

# SIXTEEN SORROWS

A HANDBOOK OF DIRE CALAMITIES



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WRITTEN BY

KEVIN CRAWFORD

ART BY

JEFF BROWN

DAVID LEWIS JOHNSON

MIGUEL SANTOS

ISBN 978-1-936673-74-2

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# ACQUAINTED WITH GRIEF

The world is born in bitterness, and every new thing comes by pain. Even in the kindest realms there are sicknesses, sorrows, and troubles to occupy any number of heroes. Still, some of these are the private tragedies of individual men and women, while others are calamities that threaten whole cities.

*Sixteen Sorrows* is a guidebook for GMs, one that provides a selection of common catastrophes that can be woven into an evening's adventure. If an evening's play is already set, they can be used to add a further complication to some existing situation. While the book was written for use with the *Godbound* core rulebook, the great majority of its contents are system-neutral and can be used with any game set in a traditional fantasy world.

Trouble is synonymous with adventure. A peaceful land, a serene rule, an untroubled season for simple folk... however much these may be cherished by the common folk, they make for bad entertainment. Famines, plagues, invasions, curses, and the scourge of terrible beasts are much more playable at the table, and the simplest way of adding more excitement to an evening's gaming is to pour more trouble on it.

Of course, many of these old standbys have gotten somewhat stale in the course of our hobby's history. There are only so many times you can face a pack of pockmarked ruffians without it degenerating into tedium, and there are only so many monstrous beasts to slay before it all gets a little jejune. *Sixteen Sorrows* is built to provide

the complications and additional difficulties to the situation that will help a GM rescue their plots from the staleness of over-familiarity.

More significantly for *Godbound* GMs, the calamities given here are supplemented with advice and details on how to make them significant problems even for such demigods as are *Godbound*. How do you make a plague an interesting problem when you have a PC who can banish disease with a flick of a fingertip? How do you make a tyrannical lord a worthwhile obstacle when one of the PCs can control a man's mind with a word?

*Sixteen Sorrows* gives you specific advice on how to cope with these situations and adjust a calamity so that it provides real challenge even to those heroes who can effortlessly subdue ordinary problems. Not only does it provide counsel on what steps to take to complicate a situation to provide more engagement at the table, it also tells you how to make those situation-defeating powers interesting and meaningful without trivializing the evening's adventure. After all, if you're running a game for a PC who's decided to become the demigod of Health, his player's apt to be aggravated if his gifts are no special use against a plague. There are plenty of problems for which divine power ought to be a direct and simple solution; the craft of the GM lies in making those problems not the only troubles to confront your players.

So read on, noble GM. In these pages you'll find a trove of useful tools. Use them to bring forth the finest of dooms on your game.



# Using This Book

*Sixteen Sorrows* borrows much of the "tag" system I've used in my other games, such as *Stars Without Number*, *Scarlet Heroes*, or *Silent Legions*. Instead of the brief tag entries in each of those games, however, *Sixteen Sorrows* gives a full two-page spread to each of sixteen different calamities that might befall a community or region.

Each calamity is meant to provide a framework for an evening's play, or more if the GM wants to complicate the situation sufficiently. These situations can be developed as part of an expected evening's play when the GM knows it will be needed, or it might be brewed up as side material to be thrown into the game whenever it's convenient.

Each catastrophe starts with a page describing its basic nature and the sort of preparation a GM will need to do in order to get it ready for use at the table. A *Terrible Beast* will require the GM to stat out a sufficiently awful monster, for example, while an *Awful Curse* will require some dire arcane blight to be developed. Each page provides considerations to keep in mind when building these necessary parts.

Opposite each of these guide pages is a list of random tables that the GM can use for inspiration and guidance. Each page of tables includes a list of potential Antagonists, Friends, Places, Complications, Things, adventure seeds, and a table specific to the catastrophe's special needs.

**Antagonists** are those figures that spark the immediate conflict that the PCs will face. They might be traditional villains to be overcome, or they might be more ambiguous figures that aren't wholly malevolent. Whatever their particulars, however, they're causing a problem here.

**Friends** are NPCs who might be sympathetic to the PCs, or ones who can be easily used to hook the group into the immediate conflict. They may or may not be sincere allies of the PCs.

**Places** are locations characteristic of the crisis, the sort of sites you can put into the game to make the players feel like they're interacting with a calamity of the appropriate type.

**Complications** twist the crisis, adding details that change the seeming thrust of the situation, complicate the moral calculus, or add further difficulty to resolving the problem cleanly.

**Things** are treasures or macguffins that are naturally linked with the crisis. When you need a treasure to motivate the actors in the disaster, a Thing will fit the situation and make sense in context.

The adventure seeds provided on each page can be used in a mad-lib fashion to build adventure outlines. Pick or roll a seed, and then fill each labeled role with a roll or choice from the other tables. While it's assumed you'll use the tables on that page, there's nothing stopping you from plucking choices from completely different catastrophes or inserting recurring villains or NPCs from your campaign so far.

In all cases, your own best judgment should be the guide. The tables and advice are good starting points for your creativity, but you should never be reluctant to alter a result or simply pick something appropriate if you have an idea in mind. The tools in this book are meant to ease your burden as a GM and save your creative effort for those parts of the game that are most exciting or interesting for you.

## An Example Calamity Creation

A GM has some spare time and decides to roll up a calamity in case he needs one later to fill out an evening's play. He picks *Lethal Plague* as something he can easily drop into a location. He doesn't have any particular adventure in mind, so he starts by rolling an adventure seed, coming up with "A Friend's misery has been enhanced by the acts of an Antagonist, after already suffering some terrible loss due to the plague. They've sought refuge at a Place, but discovered a Thing there that could overcome the Antagonist if used properly. For one reason or another, however, they can't retrieve or use it themselves without certain failure."

First off, he rolls up an Antagonist for the situation, coming up with a "Brutal official who wants to burn the sickness out." The Friend is an "Official struggling to maintain order among sickness". The Place they've sought refuge in is a "Frantic religious service praying for divine mercy", and the Thing they've found is a cache of "Vital medical supplies to mitigate the suffering".

The GM slots these rolls into the adventure template, and then takes a moment to tweak them around. It looks like the Antagonist and the Friend must have some connection, since both of them are officials, and the Place gives the GM the idea of making them both clerics. The Antagonist is a cruel and heartless Unitary bishop determined to save his flock by burning out the plague and anyone who might be infected. The Friend is a priest who's been out in the community tending the sick, recently attending his own sister's death.

The priest has fallen back to the community's cathedral, where the most desperate and zealous of the faithful are engaged in terrible rites of abnegation and penitence under the encouragement of the bishop.

The bishop is also keeping a large stash of sanctified oils that can mitigate the disease. Very large doses can cure a case, while even small applications can improve a victim's odds greatly. The prelate is keeping the stash for the use of himself and his favorites, however, and the zealots in the cathedral vie with each other to prove their loyalty to the bishop, and their coincidental worthiness to receive the oil.

The priest knows that those oils could save hundreds of lives if they're shared among the sick, but he also knows he can't possibly get them out of the cathedral, and the zealots will repulse any mobs that try to break in. He'll go to the PCs for help, as he'll have heard of their great deeds and considerable puissance.

The GM then takes a moment to think about how things might play out. He decides he'll need a cathedral map he can pull from online somewhere. He'll need Mob statistics for the temple zealots he can get from the *Godbound* core book, and he decides the bishop himself counts as a lesser Eldritch with the Sun Word as long as he's inside the cathedral. A couple minor heroes to represent the mightiest of the zealots rounds out the combat statistics he might need if things turn bloody and the PCs decide to slaughter the desperate zealots.

To round out the flavor of things, the GM rolls to find out what's so horrible about the disease. It turns out that death is even more hideous than usual, and so he dubs the plague "the Slough", as it causes the victim's skin to slough away, causing gruesome scarring on the ten percent that survive the affliction. The infection is passed by touching a victim or their possession, so the zealots will largely be armed with long pole-forks and will be enthusiastic about burning their foes. With that, the GM has sufficient material for a future session's calamity.



# AWFUL CURSE

The community is hag-ridden by a terrible curse. Usually, this blight isn't so awful as to make the place uninhabitable, but it's severe enough to be a lasting scourge on the community. People can live with it, if barely, but their lives are tainted by the weight of its evil effects.

Inevitably, there's some reason that the locals still remain. Most sensible peasants would flee regular outbreaks of demonic monsters stalking the village streets or crops withering under every full moon. Some aspect of the curse or fear of their neighbors keeps them penned in their traditional territory, there to suffer the blight.

Humans adapt to their surroundings, and even the bloodiest, cruellest curses can be put to use by some elements of society. There may be some among them who actively profit from the malediction's effects.

Godbound are usually safe from being afflicted by conventional curses. Curses that "infect" unlucky travelers usually haven't the power to latch onto divine heroes, but those that do can provide a very potent motivation to encourage the PCs to do what it takes to lift them.

## MITIGATING THE CURSE

The PCs are very likely to want to use their gifts and Words to alleviate the effects of the curse. This is possible, but there are limits to how much a Godbound's miracles can do to lift the weight of a malediction as terrible as the one afflicting this area.

A miracle or gift can provide temporary relief from the curse within a strictly limited area. Usually one section of a village or one neighborhood of a city or one area in a rural setting can be protected from the effects of the curse with one appropriate Word's miracle. This protection only lasts until the following dusk as a general rule, and it doesn't stop the consequences of the curse from bleeding into the area from outside.

Low magic techniques such as those practiced by the Curse-Eaters can provide similar protection, but on a more restricted basis. An adept can protect their own person with their spells, a master can protect a building and its contents, and an archmage of the tradition can shelter as much as a Godbound's miracles can. Each such protection requires the casting of one of the initiate's spells for the day.

If the PCs want to represent their efforts with Influence, they can do so, representing their "off-screen" work done to protect particular places within the curse's reach. They cannot spend Dominion to actually end the curse, however; whatever's causing it has to be dealt with before it can end, and once its source is quashed, the curse's effects will usually vanish without further labors.

D6

### Why Haven't They Left?

- 1 Their neighbors are convinced they'll bring the curse with them, and drive them back in
- 2 Anyone who enters the area will carry the curse back out with them, plaguing them wherever they go
- 3 Leaving the area will result in the gruesome death of the person who tries to flee the curse
- 4 The curse warps events or movement so that those born in the area are physically unable to flee the curse
- 5 Something so valuable or so enticing is in the area that it makes the locals endure the curse for its sake
- 6 An even more calamitous curse befalls anyone who tries to escape the "justice" of the ancient malediction

## DIO POSSIBLE VARIETIES OF TERRIBLE CURSES

- 1 Some children are born with monstrous deformities, or become terrible beasts at some unpredictable point
- 2 Some members of the community inevitably die at some significant interval, often by a specific cause
- 3 The crops, mines, or manufactories of the area are cursed to only ever bring forth the bare minimum
- 4 The community is a seeming magnet for bandits, monsters, malevolent supernatural entities, or like horrors
- 5 Everyone in the community dies at a specific early age, usually in some gruesome fashion
- 6 Every attempt to build some crucial dam, canal, or other infrastructure ends in bloody catastrophe
- 7 Monstrous horrors stalk the community at ordained intervals, preying on the unwary by night
- 8 Every attempt to lift the community out of misery inevitably ends in some gruesome disaster
- 9 Some painful or bloody sacrifice is needed regularly if a monster or a dire calamity is not to befall them all
- 10 Anyone who does a particular act or performs a certain role vital to the community's survival will die terribly

## LIFTING THE CURSE

Actually ending the curse hinges on disrupting its focus. The focus of a curse can take several forms, whether a physical object, a spiritual legacy, or the doings of a supernatural creature.

This focus might be a physical object that exudes the curse like a noxious miasma. Ending the blight would require that the object be destroyed or purified directly, both tasks that might require a Godbound's divine gifts to accomplish. Some of these objects were originally intended to be beneficial, and might even still seem to be that way in the hands of haplessly-ignorant possessors.

It may be the residue of a terrible crime, the curse fueled by the undying rage of a magically-gifted soul. Such a victim might have lived their life with no sign of their true gifts, but some awful crime or bitter death-rage might have been enough to spread the affliction through the area. Undoing the focus of such a curse would require accomplishing some kind of justice long denied, or completing a task the curse's enactor died unable to fulfill.

Some supernatural creatures can also act as the locus of a curse. Their existence in the area might be enough to curdle fate in the area or poison the destinies of those around them. Parasite gods in particular are notorious for warping the environment around their temples and strongholds. Other entities have simply enacted the curse as a mighty ritual or potent spell, and only they can undo what they have done. Simply killing such entities might leave the curse irreparable without heroic measures, or cause it to run wild and burn itself out in a fury of blood and disaster.

Whatever the specific focus, lifting the curse will hinge on the PCs actually going out and accomplishing something specific. Make sure you know what it is they need to do in order to lift the curse. If you have it in mind from the start, you'll be able to respond sensibly to their efforts at investigation and the course of action they choose.

D8

### ANTAGONISTS

- 1 Criminal whose vile act induced the curse
- 2 Employer of the mercenary wizard who laid it
- 3 Enchanted beast that exudes the curse naturally
- 4 Local sorcerer acting out of spite and resentment
- 5 Malevolent parasite god extorting the locals
- 6 Powerful local whose actions prolong the curse
- 7 Rival ruler who wants the place to stay cursed
- 8 Spiteful local who enjoys a rival's cursed suffering

D8

### FRIENDS

- 1 Brash outsider confident they can lift the curse
- 2 Curious scholar seeking to study the curse
- 3 Desperate local trying to lift the magical blight
- 4 Guilty local who feels responsible for the malison
- 5 Innocent victim of the curse's effects
- 6 Local unjustly blamed by neighbors for the curse
- 7 Traveler snared here by the curse
- 8 Wretched soul who failed to lift the curse

D8

### PLACES

- 1 A chamber where the curse's focal relics are held
- 2 A hidden lair for the maintainer of the curse
- 3 A place for magical workings to prolong the blight
- 4 A tavern where locals gloomily talk of the blight
- 5 Grim locale where locals suffered the curse's effect
- 6 Hiding-spot for someone accused of laying it
- 7 Panicked local meeting to discuss the curse
- 8 The site of a crime that induced the curse

D8

### COMPLICATIONS

- 1 Failing to lift the curse will cause a disaster
- 2 The curse is a fake, a cover for some dark crime
- 3 The curse is keeping an invader out of the place
- 4 The curse is tied to an innocent local's life
- 5 The curse's side-effects are making someone rich
- 6 The locals are convinced they deserve the curse
- 7 The locals have a badly wrong idea how to lift it
- 8 Their rival neighbors want the curse to stay active

D8

### THINGS

- 1 The artifact that can be used to lift the curse
- 2 The evidence proving a person responsible for it
- 3 The item that must be returned to lift the curse
- 4 The magical belongings of a deceased curse-lifter
- 5 The map to where the curse's focal item is buried
- 6 The money paid to the person who laid the curse
- 7 The possessions of a rich victim of the curse
- 8 The relic that must be shattered to lift the curse

D8

### THE CURSE'S ORIGIN

- 1 A damaged celestial engine has induced the curse
- 2 A foul magical ritual's residual pollution is the curse
- 3 A furious sorcerer cursed them for some offense
- 4 A hereditary blight tied to an ancient sin
- 5 A loathsome creature exudes the curse like sweat
- 6 A parasite god or other divine entity perished here
- 7 Dark power was carelessly unearthed by locals
- 8 Some great crime committed by the locals

D10

### ADVENTURE SEEDS

- 1-2 An Antagonist is hiring or extorting a Friend into trying to lift the curse by attacking or condemning a rival Antagonist, The hiring Antagonist knows it's futile, because the real Thing that can lift the curse is in their possession, held secretly in a suitable Place. If the rival Antagonist is killed or driven out, the curse or situation will only get worse.
- 3-4 A Friend is part of a group or serving an employer who is profiting by the curse's Complication, but can bear the shame no longer and wants the PCs to lift the curse. They know the Place where the curse is supposed to be focused, but they don't have the Thing they need to lift it, which is actually in the possession of an Antagonist.
- 5-6 An Antagonist takes the guise of a Friend in order to lead the PCs astray after it appears likely that the heroes are going to try to lift the curse. They'll try to guide them into finding and using a Thing in precisely the wrong way, which will worsen or cement the curse. A Complication exists that might clue the PCs into the real culpability of the apparent "Friend".
- 7-8 An outsider claimed to have just the Thing to lift the curse, but has been murdered by an Antagonist, the Thing stolen and hidden in a Place, and fresh trouble is on the way from the outsider's angry friends who plan to punish the whole community, especially a Friend sympathetic to the PCs.
- 9-10 A Complication is making life hard or annoying for the PCs when a sympathetic Friend tries to use that annoyance as inducement to make the PCs lift the curse. An Antagonist offers to alleviate the problem with no strings attached if they keep moving on. If the PCs look like they're going to try to lift the curse anyway, the Antagonist will seek to kidnap the Friend to a Place and use them as a hostage to keep the curse intact.



# BANDIT RAIDERS

Ah, the ubiquitous bandit. What fantasy setting has ever been without a heavy dose of these ruffians and ne'er-do-wells to liven up travel and give heroes some disposable rabble to dull their blades? Bandits are easy to add to a location, but they can be tricky to make genuinely interesting for players who might be a little too jaded by their familiarity. Even so, there are a few things you can do to sharpen up a bandit infestation as an interesting problem for the heroes.

## BANDIT ORIGINS

Every traveled road can count on a few thugs and highwaymen, but the bandit groups here are much larger. Groups of dacoits like these don't just spring up by chance; something *made* these men and women bandits. Most of them were probably ordinary peasants and herdsmen at some point, until some crisis or desperation drove them to the sword. Many of them might be genuinely sympathetic figures, forced into their acts by a lack of any other hope for survival and now trapped by the deeds they've done.

Of course, many others are amoral bastards who view common villagers as sheep to be sheared or slaughtered. Their leaders are ruthless, charismatic, and violent figures who might talk a fine game of pillaging cruel lords and robbing usurious merchants, but a successful bandit chief has a steely eye on the main chance and the best return of profit for danger. Often, that means the purse of a poor traveler or the pantry of an isolated farmstead is a better bet than a well-guarded merchant caravan. Bandit chiefs don't like hard fights, as the survivors have a bad habit of blaming the quality of their leadership.

