Atk Options Quest of Destruction

Special Actions Fear, Forbidden Lore

Combat Gear masterwork quarterstaff

Sorcerer Spells Known (CL 14th):

7th (3/day)—*sequester*

6th (5/day)—*antimagic field*, *legend lore*

5th (6/day)—*dream*, *passwall*, *wall of stone*

4th (6/day)—*arcane eye*, *dimension door*,

illusory wall, *Otiluke's resilient sphere*

3rd (6/day)—*arcane sight*, *blink*, *dispel*

magic, *gaseous form*

2nd (6/day)—*alter self*, *arcane lock*, *detect*

thoughts, *locate object*, *magic mouth*

1st (6/day)—*alarm*, *hold portal*, *magic*

missile, *obscuring mist*, *true strike*

0 (6/day)—*daze*, *detect magic*, *mage hand*,

message, *open/close*, *prestidigitation*, *ray of*

frost, *read magic*, *resistance*

Spell-like abilities (CL 14th):

At will—*levitate*

Abilities Str 30, Dex 16, Con --, Int 17, Wis 27, Cha 19

SQ Hardened Will, Quest of Destruction, Stain of Evil, Weightlessness

Feats Alertness, Empower Spell, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Spell Focus (divination), Stealthy, Toughness

Skills Climb +18, Concentration +5, Craft (stonemasonry) +10, Decipher Script +7, Diplomacy +4, Gather Information +4, Hide +12, Knowledge (arcana) +11, Knowledge (engineering and architecture) +6, Knowledge (history) +4, Listen +16, Move Silently +18, Search +5, Spellcraft +10, Spot +16

Possessions combat gear plus *Book of Vile Darkness*, +2 amulet of natural protection

Fear (Su) Those viewing Lysandrus must make a DC 21 Will save or be paralyzed with fear for 7 rounds. The target(s) cannot be affected again for the rest of the day.

Forbidden Lore (Ex) Lysandrus can use this ability as the Bardic Knowledge ability when it relates to evil magic items.

Passage (Su) Each hour, Lysandrus can create fourteen passages through stone, earth and wood, as the *phase door* spell cast by a 14th-level sorcerer.

Quest of Destruction (Ex) Lysandrus gains a +1 morale bonus to all attack rolls, saves and skill checks whenever he is engaged in a quest to destroy an evil item or an object that requires a powers check to bear or use, except for the *Book of Vile Darkness*.

Rejuvenation (Su) Lysandrus can draw on the Positive Energy Plane to heal damage at a rate of 2 hp per minute. He needs to rest for 1 hour in his lair before the rejuvenation process can begin. During rejuvenation he is helpless and cannot move.

Resistant to Blows (Ex) Physical attacks only deal half damage to Lysandrus, applied before Damage Reduction.

Stain of Evil (Ex) With a successful Spellcraft check, Lysandrus can identify if an item or artifact in sight has a corrupt or evil nature.

Weightlessness (Su) Lysandrus can control his body weight, giving him the ability to climb, fly, *levitate* and leave no tracks.

*detailed in *Van Richten's Arsenal*, published by White Wolf

APPEARANCE

Lysandrus's imposing 6'2" corpse is draped in the simple gray robes of the Guardian Seekers. Dried red eyes peer from circular sockets, while a hint of cleft-lip still remains on his face, a feature from his living days as a caliban. His bony arms embrace the *Book of Vile Darkness*, which is in turn chained to a black leather belt around his waist.

BACKGROUND

Lysandrus was born in 687 BC as a caliban, the result of a strange series of storms that tore across Darkon a year earlier. His unfortunate deformities—a cleft lip, a spine whose ridges protruded acutely from his back, skin the texture

of wet leather—earned him the scorn and fear of the inhabitants of his home town Neblus, but Lysandrus would eventually take to heart what a passing gypsy seer fated for him on his first birthday: he would with all nobility withstand a looming darkness and protect the world from a great evil.

Neblus, the City of Tombstones, was never in short supply in the trade of ancient mason stones, and during his childhood Lysandrus found it easy learning the craft of stonemasonry from his parents. Though Lysandrus was barely sheltered from the taunts of his peers, he was an adventurous soul: he would occasionally spend hours away from the toil of carving stones, wandering the misty foothills around Neblus, oblivious to tales of wandering spirits and Mist horrors that color local folklore. Here too in the serene wildernesses of restless fog, Lysandrus honed his latent skills in sorcery, which he believed was another manifestation of his birth and his eventual fate.

In Lysandrus's nineteenth year, five men in gray hoods arrived unexpectedly at his abode. Presenting themselves as "Guardian Seekers," they had claimed to see omens in the sky and the earth portending the caliban's eventual role if he ever joined their ranks, though they knew very little of how this role would be fulfilled. For three nights Lysandrus meditated on this decision. *Could this be what the seer had seen for me?* he thought to himself. Perhaps, a caliban much maligned in Neblus would be a little more welcome in a society that demanded purity as an ideal. After three days, Lysandrus finally agreed to leave his life in Neblus to join the monks.

It was five years during Lysandrus's training that the Seekers came upon obscure lore of a tome that exponentially magnified evil. It had appeared in the most unexpected of places within and around Darkon, and even His Majesty Azalin himself was said to be on the lookout for its whereabouts. The Order carefully tracked the resonating energies of the tome as it traveled, seemingly of its own will, across Darkon. When it eventually surfaced in Nevuchar Springs, the Seekers of the area, Lysandrus among them, finally took it as their own after a secret and bloody battle underneath the town. To make sure the tome would never find its way into mortal hands ever again, the Seekers constructed a small wooden monastery outside of Nevuchar Springs. They had named the tome the *Book of Vile Darkness*, for anyone who even peered for a

brief moment into its contents felt drawn to unspeakable evil thoughts and actions.

For all of Lysandrus's training as one of the Order of the Guardian, however, the fate foretold by the gypsy seer never seemed to fulfill itself to him. Indeed he may have devoted much of himself working alongside the other monks in successfully locating and acquiring the *Book of Vile Darkness*, but Lysandrus himself felt nothing of the fortunes promised to him. He suffered this frustration in silence, not once telling anyone of his personal hope.

