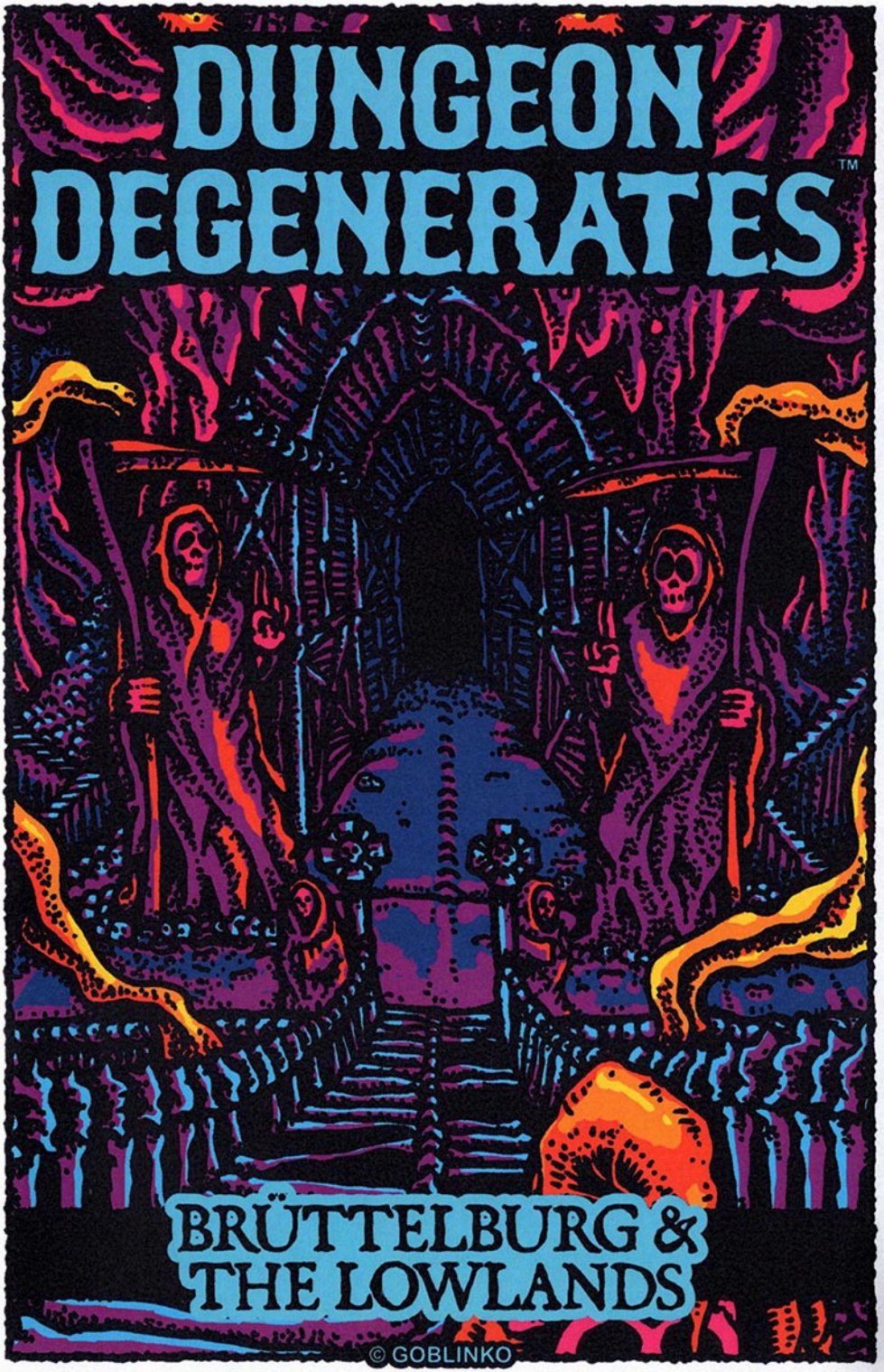
DUNGEON DEGENERATES™
BRÜTTELBURG & THE LOWLANDS
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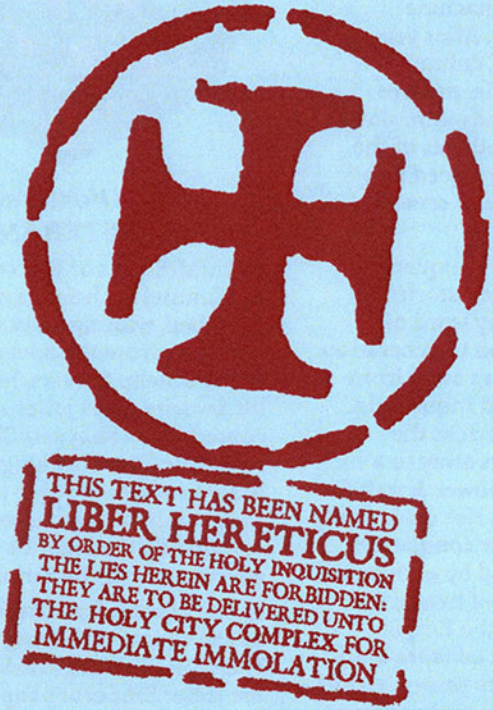
(FOOTHILLS)
THE WATCHTOWER
BRUTTELBURG
EAST BRIDGE
(WITCHWOOD)
CROSSROADS
THE FIELDS
(FIELDS)
THE GRAVEYARD
THE CATACOMBS
FISHMONGER
GHOSTGATE
(TOMB LAKE)