You can use this dichotomy to add flavor to bandit encounters. The heroes might not especially want to mow down desperate peasant lads, but their leader has the influence and control to make them fight. And

### DB Why Can't You Just Slaughter Them?

- 1 The bandits are children: former child soldiers, survivors of a disastrous children's crusade, escaped slaves, or the hungry survivors of a shattered community.
- 2 The bandits are the only force holding back another, worse danger that will move in if they're destroyed.
- 3 Some local crisis is so terrible that a fresh batch of desperate local bandits will form as soon as you clear out the current supply.
- 4 The banditry is a consequence of a social imperative or some religious tradition, and if the current group are wiped out a fresh contingent will take their place.
- 5 The bandits are kinsmen of some potent and fearsome group, and their death will bring inevitable bloody reprisal on the community.
- 6 The bandits are acting for an extremely sympathetic cause, and are simply misled or forced into their current depredations against the locals.
- 7 The "bandits" are just the penumbra of some terrible supernatural foe who hardly pays attention to what its trifling minions do when they aren't needed.
- 8 At other times of the year, the bandits comprise a vital work force or group of skilled artisans who carry out some critical labor in a neighboring community.

if the PCs do take out the chief, it just ensures another will rise in turn unless they either slaughter the bandits, drive them out of the area for good, or give them some chance at a different life. The latter can prove difficult when they might be living alongside the survivors of their recent victims.

Bandits also need a base of operations where they can trade their loot for the supplies and easy company they so enjoy. These bases might be temporary camps struck where unscrupulous traders meet to take their plunder or they might be neighboring communities that make a point of asking no tedious questions.

## FIGHTING BANDITS

If you plan on involving bandits as a challenge, you're going to need to pull some Mob statistics out of the *Godbound* core book. In particular, you'll want to review the special rules involved in fighting Mobs.

Most experienced bandit groups can be treated as Mobs of Trained Soldiers, either as a single Large Mob or as two or three Small Mobs. Such groups will need at least two or three Minor Heroes from the Mortal Foes section of the bestiary to give a decent fight to a pantheon of newly-made Godbound, and each of the Minor Heroes should have an offensive gift selected from the Sword or Bow Word to represent their martial skills.

As a general rule, if the bandit forces arrayed against the PCs don't have at least one attack per PC spread among them, the heroes are going to roll over them. The bandit Mobs will have to try to maneuver to catch as many PCs as possible in their swarms so that multiple Mobs can hit them each round. If three Small Mobs can all rush the PCs when they're bunched up, then every PC in their reach will get targeted by three attacks every round, which is enough to concern even a novice Godbound.

Canny bandit groups will use the terrain to best advantage. They'll know where the deadfalls, pit traps, and heavy thickets are in their area of operations, and enemies that go in after them will be fought on the most advantageous ground possible. If you make up a tactics table for the bandits, you should consider noting down some environmental trap or trick for use during the fight.

Remember also that bandits fight for profit or survival, and not for a glorious death. If there's no obvious reason why a bandit group should be fighting the PCs, they won't. They'll scatter and run for their lives, or simply stay away from these strange and terrifying heroes. Much of the challenge of fighting bandits is actually bringing them to battle.

Against experienced Godbound, normal mortal bandit swarms are not likely to be a meaningful opposition. If the group is composed of level 5 or higher Godbound, consider making the summary slaughter of the bandits an unsatisfying resolution to the problem they present. For one reason or another, simply exterminating them all should be an undesirable outcome, or else the PCs are likely to curb-stomp the impudent mortals and call it a day.

Alternately, you can stiffen the bandits with true supernatural allies that can actually threaten a pantheon of experienced Godbound. If you take this route, however, you're going to have to explain why the locals haven't already been reduced to abject servitude. It could be that the bandits' depredations are nothing more than a casual sideline to their real duties in serving the entity, and it doesn't bother to pay attention to such trifling shenanigans until the PCs roll up and start butchering its minions.

d8

### ANTAGONISTS

- 1 Amoral captain of a bedraggled mercenary crew
- 2 Bitter village headman seeking food and revenge
- 3 Crazy but charismatic exiled noble turned bandit
- 4 Criminal outlaw with a cynical eye for profit
- 5 Local gang boss bent on squeezing his neighbors
- 6 Political rebel with very nominal interest in the cause
- 7 Rival polity's military officer on "unauthorized" raid
- 8 Runaway slave ready to take bloody revenge on all

d8

### FRIENDS

- 1 Anguished spouse of someone killed by bandits
- 2 Avenger who's grimly tracked the chief here
- 3 Escaped conscripted bandit camp follower
- 4 Escapee from a bandit atrocity in the wilds
- 5 Merchant suffering terribly from bandit depredations
- 6 Representative of local law in search of help
- 7 Runaway bandit who couldn't stand the savagery
- 8 Worried relative of a forced bandit conscript

d8

### PLACES

- 1 A "haunted" tower the bandits know is avoided
- 2 Abandoned villa re-purposed to a camp
- 3 Hidden cave where the bandits lair
- 4 Massacre site for an ambushed caravan
- 5 Rocky outcrop with a very defensible approach
- 6 Still-smoking farmhouse burnt down by bandits
- 7 Thickly-wooded hollow deep in the hills
- 8 Unsavory way-inn where the bandits meet

d8

### COMPLICATIONS

- 1 The "bandits" are bitter victims of the locals' crimes
- 2 The bandits are being bankrolled by rival neighbors
- 3 The locals aid them in exchange for immunity
- 4 Their depredations are for fun rather than necessity
- 5 They have colorable legal authority for their thefts
- 6 They hunt for something the locals won't give up
- 7 They only look human, but have been darkly changed
- 8 They plunder under the banner of a local religion

d8

### THINGS

- 1 A precious heirloom of seemingly meager value
- 2 A sacred relic meant to give luck to the bearer
- 3 Cache of weapons and armor for local defense
- 4 Deeds or paperwork of critical local significance
- 5 Evidence of a local traitor's cooperation with them
- 6 Hidden cache of the bandits' stolen loot
- 7 Medicine or other good vital to local survival
- 8 Money meant to pay for help in fighting the bandits

d8

### THE BANDITS' MOOD

- 1 Bloodthirsty, with a zeal for maximum loss of life
- 2 Debauched, reveling in their loot and violent liberty
- 3 Desperate, hungry and in need of vital necessities
- 4 Fanatical, convinced they're fighting for a great cause
- 5 Fearful, convinced they're marked for death
- 6 Pragmatic, with a cold-eyed interest in profit
- 7 Reckless, convinced that no local can resist them
- 8 Sadistic, delighting in cruel use of their prisoners

D10

### ADVENTURE SEEDS

- 1-2 An Antagonist's bandits have let go a Friend to go tell the locals to offer up a Thing at a nearby Place within a certain time-frame, lest horrible punishment be inflicted. Unfortunately, another Friend who hates the bandit stole, confiscated, or wrecked the Thing before it could be handed over with the intent of forcing their neighbors to stand and fight.
- 3-4 An Antagonist was brought in to deal with another Antagonist, but has instead formed an uneasy alliance based on a shared Complication. A Friend is somehow responsible for this turn of events and will be lynched by their neighbors unless they can come up with the Thing they gave the newcomers in exchange for their "help".
- 5-6 A Friend has gotten caught up in the local hatred of the Antagonist and is being accused of conspiring with them. The Friend offers the PCs knowledge of a Thing's hiding place if the heroes can get them out of trouble. It's kept in a Place currently occupied by the bandits.
- 7-8 The Antagonist is really after a Thing because of a Complication and the locals are just in the way somehow, having hidden it in a Place. Unfortunately, the one who hid it died there and the locals aren't sure whether it was hidden there or at an alternate Place.
- 9-10 A Friend has a plan for defeating the Antagonist, but it's a terrible one, even though they've got the rest of the desperate locals on board with it. A Thing is key to the plan, but another Friend has stolen or hidden it in order to prevent the disastrous scheme from going off. The theft is being blamed on a different Antagonist who actually has yet to turn their attention to the community.



# DARK CULT

There are always those men and women willing to barter the insubstantial wisp of their soul for the sake of more tangible rewards. Dark cults usually arise when some malevolent entity starts making promises to the locals in exchange for their servitude. Other cults are inherited affairs, grim legacies of devotion handed down from ancestors who made pacts they perhaps ought not to have made.

Many communities have unique local faiths and religious societies, but what sets these cults apart is their harmfulness to those around the community or to those devotees unfortunate enough to be shackled to the god. This cult is hurting somebody, either the believers, their neighbors, or any strangers unfortunate enough to be present when the god needs a fresh morsel of sacrificial meat.

## THE CULT'S TEMPTATIONS

The cult is offering *something* to its devotees, even if that something is the purely negative assurance that they won't be eaten by the god. Whenever you generate a cult, you should take a moment to figure out what it is that the god is offering its believers. Understanding the appeal of the cult will also give you a clue as to how it might respond to hostile interlopers; a cult that gives superhuman strength to its faithful is apt to respond differently than one that rewards its believers with great wealth.

Identifying the appeal of the cult will also help you pin down where the faith is strongest in the local community. Wealth-granting deities will be popular among the rich and affluent of the society, as its devotees will become such prosperous souls if they aren't already. Conversely, one that promises revenge might be strongest among the slaves and other downtrodden of the area.

A cult's benefits might be delivered by direct divine miracle if the god is of the sort to offer such, or it might come along by more mundane methods, such as the special favor of powerful cult members or old ties they preserve with local organizations.

### DIO      WHAT APPEAL DOES THE CULT HAVE?

- 1 **Hope.** The god has promised something grand, and gives enough tokens of it to string the faithful along.
- 2 **Meaning.** Believers get a sense of importance and meaning from serving such a god, despite their mundane lives.
- 3 **Pleasure.** The god offers hedonistic enjoyments forbidden or unavailable to those outside the cult.
- 4 **Political power.** Membership is the fast track to being chosen for positions of authority in the community.
- 5 **Protection.** The god guards its believers from outside threats, or perhaps from its own otherwise-dire wrath.
- 6 **Revenge.** It offers the chance for weak or powerless believers to avenge themselves on their tormentors.
- 7 **Secrets.** The god gives magical knowledge or arcane gifts to those who worship it.
- 8 **Stability.** The god is holding back some natural process or calamity that would otherwise smite the community.
- 9 **Strength.** The god imbues its faithful with physical power, health, great fertility, or mighty prowess in war.
- 10 **Wealth.** The god offers material goods or sustenance to its faithful believers.

## THE CULT'S ACTIVITIES

Once you know what the cult's appeal is, you can determine what its general activities are. The demands of their dark deity are a good clue to this, but the way it fulfills its deity's requirements are apt to be strongly influenced by the cult's most effective tools. The adventure seeds on the opposite page offer some general adventure outlines, but you'll want to have a basic idea about what the cult is usually doing in the community to integrate it smoothly with the plot.

In particular, you'll want to decide whether the cult is a hidden minority within the community, a secret sect that still exercises great influence over its neighbors, a community secret that is known widely among the locals but not discussed with outsiders, or a completely public faith that has the support or tacit acceptance of the natives. The degree of overtness to the cult's operations will affect how the PCs might learn of its doings.

## A DARK HIERARCHY

Knowing now what the cult offers and what it generally does in the community, you can sketch out the cult's structure and hierarchy. A high priest with a strata of ordinary clergy and then the believers below is usually a good choice, though smaller cults often have just a single priest and the more-or-less erudite laity below. Larger cults might have sub-organizations devoted to guarding shrines, assassinating troublesome unbelievers, or conducting nefarious occult rites and negotiating with summoned entities.

As the GM, you're likely to need combat stats for the high priest and any particularly competent lay members. While truly petty cults might be led by the equivalent of Skilled Mages and have some Minor Heroes for champions along with the Small or Large Mob of cultists, any dark cult really worthy of a Godbound's attention is probably led by the equivalent of a Lesser Eldritch and its retinue of supernatural servitors. Such entities might be limited in where their powers work.

At the top, of course, is the god itself. The deity may be an amorphous spiritual entity that does not actively manifest, but must work through the tools of its cult. Alternatively, it might be an actual physical deity such as a parasite god, or a powerful magic-user or spirit entity that has grown to demand worship. The Eldritch stats usually work for the latter, or you can use Misbegotten stats for particularly tentacular deities.

Truly desperate cults might even go so far as to pray to the Uncreated for their aid, giving their service and sacrifice to one of those unspeakable entities of the Uncreated Night. Others might be minions of an angelic power, used coldly as catspaws and tools in advancing the damnation of humanity. Such powerful entities are unlikely to bother with a common village of bleating yokels, but large cities or useful mortal nobility might draw their attention.

If the patron deity is powerful enough, it might be that the cult has branches in more than one location. Heroes who mercilessly crush the cult in one city might find that their names and descriptions are known to vengeful assassins from groups half a continent away, their deeds conveyed to assorted high priests through the sendings of their patron god. If such sendings get troublesome enough, the PCs may decide that their only solution is to go and kill this vexing divinity. The entity might be found in some earthly stronghold in a remote realm, or it might make a nest somewhere in a shard of fallen Heaven, forcing the heroes to find both it and a Night Road to its location.

d8

### ANTAGONISTS

- 1 Amoral scholar experimenting with the divine
- 2 Covert antipriest using godly power against believers
- 3 Decadent noble bored with more mundane perversions
- 4 Despised local who made a pact to avenge mistreatment
- 5 Heir to a family tradition of dark and bloody worship
- 6 Local priest who's tapped into a new power
- 7 Religious reformer who's bringing a bloody cleansing
- 8 Ruthless hierarch who leads the cult for his own aid

d8

### PLACES

- 1 Abandoned ancient shrine once dedicated to the god
- 2 Bloody grove in the wild consecrated to their deity
- 3 Elegant salon where powerful cultists meet
- 4 Local festival with a hidden, horrible rite at its heart
- 5 Local temple or church taken over by cult members
- 6 Prison, brothel, or other place of easily-had prey
- 7 Subterranean hollow dug out by cultists of old
- 8 Vice den or tenement reeking of human desperation

d8

### THINGS

- 1 A cure for some curse or evil the cult has inflicted
- 2 A perhaps poorly-encrypted membership list
- 3 A precious heirloom taken from the cult's last victim
- 4 Ancient sacrificial offerings to the dark god
- 5 Blackmail material against a local ruler or official
- 6 Key that can unlock the dark god's true power
- 7 The sacred book of the cult, vital to its rituals
- 8 The vile idol which is the source of the cult's magic

d8

### FRIENDS

- 1 Apostate from the cult who was shocked to revulsion
- 2 Community elder who's seen this happen before
- 3 Escapee from a hideous cult ritual
- 4 Ghost of a cult victim seeking revenge
- 5 Inquisitor serving the Church of the One
- 6 Local official being pressured by the cult
- 7 Local spirit or supernatural being threatened by them
- 8 Relative of a cult victim who wouldn't submit to them

d8

### COMPLICATIONS

- 1 The cult has a blithely innocent outer membership
- 2 The cult has no patron, only a sorcerous trickster
- 3 The cult is being backed by a hostile foreign power
- 4 The cult is being used as a catspaw by a local noble
- 5 The cult is blocking an even worse dark entity
- 6 The cult is intimately tied to the local identity and past
- 7 The cult provides a vital service to desperate locals
- 8 The cult's leader is trying to mitigate the faith's evil

d8

### THEIR DARK GOD DEMANDS...

- 1 Blood. The cultists seek more human sacrifices
- 2 Delight. The cultists are made to loathsomely indulge
- 3 Disaster. The cult must induce some great calamity
- 4 Gold. They need more precious sacrificial offerings
- 5 Minions. Cult recruitment is their primary motive
- 6 Revenge. The cult must destroy an old rival or new foe
- 7 Rule. The god demands they obtain positions of power
- 8 Subversion. They are to infiltrate the local faith

D10

### ADVENTURE SEEDS

- 1-2 A Friend finds themselves hopelessly in thrall of an Antagonist due to an old favor provided to them or the pressure of a Complication. They seek aid from the PCs, offering to barter their knowledge of a Thing for their help, but if the Antagonist realizes their involvement, they'll doubtless suffer a fate worse than death.
- 3-4 A Complication is getting worse or more emphatic due to the actions of an Antagonist, who's using a Thing to spread the Complication's scope or intensity. A Friend is on the periphery of events, but can give the PCs knowledge of what's really going on. Unfortunately, they're in a Place surrounded by danger, and must be rescued before they can be of aid.
- 5-6 An Antagonist is using a Thing to increase their power, but wants a second Thing currently in the possession of a Friend. The Friend is hiding out at a Place, while a second Friend is seeking aid from the PCs to protect them from the Antagonist's minions and their dark purpose. A Complication is making it difficult to simply go and collect the hiding Friend, however.
- 7-8 The Antagonist has planted different cells of the cult in more than one Place, arranging it so they're actually conflicting with each other and fueling a local Complication. The real heart of the cult is in a completely different Place, using the struggle and bloodshed to boost its dark magic. A Friend approaches the PCs, trying to get them to resolve the conflict between the cult branches, but they don't realize the truth behind the fighting.
- 9-10 A Place has some special value to an Antagonist, one that promises magical might to them or the fulfillment of some dark prophecy. Unfortunately, a Friend is in the way of their possession of the Place, and it would be inconvenient to directly eliminate or suborn them. A Complication is enlisted to force the Friend out.



# Ethnic Violence

One group in the community is fighting with another. While the simple fault line here could be ethnicity, fissures based on religion, social class, or family allegiance could all form to tear apart a community.

The most likely situation for ethnic violence is when a minority group exceeds roughly thirty percent of the population. At that density, the minority group is less likely to accept implicit subordination to the customs and culture of the majority, and is likely to begin pushing for effective autonomy or a larger say in the affairs of the community. If the minority group turns to violence, they're numerous enough that the majority can't simply put them down by main force without a lengthy, bloody period of civil strife.

It's also possible to have a situation where a numerically inferior minority is ruling over a majority they've cowed by violence, mutually-agreed superiority, or the pressure of a powerful neighboring group. These situations are deeply unstable, and sooner or later it's likely for the subordinated majority to rise up. Even without such a revolt, the ruling minority usually has regular recourse to violence in attempts to crush any incipient rebellion.

In both cases, open violence will tend to rapidly devolve into bloody civil strife. Whatever original grievances were involved in the situation, the violence is unlikely to end until one of the groups is either utterly cowed, ethnically cleansed, or genocidally expunged. If the PCs want to stop it, they have to act before the mutual sins are unforgivable.

## FRAMING THE SITUATION

When framing the situation, the intensity of the trouble will depend on what sort of response you want to elicit from the PCs. If you let the player characters walk into the fantasy equivalent of Rwanda circa 1994, don't expect them to spend a lot of time negotiating with group leaders and carefully hammering out accords. If you want the PCs to think about using diplomacy first, don't let their first encounter with the trouble be an orphanage going up in flames.

Of course, you can always paint the situation in broad strokes and let the players then discover that the circumstances are more morally ambiguous than their first experience suggests. While this sort of play can be very true to life, it can also leave the players disgusted with everyone involved. If you can't imagine an end state to the conflict that would leave your players feeling like they actually did something good here, then the situation needs some more work.