Then the Great Upheaval came in 740, ripping Darkon apart and unleashing vile energies throughout the planes. A powerful wave of evil pulsed throughout the land, manifesting as hate and greed that festered within every mortal soul. Lawlessness was everywhere, and the monasteries of the Order in Darkon were besieged by creatures both human and inhuman, attracted to the evil relics found within their seemingly secure walls. Many of the Seekers fell in the supernatural onslaught, but Lysandrus was lucky enough to have been told to flee with the *Book of Vile Darkness*. A strange twist of destiny allowed him to both endure the flight from his monastery to a high mountain cave northwest of Neblus, and to unfortunately kill him as he was crushed by rocks after a brief yet violent earth tremor. When the Upheaval finally subsided, Lysandrus awoke in undeath, raised by the latent powers of the *Book of Vile Darkness*. It was on that strange cloudy morning that Lysandrus finally learned of the gypsy seer's message: only in this strange, noble undeath could he finally protect the world from the contents of the *Book*, and only he could protect the *Book* from the greed of the world.

Aware of his state, aware of the dangers of his vile treasure, and keeping to heart the code of the Order of the Guardian, Lysandrus used his sorcery and stonecutting skills to construct the abode that would serve as a tomb, both for himself and the *Book*. Nearly a year after the Great Upheaval had subsided, Lysandrus had carved out an entire complex of maze tunnels, false chambers and secret doors, all to thwart whoever wished to take the dreaded tome he guarded against the world.

To this day, what all the people of Neblus know is that an ancient being called "the Vilekeeper" wanders that high peak northwest of their city; what vile thing he keeps is anyone's guess. The folk of Neblus speak of the Vilekeeper as a high power better left untouched: his wrath, they say, is a violent thunderstorm on

a sunny day, while his wails are the chill wind in the dead of a winter's night. The mountain is his, they say, and the foolish few who scale its heights to conquer him would invite death and the Gray Realm. Indeed a few know of the *Book of Vile Darkness* and the power it brings to its wielder, and time and again they have tried to claim the relic as their own. None have been successful so far, but Lysandrus the Vilekeeper is most certainly aware of the depths that the greed in the hearts of men could fathom. Within that mountain cave caught between the endless Mists and the land he calls home, he knows that his task can take all eternity—an eternity he is willing to wait out.

PERSONALITY

Lysandrus believes that his task of keeping the *Book of Vile Darkness* from the rest of the world is noble, and he is willing to spend forever guarding it if he needs to. The power of the *Book* is so great that Lysandrus has decided to attach it to a platinum chain that ends on a belt around his waist; in this way nothing short of his own personal destruction would let him give up the *Book*. Only the Guardian Seekers and little else know of his existence, but even the Seekers themselves know to stay away from him and the relic in his custody. This is more than welcome to Lysandrus, who prefers his time alone. In the past he has thwarted plunderers and treasure hunters by creating false walls and pathways, even using his imposing undead caliban visage as a last resort to repel the most persistent of them.

Discreetly hidden somewhere amongst the twisting halls of the maze he has created, Lysandrus's personal sanctum itself is a featureless room carved of stone. Here he motionlessly whiles away the years, keeping to his thoughts or resting in dreamless sleep. Compared to the other caverns Lysandrus has crafted, this small chamber has no traps, no carvings, no markings, not even any decorative motifs. Again, its purpose is to thwart any who think the *Book of Vile Darkness* would be "naturally" placed in a far grander chamber.

Meanwhile, the evil that resonates from within the *Book of Vile Darkness* has on many occasions tried to permeate Lysandrus's soul. He struggles constantly to resist the temptation of even opening the *Book* and peering into it, and his resistance has so far succeeded, though not even Lysandrus himself could say if he would eventually succumb to the *Book's* allure.

COMBAT

Lysandrus does not reveal himself to intruders in his cave; he instead prefers to watch from afar, away from insistent eyes, using his sorcery to create *illusory walls* and *walls of stone* to fool would-be plunderers. If these are not enough to deter visitors, he uses “fear tactics” such as *dream* and *magic mouth* spells to drive them away.

As for Lysandrus himself, his powers as a 5th-rank ancient are formidable even against high-level characters—without any weapons or abilities that pierce through the supernatural defenses granted to an ancient of such high rank, fighting Lysandrus in combat is almost futile. If faced with adversaries that could indeed match his fighting prowess, he uses the cave system itself for defense, opening up supernatural passages or *dimension doors*, or using *gaseous form* to flee to his nondescript sanctum and regenerate.

STORY SEED

CHASING SHADOWS

The Order of the Guardian is not the only society to know of the Vilekeeper and his relic; since the Great Upheaval, the Fraternity of Shadows has desired to claim the *Book of Vile Darkness* as its own. Some within its ranks believe that the relic holds hidden knowledge that serves as the ultimate key to achieving their goal of dominating the world, and these few know that the *Book* is protected by an ancient of great power underneath a mountain near Neblus—to claim the *Book*, they have to corrupt its Guardian.

In the bleak years following the Requiem of 750, local lore began to spread to

different parts of shattered Darkon, including obscure tales of a “Dread Book” and its undead protector. Sifting truth from fallacy, one of the Fraternity began a quest to obtain the *Book of Vile Darkness* and use its powers to put the world under his heel.

The story begins like so many others in Ravenloft: a seemingly random and senseless murder in a dense urban area such as Martira Bay, Port-a-Lucine or Levkarest. It happens in a library in the dead of night, with no witnesses, no clear motives, and no evidence—except for a book (missing from the library) and a strange burn mark on the victim’s left palm. The missing book would have detailed the history of the Order of the Guardian, and the burn imprint would have shown the Fraternity’s symbol, of a circle formed by two intertwining snakes. The symbol would be seen again in other towns and cities, burnt on skin, painted on walls or stamped on wax as the PC’s follow the killer’s trail.

A pattern comes into fore: the killer leaves the Fraternity’s symbol in each and every place where the *Book of Vile Darkness* has emerged in the past. With this information the PC’s can perhaps predict the killer’s next steps, which eventually lead to Neblus and Lysandrus’s lair. A confrontation would almost certainly happen between the PC’s and the killer, who turns out to be a powerful *umbra*, or a master teacher of the Fraternity, whose powers and knowledge could rival that of even the world’s greatest undead creatures. Can the PC’s succeed in holding back the *umbra*’s plans to claim the *Book of Vile Darkness* as his own? Will they simply bide their time and wait until the Vilekeeper finally emerges with his wrath? How does the Order of the Guardian play into this chase?

THE BOOK OF VILE DARKNESS IN RAVENLOFT

Using Lysandrus the Vilekeeper as a pivotal character could be an interesting way to introduce the *Book of Vile Darkness* in a Ravenloft campaign. As detailed in page 123 of the *Ravenloft Player’s Handbook*, the *Book of Vile Darkness* follows the basic rules found in the *Dungeon Master’s Guide*, except for the DC 15 Madness save that good-aligned characters must roll instead of the experience-point gain. Story-wise, the DM can even choose to either create a back story for the existence of the *Book* (how for example did it come to have a human face for a cover) or to use or modify the story found in page 14 of the *Book of Vile Darkness* game accessory.

