**House of the 10th Meridian: The House of Whispers**

By Jon. Pio

Every aristocrat, from the lowest pickling house sub-scion to the Prime Meridian House Stewards themselves, has at least one hazy memory from a House Impertabo soiree. Those memories are painted from a wide palette: the spreads of luxurious foods and exotic drink, the meticulously manicured gardens and arboretums, the silver platters spread not with multi-hued gems but a selection of the House's designer drugs, the loud and boisterous lesser House *fuori*, and the lingering presence of the silent, masked House elders watching from balconies above the ballroom floor.

From the outside, House Impertabo appears to be two houses. First, there are the *fuori*: the younger scions of the House known for raucous behavior, unabashed revelry, and jovial brawling. To the lay person, these are the only members of the House they see or interact with. The second house, the *precisi*, are the elders: enrobed, unnaturally silent, masked figures rarely seen in public. They haunt the corridors of aristocracy, chambers of high finance, and back rooms of trading houses.

Like all Meridian Houses, House Impertabo has its fingers in many a Tarrasque meat pie. Its strongest sphere of public influence is business consultation and diplomatic affairs. The *precisi* are valued throughout the city as impeccable advisors on mercantile deals and financial trades. The words they whisper to their *fuori* heralds can swing a raw deal into a profitable venture that could elevate a smaller house overnight. Being party to these lucrative dealings has allowed House Impertabo to fill their own coffers. In fact, a whole subset of Blood Merchants reaps enormous profit by mimicking the monetary movements of House Impertabo

After their role as advisors and majordomos, House Impertabo is known for producing a variety of medical and vanity drugs. Many a regretful reveler has picked up a pack of Fancyfree to ease the symptoms of the previous night's drunken tryst with a citizen of negotiable affection. From their processing of the Tarrasque hindquarters and decades of scrupulous experimentation, House chemists distill and process chemicals and components into medicines and remedies. House Impertabo avoids producing any magical or alchemical reagents, preferring to trade or sell them wholesale to their alchemist allies. The density of phosphorescence in the Tenth Meridian and its high demand for ghoul upkeep by House 5 has linked those two houses in an alliance of meat and money.

Below the banal gaze of the lay public, House Impertabo is a narcotic maker of the highest regard. In laboratories deep underground, bubbling chemical vats and eldritch machinery churn out the city's supply of Shine, Slip, Butcher's Bliss, Marrocaine, Salty Nan, Jut, Tet, Hornblow, Black Annie, GORE!, Drover, and Ambergris Tobacco. Most citizens do not associate the name House Impertabo with the narcotics they use to excite their lives or deaden their pain, but the higher the social echelon, the more likely someone knows that if you want to party, an Impertabo *fuori* is the person you need.

Even more secret than the narcotics production is House Impertabo's prized creation: a drug called Veri. Distilled from a mixture of yet unidentified fluids extracted from deep within the Tarrasque hindquarters, Veri is the drug upon which the entire House is built. The purest form of Veri is a viscous blood red wine consumed via injection to the throat. A Veri user is gifted with a supernatural ability to determine the Truth of a statement. It allows a *precisi* to cut through layers of context, self-denial, and outright deception to firmly grasp what is True. It is because of this drug that the House is so valued as advisors and consultants. While on Veri, the user cannot speak untruth themselves without suffering intense pain and even bodily damage. This side effect explains the necessity of having both the *fuori* and the *precisi*.

After a violent intra-house battle of succession, house elders made it a requirement that all members of standing be dosed with Veri at all times. The inability to speak untruths to each other has solidified the unity of the House. It is quite difficult to betray your mother and steal her position when you are completely incapable of lying to her (although this makes the intra-house intrigues all the more complex and creative). Through generations of this tradition, the governance of the House is incredibly loyal and unified, almost to the point of cult-like devotion.

To minimize pain from speaking untruth, the *precisi* whisper their words to their retinue who then transmit them to clients. The lesser, younger members of House Impertabo, the *fuori*, exist to interact with the public at large; to be the liars, the faces, and the voice of their *precisi* masters. All *fuori* aspire to join the ranks of the *precisi* in time which is why most of the *fuori* are loud and boisterous bon vivants. These assistants know that their destiny eventually will travel into a life of opulent silence so they seek to make as much noise as possible until that glorious reward is bestowed. The exorbitant parties House Impertabo often throws are as much nostalgia on louder times for the *precisi* as well as an outlet for the *fuori*.

There is another, darker, side effect of Veri usage. After mere weeks of consistent Veri usage, physical deformity starts to manifest from the injection point at the throat and spreads outwards to the face and chest.  The disfiguring caused by this long-term use is why the *precisi* wear masks. The House’s vain and arrogant top clientele would most likely recoil at the true visage of a *precisi* elder. As per tradition, the more beautiful and intricate the mask, the more horrid and vile the disfigurement hidden beneath.