Ethnic violence is a problem for which combat abilities are unlikely to be a useful solution. A Godbound of the Sword might be able to mow down mobs of pogromchiks, but they can't solve the problem unless they're willing to "solve" it with a mountain of corpses. The players will have to identify the leaders of the groups, sort out their goals, forge an understanding, and enforce the ensuing "peace". In some cases, they may have to use their divine powers to create options and solutions that mortal diplomats could not possibly provide.



**D8****ANTAGONISTS**

- 1 A failure seeking meaning through their noble cause
- 2 Culture warrior seeking to extirpate their ways
- 3 Cynical demagogue whipping up fury for his profit
- 4 Enraged victim of the crime of a rival group member
- 5 Labor chief seeking to drive them out of their jobs
- 6 Merchant seeking to drive them off rich resources
- 7 Ruler scapegoating the others for their own failure
- 8 Traitorous other-group member offering false proof

**D8****PLACES**

- 1 Monument to one group's past glorious victory
- 2 Site of a brutal crime committed by one group
- 3 Hidden wilderness camp of zealous extremists
- 4 Ethnic meeting hall for festivals and planning
- 5 Burnt-out ethnic street after a neighborhood riot
- 6 Guarded ghetto quarter of a worried minority
- 7 Audience hall of mutually-acrimonious petitioners
- 8 Torchlight parade route of violent protesters

**D8****THINGS**

- 1 Arms cache meant for use in the conflict
- 2 Infant kidnapped from a leader of the rival group
- 3 Magic item one group uses for defense of its people
- 4 Old document showing the truth of a divisive event
- 5 Proof of the real culprit of an outrageous crime
- 6 Remains of victims "disappeared" by their rivals
- 7 Sacred relic of one group's revered past
- 8 Wealth stolen from a rich member of a rival group

**D8****FRIENDS**

- 1 Grizzled guard captain trying to beat back the riots
- 2 Idealistic yet hopelessly ineffectual unity campaigner
- 3 Inter-group couple trying to dodge their own kindred
- 4 Merchant trying to hold together an inter-group deal
- 5 Outside official desperately trying to hold it together
- 6 Religious leader trying to calm their furious flock
- 7 Scholar seeking to find the true roots of the conflict
- 8 Survivor of a brutal pogrom by their rivals

**D8****COMPLICATIONS**

- 1 A rival power is using the strife to weaken the land
- 2 Both sides are deeply unsympathetic to observers
- 3 One side is taking things much more seriously
- 4 One side seems totally justified in their anger
- 5 The local rulers greatly favor one side
- 6 The strife is cyclical, and most expect it to end soon
- 7 The strife is extremely profitable to a third party
- 8 The strife is rapidly building to open warfare

**D8****OLD SCARS**

- 1 One group was responsible for a terrible massacre
- 2 One group brutally oppressed the other's religion
- 3 One group is much richer and more prosperous
- 4 One group was given privileges by favorable rulers
- 5 One group has always held the other in contempt
- 6 One group kept winning battles against the other
- 7 One group was magically gifted in a minor way
- 8 One group outnumbered the other in their own lands

**D10****ADVENTURE SEEDS**

- 1-2 Two Antagonists from rival ethnic groups are stoking the conflict, and about to provoke some great riot in a relevant Place. A Friend is trying to contain the coming violence, but fears a Complication will make it impossible. Both Antagonists seek to control a Thing that neither currently possesses, but they think that they can do so once their rival is destroyed.
- 3-4 A Complication has goaded an Antagonist into finally acting, causing them to steal a Thing from their enemies and use it as a tool for raising a pogrom or revolt. A Friend is somehow responsible for the theft, and will suffer a terrible fate if the Thing is not recovered from the Antagonist. Their forces are said to be mustering in a hidden Place.
- 5-6 A Place that was traditionally the possession of one group has now been seized by the Antagonist of another. They demand that the former owners give over a Thing if they're to have possession back, but a Complication is preventing that from being a plausible outcome for anyone. A Friend is looking for help to resolve the situation.
- 7-8 A Friend is distraught after another Friend is seized by an Antagonist of a rival group and accused of the theft of a Thing. It may be they actually did steal it, or it might be a ruse of the Antagonist. A Complication is growing worse under the tension, and if the Friend is executed or the Thing is not recovered, disaster will ensue.
- 9-10 An Antagonist claims to be the only one who can resolve a Complication, and only if their demands regarding the opposing group are satisfied. A Friend is trying to stand against them, but the situation appears hopeless. In actuality, the Antagonist is the one behind the Complication, and they have no intention of allowing their demands to be satisfied; if the opposing group buckles, they'll simply increase their demands until they cannot possibly be met, and then will use the excuse for a pogrom.



# EVIL SORCERER

If "a wizard did it" is a faithful mainstay of fantasy gaming, "an evil wizard is doing it" is an even more reliable trope. Despite the familiarity of the set-up, evil sorcerers can still serve a useful role in your games, but it takes some proper framing to get the best mileage out of these robed villains.

## UNNATURAL BEINGS

As a GM, you want to avoid making evil sorcerers an easily-understood quantity. If the PCs know that the villain has spells X, Y, and Z and that it has sorcery equivalent to a seventh-level magic-user, dealing with the wizard tends to boil down to a simple matter of overcoming his available powers and weathering his predictable offensive abilities until they're able to stick a sword into his notoriously-fragile gizzard. While this can make a good evening's fun, a GM can often get more savor from a sorcerer by making him a less comfortable quantity.

One of the easiest ways is to pick a flavor of dread for the sorcerer's abilities. This dread suffuses the wizard's powers and magic. It's the particular flavor of unnaturalness or impossibility that makes the wizard so dangerous and unpredictable; he's clearly consorting with otherworldly energies and unspeakable beings, and this mark of abnormality on his workings is proof of it. The wizard's spells may create a wide variety of effects, but this dread hangs on all of them.

Most dreads won't have any concrete mechanical effect on the PCs. As Godbound, they're either too strong to be affected, or as strangers, they aren't around long enough to be tainted. Locals and minions are

### D6 WHAT KIND OF DREADFUL IS THE MAGIC?

- 1 Primal.** The wizard's magic speaks of feral beasts, untamed forests, blind nature, and a world in which humans are only prey animals. He's tapped into the raw energies of creation that have no room for Man.
- 2 Corrupting.** The wizard's magic is corrupting in a physical or mental sense. People and things he enchants or conjures are defiled or degraded in some way, bent to a particular urge, physically scarred, or otherwise lessened in some characteristic way.
- 3 Consumptive.** The wizard's magic eats what is around it, consuming the people it enchants or the objects it touches in ways either slow or fast. It may convert its meals into nebulous dark magical power, or it might excrete something even worse.
- 4 Maddening.** The wizard's magic causes insanity in those around it, usually of a particular theme. This may include perceptual distortions, the inability to recognize certain basic facts, or the compulsive urge to perform occult or meaningless actions.
- 5 Draining.** The wizard's magic siphons something away from those in its presence, whether an emotion, years of life, colors, other magical energies, fertility, strength, or some other quality it feeds on in a leech-like way.
- 6 Compulsive.** The magic forces its victims and those around its enchantments to perform certain acts or feel certain emotions, possibly as part of the magic's own self-organizing principles that use both wizard and victim as mere components in a greater plan.

apt to bear the dread's scars most emphatically, with the most enchanted or those closest to the wizard's power being the most drastically marred. You can use the dread as a sign of the wizard's influence and a cue as to what kind of magical abilities they might have.

The cause of the dread is up to the GM. It might be the result of the wizard's profane studies, or a natural warping of their magical gift, or a stigmata from their deals with the dark powers of the Uncreated or the angelic Host. The presence of a dread is a good cue to the players that there's an evil sorcerer about, and that they're not simply an ill-disposed thaumaturge of a more ordinary kind.

Lastly, try to tie the dread and the wizard's magic back to the location where they're found. Make their magic a relic of some Former Empire that ruled here long ago, or an existing tradition that the PCs know about, or a consequence of a specific place of power in the area. Making such connections helps add a sense of past to a location and a feeling that the wizard belongs in the area and isn't simply a wandering malefactor who happened to randomly set up shop here.

Of course, there's no obligation to use a dread if the crux of the challenge is identifying the sorcerer or pinning down what's going on in an area. Perhaps the dark wizard's maleficence is expressed through perfectly orthodox magic, or the nature of his wrongdoing leaves no visible stain on his incantations.

## MAGICAL MECHANICS

For the actual sorcerer, picking an Eldritch template from the *Godbound* bestiary is a good starting point. For very inexperienced Godbound or mortal heroes, a more ordinarily-human caster can be a useful foe, but an Eldritch's Word-bound powers are likely going to be necessary to give a pantheon any real opposition.

The Eldritch will need minions. One-on-one, very few of them can stand up to a Godbound pantheon. Use the sorcerer's origins and dread to get ideas for suitable bodyguards. Lift statistics for Misbegotten or Relicts for most of them, though lesser Eldritch or a cadre of human mages might exist as apprentices or allies of the sorcerer.

The sorcerer also needs a lair. Unlike a rampaging beast or a roving bandit army, an evil sorcerer is a more domestic creature. They need laboratories, libraries, slave pens, black fanes, vivisection chambers, and all the other little fittings of their work. Use the ruin generation tools in the *Godbound* core book to come up with a suitable lair for the sorcerer, keeping in mind that the wizard will have laid in defenses against those enemies he expects to come after him.

It's not crucial to have a rigid spell list or collection of powers for the wizard. You need to have firm details on the abilities he'll be using in combat, yes, but non-combat magic and the extent of his power to create or enchant things don't need to be strictly detailed. The important thing is that these non-combat spells should fit with the wizard's magical style or characteristic powers. The players just need to be able to make reasonable guesses about what a wizard can and can't do.

Heading into a necromancer's lair, they expect to deal with undead, and they're not going to start asking whether the necromancer had the exact theurgic invocations necessary to raise that skeletal mole rat swarm. They *will* start to wonder if they suddenly run into hordes of fire elementals, or encounter a room with a magical effect based entirely on plant control. When placing foes and marvels, try to link them back to the wizard's basic idiom.

## d8 ANTAGONISTS

- 1 Beast-breeding creator of magical Misbegotten
- 2 Bitter renegade thrown out of their magical academy
- 3 Diabolical artificer-sorcerer using people for parts
- 4 Gifted local wizard embittered against the people
- 5 Half-crazed wizard who pacted with the Uncreated
- 6 Ruthless court wizard plotting subtly to seize power
- 7 Sorcerer-agent of an enemy power or community
- 8 Sorcerous high priest of their own demented cult

## d8 PLACES

- 1 A refurbished wizard's tower in the wilderness
- 2 Ancient ruin re-purposed for the wizard's use
- 3 Dark corner where slavers sell stock to the wizard
- 4 Elegant country villa staffed with the wizard's minions
- 5 Ruler's palace where the wizard has taken quarters
- 6 Temple where the wizard's prey seek sacred safety
- 7 Warped trans-dimensional pocket domain
- 8 Wizard's lair hidden in plain sight in another place

## d8 THINGS

- 1 Grimoire of theurgic invocations or deep magic
- 2 Mounds of tribute offered up to the sorcerer
- 3 Relic of an ancient theurge who lived in the area
- 4 Runaway experiment of vital importance to the mage
- 5 The ancient key to unlock an artifact of the mage
- 6 The object that is the focus of the sorcerer's power
- 7 The one person who can satisfy a ritual sacrifice need
- 8 The text containing the sorcerer's secret weakness

## d8 FRIENDS

- 1 The wizard's terrified apprentice who regrets their work
- 2 A lover who was spurned or twisted by the wizard
- 3 A victim of the wizard's favorite magical tricks
- 4 A Curse-Eater mercenary in need of extra help
- 5 The wizard's old mentor who seeks to correct them
- 6 A community priest who inveighs against the wizardry
- 7 A local hedge-wizard who can't hope to defeat them
- 8 A bitter rival wizard who sees the PCs as useful

## d8 COMPLICATIONS

- 1 Only the live, cooperative wizard can undo a curse
- 2 Several wizards make up the sorcerous cabal
- 3 The wizard has a legal right to do what they're doing
- 4 The wizard has bribed or coerced local cooperation
- 5 The wizard protects as well as exploits the people
- 6 The wizard's harmless, and being framed by a foe
- 7 The wizard's help is crucial to local authorities
- 8 The wizard's intentions are of the best, if not their acts

## d8 A FAVORITE MAGICAL THING THEY DO

- 1 Bend peoples' minds with sorceries or strange drugs
- 2 Conjure up demonic Uncreated to serve their bidding
- 3 Fabricate guardians out of people or mechanisms
- 4 Give people their hearts' desires at a dire price
- 5 Lay extravagant curses upon the unwary and insolent
- 6 Rain terrible energies down on far-distant enemies
- 7 Spy on people with familiars or magical scrying orbs
- 8 Turn people into Misbegotten monsters and slaves

## D10 ADVENTURE SEEDS

- 1-2 An Antagonist takes the guise of a Friend, secretly working to convince the PCs to destroy a rival Antagonist, yet setting them up to be betrayed afterwards through the power of a Thing they possess. A Complication hints at the truth of the matter, however, if the PCs decide to investigate the source of the Complication or its finer details.
- 3-4 A Friend's time is running short as they are the victim of a magical blight inflicted by an Antagonist. It's possible to use a Thing to cure them, but to do so will ruin the Thing; the Antagonist will do all in their power to prevent the PCs from obtaining the Thing, which is either in the Antagonist's hands or guarded at a Place by something too fearsome for the Antagonist to face.
- 5-6 A Friend is confident that the Thing they possess will overcome the Antagonist, but it's actually a fake or faulty Thing. The Antagonist planted it with the intent of using it to winkle out would-be wizard-slayers and then to demoralize them utterly. The failure will unintentionally hint at the existence of the real Thing, however, in a well-guarded Place.
- 7-8 An Antagonist has crushed resistance by the use of a pitiless Complication. A Friend is driven by such hatred of the wizard that they're willing to suffer the catastrophic consequences of killing the mage. Other locals do not feel the same way, and may try to oppose attempts against the Antagonist, viewing them as the lesser evil.
- 9-10 An Antagonist uses a Complication as blackmail against the locals, who've secretly acquired or found a Thing that can deal with the sorcerer. A Friend is responsible for actually laying hands on the Thing, however, but finds that they're badly over-matched by the perils of the Place where it's kept. They need the PCs to help them get it without tipping off the wizard that the attempt is underway, lest the Complication be amplified and unleashed on the people.



# GREAT FAMINE

A famine isn't really about the hunger, it's about what the hunger makes people do. Whatever flood, locust swarm, potato blight, harvest-season invasion or hard spring weather that caused this famine has already come to pass. The locals have been starving long enough that they're starting to act in desperate ways when the PCs come into the situation. Things are already terrible, and the only question is how much more terrible they're going to get.

## SOLVING A FAMINE

Players being players, the first thing you're going to need to do when setting up a famine situation is think about whether or not your PCs have any easy famine-defeating Words on hand. Wealth is a trivially simple cure, as is Fertility. Sky might provide excellent weather for crops, or Time might try to accelerate growth, or Beasts might seek to call up a tasty tide of animals, but these other Words are less practical, and are especially unlikely to be fast enough or extensive enough to solve the situation. Still, the PCs might have Wealth or Fertility among their Words, or have enough money and friends to ship in food with minimal delay.

This is okay. A player who has taken the Fertility word is damn well going to *expect* to be able to be useful in a famine, and it would be egregious to deny them the chance to make a difference. You just need to be ready for them to do so and have something interesting to occur once the PCs solve the immediate famine problem.

The fastest way to do that is to just think one step beyond the immediate problem and ask what's going to happen when the neighbors find out that the PCs have just brought in life-saving food supplies to a particular village or city. Local warlords will want to seize control of the food, refugees are going to crawl to the food from all over, vile merchants are going to be furious as their profit margin on relief supplies collapses, and local rulers are going to panic as the people flock to someone who actually can save them.

The problem may also be too big or too deeply-rooted to be solved by casual Word use. The famines might be a recurring plague due to some curse, malfunctioning ancient dam, a ruler's depredations, or some other persistent trouble. The PCs might be able to solve the immediate problem, but dealing with the larger issue will require that they go to the root of the trouble.

## HUNGRY ACTIONS

Like most natural disasters, the chief value of a famine to a GM is in the way it forces action from NPCs. The locals have to do *something* to survive. Scavenging the hillsides for edible bark and boiling old leather harness until it's gelatinous might serve in the early days, but those under the scourge of the famine are going to have to take more dramatic action eventually.

Unlike such natural disasters as fire, flood, or earthquakes, however, famine is a slow horror. A healthy human can expect to survive about two months without food, though the young, weak, and unlucky will die far sooner. The famine in this area has likely been going on for at least a month to have left severe marks on the populace, and will probably last for another one or two months before a new crop can come in. If the famine is artificial, created by cruel rulers or brutal invaders, the locals may have no hope at all of food.

The locals will usually know when famine is coming. Cities might be surprised by suddenly-cut trade lines, but bad weather or crop disease will be obvious to all well before harvest. Those with the resources will try to get to a place that has food, but many will hang on, preferring to risk starvation than to abandon their land. As the famine progresses, many will simply be too weak to seek help.

Cannibalism is an easy go-to for horrifying players, but a deeper, even more disquieting sense of disaster can be evoked by showing the ways that the hunger erodes human relationships. Parents abandoning children on the road, friends turning murderous over a heel of bread, husbands and wives hiding food from each other... the disintegration of human bonds and social unity can be disturbing in the way that a generic backwoods cannibal village can't be.

The best use for this kind of disintegration is as an implicit threat for the PCs and an additional source of tension in trying to overcome the challenge. It's hard to overcome the warlord, break the grasp of the villainous merchant cartel, or depose the ruler who's trying to starve off his least ruly subjects. It's even harder when your putative allies are willing to turn at the drop of a sandwich, or attack each other at the first sign of something to eat. This same awareness of impending horror are can bring a deep sense of satisfaction to the players, however, when their heroism saves a village not just from hunger, but from the awful guilt that would have been inherited by its survivors.