If the DM does have access to that accessory, she can unlock the rules found there and apply them in her Ravenloft campaign. For example, a PC who reads from the *Book of Vile Darkness* artifact and makes it through the Madness save might be encouraged to choose from the list of Vile feats or prestige classes listed in the accessory.

Consider however the effects of using these rules in a Ravenloft campaign, where a balance must be made between subtle roleplaying and the acquisition of utterly vile power (reasons why Lysandrus and the Guardian Seekers want to keep the *Book* away in the first place). What for instance would be the fate of a Cancer Mage if he gets discovered? Does a rain of frogs and fish evoke true fear or just plain disgust? Will the casting of a *dancing chains* spell attract the unwelcome attention of Dark Powers to the caster himself?

PHARAOH AKHENATON



for the saddest epitaph which can be carved in
memory of a vanished liberty is that it was lost
because its possessors failed to stretch forth a saving
hand while yet there was time.

George Sutherland



Somewhere in the merciless sands of Gothic Egypt lies a little-known locale natives have for centuries called Tel el-Amarna. On the surface, nothing is left here except for a few carved stones and brick foundations, but beneath the burning sands and barren bluffs of this desolate region lies the legacy of a defiance that has endured for thousands of years. Once in its history, Tel el-Amarna was the center of the world; where lifeless rocks now stand there flourished a majestic city, ruled by a king who defied the old ways of Egypt's corrupt theocracy. Three thousand years later, Pharaoh Akhenaton still continues the daunting task brought forth to him by his solar god.

PHARAOH AKHENATON (CR 19)

Male 4th rank ancient dead (human) mystic*

15

N Medium undead (augmented humanoid)

Init -8; **Senses** Listen +22, Spot +14

Languages Ancient Egyptian, Arabic, English, French, Latin, Spanish, Mandarin

AC 22; touch 10, flat-footed 22

hp 120 (15 HD); rejuvenation; **DR** 15/magic

Immune undead immunities, electricity, cold

Resist +6 turn resistance, Resistant to Blows

Fort +7, **Ref** +3, **Will** +7

Weakness fire vulnerability

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee slam +15/+10 (1d6+8)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +7/+2; **Grp** +15

Atk Options Aton's Touch

Special Actions Fear, rebuke undead 10/day (2d6+22, 15th)

Mystic Spells Prepared (CL 10th):

5th—*commune*^D, *flame strike*

4th—*divination*^D, *fire shield* (2), *tongues*

3rd—*dispel magic* (2), *glyph of warding*,

magic vestment, *searing light*^D

2nd—*detect thoughts* (2), *hold person* (2),

heat metal^D, *gentle repose*

1st—*command* (2), *endure elements*^D (2),

obscuring mist, *sanctuary*

0—*detect magic* (2), *light* (2), *mending*,

read magic (2)

D: Domain spell. Domains: Major—Sun, Minor—All, Knowledge

Abilities Str 27, Dex 10, Con --, Int 17, Wis 25, Cha 24

SQ mystic weave*, abstracted*, Pharaoh's Call, Pure Casting

Feats Alertness, Ancient Knowledge Expert*, Craft Wondrous Item, Leadership, Scribe Scroll, Toughness

Skills Climb +16, Concentration +15, Diplomacy +13, Gather Information +12, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (forbidden lore)* +11, Knowledge (government)* +9, Knowledge (religion) +15, Listen +16, Perform (oratory) +12, Prognostication* +13, Psychometry* +4, Sixth Sense* +7, Spot +14

Fear (Su) Anyone viewing Pharaoh

AKhenaton's true form must make a DC 19

Will save or be paralyzed with fear for 8 rounds. The target(s) cannot be affected again for the rest of the day.

Aton's Touch (Su) The Pharaoh has the option of inflicting a supernatural disease that drains body moisture with his slam attack. This is similar to the Demon Fever disease (*DMG*, p.292), but it deals both Constitution and Charisma damage, and it requires a DC 20 Fort save to resist. Only a *remove disease* spell can cure this affliction.

Rejuvenation (Su) Pharaoh Akhenaton can draw on the Positive Energy Plane to heal damage at a rate of 1 hp an hour. He needs to rest for 1 hour beneath the earth before the rejuvenation process can begin, and is inert for 1 hour after the process completes. During rejuvenation he is helpless and cannot move.

Resistant to Blows (Ex) Physical attacks only deal half damage to the Pharaoh, applied before Damage Reduction.

Pharaoh's Call (Su) Pharaoh Akhenaton can mentally project any thought to any member of the Synod of the Crimson Disk, regardless of wherever that person is anywhere in the world.

Pure Casting (Su) The link between Pharaoh Akhenaton and Aton provides a source of magic uncorrupted by the Red Death. For as long as he does not cast spells for evil purposes his powers checks are halved.

*detailed in *Masque of the Red Death*, published by White Wolf

APPEARANCE

All that remains of the once-regal Pharaoh Akhenaton is a frame tightly wrapped in yellowed strips of linen. The linens however expose his lower left hip, revealing a nest of spiders living in his mummified form. Trinkets of burnished gold glorifying the god Aton adorn his shoulders and arms, while an elaborate death mask of burnished gold and bronze covers his entire head. When he ventures out into the desert, he always wears his large, flowing red cotton cowl.

BACKGROUND

Seemingly for the first half of Gothic Earth's history, Egypt ruled the world. It was a universe apart from the grandeurs of Greece and Rome: the exotic, mysterious land out in the amber wastes of North Africa, where geometric monuments of yellow stone and gleaming rock towered over the endless sands below, built to honor a host of gods and their mortal viceroys. It was the Greco-Roman cosmos turned upside down: the kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

But ever since, the priest Imhotep unwittingly allowed the Red Death into the world, Egypt's majesty often gave way to decadence, avarice and human exploitation. Soon enough, the ancient gods themselves began to lose their foothold in this world, fighting an uphill battle against the unseen evil that took this world as its own. Blinded by the Red Death and its minions, the fruitless worship of the gods continued below.

Pharaoh Amenophis II was a wise king who ruled from Thebes, Egypt's grand capital. He was, however, the unwitting pawns of the high priests of Karnak, agents of the Red Death. They saw to it that the old king continued the fruitless worship of the gods shielded forever from their devotees. The pharaoh's son was groomed to be his successor, an intelligent, albeit eccentric, young man. Every morning he would follow his father into the great temples, hailing the celestial gods in a seemingly endless list. Already, in his tender age, the young prince had begun to doubt if the gods ever heard their followers.

