

THE FRATERNITY OF SHADOWS



SURVEY ON THE SOURAGNE
EXPEDITION

SOURAANE



Port
d'Elheur

Totem
Pyramid

Chickenbone's
Hut

Maiden's
Island

Lac
Noir

Maraire
d'Tarason

Maison de la
DeTresse

Survey of Souragne

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The editors would like to give thanks and praise to everyone who submitted something for the Souragne project.

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Survey of Souragne

March 1st, 2006

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Prologue



Prologue

Greetings my Esteemed Brothers

If you can read this, you have received our decryption key to read this tome, not the vapid travel guide it otherwise seems. For those unaware, please allow me to present myself: My name is Viktor Hazan, member of the Fraternity of Shadows and one of the elders of the newly founded Souragne Chapter.

It has been three months since we were chased from our beloved manoir in Ste Ronges. On the night of Saturday, October 29th in the year 759, a traitorous elder used his reputation to conspire against our Fraternity. Alas, even Sir Castle was fooled. Having considered him a close friend, it is with a loud call for vengeance that I share his name with the readers: Erik Van Rijn.

In the aftermath of Van Rijn's treachery, we fled the city and wandered in search of sanctuary. Recently, we received a missive from Ambrose Skully alerting us to a refuge on the island of Souragne. Presently, we have set up a new base of operations on that island, and, even now, plan our revenge on Van Rijn and Death's Unholy Order.

We have found an isolated plantation known as La Maison Soulombre. No doubt, you will appreciate the location, just south of this island's main city, Port d'Elhour. The irony is that a huge cemetery is located near our property, so, in our opinion, this is the last place Van Rijn and his masters will look for us. Doctor Anthony Reuland -always skilled with propaganda- has disseminated rumours that we are somewhat retired merchants. This will cover for the merchandise we receive as well as the visit of foreigners.

Forgetting the horrible humidity, the viciously spicy food and the quaint local customs, our acclimatising here was relatively easy. Using our Fraternity's deep purse, we are considered more well-to-do here than in Richemulot. Life is easy when you are rich in Souragne; indeed, the greatest peril we face is to resist the decadence often noted in the nobility.

During my first days in this strange land, I encountered one of the so-called "priestesses" of the voodan cult. This crone, Majenka, explained to me the "laws" of the land. First, she said, all bodies were required to left intact and above ground for four days prior to burial. Next, according to her, we were forbidden to practice our magic arts, for only necromantic or healing magic are allowed. She mentioned this with a knowing smile as though she recognized that I was a practitioner of the Art. I find this particularly disturbing, since I gave the withered creature no hints of this! Still, she insisted that these laws were absolute; that they were enforced by one of the "loa" -one of her spirits- known to the locals as "the Lord of the Dead".

Following this discussion with Majenka, we took all measures to protect ourselves from his notice. Thusly, the following edicts were sent to all Fraternity members in Souragne: "All members are to refrain from the use of magic when one's goals may be achieved through mundane means. Furthermore, no member may at any time cast magic in front of witnesses (excepting when one then permanently silences said audience)."

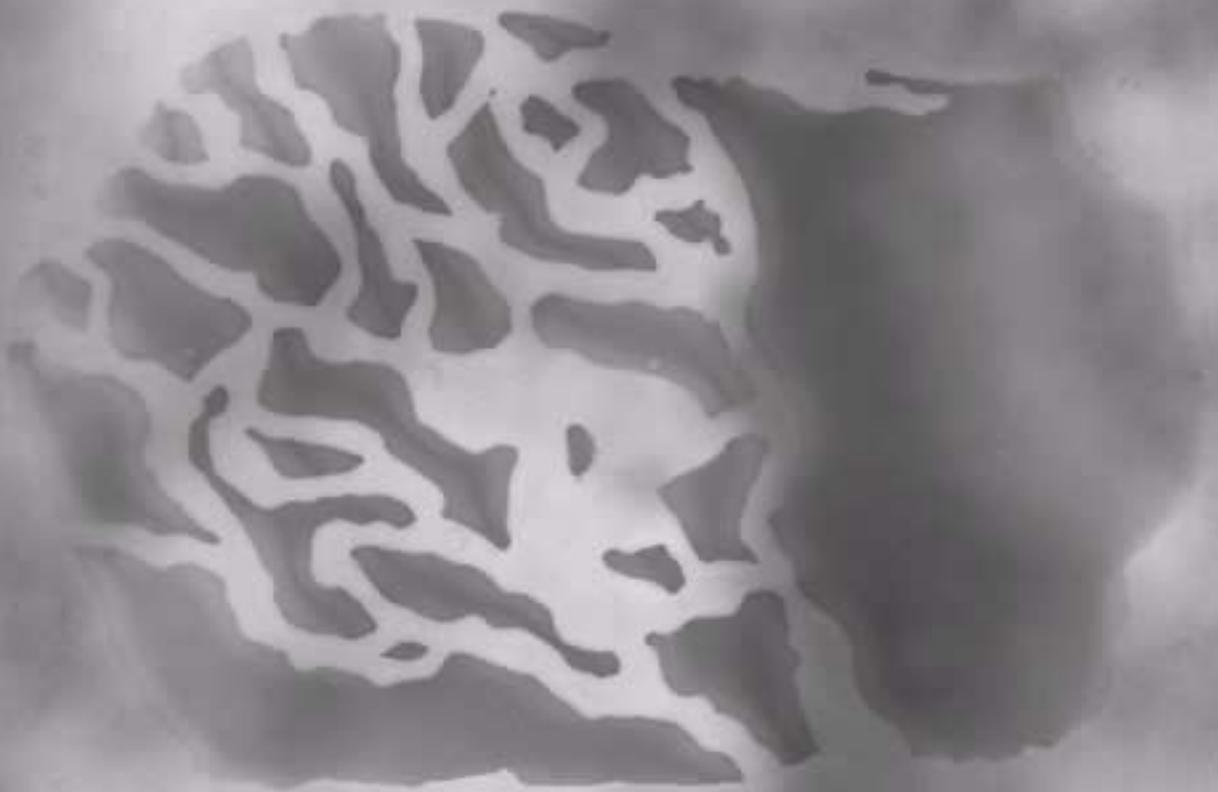
Not knowing the capabilities of the Lord of the Dead, we believe secrecy to be the highest priority. To that end, I proposed we capture a minor fiend and trap it in the basement of the plantation in order to shield us with the demon's reality wrinkle. I will reiterate that there is no need to become ambitious and summon a more powerful a fiend than required. I need not remind our members of the dreaded "Borcan Incident", and the price for such excesses.

More information will be available as we approach the summoning incantation. In the meantime, the other Fraternity cells remain on the Core, searching for Van Rijn. Sources indicate that he too is in hiding, most likely on an Island in the mists. As such, those isolated regions will be the focus of our hunt to capture and destroy him. This survey of Souragne is to be the first of many reports as we stalk the traitor.

Yours in Shadow,

Viktor Hazan

Geographical Survey



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From the bridge of our hired boat, I smiled when I saw my companion's look of shock when we emerged from the Mists. Having been in Souragne once, I knew the change from the colder mists to the very hot Souragne climate was quite a surprising contrast. My smile left me after a few moments when the first clouds of bloodthirsty Souragniens mosquitoes appeared over our heads.

"Dear Ezra! This place is a furnace!" said the Captain of the boat when we came in view of Souragne. "It's so hot here", he added, "I think even steel would melt." After swatting a large mosquito on his arm he went back inside and said "But those bugs are the reason I won't stay very long. I leave you at the quay and then go back to Darkon."

Souragne in short

Location: Island in the mists

Ecology: full (forest and hot marshes)

Darklord: The Lord of the Dead

Year of formation: 635

Cultural level: Chivalric (8)

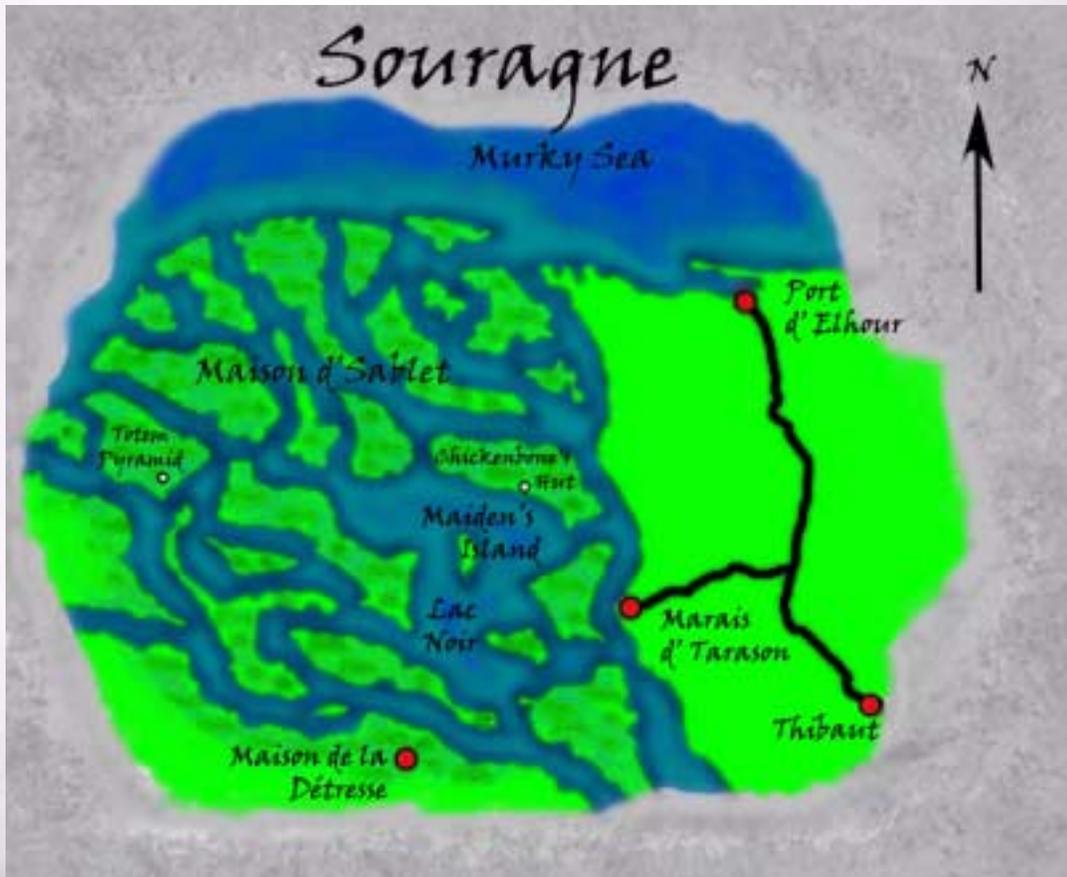
Population: 3 100 (humans 99%, other 1% - mainly calibans)

Main settlements: three - Port d'Elhour (1 200 persons), Marais d'Tarascon (300 persons), Thibaut (150 persons)

Religion: the loas (see Dark Tales & Disturbing Legends) for the masses, Ezra for the owning class

Language: Souragnien

Government: aristocratic elected leader, independent settlements



Geographical Survey

Size of Souragne - Question of scale

The swamplands, or some say the spirits of the swamp, have a way of clouding men's minds. In fact no one has really come up with a definite measurement of the realm's size. What may seem a short distance between two points to one person may seem longer or more distant to another...

The last canon measurements for Souragne are 8 miles wide, by 5 miles north to south (Domains of Dread, page 96). That is close to 40 square miles. This is only a suggested size and DMs can adjust this scale for their game.

Mistway to Souragne

The Ravenloft Player's Handbook reveals a well-known mistway linking the northwestern Nocturnal Sea, near Nevuchar Springs, to northern Souragne.

Named "The Wake of the Loa" by the sailors, this mistway is two-way and of moderate reliability (see the RPHB for drifting chances of this mistway). The hazards sometimes encountered in this specific mistway are described in Van Richten's guide to the Mists (chapter six)

Climate

Along with the Amber Wastes, Souragne is one of the warmest known lands. But contrasting the wasting desert, Souragne is plagued by a very high level of humidity. In fact, simply walking for a minute or two under the sun causes the average person to sweat. The days are mostly sunny, with a few thin clouds lazily passing by providing an appreciated -if short- screen from the sun. However, with a nice, cool iced herbal tea on a veranda, this weather is much more bearable than the desert.

On the few occasions when there is wind, this calm breeze comes from the sea and is seldom effective at chasing away the damp air or the mosquitoes. You need to stand under a mosquito net or be always on the move. Standing still only attracts them I fear. However, sometimes, for a few hours, the wind direction changes and come from the swamp. Most people stay indoors when this

happens as the number of mosquitoes and annoying buzzing flies is increased tenfold.

The very warm and humid temperature is depressingly the same at night making sleep difficult. In the early hours of morning, a short hot rain often dampens accumulated dust. On the bad sides, this rain quickly raises the level of humidity early in the day. We haven't experienced it yet, but the end of summer brings the rain season, which lasts about two months. During this period, we were told that rain can pour for days on end and the temperatures are only slightly cooler.

The Murky Sea

After the misty travel, the fog dissipates to a sea of muddy colour, the Murky Sea. This body of salt water is usually quiet with few big waves. The Sea is narrow, about a mile wide at most. For travelers on this sea the horizon on one side is the flat land of Souragne and the Mists are the others. During the day, many small fishing boats are seen on it, drifting lazily while fishermen watch over their nets. The fishermen mostly catch dull-coloured bony fishes that are tasty but unpleasant to eat. Some larger, meatier fish are not unheard of, if uncommon (tuna, swordfish; which are usually sold a good price to the seigneurs). The Murky Sea is where a lot of Port d'Elhour inhabitants get the food they eat, unless they work for a plantation and get paid for their work.

Since the waves are low and the people poor, many small fishing boats are just a few inches over the water level. When we arrived, one of these boats capsized from the waves made by our larger vessel. The fishermen yelled things we could not hear in our direction. All unpleasant I presume. Other fishing ship came to the rescue of the poor angler while our captain kept his direction and laughed nervously at the scene. "The man will be saved. But it be another reason to leave early. The people here are crazy", he muttered, "That was not a boat, it's a floating wooden door."

There are tales of fierce sharks swimming in the Murky Sea but it is probably only a fisherman's tale since it's been decades at

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least since the last dreaded shark fin was seen over the water in the Murky Sea. An old fisherman told me he saw one a few years ago. Moreover, the image in his mind was really that of a shark assuring me this man saw a real sea hunter. I, myself have never caught a shark and wonder how they taste. If they truly do swim this sea, I may have to attempt a quick expedition. For accuracy of research's sake of course.

Then our boat approached the quay. Our sea voyage from Nevuchar Springs was coming to its end. I went down to my cabin to get my belongings.

Maison d'Sablet

Population - humans and demi humans settlements: Unorganized, mostly hermits or small groups (less than 10); AL CN; CL 6-8; Total population less then 200 (not counting the swamp folk), mostly humans and a few calibans.

In all the lands, in all the realms that float within the Mists, there must be no place more hostile to human life than the Souragnien swamps. In the shades of the weeping willows and cypresses reside the most deadly contagions, the most dangerous animals and the most aggressive plants ever discovered. Worst, a fair dose of supernatural creatures also roam these bogs. The dense marshlands swarm with organisms, all of which are engaged in the savage battle for dominance. Indeed, the swamps pulse with life and death, a drumbeat to the dance of predator and prey. Understanding the nature of the primordial swamp, it would seem a foregone conclusion that civilized man has no place with the wetlands.

Dread Possibility - Bloody Waters

A Vampiric Ixixachitl (see Monster Manual II) prowls the coast of Port d'Elhour (Large 8 HD Vampiric Ixixachitl, CE). Myxitizajal (Mik-ZIT-za-jal) was altered by the Dark Powers: It can only be killed by driving a coral stake through its heart (within two rounds, otherwise it disintegrates into bloody sediment) and then allowing the sunlight to burn it to ashes. Myxitizajal must consume blood as a normal vampire, and though it feeds mainly upon fish, once every few months Myxitizajal must drain a sentient being.

Shortly after Myxitizajal was drawn into Ravenloft, it was assaulted by adventurers who stole its prized artifact: the Pearl of Entrhancement. If it could reclaim its Pearl, it could enslave the people of the Port d'Elhour. The Pearl currently resides with a Voodan priestess named Majenka. In the meantime, Myxitizajal builds its retinue of slaves from whatever aquatic creatures it can subjugate.

For a complete history see Children of the Night: Vampires.

Yet, we know there is one tool that man may employ to protect himself from the ecological warfare waged within the wetlands. This tool is knowledge. It is for that knowledge that I have conducted this extensive research into the Souragnien swamps. As the most important feature of the island is the vast marsh, it was vital that the Fraternity possess critical foreknowledge and develop survival strategies necessary to inhabit this sweltering land.



Geographical Survey

The marsh covers at least two-third of Souragne and is named Maison d'Sablet by the local people, but my experience show that speaking of "the Swamp" will suffice. Where this swamp received its name eludes me, and none was ever able to explain the origin of this designation.

Surprisingly, these marshes are not the foul places of rotting death we foreigners at first imagine. Forget the image of a grey swamp where everything is decaying. In Maison d'Sablet, the dominant colour of this area is green and it blooms with life. Plants grow and die quickly leaving room and nutrients for more. In there many edible animals live and useful wood grow quick. In fact, Maison d'Sablet offers many resources to the most adventurous Souragniens, but its important to say most of these swamp visitors never wander far from view of bordering solid ground and most probably never wandered farther west than Lac Noir.

The outer border of Maison d'Sable't are a forest of willows trees and thick bushes. This tangled wood drains the soil and forms a barrier of solid earth to keep the swamp enclosed. Beyond this thick patch is a web-like network of creeks and streams. These streams are rarely more than 10 feet across, and half that in depth.



On these borders it is not uncommon to meet Souragniens coming to the banks to try for catfish, shrimps or crawfish; or to collect wild rice, medicinal plants or cutting wood. They stay in or near their flat-bottomed boats and keep an eye for dangerous reptiles.

It is quite an experience if you enjoy fishing as I do. I would have loved to bring students in this place where fish is plentiful and combative; an entire lesson plan could be built around the swamp life. I advise people set on putting their fishhook in the water to make sure they do not get lost; it is very easy to loose all sense of direction within the swamp.

The verdant swamps of la Maison d'Sablet are home to all manner of exotic plant life. Even in the putrid, stagnant waters of the bog, numerous species of flora thrive. Indeed, the bog supports a great abundance of vegetation, including some that possess beneficial properties and some that pose a threat. The marsh is a heavily forested place dominated by large mangroves but also pines and cypress on the drier parts. Most of these trees have a pale-green coloured moss hanging from them. I found the cypress' wood seldom rots so Souragniens favour it in building. The moss, when mixed with mud, makes a solid mortar for vernacular brick houses. Other plants life includes many kinds of flowers. A vast array of mosses and mushrooms cover the swamps, with lily pads, flowers and a frightening number of carnivorous trees creatures. If it leafy and kills people, it's in the Souragne swamps.

As I wrote earlier, it's very easy to get lost in Maison d'Sablet. There are waterways slowly leading off to nowhere, and ever changing sloughs that flow aimlessly, not unlike snow-blind worms, to join a larger river with slightly more current. In most places the current is very slow, so if you see ripples, probably there is something else in the water.

Just as in a desert environment, travelers must stay hydrated at all times and avoid prolonged periods of strenuous activity. Life-long residents of the swamp prefer to travel during the early morning and evening, when the temperature is bearable. Nightfall

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brings still cooler temperatures, though locals warn that the wildlife is also more active during the night. It is my recommendation that our members employ local guides, or restrict their movements to day hours. In either case, hot weather clothing is mandatory, as is a supply of fresh water.

More than just a hindrance to travelers, the swamps of Souragne are a very real threat to life and limb. The muddy waters of the swamp are known to be toxic, forcing the natives to drink from stores of rain water. Using small micro-optical technology borrowed from our Lamordian members, we have discovered the bog waters to be infested with a plethora of parasitic life forms. Experiments revealed that ingesting the reeking water caused sickness in a matter of hours. Even brief immersion in the brackish liquid put a subject at a marked risk for disease. Fortunately, a laboratory mishap revealed that these deadly organisms cannot survive emersion in boiling liquid. It is thus recommended that all Fraternity members carry a means of boiling water during excursions into the bayou. The only sources of potable water are the one you brought, one you boiled, or rain collected in leaves.

However, in the deeper regions of the swamp grow a species of tree-climbing vine, known to the natives as "rain-shoots". These thick, grey creepers range between 1-3 inches in width, and are usually covered in a dull green moss. Once cut open these vines begin to drip water in a slow but steady flow. Over the course of an hour, a single shoot can produce enough potable water to sustain



a full grown man or woman for four hours. Wise swamp-dwellers are known to camp near large concentrations of trees, so that they might regenerate water stores as they sleep.

Though the rain-shoot is but one producer of fresh water, most other sources prove more trouble than they are worth. Case in point is the Frog Fountain, a rare and beautiful flower found in the trees of the swamp. These large, orange and crème coloured blooms catch the plentiful rainwater and store them within the convoluted folds of petals. A single flower may hold enough water and nectar to fulfill a single person's need for food and drink for one day. Unfortunately, the local wildlife prizes the blooms as nests. Some areas where these flowers grow are home to snakes and other predators, and also to a rare species of toads known as "Poison Dart Frogs". So deadly are these amphibians, said our guide, that even touching their brightly coloured skin may cause illness or death. Because of these, local residents avoid Frog Fountains, preferring other methods of water gathering.



Geographical Survey

Adventure hook - Coup Padre

This plant is often referred to as 'the Dead Plant', as its mature state looks much like the rotten remains of a dead vegetable. Mature Coup Padre plants are few and far between, however premature ones are not uncommon. A premature Coup Padre plant looks identical to a smaller version of its harmless relative, the eggplant, and can be ingested without any form of harm. However, under the right circumstances, the plant develops a black and twisted shell. A Profession (herbalist) check (DC18) is required to identify that a mature Coup Padre is more than rotten plant matter. This DC is decreased to 14 for native Souragnians. Finding a mature Coup Padre plant requires a Wilderness Lore Check (DC25).

Once a Coup Padre vegetable matures it requires no nutrition, moisture, or sunlight to remain 'fresh'. Nevertheless, the plant is still alive; placing the Coup Padre in its favoured conditions causes it to sprout a stem and roots, potentially spawning other fruiting bodies. Local rumours in Souragne say that the Coup Padre is the favourite plant of the dead. The truth is not all that far from superstition, since the powdered form of the mature Coup Padre can be used to create more powerful forms of corporeal undead.

With a Profession (herbalist) check (DC20) the plant can be ground into a powder. Ingestion of this powder immediately affects the victim, who must make a fortitude save (DC23) or be paralyzed. Paralyzed victims appear dead, however, if left alone, the victim will recover within 2d4 weeks. While paralyzed, the victim does not need air, water or food to stay alive. In most cases, the individual wakes up to find himself trapped in a coffin, only to suffocate to death.

A character attempting to raise individuals that have died in the above manner are able to raise them as if two caster levels higher than normal (thus allowing a higher number of Hit Dice worth of creatures to be controlled). These corporeal dead that were 'killed' from the Coup Padre receive a +2 bonus towards their turning resistance. However, if these corporeal undead ingest at least one table spoon of salt their hit points are reduced to zero and they resume being dead. The body cannot be resurrected or raised after this.

Movement through the swamp is a trying ordeal. The swamp is a massive obstacle course filled with trees, fallen logs, thick bushes, slick mud and small streams. Through this tangled labyrinth, even the shortest routes are made into long, circuitous trails. Navigation in the marshland maze is all but impossible. Most of the larger ponds are covered with large green water lily leaves. This vegetal carpet is often very thick making travel by boat exhausting and twice as long.

Though slow and difficult to manoeuvre, rafts preserve the energy of the traveler and often outpace all but the most experienced hikers. Some of the locals employ an even more impressive water craft, known as a "canoo". These boats are long, sleek vessels made from hollowed-out logs. The native peasants prize these boats for their lightweight: two men may carry a boat or a single man may drag it. This ingenious combination allows travelers to move over the water and land with great ease. The local aristocracy shuns all forms of native watercraft and preferring to use the more familiar rowboats. Though these craft are far heavier, they are sturdy and may carry great loads with relative ease.

The ground is muddy at best or covered with tea coloured water. Languid ribbons of mist drift slowly on the ground. This mist is often very thick and even up to the treetops. Here and there, a few sandy or rocky islands in the swamp have solid ground. Most are said to be inhabited by supernatural creatures, evil voodan or the ill-famed boccoru. I personally never saw any of them in numerous expeditions in the marshes

Interspaced throughout the bog are a variety of natural hazards. Peat bogs and quicksand are common in the water-logged soil. These lethal hazards are nearly indistinguishable from the local environment luring even experienced trekkers into danger. Unsuspecting travelers rarely suspect their peril until they have already walked deep into the center of the sucking mire. Experiment has shown that these bogs preserve their victims leaving a body intact for decades, and perhaps even centuries.

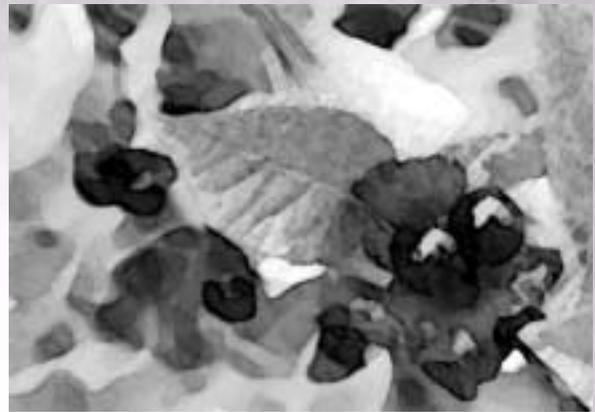
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Local superstition holds that such bogs trap not only the body, but also the soul of its victims. It is said that should a body ever be freed of the bog, it would rise as a hideous creature to terrorize the living. Further research is recommended to determine the veracity of these claims.

The muddy bogs of the swamp sometimes trap the natural process of decomposition under a thick layer of mud or peat. The decaying matter creates a miasma, called "swamp gas", which ferments under its covering becoming a reeking cloud of noxious fumes. Should the covering of mud or peat be disturbed, this cloud will escape, polluting the area until dispersed. Under certain conditions, these gasses sometimes emerge in such thick concentrations that they push out all breathable air at ground level leaving an area smothered in a cloud of horrible vapours. Even more dangerous, these gasses are known to be highly flammable. Upon escape, should the gasses be subject to ignition, they may explode with the force of up to a small barrel of gunpowder. Thankfully, such strength for a gas explosion is rarely seen.

Many animals live in Maison d'Sablet, of which, the infamously hungry alligator, is king. One may just see his eyes over the water, so travellers learn quickly to avoid these. While the average alligator is about 6 to 7 feet, certain larger ones can be longer than 10 feet. Sometimes these fierce animals do not even hesitate to try to get into a flat-bottomed boat if the opportunity presents. I nearly capsized once from the surprise of having two of these reptiles trying to enter from the same side, tipping my boat dangerously to their side. Fortunately, the noise of my pistolette chased them away.

Other animals commonly found in the swamps are raccoons, opossum, frogs, shovel-nosed turtles, small lizards and (typically poisonous) water snakes. The poison level of these snakes is within the norms for this type of snake making it a useful source of venom. It is rumoured that lone black bears and wild dogs have been seen.



In the water, the swamp is home to leeches, spiky (and likely poisonous) eels, pike and catfish. The banks host numerous types of shrimps and crawfish, which are considered a delicacy by Souragniens. And rightly so, I think. Rumours speak of monstrous brown catfish with large human-like dead eyes and sharp poisonous fins. Six to seven feet long, their weight is often over 200 pounds! Their hungry mouths are wide and sharp enough to sever a man's foot and hungry enough to eat nearly anything, alive, dead or putrid. I'm looking to landing one of these marsh monsters someday as their flesh is supposedly a delight when marinated in lime and cooked over coal fire.

In the air, birds of all sizes share the treetops: from the tiny sparrow to doves and sand pipers, falcons and osprey, and even larger birds such as the common owl, heron and stork and the occasional pelican (nearer the Murky Sea).

At night, bats of all size are seen in the moonlight preying on insects. Unfortunately, hunting is not always restricted to them. Several of the larger bats hunt any living creature for their blood: these are the infamous Souragniens vampire bats. Each animal is not difficult to destroy, a marsh guide once told me, but a swarm of them is quite another.

The Souragnien swamp is a paradise for insects: mosquitoes and flies, ticks, crickets, cicada, colourful dragonflies and scarabs. I found their buzzing at dusk surprisingly noisy and it covers the approach of larger animals hunting in the dark.

Geographical Survey



Dread Possibility - Reptile Rapture

In the westernmost swamp, there is a small tribe of reptile folk resembling four feet tall humanoid alligators. These creatures, called Merrshaulki, perform strange rituals and chants and have the supernatural ability to mesmerize the natural alligators of the swamp (see appendix).



The reptile folk are led by what they believe to be an avatar of their god, a Souragnien named Sandover (Human Afflicted Werecrocodile [see Lost Empires of Faerun, p 181] Cleric 7 with access to the Evil & Plant domains;

NE). Sandover also possesses the salient ability of Animal Command, as detailed in Chapter Five of the Ravenloft Player's Handbook.

Once a plantation worker, Sandover stumbled upon the reptile men conducting a ritual in the swamp. This touched a spiritual cord deep within that transformed him into a maledictive werecrocodile of enormous size. Sandover embraced his transformation, becoming high priest of the Merrshaulki.

His complete story is detailed in Children of the Night: Werebeasts.

The marsh is also home to the deadly black widow spider. This spider is often used by voodan in their ceremonies or their potion brewing. I got a few of them live, in a vivarium. It can be helpful should we need to get rid of someone.

Most of these denizens of the marches do not leave this area to venture far on solid ground. In the middle of Maison d'Sablet, a larger lake stands about a mile wide. The surface of Lac Noir is thick with water lilies and algae. Many frogs and insects dwell in this vegetation, with the occasional feeding heron (and the alligators feeding on the last, of course). Traveling by boat on this body of water is slow, because of the thick algae carpet. The name of this lake comes from a blackish wildberry made by a plant growing around the algae. The berries detach and float two times per year, making the surface of the water look black. This "lac noir berry" is very bitter and is often used in folk medicine.

Around the lake are a number of islands firmer than much of the rest of the swamp. Legends have a habit of forming around these locals and I have described a few below.

A small island of solid ground is found in the middle of Lac Noir, and rumours say that this sandy island is the home of the loa the en of the Swamp, a dryad-esque fey creature said to be benevolent (see appendix). Many have tried to reach for her but never were able to lay their eyes on her. I passed near this island a few times and never saw her or any sign of a house of any sort. It seems the Maiden of the Swamp is a shy being, showing herself only when she chooses.

On the eastern side of Lac Noir, near the dry land border, a peculiar island stands in the marsh. This small patch of land is completely devoid of vegetation, except a massive, black barked, mean-looking willow tree. The place is well known to most Souragnien, who nicknamed the island "The Black Willow." Legends say a plantation was formerly in this location, before the swamp gnawed at its land. Owned by a wicked owner, Nazaris Verret, who killed a servant girl he impregnated under this tree

Chapter 1

for fear of losing his status if it was known he had an affair with his lesser. Haunted by remorse and hung himself. The Souragniens say that the swamp swallowed the plantation within less than a year. The flooded ruins of the plantations are still visible. I passed near this island once, but didn't walk on it since I suspect it is haunted. It is whispered many evil voodan visit the island for supposedly increased powers, and that lightning strikes this tree strangely often.

Another similar patch of solid ground is the lair of a powerful recluse: the voodan known as Chicken Bone. This small and frail looking old man lives in a shack made of sugar cane, bamboo, and reeds on an island close to Lac Noir. It is whispered that those wanting to meet this near legendary sorcerer have to go to a certain place near the Maison d'Sablet border, where they will find a fragile looking raft that will magically reach Chicken Bone's island by itself. It is also whispered that this old man is a master voodan and can help anyone (he is said to have even met the Lord of the Dead), but for a price. The Souragniens we spoke to cautioned us that Chicken Bone usually asks for a specific task, or a peculiar thing, in the vein of a personal item you are wearing (scarf, shirt, etc.) or a strange body part (hair, eyebrows, blood).

Not wanting to get his undue attention, we asked all fraternity members to avoid him or any voodan of darker repute.

The most western part of the swamp, mainly the area west of Lac Noir is seldom visited by Souragniens. Very few humans live there, if any, and rumours of strange and cruel creatures are told: alligator people and other reptilian humanoids, secret evil voodan temples, half-sunk cities of zombies, swamp monsters, etc. In addition, a hidden area of Maison d'Sablet is rumoured to hold an impressive pyramid made of stone.

I believe we should explore this place someday but no guide wanted to bring us in this area.

Adventure hook - Black Willow

This island is haunted by Marguerite, the ghost of the servant girl. For more information on this sinkhole of evil, please see the Ravenloft Dungeon Master Guide, page 98.

Adventure hook - Chicken Bone

Chicken Bone (or alternatively "Patte de Poulet" as seen in the French Ravenloft books) is one of the most powerful and influential voodan (The 3rd ed. book Dark Tales & Disturbing Legends details the voodan class).

The suggested voodan level for Chicken Bone is 14th.

Basic suggested stats: 14d8 (63 hit points), LN, CR 10;

Str 13, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 17, Cha 14



His list of feats should include: Dancing Bones (see appendix), Brew Greater Potions (Dark Tales & Disturbing Legends) and other potion brewing-type feats, and alchemical feats (Van Richten's Arsenal).

As payment for his services, he requires afterward that his patrons perform a service for him. The nature of this service is known only when Chicken Bone has done his part of the deal. Most of the time, it is said these services or payments are minor and done in short time. What is more worrying is that on certain occasions, the task is very time extensive and even dangerous.

For more information on this character, please see the 2nd edition Ravenloft monster appendix MC2: Children of the Night.