D8

## ANTAGONISTS

- 1 Agent of an enemy power who's destroyed the fields
- 2 Bandit warlord intercepting all the incoming food
- 3 Furious sorcerer who's cursing the fields to wither
- 4 Heartless official rerouting all the food elsewhere
- 5 Hydraulic despot who's seized the irrigation system
- 6 Military officer who's requisitioning everything edible
- 7 Rich merchant who's legally seized the granaries
- 8 Vengeful spirit or parasite god inflicting the famine

D8

## PLACES

- 1 Black market selling food meant for relief or alms
- 2 Church filled with people praying for divine help
- 3 Hillside stripped bare of grass by the hungry
- 4 House full of people too weak to move
- 5 Riotous center for distribution of food and alms
- 6 Turf house knocked down as a grave for its dead
- 7 Vice den full of desperate inmates who joined to eat
- 8 Withered field where even the shoots have been eaten

D8

## THINGS

- 1 A pillaged caravan of food aid or edible provender
- 2 A magical object that creates large amounts of food
- 3 An ancient treasure able to buy a vast sum of food
- 4 Precious belonging that was traded for bread
- 5 Hidden stockpile of grain laid down by rebels
- 6 Written trade agreement that would bring in food
- 7 Contractual claim on a large shipment of food
- 8 Stolen alms-gold set aside to buy food for the poor

D8

## FRIENDS

- 1 Desperate local willing to sell their person for food
- 2 Food smuggler with a sympathetic temperament
- 3 Hedge wizard seeking a way around the famine
- 4 Local official struggling to help their charges
- 5 Merchant trying to bring in food supplies from afar
- 6 Orphaned child of a famine-stricken family
- 7 Starving peasant farmer in search of aid
- 8 Wizeden local priest praying for mercy from above

D8

## COMPLICATIONS

- 1 Aid is only being distributed to the politically reliable
- 2 Cannibalism has become quietly normal here
- 3 Neighboring communities are profiting from hunger
- 4 Some locals are wholly untouched by the famine
- 5 The community is collapsing into famine-driven strife
- 6 The famine is punishment from a far, cruel ruler
- 7 The famine was somehow the fault of local folly
- 8 The locals are convinced impiety caused the hunger

D8

## WHAT HAPPENS TO FOOD AID?

- 1 A ruthless local lord confiscates it for their soldiers
- 2 An official tries to seize it to give out to the connected
- 3 Black market toughs arrange to divert it to their use
- 4 Community elders make sure their families get it
- 5 Desperate bandits would rather burn it than not get it
- 6 Locals immediately expect the givers to fix everything
- 7 Mobs of starving peasants pillage it with blind violence
- 8 No animals are left to carry it where it's needed most

D10

## ADVENTURE SEEDS

- 1-2 An Antagonist is causing the famine, but has missed a vital Thing that would hinder their purposes in doing so. A Friend brings PCs word of the Thing's existence, but a Complication centered on a nearby Place is making it difficult to reach the Thing. If they do so violently or obviously, the Antagonist will be alerted, and will quickly muster reinforcements.
- 3-4 A Thing has been lost at a nearby Place, and an Antagonist is searching diligently for it. A Friend has been caught up in their search, and faces a gruesome fate if the PCs don't somehow rescue them; they know the Antagonist is searching for the Thing, but they don't know where it is. Spying on the Antagonist's minions will reveal the location.
- 5-6 Two conflicting Complications have caught a Friend between them and promise their likely destruction. An Antagonist is willing to assist the Friend in exchange for some betrayal, possibly of the PCs if they've made themselves prominently dangerous. The Antagonist is willing to use a Thing as bait, one tied to the PCs if they themselves aren't the target of the treachery.
- 7-8 The famine is causing subsidiary troubles, such as plague, civil uprisings, or savage banditry. The Antagonist has reason to want this chaos to occur, and is behind a growing Complication. A Friend knows a way to foil their plan, but its success hinges on obtaining a Thing from another Friend, who needs it badly for their own survival.
- 9-10 The famine directly serves the purpose of the ruling class somehow; it could be that it's weakening a center of peasant rebellion or damaging the lands of a troublesome lord. The Antagonist has orders to make sure it continues, and a Thing is being sent to them as payment. A Friend knows about the arrangement and can offer information on an attempt to waylay the Thing. If the Antagonist doesn't get paid, they'll be willing to switch sides if suitably induced, but will seek recompense from *someone*.

# INFESTED RUINS

A ruin or lair near the community has become infested with some manner of malevolent creatures. While the place may have been dangerous even before the infestation, the new residents are plaguing the locals with their depredations or sinister schemes, and someone has to go root them out. The nature of the ruin prevents an easy job of cleaning it, however, so the natives are eager to have some more expendable persons attempt the job.

## REASONS FOR INFESTATION

Under normal circumstances, there is no magical quality about a ruin that inevitably attracts monsters and bandits. If some hostile group has taken up residence in a dilapidated lair, it's because the place is offering them something valuable for their purposes. Indeed, it's valuable enough to forgo the advantages they might have from remaining nomadic and hard to find.

Simple shelter and defensibility are the most common reasons. The inhabitants need protection from the elements and walls to keep out enemies, and the ruin will serve for that. If it's a large ruin or a small group, they probably haven't infested the entire complex, but only taken those areas most easy to access or most defensible from intruders. Intelligent occupants will place a very high priority on clearing escape routes, lest they get juggled in their own lair by swarms of angry peasants.

The ruin might also provide some resource or special advantage that the group desires. A ruin that has a chamber of inexhaustible flame can be relied on for heat, light, and cooking without the burden of gathering fuel. For more sorcerous foes, that same fire might be a valuable source of magical energy for their experiments. Local vermin could make good eating, or there might be enough treasure left in the place's nooks and crannies to occupy the interlopers.

Strategic locations are popular among bandits or would-be rulers. A ruin overlooking a crucial trade route or river crossing can be a lucrative nest for a pack of bandits or an exiled noble and his retinue. Alternative routes might exist, but if the toll for using this one is cheaper than the detour they'd otherwise need to take, a careful robber-knight can make a great deal of profit. Of course, there's likely a reason why the ruin wasn't already put to such use, such as a local military force that no longer sweeps it, or a vile beast that was slain by heroes some time earlier.

While these are all rational reasons to seize a ruin, some ruins generate their own infestations. A Night Road at the bottom of some particularly deep or sinister site can vomit forth a swarm of alien relicts or malevolent Uncreated, while a wizard's ancient laboratory can spawn strange life for centuries after his death. Reaching the heart of such infestations can be tremendously dangerous, and the locals might find it easier to just cut back the worst of the ruin's abominations every few years and hope that nothing more terrible comes out in the meantime.

Unless you've got a particularly arcane or well-concealed rationale for the infestation, the locals should be able to tell why the ruin was chosen by its new inhabitants. If the PCs know why the outsiders have chosen the ruin, they'll have an easier time coming up with a plan for dealing with the infestation. If the locals genuinely have no idea why any creature would want to lair in the old place, then that's a clue to the players that something more than mundane is going on in the ruin's bowels.

## SEEKING ARRANGEMENTS

The simplest relationship between a community and an infested ruin is that of plain predation. The inhabitants harvest the locals for tribute, plunder, or occasional outright consumption. The locals might hate and fear the inhabitants, but the intruders' position is too strong or their might too great for the natives to root them out.

This doesn't have to be the only kind of relationship between a ruin and a community, however. If the inhabitants are intelligent, they might well find more advantage in a less adversarial arrangement with the locals. A robber-knight who is plundering a trade line might find it useful to have a neighboring village in which to sell his loot, and filling the right purses with silver can get him both news of impending caravans and warning about any troublesome do-gooders or government troops who might be on their way to kill him.

Such communities can be corrupted by their relationship with the ruin's inhabitants. The silver the knight pays the locals might be the key to their prosperity or the hope for surviving hard times to come. They may not be pleased about their alliance and they may go to some lengths to hide it from outsiders and their ostensible overlords, but when it comes down to the wire, the robber-knight is there and the baron is not. The locals will do what they think they need to do. They might even find it necessary to beg for aid in dealing with the ruin inhabitants in order to convince their suzerain that they're doing something about the interlopers, only to set up their ostensible saviors for a bloody ambush.

This arrangement doesn't have to be with the entire community, however. The settlement's marginal ruffians, thieves, ne'er-do-wells and bounders of various descriptions might all make good spies for the ruin inhabitants, and it's easy enough to pay off a man who can get no other work from the neighbors who hate him. The ruin inhabitants might even get by without paying at all if they make a point of arranging for unfortunate things to befall their agent's enemies.

Not just outcasts can be found serving a ruin's inhabitants. A village headman or other important figure could be making much of their association, either as a convenient route to personal riches or as a little extra muscle to keep the locals obedient. The natives may or may not recognize the outside source of the person's wealth or violence, but they'll doubtless feel its presence. Proving the existence of this connection might be enough to force the traitor's downfall, or it might just compel them to call in their allies for a savage, overt takeover of the community. Most intelligent traitors realize that they'd serve little purpose for their patrons in that case, however, and are prudent enough not to let it get to that point.

A few infestations might actually be *part* of a community. The bandits who lair in the place might be the village's young men at loose ends after harvest, collecting "tolls" from travelers who pass through their ancestral land.

Whatever the specific relationship you choose, the key point is to have the ruin's inhabitants have some kind of impact on one or more surrounding communities. A ruin full of ineffable evil that just happens to be a half-day's walk from a thriving village that ignores it will tax a player's suspension of disbelief. Such insulated sites also make it harder to turn a ruin into something more than a random dungeon bash. Tying the inhabitants to nearby locals provides more opportunities for negotiation, interrogation, or clue-searching, and thus a greater range of potential play options at the table.

## D8 ANTAGONISTS

- 1 Bandit chief with pretensions of landholding authority
- 2 Captain of a hostile rival's scouts using it as a base
- 3 Exiled heretical cleric making it a new temple
- 4 Local lord convinced that great treasures await
- 5 Outsider who claims to have the lawful deed to it
- 6 Patriarch of local troublemaking family now lives there
- 7 Rebel leader who's using the ruins as a base
- 8 Ruin raider indifferent to the horrors they stir up

## D8 PLACES

- 1 A natural vantage point overlooking the ruin
- 2 Burnt-out farmhouse too close to the ruin
- 3 Fortified estate now on guard against the ruin
- 4 Hidden tunnels carved out by original ruin dwellers
- 5 Massacre site of the last group sent against the ruin
- 6 Secret back entrance into the ruin
- 7 Way-inn full of fearful travelers near the ruin
- 8 Wilderness glade with piles of dead ruin dwellers

## D8 THINGS

- 1 A powerful magic item stolen from the ruin
- 2 Hidden treasure laid away by the ruin creators
- 3 Key to unlock the ruin's entrance or defenses
- 4 Map to secret entrance points to the ruin
- 5 Powerful theurgic tome or object from the ruin
- 6 Seal that activates the ruin's internal purge system
- 7 The new dwellers' accumulated treasure pile
- 8 Tribute treasure given to the ruin's new master

## D8 FRIENDS

- 1 Elderly local who remembers stories about the place
- 2 Escaped prisoner of the new ruin inhabitants
- 3 Local official seeking to exert the ruler's claim on it
- 4 Peasant who lived uncomfortably close to the ruin
- 5 Ruin native seeking help against the intruders
- 6 Smuggler who used the now-blocked ruin for caching
- 7 Survivor of adventuring band driven out of the place
- 8 Worried archaeologist with stories of the ruin

## D8 COMPLICATIONS

- 1 Some locals are conspiring with the ruin dwellers
- 2 The local rulers have reason to like the situation
- 3 The locals consider the ruin a taboo holy site
- 4 The new dwellers will be strongly reinforced soon
- 5 The new ruin dwellers have awoken a dire evil
- 6 The ruin controls a vital piece of local infrastructure
- 7 The ruin is in the middle of a current war zone
- 8 The ruin's obvious entrances are all sealed tight

## D8 HOW WAS THE INFESTATION NOTICED?

- 1 A local family was slaughtered by scouts of the ruin
- 2 A merchant caravan was pillaged near the ruin
- 3 A mob of displaced ruin dwellers attacked the locals
- 4 A traditional ritual at the ruin was violently dispersed
- 5 Agents of the new owners bought out local markets
- 6 Local hunter discovered the new ruin inhabitants
- 7 Smugglers who'd used the ruin were driven out
- 8 The ruin gave forth a pyrotechnic show of some kind

## D10 ADVENTURE SEEDS

- 1-2 A Friend accidentally stirred up the ruin somehow, provoking the rise of an Antagonist. In shame and guilt, they seek to find a way to fix the problem, but a Complication is keeping them from admitting their role to the other locals, and they'll prefer to seek help from outsiders like the PCs. They know the location of a Thing inside the ruin, and offer the lore as payment.
- 3-4 An Antagonist has newly arrived, but has only just been noticed and doesn't seem to be doing anything active yet. In truth, they're provoking a Complication in preparation for an attempt to seize the locality for their own ends. They've approached a Friend and tried to make them a catspaw, but the terrified Friend is looking for someone who might be able to help.
- 5-6 Two Antagonists have decided they want the same ruin at the same time, and their fighting has cost a Friend dearly. A Place near the ruin is the heart of their struggle, and the one to take control of it will be able to drive the other out. It's also the site of a Thing, but neither side realizes that, though PCs who put together lore learned from both sides will see the truth.
- 7-8 A Complication is preventing the community from responding to the Antagonist, multiple factions blocking each other. A Friend wants to act, but is too weak to do anything about it. If the Complication is resolved, the community will be able to do something, but otherwise the Antagonist will continue to grow unchecked.
- 9-10 An Antagonist has been driven from the ruin by another Antagonist and is squatting in a Place with a Thing they salvaged in the flight. They're willing to pay the PCs to help them get their lair back, and may or may not be inclined to deal honestly with the PCs. A Friend was driven from the Place and sent to bring word of the exiled Antagonist's offer to the heroes. The sooner the Antagonist is back in the ruin, the sooner the Friend gets to have their Place back.



# INVADING ARMY

There is an army in the area, and it has little inclination to be gentle with the locals. In many cases, the community or area isn't even the true target of the army, and it's just passing through on its way to its real destination, or else forced to take a position here as part of some greater strategy. Whether friend or enemy the near proximity of an army tends to be extremely unpleasant for everyone in the area.

## INSAURABLE HUNGERS

For most of the medieval-grade logistical systems of Arcem, supplies are a constant pressure on any large body of troops. The Patrians have organized supply trains, much as they have organized everything, and the Bright Republic is never so far from their rear that they have to worry much about supplies. For the rest of the nations of Arcem, an army's supply lines are frail and unreliable things and many forces are compelled to forage as they go.

"Forage" is a deceptively mild word for the methodical practice of robbery, rape, murder, and arson that follows in an army's wake, and most behave even less gently in enemy lands. Discipline is extremely weak in most armies and the majority of peasants and townfolk will attempt to hide or flee from soldiers, whether or not they're ostensibly allies. The enemy will murder them and steal their belongings because they are the enemy. Their allies will steal their belongings and then murder them if they resist, because they are the citizen's allies, and it is a peasant's duty to selflessly support these heroic protectors of hearth and home.

A few exceptionally hardy or well-connected merchants can always be found in the army's train, ready to buy loot at extortionate prices and sell liquor, women, and food to the soldiers. These sutlers usually have arrangements with the force's commander to keep the soldiers

from making too much trouble, but they're also hard veterans of military life in their own right, and usually have enough helpers around to keep order among their tents and wagons. Sometimes a sutler has to go to substantial efforts to get the goods he sells, whether that's another wagon of ale barrels or another batch of war widows. These efforts are not always graced with great legality.

Armies without a steady line of supplies are forced to keep moving in order to avoid starvation. The longer they're compelled to stay in one location, such as by a siege or an enemy they need to pin down, the more desperate they'll be about scalping the locals of their food and necessities. The commander may offer a "fair price" at first, but it is not a negotiable one, and the distinction between allies and enemies fades rapidly once the army is forced to steal or starve.

## TIDES OF IRON

Of course, whenever armies are involved, you can expect Godbound to be interested in punching them. The special forces table on this page can give you an idea of what hard core of elite troops the army might have that could make them a more-than-minor opponent for powerful Godbound. At lower levels, a simple Vast Mob or two is enough to make serious problems for a band of novice Godbound, especially when an army's elite heroes enter the fray.

If the Godbound do decide to just take on the invading army head-on, one problem is actually getting it all in one location to be slaughtered. The PCs might smash a Vast Mob of soldiers, but unless they take care to personally murder every one of those thousand-or-more troopers, a large number are going to scatter... and if the troops were hard on the locals while under command, they're going to be even worse as they desperately try to get away from the PCs and get back to their homes. The PCs might end up unleashing a scourge of deserters, survivors, and general-purpose looters on the land if they break an army carelessly.

It's important not to keep the players blind to these consequences when they're making their plans. In a lot of genres, smashing an invading army means that the troops flee homeward in largely decorative panic, and the countryside may rejoice in newfound peace. When the focus of a game is the consequences of wielding tremendous power, however, the PCs are always going to have to be ready to pick up the pieces of the situations they've dramatically broken.

In many cases, the players will have to think of some way to get the army out of the area in a single mostly-cohesive mass. That often means dealing with its leadership, either by getting the leaders what they want so they can go home, or convincing the leaders that they're never going to get what they want and it's time to abandon the cause. Diplomacy can be a major part of these interactions, along with the systematic extermination of significant portions of their reserves.

While the PCs are fighting the interloping soldiers, however, the locals are going to be doing some fighting of their own. Some enraged or desperate natives might turn bushwhacker, ambushing the troops and slitting throats when they catch the soldiers in small groups. Theft, fraud, and spying might be common among the locals. The consequences for this very rarely work out well for the aspiring rebels, however, as few generals have the faintest qualms about hanging half a village for a murdered soldier, or simply killing everything that moves in their area of operation if the locals won't obligingly calm down and obey instructions.