His answer came on a particularly hot day when heat stroke overcame him, and he would not awaken until the next morning. In his dream he saw a bright light not unlike the sun, but flushed in deep crimson. The light introduced itself as Aton, last link of the gods to Egypt. The new god taught the prince all he needed to know: of the folly of his ancestor Imhotep, of the gods kept away by an unseen evil that served as a spiritual barrier. In his dream the prince was given a divine mission: to lead Egypt out of this evil taint, regardless of the cost.

The prince eventually ascended the throne in 1350 BCE as Amenophis IV. But his mission was clear: if this unseen evil is to be destroyed, he and his kingdom must start anew. Defying the ancient rituals handed down for generations, he changed his holy name to Akhenaton, the Face of Aton. He immediately abandoned decadent Thebes and its grandiose temple to found a new capital out in the desert, free of evil's blotch. There in that wilderness he founded Akhet-Aton, Aton's Glory. Liberalizing the old ways the pharaoh ordered closed all the temples of the old gods and began sending diplomatic missions to Egypt's neighbors. He declared Aton the one true god and the others as nothing else; by 1346 BCE, the pharaoh's new capital gleamed like a desert rose.

Meanwhile Thebes crumbled, as the pharaoh had planned. Funding to Karnak was cut, all instead diverted to Aton's Glory. A

mystical barrier somehow prevented agents of the Red Death from penetrating the new city and destroying the pharaoh and his family—but what they could not do in distance they would achieve in time and propaganda.

They eventually found a flaw in Akhenaton's teachings: Aton did not present an afterlife, which was an essential part of Egyptian spirituality; Akhenaton simply believed that Aton would provide a new form of existence after death in place of the old, useless one. The priests of Karnak manipulated this flaw in the pharaoh's teaching to lure followers back into Thebes, into the old ways, and eventually back into the corrupting power of the Red Death.

Akhet-aton was slowly abandoned, leaving the heretic king alone in his palace in the desert. When Akhenaton died in 1332 BCE, still devoted to Aton, the title of Capital was brought back to Thebes, and the ways of the old gods were restored. Akhet-Aton was ransacked of its wealth and torn of its grand, imposing structures until all that remained were a few mounds of earth and crumbling walls. Horemheb, Akhenaton's successor, zealously ordered the heretic king's name removed from the Book of Eternal Life, his visage chiseled out of walls and statues, all to rectify the "tarnished legacy" of glorious Egypt. In the sacred Valley of the Kings, zealots tore into Akhenaton's tomb and defiled the mummy within.

But in life the eccentric pharaoh was wise: he had told his most devoted followers to hide his mummy in a catacomb somewhere in the stone bluffs of Akhet-Aton, and to parade a decoy in the sacred Valley. He knew that his sacred quest to rid the world of the unseen evil would continue even beyond his personal extinction.

Indeed, within five years of his death, Akhenaton arose as one of the ancient dead, resurrected by his devotees. For the most part he stayed out of history's way, watching as Egypt rose under Ramses and fell under Cleopatra. He sent followers out into the world, to watch, to gather knowledge, and to spread the saving word of Aton, as the unseen evil slowly yet viciously spread its influence into new and exotic lands.

After countless lifetimes, in the final years of the 19th century, Ottoman Egypt no longer holds the title as the center of the world; however, its people all submit to the will of one true God and his Prophet. But the pharaoh knows his quest to rid Egypt of the Red Death is far from complete. Deep within Tel el-Amarna, Akhenaton's Synod still amasses knowledge,

confident in the belief that someday, the will of Aton and his undead messenger would bear fruition.

PERSONALITY

Pharaoh Akhenaton has gained sufficient knowledge of the world around him and the unseen power that holds sway over it. He has never left Egypt, fearing the Red Death's taint; instead, he sends followers to scour the world for knowledge that would help in defeating the Red Death. His goal remains clear: through Aton, the last link of the ancient Egyptian gods on Earth, he seeks to restore Egypt's former glory free of the Red Death's clutches. Akhenaton has so far eluded attempts to be totally corrupted. The pharaoh's followers have called themselves the Synod of the Crimson Disk. It is their duty to serve Akhenaton, even if many of them have never seen the undead king themselves.

Unknown to many who know the pharaoh, a growing obsession to defeat the Red Death and to restore Egypt's grandeur feeds at the king day by day. Recently he has discovered that he can command a person anywhere in the world simply with his own thoughts, an ability he finds both delightful and frightening.

COMBAT

Unlike most other pharaohs of ancient Egypt, Akhenaton was never a warrior but a priest devoted to a new, saving god. He has never in life resorted to violence as a way to resolve problems, but if faced with no other option he would not hesitate to use his ancient powers to defeat his opponents. Additionally, as king he has subjects: the Synod of the Crimson Disk will never hesitate to defend their pharaoh in times of need.

TEL EL-AMARNA

Somewhere on the east banks of the Nile Valley near Luxor lies Tel el-Amarna, a seemingly uninhabited outcrop of desert rock and sand. The intense heat prevents most from ever entering here, but once in Egypt's history Tel el-Amarna was Akhet-Aton, for a brief period the spiritual center of the world. Here the mummy Akhenaton still holds court in a hidden network of caves to a group of devotees and Synod members.

Tel el-Amarna is one of the few places on Gothic Earth where the Red Death does not yet completely hold sway. As such, spellcasters in Tel el-Amarna can cast spells with power

checks halved, for as long as these spells are not used for evil purposes.

STORY SEED

Sun Queen

Aside from spreading Aton's word, Akhenaton has another goal: finding the remains of his wife Nefertiti. This beautiful queen was Akhenaton's true love in life and was his most active supporter, but she passed away two years before his own death. When the Red Death's minions plundered Akhet-Aton and the Valley of the Kings, they whisked away her mummy. The corpse has ever since then proved an elusive prize for Akhenaton and the Synod of the Crimson Disk. It is the pharaoh's greatest wish that his wife be beside him in the forthcoming battle against the Red Death.

In 1893, archaeologists excavated a small cavern near Deir al-Bhari, containing a sarcophagus bearing the inscription of Nefertiti. Three days after the discovery, three scholars are dead and the sarcophagus is nowhere to be found. All leads point to a secret society in Cairo, but the Synod itself has denied killing or even stealing the coffin. The characters are called in to hunt the murderers and locate the stolen mummy, encountering dark magic and intrigue along the way. It is left to the characters whether to return the sarcophagus to the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities or to deliver it to the Synod.

Within six days of the crime, Nefertiti's disturbed mummy rises up from the dead. Her awakening could send mystical repercussions throughout Egypt and the Middle East, attracting the attention of no less than the heretical pharaoh himself.