Eastern Souragne

The eastern area has higher ground than the neighbouring swamp. Still, weird water inundations in this area still happen once in about every three years from water rising in the swamp simultaneously with the Murky Sea, or so I was told. The water level covers the land by a water blanket of a few feet. After a day or two, it returns to normal. After inundations near the swamp borders, Souragniens watch for hungry alligator that drifted to the main land and were caught there when water receded. Personally, I blame a high water table and lack of soil absorption for these floods.

Oh, I need mention quickly that water from the few fountains or wells is often tainted and can make people ill. Souragniens collect rainwater for their drinking needs. A foreigner can see that all houses have water-collecting gutters on the roof, bringing rainwater to barrels.

This drier Eastern section of Souragne is where most of the domain's inhabitants are found.

The "civilised" part of Souragne -or so the seigneurs like to think- has a few settlements linked by a dusty road named Chemin Les Tristepas. This road is difficult to travel when it has rained quickly becoming unpleasantly muddy, delaying expeditions and doubling travel time.

Maison de la Détresse

The southern parts of the marshes are filled with hidden and particularly treacherous patches of quicksand. In this area, a lonely plantation stands. This vast plantation is the rumoured home of the Lord of the Dead. Few Souragniens would knowingly approach it and again no guide was willing to bring us there. They referred us to Chicken Bone, who is said to be able to bring us there. However, his price was one we were not ready to pay.

It was here that I learned that scrying in Maison d'Sablet is particularly difficult. After my failure to secure a guide, I wished to scry on Maison de la Détresse but all I could see was mist! Even when I tried to look in the marshes or the Maison de la Détresse area, only the Mists. That magic is foiled this way frustrates me and denies a usually good source of information.

Scrying in Maison d'Sablet

It should be noted that scrying spells and similar powers works with great difficulty in Maison d'Sablet. The user of these powers has to make a Will-based DC 30 to be able to successfully use these spells targeted in the swamps.

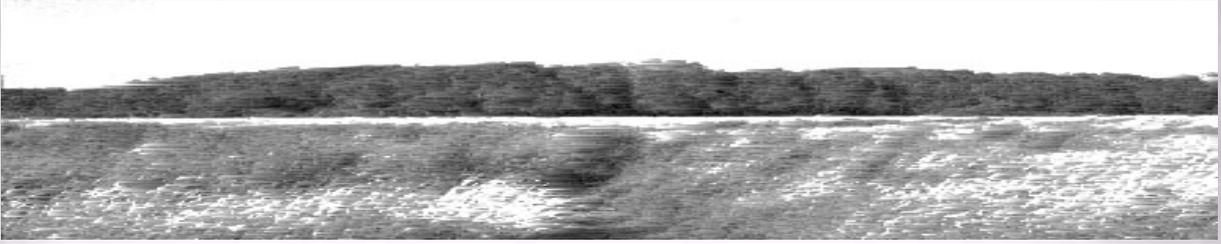
The Lord of the Dead knows when such scrying attempts are targeting la Maison de la Détresse (DC 20 Will to know Maison d'Sablet is being scryed, and DC 30 to know the culprit's identity).

Les Tristepas

"You're right monsieur; it is vraiment très dommage that one of Souragne's greatest accomplishments -the magnificent roadway that traverses the island- should 'ave earned so depressing a name as 'the sad steps'. It kind of goes against the proud nature of Souragne's people, non?"

"If you are sitting here in Marais d'Tarascon asking me all these questions, then you have seen how magnifique the road is, how much effort it took to build the t'ing. What with all the heat an' the bugs an' the bouette an' all the rainy weather... not to mention the jumbies that might crawl out of

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the closeby swamp in the middle of the night. Back in the day when it was first completed les Tristepas was quite a sight to behold. A smooth ride, flagstones and gravel had been laid for most of its length, although by the time the road expansion to Thibaut began it seems they settled on hardwood planks for shoring up stretches that were more prone to flooding during heavy rainfall. Between Port d'Elhour and Marais d'Tarascon, every time a tiny stream cut the road, a beautiful, gently arched stone bridge was built, the sides carved with all sorts of creatures of legend. An' there are ten such bridges between the two towns... faut l'faire, non? The rows of towering willows that flanked the road for its entire length were impressive, as were the oil lanterns that lighted it up at regular intervals along its length. Even the most insignificant of intersections was marked with a pretty sign. That road made Souragne a great country.

"The slaves that built the road first nick-named it les Tristepas because of all the blood, sweat an' tears that soaked the stones from which it was constructed. Hundreds of men, women, and children died during its construction from beatings, starvation, exposure, or exhaustion. They marched on it to their death. My own ancestors died to make this road. C'est triste, non? But I guess it was necessary... someone had to build it, yes?"

"The rich folk once had a different, more proud name for the road... but no one remember it. Now even the nobles call it les Tristepas. I guess it reminds them that despite all their big ambitions most still can only go from one end of this island to the other end and not much further in the big world. Walking on that road always gets me thinking about what is and what could have been, and what maybe never will be... and maybe it's the same for the rich folk.

Nowadays, a trip along the road seems to dig up one's regrets, to invite the willows to whisper unhappy t'ings in one's ear. Maybe that's because the road itself no longer lives up to what it could have been... it's still nice, but broken flagstones haven't been replaced, some stretches are uneven, there isn't always oil in the lanterns, signs have fallen, the creatures carved into the bridges look weathered and faded, and the trees... the trees look sad. Most people are afraid to travel the road at night; they say that you can hear those who built it crying in the darkness, walking behind travelers just out of eyesight.

"Anyway, I doubt that anyone will ever build such a great road again, in any country, and here it is in Souragne... pas mal, hein? And if you try telling me that the roads in Dementlieu or Richemulot are more spectaculaire, I will say that you are full of it, monsieur..."

-- from an interview with Arnaud d'Lute, shipbuilder in Port d'Elhour



Geographical Survey

The drier areas are covered with light forest, mostly oak and cypress with the occasional acajou. Near the swamps, the forest is denser. However, the trees are rarer near the few major settlements. I understand that a tree is considered a potential sack of coal by the poor. They use it for their cooking.

In these deforested areas, long grasses grow. This tall, greyish vegetation can get up to three or four feet in height and undulates in the wind. These long herbs hide small ponds and tiny snakes (poisonous of course).

Other animals found in the drier regions are wild pigs, rabbits, some foxes, a few wild horse and small lynx-sized cats. It is also plagued with mosquitoes when the wind is from the swamp. I've been told that more than one person turned Lost One because of incessant mosquito bites and buzzing.

The first place one would encounter when arriving to Souragne is the town of Port d'Elhour, where his boat will likely dock.

Port d'Elhour

Small town; conventional; AL LN; CL 8; 800 gp limit; Assets 50 000 gp; Population 1 200 (including a radius of a few miles); Humans 99%, others 1%

Port d'Elhour is Souragne's largest town, located inside Elhour Bay. The insular say the town of Port d'Elhour got its name centuries ago from the first boat to moor there, the Elhour. Other says Elhour is in fact the name of the first seigneur of this land, but they could not point any grave on Souragne bearing this forgotten name.

Many slippery wooden quays are found along the port, each hosting small fishing boats. Many more boats are seen on the muddy beaches around the bay, near Old Cypress Way. At the first glance, I found that many of the inhabitants of Port d'Elhour survive primarily by fishing, but most look sun baked, exhausted and hungry. I don't think the sea is generous, judging from their daily catch, but at least those people are free from plantations work.

The town is very noisy, especially after the sun's peak time where it is sleepier. Less working tends to mean more talking. The Souragniens are an unusually loud people, whether happy, sad, or angry. Many loud donkeys also add to the noise of the street.

I made the following first impressions of the Souragnien population at Port d'Elhour. First, the women of Souragne work very hard and surprisingly they are often independent of men for their day-to-day activities. In fact, a woman with children is often without a man steadily living home. Second, on the street, there are very few old Souragniens. Life here is hard and people here die early. Many of them are crippled and get a few coins by being beggars. In fact, there is nothing close to a middleclass: you are either a seigneur or you are poor, and the difference in status is unmistakable. Lastly, all Souragniens always wear something on their head, except at night. It's not for fashion but to protect themselves from the sun - usually a hat or a scarf.

Most houses of Port d'Elhour are adorned with painting or stone engraving. Most of these represent serpents, alligators or other marsh animals, or necromantic themes: dancing skeletons, skeletons making music, v^év^é (see the religion survey), or the ever present Lord of the Dead drawing with many variants. For us in the Fraternity, these profane necromantic drawings are often reminders of the reason we left our beloved Manor in Richemulot...

There are vacant houses in Port d'Elhour. Sometimes squatted for a time by poor people or outsiders. Other houses have burned in various proportions.

There are three parts to this small town, more or less arranged in concentric half circles around the port.

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The Port

The port is a foul area, stinking of fish refuses left rotting in the sun. Sometimes the smell is so overwhelming it can make foreign people feel sick. This miasma doesn't seem to annoy the local people and it is fairly animated, especially when a foreign trading boat arrives to haul merchandise. When such a boat is at the piers, many fishermen trade their usual hard work to offer their services as dockers. It seems the pay is better, but I believe Souragnien like to be among the first to learn of newcomers and find the possibilities they bring to improve their life.

To hide merchandise from thieves (and from the bad weather), the bay front is mainly comprised of stone or brick warehouses, rented or owned by the seigneurs for their trade with other domains. Each seigneur is responsible for the security of their merchandise, and the most valuable trade goods are watched by hired guards.

Fishermen unload their catch here too, with throw-away left there and surplus sold at the "marché", the market square.

Geographical Survey

Past-the-Port

East of the city is a slum called "past-the-port". This is a dangerous place; most people here carry a weapon, even if only passing through. Watch your pockets and don't go alone at night, especially if you look like you have a heavy coin purse. It is in this area that many people of the working class spend their meagre pay, to forget for a time their poor lives. Fights and other violence are frequent after nightfall. The men wander in drab clothing with expressions of sadness while the ladies of the street wear colourful make up as if to hide something.

Many establishments provide prostitution, gambling and cheap alcohol, and often all three. Many of the bars and gambling houses do not even have a name. Cock fights are the most frequent gambling events. The animation of these games is interesting to behold as all the town seem to be watching and wagering. I even saw a few seigneurs with their guards, disguised of course. In this neighbourhood everything has a price, even human life.

Dread possibility - Nanaea's grandchildren

Nanaea's grandchildren (see Lord of the Dead's background) are crime lords in Port d'Elhour controlling most of the establishments the vices of lower classes patron. Jessica de Nanaea (Rog6) owns many establishments (often a mix of a seedy tavern, with a gambling house and possibly a brothel), while Antoine de Nanaea (Ftr6/Rog4) controls street crime and protection rackets ruthlessly.

They enforce the protection of the Past-the-Port area with their thugs. Bodies of offenders are disposed in the swamp -when not dumped in still alive.

Both live in a mansion inside Port d'Elhour. They are secretly informants to the Lord of the Dead. Sometimes, for a price, they can tell the complete tale of The Lord of the Dead (they are among the few to know his real name).

The cheap houses are made of bricks with a mix of mud and marshes moss for mortar. These buildings are in poor shape and many of these houses do not even have a door! This part of town is particularly hot and most houses have hooks at their corner where canvas sheets (often reused boat sails) are hung over the dusty street for cover and to give a sense of privacy.

The streets of Past-the-Port are narrow, filled with refuse and very dusty, or, if rain recently fell, unpleasantly muddy. Sadly, I found many poor families living amongst the riff raff and begging children are often seen clinging around wealthy or foreign looking persons.

A small and noisy inn is located here, the very dirty 'Cat and Mouse' (the room quality is dirty and mediocre and no food). The small 'Grinning Man' (poor food and accommodations) is one that only the most hardened rogues would visit after dark. The resident fence will purchase stolen or otherwise dubious goods for a quarter to a fifth of the price, no questions asked. Many other seedy inns exist but do not have a name or sign.

Le Coq Noir is the largest gambling house of the area; it is located at the northern edge of Past-the-Port, near the Marché. This gambling house, where most nights a game of high stakes cards will be running until the small hours of the morning, is less dangerous and frequented by many seigneurs, wealthy locals and foreigners. This "hotel" is, in fact, the highest end of Port d'Elhour's gambling rooms and closed house. Companionship of the highest quality may be bought for enough gold and the chances of finding one's purse light after a night of pleasure are slim as the "lady of the house" Mme. Larouche, runs a very strict establishment.

The Town Proper

Outside the port and the adjacent slum, the town is nicer and the streets wider. Many of the poorer houses are also made of crude bricks, but they are in better repair than the ones in the slum. The best buildings are made of stone or bricks and have two or three floors.

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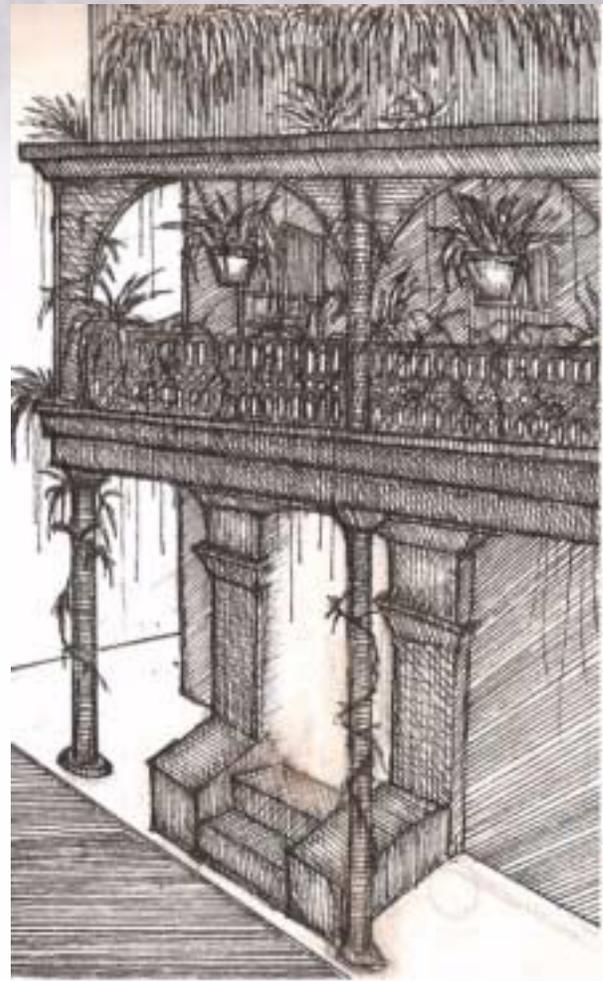
Typically, a large balcony on wooden poles overhangs the street and worked iron fences with vegetal patterns divide the plots. Some houses also have a gingerbread wooden ornamentations to it but these often need to be painted, if you ask me.

While Souragne's history speaks of glory and riches, I think most of the buildings only show a pale reflection of what the town probably looked in those better days. If you walk in Port d'Elhour today you'll find most buildings are in a piteous state and left without renovation. Still, this is the best part of town where many merchants and skilled artisans live.

Intendant Mayor Bernard Foquelaine lives in a well-kept manor on the outskirts of the town. A wall surrounds this small property of this spidery politician.

The best tavern in town is 'The Black Ship' (the food and accommodations are excellent, but this establishment is often fully occupied: it has only four rooms). The Black Ship is definitely the tavern of choice for the more well-to-do traveler as the rooms are both safe and luxurious. The furnishings have somewhat of a nautical theme with much polished wood and brass. Madame Dreyfuss, the widow of a retired sea captain and rumoured smuggler, runs the hostelry. Security for the establishment is good as Mme. Dreyfuss has employed some of her husband's most loyal officers and crew in their sunset years, rowdy customers may be surprised to find their weapons flicked from their hands with a flash of a cutlass by a grey-haired guard.

The old 'Two-Hares Inn' is a nice and cozy little auberge, usually with musicians playing in a corner (room quality is average but no food. They do serve drinks). Its name comes from a famous Souragnien tale of two rabbits: Longhears, the clever one who always helps Bouki, the one who always get in trouble. It seems they had trouble getting a steady chef in the recent years so, for the moment, the kitchen is closed. The more gossip-minded claim the place is cursed.



A seedier locale is the 'Scolding Jay' (room quality is average and again, no food. Drinks, of course, are served), but it's a good place to hear rumours. It is owned by a man of ill-repute, one Antoine de Nanaea.

Also in town is the Ezran chapel of Notre-Dame-des-Brumes, which is located on Chemin Tristepas near the Marché. It is presided by Père Étienne Lefebvre (please see Mrs Kingsley's religion section of this report).

Three other notorious landmarks are found in this neighbourhood: a dance hall where many Souragniens come to dance and drink (a converted warehouse and where opera is sometimes shown), the militia barracks and the market square called "Le Marché." I have to say the ambiance of the dance hall is contagious and even I was tempted to try the local dances. Thankfully for those in attendance, Gabrek reminded me of my two leftward feet.

Geographical Survey

Le Marché

Most people in Port d'Elhour rely on fishing, but, as I wrote before, it is an activity of subsistence only. The meagre surplus of fish is sold here at the market -mostly by women- who buy or trade for vegetables and meat sold from plantations.

The market ("le Marché") is simply an open square in the town with uneven stone flagging where people sell their goods, most of the time on a simple canvas on the floor. It is flanked by permanent little storefronts.

Ready-to-eat food cooked on the street is also found in this market. Much can be found cheaply, the main staple being rice, bananas and beans, with pork, crawfish or shrimp. Sometimes mutton from the plantations or alligator from the swamp is offered. Souragniens do not eat sweets at a meal: it isn't to their taste and most cannot afford it. Be careful, the food is often spicy to most foreigners but since most inns do not offer food, foreigners need to come here everyday for nourishment.

A dry well occupies the center of the square. It has a sculpture of fishes led by an alluring half-woman, half-fish creature. I've been told this well has been dry a very long time. It is an oddity as every other well in the land has become polluted before it had a chance to run dry.



An interesting feature of Le Marché is both the fair number of skilled artisans who ply their craft here and the medicinal market. The artisans sell most of what people need, mostly clothing and tools, but other are specialized in goods sold to sailors from foreign shores. Several of them are artists: painters making crude but colourful work with sunny landscapes, or the ever-present loas representations. All can be hired to do wall painting.

One of these well-known artisans is Jacque Faisique of Jacque's Jewels (Exp 4, Fir blooded). His creations are starting to be well known in the fashionable circles of Dementlieu. His shop is small and an odour of incense always linger.

For foreigners, the most interesting feature of the Marché is the aforementioned medicine counters, often located in the permanent shops around the square. Most are at first glance cheap charlatans promising surprising feats with their medicinal paraphernalia. I was able to buy a nice necklace made out of roots, beads and feather -for protection against zombies. I wear it everyday, for the aesthetic value and not for a second because I believed in its magical properties. If you ask around, several of the stern-looking old men and women selling their goods here are known to be benevolent voodans. Their shoppes are full of blown glasses of all shapes and colours containing dull or colourful liquids, and certain have plants or animal pieces in it. Some sell live leeches. A few sell antidotes to snake and the dreaded black widow's poison. Others sell poison itself (as if there was not enough in this land) strange medicines, and magical potions like love philtres. I tested a few of these concoctions on live subjects and the results were as promised by the sellers (again, my sincere apologies for that regrettable incident Anthony, I should have asked).

One of those permanent shops around the square is also a voodan shrine held by Majenka (voodan 10th), an old voodan priestess believed to be benevolent. Wild rumours often come out about this woman. It is said that someone saw her eat broken glass, or she is said to take bites at her cigars

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instead of smoking them. Still, she is often sought for healing or medicine. I met her once, as you know. She seemed playful and friendly. I suspect she is very protective of her fellow voodan worshipers. Her reaction to a few of my comments on life and death made her grin with a knowing smile and told me of the laws proclaimed by the Lord of the Dead. She could perhaps represent a good source of information on divine magic, both healing and necromantic. In her den (part store, part shrine) odours of food often lingers as voodan ceremonies are often preceded by food and alcohol.

This square is also where the rare public execution in town takes place. The last of these happened a decade ago. You surely guessed it right: a worker was executed by hanging because he harmed a seigneur. Outside the town of Port d'Elhour is where the cemetery and the plantations are located.

The Cemetery (the "City of the Departed")

Souragniens take great care of their dead relatives and mourn them for four days. This mourning is anything but sad: friends and family gather for this period. That was a shock for me to witness such chaffing about a dead relative. Food and alcohol is served by the family of the dead person. Stories about the dead are told -often wildly exaggerated- and the favourite games of the deceased are played. Souragnien are not educated, yet many times they showed surprising wit in coping with loss. Still, I felt there was angst in the air and many fearful gazes were thrown at the corpse. An older Souragnien explained this latent fear: occasionally the loa recall this person and the corpse rises during the mourning. The family and friends have to let the zombie go without opposing. Needless to say, this is an abrupt end to the joyful mourning.

After this four-day delay, the dead is placed in a wooden casket and a joyful funeral parade brings the corpse to the cemetery. Nobody is anxious by then and many pay their respect and thanks to the Lord of the Dead for letting the departed rest in peace.



The dead cannot be buried, as ground; water fills the hole at a depth of four feet. The cemetery itself is walled. The richest put their dead in mausoleum of stone or brick covered with white plaster. Many of these mausoleums are well decorated with ornaments and sculptures. These are very beautiful places, if somewhat morbid.

The mausoleums are neatly designed to form "streets" within the cemetery, thus the locals often call it "the city of the dead."

The working class usually cannot afford the construction of a mausoleum and put the wooden casket on a stone or brick floor, with bricks on it. These inventive persons pierce the caskets with holes so they do not float if inundations swamp this land.

On Chemin Tristepas, stands an old oak. This ancient tree is nicknamed "Vieil Branch" by the Souragniens and I witnessed it is sometimes even revered as a loa (benevolent, for peace with ancestors). The tradition by a supplicant of suspending his old clothes to the tree in the hope of getting an ancestor's good grace (or secret knowledge) is also ancient. The huge tree is covered with bits of clothes, old and new.

Dread possibility - Vieil Branch

Vieil Branch was an ancient treant, now dead. By articles of clothing on its branches the mourners bring it closer to awakening. If only a few more pieces of clothing are placed in its branches, the collective grief emotions will awaken Vieil Branch as an insane undead treant.

Geographical Survey

The Plantations

A quick look at the plantations surrounding Port d'Elhour shows that agricultural work gives more results than fishing. The plantation belongs to the seigneurs, who are considered nobility in Souragne.

All plantation main houses are luxurious places where success of the owner is made evident. Located behind cast iron portal entrances, the main house often sports large, tall white pillars at the front. Also, weeping willows and large flowers often adorn the green grass in front of the building. Very different from the dull grey houses inside the town, the plantation houses are either painted spotless white or bright colours. Typically, there is more than one entrance as the workers use a different door than the main one.

The houses are made entirely of cypress wood or are constructed of bricks with wood added to the exterior for prestige. Even when situated on higher ground they are built atop stilts so that air can circulate more easily, cooling the house.

The interiors are also very luxurious, with marbles, tapestries, ornate ceilings, and the ever present worked iron (with vines and other patterns), chandeliers, and large (unused!) fireplaces. The kitchen is located in a separate building in the back, to prevent eventual fire hazards from spreading to the main house.

Plantations usually specialise in either sugar cane (mostly used to make rum and trade), tobacco, cotton and fruits (orange, cherry, mango, banana, grapefruit) or farm animals (beef or pork). The exportable surplus is sold in part to the market in Port d'Elhour, but mainly to other land's merchants. Some plantation owners have recently capitalized on a new trend, a dark tea-like infusion beverage called café. Other plants grown there include small amounts of wheat, some corn, onions, celery, peppers (bell and chilli), and carrots.

There are about twenty plantations in Souragne, half of them located around or near Port d'Elhour. Most of them are very successful, making their owner wealthy.

However, it should be known that a few owners are no longer that wealthy and are close to losing everything. These "indigent seigneurs" are still treated as elites by their workers and the other seigneurs. I have to note that some seigneurs are among the richest persons I have met, while other seigneurs would barely hold average wealth rank in other lands. A few plantations have also been abandoned, like the one our Fraternity is currently holding.

The following is a list of the most well known plantations around Port d'Elhour:

Huit Cyprès: The Desjardins family has experienced a steady decline over the past three generations. They once had strong ties to the Tarascons and other well-off families via inter-marriage, but the strength of these ties have waned considerably. Their recent crop yields have been modest at best, and successive generations of family heads have increasingly lived beyond their means while making ever-poorer investment decisions.

In comparison with other landowners, the Desjardins tend to treat their workers with a light hand (although the occasional beating following an unexplained fit of rage does occur), but also offer some of the poorest wages in Souragne. Due to the family's mismanagement of its revenues and assets, workers frequently end up short-changed on their already pitiful wages.

The Desjardins are known for throwing lavish parties several times a year ("at the expense of their labourers," some might add snidely), which invariably turn into carnal feasts of debauchery. Over the years, they have become less discriminate where their guests are concerned as they have difficulty in attracting members of Souragne's distinguished families to their soirées.

Adam Desjardins (Ari3/War1, CN) and his wife Eve (Ari2/Rog2, N) are the current heads of the family. They have four daughters of marriageable age - Murielle, Mélina, Aline, and Odette (all Ari1). The lack of a male heir weighs heavily on the family and makes their future uncertain. Only lesser noble families, merchants, and artisans have shown an interest in the Desjardins daughters - to Adam's dismay.

Chapter 1

Maison Soulobre: An estate abandoned for many years after a worker killed the owner in 732. This plantation was bought by the Fraternity of Shadows. For the public eye, remember, we are retreated merchants from the Core.

Maison sur la mer: The Belenfant family were originally of slaves. Ambition, hard work (and even harder savings), ruthlessness, extreme suffering, unsavoury deals with other families, and even (it is whispered) secret pacts with sinister powers reportedly enabled the Belenfants to quickly ascend when Souragne first abolished slavery. The Belenfant plantation is among the poorest and most remote of the island's estates, their lands among the least fertile. In spite of (or perhaps because of) their modest roots, the Belenfants are among Souragne's most demanding employers, frequently working their labourers to death in their attempts to "keep up with the Tarascons." Surprisingly, their labourers -many of whom hail from the most underprivileged parts of Souragne- are more loyal to the Belenfants than those of other estates.

The family's patriarch, Élie Belenfant (Ari2/Clr5), preaches fire and brimstone sermons that extol the virtues of faith and hard work as the key to finding salvation and "Liberté." The self-styled Bon Seigneur Belenfant (as he insists his workers call him) is rumoured to have manifested divine "gifts" on occasion, although it is unclear in whose name he uses these gifts (some suggest Ezra, while others have mentioned darker and lesser known powers). Motivational sermons aside, Élie is a very mild mannered individual, appearing gentle and grandfatherly to those who meet him away from the fields. The success story of the Belenfant family, combined with Élie's charisma and divine gifts, may explain the loyalty of his desperate labourers. Élie has a wife (Bercine, Ari2) and six adult children.

Mortolane Mansion: Known as an eccentric to his fellow plantation owners, Bernard Mathurine paid to educate his workers to read. He owns one of the few plantations where the workers are satisfied with their conditions.

Adventure hook - A Demonic Ball

A few days following one of the Desjardins family's legendary parties (which the PCs may even have attended), the PCs receive a note from Eve Desjardins, begging them to rid their house of the demon that has her husband and daughters in its thrall. The girls have been suffering horrible nightmares, fits of hysterics, and odd burns between their thighs, while Adam has come down with a fever that has robbed him of his power of speech and left him bed ridden. Rumours soon spread across the countryside that a lustful incubus, who has also brought sickness to Adam, visited the Desjardins daughters. Soon, others claim to have been victimized by the demon, as a wave of mass hysteria sweeps the vicinity of the Desjardins plantation and nearby estates. Would-be suitors who sought the hands of the Desjardins daughters and were rebuffed by Adam eventually are suspected of summoning the demon, with the assistance of voodans (perhaps Mr. Mensonge from Dark Tales and Disturbing Legends?).

The reality is far worse: in his desperation to see his bloodline continued, and knowing fully well that his wife is unable to bear him more children, Adam crept into Murielle's room while she was semi-comatose after the party and forced himself upon his eldest daughter in hopes that she would bear his child. She now has only vague recollections (that become more detailed and accurate as the investigation progresses) of some leering demon whispering in her ear as he forced himself on her. Adam has been feigning illness since his foul deed, and the other daughters are experiencing some of Murielle's symptoms in psychosomatic form. In all cases, Eve is unaware of the truth.

Geographical Survey

New World House: The Hallie-Bourbonne plantation is located on the north side of Baie d'Elhour, and it is the farthest plantation from Port d'Elhour and remotely located. This plantation was barely hit during the hurricane of 710 and the rebuilding was surprisingly quick resulting in many rumours. To these rumours the family simply answered "We hired foreign workers", but nobody saw any of these in Port d'Elhour. The current patriarch of the family, Charles (Wiz7 (necromancy)/ Ari3) is an influent figure in the Port d'Elhour conseil des seigneurs. They trade cotton and large amounts of tobacco with the outside and exploit their own fleet of boat, headed by Captain Guy Bourbonne (see appendix), the only son of Charles.

Dread possibility An obedient work force

After the hurricane, bodies of plantation workers littered the ruins of the Hallie-Bourbonne plantation. This jaded and decadent noble family were the only one that remained alive.

Accustomed to living a life a luxury and unwilling to sink into debt for rebuilding, those nobles with skill in the necromantic arts turned to the drowned corpses as a new source of labour and servants. As a result, reconstruction was rapid, fuelled by workers that did not sleep, could not rebel, and had greater than normal strength and stamina. However, when initial reconstruction had ended the family was faced with an overabundance of increasingly decomposing and foul-smelling undead.

Being forward thinking and not knowing when these creatures might be needed again, the legions of undead were commanded to walk into the bay until they were recalled. These hundred obedient dead are still there to this day. Many decomposed to skeletons, and mired in accumulated silt, but should the nobles ever have need they can command the sea to give up its dead.

Old Cypress: Old Cypress was abandoned in 711 when a disgruntled maid poisoned the wife and two daughters of the owner, Baptiste Lalaurie. She used a poisoned cake in her murder. After the execution in the Port d'Elhour market square, Baptiste committed suicide.

Shinny Bay: The Lefbvre family of small wealth is possibly the most well educated in Souragne and Sentire Etienne its most celebrated offspring. Their members populate the city administration, which explain many of the Sentire's successful pleas for clemency or dismissal of charges. Their library, the largest in any Souragne home, is a local marvel (and eccentricity). I've seen it once and I think one day it would be worthwhile to get permission for accessing it.

Twelve Oaks: The Dessalines family is one of the wealthiest of Port d'Elhour, their plantation is the largest of Souragne. The grandfather, Patriarch and current owner quickly took the lead in trade with other lands. The most important members are: Jean Dessalines (Ari3/War3), his wife Paula (Ari2), and their only child (Laura, Ari1)

Weeping Willows: Mont Mirebalais is another very wealthy family. They have interest in boat construction and most of the family members are well traveled. The heir of the family is secretly an dark voodan (4th level).

Dread possibility Ghosts of Old Cypress

Since the murder, this property has been abandoned and rarely visited. Five ghosts are said to haunt the place: the murderous maid (Alvina, ghost rank 2, with the Dream Walk power), the pitiful wife and daughters (Nanette, Nadine and Verette, all ghost rank 1 with Aura of Despair) and the angry Baptiste Lalaurie (owner of the plantation, ghost rank 3).

Traveling South

White Magnolia Hill: The affluent Larouche family is a pariah among other seigneurs due to family connections with the infamous voodoo enchantress Ti-Maman, and Nanaea's Grandchildren.

Iolanthe Van Schelm (Ari 2) was essentially gambled away at their Le Coq Noir after her heavily-indebted father gave her away in marriage to Guy (Ari 2/Bard3), Ti-Maman's nephew. The musical mavericks often perform at their gambling house, and the family proudly attends voodoo services, performed in their own chapel by cousin Jeanne (3rd level voodoo).

White Star Point: The Van Schelm is one of the poorer plantation families, but they are quite good at keeping up appearances. They used to be quite rich, but they literally wanted to buy enlightenment with coin, paying their 'slaves' more than was considered average in the region, and lost much of their wealth. The number of employees is small, but they are among the most motivated and actually seem to get work done properly. The family's plantation is small, but still grows a small quantity of superb tobacco. Their main business however, is in draining and dredging, dyke-building, peat-selling. Since draining, when done cleverly, doesn't involve as much manpower as a full-functioning plantation, this plan's actually working, so far. Important members include Patriarch Archibald van Schelm (Exp4/Ari3) and his three sons Alfred (Exp2/Ari2), Balthasar (Exp4) and Gerard (Ari1/War3). Gerard has two daughters Josje (Exp2) and Iolanthe (Ari2), and two sons Chris (Exp1/Ari1) and Willem (Exp1/Ari1).

Archibald's is senile and continuously mourns his deceased wife, while his sons Alfred and Balthasar keep an eye on business. Alfred minds the plantation, while the more ambitious Balthasar carries out the draining and building activities. The youngest son, Gerard, ventured to the far land of Richemulot to find investors and as a lookout on the Core. Gerard sent his two sons back to aid their uncles, and has sent his daughter to the University of Richemulot in Ste.Ronges, to become a true lady.

As one travels southward away from Port d'Elhour the land elevates slightly, thus eventually relieving itself of the filthy clutches of the endless swamps and bayous. The land beneath one's feet is relatively dry and free of the creeping muck of the swampland, but plant life is still thick and travel outside the bounds of the Tristepas is still very much hampered by the dense trees.

Travellers, despite the road, are encouraged to be wary as predators occasionally emerge from the swamp and wilds. Many who leave the town are never seen again.

With the erosion due to near-continuous rainfall, tropical weathering, and the sheer humidity of the Maison d'Sablet have formed remarkable formations of dark rock called Liethe Noire at the southeastern reaches of the realm. Here the gullied badlands include dozens of curious standing rocks in the rough shapes of giant men and beasts, no doubt contributing to the local folklore.