### D8 WHAT SPECIAL FORCES DO THEY HAVE?

- 1 A group of skilled spellcasters under the leadership of a grim and capable Eldritch arch-wizard
- 2 A horrible Misbegotten killing machine that can be set to hunt and slaughter a victim unerringly if only a scrap of clothing or other personal possession is given to it
- 3 A band of sublimely skilled martial artists trained in magical techniques of unarmed combat, fighting under the command of a mighty master
- 4 The aid of an assassin's guild and the expertise of one or more deceptively innocent-seeming but highly lethal master assassins
- 5 A number of terribly altered soldiers infused with dark powers or eldritch blessings that make them tremendous combatants, yet less than human in other ways
- 6 Bitter greater undead shades either enlisted from the undyingly-loyal ghosts of the invaders' ancestors or slave-spirits raised from slain locals
- 7 A sect of religious zealots with supernatural powers and an absolute faith in a prophecy of victory that actually is true, barring divine intervention by Godbound
- 8 A crack team of mercenary heroes who are individually skilled, but tremendously more effective when they can use their teamwork and a well-crafted plan

## d8 ANTAGONISTS

- 1 Amoral mercenary captain hired to take this locality
- 2 Bloodthirsty brute ordered to root out local guerrillas
- 3 Decadent officer whose men savagely abuse locals
- 4 Disreputable chief of a band of deserters
- 5 Heartlessly confiscatory officer from "friendly" side
- 6 Honorable but ruthless officer of the enemy forces
- 7 Officer from rival neighbor with a grudge against here
- 8 Officer who treats the locals as free slave labor

## d8 PLACES

- 1 Burnt-out swath where the army has passed
- 2 Fortified estate or strong point held by soldiers
- 3 Hidden camp of deserters or enemy scouts
- 4 Hospital where sick and wounded are being tended
- 5 Military camp with soldiers and camp followers
- 6 Place of a gory battle, still strewn with destruction
- 7 Tavern hushed with fear of forced conscription
- 8 Torched field scattered with the dead of the farm

## d8 THINGS

- 1 Blackmail sufficient to control an army's leader
- 2 Bundle of vital intelligence stolen from one side
- 3 Lost supply train with vital equipment and provisions
- 4 Payroll chest for the army's soldiers
- 5 Precious thing confiscated by one of the armies
- 6 Secret weapon held by one of the sides
- 7 Treasure left concealed by a fleeing local grandee
- 8 Vital cache of grain for winter the locals concealed

## d8 FRIENDS

- 1 Agent of the rival forces looking for catspaws
- 2 Deserter from the antagonist's forces
- 3 Do-gooder bandit chief who raids hostile forces
- 4 Local peasant driven out of their home by looters
- 5 Merchant whose trade routes have been cut by war
- 6 Officer who wants to minimize conflict with locals
- 7 Priest seeking to protect their flock from soldiers
- 8 Supernatural entity upset with all this warfare near it

## d8 COMPLICATIONS

- 1 Local guerrillas are inciting brutal reprisals
- 2 Many of the local youth have run off to join the army
- 3 The army is bringing a great sickness or plague
- 4 The army plunders, and is under very bad discipline
- 5 The army's eating out all available provisions
- 6 The army's interfering with vital agricultural work
- 7 The army's leader is cowardly and won't advance
- 8 The local community has been wrecked in fighting

## d8 WHY IS THIS PLACE IMPORTANT?

- 1 An old fortification is being put back into use
- 2 It's of personal interest to an important official
- 3 It's the only good approach to a soft target in the rear
- 4 Omens or scrying claim something's to happen here
- 5 The army leader's been sent here to rusticate harmlessly
- 6 The locals threaten rebellion without an army in place
- 7 There's a crucial resource extracted here to be had
- 8 This is a vital smuggling corridor to be quashed

## D10 ADVENTURE SEEDS

- 1-2 A Friend represents the last remnants of local defenders, driven on by the Antagonist. They left behind a Thing in their retreat which they desperately need, and they appeal to the PCs to aid them. In exchange, they'll pass on information about a Place that offers a good way to get at the Antagonist without wading through their entire army.
- 3-4 An Antagonist has been here for some time, and a Complication is making life almost unlivable for the locals. They're secretly smuggling in a Thing to help them survive, but a Friend discovers that their plan is being leaked by a traitor, and if help isn't found soon, the Antagonist will have both the Thing and the ringleaders of the resistance.
- 5-6 A Friend is hiding from the Antagonist, as they were responsible for slipping a Thing to local rebels. The Antagonist is amplifying a Complication in an attempt to pressure the locals into finding and turning over the Friend. They refuse to do so thus far, but it's just a matter of time if no one manages to lift the pressure soon.
- 7-8 The Antagonist is trying to take a Place that is being defended by another Antagonist, and the locals are getting slaughtered in the crossfire. A Thing exists that can tip the tide, and both Antagonists are prepared to send minions to take it from the Friend who currently holds it. The attempt to seize it is exposing vulnerabilities in both Antagonist groups.
- 9-10 Two grinding Complications are making life difficult not only for the locals, but for the Antagonist. The Antagonist can solve at least one of them by releasing a Thing they possess, but they have no intention of doing so, as they're convinced a Friend at a Place can somehow alleviate the situation. They intend to send minions to "persuade" the Friend, who has received advance warning of the attempt and is desperate to find help.



# LAWLESS CHAOS

Local authority has broken down entirely in this area. Whatever government remains no longer has an effective monopoly on violence, and the citizens here are forced back on their own resources to preserve themselves and their property. The place may be seething with bandits, thieves, and extortionists, but these ruffians aren't the root of the problem. The essence of this crisis is that there is no one to drive them away and no prospect of such a savior any time soon.

## MIGHT MAKES RIGHT

In the absence of some formal governmental structure the locals have almost certainly fallen back on familial ties, community bonds, and religious organizations to provide for the common defense. If the community is in some borderland far from the central government, it might be at least moderately equipped to provide for its own defense and order, but whatever crisis it's facing has overwhelmed its limited resources. The locals are in trouble, and there's no one to help them.

Crime is no longer a matter of imposed laws and regulations, it's whatever the local strongman doesn't like. Bandit chiefs, merchants with powerful bands of retainers, clan patriarchs, and religious leaders might all command enough hard-eyed minions to impose their own law on an area, and there's no one around to tell them otherwise. They might be actively undermining any attempt to impose external control on the community, either out of a jealous desire for independence or a simple greed for local control.

Common folk hate these periods of disorder with a desperate passion. Ordinary farmers are vulnerable to burnt crops or plundered farmhouses. They can't get away from their tormentors and their only possessions of worth are easily destroyed by armed men. When faced with the prospect of lawlessness or the burden of tyranny, most peasants will leap for the iron-fisted lord, simply because he will only be a single brutal thief. Monstrously cruel or unnatural masters can accumulate deep popular support from reluctant men and women who know the alternative all too well.

## BRINGING ORDER

Of course, in such desperate hours, a Godbound hero can come to a community's rescue as well. The locals might be frantically eager to throw their offerings at the Godbound's feet if only they stay and protect them from the many evils that prey upon the poor and weak. A Godbound might not need to remain in the area personally if their Dominion can provide suitable protectors, they stop there often enough to keep Influence applied, or if their adventures can find and enthrone a fit lord for these people.

Naturally, those who profit by the disorder will do everything they can to disrupt any efforts at restoring order to the area. The agents that initially ignited the chaos might be planning to establish their own new order, and the Godbound is a threat to this careful plan. Neighbors of the community might find its crippling weakness to be beneficial to their own trade or importance, and do many things to interfere with its revival. Even the old authorities might act to keep the situation aboil if they think the PCs might be permanent regents.

Throughout these efforts, locals will be desperate to regain order and will do whatever they think is necessary. They'll do so even if that involves pacts with unsavory powers or alliances with dark rivals.

Ultimately, a would-be restorer might have to address the situation that set off the whole catastrophe. If the religious schism isn't healed, the usurper isn't deposed, or the regular famines aren't mitigated, the locality might just be one bad week away from a relapse into chaos.

Unless the GM knows that the pantheon is easily motivated by sheer do-gooding impulse, it's important to have some concrete benefit to bringing order to the area. The community might have some especially useful artisans or experts, but they can't operate freely until public safety is restored. The natives might be eagerly enthusiastic about throwing their worship to their saviors, but can only do so after the evil temple's machinations are broken. Of course, for some groups, it might be sufficient to have a large pile of tax payments awaiting the ascension of the new rightful ruler of the domain.





## D8 ANTAGONISTS

- 1 Bandit chief working with local criminals to take over
- 2 Clan patriarch who wants it all for his kinsmen
- 3 Crazy religious leader with a demented creed
- 4 Cynical merchant prince grabbing for control here
- 5 Dark sorcerer who sees a lot of loose spare parts
- 6 Idealistic rebel leader who seeks justice in blood
- 7 Noble lord too important for anyone to lawfully resist
- 8 Ruthless mercenary leader who sees their chance

## D8 PLACES

- 1 Broken-into merchant's store, looted to the floor
- 2 Burnt-down government offices or palace
- 3 Deserted court with its files strewn and burnt
- 4 Empty barracks that should be holding soldiers
- 5 Fortified neighborhood with paranoid defenders
- 6 Hushed street covered by crossbow snipers
- 7 Street smeared with the remnants of a bloody riot
- 8 Torched storehouse once filled with food

## D8 THINGS

- 1 A dark magical icon that is worsening the trouble
- 2 A holy relic that would give a side legitimacy
- 3 A symbol of legitimate rule that would calm many
- 4 A tax shipment that never reached the capital
- 5 An arms cache sufficient to shift the local balance
- 6 Documents proving the guilt of the chaos' instigator
- 7 Much-needed food sacked from a merchant caravan
- 8 Treasure plundered during the confusion

## D8 FRIENDS

- 1 Former watchman now the last of his detachment
- 2 Hard-pressed local magistrate trying to keep order
- 3 Local elder desperate for a new source of stability
- 4 Merchant looking for protection from the chaos
- 5 Orphan made so by the recent violence
- 6 Retired official who's aghast at the situation
- 7 Rioter who now regrets what the situation's come to
- 8 Visiting noble trying to help the locals regain order

## D8 COMPLICATIONS

- 1 A monstrous criminal got loose during the confusion
- 2 A neighboring rival is encouraging the chaos
- 3 An incompetent official is making things worse
- 4 The bloodshed is producing undead and dark spirits
- 5 The chaos is drawing brigands and worse to the place
- 6 The government plans to restore order savagely
- 7 The locals demand a totally impractical outcome
- 8 The only legitimate authority left is brutally corrupt

## D8 WHAT IGNITED THE CHAOS?

- 1 A gruesome celestial omen drove the locals to terror
- 2 A now-vanished demagogue whipped up the locals
- 3 Failed rebellion that still crippled local authority
- 4 Food shortages drove the locals to bloody rioting
- 5 Madness or murder of the local ruling official
- 6 Religious conflict turned bloody and badly confused
- 7 Runaway street war between rival criminal groups
- 8 Sudden earthquake, flood, or other natural calamity

## D10 ADVENTURE SEEDS

- 1-2 A Complication of the chaos is apt to kill a Friend or people they care about, and they're desperate to find help from powerful figures like the PCs. An Antagonist is somehow profiting from the Complication, and will move to block any attempt to alleviate the situation or end the Complication.
- 3-4 Two Antagonists are struggling to gain control of the chaotic situation, and a useful Friend who's holed up in a Place is being courted by both of them, with the promise of a swift and gruesome death from the loser of the bidding. Both Antagonists are offering a Thing to win the Friend's cooperation.
- 5-6 Two Friends have different ideas about how to resolve the chaos, and are at loggerheads as an Antagonist makes the situation worse, inciting a further outbreak of a Complication and moving to ruthlessly seize a Thing that's being kept at a nearby Place. If the Friends can be reconciled, they may be able to give substantial aid in stopping the attempted seizure.
- 7-8 The chaos has unleashed a long-suppressed Complication that's snowballing into a truly catastrophic situation. An Antagonist is trying to exploit the circumstance while remaining ready to bolt from the area once it finally comes to a head. This Antagonist has a Thing that is precious to a Friend, and if it's not recovered before the Antagonist flees, they may never get it back.
- 9-10 A Friend has accidentally set off a Complication while trying to deal with an Antagonist. It's getting worse, and the Friend has struck on the idea of retrieving a Thing that might tamp down the Complication. Unfortunately, it's at a Place which is unreachable due to the dangers involved, and a second Antagonist is dangerously close to it. A careless attempt at retrieval might alert that evildoer as well and set them to chase the salvagers.

# LETHAL PLAGUE

Some unspeakable sickness is scourging the area. It might be a directly lethal sickness that leaves its victims dead in heaps, or it might be an even worse murrain that merely makes its prey *wish* for death. The crux of the challenge might lie with the need to stop the plague from spreading, but it's also possible to use this calamity in a more indirect way, forcing the PCs to overcome some trouble that results from the sickness' consequences.

## APPOINTED HOURS

When building a plague, the first thing to decide is how far it should be advanced by the time the PCs come onto the scene. If the plague has only just now begun and the first few victims are infected, then the challenge is going to implicitly rest in stopping the spread before it becomes a regional calamity. The players will naturally try to find and corral the sufferers before they have a chance to let the sickness spread.

If the PCs enter the area after the sickness has already established itself, the challenge is going to revolve around mitigating its effects. They'll be seeking cures for sufferers, material supplies the victims are too sick to obtain for themselves, protection against those forces that would prey on the weakened population, and the maintenance of public order in the face of the disaster. While these are relatively small problems that most pantheons will be able to handle without much trouble, the GM can add difficulty by making them extremely time-sensitive, with dire consequences for tardiness.

If the sickness has already peaked or run its course, then the PCs will find themselves dealing with the aftermath of it more than its immediate effects. Power vacuums caused by dead officials or runaway lords are rapidly filled by survivors and outside interlopers. Depending

on the region, a place that was recently plague-stricken can actually *attract* bandits and worse once they're confident the sickness is past, as plague has a convenient way of leaving possessions while taking their possessors. The PCs might find themselves trying to save a community from conquest by neighbors or invaders who see a perfect opportunity for expansion.

These three phases assume that the plague is essentially natural in character, and not being magically caused by some evildoer or sinister artifact. If the plague actually is being actively generated by something, the immediate response of the PCs will soon have to give way to a more thorough settlement of the region's problems.

## BORN TO HEAL

Some PCs might well have Words especially suited to dealing with plagues. Those with the Health Word are an obvious match, while Fertility and Endurance might provide some benefits against the march of disease. If you've decided to make a lethal plague a significant challenge for your group then a single Word may not be enough to resolve the situation, but it ought to mean something important during play all the same. A PC with the Health world is going to expect to be curing the sick, and they shouldn't be denied their moment in the sun.

When such a PC tries to help, give them at least one easy victory. Give them a situation where something horrible is obviously about to happen, and then let their intended action clearly and directly solve the problem. Use of Influence or Dominion might be able to cure the plague entirely in the area, depending on how big the affected region is and how much Influence or Dominion the Godbound has to spare.

You can still make a lethal plague a problem for pantheons with such Words at their disposal, but you're going to have to make it a problem involving more than just a normal sickness. Magic diseases that are immune to curing are a cop-out and to be avoided, but something that is persistently spreading the disease and undoing the Godbound's hard work is much more useful as a complication.

## ODDITIES OF HEALTH

A lethal plague calamity doesn't need to be a mass die-off to be a problem. A plague that only affects a select few victims can be equally troublesome if the effects are sufficiently dramatic or insidious. For example, a plague of lycanthropy, of monstrous transformation, or of superhuman power can all cause problems in an area without racking up a particularly large body count.

For these special cases, it's simplest to decide at the start whether the plague's problems are going to be overt or covert. If the problems are overt, then whatever transformation or cost the plague exacts is obvious; grandpa's turned into a mantis demon and he's eating the grandkids. The youngest got away, but she's got chitinous patches on her shoulders. For these plagues, only a few people might be infected, but the sickness still needs to be contained.

For covert problems, the chief issue is that the disease is extremely dangerous but the sufferers either don't know they're infected or have reason to conceal it. Some diseases might even lessen to the extent that the sufferer infects others, causing people to spread the plague to better their own chances of survival. Concealing zombie bites or other such self-serving deception is another common theme, however useless it may be in the long run. Heroes in this situation will need to find these hidden sufferers before the plague can be contained.

### D20 WHAT IS THE VECTOR OF INFECTION?

- 1 Miasmas and the breath of the sick spread it
- 2 Skin contact with a victim, however brief
- 3 Touching the possessions of the sick
- 4 Sexual contact or touching a victim's body fluids
- 5 Transmission through related bloodlines
- 6 A ubiquitous animal or vermin species
- 7 Cursed objects unearthed or traded
- 8 Tainted foodstuffs or drinks spread the plague
- 9 Meeting a sufferer's gaze will spread the sickness
- 10 Particular infectious locations or sites carry it
- 11 Breaking a local taboo or stricture
- 12 Offending a parasite god or local spirit causes it
- 13 Committing a particular type of crime
- 14 Incurring the anger of a ruler or holy man causes it
- 15 Engaging in a certain line of work puts you at risk
- 16 Seeing a particular object or symbol may cause it
- 17 Hearing a particular word or sound
- 18 Eating forbidden foodstuff
- 19 Worshiping a particular dark power
- 20 The infection seems to be totally random



## d8 ANTAGONISTS

- 1 Brutal official who wants to burn the sickness out
- 2 Looter chieftain who doesn't always wait for death
- 3 Necromancer joyously pleased at all the fresh parts
- 4 Plagued Misbegotten that waxes with the suffering
- 5 Priest of a plague cult, celebrating the sickness
- 6 Quack physician with a desperate following
- 7 Religious zealot blaming the sinful for the plague
- 8 Sorcerer who has a cure but uses it to control locals

## d8 PLACES

- 1 Cemetery with piles of unburied plague dead
- 2 Frantic religious service praying for divine mercy
- 3 Frenetic party estate sealed off against the outside
- 4 Funeral with mourners too exhausted to mourn
- 5 Market with shrouded buyers and sellers
- 6 Overtaxed hospice for the doomed but not yet dead
- 7 Stretch of road lined with those who dropped dead
- 8 Vice den laden with the dead's scavenged wealth

## d8 THINGS

- 1 A cache of gold meant to pay for food supplies
- 2 A magical cure for the plague
- 3 An old manuscript that records a cure for the illness
- 4 Deed to a dead grandee's vast estate
- 5 Heirloom taken by a person now dead in the wilds
- 6 The magical item that's causing the plague
- 7 Treasure left behind by the recently dead
- 8 Vital medical supplies to mitigate the suffering

## d8 FRIENDS

- 1 Government agent who is helpless to be of aid
- 2 Hard-pressed physician who can only treat symptoms
- 3 Healer-mage with a wild plan to cure the sickness
- 4 Official struggling to maintain order amid sickness
- 5 Priest wearied by the vast number of dead to bury
- 6 Scholar researching the nature of the plague
- 7 Unprepared noble elevated by sudden parental death
- 8 Wretched local who's the last of their family

## d8 COMPLICATIONS

- 1 An extremely tight quarantine is in place
- 2 Civil society has broken down entirely in the plague
- 3 Dark supernatural powers are drawn by the sickness
- 4 It's being spread by a ruthless enemy of the place
- 5 Plague victims have some magical or money value
- 6 The current treatment plan is completely wrong
- 7 The plague is a biological weapon of the ancients
- 8 The plague is only affecting an unloved group

## d8 WHAT'S HORRIBLE ABOUT THE PLAGUE?

- 1 Death is spectacularly loud and painful for the victim
- 2 It specially targets children for a terrible death
- 3 No one can determine how it's actually spread
- 4 Only some hideous act can prolong a victim's life
- 5 Survivors often relapse much later to spread it anew
- 6 The victim is gruesomely deformed by it before death
- 7 The plague doesn't directly kill, only cripple terribly
- 8 The victim becomes maddened and dangerous

## D10 ADVENTURE SEEDS

- 1-2 A Friend's misery has been enhanced by the acts of an Antagonist, after already suffering some terrible loss due to the plague. They've sought refuge at a Place, but discovered a Thing there that could overcome the Antagonist if used properly. For one reason or another, however, they can't retrieve or use it themselves without certain failure.
- 3-4 A Friend has been driven to such extreme measures by a Complication that it would be easy to mistake them for an Antagonist, but their actions are actually very defensible when the true situation is understood. An actual Antagonist tries to bait the PCs into doing something about the Friend, misrepresenting their actions and shading events in ways that aren't quite outright lies.
- 5-6 An Antagonist has accidentally set off a Complication that threatens to derail their own plans, and is forcing a Friend to try to resolve the situation under pain of death or worse. The Friend can't be seen to be visibly opposing the Antagonist, but they're secretly working with another Friend at a Place in an attempt to find someone able to stop the Antagonist.
- 7-8 Two Friends are struggling desperately for control of a Thing that both of them need, but that can't easily be shared between them. An Antagonist is sitting on another Thing that would solve the problems of at least one Friend, but getting it away from them at their fortified Place would be an act of great heroism.
- 9-10 A current Complication is threatening to metastasize into a second, unendurable Complication, and an Antagonist is pushing it along because the eventual devastation serves their plan. A Friend is aware of the impending disaster, but some element of the Complication means that nobody is listening to them. They're forced to seek the aid of outsiders, despite some quality or past trait that would seem to make them extremely untrustworthy. This lack of trust may well be justified in the end.