PONCIANE OF THE FELL TREE



Many words have been granted me, and some are wise, and some are false, but only three are holy: "I will it!"

Ayn Rand, "Anthem" (1946)



Souragne is a land in constant flux, as mutable yet as old as the swirling swamp waters that define itself. Here the gods do not hold sway, their powers overruled by the *loa* that wander the humid wilderness. For years many have tried to usurp their dominion, but the *loa* have always proven their mettle. Perhaps, some say, only the likes of the *loa* themselves could bring about their downfall. One such person had in life nearly brought about this possibility in the swamps, and in death he continues still. Though his body is inert and useless, it is what lies beneath the fetid waters that makes him nigh unstoppable.

PONCIANE OF THE FELL TREE (CR 12)

Male 3rd-rank ancient dead (monstrous humanoid) voodan* 9
NE medium undead (augmented humanoid)
Init +1; **Senses** Listen +16, Spot +16
Languages Souragnien
AC 21; touch 11, flat-footed 20
hp 78 (9 HD); rejuvenation; **DR** 10/magic
Immune undead immunities, acid attacks
Resist +4 turn resistance, water-based attacks 10, Resistant to Blows
Fort +9, **Ref** +3, **Will** +14
Weakness fire-based vulnerability
Speed burrow 30 ft. (6 squares), Massive Reach
Melee slam +13 (1d6+8) and
Melee slam +9 (1d6+8) and
Melee slam +3 (1d3+4)
Base Atk +6/+1; **Grp** +14

Atk Options Mount of the Loa

Special Actions Rebuke animals and/or undead 6/day (2d6+12, 9th)

Voodan Spells Prepared (CL 9th):

5th—*dream*

4th—*hallucinatory terrain, modify memory*

3rd—*scrying, sculpt sound, speak with animals*

2nd—*darkness, minor image, misdirection, whispering wind*

1st—*cause fear, magic mouth, silent image, ventriloquism*

0—*dancing lights, daze, mage hand, message, open/close, read magic*

Domain: Illusion

Spell-like Abilities (CL 9th):

3/day—*speak with plants, speak with animals, speak with dead*

Abilities Str 24, Dex 12, Con --, Int 12, Wis 23, Cha 16

SQ Bestow *Gris-gris*

Feats Alertness, Animal Affinity, Blind-Fight, Brew Potion, Iron Will, Multiattack, Toughness

Skills Climb +16, Concentration +12, Craft (alchemy) +8, Handle Animal +11, Hide +12, Knowledge (nature) +4, Listen +16, Move Silently +19, Sense Motive +7, Spellcraft +7, Spot +16, Swim +12

Bestow *Gris-gris* Ponciane can bestow any of his voodan spells in material form to anyone he chooses. These spells last for 24 hours.

Fear (Su) Those viewing Ponciane's corpse must make a DC 19 Will save or be paralyzed with fear for 9 rounds. The target(s) cannot be affected again for the

rest of the day.

Massive Reach (Su) Ponciane's tree roots have a reach of half a mile from his corpse, and can thus affect and be affected by anyone within this area.

Mount of the Loa (Su) Once a day Ponciane can call upon Kaberon to enhance his Strength score by +2. This lasts for 5 rounds.

Rejuvenation (Su) Ponciane can draw on the Positive Energy Plane to heal damage at a rate of 12 hp an hour. He needs to rest for 1 day underneath the swamp before the rejuvenation process can begin, and is inert for 1 hour after the process completes. During rejuvenation he is helpless and cannot move.

Resistant to Blows (Ex) Physical attacks only deal half damage to Ponciane, applied before Damage Reduction.

**detailed in Dark Tales & Disturbing Legends, published by White Wolf*

APPEARANCE

The human voodan once known as Ponciane is now nothing more than a rotting corpse tied crudely to the blackened trunk of a fallen swamp tree. Though both he and the tree itself look dead, the intricate roots beneath are very much alive, and they serve as the conduits of his power.

BACKGROUND

Ponciane d'Veud was one of the *voodan*, spirit talkers of the swamplands of Souragne. As such he had the ear of the *loa* spirits that populated the land, and also mastered the ability to channel their will through him. He had also began teaching his craft to a younger man named Maurice, who had in his young life mastered much of the ways of his teacher. The small village of Gavonuille benefited much from Ponciane's ways.

A chance discovery in the Maison d'Sablet would change the voodan's life forever. On a rather humid day, as the sun sank low on the horizon, Ponciane oared his raft across the swamp and found a large fallen bayou tree blocking his path home. Ponciane was curious enough to examine the massive deadfall, and perhaps scavenge it for ingredients in his hallowed *gris-gris* bag, but upon doing so he had found ancient writing on what had been the dead tree's upper trunk. Alongside the writings was a glyph, not unlike the symbols used to summon the *loa*, but this inscription was unlike that which he had seen before. With no superiors to consult, Ponciane came to the conclusion that the

inscription and the glyph both pertained to a long-lost *loa*, one that had never been summoned for ages. Taking out his bone-dagger, he cut off the bark that held the inscriptions and took it home. Though he acknowledged the dead tree, he hid the knowledge of the inscription from Maurice and the rest of Gavonuille.

It took three days for Ponciane to decrypt the writings on the piece of bark he cut from the tree. Almost immediately after the end of the third day he immediately set off out of town to an islet only he knew, and followed the instructions to summon the long-lost *loa*. With intricate rituals and ingredients he already had in tow, and only after drawing the spirit's symbol on the earth using blood-colored chalk, Ponciane watched in both fear and awe as a large three-headed hound emerged from the brackish waters of the swamp. With but fleeting thoughts for communication, they struck a bargain: the *loa*, calling itself Kaberon, asked nothing more than spreading its fame through speech and wit, in exchange for higher levels of knowledge never harnessed by any voodan before.

Indeed the voodan felt his power increase as the days went by, and he kept his part of the bargain as well by vocally heralding Kaberon, the *loa* that was unseen by all but felt by all. Most of Gavonuille found the change brought to Ponciane by this new spirit as unusual, but they went on with their lives not knowing of Kaberon's true nature. Not so for young Maurice, who had begun to doubt his teacher—why hide Kaberon's face from him, a fellow voodan? Determined to find the real truth behind Ponciane's transformation, he sought help from higher powers.