Dread possibility - Anton's wife

Anton's wife, Nicole, and the gentlemen drowned with her, are still around (see Anton's background). These corpses creep at night on the road between Port d'Elhour and Marais d'Tarascon. They are only encountered when the moon is full, such as the night they died in the swamp.

These water bloated creatures, wearing stained old fashion noble clothes, will try to catch unwary travelers and drown them in the nearby swamp with them. If destroyed, Nicole and her unfortunate companion's bodies reform in a year, at a full moon, to haunt the roads once more and drown innocents.

Treat them as rank two mummies who appear as grey corpses, water bloated and making squishing noises. They are immune to fire.

Geographical Survey

Marais d'Tarascon

Dread possibility - Mordu

Mordu is a resident of Marais d'Tarascon whom rumours suggest is not a native of Souragne but instead may have come accidentally, through the Mists. Mordu is a nickname given him by locals which means "bitten" in Souragnien - bitten perhaps by madness, for he indeed is quite eccentric. He frequently speaks to himself in a language others do not understand and has an extensive book collection that difficult for Souragniens to understand.

One of the books in Mordu's vast collection, "The Cult of the Swamp God", is thought to be a treatise on the self-proclaimed "reptile god" allegedly dwelling on a world called Oerth. Mordu himself believes the swamp god detailed in the book is one of the loa revered and feared by Souragne's peasants that may also be found in the swamps.

The only book in his collection that he is unable to read is a book on the life of the Lord of the Dead - a book written in antiquated Souragnien, which few of the locals know how to read, and therefore that much harder for even a literate "outlander" to learn.

How Mordu came into possession of the book on the Lord of the Dead is unclear. It is quite possible that it was written out of narcissism or desperation and expected that a rare literature aficionado would appreciate the work. Another theory suggests that the book is a mysterious gift in return for services that Mordu has performed -perhaps without full awareness- on behalf of the Lord of the Dead

The native voodan themselves have apparently given specific names to many of these simulacra, in honour of various swamp spirits who color the land's prevailing mythology.

At nearly 50 feet high, the tallest of these natural structures is a limestone outcropping with the rather whimsical name Vierge d'Dindon, which, at a certain angle, looks like a rotund woman with a valiant gait looking westward ominously out into the swamps. Locals coming from as far as Port d'Elhour have taken to venerate Vierge d'Dindon, offering food, flowers, lamps and, curiously, little rag dolls at the foot of this humongous limestone pillar.

Hamlet; conventional; AL LN; CL 8; 100 gp limit; Assets 15 000 gp; Population 300; Humans 99%, others 1%. The 2nd Edition adventure: Night of the Walking Dead features maps and details on this hamlet.

According to local legend the seigneur Pierre de Tarascon founded this village two centuries ago. He needed workers for his plantation. Close to the marshes, this small village is built of poor-looking wooden houses. The Tarascon plantation is located east of the hamlet. It is now run by a cousin of Marcel Tarascon.

The hamlet of Marais d'Tarascon is a sleepy town during the afternoon where an onlooker might feel this place is abandoned or forgotten. While quiet during the day, I found it lively by the end of the afternoon. An important landmark of this town is the Full Moon Inn (both the rooms and food are average). The most interesting bit of local colour I was told was that liquorice sticks are known as "bone rattle" in this town.

Adventure hooks - Nights After the Walking Dead

After the events in Night of the Walking Dead, one of Marcel Tarascon's cousins might take over the family estate in Marais d'Tarascon and seek to enlist the PCs in his struggle against rival families who wish to claim the plantation and lordship over the town for their own. Like all nobles in Souragne, he would be abusive to the plantation workers, but may also possess an item or knowledge that is essential to the PCs, and which they can only obtain by cooperating with him (or her).

Also, the old part of the cemetery was sealed for over a hundred years before these terrible events involving Marcel Tarascon. The place has since been closed again, however, to prevent other sinister persons from establishing their evil activities there, adventurers are asked to check on this closed cemetery about once a year.

Chapter 1

There are a number of curious residents of this small village, but none attracted my attention more than talk of a local madman with a wide collection of books. It was regrettable that I was unable to locate him before this survey was completed.

Bernard Foquelaine, the current intendant mayor of Port d'Elhour, is the highest authority in Marais D'Tarascon. However, he is present only for the few monthly meetings of the council when he is needed. The wealthy Tarascon family keeps the law and manages day-to-day affairs.

In the past, Marais d'Tarascon was some of the richest farmland and important plantations on the island. It was a plantation grown so large it became its own town. However, the last centuries have eroded the wealth and status of the inhabitants and many avoid this locale as cursed. The famous events of two decades ago are just one of the many problems that have plagued the village.

Thibaut

Hamlet; conventional; AL LN; CL 8; 100 gp limit; Assets 7 500 gp; Population 150; Humans 99%, others 1%

Located at the Southern end of chemin Tristepas, this small hamlet is built around the Durand plantation and the Bourdiel merchant family.

Vardain Durand (Ari3) owns the plantation. This old family has made bad trading decisions in the last decade and its wealth is now just a shadow of what it used to be. The family coffers will soon be empty. The other member of this family, Hillaire Durand, is the sister of Vardain. On another fate line, the rich merchant Bourdiel family was very successful about overnight in rare wood trading with other domains. They plan to marry their daughter Renée to Vardain Durand.

In the southern marches closest to Thibaut, near the misty borders, lives a voodan of great power, Monsieur Mensonge (voodan 16th, See "Appendix 2 Who's Who" on page 84.). His reputation is that of a mighty sorcerer.

To Honour and Obey

There is an intriguing tale written in Dark Tales & Disturbing Legends about an arranged wedding, where many people have their darker interest in it. The role of Vardain, Hillaire, Renee and Monsieur Mensonge should be set by the DM before the PCs arrive in Thibaut, i.e. before, during or after this tale?

Other Rural Locales

Unorganized little thorps or smaller plantations of 100 persons or less; total population of about 1 200; AL CN or LN; CL 8.

On the road between Port d'Elhour and Thibaut, smaller plantations are found on Chemin Tristepas. Less successful than those located near the largest towns, these plantations are often owned by descendents of former slaves.

These plantation owners are often ruthless in the treatment of their employees. The profits from these exploitations are small. These seigneurs, in another domain, would be no richer than an artisan. Still, their workers treat them like richer seigneurs.

Travelers going south to Thibaut or wandering off Chemin Tristepas sometimes cross small, unnamed settlements. Made of frail looking wooden houses, these thorps look abandoned with a population composed of those fleeing the servile work found in the cities or the plantations or those looking to vanish from sight. They live by hunting or fishing as independency is an important value of these people.

These isolated places have many small forbidding voodan shrines hidden in the wilderness and the backward superstitious people are often afraid of strangers.

Sociological Survey



Chapter 2

Indigenous Peoples

Admittedly, I have spent the majority of my life in the Core, and much of that in my home of Dementlieu. As a result, I have been subject to the homogeneity of those lands where the different races are distinguished by the hue of hair. Thus, it was a jarring shock when I stepped off the boat. Even in my days educating bright young minds at my beloved University de Richemulot -an institution that attracts many from across our misted world- I did not see such diversity!

There are two very different races of people in Souragne. The first is very much like familiar peoples of my homeland. Almost too alike, but I shall write on this later. Light skin with darker shades of hair ranging from reds to browns. The second race is very different with dark brown skin and black hair that varies widely from kinky to straight.

Of course, I am describing the original appearances of the two peoples. Due to centuries of interbreeding, intermarriage and inter-class dalliances there is a fine mixture of traits with dark and curly hair being found in fair-skinned families and light auburn amongst darker skinned peoples. There are a few families, mostly the old-bloods and generationally rich, who insist upon purity of blood, but most everyone else has some degree of mixed blood.

Both groups refer to themselves equally as Souragniens and think of themselves as natives to the island. However, only the darker skinned peoples are truly natives; the fair-skinned Souragniens are settlers who came to the land many centuries ago.

Apart from the double examples of humanity there is precious little sentience in this marshy land. There are a scattered few calibans who roam the swamps but few other demihumans. I expected some pockets of elven fey in such a verdant land and was surprised to hear naught but wild rumours on such people. A pity as a village of such folk might have been an excellent excuse to invite our missing brother, Jonothan Lochspear, to join us in exile.

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For such a starkly divided people the Souragniens are a remarkably united in language and culture. While the history talks of slavery and common sense would imply racial tensions, this simply is not the case. The two people are as one, equals under the eyes of the law and society. Both can own property, land and have the same entitlement to rank, political office and social standing.

This is not to say all Souragniens are equal. There is a vast social divide between the rich and the poor. The landowners, merchants and wealthy are all considered the elites, an aristocracy that wields the power in the land. Anyone who has no property, goods or money is considered poor and can be beaten or worked to the point of death. The aristocracy treats this working class akin to dirt; they are below any consideration and barely even considered human. Even the owner of the smallest scrap of land is one of the cultural elite.

The two races influence the class divide; the dark-skinned former slaves are the overwhelming majority amongst the poor, although there is a rapidly growing number of fair-skinned folk in their ranks. And while there are dark-skinned folk in the elite, they are few in number and many married into their rank. The richest and most powerful plantation owners have a firm grip on their position and most new aristocrats, regardless of race, quickly lose their position.

Once, the commoners were slaves, property owned by the landowners and forced to work. However, slavery was based on racial lines and the pool of labourers fixed. For a variety of reasons (discussed below) slavery was abolished and now there is only paid labour. However, the quality of life for these poor wretches has not improved.

Workers are paid a pittance, a small token sum barely enough to cover the necessities. Many employers deduct the cost of food and lodging from these wages and put the workers up on their land. Others simply let the workers find their own way. At first this seems like an improvement, I know I thought

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paid labourers would fare better than slaves. However, slaves require a steep initial investment; they are expensive property that must be purchased. One typically does not damage one's furniture without good reason and neither does one cripple one's slaves.

Workers are another matter as it may take years, decades even, to spend the same amount of money as it would take to purchase a single slave. There is no investment in workers and they can be beaten, discarded or simply replaced for a minimal cost.

Debt also forces people into hard labour as the law requires those unable to pay to perform services for those whom they are indebted. Landowners are not required to pay their indentured help higher wages, nor does the law place restrictions on interest. Unscrupulous landowners often force whole families into increasing debt that they can never pay off, as their wages cannot compete with the interest.

The aristocracy is simply interested in the continuation of their status. Most of the true elites have been rich for generations and have a stranglehold on the best lands, the fertile fields and best trading routes. There is little threat of them losing their position or being usurped. There are but a few of these 'true' aristocrats, less than two dozen families in the entire land.

Many have fallen on harder times with the rest struggling to maintain their position while their peers steal their wealth and position further ensuring their own. Soon there may be less than a dozen rich families that control all, each holding several plantations.

Caught in the middle between the elites and the poor are the owners of local businesses, skilled craftsmen and the minor aristocrats. They walk a tenuous line between having money and having none. At any time they can ascend by becoming earning a high profit or descend into indentured service and forced labour. A bountiful crop or some chance luck can elevate a family for years, perhaps even a generation, while the reverse cripples for longer. The lesser elites live the most

precariously having to maintain a respectable standard of living and appearance but without the same amount of resources

Daily Life

Lifestyle varies wildly between the classes. There are few similarities between those of high and low rank. Souragniens conducts themselves about their business with as much grace and pride as they can muster. I was a little surprised by this, the commoners have a dignity all their own and refuse to be beaten down or have their spirit crushed. I found it both inspiring and off-putting.

The majority are common folk: those forced into a life of labour by debt, poverty, or birth that spend the entirety of their days working. From sun up until sun down, they toil in the fields tending to the livestock and crops. It is in the cotton fields that commoners are particularly numerous, the produce being labour intensive and requiring constant attention. Men, women and children all work the fields together, there is no separation based on age or gender.

Meals are taken first thing in the morning and again at night: a small breaking of the fast and large evening sup. There is no midday meal for commoners and instead there are a couple short breaks given during the day when they are allowed to rest and get something to drink. Cooking is done by those too old or injured to work the fields.



Chapter 2

It is not much easier as they must rise earlier to have food prepared and spend much of the afternoon cooking, cleaning and caring for the young.

As the aristocrats are followers of Ezra, they respectfully give their workers one day of rest every week. So every seventh day the common folk retire from the fields and are not required to work. Many workers ignore this and continue to labour for the extra money. This is especially true for the indentured labourers as it may be the only way they can extricate themselves.

From the age of six and upward, commoners are expected to work the fields for a living. Those younger are allowed to help around the homes or permitted to entertain themselves as long as they do not interfere with anyone.

A few commoners are rewarded with easier tasks and rank. They continue to live with the other commoners but are paid more, treated better and given a modicum of authority. They are expected to maintain discipline amongst the commoners. They are the favoured of their masters, those who -for one reason or another- have earned the gratitude of the aristocrats. They seldom work the field and instead spend their time in the kitchens and stables, or even inside the homes as servants. They have an easier life and are usually disliked by the other commoners.

The elite live a different life: they live off the efforts of their workers. They amuse themselves with various leisure activities such as games and dinner parties, often entertaining guests or visiting other plantations. They concern themselves with the trivialities of fine dining, grand dances and the latest of imported fashions.

A typical day is first spent tending to the few daily duties such as organizing the help and seeing to one's legal and financial affairs. Some spend their time with their families, often in such activities as schooling the children, but many leave this to an in-house nanny or governess. Evenings are usually devoted to social activities: small gatherings, parties or the like. Some aristocrats like to spend their time in

physical pursuits such as equestrianism or hunting on the borders of Maison d'Sablet. Others attempt creative endeavours such as painting or embroidery.

Social gatherings take up a disproportionate amount of time for preparation. Some take weeks to ready for but a single night. Some aristocratic families are known across the island for a specific seasonal ball and there is constant competition to hold the best and most entertaining bash of the year. This unofficial competition gets surprisingly cutthroat, sometimes even in the literal sense. Despite the small number of plantations, there is always a party in preparation somewhere.

For an example of an average party, I relate some of my experiences at the winter gathering of the Dessalines. They have an annual gathering at their estate, Twelve Oaks, where they celebrate the winter solstice. As it is the shortest day of the year they take the opportunity to revel from sunset to sunrise, something not that difficult given most nobles seldom arise before midday.

All the aristocratic families were invited, say the Mont Mirebalais and the Danneels, both snubbed for prior social faux pas. Coincidentally, the Danneels suffered a financial upset shortly afterward, so I do not expect to see them at future parties.



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Appetizers and hors d'oeuvre were served immediately as people were escorted into the ballroom for dancing and drinks. A live band entertained the revellers until the grandiose four-course dinner began. This was an extravagant event with extraneous silverware and as many different dishes as could be included. Conversation was light and full of gossip, rumours and innuendo came readily from both genders. Afterwards, the women withdrew for a game of bridge while the men took to a smoking room for drinks and conversation, much related to business. Over the course of the night there was a small theatre performance, drinks, more dancing and food, some light desserts, even more drinks and some diverting parlour games. Charades is often a popular game, as is one they call "similes". A good half-dozen different games were performed in a very mannerly and proper manner.

Beneath this opulent surface lay a darker party. Gambling was rampant throughout, with the ladies' bridge game being particularly high staked. A young woman identified as 'Lily' left in tears sans jewellery after a bad hand. Also invited to the party were several young, female commoners who were kept apart and referenced as "dancers" although they did not take part in the ball. Their dress spoke of wealth but their expressions and awe hinted at far more humble origins suggesting they were merely dressing the part. A number of men took them aside during the course of the evening and it became obvious what their purpose was. When I left, I noticed their numbers had diminished, sad victims of grimmer activities I imagine.

By far the grandest party of the year is the Mardi Finale. Every year on the last Tuesday of February, the population of Port D'Elhour holds Mardi Finale: a city wide festival filling the streets with music and dance. Celebrated by both upper and lower classes most of the attractions require no money. Seigneurs scowl at this festivity weeks before it occurs yet are still among the crowds wearing a decorative mask. There is a certain magic about the crowd that makes one act as if gone completely mad. Perhaps the most interesting part is a game involving

the collection of beads. It is uncertain why, but the people of D'Elhour seem fixated into collecting the beads of other people during this event. There are even trades of material goods, such as money or alcohol, for these beads. This may be the key reason why the lower class population is quicker to begin the celebration than upper classes, since Mardi Gras proposes an easy opportunity to obtain things otherwise too expensive to buy. Beads are not to only part of Mardi Finale worth taking part in as practically everyone in the region offers their talents to lighten up the city.

The week after Mardi Finale is a different situation. The Ezran clergy strictly dictate that this week is a time of fasting, prayer, and self-reflection. Gambling, whorehouses, and cockfights remain open, but receive significantly less business. Anchorites of Ezra don a black sash upon their left shoulder as a grim symbol that reality has come back after the sublime frenzy of Mardi Finale. Likewise, the clergy take no part in Mardi Finale itself, rather they spend time preparing for the week following. The streets at night can get quite eerie during this week, as one cannot help but hear inhuman moans of anguish soar from penitents.

Returning to the topic of this chapter, there are a small but growing number of dark-skinned Souragniens amongst the elites. Those few who, through luck, intuition or creativity, have managed to accumulate wealth and status. One would assume they would keep their traditional values and lifestyle but this is seldom the case. In fact, many act as other aristocrats, indulging in opulence and vice. Many actually exceed their peers in sheer decadence, as if they were making up for generations of lost time. As a result, few dark-skinned families maintain their position for long before excessive spending drags them back down. There are a few notable examples and it will be interesting to keep an eye on them. One cannot help but wonder if they have some outside edge.

I have spent far more time amongst the upper class of Souragne than the commoners and find them similar in lifestyle to the nobles of Dementlieu and Richemulot. They

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concern themselves with trivialities and entertainment existing only to amuse themselves. While diverting, I found much of the time intellectually draining with vapid conversation.

Literacy is all but unknown on the island, only a scant few have any knowledge of reading and writing. Even amongst the aristocrats and seigneurs there are precious few literates, it is seen as a useless skill and a "waste of time." Even poetry is ignored, odd for the flowery and dramatic nobles. History is taught orally, when it is taught at all. There is a remarkable and willing ignorance to the past. And what little science, philosophy and knowledge is quickly being forgotten in favour of superstition and myth. Books are equally rare although there is the occasional private collection, but even these tend to be damaged by the humidity. I needn't explain the tedious steps we have had to take to preserve our few surviving or rescued tomes. Damn the eyes of the thief that raided our library!

As mentioned, games are a favoured diversion of the wealthy, another example of the competitive nature of the Souragniens. Card games are currently in fashion and every good gathering has a card table readied. Despite being less popular at the moment other games are still played. Both checkers and backgammon have been popular for a time and crochet is just falling out of favour. To my chagrin, chess has never been held in high regard in Souragne. Savages! Although, a local game I have become quite fond of is called 'Bones' and is played with just over two dozen rectangular bone or ivory tiles called bones (hence the name of the game). Each bone is decorated with two sets of painted dots ranging from zero to six. Much like cards there is a number of different games that can be played with a set of bones.

Games are firmly equated with gambling in Souragne, especially card games. Even friendly sessions at a gathering or party are "made interesting" with some liberal wagering. What starts as a simple game of bridge can quickly become a devastating blow to one's purse. Men also enter into so-called "gentleman's wagers" over a wide

variety of subjects from crops and business to hunting trips. Other games of chance are almost epidemic in the urban areas with entire buildings devoted to gambler's art. From dingy alleyways to steamboats there are people wagering their life's worth for a single roll of a die.

Some of the more carnal-minded wealthy also frequent the "houses of ill-repute" throughout Port d'Elhour. These buildings cater to the sinfully minded -or rather the sinful burdened with unwanted gold. Many of these burlesque houses also feature gambling parlours to entertain the less lascivious. Ladies in the employ of these establishments tend to be upper and middle-class women who have fallen on hard times. It is seldom that a commoner finds employee in any but houses of the lowest quality. Common women are seen as too 'rough' and 'crude' to be appealing to men.

Upper-class establishments have performances with musicians and dancing girls (or so I have been told) and offer imported drinks. Privacy and discretion are promised and every step is taken to guarantee comfort. Not that being seen in such a place is harmful to one's reputation; certain things are just accepted in this land. I cannot imagine such activity being unabashedly tolerated back home. The reverse of this are the lower class brothels, little more than showrooms with dimly lit hallways leading to somewhat private suites. Unlike the high-class establishments, men of breeding never wish to even be seen soliciting in such a place. This does not mean they do not frequent such places; the few that do simply take greater pains not to be seen.

Clothing

Fashion is both ignored and desperately important on this island. Like so much else, it is subject to one's wealth and status.

The poor wear whatever they can find and dress equally in used-clothing or garments they have made themselves. Cloth headbands are common amongst any who spend their days toiling directly under the sun while others try to accent their clothing

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with neckerchiefs, simple woven necklaces or cloth belts. Others take a functional approach using hemp rope to hold their leggings up.

For men, loose shirts and sturdy breeches are the garb of choice. The shirts themselves are crudely woven and seldom have cuffs, ending in the middle of the forearm. Most bear signs of repair such as thick patches or sewn tears. Boots are worn if able but many wear crude sandals or go barefoot. Clothing is seldom dyed or coloured with the exception of plain earthen hues such as browns and greys.

Women wear lighter shirts, often with shorter sleeves that end just above the elbows. Thick skirts are worn instead of pants, often paired with heavy cloth aprons. Some women also wear thin, brightly dyed sarongs, but these are never worn while working and the aristocrats discouraged their use as being "undignified" and "not befitting civilized people". Small shoes or sturdy slippers are favoured over boots but women are just as likely to go barefoot as men.

Hair is typically short for the men, cropped tight against the head to keep one cool under the bright sun. Facial hair is neither favoured nor shunned; few commoners have time to shave on a regular basis and most sport the beginnings of beards. This definitely adds to the 'scruffy' look of lower-class men. Women let their hair grow long but seldom take care of it letting it become a tangled mass. They seldom adorn their hair with anything, simply tying it back when it becomes a nuisance.

In stark contrast, fashion is of vital importance for the elites. No expense is spared having the latest fashions imported from Port-a-Lucine and Port-a-Museau. Both genders slave over appearance, often refusing to leave their homes if they do not look perfect.

Men (currently) wear thin white shirts with frilly fronts and wide cuffs often accented with lace or frills. These shirts are always worn with expensive doublets or jerkins of various bright hues. Equally colourful breeches cover the legs and high riding boots finishing off the fashion. Colourful sashes,

kerchiefs and jewellery are worn as signs of wealth and style.

Women wear thin, brightly coloured dresses and gowns overtop their tightly pulled corsets. These dresses feature many petticoats and silken layers and more ruffles than would seem possible. Oddly, while pains are taken to cover the legs in a shapeless mass of fabric the tops are quite low-cut. This fashion of the wealthy is shockingly revealing to my Rlichemot sensibilities. Despite the latest of fashions being imported in, all dresses are altered to meet the local tastes. I cannot say I disapprove. Current accessories are lacy parasols -used to provide shade- and as much jewellery as can be worn without appearing (too) ostentatious.

Long hair is in-style for both men and women; men cut their just below shoulder length while women allow theirs to grow to the middle of the back. Both groom their hair meticulously, brushing and combing for hours. Women further adorn hair with broaches, clips and long pins. Men tend to tie theirs back with a single ribbon or clip. Men are uniformly clean-shaven, facial hair of any kind is shunned. The only exceptions are elderly gentleman who occasionally grow a goatee or Vandyke beard.

Jewellery is necessity for any aristocrat's wardrobe. Rings and pendants are common with men, while women adorn themselves with necklaces, rings, bracelets, broaches and more. Jewellery is typically precious metals with brightly coloured gold being favoured over silver and platinum. Gems and other precious stones are highly prized additions to any jewellery and these expensive imports fetch a high price. Brightly coloured stones such as jades, rubies, sapphires and the like are much preferred over white or transparent stones.

At the moment of this writing, violet is the colour of season. All the vests and gowns simply must be a royal purple hue and violets are in high demand as centrepieces. Amethysts are highly prized stones and are currently fetching a high price. Although, I expect this to quickly change as moods shift and some other fancy takes hold.

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Food

It took far longer to research this section than I would like, simply because it took me quite a while to develop a pallet for Souragnien cuisine. They cook with a local vegetable known as the 'chilli pepper' although it is nothing of the sort! While the locals insist that food must have some "zest" I find my meals tastier more when I'm not in burning agony. I don't know what flavour it is suppose to add because all I can taste is pain!

The locals enjoy a variety of what could best be termed "stews". They are mixtures of meat and vegetables thrown into a pot and cooked. However, they are colourfully given names like jumbalaya, gumbo and etouffee. The most common ingredients include onions, a variety of peppers, carrots and meat. Possible meats include chicken, rabbit, pig, fish, shrimp and other seafood. Recently introduced to the region is rice, a grain imported from Rokushima Taiyoo, which grows remarkably well in the moist soil of Souragne. It is quickly becoming a regional staple.

The locals also have the curious habit of burning the outside of their meals. They purposely blacken good food too add texture and flavour or some other such nonsense. While not as disturbing as their selection of spices it is an eccentricity unique to the island. Until we find a good cook from Dementlieu for la Maison I fear I may lose some weight.

Little livestock is raised in Souragne save for some small chickens and hogs. Chickens are by far the most common as they have a special significance in the religious rites of the land and a connection to the people. Few commoners don't have access to a coop. Pigs are also raised but in smaller numbers and usually prepared as spiced sausages.

Most of the meat for meals is either caught, such as snared rabbits, or more commonly, pulled from the water. Souragniens have an affinity of fishing that I envy. They are adept at feeding themselves from the rivers and coastlines of the island. Shrimp, fish, oysters, crayfish and more readily find their way into pots and onto plates.

I spent many days talking (and sometimes arguing) with the locals on the finer points of lures, nets and baits. I must admit, I have been landing more catfish since I swapped from chicken skin to fermented liver.

For a remote land of swamps, Souragne plantations actually boast a wide variety of unique and tasty dishes that would rival the concoctions of some of the best restaurants in Port-au-Lucine. While crude and rustic in terms of presentation, dishes range from the tantalizingly subtle, to so highly spiced they would be palatable to only the most experience palate.

The poor eat anything! One dish is made from a meat which visitors are referred to as "swamp chicken" that I later discovered is, in fact, a species of snake. When cooked properly it produces a meat that, as its name suggests, tastes just like chicken. In the manors, meal can be very refined, especially during balls. I witnessed a dish involving a large and brightly plumed bird, plucked prior to baking that, just before the end of the cooking process, was removed from the oven then carefully so the cook could painstakingly reinserted the animal's plumage. The end result was a stunning centerpiece for the meal table.

A number of plantations in Souragne grow a type of cane which can be squeeze to produce and extremely sweet syrup. The taste is reminiscent of the pulp of the Mordentish sugar beet or the sap of Lamordian sweet-pine. This is used to make a variety of confectionaries and sweets. It is sometimes drunk fresh or after fermentation, sometime with fruits and spices added. The fermented drink is particularly popular, and is purchased by the barrelful by visiting sailors. I found the drink to harsh myself, although I did partake of an interesting fruit concoction which used the spirit as its base.

- Prof. E.C.M Parsons

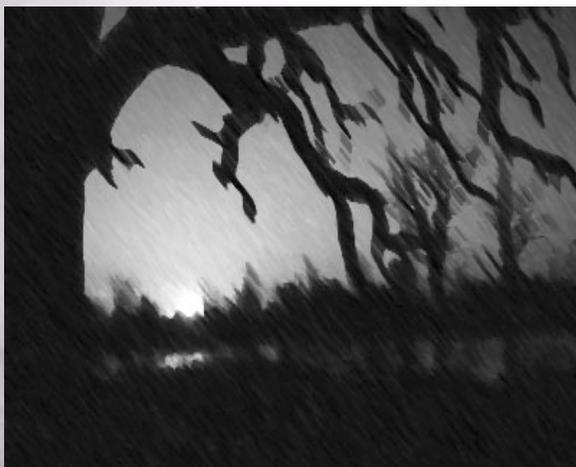
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There are some class differences between meals. Commoners tend to have smaller, simpler meals cooked in a communal pot. Sets of families share food and cook joint meals. It is easier for a family to fill their small garden with one type of vegetable than have to grow a variety. One might focus on raising chickens trusting others to provide them with greens. Or painful, fiery reds.

The wealthy cook their vegetables and meat separately, serving 'stews' as a side dish. They also use a wider variety of herbs and spices, many imported from as far away as Hazlan and Sri Raji. The nobles eat many exotic and imported dishes, especially when hosting parties.

I assumed wines would be the drink of choice and was shocked to find this not the case. Vineyards are rare in these swamps and what precious few bottles here have been imported. Some of the richer families bring in a dozen or so bottles for large parties with either Borcan or Invidian wines favoured, primarily due to reputation rather than flavour. They are seldom the finest vintages or from reputable vineyards but are treated as if they were.

Souragniens enjoy many beverages. The elites favour absinthe, a strong green alcoholic drink that is also mildly toxic. Although, it seldom causes any real impairment and its reputation is mostly for show. The implied danger adds to its mystique. Rum made from sugarcane is a far more common drink. The aristocrats drink rums flavoured with a variety of spices while the commoners make do with a watered down beverage named grog.



Language

I was surprised to hear Souragnien, the sole language spoken by all on this island. It is remarkably similar to High Mordentish, the speech of Dementlieu. With but a little practice, and when spoken slowly, I quickly picked a conversational understanding of the tongue and have no problems conversing without magical assistance. I may not be a linguist like brother Lochespeare, but this old professor is not uneducatable yet.

However, there is enough local slang and regional variants to throw off the unfamiliar, and the language has mixed with at least one native dialect. It has picking up the odd word or phrase while their accent is slurred lacking the crisp annunciation of Dementlieu making comprehension more annoying.

I would not assume a working knowledge of Mordentish would be enough if survival were at stake, nor would I expect a warm reception. Souragniens tend to think of those who do not speak their tongue as slow-witted or savages, whether they are from the backwoods of Valachan, the height of Paridon society or even speaking their language the way it is meant to be spoken.

Table 1: A Souragnien Primer

Alligator	Krokrodile
Boat	Kok-bato
Dead	Kaokoun
Fish	Balaou
Hello	Bozour
Help	Sokour
Magic	Mazi
No	Non
Old	Ancyin
Sea	Loséan
Sorcerer	Mazigador
Swamp	Marècage
Thank you	Romèrsi
Yes	Oui

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Outlook and Worldview

Like all things in this island, there is a dividing split. As the solid land is apart from the bog so do the commoner see the world differently than the elites. The poor see things in relation to nature with a mixture of spirits, animals and superstition, while the elites think in terms of people; either allies and rivals. Both have a strong connection of the 'old ways', the manner in which things were done years ago and, presumable, continue to be done. They are simply carrying the tradition and legacies upheld by their forefathers.

To the commoners, they are living life as unchanged as possible. They maintain their faith and religion and continual their rituals. They may work for their employers during the day but are their own masters by night. Then they are free to sing and dance and light the ritual fires. They are quite proud of how they managed to resist attempts to ban their rituals and corrupt their way of life.

The fallen elites who now toil in the fields are equally proud, as they will seem all the grander when they restore themselves or remove the tarnish from family's name. They are all convinced their misfortune is merely temporary, even if they have been in debt and poverty stricken for generations. Their compatriots in the middle ranks also hold the belief they are destined to rise to greatness and that they are not that far removed from the aristocrats.

To the nobles, they are living a life of culture and dignity, one far superior to anywhere else. They are refined gentlemen and ladies and the crême of society. These elites are convinced they are the cultural equals of Richemulot and Borca and Dementlieu, if not cultural superiors. During my initial visits I was greeted with a touch of disdain, as if I were quaint. They were, of course, happy to see I'd moved away from the savages of the Core to somewhere civilized.

After my months of research, I have managed to find one single word that describes their opinions and beliefs. Just one word that describes them all.

An interesting anecdote first. I filled a small bound notebook with my thought and observations on this land as I travelled its length and breadth. While relaxing in the comfort of la Maison I read through my thoughts and found I had used the same descriptor throughout. It cropped up repeatedly through the latter half of my notebook and I never realized it. The word was "hypocrite". Although "delusional egotistical hypocrites" might apply just as easily.

The dark-skinned commoners believe they remain true to the past despite having abandoned the clothing, language and daily life of their ancestors. They believe they can work for and with the fair-skinned Souragniens and still maintain a separate identity. The saddest example is those who find wealth and ascend into power and yet still believe they are in touch with their roots while they revel in greater debauchery than even other aristocrats. The middle-class fails to see their dwindling numbers as more and more descend into poverty and oppression or the vicelike hold the aristocrats maintain on their wealth and holdings. Finally, the aristocrats insist they are the cultural pinnacle of the land failing to see the obvious: that they are a pathetic folk ruling over a backwater swamp.

I cannot help but wonder if this fantasy is actually believed or if the shared delusions are simply a bold face put forward to hide from the truth. Or perhaps it is a lie told so often they have forgotten it is a lie and believe the falsehood.

Government and law

Souragne does not have a single political leader; each settlement has its own ruler. A Conseil des seigneurs gathers all the seigneurs of town, mostly plantation owners, but also some wealthy merchants. To be invited to this exclusive club, one has to have at least 25 workers working for him for the last five years. The Conseil usually meets four times each year.

The Conseil des seigneurs elect their leader, the intendant mayor. A plantation or

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merchant has one vote, but many wealthy owners make sure to have several votes on their side though loans or threats. The intendant is named for a period of two years, but if needed the Conseil can revoke a mandate and put someone else in his place (it has never happened but the threat is there). The intendant is the voice of the wealthy and the election of the intendant is always the occasion of intrigue and soft-spoken deals between the powerful families.

The people of Souragne are too poor to be taxed profitably; this is one of the few reliefs these persons have during their life. The Conseil votes on their self-taxing budget, which is used for administrating the town, the militia and other specific tasks or works, such as a new pier, a bridge, new armour for the militia, etc. Of course, they never miss a chance to let know the working class of the 'caring ways' of the seigneurs.