# MAD DEMAGOGUE

A local leader has whipped the area into a frenzy with their words. They might be promising a glorious new social order, or focusing profitable hatred on some disliked group, or claiming legitimacy by virtue of divine favor. Whatever the mechanism of their authority, a dangerous number of locals are following their orders, and their orders are not good ones.

## GOLDEN WORDS

Demagogues appear most often when something is badly amiss in the region. Some recent disaster, ongoing trouble, or restive portion of the populace is looking for change, and the demagogue is in a position to offer that to them. The rhetoric of the demagogue speaks to something at least some of the people want badly to be true.

When you create a demagogue, it's important to identify the grievance that is giving them their power. This issue will absorb the majority of their promises and drive the bulk of their followers. The demagogue will act to respond to this issue, even if their choices are demented or utterly impractical. And of course, any failure of their plans is just so much further evidence of the perfidy of their enemies or the treachery of their less-favored followers.

The demagogue may not be the only local speaking to this issue, or even the most long-standing of them. Former banner-bearers might have been shouldered aside by this new voice, and might resent the upstart or find it infuriating how they promise the impossible to win the crowd. Others are more pragmatic and will throw in as loyal lieutenants in hope that the demagogue will be able to deliver, or out of a desire for more practical benefits. Some might be allies simply out of fear of the consequences for refusal.

## TOOLS OF INFLUENCE

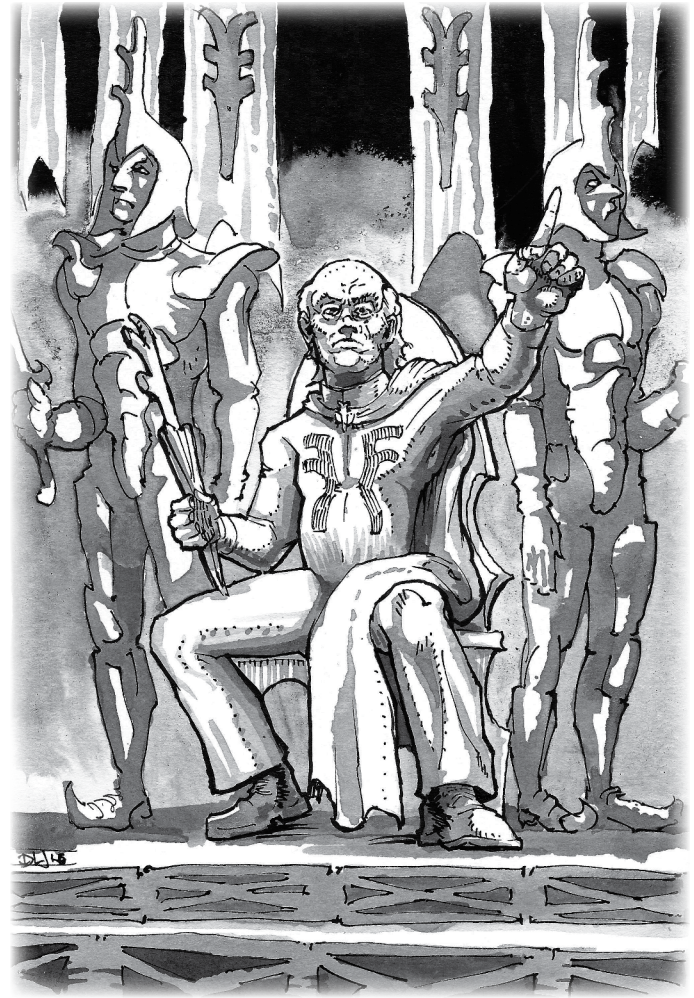
If the demagogue is to be a meaningful challenge, they're going to need some method to challenge the heroes. If the PCs can simply march up to the rabble-rouser and apply some gift of Command or sweep his minions away with miracles of Passion then the speaker is unlikely to provide much entertainment for the game session.

If the pantheon hasn't got access to any convenient mind-bending Words this might not be much of a problem. The heroes will have to use old-fashioned mundane methods to discredit the demagogue or break their influence.

If the GM needs to provide a challenge to more socially-capable pantheons, it will be necessary to tuck the demagogue away where the PCs can't conveniently confront them. Ringing them with loyal minions or placing them in some remote, defensible location from whence their lieutenants come and go is a useful first step. Ensuring that the demagogue has some way of resisting mental effects is another, even if it's something as simple as being able to spend Effort to succeed on saving throws and having too many hit dice to be treated as an easily-manipulated lesser foe.

Still, even this tactic requires that the demagogue have enough personal power or sufficient guardians to prevent a simple head-on assault by the pantheon. There are some situations where this is implausible, and the GM may wonder why the demagogue hasn't simply seized power by force with so much muscle at their disposal.

The way around this complication is to make the demagogue a mere symptom of the deeper problem. Even if the demagogue is killed, the events that created them will still exist and will produce another



demagogue in due season. The PCs will have to resolve the basic problem while dealing with attacks or pressure from the demagogue, who doubtless has their own ideas about how things should be fixed.

Another means of adding complication is to make the demagogue's followers fundamentally sympathetic, such that the PCs can't simply carve a bloody hole through the demagogue's defenses. The locals might be so desperate that even this zealot might seem like a better bargain than the one they have right now. Some of them might be forcibly impressed into service, obeying out of fear of what might happen to their families if they don't give good service. While PCs can choose to knock enemies unconscious or merely subdue them if their attacks can plausibly be interpreted as such, that might not help the children of a warrior who fails his tyrannical master.

Even in the case that the demagogue himself is surgically slain without giving them the chance to harm their followers, there's no guarantee that a lieutenant won't promptly rise to take their place. GMs who want to make the situation particularly complicated might oblige the heroes to both solve the essential problem that's giving the demagogue their power and then kill the demagogue before they can create a fresh crisis.

If these steps aren't taken together and with sufficient haste, the problem might just perpetuate itself. Fix the problem and delay killing the demagogue, and they'll just stir a fresh calamity. Kill the demagogue and neglect to fix the problem fast enough, and it will vomit forth a fresh zealot or a lieutenant will take the dead leader's place. If you take this angle, however, make sure the PCs realize the pressure.

## D8 ANTAGONISTS

- 1 Ethnic demagogue who's demanding genocide
- 2 Impostor "noble" claiming legitimate rule of the area
- 3 Invincible military leader who's so far won all battles
- 4 Leveler radical seeking to plunder all with two coins
- 5 Philosopher-zealot with a bloody new pattern for life
- 6 Rebel promising a glorious new order for the poor
- 7 Religious zealot decrying the evils of a hated group
- 8 Supposed emissary of the gods who brings a new law

## D8 PLACES

- 1 Burnt-over homestead of an unsupportive peasant
- 2 Deserted civil offices, the government now fled
- 3 Heavily-fortified estate of a worried local noble
- 4 Hushed village tavern with folk who don't dare talk
- 5 Mass meeting of demagogue supporters
- 6 Plundered home of a member of a hated group
- 7 Restive camp of the demagogue's followers
- 8 Workshop full of the demagogue's eager minions

## D8 THINGS

- 1 A vast bribe intended to avert the demagogue's wrath
- 2 Arms the demagogue needs to equip his minions
- 3 Evidence that the demagogue is an impostor or fake
- 4 Heirloom from a local noble killed early in the rising
- 5 Proof of the demagogue's real intention for the locals
- 6 The magical artifact the demagogue relies upon
- 7 Treasure buried by those who fled the demagogue
- 8 Vital supplies from a caravan the minions sacked

## D8 FRIENDS

- 1 A commoner from a group the demagogue hates
- 2 Internal rival of the demagogue seeking catspaws
- 3 Merchant whose holdings have been taken or burnt
- 4 Noble who's rapidly losing control of the situation
- 5 Official from afar with no power to cope with this
- 6 Old friend of the demagogue who knows the truth
- 7 Refugee fleeing ahead of the demagogue's forces
- 8 Religious leader forced out by the demagogue's men

## D8 COMPLICATIONS

- 1 The demagogue is the only one holding back an evil
- 2 They have a good point but are taking it much too far
- 3 The only alternative to them is something vile too
- 4 They're a secret agent of a rival power in the area
- 5 Their followers are just catspaws for their true purpose
- 6 They use a local prophecy to legitimate their acts
- 7 They're being controlled by a secret kingmaker
- 8 The government has a reason to let it burn a while

## D8 WHY DO THE LOCALS LISTEN TO THEM?

- 1 A long-running religious dispute has the locals bitter
- 2 A small local group has all the money and power
- 3 The demagogue is supported by important locals
- 4 The demagogue seems to have miraculous powers
- 5 The government has ignored a recent crisis there
- 6 The local ruler is viciously abusive toward the people
- 7 They're intimidated by the demagogue's violence
- 8 They've been taxed cruelly for a long time

## D10 ADVENTURE SEEDS

- 1-2 A Friend knew the Antagonist from days of old, and has information or blackmail material that would destroy the Antagonist in the eyes of their followers. The Friend is currently in hiding, while the proof is hidden at a distant Place held by the Antagonist, who doesn't know of it. If the Friend shows their face in public, they're sure to be slain by minions of the Antagonist.
- 3-4 An Antagonist is secretly causing the very Complication they claim to be able to resolve, and hiding away the Thing that would put paid to the trouble at a well-guarded Place. A Friend is aware that the Antagonist seems to be acting strangely in some ways, and can put the PCs on the trail of the evidence, though hard proof of the Antagonist's involvement would be hard to get.
- 5-6 A Thing is being demanded by the Antagonist despite the resistance of its current owners. The Antagonist is motivated by one Complication, but is threatening the impending arrival of a second Complication if their demands are not satisfied swiftly. A Friend of the Thing's owners is able to escape the Antagonist's attention and seek aid from outsiders.
- 7-8 A prior Antagonist was overthrown on claims that he was false; his minions have fallen into the camps of two other hostile Antagonists, one who claims the prior one was genuine, the other who swears he was false. Their struggles are destroying the community, while the true facts can be found along with a Thing hidden by the dead Antagonist at a dangerous Place.
- 9-10 The Antagonist appears to be putting together a successful utopia with their followers, exploiting the first flush of convert's enthusiasm to make their impossible ideas seem practical. The cracks are starting to show, however, and a Friend has slipped away from the community as a Complication starts to build. The whole edifice is about to explode in blood and chaos, and they're desperate to get another Friend out before it's too late, but the other Friend is a true believer.



# NATURAL DISASTER

Earthquakes, locust swarms, floods, fires, meteor strikes, or some other massive calamity has struck the region recently. Whatever horrible thing has happened is already largely over, so the PCs are unlikely to be in a position to prevent it, but the aftermath is still fresh. Further horrors are going to happen if the PCs don't take steps to contain the situation and aid the survivors.

## ALL AGAINST ALL

The disaster has blown apart local controls, whether those controls are social, military, or financial. No one is in a position to contain the ensuing mayhem, and different groups in the area are all forced back on their own resources and actions to get what they need to survive the aftermath of the disaster. Unsurprisingly, this will get bloody.

Of course, it's possible that the community is used to this sort of disaster, and that periodic floods or crop blights are just part of life here. The community has developed procedures and customs for handling these catastrophes and while the suffering will be immense, it will be immense in expected and controlled ways. These kind of communities make for boring disasters, however, so it's more interesting to assume that the locals are simply not equipped to deal with this event.

When you plant a disaster in an area, take a moment to identify at least three important groups in the region. These may consist of the elite, the peasants, and the traders, for example, or three major clans in the area, or a major temple, the locals, and the royal garrison stationed here. It's not necessary that these three groups be perfectly matched in their influence, but each of them should have a reason to be wary of the others and shouldn't be able to dispatch them easily.

Once you know these three groups, take a moment to choose a conflict point that each group has with the others. If the three groups

are the elite, the commoners, and the traders, for example, you might decide that the elite desperately need taxes from the commoners because they're deeply in debt to the traders. Meanwhile, the traders face bankruptcy if they don't get their loans repaid by the elite, and are refusing to bring in supplies for the commoners until they can be sure they can afford the investment. The commoners can't hope to both eat and pay their taxes, and can't repair their homes or get in a new crop without the traders bringing in supplies.

By creating these friction points you give the PCs some obvious problems to solve. On top of that, you can layer an adventure created with the tools on the opposite page, allowing the players to navigate that immediate crisis while hopefully addressing the fundamental problems that are making things so bleak for the locals. Of course, the PCs might just be inclined to solve the immediate issue and move on, leaving the locals to find some sort of resolution to their strife.

It can be tempting to make one of the conflicting groups clearly sympathetic to the players while the others inspire less charitable feelings. While it's perfectly possible to make the situation clean and neat for your players, more interesting results can often be obtained when none of the groups are clearly in the moral right.

It's a key thematic element of a natural disaster that it affects *everyone*, the righteous and the wicked alike. Good and decent people can end up doing terrible things in order to survive their sudden privations, and the most sympathetic, appealing figures can behave in brutal fashion in order to ensure the survival of their families.

Part of the heroism that PCs can offer is the reprieve from these kind of decisions. The greatest kindness the heroes might give to a community is not so much in the food or order or hope they bring, but in the exemption from the kind of terrible choices that would have to have been made otherwise.

## FIXING THE CALAMITY

While the worst of the disaster is over, there may still be aftershocks or physical remnants of the misery. Fields might still be flooded, tremors might still shake a ruined city now and then, or stretches of forest might still be burning out slowly around the community. Some PCs, such as those with Words of Sea, Fire, or Earth, may be in a position to do something about this aftermath.

*Let them.* If the PCs have a Word related to the problem, let them use miracles or gifts to mitigate the situation, save lives, and earn friends. The players should never feel that a fitting Word was irrelevant to the situation or that their actions were pointless. When they use them to fix something, give them some obvious and immediate good thing that comes from it.

Of course, fixing the aftermath doesn't solve the fundamental problem. Even if the PCs happen to have just the right Words to repair the town, banish the floodwaters, refill the granaries, and drive off the giant river-serpents, they still have to deal with the social aftermath of the chaos and resolve the grudges, bitterness, or evils that were done before they got there.

The key thing for a GM to remember in this situation is the need to take such Words and options into account when designing the challenge. If you know your group has the Words to quickly resolve a situation, don't make that situation the crux of the challenge. It's important not to let Words be irrelevant, or else players will get dispirited. Rest the evening's entertainment on some deeper problem.

### DB A CRISIS THE PCs MIGHT ENCOUNTER

- 1 Lodgings have been destroyed by the disaster, and a group of locals is exposed to cruel weather.
- 2 There's a store, granary, or other cache of vital supplies and two or more groups of locals are about to engage in reluctant but bloody combat over who is to loot it.
- 3 A figure from outside the disaster zone is taking advantage of the locals, reducing them to slaves and playthings in exchange for vital supplies or protection.
- 4 A monstrous predator has been stirred by the disaster and is devouring large numbers of locals, who are without protection or the security of walls.
- 5 Religious zealots are marching through the disaster zone, blaming some group or local practice for the disaster and winning desperate adherents along the way.
- 6 A benevolent group from outside has been forcibly cowed by a local warlord and is allowing the warlord to control the aid they offer and who is to get it.
- 7 Some crucial infrastructure has been destroyed by the disaster, and long-term calamity faces the region if it's not repaired or kept from being looted by the desperate.
- 8 A dark cult is taking advantage of the chaos to win adherents in exchange for the sinister aid granted by their malevolent patron.

**D8 ANTAGONISTS**

- 1 Bandit chief controlling the only road into the area
- 2 Clan leader who exploits others for their own kin's aid
- 3 Dark magical entity raised by the natural disaster
- 4 Demagogue who blames an unpopular group for it
- 5 Foreign agent who wants to promote the suffering
- 6 Incompetent ruler who thinks only of their own safety
- 7 Mercenary captain selling "protection" from the chaos
- 8 Sorcerer who caused this to advance their own magic

**D8 PLACES**

- 1 Building full of the dead who thought it was safe
- 2 Country estate wrecked by the disaster or its aftermath
- 3 Cramped refuge-place where the disaster can't reach
- 4 Desolate village or neighborhood emptied by flight
- 5 Neighborhood ruined by the disaster's consequences
- 6 Once-splendid building left in ruins by the calamity
- 7 Refugee camp with miserable escapees from it
- 8 Road crowded with desperate escapees from it

**D8 THINGS**

- 1 A cursed magical item that's calling forth the disaster
- 2 A great pile of plunder collected by looters in the chaos
- 3 A key item for preserving vital damaged infrastructure
- 4 Food or other vital supplies needed by survivors
- 5 Rich merchant's savings he was trying to get out
- 6 The relic that will prevent the disaster from worsening
- 7 Treasure revealed by the disaster's scathing
- 8 Wealth buried in a disaster-ruined structure

**D8 FRIENDS**

- 1 Engineer trying to keep things from worsening
- 2 Escapee who dodged the Antagonist's dark plans
- 3 Local official struggling to cope with the disaster
- 4 Local somehow blamed for the disaster's intensity
- 5 Merchant trying to organize relief from the disaster
- 6 Religious leader whose flock is scourged by it
- 7 Someone whose family or land was ruined by it
- 8 Spirit of an unquiet, unburied victim of the calamity

**D8 COMPLICATIONS**

- 1 An official is profiting cruelly on the suffering here
- 2 Higher government is unable to give any assistance
- 3 Looters and the vengeful are taking advantage of it
- 4 Outside forces want the locals quarantined away
- 5 The disaster has revealed some lode of great treasure
- 6 The disaster will strike again soon, much worse
- 7 The disaster wrecked something they need to survive
- 8 The locals were totally unprepared for the disaster

**D8 WHAT WAS THE DISASTER?**

- 1 A flood that drowned out the community
- 2 A killing cold is making livestock and people die
- 3 A lengthy drought has threatened famine to all
- 4 A plague of locusts or other vermin scourges them
- 5 A sinkhole or avalanche buried a good part of town
- 6 A terrible storm flattened the crops and cottages
- 7 A tremendous fire that burnt homes or rich fields
- 8 An earthquake toppled important infrastructure

**D10 ADVENTURE SEEDS**

- 1-2 A Friend is responsible for the lives of a group of sympathetic NPCs, even as a Complication seems certain to doom them. An Antagonist controls a Place that would serve as a refuge for the Friend and their compatriots, but they're unsurprisingly unwilling to share it without a terrible price, and the Friend fears they're just planning to collect it and then kill the new residents.
- 3-4 An Antagonist is working to seize a Thing left behind by its now-dead collectors from the Place where it was left, but a Friend and their allies are preventing them from getting through. Unfortunately, the strain of holding back the Antagonist makes them unable to get the Thing themselves, and the Antagonist may soon overwhelm them.
- 5-6 A Complication is all that's holding back an Antagonist from inflicting a terrible outcome on a Friend and their allies, but that Friend is responsible for somehow dealing with the Complication. They don't dare do so as long as the Antagonist still threatens, but if they don't fix the Complication soon, they and their compatriots may die from it.
- 7-8 A Friend has lost a Thing that's vital to survival as an Antagonist has moved into the Place where it was hidden. If it's not retrieved very quietly, the Antagonist will realize its worth and pursue it. Meanwhile, a Complication has moved in that's making any approach to the Place a difficult matter.
- 9-10 A Friend has escaped an Antagonist's cruel attentions with knowledge of a Thing the Antagonist recently recovered, one that leaves the evildoer confident that they can survive the consequences of a dire recent Complication. Unless the Thing is taken from the Antagonist, it will be very difficult to beat them, as all the locals will have to cooperate with the malefactor or else face the disaster's aftermath without the benefit of the Thing.