With Veri as their tool, the Impertabo earn additional revenue through blackmail and interrogation. Analyzing the small talk of aristocrats for Truth at one of their many banquets and balls is profitable on its own without forcing secrets out of any guest. Uncovering information and prying thoughts out of prisoners is quite easy when dosed with a small amount of Veri. There is no need for red hot pokers or rusty pliers when your own body tears itself apart should you speak untruth.

Armed with riches, black ledgers full of compromising information, and a tireless pursuit of Truth, House Impertabo under the leadership of Binder-Lord Baldomero Impertabo is a major player in the intrigue of the City of Salt in Wounds yet they make no overt moves to gain more power or control. With what they know and what they could reveal, their unseen, deformed hands could already be clutching innumerable puppet strings attached to the powerful across the city.

**Primi Precisi Baldomero Impertabo, Binder-Lord of the 10th Meridian**

The current Binder-Lord for House Impertabo is Baldomero Impertabo, a direct descendant of the original hero which helped bind the Tarrasque, Piorvani Impertabo. Much like the first of his line, Baldomero was a rake in his younger days; from duels in the street to the Saint Jacopo’s Eve Orgy (now immortalized in the painting of the same name; House Impertabo Galleria, West Mezzanine). Rakishness and skill with a rapier led to an ever-rising position in the House Militia. Under his leadership as Consgli of the Militia, House Impertabo’s control of street level narcotics dealing expanded through a targeted acquisition of the city’s water dens and other havens of inequity. Additionally, his decision to focus militia *fuori* as bodyguards for the young aristocrats of the city ensured House Impertabo was in a good position to advise them with the *precisi* later in life.

Today, few lay their eyes upon Baldomero and not just because of the severe amount of Veri-based disfigurement he has suffered. The Binder-Lord spends most of his time within the house tower in Beast’s Crown. Known for their somber subtlety, most citizens would casually ignore the unassuming tower which belongs to the 10th Meridian house, their gaze distracted by the encircling taverns, water dens, and flesh pits. Baldomero serves as advisor to the *precisi* below him, shaping the way they exert their influence in the various financial and diplomatic dealings into which they have inserted themselves. Unbeknownst to all but the closest family members, Baldomero has gotten more and more obsessed with his physical decline and advancing age. It is because of this fear of the end that he has drawn his House closer and closer to House Five; offering secrets, wealth, and choice Tarrasque cuts in exchange for more and more arcane forms of life extension. His thoughts turn to ghoulification at times, but he worries that if he became immune to Veri usage as a ghoul, his place as head of House would be made invalid.

**Altopar Menzogna-Impertabo, Keeper of the Black Ledgers**

The Library of Black Ledgers is a near-mythical warehouse of information and secrets guarded zealously by the Impertabo family. From details of the most banal meeting between a God-Butcher and a Marrowminer eighteen years ago, to a meticulously collected list of possible command words of all Thirteen Meridian anchors, the Library contains data on an unimaginable scale. Most House members who have been blessed with access have never even lain eyes on the shelves and shelves of books, racks of scrolls, and drawers of tablature; opting instead for a comfortable salon where a *fuori* and *precisi* Weaverscribe pair analyze the information request and bring forth the relevant materials. Of course, the request for the information is itself logged and added to one of the Black Ledgers for future analysis.

Altopar Menzogna-Impertabo, great nephew of Baldomero Impertabo, serves the family as chief librarian and keeper of the Black Ledgers. He has chosen to remain a *fuori* and go without Veri his entire life as a sacrifice for his specialized role. His memory is unparalleled and his ability to weave together flimsy and tenuous threads of information into a tapestry from which the House may act has proven priceless again and again. His role places him as one of the most important viziers of the Binder-Lord, yet his own secret ambition and zealotry may ultimately mean the downfall of the House or the city itself.

**The Mondus Veri**

The Impertabo dedication to the truth manifests zealously in some individuals. They find its pursuit and adherence a near religious mandate, sometimes even punishing dishonesty at the expense of the House’s holdings. This crusade resulted in the creation of the Mondus Veri cult within the ranks of House Impertabo. The Mondus Veri believe that a state of pure Truth can be attained within the City of Salt in Wounds: the elimination of secrets, the end of intrigue, the expulsion of dishonesty, and the dispelling of all illusion. How they plan to accomplish this goal is unknown but some mass exposure of Veri or public access to the Black Ledgers must be involved, with House Impertabo ascending to the ultimate keepers of veracity. The House tends to crack down on proven members of Mondus Veri, considering their actions in direct conflict with the advancement of the House and its agenda. Despite the persecution, membership continues to increase, including the recent addition of Altopar Menzogna-Impertabo himself. Suspicious of the head spymaster, he proved his dedication to the cause by informing the cult leaders of his evidence-backed hypothesis concerning the true nature of the unknown chemicals extracted from the Tarrasque’s abdomen; the same chemicals from which Veri is distilled.