The few laws proclaimed by the Conseil made with the interests of the workers in mind, or so they claim while they really protect the status quo and seigneurs' interests. For example, among the worst crime would be to kill or otherwise incapacitate a plantation owner, "in the interests of the workers getting paid by this purveyor of work." Lovely way to phrase it, no? The punishment of such a rare crime is hanging on the public square.

There is no permanent militia for the towns although young seigneurs need to serve for two years in the Port d'Elhour militia. After this period of time, most noblemen are proficient with a weapon. At any given time Port d'Elhour has about 15 to 25 young nobles ready to take arms on short notice. They are well trained and well equipped (leather and shields, long swords, crossbows and many have pistols). The militia can also conscript the poor, adding 75 young workers within a day's notice (armed with clubs and wooden shields.)

In Port D'Elhour, the intendant mayor is a bright man very good at playing his influences and support in order to remain in power - so well, that Bernard Foquelaine (Ari3/Rog1) has been the intendant of Souragne's largest city since 742, always

being reappointed to the task every two years. But his current mandate is his last one since the man is now getting old and is often incapacitated by sickness. The seigneurs have at least three worthy candidates and the next Conseil vote should be intriguing.

In Marais d'Tarascon, with the benevolent accord of the Tarascon family, the current intendant is also Bernard Foquelaine. The intendant mayor of Port d'Elhour leaves his day-to-day duties to Constable Gremin (Ftr 3). Constable Gremin is also old and is considering leaving his duties to his second son (his first one died in 730 during events leading to the Great Upheaval.)

In Thibaut, the intendancy is shared between the Bourdiel and Durand family. It is mainly an honorific title since few things need immediate decision in this quiet hamlet.

The intendant and Conseil des seigneurs know better than ignore the Lord of the Dead. When they receive a commandment from him it is quickly obeyed. However, whenever they can they like to remind the workers and foreigners that they are the dominant force of Souragne.

Trade with Other Lands

Even if Souragne is isolated within the Mists, it has established trade links with other lands. The primary destinations of these trade routes are Darkon and Liffe, due to the Wake of the Loa mistway, but the interested coastal nations of the Northwestern Core (Mordent, Richemulot, Dementlieu and Lamordia) are also common destinations. Souragnien trade ships traverse the length and breadth of the Nocturnal Sea stopping at all the islands there

In the last decades, the population of these lands has grown fond of Souragnien goods and several seigneurs have grown richer in short time. The main exports are cotton, sugar, tobacco, café and dried fish. A more recent addition is rice; the grain of Rokushima Taiyoo grows so well here they have begun to export it to the Core.

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Adventure hook - Trade help

Characters must represent Souragne's political interests abroad (in the lands of the Core), or try to establish new colonies in existing (or as yet undiscovered) islands of terror. Of course, treachery between noble families means that either the PCs can never be sure of the rewards they will get for successfully carrying out their mission, or that they can earn the enmity of rival families who will stop at nothing to see the plans of the PCs and their backers fail.

Imports tend to be specialty goods unavailable for the locals, exotics and luxuries to please the elites: fashions from the West, wines from the middle, craftworks from the East, and spices from everywhere. Exotic foods and some animals are occasionally brought back, especially if they are entertaining.

Heroes are often hired as guards to bring back payment to Souragne, or for special tasks, such as an inquiry on a merchant's emissary's disappearance. Given the long treks goods must sometimes make across the entire Core, guards are all but a necessity.

History

I encountered difficulty as I focused on the island's past; the high number of illiterates meant few reliable historical documents were written. Much of the history is passed down through oral stories. It became a frustrating endeavour to piece together what happened. Further complicating this is the possible false nature of the past, I am sure my brothers are aware of the theory that whole peoples and lands are created by the will of the enigmatic force(s) that control our world. It is impossible to know how much of the history is real and how much is fantasy, like the false memories of Darkon.

After weeks of searching, I stumbled upon three tomes that proved invaluable. The first was a copy the private journal of Edvard Renfus, captain of a Darkonian vessel that stumbled upon the island over a century ago. It impressed me so that I dispatched someone to examine the original in Nevuchar Springs and send me notes on what they discovered. The second is the book written by his descendant, Dannen Renfus, a bard who lived on the island for a time while researching his ancestor's journey. Lastly, I used the diary of Pierre Tarascom. Tarascom, notable for the town named after his family and a series of events that occurred there.

I will include passages from all three when relevant. While insightful, they are not always entirely accurate but still proved an excellent insight into the past.

Excerpt from: The Journal of Captain Renfus

A little back, in 635 BC, this island of Souragne was first sight'd in the Mists by this Darkonian mariner. My name is Captain Edvard Renfus and my crew of the Nevermore mired our ship on one of the many sandbars that lurk beneath the surface of the Murky Sea in the vicinity of Port d'Elhour. We were cautiously rescued by townsfolk who marvelled our arrival, for the local colonists had lost all contact with the outside world for the better part of a year. We expected celebration or greetin' as heroes but found none.

My crew and I spent nearly one year in Souragne, during the course of which we tried unsuccessfully to tow the Nevermore out of the shallows before we built a new ship, La Licorne, in collaboration with some wealthier benefactors, the Mont Mirebalais family. Meanwhile we also took time to explore the island and get to know its people, culture, and language.

It is a grim and cheerless land, at least in my opinion. The people are unfriendly and callous with little joy remaining in their lives. They seem to do little but go through the motions of daily life. How I longed to return to Darkon and my waiting wife.

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This report is more that a little odd and does not at all seem like the Souragne I currently reside in. When I discovered this and read both the Captain's Journal and the ship's log I was confused and ready to abandon my research. Then I recalled reading about similar shift in attitudes in Invidia and Sithicus. Some dramatic event has occurred between this land's emergence from the mists and the present day.

Excerpt from: "Souragne and its People" by Dannen Renfus

For the following history I rely on both oral history and some intriguing notes on the life of nobleman Anton Misroi (born aprox. 599 BC, died 635), which recently were found near Marais d'Tarascon in the possession of an eccentric man by the name of Mordu. They suggest that prior to the arrival of Captain Renfus, Souragne was but an isolated trading outpost on a sea route linking what its inhabitants call the "Old World" (and a country called Aurélians in particular) and the "New World." The colony had existed for perhaps a little over a century when much of it was lost to the mists.

The island was discovered by one Capitaine Ferdinand Misroi and his crew of maritime explorers from Aurélians in what I estimate to be 528 on the Barovian Calendar. The Emperor of Aurélians reportedly chose the name Souragne himself - though there is no record as to what the name signifies or signified.

Ferdinand Misroi, who was widely whispered to be an ambitious and scheming man, initially considered claiming the island for himself without alerting the Emperor to its existence. He quickly concluded that it was only a matter of time before rival explorers, from Aurélians or some competing power, reported his discovery and he would need to fight to keep his land against usurpers. Misroi, who had always had a reputation as a highly independent type, decided that it might be wise to present the island to the Emperor as a gift and a sign of unquestionable loyalty, hopefully in exchange for being granted title and rule over the island. This anticipated reward

would in turn grant him the defensive support la Marine Impériale de Auréliaise whenever he might require it, as well as a secure base of operations to launch his continued forays into the New World.

I wonder at the location and existence of this "Aurélians". The language is so remarkably similar to that of Dementlieu and Mordent one cannot help but wonder at a possible common origin. Obviously, Dementlieu could not have been Aurélians; the former did not reveal itself from the Mists until seven decades after the discovery of Souragne. However, with what we suspect of the origins of our lands, it is possible that Aurélians is a forgotten relation to Mordent. It could be a colony, related land or even the land from whence the folk of Mordent came.

This possible connection is further muddied by the worship of Ezra by the aristocrats of Souragne. Given the age of the churches in Port d'Elhour, it is unlikely that the Borcan faith spread to the island in the century that the island has been in the Mists. The locals insist that Ezra is the faith of their Aurélian progenitors, but there is no way to be certain.

I am interested in this man Mordu, if he could be found -either alive or dead- he might be a valuable source of information. However, he has currently evaded all my attempts to locate him, both mundane and magical.

Excerpt from: The Journal of Captain Renfus

The people of this island are of two races. At one time slaves from other distant colonies were also brought to Souragne. The conquerors did what they could to dominate the native inhabitants of the island, subjugating hundreds and slaughtering thousands who would not yield to their will.

It is said that Souragne was much larger then than it is now, the island stretching almost 100 miles farther to the south of the Tristepas. There was also land rumoured to exist southwest of Maison d'Sablet, but few settlements were ever established there

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Some of the savages managed to hide in the swamps or in the hills, but over the course of the following decades the last of their number were exterminated.

The once impressive size of the Island would explain much, such as the source of the resources that supplied the construction of the settlements and plantations, to say nothing of the endless graveyards. Currently stone and limited ore has to be pulled from small quarries on the Eastern border, a dangerous task as folk frequently vanish into the Mists. However, there is not nearly enough stone and ore there to have built the large pre-existing buildings or minted the pre-existing currency.

Excerpt from: "Souragne and its People" by Dannen Renfus

While Ferdinand Misroi was granted title and deed over a respectable parcel of fertile land close the edges of Maison d'Sablet, the Tarascon clan quickly developed the wealthiest holdings on the island. Of the four Tarascon sons who came to Souragne, Pierre by far was the most successful. He was arguably the most prosperous land owner in Souragne and attracted many labourers and craftsmen to his estate, which, in but a few short years, grew into the town of Marais d'Tarascon.

His good fortune was due in part to the quality and size of the land as well as to his intuitive understanding of the agricultural techniques that could be applied most effectively to the Souragnien context. Moreover, as the eldest son of the Tarascon clan, he had inherited a small fleet of merchant vessels from his recently deceased father. With this fleet, he easily could export his crops and timber back to Aurélians at little cost, while also being able to charge hefty, yet still competitive, shipping commissions to other land owners of more limited means who sought to export their exotic goods back to the Old World.

Meanwhile, the Misroi family's land, located at the southern edge of the Maison d'Sablet, slowly began to sink into the bog. The once solid and fertile ground became marshy after poorly implemented irrigation paired with unfortunate flooding drenched the soil. The northern fields became increasingly mired and the Misroi were forced to rely on the less fertile southern fields. This, combined with the success of the Tarascon's, only infuriated Misroi, who saw his influence on the island decline year by year.

Ah, the start of the famed Misroi/Tarascon rivalry. Many songs, stories and jokes have been told over that lasting feud. The two rivalling plantations that set the stage for all the lesser familial quarrels that continue to this very day. This went on for almost a century before the Misroi line all but ended with the death of its patriarch Anton, save for a few scattered members without the land and power they once had. More recently, the Tarascon line has been crippled after the events of twenty years ago.

Despite this, Marais d'Tarascon is still a living town and frequent stop for vessels braving the swamp, especially those hoping to by-pass the often-expensive port authority at Port d'Elhour. Meanwhile, the once grand Misroi plantation is now lost in the swampland of Maison d'Sablet.

Excerpt from: The Diary of Pierre Tarascon

Woe and shadow lurk over the minds of my countrymen. Despite the constant growth in our land's prosperity over the past half-century, we fear the prophetic remarks made by a mysterious gypsy.

It occurred shortly after I founded my legacy, the town of Marais d'Tarascon. The gypsy man - named Hyskosa - arrived on our shores. He was rumoured to have been seen in Aurélians on several occasions, and was known to have an uncanny ability to predict the future with remarkable accuracy.

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How he came to Souragne none seem to know. He had not travelled to the island aboard any of the ships that were docked in Port d'Elhour and many later whispered that it was as if a ghost had ridden in from out of the fog on a wagon to deliver a message to poor myself.

Initially I welcomed the gypsy with warmth to Marais d'Tarascon, even inviting him to my estate. Would that I have simply cast him from my sight! I was looking forward to hearing the man's travel tales and fortune telling. I admit I enjoyed the attention and talk that Hyskosa would generate among the island's populace, being the centre of attention brings many advantages. Hyskosa remained in Marais d'Tarascon for several weeks, spending much of his time with myself.

Shortly before he vanished without a trace, riding down the road on his wagon, Hyskosa left me with two shocking revelations: the first, that Souragne would suffer a terrible curse by the end of its first century of existence! The second would occur yet another century later and would involve the manifestation of one of the Six Signs that would forever change both island and the wider world around it.

I was dumbfounded. In a state of despair, I began to share Hyskosa's revelations with my brothers and others in my social circle. It was not long before the tale spread around Souragne and had taken on a life of its own.

I do not record the Six Signs here; I cannot bear to write them again. Nevertheless, they have been recorded for prosperity on a scroll, a scroll penned by the gypsy himself, which I now hide for its safety for it may be the source of our salvation.

I found this report enlightening and shocking. My brothers should recognise the name "Hyskosa" immediately. What is most startling is the date, approximately 535 BC! This is more than a century before Souragne was drawn into the Mists and well before the time of the fabled Dukkar. And it is exactly two centuries before the first recorded prophesizing of the Hexad in 735, as noted in many timelines of our Land.

I am aware of the time-altering properties of both the Mists and the Vistani (especially the Canjar) but if this is true it is simply extraordinary.

We must investigate this further as the ability to move so far back through time that one emerges in a land before it is engulfed is too tempting a possibility to ignore! To journey down the river of time to the actual moment of creation might even offer a glimpse of the Watchers.

However, this might simply be a creation of the false history, a faked memory revealed through the glaring discrepancy between observed events. Or it may simply be a Vistani of the same name or tribe, an ancestor of the Hyskosa we know. The descriptions are similar but not beyond the realm of coincidence.

Excerpt from: "Souragne and its People" by Dannen Renfus

For decades following Hyskosa's visit, the island's prosperity only continued to increase. The indigenous natives were virtually annihilated and their "threat" eliminated, crops were abundant, Port d'Elhour and Marais d'Tarascon grew steadily, and the Tristepas roadway was constructed to link Port d'Elhour with the island's other communities. Rivalries and intrigue continued between noble families; the Misrois and the formal representatives of the Crown pervaded the island, but had little impact on its economy and overall political stability. Insect-borne diseases and tropical storms periodically afflicted the colony, but life went on as normal and Hyskosa's predictions were forgotten.

Then, a series of disasters struck the island during its second half century. Decades of warfare in the New World and along the naval routes connecting the Old and New Worlds ravaged Souragne's economy and curtailed travel to and from the island; both a slave rebellion and civil war (with the Misrois on one side and the Tarascons on the other) resulted in significant loss of life on the island. My estimates place the casualties from 3,000 to 5,000 lives lost.

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The Yellow Death claimed nearly 2,000 additional souls to the death toll. People began to recall Hyskosa's prophecy and sought to flee Souragne.

A few years following the closing of Souragne's first century of colonization a hurricane of unparalleled force battered the island for weeks preventing contact with all central and southern settlements; all sought what shelter they could find. The massive eye of the storm positioned itself overtop Maison d'Sablet cutting off vast sections of the island with a terrifying wind and pounding rain. Unnaturally, it held its position for days cutting off all outside contact. When the storm at last died down it was replaced by thick fog, which continued to choke Souragne. A fog thicker and more pervasive than any the inhabitants had seen before.

Those who remembered the tale of Pierre Tarascon and Hyskosa agreed that the gypsy's first prophecy had come to pass. Complete despair settled on the islanders.

To the people of this island it is merely 'the Storm', a terrifying memory of a disaster long since past. To the enlightened, like ourselves, it is clearly the moment the land was created or brought into the world. The seminal event -the impetus behind the land's creation- can be found in the events of 635 BC.

With the sketchy records, it is hard to be positive what occurred. However, one event stands out: the death of Anton Misroi. In fact, the entire Misroi family disappeared one night in 635 around the time of the Storm. It could very well be they perished in that disaster, or, much more likely in my opinion, their collective murder was the event that caught the attention of the Watchers in the Shadows!

The question remaining is who was behind the murder of the family? The most obvious suspects are the Tarascon family, especially with the recent rumours of their consorting with monsters. But there is no obvious individual on which to pin the crime, no single Tarascon that stands out as such a notorious villain.

The other likely suspect is the Lord of the Dead, the Loa figure feared by all across the land. While I am not convinced of his existence, I have seen enough to believe there is something or someone that fits the role. He is rumoured to make his home deep in the swamp and is known to be quite vengeful. It is very possible that Anton Misroi offended the Lord and the entire family paid the price.

Whatever the truth the event proved wicked enough to catch the darkest of attentions and drag the land deep into the Mists.

Excerpt from: "Souragne and its People" by Dannen Renfus

The first decade after the storm was a tumultuous time. The world had changed and the rest of the island had been washed away by the hurricane and smothered by the Mists. The populace felt detached from their old lives, removed from humanity. A disgruntled apathy settled across the minds of the people and the period was marked by a series of particularly cruel and humiliating acts.

Strict and harsh laws were enacted, punishments for disobedience were severe and plantations isolated themselves from their neighbours. The few ships that had survived the storm made no attempts to seek other lands or return to Aurélians.

It was on 645 that life was finally seen to have stabilized. In an abrupt shift cheer was restored to the people. Most of the new laws were repealed and forgotten and homes were again reopened to neighbours. The shock of being cut-off finally wore away and shipyards sprung up and trade was renewed.

This was also the remarkable year that the nobles "freed" their slaves. They openly claim to have done this because they thought it was uncivil to keep and trade men like animals, and therefore decided to do the respectable thing by paying their workers. Admittedly few workers managed to save enough to buy their way out of servitude and most continue to work just as if they were slaves, but most nobles remind doubters that change takes time.

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More cynical folk claim that being isolated made slavery un-maintainable, that without the armies of Aurélians or threat force the slaves would have risen up. But if this were true why would they poor and indentured workers not revolt?

Another frustrating passage albeit one that shines a light on the initial comments of Captain Edvard Renfus. It seems that some dramatic change occurred ten years after the land appeared in the Mist. Something fundamentally altered in Souragne, something akin to the dread lord being slain or usurped. Something that caused the entire land to shudder imperceptively. Something there is no record of, no trace of, no real evidence of; I am sure something happened but can find no proof of the matter.

Regardless, life subtly changed in Souragne. The people regained their focus on manners and civility -regained their humanity if you will- but adopted an attitude of superiority paired with a refusal to see their flaws and mistakes. Incidents of casual cruelty did not diminish, slaves -or rather workers- were beaten just as savagely, only now the façade and attitudes had changed.

Excerpt from: "Souragne and its People" by Dannen Renfus

In 739 BC, sombre gypsies again emerged from the Mists with their wagons and visited Marais d'Tarascon. The meaning of this visit was all too familiar to the locals. Remembering the cautionary tales of their ancestors, the residents of the village prepared for the worst. For weeks, the skies over Marais d'Tarascon were an oppressive and roiling black. Villagers suddenly began to vanish, descend into madness, or die mysteriously without warning, including Marcel Tarascon, head of the Tarascon estate. The village, not the cheeriest place at the best of times, choked with terror's grip.

Brave adventurers dared face the challenge and attempted to prevent the passing of one of Hyskosa's six signs: "The light of the sky shining over the dead / shall gutter and fail, turning all to red".

It is said that their investigations led them to confront the monster that had been responsible for the sudden deaths and disappearances in Marais d'Tarascon. Yet a crimson moon shone through the roiling black clouds and the sky shed bloody tears in a torrential downpour as the heroes fought their adversary - one of the foretold Six Signs of the second prophecy had come true.

While the supernatural events left the islanders reeling, they learned years later that part of the grand prophecy concerning the Six Signs had been averted, and that they were spared the full brunt of the Great Upheaval of 740 BC.

I have read Hyskosa's prophecy, it is required reading in our Fraternity after all. A confusing mass of typical foresight that can be attributed to any number of events. Events said to be fulfilments of the Hexad and related the Great Upheaval can be found in the histories in every land. Everyone has their legends and stories where they claim responsibility for saving the world. While many of the occurrences are inarguably related (such as Daglan and the Crown of Souls in Kartakass) there is much scholarly debate on the missing revelations. Skully is convinced events in Har' Akir were apart of the prophecy while Reuland subscribes to the theory that events in Sri Raji fulfilled the Hexad.

The eclipse and related events in Souragne do suggest one of the six signs occurred in this swampy land, but there is no way to be sure. It remains a fanciful theory that is unprovable and of little use to the Fraternity. Whatever the truth, that year climaxed the downfall of the Tarascon family.

Excerpt from: Souragne and its People by Dannen Renfus

The confidence of the Souragnien nobility has grown steadily over the past decade. Dark prophecies no longer hang over their heads and they weathered the last two relatively well.

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They have begun to explore the seas more aggressively, hoping to establish colonies of their own on forgotten, yet resource-rich islands. Souragne strives to become a world power, but it lacks the intelligentsia and innovators who can efficiently harness those ambitions into effective action. Likewise, the never ending treachery between noble families (and in particular between the Tarascons, Misrois, Dessalines and the Mont Mirebalais) inhibits the collaboration that is required for Souragne to play a more influential role on the world stage.

For all their talk of being the epitome of rational and civilized society, most Souragnien nobles are very superstitious and have an arguably healthy fear of the spirits that are worshipped by the commoners-and of the Lord of the Dead in particular. It is rumoured that the Lord of the Dead may actively oppose the plans of some of the families. This likely will affect the extent to which the expansionist ambitions of Souragne's nobility are or are not realized in time.

Ah, the joys of history. Describing events of pure truth and facts with as much bias and opinion as a single author can manage. Finding the truth is much like fishing: one casts out a line and sometimes snags a decent morsel, while other times hours can pass without even a nibble.

I have presented what I have found and commented where I can, which is all one can do. They say those with no knowledge of the past are doomed to repeat mistakes and this is especially true of Souragne where the people cannot even see their mistakes regardless of how plainly visible they are.

Customs and Beliefs

I cannot overstress the role of etiquette in society. There is a 'proper manner' for introducing people, mealtime, courtship and every other aspect of life. These rules are not universal; the commoners have one way of doing things and the aristocrats have another.

The common folk have a very earthy lifestyle with an emphasis on nature and the living world. Their religion is important and plays the dominant role in their life. Everything is thought of in relation to the spirits, the spirits and loa are consulted on every major decision. Prayer is frequent and small offerings are left on an altar every day. Sometimes animal sacrifice is required, for special occasions when a favour or service is required of the spirits.

This belief in the spirits colours all activity as one must be careful not to offend any loa, either your patron whom you worship directly or any of the others. You must not kill the wrong animal or break any of the many taboos; you must not invoke the wrath of any other worshipers or sorcerers.

Failure to observe etiquette leads to illness. The sick are blamed for causing their own disease. Predictably, the cure for the illness is to make amends to the offended spirit or sorcerer. For ambiguous faults sometimes elaborate rites are needed to pacify the slighted and the assistance of a voodan priest is required.

Rites can include a number of items and seem to revolve around a few key animals or thematic objects. Feathers and bones are common instruments although the type of bird the feather came from is highly important depending on which spirit one wishes to deal with. Bones can be used in a variety of ways from wands or noisemakers (rattles, drumsticks) to clothing adornments, they are simply key symbols. Common animals are spiders and reptiles with snakes being the far most common. This does not include sacrifices, something chickens are typically used for. Already I have seen so many birds be gutted I begin to feel sorry for the poor dumb birds.

For more on Loa and Voodan please see the next chapter for a report excerpt filed by another of our order. Those interested in this brand of magic are encouraged to consult the full manuscript, which includes lengthy descriptions of observed spells and attempts to replicate them through arcane means.

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Belief: Cabrit Sans Cor'

Cabrit sans cor' is a seldom used phrase by the Souragnian and translates as "goat without horns" and, contrary to the translation, does not infer to female goats but instead to a human sacrifice. During a ceremony to summon a loa, the voodan make sacrifices to the loa they are summoning. The loa are asked what they want, most will be pacified with offerings of rum or food, but some will only be pacified with a sacrifice. Usually the sacrifice is chicken but goats or bulls are also given on occasion. However, the fear that the loa may ask for a human remains such a concern that it has been built into the very chants required to summon the loa, for example:

Mistress Lethede, come and aid us.

If a cock is demanded, we will give it.

If a bull will suffice, behold it.

But if a goat without horns is required for sacrificed,

Oh, where will we find one?

Letheda is one of the more gentle loa, often summoned for protection, but still the fear is there and if needed the demands of the loa will be met.

There are two views of magic to the commoners: the magic of the spirits and the loa, and the magic of death and corruption. In terms my esteemed brothers would understand, they believe only in divine (or priestly) magic and in necromantic arcane magic. While the power of the loa is respected and feared, for it is the power of hurting as well as healing, it is still viewed as natural. Only that magic which has a parallel with the loa - that of necromancy and healing - is permitted. Arcane magic is not, and is seen as an abomination, a twisting of the land. A frequently cited legend says that it was magic that sunk the land and raised the waters to the west turning much of the island into swamp.

Dread Possibility: The Red Moon

The coming of the red moon marks a day of silence by the Loa of Souragne, for it marks the day they lost one of the greatest from their number, the wife of Kurkva. This event is highly disruptive to undead and magic users, often causing those of the undead to suddenly be cut off from the energy that animates them, unless they are under the control of the Lord of the Dead; or spell caster's spells to backfire (DC 14 Wisdom-based to be able to cast a spell correctly).

Arcane magic is also blamed for a rare phenomenon when the moon becomes blood red, an omen of significance that seldom bodes well. Superstition runs rampant on such nights.

Now, after some time on the land I can tell you quite clearly that arcane magic has no more corruptive effect than in any other land. The natives speak out of fear and ignorance, especially as many other mage spells have effects similar to priestly ones. Both can summon up fire as easily as they raise the dead. They speak only out of fear and belief in their teachings. However, this does not make their fear any less relevant to this report; they will react very badly to any overt display of magic.

The elites have very, very different beliefs. They hold to the religion of their forefathers, to Ezra, but most pay this little more than a lip service. Some are devout practitioners but most simply go through the motions with little piety or passion. They will claim to be strong in their faith but this is another little self-deception.

Chapter 2

Instead of faith, the dominant belief in their lives is manners. The aristocrats are motivated by what is polite or proper or expected. There are entire books written on the subject of manners and respectability, not that they do much good to these illiterate folk. This (mostly) unwritten code is enforced by gossip and fear of shunning more strictly than any law in the land.

Manners are a dance, much like the formal balls so enjoyed. They have their introduction and bow followed by an elaborate movement of feet where you attempt to be as fanciful and graceful as possible while not stepping on your partner's toes. There is an atmosphere of one-upmanship to politeness, almost an unspoken contest.

To be seen as crude or improper is a horrific fear of the upper class. It is a label sure to kill one's chance of attending future balls and hinder business opportunities. No one wishes to consort with someone who has been deemed 'improper'.

Noble Souragniens say it is because of their superiority they must have manners and rules, it is a part of civilized society. It is a firm belief of the aristocratic Souragniens that they are the peak of civilization, that they are a kind and compassionate and enlightened souls. Their manners are simply another sign of their superiority as a culture. They claim not to look down on the commoners and instead say they are slowly working to educate them, to make them as enlightened as they are. They see themselves as parents who must teach and discipline a child. I believe I have documented the truth enough and my Brothers can guess at the true state of affairs.

The elites also claim to not believe in the supernatural dismissing it as folk tales that entertain the common folk. Magic and spirits are viewed with disdain; stories for those not educated enough to know better. And yet I have still witnessed seigneurs paying a voodan priest for a favour or nobles shopping around for charms. They whisper small prayers under their breath and follow a number of small superstitions design to ward away evil spirits or bad luck. True magic is

still rare in the upper classes. Magicians and practitioners of our art are precious few in the land already, but they are even fewer amongst the nobles.

Souragniens festivals and holy days

Souragnien observe many "holy" days in their loa worship: there are numerous loas and most of them have their special place for worship in the year. The most feared and worshipped of all loa is the Lord of the Dead, and four days during the year are Days of the Dead, in addition to the moonless night when his worshippers also pray to him. The Maiden of the Swamp is also revered all through the year but especially around early spring. The other loa usually have one holy day each.

Arcane magic in Souragne

The Lord of the Dead has placed a ban on all magic in Souragne not related to the Loa or Necromancy. He has precious little understanding of the arcane arts, and what he does not know or understand he fears. He maintains this ban through rumour and fear, hinting that magic corrupts the land or increases the size of the swamp. He tells tales of those who were once men but now walk as lizards and reptiles due to magic

However, the darklord has no unnatural ability to sense small uses magic. He scrys across his land and uses spies to keep an eye out for magicians while encouraging locals to reveal anyone who uses magic. However, he is not omnipotent thought and careful wizards can slip through his grasp.

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Souragne's Misty Border: Risk, Profit, and Liberté

It is a common belief amongst the poor that the mountains that once allegedly rose from the heart of Souragne and provided the raw materials for the towns and estates have not vanished, but have merely faded from view and are lost in the Mists. The brave or the foolhardy may search the Mists in search of building materials. Although the financial profits from such attempts can be enormous if successful, more often than not would-be entrepreneurs either never return, or come back scared out of their wits. All sorts of creatures reportedly dwell in the Mists, and the manpower required to bring back a supply of stone in such a godforsaken environment therefore makes profitable ventures difficult to organize-few are willing to risk their skin.

Freedom and true equality are distant dreams to most Souragnien commoners. For some, the dream never dies -quite the contrary, it grows stronger as the abuses they suffer grow. For countless generations labourers have passed down the legend of a place called "Liberté", where peace, freedom, and long lost friends await the weary workers. Many dismiss it as nothing but legend, refusing to place their hopes in such a mad delusion. Others consider the dream to be their salvation, a dream rekindled by the odd person actually claiming to have made it to Liberté.

The legends state that Liberté lies through the Mists and in order to reach it one must first have suffered a great deal at the hands of the land owners, then come into possession of a protective charm or amulet before finally dreaming of a safe pathway to the settlement. On the following new moon, the dreamer must walk off the Tristepas into a patch of fog and seek the path she saw in her visions while keeping one step ahead of the demons that wish to lead her astray and

devour her soul. Most who attempt the journey are never seen again -whether because they perished along the way or successfully reached their paradise is unknown. Some return with their sanity badly damaged after some horrific encounter in the Mists.

A few do return to Souragne in order to spread the word and to encourage others to make the journey. Needless to say, the land owners do everything they can to silence all discussions concerning Liberté, going so far as to hunt down and slay those who claim to have been there.

It should be noted that despite (see plantations) Élie Belenfant's fiery sermons concerning the way to Liberté, he himself has never been there nor does he actually wish his workers to make a break for freedom. Belenfant's version of Liberté implicitly stresses that freedom and happiness can be found in hard work, voluntary servitude, and adherence to his gospel. Other paths to Liberté are false; "shortcuts" ultimately lead to damnation, peace and freedom on a superficial level.

Search for Liberté Part One

Jeannine Mirabel, a commoner claiming to have successfully made it to Liberté, contacts the PCs. She needs their assistance to discretely spread word of her journey, to recruit others for the journey, and ultimately to escort the fugitives through the Mists. Possible events would include developing relationships with commoners and voodan, clandestine meetings to spread Jeannine's word, properly judging the strength and desire of deserters while keeping the land owners in the dark concerning the escape.

The PCs might feel that the authorities are closing in on them. Once Jeannine and the PCs have recruited a sufficient number of people and are ready to embark, the local militia attack the fugitives, attempting to capture as many of them as possible to make an example of them.

Jeannine mysteriously disappears without a trace leaving the PCs to flee or to defend the fugitives against the militia (Jeannine actually works for one of the landowners, has never been to Liberté, and was tasked with unearthing as many potential "coureurs" as possible). It might be possible for the PCs to discover Jeannine's true plans and to come up with countermeasures; Jeannine would insist that some of her relatives are being held hostage. Belenfant might intervene in the conflict, but whether on the side of the militia (to punish the weak who would be so easily swayed to follow a "shortcut" to freedom) or on the side of the fugitives (to give them a chance to convert to his faith) also is up to the DM.

Search for Liberté - Part Two

The Lord of the Dead is growing increasingly distraught over the rumours of Liberté's existence; however, he is unable to perceive its location even though he usually has little trouble peering through the Mists. Misroi hires the PCs through agents in Port d'Elhour to investigate. The agent might hint that he has recently found evidence suggesting that the legendary settlement may in fact be a place of evil that is luring gullible commoners to a grisly end.

If the PCs accept the mission, they must first figure out how to reach Liberté. If Liberté does not exist, they may nevertheless have to survive dreadful encounters both in Souragne as well as in the Mists in order to reach this conclusion. Follow-up stories might involve the exploration and documentation of Liberté, returning to Souragne, and perhaps journeying to Liberté to eliminate its leader. Perhaps a friend of theirs made it to Liberté, but now desperately wants to escape? In the process, they may act as unwitting pawns for the Lord of the Dead.

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Chapter 3

The Loas

Though the Church of Ezra claims the dominant path among the people of Souragne, the worship of the loa remains prevalent, even among certain of the affluent. It is seldom seen as blasphemous for a devotee to attend Ezran services in the morning and then participate in a voodan ceremony in the afternoon. For a small fee, a simple farmer could pray to Ezra for a bountiful harvest, then easily go to a nearby voodan "witch doctor" to ask a loa to destroy a rival farmer's crops. The mere fact that the vast majority of the populace participates in two spiritual paths shatters the rather romanticized belief that loish worship is an "underground religion" practiced only by a secretive few.

As anchorites open the way to Ezra's Grand Scheme, voodan priests, given the mandate to be the negotiators between the spirits and the world of men, lead the rites to placate the loa. Loish worship is first and foremost a communal affair and almost every known ritual involves the participation of at least five individuals (the fact that the voodan frequently choose the number five is an example of how worship of the loa borrows sparingly from Ezran worship, as would be stated below). Rare is the ritual "I have lived in these swamps almost all my life, watching and listening as the mires ebb and flow, die and be reborn, and yet remain exactly the same. I have hunted too many of the dead things that lie beneath the waters; too many, perhaps, for normal folk to bear in one lifetime.

"I know not why I could not leave here. There would be times that I would see the dead things cackle and creak their bones, dredging themselves in a mockery of life beyond the steep, uncharted ends of the swamplands, and yet as I chase them the fog becomes too thick, and the filth beneath the waters turns to paste that seems to hold me back, pulling me away from the edges of this sorrowed land.