# OPPRESSIVE LORD

The tyrannical lord is a venerable feature of adventures. Indeed, it can often seem that reasonable, competent, adequately-interested local autocrats are suspiciously thin on the ground in most settings. If you plan to dish up an oppressive ruler at your table, you'll want to make sure this particular aristocrat has something about them to pique your pantheon's interest.

## UNEXPECTED EVILS

One of the simplest ways to spice up an oppressive lord is to make them something unusual. In place of the black-bearded tyrant scowling on his throne, you might place a cruelly beautiful young widow, or a hopelessly incompetent man-child orphaned without good counsel, or an idealistic do-gooder with a reckless disregard for the consequences of their ideals. Almost any figure can be made into a suitably oppressive tyrant if given the right motivations and the wrong choices.

Some of the best tyrants are those who have sympathetic qualities or those who are serving some critical function in the community. The widow may be a bloodstained murderess, but her military acumen is all that's keeping the city from being enslaved and possibly eaten by the Howler raiders across the border. The man-child may be making catastrophically bad choices in his advisors and minions, but those advisors and minions were the only people who showed him the slightest loyalty when he was still an unwanted third son. If you complicate the situation for the players, they might find it more difficult to simply storm the blackguard's castle with the blazing fury of their pantheon-mates.



## SLOWING THEIR ROLL

Of course, players being players, some groups won't be slowed in the slightest by questions of consequence should the villain be violently deposed nor delayed by moral hesitations about slaying a figure with sympathetic traits. These heroes will go straight for their swords when presented with the first savage atrocity they can pin on the local ruler.

As the GM, you're in a better position than any author to know if your group of players is likely to respond in this very traditional way. If they are, then you'll need to rest the crux of the challenge on getting to the lord and killing him rather than on resolving the circumstances around his rule. More pacifistic groups can be entertained by disentangling the vital role the lord is playing in the situation, but even they might need some practical challenges to discourage them from simply storming a castle.

To start, decide whether the lord himself is going to be a serious combat opponent. Most tyrants are simply no match for a Godbound, still less for a whole pantheon. A veteran brute might have three or four hit dice and be a match for any ordinary man, but he's going to be reduced to a pink mist by any Godbound. If you want to make him personally impressive in combat, you'll need to decide how to do so.

Making him a major hero from the bestiary or a heroic mortal from the *Godbound* deluxe rules is one way to do it. Such a hero can't stand up to a pantheon, but he can survive long enough for his allies to come into play. Alternatively, the tyrant himself may be a parasite god, powerful Eldritch, warped Misbegotten, or other supernatural entity fully capable of going toe-to-toe with the players... and coincidentally explaining why the locals have no chance of deposing him by force.

Next, decide what kind of defenses stand between him and the heroes. Mobs of guards are always a good choice, along with a carefully-chosen magical vizier or two to provide fire support. The lord might be lairing in a place with functioning empyrean wards, increasing the difficulty of using Godbound gifts and miracles. As a last resort, the tyrant might be able to summon up a terrible monster or dark power to save himself, though the consequences of such pleading are usually awful enough that the lord will do it only in a desperate moment.

Once you've set up the defenses, work them into the existing social situation. If the lord has a Vast Mob of trained soldiers at his command, then he's clearly a military warlord of major importance in the region. Destroying that Mob might not just clear the way to the throne room, it might also embolden neighbors into striking before the scattered soldiers can regain their morale and lick their wounds. If the lord has powerful sorcerers at his disposal, decide what he's doing to keep them loyal, and where they might have come from. Their patron organization or wizardly allies might be displeased should some random heroes come along to terminate their contracts abruptly.

Lastly, if you know the heroes will go directly to violence, you might make the lord a relatively trivial obstacle to kill. It might be a simple matter to push through his scattering of troops and slaughter him on his throne. The *real* challenge might occur after the lord is dead, as the forces he was keeping under control now rampage through the community, with different would-be replacements struggling with each other to seize the now-vacated throne.

Such sword-happy heroes might find themselves forced to engage in careful diplomacy, measured violence, and judicious bribery to stitch the broken land back together. Or, being heroes, they might simply ride on and leave the wreckage behind them to find its own solution.



## D8 ANTAGONISTS

- 1 Conqueror who rules their new lands like a pillager
- 2 Conquest-mad lord who is constantly fighting wars
- 3 Depraved lord who seizes the young and fair
- 4 Grossly profligate lord who taxes people unmercifully
- 5 Incompetent lord who keeps making awful choices
- 6 Puppet lord who serves a sinister power's purposes
- 7 Sadistic lord who simply delights in causing pain
- 8 Usurper of the true lord who rules with an iron fist

## D8 PLACES

- 1 Back room of a tavern where conspiracies are plotted
- 2 Barracks of brutish and abusive mercenary soldiers
- 3 Forest camp of bitter bandit-rebels
- 4 Hiding-place for women and children in the wilds
- 5 Market plagued with bullying minions of the lord
- 6 Ornate hall of a toadying minion of the lord
- 7 Scourged hamlet of oppressed peasants
- 8 Slave market where the lord's victims are sold

## D8 THINGS

- 1 A holy artifact plundered from the local temple
- 2 A precious gift sent in an attempt to curry favor
- 3 Ancient text that has a secret the lord craves to know
- 4 Item of regalia that gives legitimacy to the ruler
- 5 Magical artifact that does a thing the lord direly needs
- 6 Proof for the king of the lord's unfitness to rule
- 7 Taxes collected from the cruelly-downtrodden people
- 8 The wealth the lord uses to pay his henchmen

## D8 FRIENDS

- 1 Cynical kingmaker who has no further use for them
- 2 Government official worried about the events here
- 3 Noble relative who'd be the next in line to rule here
- 4 Rebel leader trying to depose the oppressor
- 5 Religious leader who wants to protect their flock
- 6 Rival lord who hates them for an old offense
- 7 Spouse of the lord who hates them bitterly
- 8 Vengeful spirit of someone they unjustly slew

## D8 COMPLICATIONS

- 1 One powerful local group profits much from the lord
- 2 Rival successors threaten civil war at the lord's ouster
- 3 The lord has to keep this up or they'll lose vital support
- 4 The lord is holding back an even worse outside threat
- 5 The lord is mistaken, but theoretically redeemable
- 6 The lord is much loved by their feudal master
- 7 The lord is really doing this for secret magical reasons
- 8 The strongest opposition to the lord is a very bad man

## D8 WHY HAVEN'T THEY BEEN DEPOSED?

- 1 A strong local group is firmly behind the lord's policies
- 2 Everyone is terrified of the lord's potential revenge
- 3 Spies and informers are everywhere in the area
- 4 The greater government is firmly behind the lord
- 5 The last attempt ended in a horrible massacre
- 6 The lord has some potent magical resource to aid them
- 7 The lord is paying off vital persons in the community
- 8 The only good rebel leader is imprisoned by the lord

## D10 ADVENTURE SEEDS

- 1-2 The Antagonist has ruled by virtue of a Thing they and their predecessors have owned for generations, and the locals are convinced that nothing can overcome them until it is taken from them. A Friend knows the secret Place that is the start of a dangerous hidden path to obtain the Thing. Are they sincere, or are they bait to lure the PCs into a trap?
- 3-4 The Antagonist used to be a decent lord until a second, hidden Antagonist corrupted them with some dark power or wicked curse. A Thing is the key to breaking the curse, and a Friend has vague hints of the true situation, but any direct assassination of the ostensibly oppressive lord would merely ensure the true puppet-master came to power.
- 5-6 The Antagonist has grown wicked over years of struggling with a Complication, their virtue exhausted by the strain of the situation. If the Complication is somehow resolved, they may become a much better lord, but a Friend among the populace will want them dead for their crimes no matter what they intend to be.
- 7-8 A Friend has ended up causing a Complication with their attempts to unseat the oppressive Antagonist, and now they're in hiding at a Place. A second Friend is trying to drum up help for them, but the locals are now disgusted with their efforts and will do nothing to aid them.
- 9-10 The Antagonist is actually even worse than they seem, their outward vices a mask for some deeper, more terrible purpose. More than one Complication has started to form because of their secret purposes, and they're perfectly willing to destroy their own land in order to obtain their real end. A Friend has escaped their machinations with a clue as to the Antagonist's real purposes, but a Thing is needed to unravel the real situation.

# RUNAWAY POWER

Something has gone catastrophically awry for the area as some minor power or personage has suddenly gotten their hands on ridiculous amounts of power. This power might be magical in nature, or financial, or military, but whatever the details its wielder is profoundly unsuited for having it. They're fulfilling all their most selfish and single-minded desires and the locals are suffering terribly under this new lash.

## SMALL INTO GREAT

The key to the situation is that this runaway power has been an enormous shock to the existing system of authority. The local rulers either can't overcome the power or are unable to do more than protect their own immediate persons. The greater area is prey to the power's depredations or revenge, and no one is available who can stop the rampaging newcomer.

This rampage doesn't have to be literal in its violence. A bitter wandering peddler who finds a cave full of Former Empire treasure might be canny enough to hire muscle to protect it and use the rest to seize control of the local economy and bribe away the troops that the ruler formerly relied upon. Once in firm control, the peddler might be sadistically tormenting those who used to make his life difficult, faithfully supported by mercenaries who care only for the gleam of his gold. Whatever greater governmental powers exist might be bought off by the peddler or simply be unconcerned over a situation that clearly doesn't involve banditry or open rebellion.

One trait of these sudden ascensions is an initial focus on very small, almost petty ends. A common peasant who awakens as a parasite god might have enormous power, but his initial thoughts will be the dreams and ambitions of a simple farmer. His house will be the biggest, his fields will be the richest, his animals will be largest and most

marvelous of all his neighbors. Only after achieving the undoubted pinnacle of their present life will they start to dream larger and more terrible dreams.

Which is not to say, of course, that the immediate foci of their wrath will escape terrible fates. That bitter farmer's ascension as a parasite god might see his neighbors first in line to be "recruited" into his cult, with horrible services demanded in punishment for their years of insolent disdain. Unaccustomed to the kind of self-control that great power demands, these newly-ascended titans can be hideously childish in the punishments they inflict.

They are also often easily-manipulated, having had little experience of being cozened by those who seek their favor. Instincts of servility and obedience can also remain even after the gain power far beyond their old masters; the new parasite god first thrills to imagine himself the village squire's equal long before he comes to realize that he is so much more than a mortal lord ever could be.

## STOPPING THE RAMPAGE

These powers are relatively simple to set up. The GM just needs to follow the guidelines in the *Godbound* book's bestiary to create a major opponent for the pantheon. If the power that's been unlocked is mundane in nature and it doesn't make sense to make the recipient personally fearsome in combat, just stat out the bodyguards or servant powers that their newfound wealth or influence has earned them.

It's possible to leave the situation at that. The PCs will come into the situation, see the runaway power, and engage them directly to subdue, kill, or drive off the evildoer. Such an encounter may not require great subtlety, but it's a good way to give some excitement to combat-oriented pantheons or to fill a short bit of table time.

To stretch out the play, make the runaway power largely unbeatable unless their power source is sealed away or destroyed. Parasite gods might be unstoppable until some local place of power is sealed shut again or the hidden celestial engine in the region is repaired. Sorcerers who make pacts with Uncreated Night might have overwhelming strength until they're prevented from conducting the ritual that refreshes their powers each new moon. Even after their power source is sealed or destroyed, the entity might have enough juice left to make a good end-of-session fight for the PCs. An entire session's play can be built around discovering the nature of their power, finding the crucial location, object, or event, and then nullifying it.

If your pantheon is given to moral considerations and inclined to diplomacy, you can give the runaway power a sympathetic background or understandable motivation. The PCs might be offered a choice between directly slaying the wretched victim of this newfound power, or else going to the time and trouble of finding its source and cutting it off without killing the subject.

Even after the runaway power is dead or subdued, however, the situation may not be over. Some power is fungible enough that it might fall into other hands. Some power might even be of the sort that the PCs can seize for themselves, perhaps with the self-assurance that they'll use it more wisely than its prior possessor. A GM can make a tempting choice for the players by offering them extra Dominion, free gift points, or other such benefits if they choose to take up the fallen entity's gift. If you choose to present them with this choice, make it an actual *choice*. Let there be consequences to it, but not ones so dire that no sensible person would seize the opportunity.

### D8 WHAT FUELS THEIR ANTI-SOCIAL ACTS?

- 1 They've just always been a loser, held in contempt by their peers, and now they get a chance for revenge.
- 2 They were the victim of a gross injustice in the past, and over the years they've come to blame a wide penumbra of people for it and not just the direct culprit.
- 3 They've always nursed the conviction that they were meant for more than their petty life, but the people around them constantly held them back. No more.
- 4 The power has driven them megalomaniacally insane, and they are completely irrational in their conviction that they must be glorified and obeyed by all.
- 5 They're naturally sadistic or rapacious, with no interest in the well-being of others. They do their crimes because it's fun and satisfying for them.
- 6 A sense of religious obligation drives them, with the feeling that their god or gods have chosen them for great deeds and that to deny it is blasphemy.
- 7 Cruel sophistry animates their choices, with shoddy logic and special pleading used to rationally justify every vicious act and self-indulgent pleasure they take.
- 8 They're actually a skin puppet for an arcane power, a mere mask that some greater, darker intellect uses for its own occult and terrible purpose.

## d8 ANTAGONISTS

- 1 A commoner who recently became a parasite god
- 2 A local has gained control of a mighty Misbegotten
- 3 Alchemist who devised an addictive elixir of might
- 4 Local with a grudge who's recently become Godbound
- 5 Malcontent suddenly awakening to a supernatural gift
- 6 Petty official who's laid hands on a powerful artifact
- 7 Sorcerer who made an Uncreated pact for dark power
- 8 Troublemaker who found a huge cache of wealth

## d8 PLACES

- 1 Empty streets of a place frightened of this new power
- 2 Forced festival celebrating the new power's ascent
- 3 New lair or stronghold raised by the new power
- 4 New temple forcibly erected to the power's glorification
- 5 Scarred or defaced land in the wake of the new power
- 6 Smashed office or palace of a ruler who was driven out
- 7 The humble home the power's wielder once dwelled in
- 8 Tribute collection point for the new power's taxes

## d8 THINGS

- 1 A magic treasure that failed to stop the power's wielder
- 2 A precious substance created as a power side-effect
- 3 A rare addictive substance needed by the wielder
- 4 An object that negates or protects against the power
- 5 Blackmail to force the wielder's lieutenant to leave them
- 6 Money gathered to pay someone to stop the wielder
- 7 The object or secret that will undo the power
- 8 Tribute collected for the power's wielder

## d8 FRIENDS

- 1 Commoner who was an early victim of the power
- 2 Community elder who's been shoved aside
- 3 Local wizard distressed at the sudden eruption
- 4 Merchant who fell victim to the power's depredations
- 5 Outside agent who's concerned about the power's rise
- 6 Overmatched guard captain or local defender
- 7 Ruler who finds the situation spun out of control
- 8 Worried relative of the runaway power's wielder

## d8 COMPLICATIONS

- 1 Rivals lie in wait to snatch up the power if its user falls
- 2 The power can't be overcome by brute force
- 3 The power is intelligent, and controls its wielder
- 4 The power is needed to perform some vital task yearly
- 5 The power is somehow infectious or spreading
- 6 The power is sustaining some vital local necessity
- 7 The power used to be used well, but is now usurped
- 8 The power's wielder is sympathetic in some way

## d8 WHAT CAN SEAL THE POWER?

- 1 A magic device hidden in a ruin must be deactivated
- 2 A magical artifact must be destroyed to stop the power
- 3 A particular supernatural entity must be killed
- 4 A timid or frail mage must confront the wielder
- 5 A token of power must be returned to a magical entity
- 6 Several magi who hate each other must cooperate
- 7 The wielder must be lured to a specific magical place
- 8 The wielder must be tricked into consuming something

## D10 ADVENTURE SEEDS

- 1-2 An Antagonist has cracked open an ancient power that leads to a dire Complication. A Friend is scorched by the Complication and seeks aid in stopping the Antagonist before they make the situation even worse; meanwhile, the Antagonist is trying to lay hands on a Thing which will make them much harder to overcome.
- 3-4 A Friend accidentally set off a series of events which lead to an Antagonist becoming a major power. They repent of their actions, but the Antagonist is benignly disposed toward them for having ushered in their new power, and has carelessly trusted them with knowledge of a Thing important to the Antagonist, kept at a well-guarded Place.
- 5-6 A Friend with ties to a newly-empowered Antagonist wants to stop their rampaging ways, but doesn't want them killed or maimed. They'll give details of an important Thing to people who seem able and willing to leave the Antagonist alive, but a growing Complication makes it very hard to subdue the runaway power without killing them.
- 7-8 A seeming Antagonist is really nothing more than a boosted catspaw of the true Antagonist and their real source of power, a minion used to draw out opposition to be ruthlessly crushed by the real Antagonist operating behind the scenes. A Friend has been serving the puppet Antagonist, but is beginning to suspect something is awry, and that the truth will be found at a Place.
- 9-10 Two Antagonists have partially taken on a new source of power, but neither has complete control of it, and their fighting is causing much devastation. A Thing will resolve the struggle in favor of the one who seizes it, but only a Friend who's currently in hiding knows how to get to it. One of the Antagonists plans to let the heroes retrieve it and then take it from them once they're weakened by the struggle.