One night, as Ponciane slept, Maurice used dangerous *gris-gris* to summon the Lord of the Dead, *loa* of secrets. Maurice needed no question for the shadowed spirit that eventually loomed over him; Kaberon was dangerous, the *loa* told the young voodan, an entity such as it undermined the power and traditions of all the *loa*. There are reasons why the likes of Kaberon and his worshippers should not gain a foothold in the land. As proof, the Lord of the Dead pointed to Ponciane's sleeping form—the elder voodan growled in his sleep, like an eternally ravenous hound. Kaberon's influence had finally taken him. Maurice received one last message from the Lord of the Dead: with his devotion now solely in the hands of the new spirit, Ponciane is a lost cause. Maurice knew what to do, and left Ponciane's hut for one last time.

The next morning, a heavy fog hung over the Maison d'Sablet. Ponciane awoke to find the grim faces of all of Gavonuille at his doorstep, Maurice among them, ready to take the elder voodan for the Lord of the Dead. Kaberon is a false *loa*, they declared, and those who bargained with false *loa* must forfeit their lives. Though Ponciane resisted with all his *gris-gris*, he was no match for the mob. The people of Gavonuille dragged the voodan by his legs, tied him to the fallen tree and left him there, taking away his *gris-gris* and burning down his hut. For days after, Ponciane's cries were heard throughout Gavonuille and the empty swamp, but no one was allowed to free him from his tight bonds. On the seventh day, the voodan fell silent, and the Lord of the Dead was appeased—or so the stories say.

A year after Ponciane's lynching, though no one really knows how or why, Gavonuille was abandoned, its huts now empty, rotten and half-sunken into the swamp. Some say Ponciane had wreaked his silent vengeance on the village, others claim that its residents had fled, seeing how the swamp around it had changed. Whatever the cause, all who speculate agree that Ponciane is the literal root cause. As stories told years after his death would claim, in the nebulous half-realm between this world and the next, Kaberon and his ilk captured Ponciane's soul and, seeing its usefulness, flung it back to the world of the living. It indeed fell back, root within the swamps near Gavonuille itself, on the fallen tree that until today still bears the dead voodan's rotting corpse. Now, the stories say, Ponciane *is* the tree, dead above the waters but unliving beneath, using forbidden powers to eventually open the gates for the return of long-banished *loa* of forgotten times.

PERSONALITY

Ponciane bides his time exploiting his horrific undead form and reveling in his new powers. Ponciane is still actively devoted to Kaberon, an entity he believes is a *loa* from times forgotten. Though he has long exacted vengeance over the village of Gavonuille for what its townsfolk has done to him, he believes he has a greater cause to bring Kaberon and its kind into the world, no matter what the cost. He patiently awaits the time when he could be powerful enough to entertain the likes of Kaberon, and he also awaits the time when he himself becomes one of whatever Kaberon really is.

Though Ponciane no longer has control over his corpse, the vast network of undead roots of the dead tree where he discovered Kaberon's glyph is one with him to manipulate at will like really long arms that reach underground. Though he continues to create *gris-gris*, any intruder who even comes close to his mummified corpse, however, is mercilessly pummeled by his roots.

COMBAT

Ponciane's roots can burrow anywhere within his Massive Reach ability, and can suddenly emerge from beneath and strike anyone by surprise. Barring any combat gear or magical items he is relentless in using his Fear ability and multiple slam attacks to pummel any opponent. He can also creatively use his own *gris-gris* spells such as *hallucinatory terrain* and *dream* to confuse hapless intruders, or to warn anyone from ever entering his territory. When down to half his total hit points caused by fire, he immediately withdraws into the ground to rejuvenate.

GAVONUILLE

The tiny hamlet that Ponciane once served is no more: found within the ancient Ponciane's massive reach, whatever is left of this isolated farming community is slowly rotting and sinking underneath the Maison d'Sablet. Swamp animals now make their homes in the ruins, but some houses are still habitable and dry enough to inhabit for even a day or so. Ponciane himself however is almost certain to discover any sentient presence lurking within the abandoned village.

STORY SEED

SOMEWHERE ELSE INSTEAD

Though the *loa* of Souragne have little to fear with Ponciane's horrific undead form, they have enough reason to act over what Ponciane has invited into this world: Kaberon is neither *loa* nor god, but something else entirely. Traveling across the swamps of Souragne, the PC's inadvertently enter Ponciane's realm into Gavonuille. Taking shelter within a small hut, they are immediately attacked by Ponciane's undead roots. The ancient then weakens them further by using mind-affecting spells and clawing at their own withering sanity, isolating them within Gavonuille with seemingly no way out.

However, the PC's are never truly alone within Ponciane's realm: for years now, the

voodan Maurice (voodan 5, 40 hp) has been studying the undead's power, finding a way to finally relieve Ponciane's soul from Kaberon's will. He has been using his own *gris-gris* to hide from Ponciane, and has also been aided for many years by the Lord of the Dead. Will the PC's be willing to ask for their aid, knowing that they face a powerful undead creature that worships an entity known only by name? Or will they have to get out of Gavonuille on their own, risking possibly their lives in the process?

KABERON THE VESTIGE

Kaberon is an alternate name for Naberius, a vestige found on p.41 of the *Tome of Magic* accessory. "Ponciane of the Vile Tree" assumes that you have no access to that accessory, but if you choose to incorporate the rules for calling vestiges, treat Ponciane as a 3rd-rank ancient dead with seven voodan levels and 2 binder levels.

SEDJEB-AI THE SCORNE



I have lived upon truth, I have fed upon truth, I have performed the ordinances of men, and the things which gratify the gods...I am pure. My breast is purified by libations, and my hinder parts are made clean with the things which make clean, and my inner parts have been dipped in the Lake of Truth...
The Papyrus of Nu (Brit. Mus. No. 10477, Sheet 24)



It is perhaps a most difficult burden if one is publicly scorned, more so if one is scorned due to superficial reasons. It is often more difficult for women, who, due to culture, have to bear the brunt of beauty's norms and standards. It may take a whole lifetime to try to be beautiful, and it would take perhaps a lifetime more to get over the rejection of a man who claims "you're not beautiful enough." For one scorned ancient displaced in time and space, living a lie in a city that exalts beauty, many lifetimes to forget a bad memory is still not enough.