Maiden of the Swamp

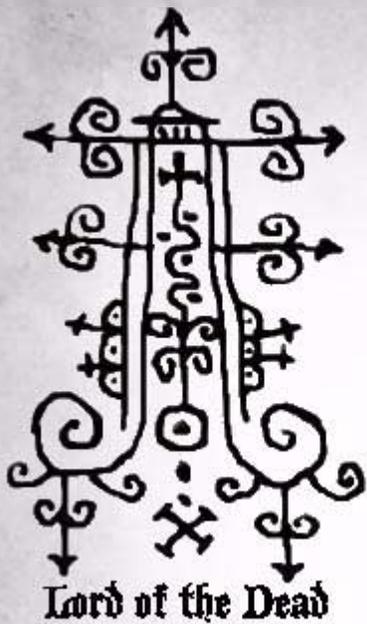
"They say the Mists hide many, many more lands within its thick veil. Wherever they may lie, I am unsure if I would ever see them in my lifetime, where the dead things go. I am trapped here, for reasons beyond my ken."

--Mama Kristienne d'Bourbonette
Voodan of the Bayou, Sept. 17, 751.

No true historical manuscript reveals the history of the loish religion; it is believed the loa existed long before humanity ever set foot in the swamps. Oral history mentions the loa as ancestor spirits who walked the earth before taking on an intangible form to give their humanoid successors a chance to live their lives.that involves only the voodan, and even then an audience is required to watch the spiritual proceedings take place. Heavy drums, rhythmic dancing and the ingestion of alcohol and hallucinogenic plants are staples of any voodan ceremony, and in the course of time any participant in a ritual could become the "mount," or channel, of the loa (see Dark Tales & Disturbing Legends). This ritual possession is the height of most voodan ceremonies, and utmost care is practiced by the presiding voodan to negotiate between the wants of the spirit and the needs of the mortal petitioners.

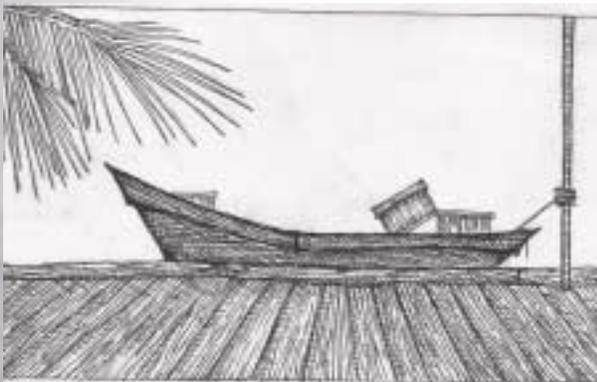
To summon the aid of any particular loa, a voodan (or any other believer in the loish faith for the matter), inscribes a vévé, on cloth, wood or on the ground, using certain materials from his or her gris-gris collection. This intricate sigil is a symbolic representation of a particular loa and serves

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as an anchor to help ease the loa's transition into the mortal world. Once the loa's services are no longer needed, the vevé is destroyed immediately for fear that the loa's wishes might extend even beyond the confines of its ritual.

More often than not, loish worship borrows Ezran trappings and rituals to placate its countless divinities (Viktor's note: for this subject, you should refer to Mrs Kingsley's following text). Many voodan use crude versions of the green and white robes worn by anchorites in ceremonies and many voodan altars (positioned to resemble Ezran church settings) prohibit the use of any metal other than silver within its premises. Church iconography is exploited generously: the popular loa Madris Orundi for example, as described by her devout followers, show her to look almost like Ezra herself.



Vévé : loas representations

While there are nearly a thousand different loas, from dead ancestors to regional loas to animalistic ones, such as Bouki and Longhears (wild rabbits), about a dozen are considered majors loas. The vevé for the major Souragnien loas are shown here:

Vévé and the Loa

A vevé is an intricate symbolic representation of any particular loa, and could be used by any believer in the loish faith. However, only characters of the voodan class (see *Dark Tales* and *Disturbing Legends*) can access the full powers of vevé, as detailed below. The various vevé of all the loa spirits described in *Dark Tales* and *Disturbing Legends* are illustrated elsewhere in this book. Inscribing a vevé takes a full action, regardless of its intricacies.

Vévé are considered holy symbols when stitched on single-colored cloth or etched on wood. Followers of the loish religion can use this ability but Craft checks to create holy symbols still apply in the process. For purposes of using the Craft skill, vevé as holy symbols are treated as high-quality items (DC 15). This DC is reduced to 10 if the crafter is a voodan. The duration last as long as the material the vevé is inscribed on remains durable, just as other holy symbols of other religions.

Only voodan are permitted to inscribe vevé on the earth itself, as reaffirmation of their status as negotiators between the spirit world and the mortal world. These earth-inscribed glyphs are still considered as holy symbols but they offer absolutely no mystical power whatsoever if they were inscribed by non-voodan characters. Depending on the alignment of the loa the vevé represents, the area where a voodan inscribes a vevé is either consecrated (if good-aligned) or desecrated (if evil-aligned), as the divine spells cast by a cleric of half the voodan's level (minimum 1st). Neutral-aligned vevé have no such effect on its surroundings. The duration lasts as long as the spell description or as long as the length of the ceremony, whichever takes longer.

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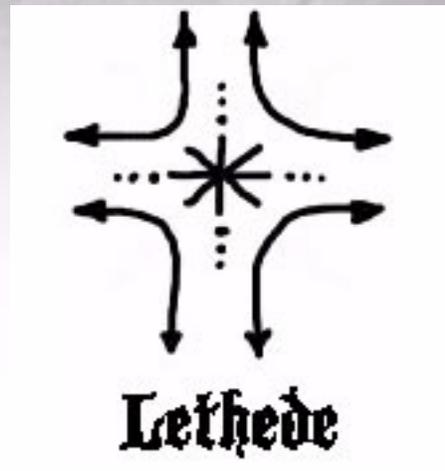
Vévé give its voodan inscriber a +3 circumstance bonus to both Diplomacy and Knowledge (religion) skill checks relating to a loa being petitioned (with a question or with an ability such as Mount of the Loa). If other loa are present but their vévé is not inscribed, the voodan has only a +1 circumstance bonus to Diplomacy and Knowledge (religion) skill checks when relating with them.

Within a radius of the vévé equal to 10 ft. x the voodan's Charisma modifier, the penalties for bestowing gris-gris on someone else are lowered by 1. For example, a non-voodan loa worshipper therefore has both the effective caster level and save DC's for a bestowed gris-gris at -1 instead of -2. This person needs to stay within the radius given above to gain these advantageous diminished penalties.

Dear Esteemed Brothers

This information that I have gathered may well interest you. It pertains to a cult within the worship of a Loa, one known as Brahmbei the Oracle. Though membership in this loa cult (known as Brahmbei's Hand) is utterly unknown to the outside world it is an open secret amongst the voodan that serve the Oracle.

The cult claims to have been granted a "Holy Mission". They believe that it is their duty to collect as much knowledge as possible for their own, and to destroy any other text or relic holding that knowledge. They see themselves as the shepherds of knowledge, granting or denying it to all who pass into their domain. Supposedly, the Loa Brahmbei contacts members of this cult in their dreams showing them an image of one who searches for knowledge walking down a black road, in addition to one of two items: a book or a flame. The book means that the Hand must grant that stranger what he seeks; the flame means that they must strain every effort to deny him his goal. The idea of Brahmbei -or any Loa- sending visions to so many people is absurd but it appears genuine. The cult founding happened when a dozen Voodan of Brahmbei, each living in separate parts of Souragne, experienced the same vision simultaneously.



I believe that some outside force, possibly Brahmbei but more another, influences these gullible Voodan to carry out their own agenda. If we use our magic to grant these voodan a similar vision, we could gain access to a font of lore containing many of the secrets of Souragne. Such Lore could prove invaluable against van Rijn and his dead companions.

Raphael Buchvold

Hon. Brother of the fraternity

Dread Possibility - the Oracle

Brahmbei has never been involved with the cult that bears his name. The manipulation comes from other sources: not one, but a pair of opposing forces manipulates the Hands. The organization was originally formed by Oriel, (male human Div9) an outlander who arrived in Souragne and managed to adapt relatively quickly.

Deploring the voodan's practices of keeping knowledge to themselves he sent a vision to some of the voodan of Brahmbei (disguised in such a manner as to appear to originate from the Loa) explaining the ideology of the Hands. Hence after, he spied upon those seeking knowledge in Souragne and sent the hands the appropriate visions to encourage the spread of knowledge. Since then, another has discovered Oriel's group and seeks to turn it towards somewhat darker knowledge (an idea Oriel finds worse than the constraint of knowledge). The diviner has been unable to discover anything about the second manipulator, except that most visions sent by him feature the image of a golden quill somewhere in the background.

Religious Survey



Searching for Ezra

Greetings my Esteemed Brothers, I thank you deeply for the opportunity to contribute to this task, despite the many inconveniences in this land.



The Cult of Notre Dame des Brumes (?-year 689)

When Souragne arose from the Mists in 635, its seigneurs did not have any clerics or churches. Chapels were attached to estates; the earliest sketches reveal statuary of a goddess named Notre Dame des Brumes (Our Lady of the Mists) and symbols which resemble an inverted long sword. These statues, bearing their old inscriptions, have been claimed in Ezra's service and still look peacefully down upon their wealthy worshippers.

Questioning of the eldest citizens revealed a variety of answers. Some muttered about fatal slave rebellions and burning churches yet no records back up such remarkable events. Others insist on the presence of priests who traveled between estates but offer neither names nor graves. Others (probably the most honest) admitted no knowledge of clerics or their fate. They described short family gatherings in the family chapel, led by the patriarch of the household, consisting of simple songs, offerings (flowers and candles), and prayers. As vociferous as the seigneurs are against the worship of loa, their recorded pre-Ezran protests list neither religious reasons nor authorities for their stance.

No religious books exist from this era. The oldest songs were edited to fit Ezra's worship; alas, there are no copies of the original, and the elderly do not remember them. Poor in literary skills, the seigneurs' religious practices were based on a rich oral tradition with set prayers and small rituals. Most of these practices have been subsumed.

Prominent metaphors for Ezra are her sword and shield; Notre Dame's are her enfolding cloak and arms. When this is presented to the Souragniens, they are surprised at the suggestion there is any difference while mouthing the church's line on Ezra's renowned compassion. If pressed, the knowledgeable suggest that the prayers addressed to Notre Dame are very old and have been retained due to long association and familiarity.

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Some seigneurs in defence of this idea proudly claim that Notre Dame represents the true, tenderhearted Ezra so long worshipped in Souragne (these endorse Sentire Lefebvre's search for correlations between Notre Dame des Brumes and Dementlieu's Ste. Mere-des-Larmes). How ironic that the seigneurs admire and invoke a mercy they do not practice.

Franklin Tennyson (year 689 to 700)

Franklin Tennyson was one of the dozen followers whom Yakov Dilisnya had converted in Mordent. Rumours had filtered back to the Core about the Souragnien chapels amid devotion to primitive spirits. Once success had been established in Borca, the missionary turned his attention to this latest challenge. He was surprised at the warmth of his welcome in 689 and the immediate support he received from the seigneurs. Correspondence with Felix Wachter (friend and future Bastion of the Mordent sect of Ezra) remarks on his wonder at the similarities between Ezra and Notre Dame. The kite shield was quickly raised on the estates, and Ezra adopted as the national faith within two years of his arrival.

Once he had absorbed this heady success, Sentire Tennyson realised with some dismay that the lower classes were not overly interested in his church. The poor were happy for the good priest's aid but saw merely another attempt for the seigneurs to impose upon their lives. Notre Dame was not their Lady after all, and Tennyson's distaste for the loa was well-known. The anchorite noted the seigneurs' lip service to his pleas for compassion and charity, but their embrace of the Home Faith's focus upon justice, obedience, and other law-abiding (and seigneur-favouring) virtues.

When pressed, they referred to their 'generosity' in the manumission of slaves and rewarding of the most loyal. They excused their practices of oppressive paternalism by pointing to the lower class' heathen ways; if they would not willingly attend Ezra's rites now, what would become of the church if they were given freer reins? They were also not shy to point out the social similarity with Borca, often remarking that when the Home



Faith saw fit to transform the situation there, they would attend to it themselves.

The first Ezran schism in 698 did not leave the Mordentish native unscathed. He had been able to turn a blind eye to Borca's misery, caught up in the euphoric birth throes of his church; the dilemma was finally driven home to him, a lone Cvore anchorite amid the island's wretched poverty and oppression. At what point must compassion concede to civil obedience, the church to government? Wachter's schism from the Home Faith, move to Mordent and popularity were prominent in Tennyson's mind, as his journals and correspondence of that time reveal. In Yakov's failure in their homeland, he saw a reflection of his own; in Wachter's success, he saw redemption. He embraced the Second Book of Ezra in 699 with renewed zeal and hope. Upholding the new book, he dedicated more time and services to the poor, and preached from his pulpit the overriding virtue of mercy, so long expounded by Notre Dame des Brumes.

The Souragniens of the turning century looked askance at the priest. The poor were suspicious of his motives; the seigneurs saw him as a nuisance, harping continually on improving workers' wages and conditions. Neither took any real offence for the anchorite was beginning to succumb to an illness which had dogged him for nearly a decade. They considered his fervour a symptom. When Tennyson died of malaria in the spring of 700, there was little surprise and some relief.

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Manon 'Ti-Maman' Larouche (year 700 to 710)

Manon Larouche became the new leader of the Souragne church, based in Port d'Elhour. The first few years of her leadership were relatively quiet, as the diminutive woman who would become known as Ti-Maman (Little Mother) became familiar with her new duties and larger congregation. A daughter of Rene Larouche (owner of Le Coq Noir, a popular casino), Manon was welcomed by the seigneurs as clearly one of their own.

This complacency was shattered in 705 when Ti-Maman was suddenly galvanised into action. She had had a 'revelation'-whether it was intellectual or spiritual is not clear. She not only recognised the loa; she declared Ezra to be foremost among them.

This sudden acceptance of the loa may seem remarkable to outsiders. It is known that various seigneurial families, especially those involved with gambling and the sea-trade, were not adverse to turning to other powers to abet their luck. The Larouche family was no exception and Ti-Maman had been a known worshipper of the loa before Tennyson's arrival. It is uncertain whether Manon Larouche halted her devotion or merely hid it carefully like so many other families. What is clear is that the anchorite had exposed a secret double standard and declared it unnecessary.



When Ti-Maman began to attend voodan rites publicly, the seigneurs were in an uproar. In 706 she left the Port d'Elhour church under the guidance of her secretary Etienne Lefebvre and moved to the small church in Tarais d'Marascon. "At the heart of Souragne lies the heart of the people, the loa, and Ezra. Now may it be the heart of the church."

She gathered together fellow loa-worshipping priests and acolytes introduced further renovations. Statues of Ezra were carved from wood and painted, light and dark-skinned; they were wreathed in flowers and garlands of cypress. Smaller statues of certain loa (Brahmei, Kurkva, Lethede, Madris Orundi, and Sehkelo) were introduced; the most prominent was the Maiden of the Swamp. Icons of Ezra and these loa arose; she stood large in the background, her cloak (borrowed from Notre Dame) sheltering them. Days sacred to the loa were celebrated in Ezra's chapels, with prayers addressed to 'Ti-Freres et Ti-Soeurs' (Little Brothers and Little Sisters). Drums and dance were introduced to the shrines among the poor, and songs evocative of the popular voodan chants composed by the musical anchorite.

Much of the rituals were translated into the local patois, so that the ceremony would be understood by the uneducated. The anchorite healed anybody, worshipper or, even at voodan rites. Whether this was simple compassion or an ingenious ploy, it brought a mass of worshippers to Ezra's chapels as the poor began to swarm to Ti-Maman's services, admiring the novelty and the charismatic priest's zeal. As the numbers swelled, Ti-Maman sent her priests out to wander among the plantations, and established a shrine in the slums of Port d'Elhour.

As church attendance grew, so did the animosity towards Ti-Maman. The seigneurs had always fought (publicly at least) against the loa. They had been able to keep Tennyson's pleas at bay by pointing at the base voodan devotion. Now their places of worship were in danger of being contaminated, and their threat rendered invalid. Even those seigneurs rumoured to be

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loa-worshippers were no less vociferous. They refused to believe that LaRouche would be able to remain in power, inspiring a revolution which would surely be banned by either the church or the other seigneurs. They foresaw an eventual backlash that could cost them their titles and estates if attention were drawn to any other unorthodox families.

Many voodan were also not pleased by this embrace of their spirits. They feared the potential absorption of the loa within the church as intercessors or servants of Ezra. Their own role would then be eradicated or weakened under such circumstances. Some had also been enjoying the private patronage of various seigneurs; now these same families were quickly backing away, taking their funds with them.

And the church of Ezra? Ti-Maman was ignored at the beginning as the church focused upon its first schism and expanding their influence upon the Core. When the Third Book of Ezra was penned in 709 in Dementlieu, attention finally turned to rumours that Manon Larouche was also busy writing. The church was already reeling over claims that Ste Mere des Larmes was older than Yakov's vision; what if this backwater anchorite began to claim the same for her native church, and threw in a whole pantheon of loa to boot? A missive was finally sent to Souragne, demanding that the anchorite explain herself.

Ti-Maman's reply, if ever penned, is unknown as she was assassinated in 710. Her corpse disappeared during the days of exposure decreed by the Lord of the Dead. Rumours abound that the seigneurs stole her body away to prevent veneration or the creation of artifacts from her bones and locks of hair; others said that in punishment the Lord of Death took her body and soul for her disservice to Ezra.

Who killed her? Nobody was ever caught. Souragniens have many theories which they are happy to espouse now that most of the suspects are dead and not able to retaliate. Conspiracies and hidden alliances are still heavily debated. Several families have taken private ancestral credit for the deed; yet even they are careful to not proclaim it publicly.

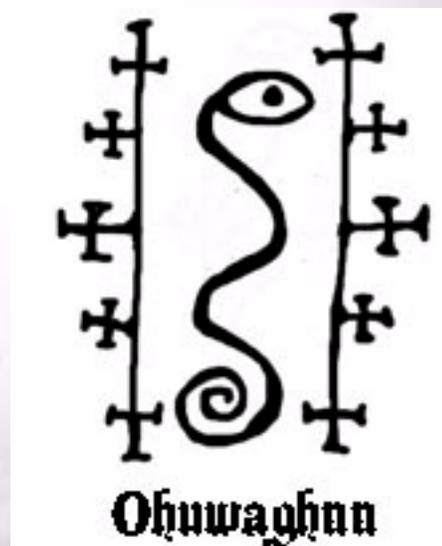
Ti-Maman has been dead nearly fifty years but is still a thorn in Souragne's side, kept alive by her cult.

What of Ti-Maman's revelation? Her writings (if they ever existed) have vanished. The present sentire is tight-lipped about her beliefs and the rationale for her actions. Her disciples, the priests who served her in Marais d'Tarascon, relate that Ti-Maman had treated her revelation as a source for public action; its details however were solely for private meditation. Public opinion is no less informative, as it veers between portrayal of a saint and a heretic.

The Church of Ezra gave her final rites and an empty plot and tombstone is dedicated to her within the confines of their cemetery; whatever controversy surrounded her life, she was acknowledged as true to the faith in death.

Etienne 'Pere Laissez-Faire' Lefebvre (year 710 to present)

Etienne Lefebvre, a magistrate's son, abandoned his inherited vocation for his calling to Ezra's worship in 697. Sentire Tennyson had made his small library available to the bookish youth. Just before his death he sent Lefebvre to Mordent to see the church he envisioned in Souragne. The missionary's writings confide his personal belief that this promising scholar would someday lead the local church.



Religious Survey



Upon Lefebvre's return in 702, Ti-Maman appointed him the church's secretary and four years later, Sentire of Port d'Elhour upon her departure to Marais d'Tarascon. Rumours abounded of private arguments between the two. Lefebvre was the natural candidate to lead the church after Larouche's murder: a Core (ergo orthodox) education; his family's pure laine (Souragnien slang for purebred) devotion; years of service and familiarity with the temple in Port d'Elhour.

Lefebvre was not blind to the quandary he was being placed in. Whatever his quarrel with Ti-Maman, he admired her ability to draw those who most required Ezra's aid. He had witnessed the danger of Ti-Maman's radical change, but also Tennyson's ineffectiveness in successful application of the Second Book of Ezra.

Lefebvre sequestered himself during the period of his investiture, meditating upon the situation. When the soft-spoken Sentire took to the pulpit, he carefully celebrated the traditional forms espoused in the temple of Port d'Elhour. The knowledgeable anchorite spoke of Ezra's henotheistic approach; the Third Book explicitly recognised the existence of other gods, while acknowledging Ezra as foremost among them. He discussed the Core's churches politic approach to other faiths, as well as its recognition, even requisite celebration of local holidays and customs; ergo the place of Notre Dame's prayers, songs and devotional practices in Souragne's worship of Ezra. It

was important that those who sought Ezra in times of need should be greeted by familiar, soothing surroundings and customs.

However, as he explained to a dumbfounded congregation, this courtesy had to be extended to Souragne's other congregations. How could he tell the poor that the loa were not permitted where Notre Dame still stood? He acknowledged the Core Church - and seigneurs'- concern, while reminding that no actual sanction had ever been set upon Ti-Maman, nor an immediate ban upon her practices. Most importantly, Ti-Maman and similar loa-worshipping priests had never been punished by the loss of their powers. Who was he then, to gainsay Ezra?

Quoting a Darkonese maxim, 'festina lente'(make haste slowly), Lefebvre explained that it was important during such violent, turbulent times to act carefully. Rash decisions could invite anger not only within the churches, he suggested, but within society at large, especially when Ti-Maman's assassins were still at large. Having planted the fear of insurrection, he calmly stated that until Ezra had revealed her will more clearly, it was wisest to continue with the two styles of services. He named them high church (haute eglise) and low (known in local patois as ti-'glise).

As sentire of Souragne, he would maintain the high church service. This was the seigneurs' service, which followed the Mordentish format and included Tennyson's approved inclusions from the Notre Dame tradition. He promised that the seigneurs' chapels and temples would continue to celebrate this service. The low church service established by Ti-Maman would remain in Marais d'Tarascon and its sister shrines. If Ezra chose to reveal her displeasure, Lefebvre promised swift retribution and reparations.

At the same time, Lefebvre had sent missives to the Home Faith in Levkarest and to the Mordent sect in Mordentshire, outlining his actions. He addressed the cost of Tennyson's disdain for the loa in terms of numbers and offerings. Was the church willing to lose these? He repeated the points

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he would list in his first sermon, and reiterated his vow to intervene at the first sign of divine disfavour. Neither sect was pleased with the situation, but once again, mainland politics were foremost in their concerns. In the wake of the latest schism with Dementlieu books of Ezra were arising all over the Core. The Third Book's allusions to gods had encouraged the creation of apocryphal pantheons claiming equality with Ezra; these were a greater threat than aboriginal spirits.

Unsurprisingly, the priests of the low church did not lose their powers. The seigneurs were unhappy but unable to complain, at least publicly. This changed in May 714 when statues of Ti-Maman began to appear in personal shrines. Dressed in her white and green sentire robes, her left hand presses a book to her heart; Ezra's shield rests against her left leg; Notre Dame's grey cloak around her shoulders. As if this were not controversial enough, the right hand is sometimes held up in either blessing or greeting, fingers splayed; others show it holding objects that suspiciously resemble gris-gris (rocks with symbols of the loa; twigs and blades of grass woven into certain shapes).

There had been rumours about prayers and songs devoted to Ti-Maman in home worship, seeking her intercession with Ezra; this was the approach used in Ezra's low church. Small groups supposedly praying for Ti-Maman's soul were often frequenting her grave, leaving offerings. The seigneurs had ignored this foolishness, but demanded immediate action at this latest development.

Lefebvre forbade statues and public prayers to Ti-Maman in both high and low church. He refused however to intervene any further. If Yakov Dilisnya could stand before the Great Cathedral, how could he ban a cherished sentire from homes? When pressed about the voodan links he reiterated that these works were not icons blessed or sanctioned by the church, but 'art' or perhaps voodan icons. It was not his place to define loa- he left to the voodan.



In 715, reports of miracles attributed to Ti-Maman began to arise. Wounds and ailments were suddenly healed overnight; there were even reports of her appearance. Once again the seigneurs approached the sentire. Lefebvre met designate behind closed doors. The matter is another popular topic of speculation, but no sanctions or actions were proposed. The statues are still found throughout Souragne, even, according to rumour, in the private shrines of priests. The church carefully records the alleged miracles, and decades later, declare they are still studying the matter.

The nickname 'Pere Laissez-Faire (Father Leave Be/Let It Go)' was coined at this time. The seigneurs are displeased at the continuing presence of the loa and icons to Ti-Maman. However, the low church is also ambivalent about their supposed champion. Lefebvre has never attended voodan rites; during his visits to Marais d'Tarascon, he celebrates the high service. They also feel he is too slow in recognising Ti-Maman, be it as saint or as loa, and that he is lenient with the seigneurs.

This is not to imply that Lefebvre is unconcerned with the poor. His approach is, as usual, slow and patient. He does not castigate the seigneurs from the pulpit, for he knows it will only encourage lax attendance and inattention to him in and out of the temple. The sentire does a routine circuit of seigneurial estates and manors, aware that his presence at a table is able to evoke more donations than the temple offering plate.

Religious Survey



Tonthomba

He encourages tender-hearted devotees to maintain hospices and soup kitchens, publicly praising their efforts to encourage a beneficial rivalry. He uses his family ties to denounce harsh laws and mediates on behalf of worshippers accused by the law or employers of wrongdoing.

Lefebvre is an avid scholar of the Books of Ezra, the schisms, and heresies. The paradox of Ste Mere des Larmes has inspired his search for a parallel in Notre Dame des Brumes. This is one idea which does appeal to the seigneurs' nationalism, and they are proud to make the claim without any proof. Despite his interest, the sentire disagrees with the intellectual focus of the Dementlieuse sect. "A church is not a university; the mind serves the heart; the letter, the spirit; not vice versa," he has been heard to say. "Ezra, goddess or not, did not say she would think about the Lost, or fall into a reverie of introspection, but that she would save them. We must not waste our time trying to figure out what Ezra is at the expense of her mission."

Illiteracy and the lack of education standards in Souragne are Lefebvre's personal bane. His time in Mordent has made him aware of how backwards his homeland and its rulers are. The training -basic and theological- of his acolytes is intense. It is imperative that Souragne's temple be able to defend its practices with a firm orthodox foundation, or suffer a sentire imported to do the will of Core. Lefebvre encourages his priests to tutor labourers and their children under the ploy that they are being

indoctrinated in holy writ. Many of the successful students have found employment in the docks and warehouses, keeping inventory and accounts, and even translators.

Despite the public dissatisfaction, Lefebvre has survived to a grand old age. He is recognized for his intelligence and possible canniness. His decisions while the cause of anger are never ignored, but studied for motives. Even now, the congregation wonder at his successor, but the old man remains, as usual, silent.

With respect,

Professor Gertrude Kingsley (University of Paridon, Sociology), 760 BC

The Fifth Book of Ezra

Manon Larouche had been writing a book on her vision of Ezra when she was assassinated. She had turned to Etienne Lefebvre for assistance in the task due to her poor literary skills; these writings were the cause of their frequent meetings and arguments. Below is a pertinent excerpt from these writings:

Ezra looked upon the Time of Ultimate Darkness, wondering at the people's despair and disbelief. As her eyes sought the source of doubt, they fell upon her church. Here were the lackeys of kings, the worshippers of words, and the heartless self-righteous. And many were their victims. Her heart opened, and she said, "Do I not heal the sick, and protect the weak? It is not my place to turn my back on any in the Grand Scheme."

Ezra moved through the tides of time, she who is veiled by mist and myth. She sang of duty, mercy, knowledge and justice. Last of all, she sang of peace and compassion. She sang, and echoes of her message rose and took shape. But Ezra warned, "Words must not divide those united in spirit. Wonder not at the number of echoes, nor whence the music sprang. My name is nothing; my mission is all. Heed me, and follow my example."

Then Ezra moved through the heavens and spoke to the spirits and gods of light. "Shall we let the Legions of Darkness delight in our rivalry? Is this the example we seek to set?"

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Let us agree to harmony; and unite against our common enemy." The gods and the spirits did not resist her words, and she set her shield to their defence. She said to the Mists, "These I claim as kin and friend; these too are good, and speak in my name. We are one and many. Together we shall stand in the Time of Ultimate Darkness, together with those who love us."

Then Ezra saw the damned in the Mists of Death. She heard their cries, and her heart opened. But the Lord of Death, a voice of the Mists, said, "Turn back. This is not your realm; you are not its queen. You have claimed the pure of heart, and the redeemed. The damned did not accept you."

Ezra said, "Must the brief span of mortal years hold sway for eternity? Have none of the legions of darkness come to learn regret?"

The Lord of Death, a voice of the Mists, said, "Step through these gates and you will not emerge until the end of Time."

Ezra spoke, saying, "Have I not joined with the Mists? I am she who heals the sick, and protects the weak. I am she who shelters the pure, embraces the redeemed. Even in death, souls may find me, and be saved. Until all souls are saved, and the Hollow filled, here I will be. This is my role in the Grand Scheme. This must be."

Excerpt from the Fifth Book of Ezra, by Manon Larouche and Etienne Lefebvre

In her revelation, Ezra's concern about the numerous Legions of Darkness had turned her attention to seeking the cooperation of the loa, and other good spirits and gods. Ti-Maman had seen the seigneurs deny rights to the poor on the basis of their beliefs; she was sure this practice was common in the Land of the Mists. She was concerned as a Souragnien not only with the loa and their worshippers, but her ancestors. What became of the souls who had never known Ezra?

Ezra's place in the Grand Scheme was not her worship at the cost of all others, but saving all those who accepted her. According to Larouche, this acceptance was extended to other gods and the good spirits. This inclusive compassion was the keystone of Manon's vision of Ezra.



Ulwaddithri

Lefebvre was familiar with the Rite of Revelation, in which a new sect of Ezra was officially recognized. He had seen Ti-Maman and her followers manifest a new variety of the Shield of Ezra, which granted some protection from the undead. But the Book itself was incomplete, and without it, Ti-Maman and her followers would be labeled heretics. Lefebvre foresaw a pogrom which would annihilate this sect, and further crush the lower classes.

Dread Possibilities: Ti-Maman

It is possible that an individual as powerful as Ti Maman might defy death itself. There are many ways by which the priestess might return to Souragne.

- She has become a ghost or an intelligent, good undead. Possibly with voodan abilities in this form, and she serves the Maiden of the Swamp
- Ti Maman may ascend into a minor loa, as an ancestor who has become empowered by veneration;
- The priestess might have been raised, and is hiding in the swamps, where she presently tends to the undead, now that her time among the living is over;
- Alternatly, she may actually be dead, but Lefebvre is considering raising her as his successor and promoter of their now shared book.

Religious Survey

The sentire, as a traditional seigneur, was also personally ambivalent about Ti-Maman's embrace of the loas, and knew that he himself at that point in time could not fully endorse her. He hid the book, established the two church services, and meditated.

As the low church flourished and Ti-Maman evolved a cult, Lefebvre turned to Larouche's writings. He began to elaborate on their theories. He considered revealing the books at various anniversaries but always held back. When the Fourth Book of Ezra appeared with its grim message, Lefebvre knew that he could not delay any further. He has gathered a cadre of priests to introduce the book after his death. He has set the date for the book's release as the fiftieth anniversary of Manon's death.

Petitioning the Loa

Souragniens worship the loas instead of the other deities known elsewhere because they feel those loas are closer to Souragne. Sometimes the loa do grant their petitioners answers or spell-like abilities on them. For example, someone praying the Maiden of the Swamp for healing can receive a cure light wounds spell on her, or another praying suddenly finds the right way to exit the swamp where he is currently lost.

It should be a DM's prerogative to let the loas grant these privileges, under the following guidelines:

- The petitioner should pray at least an hour for the loa to answer, or petition the loa during a voodan ceremony to this specific loa.
- The spell-like power granted on the petitioner should be less than 3rd level in most cases. Only in very rare exceptions should these powers exceed this norm. Use the suggested alignment, schools and domains of a loa as guidelines in order to judge what a loa would grant or refuse.
- The power should be given to the petitioner, or to a person the petitioner is praying for (ex: a mother praying for his wounded daughter would see her daughter cured by the petitioned loa; or a person worshipping a malevolent loa to get his rival cursed). Usual DC should

be applied to unwilling targets of a power.

- In case of an answer to a question (such as the way to get out of the swamp), this should be limited by the DM to matters of interest to the petitioned loa.
- The suggested chance of a loa answering a petitioner should be around 10%, modified by circumstances (DM's judgment). The petitioner should be a regular worshiper of this specific loa (petitioner praying the loa for the first time, or less than three times per year, get a -8% penalty). If petitioned during a voodan ceremony to this specific loa, add a +5% bonus. A voodan priest add twice his level to the chance of getting answered by the usual loa worshiped by this voodan (a 3rd level voodan usually worshipping Brahmbei should get a 6% additional bonus when petitioning this loa). If the loa petitioned isn't a major loa, add a -5% penalty.

Any petitioner should not get a specific loa's attention more than once every two months, modified by circumstances (DM judgment). The only exception to this rule is voodan, who can get "answers" from their loa up to once a week.

Epilogue

Chapter 4

Chapter 4

Dear reader,

I had put away my pens and parchment, this book was done. But it was not to be. Even with our care to hide our arcane skills, we found ourselves into problems with the first Lord of the Dead's rules about forbidden magic. We trust the following will remain confidential.

Last Monday, an old man came to the Maison Soulobre plantation early in the morning and asked to speak to the new owners. Usually the servants handle peddlers and merchants but since this one managed to slip past our defences, we granted him an audience. The man introduced himself as Patte-de-Poulet and claimed he was sent by the highest authority of Souragne. At first, we thought him to be acting on behalf of the Port d'Elhour Conseil des Seigneurs. Oh, how wrong we were!