# Savage Custom

Every band of heroes is apt to face a custom they despise sooner or later. Slavery is an easy target in many nations in Arcem, but the worship of vile deities, the systematic oppression of a section of society, or the habitual sacrifice of wealth to the chosen elite might all incur the wrath of a pantheon. Getting rid of these customs, however, can be a great deal more difficult than simply killing a parasite god or rerouting a troublesome river.

The real challenge of a savage custom is that it runs *deep*. Genuine customs, ones sanctified by time and suffering, are ones that are rooted in all levels of a population. The people have committed to these customs, even those who suffer by them, and they are not going to stop simply because a glowing outsider tells them that it's a bad idea. A section of the population may be afflicted by the custom, but they've learned how to live with it. The hard wisdom of experience has taught them that the alternative to an enduring evil is usually an unendurable one.

## Naming the Players

When you set up a savage custom, identify a group that's profiting the most by it. This might be a specific family in a small village, or it might be a social class in a larger society. These are the people who are getting concrete benefits out of the custom, whether in tribute, obedience, or the weakening of a potential rival group. They're usually quite ready to use violence to ensure the custom continues, and the strength they've drawn from the practice usually makes them substantially more powerful than the group that's suffering from it.

Then specifically identify the group that's suffering the worst from the custom. The whole community might be blighted by the practice, but these are the people at the sharp end, the ones who take the worst of it. They do so for a reason, whether because their superiors are too powerful to contest, or because they're genuinely convinced that the custom is right and deserved. In many cases, it's both.

These two groups are going to form much of the tension of the situation. The over-group will be offering overt hostility toward the idea of abandoning the custom, while the underclass will have a heavy weight of inertia, fear, or conviction to shift before they can possibly escape from it.

## Identifying the Justification

Now look at the custom and come up with the justifications that both sides use to explain why it needs to continue. Even the underclass will have these reasons, even if they're something as brutally simple as a justified fear that they'll all be wiped out if the custom isn't around to make them useful to their superiors.

Many justifications have at least a sliver of truth to them. Some horrible customs might well spring from the harsh realities of an awful situation. The victims might be wholly blameless in everyone's eyes, but their suffering is considered a necessary sacrifice for the good of the whole group, and the group will fight to ensure that this sacrifice continues.

It can provide a distinct sense of heroism to the players when their Godbound PCs come into such situations and then change the basic facts so as to banish the need for the custom. The society might well celebrate the opportunity to abandon the tradition, and the only challenge in the situation is to identify the things that need to be changed and then use the heroes' divine powers to change them.



## Handling the Aftermath

Most customs do not die so cleanly, however. If the players aren't careful, they can easily end up unleashing a horrific outbreak of score-settling and grudge violence that sweeps through the entire society. Slaves suddenly freed by the thunderous overthrow of their masters are not likely to nobly set aside the past to work together with their former overlords toward a brighter future. They are far more apt to burn latifundia, slaughter the families of their owners, and inflict as many brutal atrocities on them as their fury can compass. The sudden overthrow of similar oppressive customs can be expected to produce a corresponding backlash.

A careful and foresighted pantheon can limit the potential fallout of an overthrown custom by easing it out in stages, dismantling it carefully so that furious passions have time to cool and new modes of peaceful living have time to form. Those with the right Words, such as Passion, Command, or Deception, can use their abilities to temper the behavior of crowds and keep a lid on public order. They can negotiate with leaders of various groups to ensure that things move more calmly toward a better future.

PCs who simply rampage through the slave market, kill the guards, and throw a wagon-load of swords to the freed slaves will get different results. For some groups, this might be totally acceptable; the custom might be so horrible that they really don't care what happens in the wake of its ending. This, too, is a valid choice to make, and it's up to the players to decide what kind of divinities their Godbound heroes intend to be.

## D8 ANTAGONISTS

- 1 Gang boss whose vice trade depends on the custom
- 2 Harsh elder who has their position because of custom
- 3 Heartless priest who profits from the custom
- 4 Merchant whose profits hinge on the custom
- 5 Outside grandee who profits by keeping the custom
- 6 Sorcerer with magic that relies on the custom's use
- 7 Supernatural monster kept contained by the custom
- 8 Vicious lord whose rule depends on the custom

## D8 PLACES

- 1 Elite neighborhood where the oppressed can't go
- 2 Execution ground with troublemakers in the gibbet
- 3 Farm worked by labor compelled by the custom
- 4 Luxuriant estate bought with the fruits of the custom
- 5 Miserable shack of some hard-pressed victim
- 6 Public festival celebrating the rightness of the custom
- 7 Secret back-alley meeting place for rebels
- 8 Slave market or workhouse for the oppressed group

## D8 THINGS

- 1 A magical artifact used to help enforce the custom
- 2 Ancient texts that prove the custom was unfounded
- 3 Arms stockpiled by rebels among the oppressed
- 4 Deed to some land earned by the custom's exactions
- 5 Evidence proving the wrong group is being targeted
- 6 Pile of wealth acquired through the custom's demands
- 7 Relic of legitimacy wielded by the custom's enforcer
- 8 Venerable document proving the custom's validity

## D8 FRIENDS

- 1 Brilliantly gifted person from the oppressed group
- 2 Elite who's secretly a member of the oppressed group
- 3 Idealistic campaigner with wildly impractical plans
- 4 Oppressed local who escaped their role somehow
- 5 Outside crusader seeking help in undoing the custom
- 6 Pragmatic local who's convinced it's unhealthy
- 7 Reformer from a privileged group in society
- 8 Scholar looking for the roots and basis for the custom

## D8 COMPLICATIONS

- 1 An external power supports and demands the custom
- 2 Even the oppressed are convinced they deserve it
- 3 The chief reformer is a horrible person with dark plans
- 4 The custom has supernatural support from an entity
- 5 The custom is fueling the community's prosperity
- 6 The custom's most likely replacement is worse
- 7 The oppressed want to respond with blind violence
- 8 The society's stability would be lost without the custom

## D8 WHAT IS THE VILE CUSTOM?

- 1 A certain group has carte blanche to do as they will
- 2 A group is considered fit only for slavery and abuse
- 3 A particular group is forbidden to leave their profession
- 4 A particular group is methodically oppressed by others
- 5 Disobedience toward a particular office is unthinkable
- 6 Human sacrifice is expected with victims from a group
- 7 Property is kept only at the leave of a particular official
- 8 The earnings of a group are all owed to someone else

## D10 ADVENTURE SEEDS

- 1-2 An Antagonist is richly rewarded by the custom, and ruthless about dealing with would-be reformers and agitators. A Friend is a secretive survivor of the last serious attempt to end the custom, and is demoralized and keeping a low profile. A Complication is making things worse, however, and they begin to entertain the idea of looking for help to try again.
- 3-4 An Antagonist is actually a former victim of the custom who is using the outrage against it by those who suffer from it to build a secret force of minions. They don't intend to eliminate the custom so much as change who it applies to, subjecting their old oppressors in turn. A Complication is hindering their efforts, but a Friend is aware that the Antagonist has strange ties.
- 5-6 The custom is relatively recent, but strongly supported by the Antagonist under the weight of a Complication. A Friend advocates for the older tradition it replaced, but like-minded locals fear the Antagonist too much, or find their patronage too profitable. A Thing might be enough to shake them from their quiet, and the Friend knows where to find it.
- 7-8 A Place has been savaged by a Complication of the new custom, and a Friend is one of the few to have survived. An Antagonist is promising to temper the Complication, but wants the custom expanded even further than it has been in the past. The Friend doesn't believe their promises, and thinks proof of the Antagonist's malevolent purposes can be had at a Place.
- 9-10 Two Antagonists are competing to be the one who gets the most from the custom, and their struggle is sharpening a Complication. One of the Antagonists is distinctly more sympathetic than the other, and might even be turned to kinder ends, but they're also the weaker of the two. The stronger has a Thing which is supporting their cause, and only a Friend knows how to pry it out of their grasp.

# TERRIBLE BEAST

This place is scourged by a monstrous beast. Some of these creatures are born from the soured sorcery of ancient days, the result of wretched victims wandering where they shouldn't be and becoming changed by the eldritch radiations of a place. Others are altered by carelessly using broken relics of the Former Empires or consuming old elixirs that no longer function as they were intended. A few, of course, become so voluntarily, trading their humanity for the promise of unearthly power.

Some of the beasts are ancient, and have persisted in the area for centuries. Truly terrible Misbegotten are usually ageless and immortal until some hero finally puts them down, and a community can learn to deal with the cyclical depredations of a beast that becomes active only a few times in a generation. Some malefactors view these natural scourges as useful tools, and seek to gain control of them or awaken them before their appointed time.

Whatever their origin, the beast is doing something intolerable. It may be that it's lost its old caution and is starting to truly decimate the community, or some vital defense that has protected the people for generations is now lost or broken. If the PCs don't intervene in the situation, something horrible is going to happen to the people.

While most Terrible Beasts are very obvious in their presence and activities, some horrors are more subtle than that. In place of the dynamic of seeking out the beast's lair and bracing it in its own den, the creature might blend in with normal humans, making the challenge one of identifying the real monster without causing too much damage to the community.

## HUNTING THE BEAST

Much of the challenge is going to revolve around finding the creature. It may be that the beast's lair is well-known to the locals, but it's more likely that they have only a general idea of where it's found most often. When preparing a challenge, take a moment to think about some of the ways your group of PCs might locate the creature's den.

Some groups will have easy ways to locate the creature; a Godbound with the Beast word won't be looking for long, or those with a gift of Knowledge, or simply a hero with a Fact that would make them a good tracker. It's not your obligation to hinder these abilities; you just need to have an idea of how the heroes might find the thing.

Groups without such easy recourse are going to have to get help from the locals, and so you might take a moment to prepare a likely

guide. Such a helper might be a Friend that's already part of the adventure, or a side NPC who can be persuaded to aid with sufficient inducement. Not all such guides are trustworthy.

Intelligent beasts will have hunters in mind, and are likely to shape their dens to repel them. It might seal the entrance with a stone too heavy for a normal man to lift, or enter it via water or flight if the creature is comfortable in such environs. The interior will be shaped as best the beast can to give it the optimal number of ambush points and quick escape routes.

## FIGHTING THE BEAST

Once the PCs have found the creature, you'll need to give them a fight. You can pull creatures directly from the *Godbound* Bestiary chapter for this but if you do so, or if you brew your own, you'll want to keep a few guidelines in mind.

If the beast really is worthy of a Godbound pantheon's attention, it's going to need at least one attack per Godbound PC per round. Thus, a creature with two actions and three attacks per action could be a reasonable match for a pantheon of six Godbound. The attack damage dice they roll should be straight, and no less than 1d8. If the beast has a lot of attacks, give them a +10 attack bonus, while if it has only one or two attacks per action, let them hit automatically.

The creature must have at least two actions and probably three for groups of 5 or more Godbound. It also needs to be bound to at least one relevant Word and have the ability to spend Effort to automatically succeed on saving throws. If it can't defensively dispel gifts or auto-save against dangerous effects, the pantheon will be able to hammer it down quickly through their sheer number of actions.

For hit dice, sum the total levels of the Godbound pantheon, double it, and add ten. A creature this tough will be able to handle several rounds of the pantheon throwing everything they've got at it, if it dispels defensively in a judicious fashion. Any fewer, and a pantheon can take it down just by focus-firing their *Divine Wrath* gifts or miracles over a few rounds.

Lastly, sketch up a tactics table for the creature, taking into account the fact that they'll probably face it in its lair. Give it six options that fit anywhere, as explained in the *Godbound* Bestiary chapter, and then give it a couple more that directly reference the preparations it's made in its lair or the natural qualities of the place. These might serve as alternative attacks or special hindrances to the heroes.

### DETAILS OF THE TERRIBLE BEAST

DIO	BODY FORM	BESTIAL TRAITS	MODE OF ATTACK	BEHAVIOR	WHAT IT CRAVES
1	Humanoid	Reptilian	Claws and fangs	Patient	Fresh human flesh and blood
2	Amoeboid	Canine	Sucking proboscis	Sadistic	Gold and bright treasures
3	Centaur-shaped	Insectoid	Tentacular rasp and grip	Stealthy	Worship and elaborate rituals
4	Quadrupedal	Avian	Noxious skin exudate	Blatant	Mates or wretched playthings
5	Radially symmetrical	Piscine	Toxic or caustic gas	Erratic	Obedience and legitimate rule
6	Serpentine	Amphibian	Crushing grasp or blow	Cunning	Anguished terror directed at it
7	Octopoidal	Turtle-like	Chewing mandibles	Deceitful	Very specific types of prey
8	Distributed bodies	Feline	Pincers	Voracious	Elaborate construction for it
9	Plantlike	Scorpion-like	Spines or spike thrusts	Luring	Tremendous amounts of food
10	Roll two and mix	Other mammalian	Fabricated weaponry	Blasphemous	A particular substance it needs



d8

### ANTAGONISTS

- 1 Monstrous creature enslaved by a cruel sorcerer
- 2 Monstrous god-beast that demands bloody sacrifice
- 3 Once-a-century horror that's due to rise up soon
- 4 Once-peaceful creature somehow goaded to savagery
- 5 Sadistic native who's pacted to become a shapeshifter
- 6 Terrible relict accidentally unearthed by the locals
- 7 Unlucky mortal transformed to a dire Misbegotten
- 8 Vile abomination that transforms its victims into spawn

d8

### FRIENDS

- 1 Bitter refugee from a community the beast destroyed
- 2 Envoy of the greater government looking for hunters
- 3 Grizzled local hunter who's observed the beast
- 4 Leader of a desperate local militia seeking to kill it
- 5 Local leader trying to find someone to face the beast
- 6 Lone survivor of the beast's last attack
- 7 Scholar curious about the beast's nature and past
- 8 Veteran monster-hunter in need of assistance

d8

### PLACES

- 1 Desolate streets with the locals hiding indoors
- 2 Makeshift defenses manned by worried militia
- 3 Meeting of panicked townsfolk discussing the creature
- 4 Seemingly impregnable stronghold just before attack
- 5 Site of a gruesome massacre committed by the beast
- 6 Stinking lair piled with the bones of the beast's prey
- 7 Tavern full of worried locals talking about the beast
- 8 Torn-up farmhouse littered with the dead inhabitants

d8

### COMPLICATIONS

- 1 It generates some precious byproduct by its violence
- 2 Killing the beast will cause a magical disaster
- 3 Only a particular item or effect can harm the beast
- 4 Right now, the beast is hurting a vile group the worst
- 5 The beast has a cult of devotees that worship it
- 6 The beast is intelligent and inclined to bargain
- 7 The beast's life is tied somehow to a sympathetic soul
- 8 The locals somehow are at fault for the beast

d8

### THINGS

- 1 A magical item owned by a now-dead beast hunter
- 2 A prize held by someone carried off by the beast
- 3 A treasure accumulated from the beast's victims
- 4 A weapon of especial banefulness against it
- 5 An ancient text describing the way to banish the thing
- 6 An object that is enraging the creature and drawing it
- 7 The prize that the beast is meant to be guarding
- 8 Tribute piled up in an attempt to appease the thing

d8

### WHAT'S SO TERRIBLE ABOUT IT?

- 1 It destroys property and possessions as well as lives
- 2 It can infiltrate any place, leaving no home safe from it
- 3 It inflicts some terrible post-death fate on the corpse
- 4 It is cleverly sadistic, toying like a cat with its prey
- 5 It is voracious, killing and eating incessantly
- 6 It kills by an especially hideous or lingering method
- 7 It targets particularly sympathetic groups, like children
- 8 It's so armored or so hardy that it can scarce be hurt

D10

### ADVENTURE SEEDS

- 1-2 An Antagonist is remorselessly hunting a Friend due to some consequence of a Complication. The Antagonist either cannot get at the Friend directly or takes satisfaction in picking off their friends and loved ones. The Friend can somehow weaken the beast gravely if they can get to a Place, but to do so without a mighty escort would surely doom them.
- 3-4 An Antagonist is breeding or preparing to have offspring at a dangerous Place, and a Friend has seen signs of what is to come. The Antagonist will be fired with tremendous fury if its eggs or spawn are injured, but fighting the Antagonist and its young spawn all at once may be prohibitively difficult unless a Thing is obtained that will split the group or weaken the beast.
- 5-6 A Place has become a lair for an Antagonist, but a Friend has a desperate need to get there for some magical or religious reason. If the Friend's purpose fails, a currently unpleasant Complication will become unendurably worse. The Friend knows of a Thing that could help deal with the beast, but obtaining it requires dealing with an extremely dangerous Place.
- 7-8 Two Antagonists have emerged and are fighting each other, with a Friend caught in the middle, A Complication has arisen from the attempts of the locals to placate the creatures or at least avoid their wrath, and a Thing was lost in the course of their tragically useless efforts. It can be retrieved still, but it lies in territory where both beasts prowl.
- 9-10 An Antagonist is entangled in two different Complications, one of which is related to an attempt by a local ruler or sorcerer to control the thing. The keeper is successful thus far and the beast is being used to further its master's purposes, but the thing is rapidly slipping out from its keeper's control despite its master's refusal to admit this. A Friend is a survivor of the beast's depredations, and knows about a Thing the master keeps in a Place which is meant to simplify the control of the beast.

# DISASTERS AND WOES

WITHIN THESE SORROWFUL PAGES A READER WILL FIND SIXTEEN CALAMITOUS CIRCUMSTANCES TO PRESENT TO THEIR PLAYERS, EACH ONE DESIGNED TO PROVIDE DIRE ANTAGONISTS, FRIENDLY FACES, NETTLESOME COMPLICATIONS, FLAVORFUL MACGUFFINS, AND MATCHING ADVENTURE SEEDS FOR THE BUSY GM. TRUSTY MAINSTAYS LIKE BANDIT DEPREDATIONS, EVIL SORCERERS, TYRANNICAL LORDS, VILE CURSES, AND OTHER STAPLES OF THE GAME MASTER'S ARTS ARE INVIGORATED AND SHADED BY THE TOOLS IN THIS BOOK, GIVING A READER THE FRESH IDEAS THEY NEED TO PUT A NEW GLOSS ON OLD FAVORITES. WHILE *SIXTEEN SORROWS* IS WRITTEN FOR THE *GODBOUND* ROLE-PLAYING GAME OF HEROIC DEMIGODS AND DESIGNED TO EQUIP A GM WITH SUITABLE CHALLENGES FOR THOSE MIGHTY EXEMPLARS, THE TOOLS IN THIS BOOK ARE BUILT TO BE EQUALLY USEFUL TO GMS RUNNING MORE TRADITIONAL FANTASY GAMES.

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LAMENTATION ON AN UNSUSPECTING WORLD!