SEDJEB-AI THE SCORNE (CR 7)

Female 2nd-rank ancient dead (human) bard 5
CN medium undead (augmented humanoid)
Init +1; **Senses** Listen +14, Spot +14
Languages Akiri, Balok, Darkonese, Draconic, Lamordian, Vaasi

AC 19; touch 11, flat-footed 18
hp 35 (5 HD); rejuvenation; **DR** 5/magic
Immune undead immunities, cold
Resist +2 turn resistance, Resistant to Blows
Fort +6, **Ref** +5, **Will** +8
Weakness fire vulnerability
Speed 50 ft. (5 squares)
Melee slam +8 (1d4+5) or
Melee +1 dagger +9 (1d4+6; 19-20/x2)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +8

Atk Option Adipocere Touch

Special Action Fear

Combat Gear +1 dagger

Bard Spells Known (CL 5th):

2nd (1/day)—*alter self, minor image, scare*

1st (3/day)—*charm person, expeditious retreat, hypnotism, silent image*

0 (3/day)—*daze, detect magic, know direction, lullaby, read magic, summon instrument*

Abilities Str 21, Dex 12, Con --, Int 18, Wis 19, Cha 21

SQ bardic knowledge +9, bardic music 5/day (inspire courage +1, inspire competence, fascinate 2 creatures, countersong), Passage

Feats Alertness, Deft Hands, Magical Aptitude, Toughness

Skills Bluff +12, Craft (alchemy) +12, Decipher Script +9, Diplomacy +13, Disguise +10, Gather Information +11, Intimidate +7, Knowledge (arcana) +11, Knowledge (history) +12, Knowledge (religion) +10, Listen +14, Move Silently +10, Perform (singing) +13, Perform (string instruments) +12, Perform (dance) +11, Profession (historian) +5, Sleight of Hand +10, Spot +14, Use Magic Device +7

Possessions Combat gear plus masterwork harp, 2 tanglefoot bags, 2 thunderstones, 1 sunrod

Adipocere Touch (Su) Sedjeb-ai can inflict a strange wasting disease on any target with a successful slam attack (DC 22 Fort save to ignore). This disease actually turns blood into decayed fatty tissue, dealing 1d4 Constitution damage per round. The victim also suffers the slippery effect of a continual *grease* spell. To free himself from the disease, the target must make a DC 15 Fort save every round.

Fear (Su) Anyone viewing Sedjeb-ai's mummified form must make a DC 15 Will save or be paralyzed with fear for 5 rounds. The target(s) cannot be affected again for the rest of the day.

Passage (Su) Five times every hour, Sedjeb-ai can create a passage through stone, earth and wood, as the *phase door* spell cast by a 3rd-level sorcerer.

Rejuvenation (Su) Sedjeb-ai can draw on the Positive Energy Plane to heal damage at a rate of 6 hp an hour. She needs to rest for 1 day in her sarcophagus before the rejuvenation process can begin, and is inert for one more day after the process completes. During rejuvenation Sedjeb-ai is helpless and cannot move.

Resistant to Blows (Ex) Physical attacks only deal half damage to Sedjeb-ai, applied before Damage Reduction.

APPEARANCE

The ancient known as Sedjeb-ai has three forms. Her first form is that of a dried corpse wrapped in linen, typical of most mummies, lying in a sarcophagus amongst many others within the antiquities wing of the University of Port-a-Lucine. Her second, daytime, form is that of a pretty yet obese woman with angular features in her early twenties, wearing nondescript yet seasonal clothes. Her third, nocturnal, form wears her second form's face, but her body is that most other woman would want to envy and that most men would want to apply their primal desires on. In this final form she wears the latest fashions of Dementlieu, customized to emphasize her ripened assets.

BACKGROUND

Beyond a time when the Mists held sway, in the vast ancient kingdom known as the Black Land, there lived a young woman named Sedjeb-ai. Born to affluent parents in the service of the pharaoh, Sedjeb-ai was nevertheless different from her peers: they were slim and graceful, while Sedjeb-ai herself was not much so. Young men her age picked thin women over her' some

even openly refused her in favor of women with "the right curves." Word of her rotund figure was often on many lips, and unable to defend herself from the giggles and the ridicule Sedjeb-ai often spent time alone, away from their prying eyes.

Inwardly Sedjeb-ai would have wanted to be thin, her body as graceful as a temple dancer's, though even if she tried she seemed to be as fat as ever. Nothing short of starving herself would have worked, and her parents often scolded her for even mentioning the possibility of such. Fat from birth, Sedjeb-ai could never become what she had always wanted.

Her intellect and expression, however, made up for her portly form. During her many times of solitude she had learned to sing and play various instruments, even attempting a few steps of dance. Gradually the alchemical and arcane arts also captured her attention, but her knowledge of rudimentary magics would not give her even a little of the nubile beauty she desired.

As beholden to the young pharaoh, Sedjeb-ai's parents had to eventually present her to him, perhaps have him wed her as a minor wife. On her seventeenth year, Sedjeb-ai was brought to the palace, dressed in silk and cotton and bedecked in flowers and gold. Facing the pharaoh, she tried to hold back her tears as the court openly ridiculed her heft. Unfazed by his court's judgment the pharaoh asked her to sing, and when she did it was as if the great Sun itself had stopped in its daily passage across the sky. After the song and the long and awkward silence that followed afterwards, the pharaoh took her hand and led her to his gardens for a leisurely stroll.

It was obvious that the pharaoh had been struck by Sedjeb-ai's talents and intellect, and for once she was happy that a man saw beyond her fatness and pierced through what she knew she really was: an intelligent and creative young woman. For seven cycles of the moon the two immersed themselves with each other, and hopes were high among the people that the pharaoh would pick Sedjeb-ai as his prime wife, for he did not yet have one.

A foreign caravan came one morning on that seventh month, bearing a generous tribute of exotic spices and perfumes. But the jewel of this tribute was a young woman with tender skin and almond eyes. She had both the grace and form of a desert oryx, and with but a few words to say she had captured the pharaoh's fickle attentions. Within a few days, the pharaoh chose the foreigner as his prime wife, while Sedjeb-ai was

proclaimed a mere minor wife. Devastated beyond words, for she had true feelings for him, Sedjeb-ai ran from the palace into the desert. She refused to be a mere minor wife, one the pharaoh approached only if he wanted to satisfy his intellectual pursuits; she wanted him to love her as a whole. Bearing the brunt of scorn all her life, she could not bear the humiliation of an entire kingdom.

She had stolen a ceremonial dagger on her flight from the palace. Perhaps, Sedjeb-ai thought, she would never be rejected as such in the next life.

The palace guards found Sedjeb-ai's body in the desert the next morning. With a tinge of guilt the pharaoh ordered full mummification rites for the woman he had scorned, even as he still took the other exotic woman as his prime wife. A small yet elegant tomb for Sedjeb-ai was carved into the desert rock, and there she lay forgotten until the Mists came for the Black Land.

On a tomb scouring expedition to the far wastes of Har' Akir, a scholar from Port-a-Lucine named Jordain Fechanne found the entrance to Sedjeb-ai's tomb in 751 BC. Excavations began almost immediately. Ransacked by scholars in the name of discovery, Sedjeb-ai's post-mortem remains, not to mention the immense wealth of her tomb, were all brought to the University of Port-a-Lucine.