Though polite, our strange guest did not lack for nerve. Rather than discuss his purpose for coming, he questioned us of our origins and our goals in Souragne. We resisted the urge to punish him for his impudence, and answer evasively. However, he seemed to see through our deception and boldly announced that his Master did not like to be lied to, nor did he suffer magicians to run loose in his realm.

It was clear, then, that Patte-de-Poulet (or Chicken Bone, as we later learned) was an emissary of the Lord of the Dead. My first thoughts were, well, violent, but before I could act, he looked at me sternly as though he knew my intentions. Clearly he was one adept in the Art, as we should have suspected.

In the silence of our stunned realization he left us, though not before making a final proclamation: his master would send for us soon, and we would be wise to obey. The rest of the evening was spent between fevered debate and long thoughtful silences.

The next day, around noon, we received a short letter:

Dear Elders,

I now feel I have to talk to you privately. I will send you a guide tonight, after sunset, and please feel obliged to follow his horse.

Sincerest regards,

A.M.

The missive proved as disturbing as Chicken Bone's visit. Our correspondent had named us "elders", a title we used only between us at the Fraternity. We were further puzzled by the signature "A.M." We knew of no person in the Conseil des Seigneurs or in town with these initials. Despite our growing apprehension, we realized that we had no time to prepare spells for the encounter. The mysterious A.M. knew what he was doing.

After some hasty discussion, we decided to send a small group of well-equipped elders: Skully, Lutemmi, Reuland and myself would meet with our enigmatic friend. We also wrote a warning letter to Jonothan Lochspeare -currently in Sithicus- in case we did not return, and gave instruction to send it to him if we were not back in 48 hours. In spite of our prudent measures, we were fairly confident in our safety. We had deduced that if the mysterious A.M. were indeed the Lord of the Dead then he could have destroyed us outright. We concluded that he might want something from us.

After sunset, a lone horseman came to our property. The frightened Souragnien told us to follow him and stubbornly refused to answer our questions. Rather than lead us towards Port d'Elhour, he took us on a trail towards the festering swamplands of la Maison d'Sablet. From there, he ferried us by raft deeper into the depths of the boglands. If our friend "A.M." had chosen his meeting place to intimidate us, he had succeeded.

Time passed slowly as our guide navigated the tiny craft through the twisted labyrinth of marshes. Finally we emerged into the vast expanse of Lac Noir. Our guide led us across the sea of reeds to a solid patch of shore. In front of us, we saw a faint glow and heard a deep voice: "Good evening, gentlemen."

Through the trees emerged a man on horseback, a tall aristocratic gentleman carrying a torch. He spoke in a polite tone, though his words carried an air of condescension. Smiling, he added: "It is a pleasure meeting you all here tonight. I am Anton Misroi."

I noticed immediately that something was amiss with our host. He was bothered by neither the sweltering humidity nor the biting insects that tormented us even as he spoke.

Speaking to our guide, Misroi uttered "Télesphore, grand-grandchildren of my dear Nanaea, leave us. Return in an hour."

Meanwhile, we looked at each other. "Misroi?" Skully whispered, "But that's a name of the past!" As my eyes adjusted to the light, I noticed with dread that Misroi's mount was a quite dead...

When our guide had left us, Anton resumed his conversation with us. "I have watched your group since you first arrived and long known that you were not as you appeared. This is my home, gentlemen, and nobody is allowed to spy on me, especially with forbidden magic. No secrets are hidden from me, gentlemen. Did you honestly expect you could break my laws and leave this island alive?"

Anton's polite smile changed not a fraction, though his eyes gleamed with savage joy at our fear. It seemed that we had made a grave miscalculation. But something in Misroi's expression changed. The civil smile and savage eyes dissolved, leaving a more genuine, if grim expression. We relaxed slightly; with his show of force done it was time to talk business. Still, even with all my training I felt like a schoolboy being lectured.



Chapter 4

"But, dear Elders," he said, "it would seem we have a common enemy. You see, a pitiful being known as Death -how ironic for a name, no? - sent emissaries to me a year ago. These messengers said Death had read about me in an old tome. They wanted me to share my knowledge of this world with Death. The fools compounded their impertinence by offering nothing in return. Sadly, I have found that the dead are the first to forget good manners."

"Naturally," he continued, "I punished these ambassadors for their rudeness. Though, astonishingly, their master has yet to understand that I am master within my realm. I destroyed them save one and told her to return to her pitiful master and repeat my answer to his request. Even now he threatens to pester me with his pitiful minions. Though these intrusions have become a source of new servants, they have also proved to be a nuisance."

"Then," he resumed, "you arrived in Souragne. I could have you destroyed quickly. However, I learned that we have this common enemy. That you are still alive tonight is owed solely to that fact. I appreciate the potential value of living servants, especially in dealing with matters beneath my attention."

Anton then ordered us the following. "First, I am curious what your organization has learned of me and my modest realm. You will prepare for me a copy of all you know about Souragne within a month and not a day more. I advise you to omit nothing. You will give these documents to Patte-de-Poulet. I believe you are well acquainted with him."

"Second, you will keep a very low profile and not flaunt my ban of magic. My subjects have faith in my laws and I will not suffer that belief to be challenged. As well, while in my realm, the Fraternity will keep the servants of Death out of my land. Hunt them and destroy them quickly, for if I must lower myself to dispatch them my patience with you shall wear thin."

"Finally, dear Elders, you must never doubt that my laws are absolute. You have been given a reprieve, not a pardon. Should you ever defy my will, I assure you, I shall teach you all possible meanings of a fate worse than death."

With that, he disappeared back into the gloom. After ages of waiting in the black, our guide returned and ferried us back to civilization. Of course, we have complied with our new found benefactor. Was there any other choice? Despite his bluster and predictable power games, it is clear that he is a force beyond our ability to challenge -for the time being- so we must conform to his conditions.

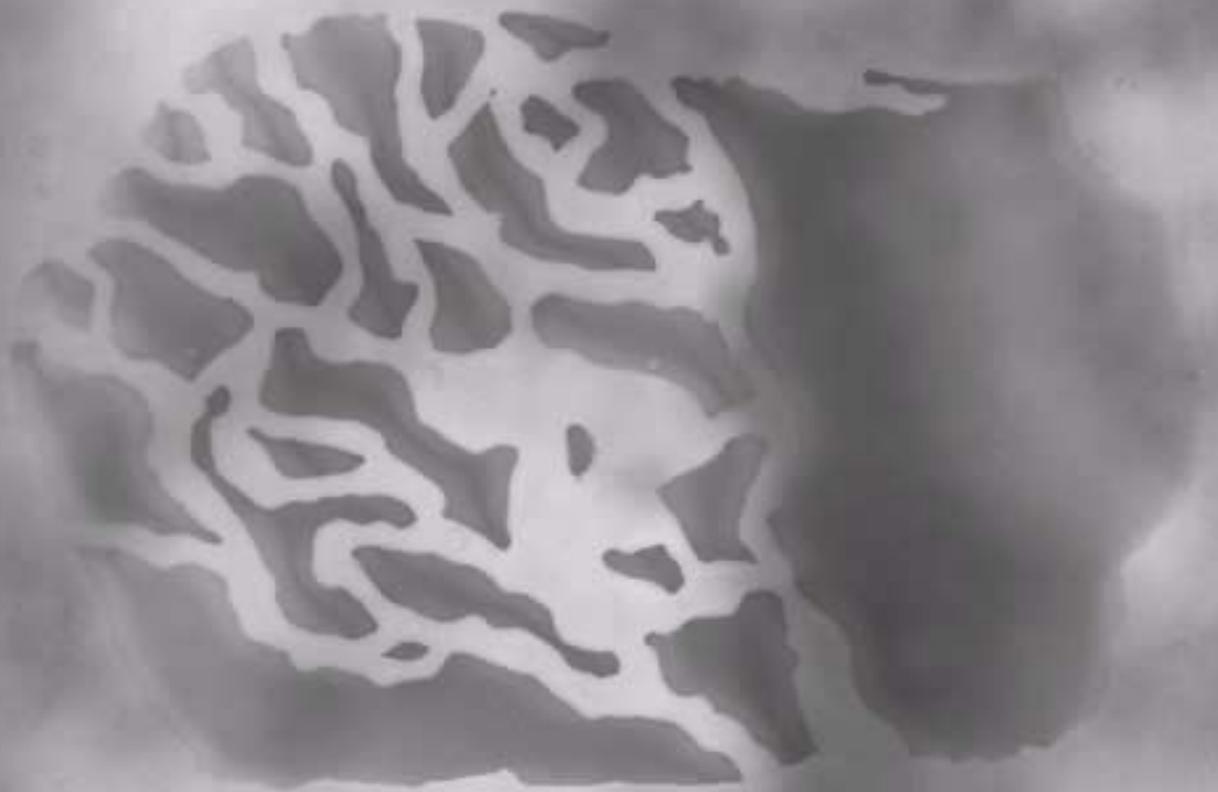
Still, this Misroi is a fascinating character. He may yet be a source of great information. I sincerely hope both parties will profit from this association.

Viktor Hazan

Maison Soulombre, Souragne

February 1st, year 760

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Appendix 1

New Feats

Dancing bones

You are able to cast spells simply by dancing or singing them.

Prerequisites: Born in Souragne, able to cast spells, 5 ranks in Perform (Dancing or singing), Charisma score of at least 13.

Benefit: Through dancing or singing (or both), you are able to cast spells. You do not need to make the normal somatic gestures to cast them. Material components must be in hand (and they can be used or consumed as per the spell description). The singing and dancing is a full round action (or longer, if the spell takes longer to cast).

Since you are in movement, you are considered to be in defensive mode when dancing. If the spell is cast by singing, the caster appears to sing a strange song in a foreign language. To spot that a spell is being cast, other casters must make a Sense Motive check DC 16 (+ Cha modifier of the caster). In addition, Spellcraft checks to identify the spell are made with -4 penalty due to the unfamiliar movements.

New Spells from Souragne

Exterminate

Necromancy

Spell level: Wiz/Sor 2nd, cleric 2nd, druid 1st

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 2 rounds

Duration: Instant

Range: Close

Area: 50 sq. feet + 50 sq. feet per level.

Save: None (Fort negates)

Spell resistance: yes

This spell is used on houses overridden with swamp vermin, when their numbers are such that they can't be driven off with any other means and they are a threat to the health of the residents.

This spell immediately kills 50 vermin/caster level (each with less than 1 hit point) in the area of effect (no save). The area can be shaped according to the caster's wishes to a square, a rectangle or a combination of adjacent rectangles. Each size of the area must be at least 10'. Vermin with more than 1 hit point or larger than diminutive size are immune to this spell.

In case of a swarm, the swarm may make a Fortitude save to negate the spell entirely. In case of a magically summoned swarm, the spell has a DC penalty of -4.

This spell does require a Power Check.

Material component: the remains of a rat that has been simmered in swamp water for 3 days and nights.

Spirit armour

Necromancy

Spell level: Wiz/Sor 2nd, cleric 2nd

Components: V, S, F

Casting Time: 1 round

Duration: 1 hour/level

Range: touch

Target: Creature touched

Save: Fortitude negates (harmless)

Spell resistance: yes (harmless)

This spell uses the life force of the caster or another creature to create an armor of shorts for the caster. While under the effect of this spell, the caster has an unnatural aura around him that unnerves others (+1 OR).

To cast this spell, the caster must deal 1 hit point of damage to a living creature (including himself) with a special dagger (the focus of the spell). In the next round, he casts the spell. In case that the caster uses his own blood, the spell can be cast at the same round that the caster wounds himself (concentration check for one hp damage needed).

The spell gives the caster a +5 armor bonus and the caster gains a +2 resistance bonus to all saves to resist any deliberating manipulation of his life force, from energy drain, ability damage or drain to vampiric touch and ray of enfeeblement.

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The Swamp

In case of ability damage or drain, the spell also lessens the damage by 1 (minimum 1 point of ability damage or drain). For example if the caster was drained from a vampire for 3 points of constitution, he or she would lose only 2 points.

This spell cause a powers check if the caster is using someone else's blood: if the caster damages another creature to gain the protection of this spell, even if this creature is a foe, the spell is considered evil and the power check is 4%

Focus: A specially prepared ceremonial dagger, costing at least 50 gold pieces. The dagger must have been used in rituals to the Lord of the Dead.

Vermin ward

Abjuration

Spell level: druid 2nd

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 round

Duration: 2h/ level

Range: Close

Area: 10' radius +5'/level

Save: None (will negates)

Spell resistance: yes

A less extreme method for dealing with vermin in the swamps of Souragne than the exterminate spell. This spell is often used to ward off annoying mosquitoes or leeches from the camp site of the caster or to drive off vermin from an area during the duration of the spell.

This spell immediately drives off the area of effect all vermin (flying insects, parasites, small reptiles etc.) The spell affects vermin of diminutive size or less, with up to 1 hit point. For the duration of the spell, vermin won't enter the area of effect.

Larger vermin can resist this spell: vermin up to 1 HD may make a will save to resist this spell. Vermin larger than 1 HD are totally immune to the ward. In case of a swarm, the swarm may make a will save to negate the spell entirely. In case of a magically summoned swarm, the spell has a DC penalty of -4.

Terrain effects

Should the DM needs it, here's a random table of Maison d'Sablet terrain Features:

Shallow bog	50%
Deep bog	15%
Light undergrowth	20%
Heavy undergrowth	15%

Most of the brooks are just a few feet across, but some water ways are wide enough for a large boat navigating slowly (and with an experienced guide). The Lac Noir area and some of the larger water ways are anywhere between 10' and 40' deep before reaching mud. .

Bogs: see DMG description p 88 for movement and various check modifiers in bogs.

Undergrowth: Those are drier islands, with wildly varying size. Truly dry land is very uncommon and most undergrowth patches are muddy at best. See DMG description p 88 for movement, concealment and various check modifiers in these.



Appendix 1

Table 1: Boat Statistics

Boat type	Capacity	Size	Speed	Manoeuvrability	HP	Hardness
Canoe - small	2	medium	30	'Good	15	3
Canoe - large	6	large	30	'Medium	25	3
Raft	6	large	30	'Medium	15	3
Rowboat	8	large	30	'Poor	30	4

Quicksand: The chance to encounter a quicksand is 5% per hour. Those quicksand patches look like drier land and they are mostly located on the outskirts of dry islands. See DMG description p. 88 for mechanics of quicksand and rescue.

"Swamp gas": The chance to encounter an area with inflammable gas is 5% per day. It is left to the DM to establish its effects, but most swamp gas areas should contain small quantities of methane gas. The PCs should be able to smell the tell tale odour of rotten egg (sulphur). Also, some of these sources of swamp gas could already be burning, in a never-ending torch way. As an option, some swamp creatures could use these gases when crafting traps.

Optional equipment: Swamp Shoes

These very uncommon items are made of wooden rods and leather and look somewhat like an upside down umbrella. Swamp shoes hold the user above the surface of swamp water and enable him to walk on the surface at normal move (the normal move in a swamp is cut in half). The user can't run.

Some of the humanoids dwelling in the swamp use them for quicker walking across swampland and have an advantage for hunting. The swamp shoe has an oval kidney-like shape, roughly 45 by 70 inches large. It takes about two weeks of training to be able to use the swamp shoes, but the user still have a -4 dexterity penalty and can't move and fight in the same round. It takes another two week of training to be able to fight without dexterity penalty and be able to walk and fight during the same round.

Getting lost in the bog: There are many ways to get lost in the wilderness. Following an obvious road, trail, or feature such as a

stream or shoreline prevents any possibility of becoming lost, but travelers striking off cross-country may become disoriented-especially in conditions of poor visibility or in difficult terrain.

Poor Visibility: Any time characters cannot see at least 60 feet in the prevailing conditions of visibility, they may become lost. Characters traveling through fog or a downpour might easily lose the ability to see any landmarks not in their immediate vicinity. Similarly, characters traveling at night may be at risk, too, depending on the quality of their light sources, the amount of moonlight, and whether they have darkvision or lowlight vision.

Difficult Terrain: Any character in maison d'Sablet may become lost if he or she moves away from a trail or other obvious path or track.

Chance to Get Lost: If conditions exist that make getting lost a possibility, the character leading the way must succeed on a Survival check or become lost. The difficulty of this check varies based on the visibility conditions, and whether or not the character is familiar with the area being traveled through. Refer to the table below and use the highest DC that applies.

	Survival DC
Maison d'Sablet, not familiar with the area	12
Maison d'Sablet, somewhat familiar with the area	10
Maison d'Sablet, very familiar with the area	8

A character with at least 5 ranks in Knowledge (geography) or Knowledge

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(local) pertaining to the area being traveled through gains a +2 bonus on this check.

When in deep fog or at night, add a +4 penalty to the Survival DC check.

Check once per hour (or portion of an hour) spent in local or overland movement to see if travelers have become lost. In the case of a party moving together, only the character leading the way makes the check.

Effects of Being Lost: See DMG description p 86 for rules on the effect of getting lost.

Other dangers of the swamps

Each time spent in Maison D'Sablet, make these checks for unprotected PCs:

Exhaustion check: When moving in the swamp, from the high humidity and difficulty to move through the swamp, PC in Maison d'Sablet should make a DC 13 check (Fortitude) or become fatigued. The check is made after a period of four hour, and for each hour hereafter.

A fatigued character should succeed a DC 16 check each hour or become exhausted.

Water: Drinking water from the swamp or from a well in the drier lands of Souragne, unless boiled before, can make character sick (DC 14 Fortitude when drunk; Damage: Con 1, and be nauseated).

Disease: Because of the fouled swamp and mosquitoes, for every contact with the swamp, or 24 hour period spent in it, PC should make a DC 14 check (Fortitude) or become diseased.

The check is made with a penalty of +4 if the character has an untreated open wound for at least an hour during this period, and a bonus of -4 if the character is well protected from insect bites.

Check on the following table for that nature of the disease.

Swamp fever	70%
Leech fever	15%
Gator rot	10%
Slimy Doom	5%

Swamp Fever: A DC 14 Fortitude check after incubation period of d20+6 hours. Damage: 1d4 Strength and 1d4 Constitution. The disease make the character feel sleepy and fatigued. This is mildly contagious (DC 8 when in physical contact with the diseased).

Leech sickness: A DC 16 Fortitude check after incubation period of 1 day. Damage: 1d4 Wisdom. The diseased character is prone to hallucinations. This is not contagious. If not healed within four days, the character can get permanently blind (DC 10 Fort each day after the fourth).

Gator rot: A DC 18 Fortitude check after incubation period of 1-4 days. Damage: 1d4 Constitution. The diseased has patches of his skin turning to alligator scales. The whole body is covered after a week if not healed before that. Unfortunate person with visible signs of this disease sometimes have been stoned by superstitious mob. This is mildly contagious (DC 8 when in physical contact with the diseased).

Slimy Doom: see DMG p. 292. Victims turn to infectious mud coloured goo from the inside out. This is highly contagious (DC 12 when in physical contact with the diseased).

See the DMG p 292-293 for diseases and how to heal them. Some voodan potions and filters add a +2 bonus to healing checks.

Monsters and Encounters

Swamp Animal Threats

For Souragniens alligators, use the Monster Manual regular crocodiles stats block (page 271) but making them one hit dice smaller to 2d8+6 hp (15 hp). On full moon night, the intelligence of these reptiles augments from 1 to 4 for a week, making them more cunning and deadlier during this period.

The water snakes are tiny, small or medium vipers. The poison of the black widow (tiny spider) should be: poison DC 20, initial damage 2d8 Strength. Some of these snakes have the habits to get on a tree to dry, and wait to drop on unsuspecting passer by.

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Souragnien monstrous catfish: those thankfully rare horrible fishes eat anything, even young alligators. Use the Monster Manual regular medium shark stats block, but changing their physical description and giving them slower swimming speed of 30 feet. They are not poisonous so the folk tale description is false on this part. This was inspired by the Fishead short story by Irvin S. Cobb.

Vampire bats: use a swarm of Night Hunter, from Monsters of Faerun, a 7' giant carnivorous bat (CR 1), and make them hunt at night, hungry for warm blood. It is said that voodan priest often need these animals' corpses as part of their potions.

Leeches (vermin): the swamp waters are often infested by these tiny parasites. Their bite is painless since an anaesthetic is contained in the leech's saliva. A spot DC 20 check is needed to notice a leech has bitten and is attached to the body. A Souragnien leech gorges itself with blood, even when the victim gets out of the water, at the rate of 1 constitution point for every five leeches attached, per hour. The probability of a leech attack is relatively low, like 5% per minute spent in the water, but in some areas this chance rises to 20% per minute. Each attack is composed of 1d4 leeches.

Being bitten by leeches augments the DC for disease by a penalty of +4.

Monstrous Encounters

Uncommonly, monsters and other supernatural creatures are also encountered in the swamp. Following is a list of creatures according to rarity.

Most common: Zombies¹ (CR varies); Souragnien Zombies² (CR varies. Some of them are not aggressive, being in fact on an errand for Anton Misroi); Leech - Witchbane³ (CR ¼); Quickwood³ (CR 10).

Uncommon: Bloodrose 3 - plants trying to lure people to their leaves filled with fresh rain water (CR 1/2); Aquatic Ooze - Bloodbloat (CR 1); Aquatic Ooze - Flotsam Ooze (CR 2); Crawling Ivy 3 (CR 2); Zombie - Cannibal³ (CR 3); Lashweed³ (CR 4); Evil treants (use Dark Trees (CR 7)

from Monster of Faerun, but making them smaller - 5d8+10 (47 HP), CR 5; or use the Dread Treant³ sidebar p.170); Will o' wisps¹ (CR 6); Doppelganger Plant³ (CR 6); Death's head tree³ (CR 9).

Rare or unique encounters ideas:

For other possibilities, a DM in Souragne could use a coven of hags³ hidden in the swamps, posing as benevolent voodan priests. Also, the evil Bog Hag (in Oriental Adventure) wears the skin of its victims.

A "swamp thing" monster (shambling mound¹ (CR 6)) idea could involve a person cursed to this shape by an evil voodan (But what did he do to cause this?).

Travellers might also encounter feu follet, good aligned Will o' wisps with identical stats but different dietary requirements.

Other interesting swamp-themed creatures' adventure hooks include: Drownling³ (CR 3); a tribe of Moor Men³ (CR 3); Aquatic Remnants³ (CR 3); Corpse Rat Swarm⁷ (CR 4); Yellow Musk Creeper⁵ (CR 4); Swamp Strider Swarm⁶ (CR 5); Bloodmote Cloud⁷ (CR 6); Lycanthrope-Werecrocodile⁴ (CR 6); Catoblepas⁵ (CR 6); Darktentacles⁵ (CR 7); Mudmaw⁵ (CR 7); Octopus Tree⁵ (CR 12); Zombie Golem³ (CR 12).

1 - from Monster Manual; 2 - see appendix; 3 - from Denizens of Dread; 4 - Monsters from Faerun;

5 - from Monster Manual II; 6 - from Monster Manual III; 7 - from Libris Mortis

New Monsters

Merrshaulki

In the western part of the swamp, amidst the fetid vines lies the mighty Ziggurat of the Great Crocodile and heart of the Merrshaulki civilization. The remnants of a once great race, Merrshaulki have regressed to a more primitive way of life, yet the still yearn for the greatness they once had. They offer daily sacrifices of blood and food to their god, in the hopes that he will once again find them worthy and lead them back into the true

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dominance over the soft skins (other forms of sentients).

Once they were the Akarawa, some of the original natives of Souragne who had an animist faith in which reptiles and the reptile loa were revered above all others. Those with the greatest spiritual strength could call upon the Crocodile God in a ritual that involved soft chants, eerie flute music, and a hypnotic dance. The god would bestow upon his most faithful the ability to shapechange into one of those creatures.

When the Akarawa faced genocide at the hands of the Aurélians, the last of their number enacted a powerful version of the ritual that changed them permanently into the diminutive reptile men that now inhabit a remote corner of Western Maison d'Sablet.

The reptile men typically keep to themselves and do their best to exist unnoticed, but also secretly scavenge building materials from Souragne's towns and estates, as well as from the mist-shrouded mountains at the forgotten heart of the island. They occasionally abduct humans, preferably children, for monthly ritual sacrifices to their god. This has given the reptile men the status of bogeymen in Souragnien folklore.

Their stats are identical kobolds.

Appearance & Fashion

The Merrshaulki stand at about 4 feet but their slouched posture means appear closer

to 3 feet. They resemble a bipedal crocodile, with scale coloration varying from mottled brown-green to dark green. This almost uniformed look means that one Merrshaulki looks very much alike to most human but Merrshaulki can readily identify each other by slight colour variations and pheromones. Most Merrshaulki wear little in the way of clothing, wearing only a simple loincloth, but other decorate themselves with simple bone trophies tied with leather cords to their body to allow free movement. The exception is those of high ranks who wear elaborate headdresses made of soft metals, bone and feathers, with Jaws of the Great One, Sandover, possessing the most elaborate.

Language

Merrshaulki is a mixture guttural resonating noises and high pitched squeaks, designed to pass for some distance within an aquatic environment. However since the coming of the holy prophet, Jaws of the Great One, many of the Merrshaulki have (re)learned the language of the native soft-skins, but mouth structure prevents them from speaking in anything other than broken words and complex words of more than two syllables remain impossible. However, they often understand words spoken in their presence and woe betide any who think they are slow-witted due to broken speech.

Lifestyle & Education

The Merrshaulki have a ridged social structure, with a labour caste, a warrior caste, a priest caste and hunter caste. Each Merrshaulki is assigned to their caste when they hatch by a high-ranking member of the priest caste.

The labour caste, while regard in most societies as downtrodden, is one of the most respected next to the priests. They contain within their ranks the Egia (Nursery workers) whose duty is to tend the eggs of the next generation. The labour caste also contains the Grina (Builders), those trained in the knowledge of how to construct the works of the ancients. They were responsible for constructing the Temple of the Great Crocodile.

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The Warrior caste are often the most burly of all the Merrshaulki due to generations of selective breeding. It is the warrior caste who are responsible to obtain sacrifices and slaves from the soft-skins. The warriors act as personal guards of the small priest caste and are responsible for removing every tenth sacrificial remains to the north of their territory as a tribute to the One-who-is-dead-yet-not-dead on the orders of Sandover.

The hunter caste is the most numerous of all the castes and is responsible for ensuring the population gathers enough food, they are also responsible for feeding the sacred ones (the local alligators). The small priest caste were the leaders of the Merrshaulki society until the coming of Sandover, and were responsible for ensuring the correct rituals and rite were said, making sure the correct sacrifices were made, and telling the tells of tales of the Great One. However, their roles have diminished with coming of Sandover and now act more as an advisory council, performing only the minor rituals and sacrifices by themselves. Elders in the castes teach children through oral tradition, all Merrshaulki are taught the tales of the Great One.

The slaves are regarded as fit only to be used up then thrown away. They are looked down on by all of the Merrshaulki. Thanks to the ritual that the slaves go through after their capture, merging them with reptilian essences, they are so docile to their masters that they will calmly stand still for one while it cuts its heart out for a sacrifice.

Attitude Towards Magic

The Merrshaulki worship only one god, alternately called the Great One or The Great Crocodile, but concede that this is but one of his many aspects and represents his strength, power and unbridled savagery. His aspect of the Twisting Serpent represents his deviousness, trickery and magic. His aspect as the sun represents his life giving and glory, while his aspect as the moon is that of his healing and caring. To honour these aspects, three shrines exist at compass points to the Temple of the Great Crocodile, to the East lies the shrine of the sun and the West

Dread Possibility: Way of the Winding Jaws

(Mistway: Sourange - Wildlands, swamp of King Crocodile two way 100% reliable to the Wildlands, 20% reliable from the Wildland. Conditional Mistway: Live human need to activate it both ways).

Discovered on slightly before the coming of Sandover, this mistway has become an almost revered pilgrimage to ailing Merrshaulki, to meet what they have come to consider the holy Avatar of their god, a thought King Crocodile would find most amusing if it weren't for the live humans that they keep bringing with them.

the shrine of the moon. The Shrine of the Twisting Serpent lies to the North of the temple, to the south of the temple lies the sacred pools of the alligators.

The Merrshaulki do not see magic as evil, rather it is a blessing of their god in his aspect of the Twisting Serpent. Any Merrshaulki that shows such a blessing after being assigned to a caste other than that of the priest, often find themselves subjected to an arduous ritual to prove themselves worthy of changing castes. However, such a blessing of the Twisted Serpent is often a mixed blessing as they are often seen as possessing all the traits of the Twisting Serpent and are seen as deceitful and crafty.

The Temple of the Great Crocodile

Sandover truly believes he is the avatar of his profane reptile god and seeks sacrifices in his god's name (and as a convenient food source for himself when he changes to his crocodile form on the three nights of the new moon). His reptile men have completed work on the step pyramid that he ordered, and it is from this edifice that he rules. He kidnaps villagers from both Port d'Elhour and Marais d'Tarascon, and is on the lookout for powerful artifacts to allow him to expand his control. Sandover has created a magical pool, which will allow him to transform people into reptile folk through a ritual.

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The mighty ziggurat Temple of the Great Crocodile is one of the wonders of the Land of Mists. Towering above the village its tip lies above the treetops and containing a staggering number of stones blocks. Every visible surface contains some kind of carving dedicated to the Great Crocodile. Four stairways lead up the ziggurat to the entrance that leads down into the inner structure, at the base of the South stair lies the ritual pit that the captured soft skins are placed into during the ritual that makes them forever slaves of the Merrshaulki. The upper chambers are built for low-level priests, while further down lies a large chamber containing a large, realistic statue of the Great Crocodile. Near this chamber is the chambers of Sandover and that of higher ranking priest, below these chambers lie the final resting place for mummified sacred alligators and those priests who have proven themselves worthy.

Souragne in the Spirit World

The horrors of Souragne's fetid swamps have claimed countless lives and the restless ghosts of these unfortunates now reflect the disease-ridden nightmare from which they could no longer escape from. Ghosts in Souragne may choose the following as their special attacks:

Corrosive Caress (Su): With this horrific ability, the ghost has the ability to channel the minute dangers of the swamp around her and inflict a rust-like poison on anything it touches. Any living creature hit by a ghost's unarmed attacks must make a Fortitude save (DC 10 + ghost's hit dice + ghost's Charisma modifier) or suffer the effects of a strain of tetanus (Incubation 1d20 days, Init dam 1d6 Dex, Sec dam 1d6 Con). This disease is not supernatural and could be neutralized with remove disease or any similar spell. Metallic weapons and creatures struck by a ghost's corrosive touch suffer as if under the effect of a rusting grasp.

Death's Denial (Su): A ghost with this ability has an effective Spell Resistance



equal to 5 + its rank + its Cha modifier against any Necromancy spell targeted against it. Death's denial is always active, but the ghost can turn this ability off and on as it wishes as a free action. Only ghosts of third rank or higher can acquire this ability.

Call of the Sun's Shadow (Su): For a number of times a day equal to its Charisma modifier, a ghost with this powerful ability can rebuke zombies, ghouls and other Walking Dead; this ability is similar to the turn undead ability of a cleric, but the ghost turns the Walking Dead as a cleric half its Hit Dice. Additionally, once a day, the ghost can automatically destroy any one of these turned undead; this ability is similar to the granted power given by the Sun cleric domain.

Only ghosts of fourth rank or higher can acquire this ability.

Evil Voodans and Zombie Creation

Zombies are an important part of local Souragnien folklore. While most voodan priest are benevolent, the dark oriented ones are feared: they are known to threaten people

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of bringing them -someone dear to them- back to eternal unlife as a zombie slave. The Lord of the Dead in Souragne is also known to use similar necromantic powers. The evil voodan priests of Souragne became masters on the creation and uses for obedient dead. Zombies are fairly easy to create and are found all over the Dread Realms, but it is in Souragne that the most evilly refined uses of zombies are found.

These are some the observed powers of evil voodan priests regarding obedient dead:

Bigger pile o' bones (Sp): Creation of "normal" zombie, as the animated dead spell - but in higher number. They add their voodan level to the number of hit dice of zombies created.

No bone brained zombies (Su): Zombie with higher intelligence: when the voodan level is higher than 5th, these zombies are often more intelligent than their ordinary unintelligent cousins: the chance is 5% per level (up to a maximum of 60%) and these zombies have an intelligence score of 3-4 (voodan of 5th to 8th level), 4-5 (voodan of 8th to 12th level) and 5-7 (voodan of 13th level and up). These zombies are known to use basic battle strategies, and can understand more elaborated commands, like a trained animal would. See the Van Richten's Guide to the Walking Dead on page 25 for more on intelligence.

Speak with the dead (Su): A voodan priest raising a corpse as a zombie can ask question about something the zombie knew while it was alive (location of treasure, password, witness information, etc.), as the Speak with the Dead spell. If the spirit would normally be uncooperative, the Will DC save to resist is increased by a penalty of half the voodan caster level (rounded down).

General notes on "normal" zombies

The condition of the body isn't really important but at least 75% of its flesh and organs should be remaining on the corpse for a zombie to be created; otherwise, it's a skeleton that will be animated. The corpse can be freshly dead or in an advanced state of putrefaction. The corpse's rotting process

is greatly slowed but not stopped: a zombie can rot nearly forever.

Appearance and Biology

A zombie is a horrible sight, usually with pale gray skin (the color of rotting meat) and many blood red holes or bruises are seen on the skin. Its eyes are dead and not always focused front. Many have worms and other insects crawling on/in their rotting flesh.

Several zombies (20%) are created from less than perfect bodies, as seen in the following table (roll d10):

1-3	Missing hand (one attack every two rounds)
4-5	Missing arm (one attack every two rounds)
6-7	Missing feet (move diminished by 50%)
8	Missing leg (move diminished by 90%)
9	Missing large part of head (possible hearing or seeing problem)
10	Missing large part of the trunk (no penalty)

Also, zombies that have been in battle before are often maimed, as are zombies created a long time ago (20% chance per battle, or for every 5 year of existence: roll d10 on previous table).

The rotting meat stench of zombies can usually be detected from a distance of 100 feet, and possibly more if a wind carries it in the right direction. However, except in tropical places, zombies tend to dry, and the stench decreases by 10 feet for each year to a minimum of 30 feet. In some very silent places, the noise of carrion flies feeding on the zombie's decaying flesh and fluids can also be heard from a distance.

Zombies can see in the direction they are facing, up to the maximal human range. They have the normal hearing sense as they had in life. Zombies do not breathe. So the legend of zombies madly burrowing from their grave through the ground to fill their lungs with air is, well, just a tale. Even if they are flesh creatures, they do not need to eat or drink to survive as most biological functions have stopped.

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Psychology

Zombies are mindless automatons, being little more than walking corpses. However, they understand more complex orders than those understood by skeletons : up to 12 words per command. Usually, zombies do not speak; they often mutter guttural sounds or simple syllables, especially when they can't finish their ordered task.

The first time a zombie encounters someone it knew in life, there is a 20% chance that the zombie's dead brain will react to that person's presence and have some kind of reminiscence that makes the zombie act horribly. The zombie will then say or do something very meaningful to that person. An ex-lover might try to embrace, a son might ask his father to go fishing, a zombie child tries to get in his parent's arms, etc. A horror check should be rolled for the subject of the zombie's attention.

Souragnien zombie template

The most horrifying powers of the evil voodan priest are the creation of zombies with their minds still attached to the body. These Souragniens zombies are not mindless automatons, and they are trapped in their slowly rotting body! The Lord of the Dead in Souragne has many of these obedient dead working for him in his plantation.

These special zombies have to be created within 48 hours of the person's death and the corpse should be whole for a Souragnien zombie to be animated. A voodan needs to be at least 8th level to create a Souragnien zombie, and can do it only once per month. The full process takes 24 hours.

One such zombie is created at a time, and only the voodan priests know the creation process. These voodan priests claim to have "magical formulas" and alchemical poisonous concoctions that they put in the corpses's mouth. The head is needed for a Souragnien zombie to be animated.

If someone alive was to drink this zombifying concoction, the Will DC to resist its effect is 8 plus the voodan level of the caster. A failed save means the person falls

completely and for ever under the voodan control, and upon this person's death, this person rises as a Souragnien zombie. The only way to break this strong enchantment is to kill the voodan and get a remove curse; or with a high level spell such as Miracle or Wish.

Creating a Souragnien Zombie

"Souragnien zombie" is an acquired template that can be added to any corporeal creature (other than an undead) that has a skeletal system (referred to hereafter as the base creature). This is adapted from the SRD zombie template.

This template is a different from other templates as it is modified with time. As time goes by, the brain of the Souragnien zombie becomes less and less effective and its body rots. To simulate this, the time steps when modifications to the template should be made are:

- The first three days of "creation": the zombie appear to be alive, but body is somewhat stiffened. All body functions still work, but are slowed. Zombies recently raised could eat or drink, but without appetite. Importantly, they do not always know they are dead, as voodan priests often lie to the recently "awakened", telling them they had an accident, a fever, an illness, fell into coma, etc. or that someone tried to murder them in their sleep.
- After four days of creation. After that delay, the bodies start to smell and their decay starts. Body functions have completely stopped.
- Next to other full moon after creation (between 24 to 52 days after creation); and
- Each "anniversary" of creation. Their mind becomes more and more numb.

Size and Type: The creature's type changes to undead. It retains any subtypes except alignment subtypes and subtypes that indicate kind. It does not gain the augmented subtype. It uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

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Hit Dice: Raise the Hit Dice to d12s, up to a maximum of 10 Hit Dice (remove Hit Dice in excess).

Speed: If the base creature can fly, its manoeuvrability rating drops to clumsy.

Armor Class: Natural armor bonus increases by a number based on the zombie's size:

Tiny or smaller	+0
Small	+1
Medium	+2
Large	+3
Huge	+4
Gargantuan	+7
Colossal	+11

Base Attack: upon creation, a Souragnien zombie has a base attack bonus equal to $\frac{2}{3}$ its Hit Dice (round down).

Next to other full moon after creation: change this base attack bonus to $\frac{1}{2}$ its Hit Dice.

Attacks: A zombie retains all the natural weapons, manufactured weapon attacks, and weapon proficiencies of the base creature. A zombie also gains a slam attack.

Damage: Natural and manufactured weapons deal damage normally. A slam attack deals damage depending on the zombie's size. (Use the base creature's slam damage if it's better.)

Fine	1
Diminutive	1d2
Tiny	1d3
Small	1d4
Medium	1d6
Large	1d8
Huge	2d6
Gargantuan	2d8
Colossal	4d6

Special Attacks: A zombie retains all of the base creature's special attacks.

Next to other full moon after creation: a Will DC 12 should be rolled for each special attack ability; failure means the ability has been forgotten or the Souragnien zombie is no longer able to do it.

Each "anniversary of creation": again, a Will DC 14 should be rolled for each special attack ability; failure means the ability has been forgotten or the Souragnien zombie is no longer able to do it.

The following modification applies to all Will checks: Extraordinary ability (+3 bonus), Spell-like ability (-3 penalty), Supernatural ability (-1 penalty).

In the case of spell casters, or class attack physical abilities, this Will check should be made for each spell and ability separately.

Special Qualities: A zombie keeps most special qualities of the base creature, except those relying on a good alignment (ex: paladin power of smite evil, or magic circle against evil).

Next to other full moon after creation: A Will check should be rolled for each special quality relying on improved senses (DC 10, ex: darkvision, tremorsense, etc.) or magic abilities or magic state (DC 15, ex: summon familiar, protective aura, change shape, telepathy, etc.); failure means the ability has been forgotten, or the Souragnien zombie is no longer able to do it.

Each "anniversary of creation": as previous, but the DC is 14 and 18 respectively.

A similar Fort DC 12 check is made for each "physical" special qualities (Damage reduction, immunities, vulnerabilities, etc.).

Also, on a failed Will DC 15 check, a zombie gains the following special quality. Single Actions Only (Ex): Zombies have poor reflexes and can perform only a single move action or attack action each round. A zombie can move up to its speed and attack in the same round, but only if it attempts a charge.

Saves: Base save bonuses are Fort +1/3 HD, Ref +1/3 HD, and Will +1/2 HD + 3.

Abilities: A zombie's Strength increases by +2, its Dexterity decreases by 2, it has no Constitution score. Remove 1d2 permanently from Intelligence, Wisdom scores, and 1d4 from Charisma score.

After four days of creation: Will DC 10 or remove 1d4 permanently from Intelligence and Wisdom scores (down to a minimum of

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3). Remove 1d6 to Charisma score (down to a minimum of 1).

Next to other full moon after creation and each "anniversary of creation": Will DC 10 or remove 1d4 permanently from Intelligence and Wisdom scores (down to a minimum of 3); Will DC 20 or remove 1d10 from Charisma (down to a minimum of 1).

Each time, make the needed change to abilities, skills, etc. For example, if a Souragnien zombie's dexterity falls below 15, it can't use the Two Weapon Fighting feat anymore.

Skills: Upon creation, a Souragnien zombie keeps all skills it had in life.

After four days of creation: Knowledge check DC 8 (Int) when trying to use a skill. Failure means this skill can't be used in the next 24 hours. Keep a note of the failed check: after three failures, a skill is completely forgotten. Roll separately for each skill.

Next to other full moon after creation: as previous, but check DC is 10.

Each "anniversary of creation": as previous, but check DC is 12.

Feats: Upon creation, a Souragnien zombie keeps all the feats it had in life (unless a diminished ability score is lower than the minimum needed), and it gains Toughness.

Next to other full moon after creation and each "anniversary of creation": Will DC is 14 or loose the feat. Roll separately for each feat.

Environment: Any land and underground.

Organization: Any.

Challenge Rating: upon creation its CR is roughly 0,8 to 1 with Hit Dice (a 10 Hit Dice Souragnien zombie is CR 8 creature).

As the Souragnien zombie starts to "loose" fighting and casting abilities, gradually diminish its CR down to the "normal" zombie minimum, as follows:

Hit Dice	Challenge Rating
1/2	1/8
1	1/4
2	1/2
4	1
6	2
8-10	3

Treasure: As base creature had upon its death (minus what the voodan kept for himself!).

Alignment: Always neutral evil.

Advancement / Level Adjustment: N/A

Final notes on Souragnien zombie

When an evil voodan creates a zombie of that kind, the sorcerer has two options regarding the control he will exert on the zombie; full control or no control at all:

Full control: the priest possesses a voodan doll of the deceased person, made with the person's blood and hairs. With it, the voodan priest has a mental link with the zombie and can control it at will. The control is in fact similar to what vampires have on their spawn: the zombie realizes its condition, but it can't resist his master's orders and the zombie will never hurt the voodan priest willingly. This eternal control is what Souragniens fear most.

No control at all: as most of these do not realize they are dead, the uncontrolled zombie will usually resume its task as if nothing ever happened: try to take back its former place in a family, at work, etc., to the horror of those who see the person back and undead... If this option is chosen, the voodan priest can't choose to control it later.

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K knowledge

Upon creation, a Souragnien zombie keeps all knowledge it had in life.

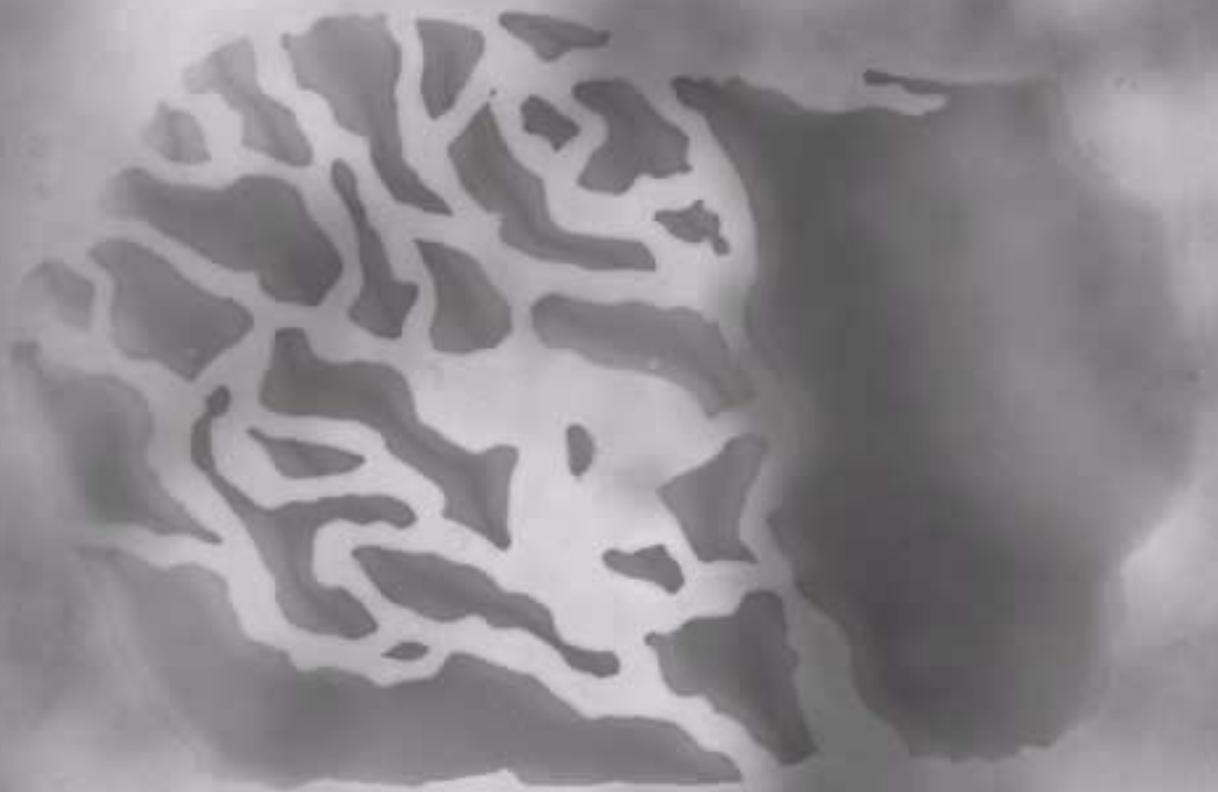
Next to other full moon after creation: Knowledge check DC 8 (Int) when trying to remember a fact it knew in life. Failure means this knowledge is gone from the zombie's brain (the DM should take note of these "forgotten" knowledge and use common sense to judge tries to recall similar or related facts). Roll separately for each "fact".

Each "anniversary of creation": as previous, but check DC is 12.

Salient abilities

At DM's choice, most salient abilities for obedient dead from the Van Richten's Guide to Walking Dead (chapter two) can be added to these special zombies. Also, the appendix of this book (page 104) details "voodan zombies", undead that are quicker and more cunning, like ju-ju zombies.

Appendix 2



Who's Who

Anton Misroi

Darklord of Souragne

Male human Zombie Lord; Ari 5 / Sor 5 / Brd 3

Basic stats: 13d12 (84 hit points), LE, CR 15

SA: see combat SQ: undead traits, see combat

Str 17, Dex 18, Con -, Int 16, Wis 8, Cha 22

List of feats should include: Dancing Bones

Sorcerer spells known - necromantic only.
Special, see under "special attacks"

Bardic spells known (the casting of these spells must be sung or danced):

0 - Dancing Lights, Ghost Sound, Lullaby

1 - Disguise Self

The Lord of the Dead, Anton Misroi appears to be a handsome human in his mid-thirties, tall with shiny black hairs slightly curling at the back. His manners and preferred clothes identify him as an old-fashion aristocrat.

One often has the impression that Anton is repressing excitement when meeting new people, especially women. He is a man that loves the company of the fair sex, especially if they have the wit and charm to entertain him. He sees them as a challenge, making him a perfect gentlemen in their company: very gallant and looking to please them with gifts and good words.

In his conversation Misroi is always polite and often philosophical, especially about human struggles with life and death. He is often impassive, witty, tongue-in-cheek, but always in control of the situation and makes sure his guests understand that this charming gentleman is actually in control of their fate too. However, when provoked or insulted, he will swiftly destroy the object of his rage.



Background

Anton Misroi was born the son of a wealthy plantation owner. Spoiled as a child, Anton and his elder brother were always in competition for their father's attention. Both were charming children and they were the subject of many words of praise by the adults around them. At twelve Anton had a fit of rage against his brother and pushed him in a swamp infested by alligators. Hearing the child's cry of horror, workers came but it was much too late. Anton's brother has been killed.

Horrified at what he had done, Anton fell into dumbness. During this period in bed, he heard people expressing their horror at Anton being a witness to this horrible accident. Feigning sleep, Anton felt two exhilarating emotions: he was thrilled that his bad action wasn't seen or suspected and happy of his manipulations of the adults' emotions. But more troubling was that Anton watched his brother get devoured by the reptiles with secret glee. He was fascinated by the memory of his brother's eyes looking at him while his face showed pain and shock.

The rest of his spoiled childhood passed normally. In his adolescence Anton learned to ride horses. He loved to push them close to their limits. He also loved cock fights,

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especially to see these animals in fury shedding each other's blood with the razor blade attached to their legs. It gave Anton a high level of secret exaltation.

He married when he was a young to a refined and educated woman, Nicole, the daughter of a rich tailor. That he was married didn't prevent Anton from looking at other women and his wife sometimes waited for him to come home until dawn.

Anton became a minor practitioner of a form of bardic magic called "spell-singing", casting involving either singing or dancing. He never became an expert in this type of magic but his love of dancing had a definitive influence on his future magical studies.

Charm and intelligence were used by Anton to rise in local politics. He was always in company of the elite and soon he was a sought-after adviser. He once had to advise in a case of a local band of minor ruffians and bandits. The leader of the ruffians was a beautiful woman of colour named Nanaea that he easily charmed to bed.

For Anton, wild horse rides and cock or alligators fights were no longer enough. He used excuses to justify kidnapping a troublesome shop owner. They rode to the swamp and gave him the infamous "Souragnien burial": thrown into the swamp to be. Anton watched until there was nothing left.

In the following years, Misroi killed many in this horrible manner. He eventually ran out of political enemies but it didn't stop him: in the end he and Nanaea's thugs were snatching random people at night for this grisly fate.

Meanwhile, Nanaea slowly planted seeds of doubt in Anton's head about his wife's fidelity. Anton could not really believe that his dull wife was having an affair, but the idea troubled him. Nanaea was in fact manipulating Anton to abandon his wife so that she could move into the plantation main house and live like a lady of upper class.

One day, Misroi came home early and in the garden, he found his wife in the arms of a neighbouring plantation owner. While she was actually weeping about her unhappy life

while the gentleman comforted her, Misroi quickly denounced them as lovers. With a triumphant Nanaea and her ruffians, Anton had both of them thrown in a patch of quicksand barely deep enough to cover a man's head.

Nanaea and the other ruffians left Anton alone to watch the pair slowly drown. Under the full moonlight he played a sinister game of conversation cat and while they were slowly sinking. He told them that if they admitted their "relations" Anton would throw them a rope. Sometimes he actually did throw them the rope but always a foot short. Since the "lovers" had nothing to confess, Misroi ignored their pleas of mercy and let them drown while entertaining them with the vanity of human life and death and similar philosophical topics. At one point, the man told Anton's wife to climb atop him while he went under. When he was sure the man has died, he said that this was a proof of their love and then used a pole to push her in. With her last breath, his wife cursed him but he laughing in her face.

When she had disappeared, he sat on a log to enjoy a few gulps of strong brandy. The swamp suddenly went very quiet. Then the murdered pair arose, grabbed Anton by his coat and dragged him in the quicksand to die.

Horrified, Anton yelled to the sky "I don't want to die! Don't let me die!" while he drowned. Something heard his plea and Anton found himself able to escape the quicksand. Days had passed. Anton's flesh was bloated with water and his skin swollen and bloody from the nasty bites of insects. His horse ran away from his approach.

Panicking and far from understanding what happened, Misroi slowly walked back to his plantation to see the road seemed now merely a path through the swamps bordering his plantation. Animals seemed to shun him.

Seeing a "monster" coming out of the swamp, the workers of his plantation attacked him and drove him back in the swamp. Looking at his image mirrored in the water, he saw he had become a hideous creature - one of the living dead.

Near mad at this horrible turn of event, Anton wandered the swamp angrily for

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years. He spied the workers of his plantation and also people living in towns and villages east of the swamp. He was also dumbfounded when he realized the miles of countryside had disappeared into mists. He eventually considered the swamp to be his "land" and killed most humans found trespassing in it, especially his former workers. He quickly discovered he was able to raise those he killed as zombies. He quickly became the legendary Lord of the Dead.

One day he found an island in the swamp inhabited by a plant-like woman. The Maiden of the Swamp was horrified of Anton's fate and thought he was a fey-like creature like her, but who hadn't yet been connected with the land. Over a period of two years, she helped him learn the powers found in nature's essence.

Anton manipulated her during all this time. The Maiden was more than happy to attempt to help, whom she believed was suffering wrongly. She could not even consider Anton to have an evil soul leaning toward destruction instead of life. She taught Misroi by showing him the energy flowing around life and death and how to manipulate those forces through dance or rituals with the land. He told her his secret wish was to regain his appearance, his humanity, and she showed him how to use nature's positive weave of energy to make himself appear human again.

While learning from the Maiden, Anton also expanded his necromantic powers through experimentation. Since the Maiden could not leave her island, he could keep these tests secrets from her. When the Maiden learned that Anton had not abandoned his fascination with necromantic power, it was too late. Anton's inner power was so great he was the undisputed master of Souragne and the Maiden was simply "that annoying moss creature." The year was 645 and Anton regained his humanity.

His first move was to regain his plantation; he killed his former workers and raised them as zombies. He was satisfied that the servants he was creating now kept their knowledge and craft.

However, the power rituals he made with his land to get these new abilities had a drawback: Anton found he couldn't leave the swamp anymore. As the Maiden was limited to her island, Anton was no longer able to walk the land: solid land was as quicksand.

Since then, Anton's power has grown, to the point where he may alter Souragne's geography at will. He has felt powers tugging his island toward others but he has been able to resist these forces. Since its appearance in the Demiplane of Dread, Souragne would surely have melded with other islands or the Core if not for Anton's absolute control and desire for isolation.

Anton's Curse

Anton can't walk on the solid ground of Souragne. For him, crossing from Maison d'Sablet to solid ground is like jumping into quicksand, "drowning" him within seconds. Anton then exits somewhere else in the swamp (see the Master of the Swamp ability) but his appearance changes to that of a bloated zombie corpse similar to when he first exited the swamp in the year 635. This is something he loathes. He is forced to keep this bloated-corpse appearance until the next full moon.

While he cannot access most of the Eastern dry part of Souragne and a few islands within the swamp (the Maiden's isle and some other) he can walk the marshy land in the South of Souragne where his plantation is located, but he prefers to travel these areas on horseback.

During rain seasons or the inundations, where the ground is very wet, Anton Misroi's is able to travel on "dry" land. However, his travel on these soaked lands have to be made on horse's back, he still cannot touch the land. Anton then haunts the towns at night, usually on a zombie horse, never setting his foot on ground. Souragnien whispers that "Death rides in the rain." When it pours many Souragniens refuses to go outside.

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Current Sketch

Anton enjoys a quiet existence in his plantation. The Manor house's appearance has declined over the years and is in need of maintenance, but Anton finds a certain charm to it. While he cannot leave the swamp, Anton is able to learn much of what is taking place on the land. Usually, he is just an observer of the, but sometimes wishes to play a part or desires to meet some he think are worthy of his attention.

He will then attract them in the swamp where he meets them in person under the guise of an old fashion gentleman. These people receive invitation to meet him at his plantation, or sometimes hear strange drums in the swamp to lure them to his plantation.

His inability to walk on the land frustrates him from again being part of the upper crust of society. Anton likes wine and fine cuisine but is rarely able to entertain guests at Maison de la Détresse.

Anton is not as bloodthirsty as before he became a darklord, but he loves to share this excitement at watching pain and suffering with those he think will appreciate it. Activities like riding a horse to its death, watch cocks or other animals fight or a trapped animal gnaw at its leg to release itself from a trap.

Anton has a unique power: he is able to make his spirit leave his body and travel to the other lands. He is able to observe what is going on in these places and he does not like what he sees out there. In his opinion, the other domain rulers are not sophisticated enough to fully enjoy their condition or simply too single-minded. They are fools unable to escape their curses as he has and unworthy of respect. They confirm his choice to keep Souragne isolated.

Anton Misroi had made sure Souragniens knew of the laws he proclaimed. But most Souragniens know him as the Lord of the Dead and are unaware of his real name. The first edict is that newly dead bodies are to be left unburied and unmaimed for four days, in case his whims lead him to raise them as zombies. The second is an interdict on the practice in Souragne of any kind of magic

other than necromantic or healing. While Misroi doesn't know when this ban is trespassed, he has many informers (both humans and undead) who would tell him of the culprit spellcaster. In fact, this ban is something that has been enforced few times in the last decades, but always with horrible consequences to the offender.

Examples of punishments meted out to those practicing forbidden magic, Anton has sometimes had the caster tied to a zombie by a cord passing over an alligator infested pond. The zombie stands on the opposite side of the pond and begins moving away from the pond. After long hours of struggle, the dead wear the victim out, and drag him to his grizzly demise in the pond. This fate of the spellcasters was made well known to the Souragniens and it is rumoured that this caster is now serving Misroi as a horribly maimed zombie.

Misroi feels secure that no one practicing necromancy can really challenge his power, but he is not as confident about the other branches of magic, which he does not understand. With this ban, he makes sure that outsider spell casters are shunned by the Souragniens and denounced. People without scruples who want to destroy an enemy have been known to spread false rumours, making sure that the Lord of the Dead hears about someone practicing forbidden magic.

Even with all his limitations, deep inside him Anton is convinced he cheated his fate. He survived death and beat the Dark Powers. He restored his humanity, regained his old life and learned necromantic power more potent than his wildest dreams. He sneers at those other lords he sees through his watery scrying and their pitiful attempts to free themselves of their curses, they are beneath him.

But deep down he knows this is a lie. The Dark Powers remind him of this. Every time he allows himself to become complacent and forget -just for a moment- that he is a dead man dressing up as a mortal, he is painfully reminded. Often he wakes to a horrible stench, his bloody and sticky skin releasing a foul odour of decayed and rotting flesh. This stench and the decaying blood and flesh on

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his skin are only removed by bathing in pure rain water that needs to be thrown away afterwards.

The Dark Powers are nothing if not creative and continually remind Misroi of his inhumanity with a myriad of reminders, both blunt and subtle.

Combat

Anton Misroi has unique powers that make him a kind of overlord to the zombie lord creatures (see Denizens of Dread). In combat he is extremely dangerous as his fury usually quickly changes to excitement where he becomes refined and cruel in his attacks.

All these abilities function as if cast by an 18th-level necromancer.

Special Attacks

Anton's Dance of the Dead (Su): By dancing, Anton can cast any necromantic spell (arcane, divine, or turn undead) through Anton's dance of the dead. One spell per round. Using this ability often causes his appearance to change to a capering zombie in the clothes of a gentleman for the time it takes him to cast the spell.

Anton Misroi can share this power with anyone should he wishes to teach it, but these enlightened persons cannot teach it themselves. This acquired power is limited to one necromantic spell effect, or turn undead attempt, or the spell *Danse Macabre* (from Van Richten's Arsenal). Those attempting to use this power also appear as skeletons or zombies while they dance. The DC to succeed in casting (dancing) Anton's dance of the dead is charisma based (DC 14). If they fail, the effect is horrible: they are transformed into Souragnien zombies (for onlookers, they keep the undead appearance they took during the dance). If the rolled DC is 13 on the dice, the spell affects everybody looking at the scene, friend or foe, in a radius of 150'.

Awaken the Dead (Su): see Denizens of Darkness under "zombie lord", but with a 18th level effect.

Reach of the Grave (Su): Once a month, when someone has wronged him or simply

when he wants someone's attention, Anton can send curses and messages with an unlimited range. This power even reaches outside the borders of Souragne, but not in a domain where the darklord has closed his borders. Anton needs something like a piece of clothing or bits of hair, skin, fingernails or blood.

The "curse" Anton usually prefers to send is having a zombie visited the target of this ability. It acts like a summon undead spell with a radius centered on the victim. If there is one within three miles of the target, not under control of other entity, this zombie will slowly walk to the target. It will not attack him but instead try to hug and kiss the target for a minute. After that the target knows he has been sent a "gift" by Anton Misroi. Oftentimes they hear a specific message up to 20 words. The zombie returns to its normal behaviour when finished.

Zombie master (Su): see Denizens of Darkness under "zombie lord", but with a range covering all Souragne.

Zombify (Su): see Denizens of Darkness under "zombie lord", but 6 times per day

Special qualities:

Master of the Swamp (Su): This is Anton's most powerful ability, making it nearly impossible to destroy him. Anton is capable of blending into the swamps simply by merging into a tree or also sinking into the swamp within seconds as if he was ethereal. Doing any of these actions immediately restores him to full hit points.

This ability also allows him to travel from place to place anywhere in the swamp (an ability similar as the druidic 6th level spell *Transport via Plants*) or transfer his mind to any corpse (humanoid or animal) within the swamp. The flesh and bones of that body transforms to take Anton's body appearance.

Speech of the Dead (Su): see Denizens of Darkness under "zombie lord", but without any limit to what Anton can learn from the dead spirit.

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Dread possibility - Anton's Sketches

Anton owns about a dozen magical frames. It's unknown who created these. Similar in ways to a Mirror of Life Trapping, any creature Anton holds and presents the frame to while saying the command word must make a DC 23 Will save or be trapped within the frame. So far, the command word is only known to Anton and those trapped within. Victims trapped in the frames are conscious and see the room where the frame is hung.

When a creature is trapped, it is taken bodily into the frame. Constructs and undead are not trapped, nor are inanimate objects and other nonliving matter. A victim's equipment (including clothing and anything being carried) remains behind. The same command word frees the trapped creature. Each command word is specific to each prisoner.

Those looking at the frame see a well made pastel sketch image of this person in various positions, in the location similar to where they were trapped in the frame. A Spot DC 18 will show onlookers that the person in the frame is slowly moving. Some people can pass messages to frame onlookers through body language, signs or writings.

Anton currently has about ten persons trapped in these frames. One of them is a crying woman appearing seated on a desk. When given the opportunity, she will write "Help me" or "Set me free" on the desk before her. She has been there for so long nobody but Anton remembers her anymore. Another frame contains an arcane spell caster that offended Anton. This frame was thrown in the swamp in a place known only to Anton. Other frame's content is left to DMs.

Strong abjuration; CL 14th; Craft Wondrous Item, imprisonment; Price 80,000 gp; Weight 10 lb.

Lair

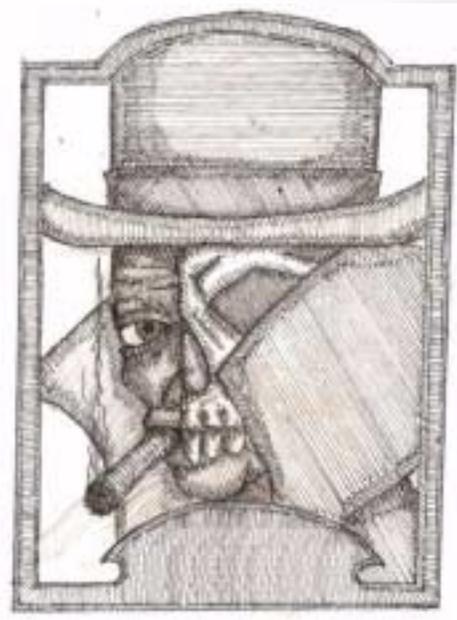
Anton's plantation is "Maison de la Détresse, a large plantation now bordered by swamps on all sides. A couple more-or-less hidden paths leading to Maison are the only means of entrance.

Zombie workers toil there night and day, maintaining the crops, horses and cattle for Anton's pleasure and guests. These zombies will not fight to defend the plantation unless attacked, but will immediately alarm Anton of visitors.

The wooden home stinks of stale air and is old but its walls and floors are still solid. It has two stories and is built on poles. While everything is endlessly maintained clean by the zombie servants, it is old and in need of major repair. The paint on the walls is often chipped, floors are covered by water-stained carpets, and light come from old cobwebbed chandeliers. In the salon, a well maintained fireplace struggles with difficulty to lower the damp humidity. Eerily, a few of the drawings on the wall sometimes appear to move.

Closing the Borders

People can't leave the island if Anton wishes it closed. People entering the Mists find themselves back in Souragne after having wandered for a few minutes.





The Maiden of the Swamp

Female dryad (Loa); Druid 8th

Basic stats: 4d6+8d8 (86 hit points), CG, CR 10

SA: spells SQ: see below

Str 10, Dex 15, Con 17, Int 10, Wis 16, Cha 16

The shy Maiden of the Swamp is a six feet tall thin fey-like woman, with pale green skin, large emerald eyes, and white-green hair. Her robe is made of leaves and vines and her feet never completely leave the ground when she walks. Finally, her hands appear wooden and her fingers are twigs-like.

This enigmatic dryad has always been rooted to Lac Noir, and was revered as a benevolent loa before the creation of Souragne. However, her memory is faulty and she doesn't remember much of the era before the year 635.

She was fooled by Anton Misroi to teach him nature spells and things he wasn't meant to know. Realizing her mistake, she hid from all sentient being from dry lands for a long time, until Larissa Snowmane came to her island. Seeing goodness in her heart, and sure Larissa's cause was worthy against necromancy, she awoke the druidic powers in her. This success in her teaching healed the shame of having been fooled by Misroi.

The Maiden's Children

The Maiden of the Swamp is a force of the nature, and she emanates an energy that affects all the swamp around her. But as everything in the Land of Mists, her "aura" is sometimes corrupted and distorted in a way to generate horror: sometimes, people who die in Lac Noir are bathed by these corrupted nature energies.

These individuals rise again from death, but not as zombies. They become a strange kind of elemental mud creature. Their bodies appear as when they were alive. Their mind is insane and they quickly turn to foul mud when killed. Use Mudman stats (from Tome of Terror), except for physical description.

The Maiden of the Swamp knows about these creatures, and it pains her.

The Maiden of the Swamp sometimes takes apprentices, but she chooses them carefully: good heart for healing without and a devotion to protect nature.

The Maiden is unable to leave her island in the middle of Lac Noir. This island is about half a mile long by about 400 hundred feet wide and heavily forested. Due to the dryad's aura, there is no monstrous creature on this island although many animals live there to get the Maiden's protection. She avoids Anton Misroi and has never seen her since the time she was teaching him.

Now raised to loa level, many Souragnien pray for her healing blessing. Being connected to the land in a unique fashion, the Maiden knows much of the plane (treat as Knowledge (Planar): 8 ranks).

The best way to petition her directly is to send her a message through a bird or any other animal (speak with animals). Other Souragnien simply travel to her island and tell aloud the tale of their problems and how the Maiden of the Swamp could help them or their cause. If she is moved by the petitioner,

Appendix 2 Who's Who

the Maiden will appear to them. However, since her fiasco with Anton Misroi, she now asks many questions before getting involved.

Spell-Like Abilities: 8th level druid spells, plus:

At will-entangle (DC 20), speak with plants, speak with animals, tree shape; 3/day- charm person (DC 15), deep slumber (DC 17), tree stride; 1/day-suggestion (DC 17). Caster level 12th. The save DCs are Wisdom-based except entangle (Reflex).

Lac Noir (Su): The Maiden is bound to a single dry island in the middle of Lac Noir. If she wants to hide, she can merge in the ground or in a tree for as long as she wants. The tree or ground where she hides doesn't radiate magic.

Wild Empathy (Ex): This power works like the druid's wild empathy class feature, except that the Maiden has a +8 racial bonus on the check.

This NPC is featured in the novel *Dance of the Dead* and described as a loa in the 3rd edition *Dark Tales & Disturbing Legends* accessory.