One night, alone in a vast room amongst Sedjeb-ai's treasure, Fechanne opened her sarcophagus and gazed upon the mummified remains within. It took a few more moments of fine investigation for him to see and translate the inscription within the upper lid: "Scorned in the first life, true love and fair form in the next."

Suddenly a wind howled through the hallway, turning his sights away from Sedjeb-ai's mummy. When he turned back, the mummy was gone. Though the dried corpse would eventually return, it would do so repeatedly in the following years under Fechanne's watch.

At a street corner nearby, outside the University, Sedjeb-ai walked naked in the streets, knowing nothing of this new world. A reflection on a glass pane window would reveal a dramatic transformation: though she was dead, her skin and flesh were soft and warm as in life. Though she wore her own face, her body was not her own—it was thinner, more taut, and generally more pleasing to men. Sedjeb-ai indeed got what she wanted: a more nubile form in the next life.

She had not yet finished admiring her reflection when a heavily inebriated man suddenly emerged from around the corner and grabbed her into his filthy embrace, ready to violate her. Sedjeb-ai tried to push him away, but she had underestimated her newfound supernatural strength. With but a few swift blows she killed the man, and in shocked disbelief she ran from his corpse. As the sun rose over Port-a-Lucine, Sedjeb-ai felt her flesh loosen and become heavy, turning into what it once was during her living days. Eventually she would learn the cyclic effects of her strange reawakening: by day she was rotund, unsightly in an alien culture that glorified physical beauty; but by night the fat would dissolve to reveal the body of a temptress. All the while her only true sanctuary would be an ancient coffin displayed in a University museum. To what end does this strange unlife amongst the living have for Sedjeb-ai, she can only guess; but perhaps a fleeting final thought from ages long past would grant a second chance for she who was once scorned.

PERSONALITY

Outwardly Sedjeb-ai projects a strong, confident woman, regardless of her forms. She has managed to acquire a daytime position as Yasmin d'Aix, Akiri historian at the University of Port-a-Lucine, guarding her own relics from thieves and providing vital information about her culture to the institution's scholars. As she never really requires rest apart from her rejuvenation, she lives another life at after dusk as a multitasking woman of luxury known only as Sienna, pulling at the strings of admirers yet never getting close to them. She has, on occasion, come close to being courted by some of Dementlieu's most eligible bachelors, but she prefers to be alone; Sedjeb-ai's rejection by the pharaoh all those ages ago is far fresher in her mind than the walking corpse she now is.

Her mummified form is immobile and inert, and is therefore used solely for regenerating; this has on occasion caused consternation and frustration amongst the scholars of the University of Port-a-Lucine, especially with Jordain Fechanne. Though he knows nothing of Yasmin d'Aix's true identity, he has gotten relatively used to the fact that Sedjeb-ai's mummy occasionally disappears for a few days then returns intact when no one is looking. Aside from her sarcophagus, Sedjeb-ai has used her resources to rent a small but fancy

salon room near the University for guests, though she does not rejuvenate there.

Sedjeb-ai knows all too well that even if her motives for love are pure, her beautiful undeath would in all likelihood never give her what she wants the most: a man who would love her physically, emotionally and intellectually. For now she has erected around herself a façade of strength to hide her depression.

But a darker side exists to Sedjeb-ai: she seethes at the fact that a lot of men are no different now from her time as a living being. All around her she sees men, some of them misogynistic, who scorn women because of their looks, and she sees in these women kindred spirits, for she too was long ago one of them. Sedjeb-ai clandestinely uses her own nocturnal beauty to exact vengeance on these men, tempting them then exacting cruel punishment on them. A number of odd murders around Port-a-Lucine could indeed be traced back to this vengeful ancient.

COMBAT

Sedjeb-ai does not present herself as a woman of combat during her daytime form, preferring instead to rely on the alchemical substances she crafts on occasion. In her more sensual form, however, she uses her bardic abilities to the fullest, especially against men who have hurt women. She then uses her slam attack to apply her adipocere touch. When fatigued or drained of half her total hit points, she uses her passage ability to flee to the University of Port-a-Lucine to rejuvenate in her sarcophagus. Her fear ability is most useful when regenerating, allowing her to completely heal in peace.

For most of the time, however, as a diplomat she would rather befriend PC's than fight them. For all her power and her undeath she still thinks herself as human, and that all resolutions could be settled peacefully. Though many would see Sedjeb-ai as a zealous, avenging character, she believes herself otherwise, and has little patience for those who she finds zealous and avenging herself.

STORY SEED

THEY DON'T CRY

The people of Port-a-Lucine have been on a vigil ever since three odd murders have rocked their city in the past five weeks. All of the victims have been men, and all of them bear the same sinister cause of death: aside from the slits on

their throats, much of their blood has turned to adipocere, a soapy substance similar to decayed body fat.

If the PC's join in the investigation, they find out that all three men had attended one drinking session more than a month ago, when they in their drunken state undressed a beautiful woman against her will and made her dance while they pointed and laughed. When the PC's visit the woman, she claims that a man who she once courted was among them, and he was still alive—but for what he has done, she now wishes he was dead. Rushing to the man's house, the PCs see him dead, covered in adipocere. The killer, however, has left a tiny trace of linen akin to old mummy wrap.

The PC's now have to ascertain which among the numerous mummies stored in the University of Port-a-Lucine could be the killer, or if even the killer was a mummy in the first place. Sedjeb-ai's mummy has not been seen for weeks, though, and both Jordain Fechanne and Yasmine d'Aix claim Sedjeb-ai is “under strict isolated study.” Suspicions against the University may arise eventually as days go by as two more male bodies are discovered and Sedjeb-ai's mummy re-emerges, while Yasmine d'Aix takes a leave of absence. Meanwhile, a male PC begins to date a most enchanting woman named Sienna, who for some reason is not seen during the daytime. Can the PC's link the characters together and finally confront Sedjeb-ai to account for her actions?

*Powers from the Past
have returned
to claim the Present
as their own.*

Ashen: the Ancient Dead details eight stories of powerful mummies. From the undead children that wander the swamps of Tepest, to the silent priestess hiding at the heart of Ezra's Great Cathedral, to the heretic king who seeks to restore his power in the desert sands of Gothic Egypt, their presence can potentially affect the tenuous balance of power in the Dread Realms and Gothic Earth.

For use with the *Dungeons & Dragons* roleplaying game (v.3.5) and the *Ravenloft Campaign Setting* books published by White Wolf.