Larissa Snowmane

Female human; Druid 6

Basic stats: 6d8 (51 hit points), NG, CR 4



SA: spells SQ: see description

Str 12, Dex 18, Con 15, Int 13, Wis 17, Cha 18

List of feats should include: Dancing Bones

Signature Possessions: Anton's riding crop (whip becoming a lashing viper when activated: 1d2 damage, poison DC 16, 2d6 Strength.)

Larissa Snowmane is a middle age woman of rare beauty. Her icy blue eyes and flowing long white hairs increase her natural grace. Her uncle raised her from childhood to be a dancer on La Demoiselle du Musarde, a paddleboat show theatre.

However, during a stay of the paddleboat in Souragne, she discovered her uncle's evil secret plans with the help of her feu follet lover Willen. Using the aid of a sinister necromantic wizard named Lond; he planned to turn all personnel of the showboat into submissive zombies. In order to thwart her uncle's evil actions, she met the benevolent Maiden of the Swamp. The fey taught her how to harness her natural magical powers, transforming her from dancer to a special spellcaster: Larissa can cast her nature-oriented spells normally or through dance (see the Dancing Bone feat).

Later, she also met the Lord of the Dead himself who taught her a few things and unveiled her deep hidden fascination with life and death. Her common points with Misroi about life, death and pain fascinated her but she has now chosen to put them aside in her life and ignore those urges.

Satisfied about his pupil's inner strength, Anton also taught her the infamous Dance of the Dead, which was decisive in the battle against her uncle and Lond. However, something went wrong during the performance of this difficult dance, and her lover Willen was killed by its deadly powers.

After defeating her evil uncle, she was elected captain of the showboat by the other entertainers. She renamed the boat River Dancer and began to tour the domains of the Core and countless Islands and Clusters. She surely is one of the most traveled people of the plane.

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Many adventure hooks can be derived from her travels and entertainment possibilities. Larissa could easily transport some of the PCs on the River Dancer.

This interesting NPC is described in length in the novel *Dance of the Dead* and the 2nd edition *Champions of the Mists* accessory.

Captain Guy Bourbonne

Male human afflicted were-crocodile Exp3/Ari3: CR 6; Medium shapechanger (5ft. 7" tall); Hd 3d8+3d8, hp 35; Init +6 (+7 hybrid form); Spd 30 feet; AC 12, touch 12, flat-footed 10 (hybrid form: AC 17, touch 13, flat-footed 14); Base Atk +4; Atk + 6 melee (1d8+1/19-20, masterwork longsword) or +7 ranged (1d10/x3, masterwork pistol), or +9 melee (1-8 +5/20, bite) or +9 melee (1-12 +5/20, tail swipe); Full Atk +9 melee (1-8 +5/20, bite) and +7 melee (1-6 +5/20, 2 claws) or +9 melee (1-8 +5/20, bite) and + 8 melee (1d8+5/19-20, masterwork longsword) as hybrid;

As were-crocodile: (Lost Empires of Faerun, p 181); AL NG (NE); SV Fort +3 (+6), Ref + 6 (+7), Will +6; Str 12 (20), Dex 15 (17), Con 9 (15), Int 16, Wis 15, Cha 11.

Skills and Feats: Appraise (6) +11, Balance (0): +2 (+3 as hybrid), Bluff (6): +8, Climb (0): +1(+5 as hybrid), Concentration (0): -1 (+2 as hybrid), Diplomacy (5): +11, Disguise (0): +2, Forgery (2): +5; Escape Artist (0): +0 (+1 as hybrid), Gather Info (5) +5, Handle animal (0): +0, Heal (0): +2; Hide (5): +10 (+11 as hybrid), Listen (2) +6, Intimidate (8) +12 (+16 as hybrid), Jump (0): +1 (+5 as hybrid), Knowledge [nobility & royalty] (5) +8; Knowledge [local] (2) +5; Mv Silent (0) +2 (+3 as hybrid), Profession [sailor] (1) +3, Profession [merchant] (1) +5, Ride (1) +3, Survival (2) +4, Swim (3) +4 (+8 as hybrid), Search (0) +3, Sense Motive (5) +7, Spot (4) +8; Alertness, Skill focus (hide), Persuasive, Mercantile background (+2 Appraise & +2 one Profession); Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Firearms), Improved initiative

Languages: Souragnian*, Mordentish, Pharazian, Vaasi.

Signature possessions: noble outfit, masterwork pistol; masterwork longsword, masterwork dagger

Background

Guy Bourbonne is seen by many to be the embodiment of Port d'Elhour, an example of springing back from disaster. Guy narrowly escaped with his life when one of their family's merchant vessels, which Guy was captaining, was lured onto reefs rocks of the northwestern coast of Souragne by a gang of caliban bandits. Mistaking a placed beacon for a lighthouse, the ship's helmsman hurled the vessel onto the unforgiving rocks. Guy escaped, but with injuries from the leader of the gang of bandits, a hideously deformed creature and twisted mockery of a man.

It was several weeks before Guy discovered that the deformed monster that had attacked them must have been a were-crocodile, infecting him with its curse. Guy had always been frail and sickly, and the onset of the curse gave him health that he had never known before. What distressed Guy most were the bestial urges the curse brought to the surface. These urges typically involved killing and eating children.

Initially Guy tried to repress these urges, but doing so led hideously violent rages each full moon, and several incidents which only large amounts of money and "disappearances" of witnesses kept quiet. To quell the beast within, he had constructed in the basement of his house a special room where children, either slave children, vagrants from the city streets, or children that would otherwise not be missed, could be taken. The rest of the bodies of his victim are then transported to the swamps where they were sunk out of sight. These practices meant that Guy could maintain a more stable public persona, and his position as a member of the aristocratic elite.

Guy is always well dressed in the most sumptuous of fashions, and always has a sword at his side. His most distinguishing feature is his left hand, always gloved, which he tries to keep in a pocket or under his coat. This hand was where his wound occurred that injected the lycanthropic curse into his

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body. Unfortunately it is forever mutated and twisted into the stumpy, scaled claw of a crocodile, which a padded glove helps to hide. Guy is extremely conscious of this deformity and will fly into a rage if it is mentioned.

Monsieur Mensonge

Male human; Voodan* 16th

Basic suggested stats: 16d8 (104 hit points), neutral evil, CR 12

SA: spells, including Heart and Souls* and Touch of the Doppelganger*

Str 13, Dex 13, Con 15, Int 15, Wis 16, Cha 16

Feat list should include: Brew Greater Potion*

*see Dark Tales and Disturbing legends

Monsieur Mensonge is a dark skinned man appearing to be in his late forties. Looking youthful and healthy, his hair is still black and his quiet eyes seem to be constantly appraising something.

Mensonge was born on a plantation near Port d'Elhour. His parents worked hard for their wealthy plantation owner, as they knew nothing else. When he was young, Mensonge saw his father die under a pile of logs, as a consequence of neglect from a



foreman. His father's death forced his mother and two sons into deeper poverty, and many around them abused of this situation.

When she was stuck by melancholy, Mensonge's mother sometimes told them of their parentage on her side with the past grand Misroi bloodline, to put emphasis on their twisted current fate of poverty.

At 17, disgusted by this sore existence, the rebellious Mensonge fled to the south, where he met elders, who taught him of the healing and benevolent magic of the voodan. His first patron loa was Lethede, the Lady of Roads. However, in his early twenties, his hate of the caste system that imprisoned Souragniens into hard work and poverty made him listen favourably to another, darker loa. He heard his mother died a decade ago, but he has no idea of his brother's whereabouts.

He now lives alone in a small abandoned plantation located near Maison d'Sablet, not far from the town of Thibaut. Most people of Thibaut know of this location, and they usually fear going there. Many snakes and swamp animals are free to roam this property's crumbles walls, menacing but actually not aggressive toward the rare visitors.

Over the last decade, a few disappearances in southern Souragne have been rumoured to be Mensonge's doing, but if it's accurate, it seems the figures of authority are not undertaking anything against him. People often whisper about how Monsieur Mensonge is seemingly above the law, and why are the authorities leaving him be.

However, his fame over potion brewing skills covers all of Souragne and many desperate people seek his trade, sometimes from outside the island. There seems to be no limit to what kind of power or sorcery Mensonge is able to distil in his expensive flasks of coloured glass.

Mensonge's secret patron loa is Ohuwaghnn, the Serpent King, whom Mensonge serves since a long time. Mensonge take for his Ohuwaghnn' hatred of humanity and he also makes everything he can to destroy civilized society. Mensonge'

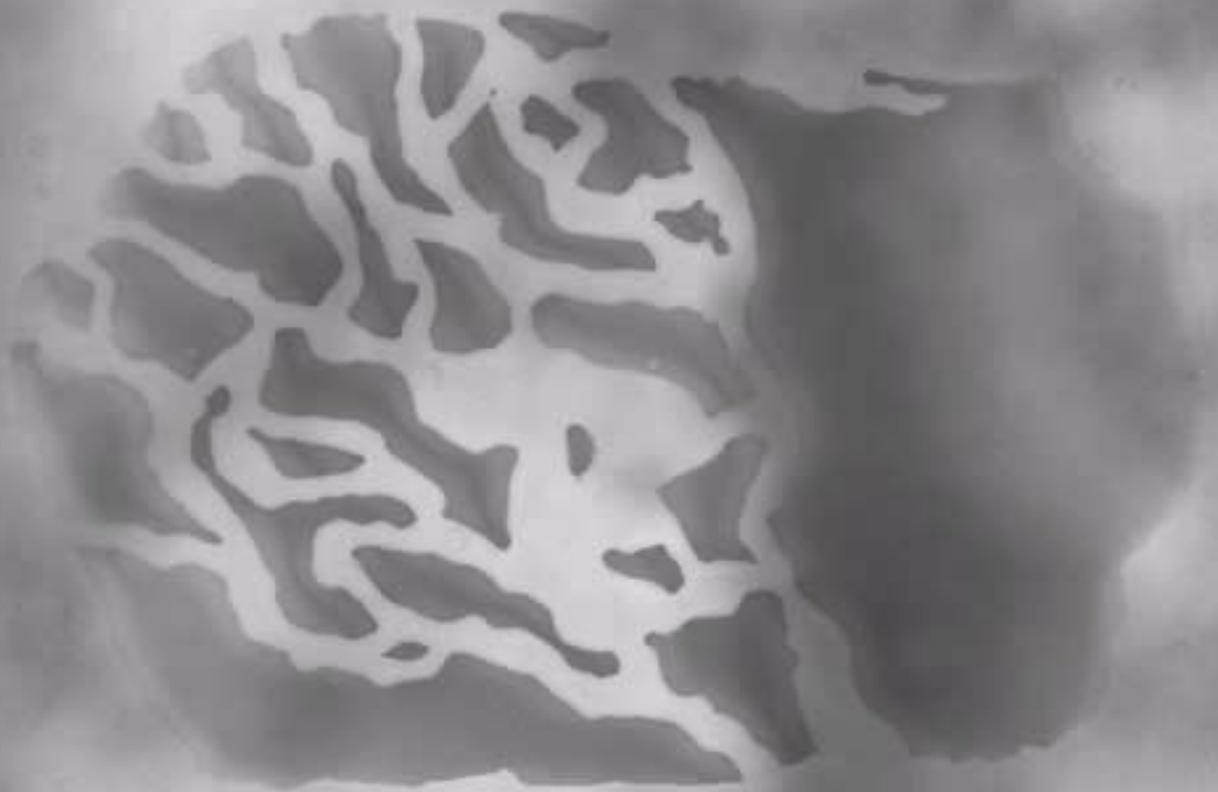
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long term goal is the collapse of the plantations and everything that represents law and order. By trickery, his divination, necromantic and transmutation skills are aiming to destruction, under well intended appearance. Of course, he keeps his patron loa faith a secret, passing himself off as a powerful, but otherwise ordinary, beneficial voodan. When asked about his bad reputation, Mensonge argue about the lack of respect of the populace toward voodans in general.

His divination skills are accurate and few secrets are hidden a long time from him. To this use, he often draws on dark necromantic items like Spirit Bottles and Gris-Gris Coffin (see Misroi Legacy appendix). This knowledge serves him in planning corruption and destruction against the nobles of mid and southern Souragne. The flasks and advices he sells often have a painful unseen consequence and have caused a lot of suffering.

This NPC is featured in the adventure "To Honour and Obey" in Dark Tales & Disturbing Legends accessory.

Appendix 3



The Misroi Legacy

Appendix 3

Without a doubt, the library was the greatest loss in the destruction of le Manoir de Pénombre. All manner of ancient tomes and magical treatise were incinerated in the fires that consumed our Richemulot estate.

As insult added to injury, the few volumes that survived the fires proved to be of little value. Ironically, our storage locker of valueless books proved to be the surest protection against calamity. I spent many a melancholy hour sifting through our "junk bin", in the vain hope that somehow some important document had been saved amongst the clutter. It was during such a diversion that I discovered a surprising treasure: a worn and aged diary.

Initially I thought nothing of the tiny booklet, and leafed through its pages as a distraction. The former owner's name seemed familiar, though for what reason I could not recall. I was about to toss the yellowed book away when one word caught my undivided attention: Souragne.

By purest luck, I had happened upon a valuable source of knowledge. I immediately devoted myself to deciphering whatever insights the journal held. To my disappointment, the diary focused not upon the land, but rather the history of an obscure noble clan hailing from that realm and long since dispersed throughout the mists. Nonetheless, the Misroi Diaries offer us an insight into the culture and nobility birthed by the domain in which we now dwell.

Below are my summarized notes.

~ Ambrose Skully

The Misroi Family

The Misroi family is an ancient line of nobility, widely disbursed throughout the demiplane of dread. The Misrois are consummate landed gentry, they eschew most mercantile pursuits in favor of developing and exploiting large estates. Wherever they dwell, the Misrois quickly gain a reputation for their ambition. The clan aggressively seeks out favorable marriages and alliances to increase their holdings. This assertiveness has served the clan well, allowing it to imbed itself within the aristocracy of numerous realms.

Focused wholly on advancement, the Misrois ruthlessly pursue power. There would seem to be no limit to the potential of this mighty line, were it not for their infamous animosity towards their family members. No sooner is a Misroi established than he or she is attacked and plundered by their relations. Family loyalty is unknown amongst the Misroi clan, who are known to prey upon their cousins, parents and children with equal abandon.

Though they draw their origins to the land of Souragne, few Misrois dwell in that land. The family fled their ancestral home in the aftermath of a terrible curse. Long ago, the family reached the height of its power under

their patriarch, Anton Misroi. When he disappeared mysteriously, the family fell into their usual savage infighting. Like ravenous vultures, the Misrois divided up Anton's estates. The strongest members carved their own estates out of the legacy, and forced their weaker cousins to flee the domain. This would prove to be a blessing in disguise, when the family estate was swallowed up by the swamp. Like Anton before them, those Misrois who remained in Souragne vanished without a trace.

Today, the Misroi family is found mostly in Dementlieu, and in smaller numbers in Mordent, Darkon and Nova Vassa. In recent years, a small number have returned to their native Souragne, though none have dared to search for the old family estate.

Fitting In

The Misrois are of medium build, with dark hair and pale skin. It is said that the Misrois exhibit some of the facial characteristics similar to the Valachani or the indigenous people of Sourage. To the bafflement of outsiders, the Misroi's hotly deny any such relation and consider even the mention of such traits as cause for a duel.

Appendix 3 The Misroi Legacy

The Misrois try to exemplify the values of the gentry and are extremely haughty towards people of lesser station. Scions of the line are required to flaunt the affluence of their line by maintaining the most extravagant homes and clothing. Often, members bankrupt themselves by decorating their estates to hide disuse and decay.

Most importantly, Misrois are required to refrain from socializing with people below their station and partaking in any behavior not fit for nobility. Adventurers and sellswords are improper company for Misroi scions, though retainers of servants and bodyguards are permissible.

The Misrois share a preoccupation with death. They enjoy walking amongst tombs and graveyards, and in their old age speak enviously of the departed, as if with a yearning to occupy the elaborate tombs they construct. Some servants whisper that the more powerful Misrois actually keep preserved carcasses in secret chambers of the house as perverse curiosities.

Claiming Membership

More so than other families, the Misrois are loath to welcome new scions. As the Misrois continue their perpetual feud with their relatives, few welcome still more competition from long-lost kin. Indeed, it is not unheard of for legitimate Misrois to find themselves disowned should they fall out of favor with their elders.

There are few circumstances when Misrois recognize wayward progeny. In order to legitimize one's claim to the Misroi legacy, a petitioner must have the support of a prominent family member. Misrois only acknowledge such petitioners if they can be used to further their benefactor's goals.

One common tactic is for a Misroi to recognize a sibling's illegitimate child so as to humiliate his relative and further split the inheritance of his own nephews and nieces.

Even with the support of a prominent benefactor, a petitioner must possess strong evidence to sustain his or her claim. Letters, diaries, or other tokens must be presented as proof of lineage.

With acceptance into the family, petitioners are meticulously groomed for their future position amongst the wealthy elite. Acknowledged Misrois are expected to join the ranks of the landed aristocracy and participate in the family endeavors and feuds. Those who fail to take their rightful station may soon find themselves out of favor and disowned once more.

Misroi Traits

-2 Wis, +2 Cha: Misrois have powerful personalities, but they are arrogant and short sighted.

Rot in a Corpse's Shell: A Misroi who dies of unnatural causes has an increased chance of rising as a walking dead. A Misroi who is killed under dramatic circumstances has a % chance equal to his or her hit dice multiplied by his cha modifier of being resurrected as a corporeal undead of equal ECL.

Family Feats

When creating a Misroi character, the player or DM should select at least one of the following feats: Ancestral Legacy, Cold One, Courage, Dancing Bones, Die Hard, Iron Will, Jaded, Machiavellian, Open Minded, Scent of the Grave, Unwholesome Ichor, Wealth. The character must meet the requirements of each feat, as usual.

The following new feat should be available only to Misroi characters (or, at the DM's discretion, to those of some other family with a necromantic background).

Scion of Death

A family legacy of evil sorcery grants you control over the dead.

Prerequisites: Cha 13+, this feat must be taken at 1st level.

Benefits: Once per day, you may rebuke undead as a cleric of level equal to your charisma modifier. If can already rebuke undead, this feat allows you to rebuke undead an extra number of times per day equal to your charisma modifier.

Appendix 3

Family Magic Items

Spirit Bottles

With this tool, a user may trap the soul of a dead being in a bottle, so that he or she may converse with them once each day.

To do so, the user places a spider inside of the casket of the subject before burial. After the body has rested for one night, the user digs up the body, removes the spider, and places it inside of the spirit bottle. The bottle is stopped with a cork impregnated with wax rendered from human fat.

Once each day, the user may open the bottle and *speak with dead*, as if speaking to the corpse.

If the bottle is ever broken, or left unstopped, the venomous spider seeks out the user and tries to kill him/her.

Strong necromancy (evil); CL 5th; Craft Wondrous item, speak with dead, Price 8000 gp; Weight 1/4 lb.

Gris-Gris Coffin

Of the many devious tools available to the Misrois, few are as insidious as sympathetic curses. The Gris-Gris coffin is one of the more exotic forms of sympathetic enchantments available.

To perform this hex, the user constructs a gris-gris doll out of hair, fingernails and clothing scraps belonging to the victim. This doll is then placed into a tiny replica of a coffin, constructed from wood taken from a coffin that once housed a corpse.

Once each day, the user may place a drop of blood on the lips of the doll. That day, the user may cast *suggestion* to the victim. This *suggestion* must be the first thing the user says to the victim, or else the spell is wasted.

Faint enchantment; CL 5th; Craft Wondrous item, suggestion, Price 8000 gp; Weight 1/4 lb.

Charnel Altar: Minor Artifact.

The altar is a four-foot high shelf, fashioned out of ebony wood in the shape of a pointed arch. The front of the arch is a hollowed gouge, in which are supported numerous

hooks and knobs shaped like serpents and claws. These hooks are designed to hold skulls inside of the altar and candles within the skulls. Elaborate engravings on the altar mark it as dedicated to the voodun loa, the Lord of the Dead.

In the rear of the altar is a drawer, which is perpetually filled with writhing insects. These carnivorous pests devour the flesh of whatever is placed inside the drawer, leaving only clean bone.

The altar is an ancient heirloom of the Misrois, used by the dread family to rise to power in their native land. In the chaotic aftermath of Anton Misroi's disappearance, a servant stole the relic and sold it to a sorcerer in Port D'Elhour.

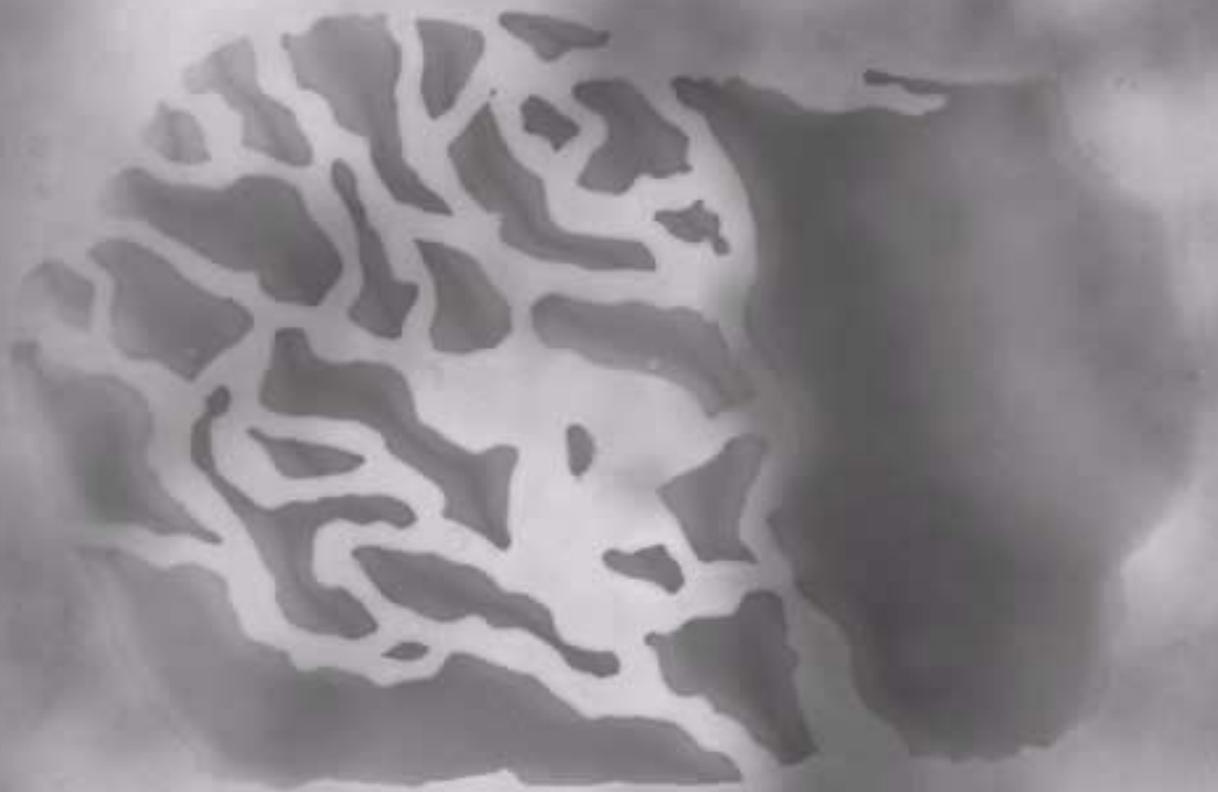
Without the Misroi line to give it purpose, the altar went dormant and was traded to a ship's captain as a grisly curiosity. The altar was passed across the Core for years until a Misroi scion discovered it. Sensing its opportunity, the altar awoke and compelled its new owner to put it to grizzly use.

The altar is dedicated to serving the Misroi's and establishing them as rulers. One activates the altar by decapitating a hapless enemy. The head is then placed in a box inside of the altar, which is filled with vermin. These insects clean the skull, which is then mounted on the altar. The remaining body is then rendered down into 23 black candles, which may be burned inside of the skull. A single candle burns for eight hours. These candles shed only the faintest light, though the shadows they create become longer and darker.

Once the owner of the artifact lights a black candle and places it inside of the skull, he or she may cast a spell from the necromantic school or death domain, as a sorcerer or cleric of caster level equal to his or her hit dice. This spell gained must be of level equal to half the victim's former hit dice. The user chooses the spell gained upon lighting the candle and must cast that spell while the candle is burning in the altar. Once the candle is burned out, the spell is lost.

Strong Necromancy (Evil); CL 15th; Weight 100 lb.

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Other Souragne Sources

3rd ed: Ravenloft Campaign Setting, Dark Tales & Disturbing Legends.

Recommended 2nd ed: Night of the Walking Dead, Domains of Dread, "Chicken Bone" entry (Ravenloft MCII), Champions of the Mists (Larissa Snowmane);

Other 2nd ed.: Children of the Night: Vampire (Myxitizajal), Children of the Night: Werebeasts (Sandover).

Novel: Dance of the Dead, by Christie Golden (highly recommended for flavour and ways to role play Anton Misroi).

Fan made: Boccoru specialist kit (Book of Sorrows 1998); Voodan Zombie (Book of Souls 1997); Children of the Bayou Book of Sorrows 1998); Simon LaFleur (Book of Sorrows 1998); Zanango Society (Book of Sacrifices 2001); Living Bayou (QtR 1).

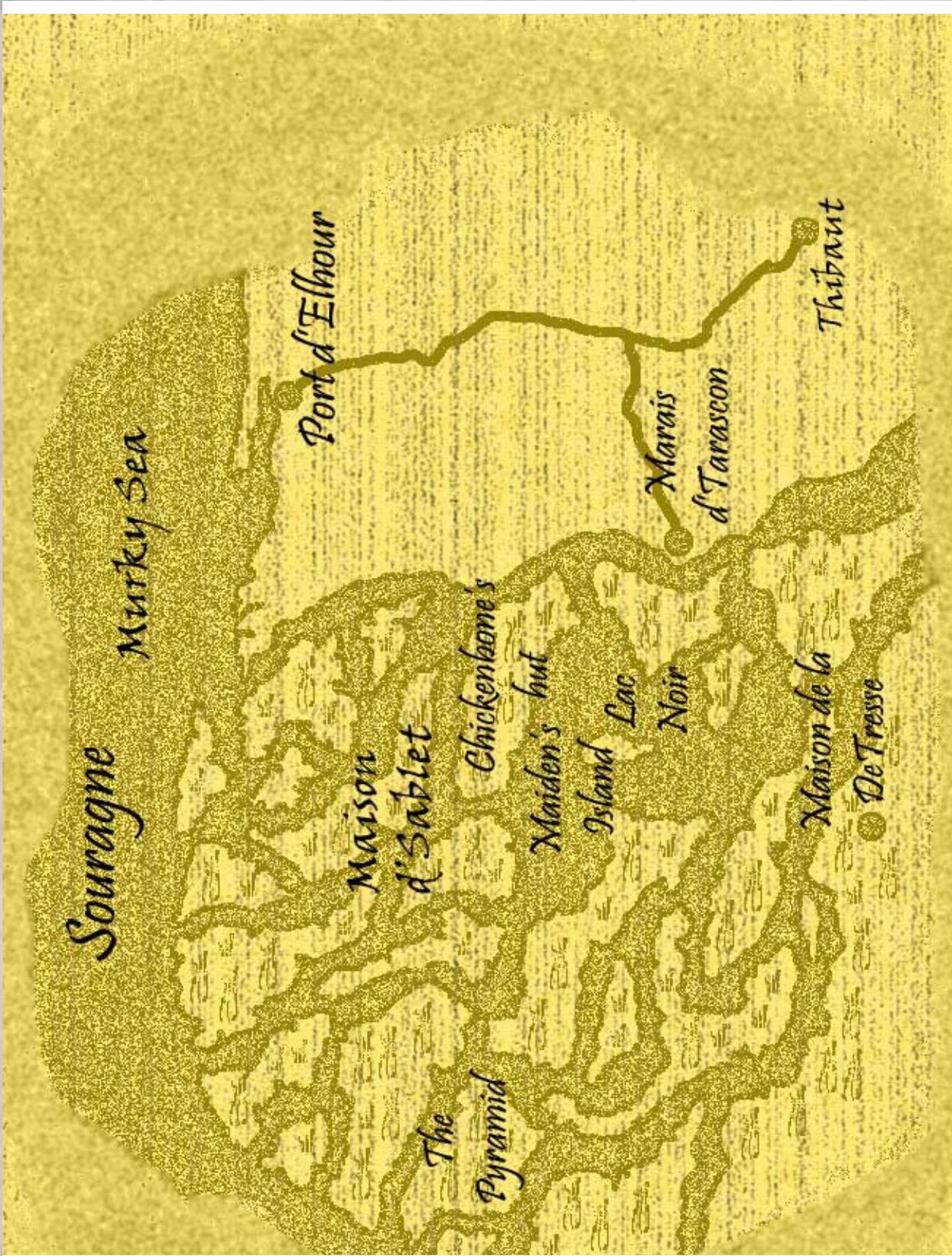
And suggested inspiration:

- Serpent and the Rainbow movie (1988)
- Fishhead short story, by Irvin S. Cobb (1911)
- Vampires and witches novels by Ann Rice, often set in New Orleans

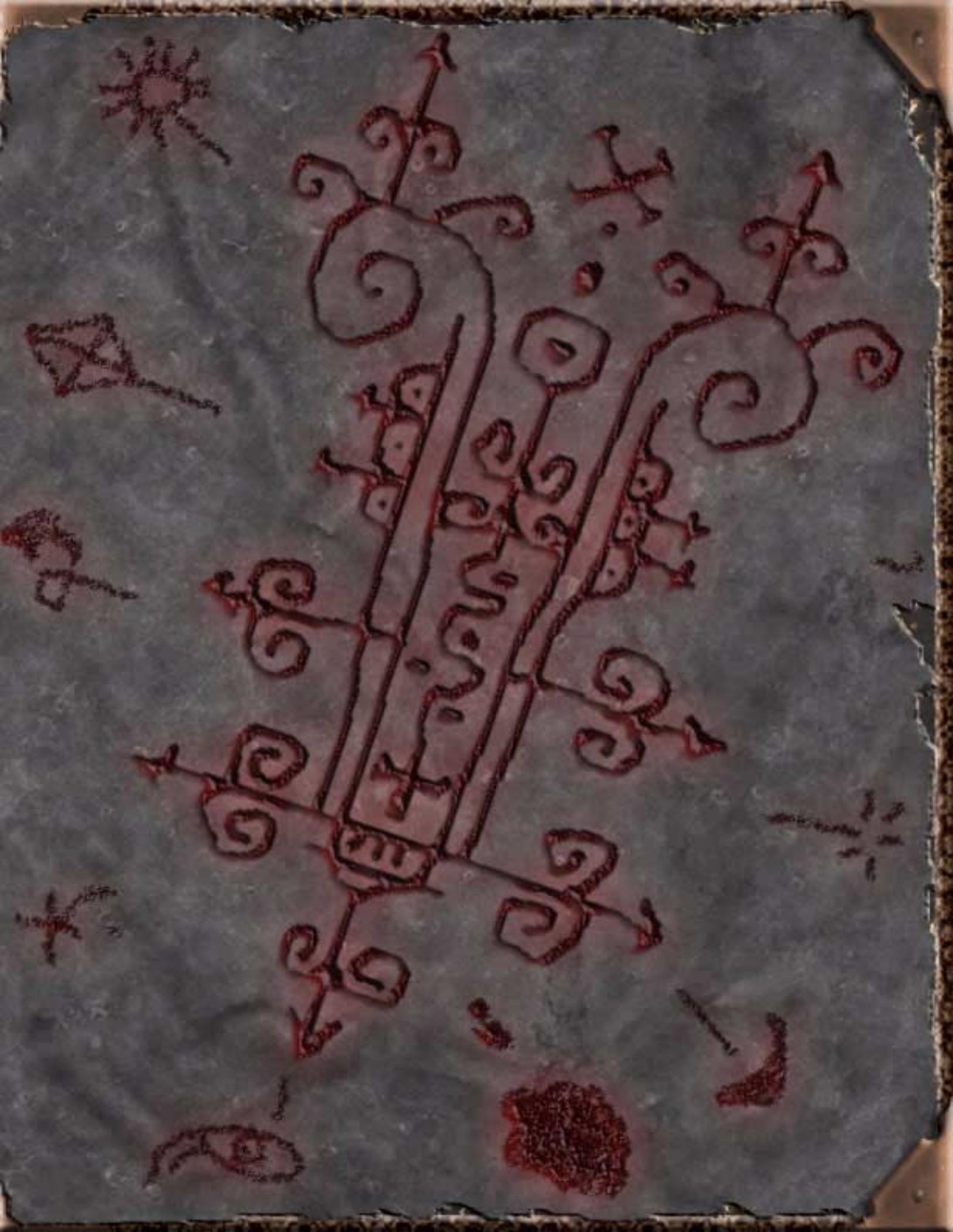
Chapter 1



Player's Map of Port d'Elhour



Player's map of Souragne



Welcome to the Swamp

Souragne, a land of secrets and superstition. Join the Fraternity of Shadows as they explore this to this strange and exotic island in the mists. Travel to the towns and villages of the island, where the rich rule over grand plantations, where commoners work as slaves. Uncover the secrets of the magicians known as the Vodun, and the bizarre spirits known as the Loa. Delve deep into the depths of the swamp, le Masion de Sablet, and discover the fell things that lurk in the shadows of the bog. But be forewarned: Souragne is a place of terrible danger. The swamps teem with deadly predators, while the land is home to treacherous nobles and hex-wielding Bocars. Even worse are the legions of lifeless zombies, ruled by Anton Misroi, the dreaded Lord of the Dead.

For use with these Dungeons and Dragons® core books :
Players Handbook™, Dungeon Master's Guide™,
and Monster Manual™ as well as the Ravenloft
core books: Ravenloft Campaign Setting
3rd edition™, Ravenloft Player's
Handbook™ and Ravenloft
Dungeon Master's
Guide™