BRÜTTELBURG & THE LOWLANDS

Hier ein Aas ist, da fliegen die Krähen

The Lowlands are the last foothold of the Empire on the Borderlands. The rotting & dangerous fortress city of Brüttelburg dominates the surrounding fields & enforces its tyrannical laws over the downtrodden masses of the Würstreich. To the South, the priests of the Holy Order oversee a sprawling necropolis, waging a brutal & bloody war for control over the minds of the living & the bodies of the dead against legions of cultists, heretics & their monstrous allies. To the East, the gloom-shrouded Witchwood's haunted depths offer only danger & terror to travellers desperate enough to brave its paths.

Contained herein is an overview of the peoples & places of the Lowlands on the Eastern border of the great Würstreich, with special attention given to the layers & districts of the fortress city of Brüttelburg, the servants & sects of the Puritan Order, the major Noble Houses of the Empire & the rites of the ancient Pumpkin cult of the subjugated Gütter peoples; descendants of the old heathen tribes native to the area.



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HISTORY OF THE WÜRSTREICH

The history of the bloody rise of this vast & once-great Empire has been recorded by the scribes & scriveners of the Holy Order as a righteous & glorious crusade against the heretical tribes scattered across the land - a heroic struggle led by mighty & virtuous warrior-saints to deliver the brutal hordes of savages from the darkness of their primitive beliefs into the light of civilization & order under the banner of the first Emperor; High Würstmeister Otto Die Schrecklichen.

The campfire tales & unwritten oral traditions of the various Gütter tribes subjugated by the Empire tell a different story; that of a merciless horde of religious fanatics - an unstoppable war machine bent on total conquest. After years of devastating warfare, cultural assimilation & genocide, the free tribes of the Borderlands were slowly crushed under the bootheels of the Imperial Juggernaut & forced into lives of bitter servitude to cruel & pitiless masters.

The ancestors of these conquered people remember - their stories & beliefs handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation during secret gatherings away from the eyes of the dreaded Inquisitors of the Order. They watch as the Würstreich slowlys rots away to a shadow of its former power & wait for the day when they will rise up & throw off the shackles of their conquerors, ancient enmities fueled by each new atrocity. Built on ages of hatred & bitter revenge-cycles, the Empire wavers on the verge of collapse & all-out war; for as the years passed, so did the glorious age of Imperial conquest. The rot of corruption, division & mismanagement eats away at the heart of the Empire as threats from within & without steadily erode the influence of Imperial rule.

The Empire's borders slowly shrink as the East is gradually reclaimed by chaos, lawlessness & the beasts of the wilderness.

Now, at the end of the Empire's long decline, hysteria & desperation fill the hearts of its subjects. A palpable aura of fear hangs over the streets of the Imperial cities where violence lurks beneath a thin & tattered veil of civility.



His Imperial Majesty Shaygets Shvantz

THE JESTER EMPEROR

As child-Emperor Fercockt Fertümmel lay heirless on his deathbed, wasting away at the tender age of six from the advanced stages of the Bluelip Shivers, he appointed his favorite court jester - the juggler & contortionist Shaygets Shvantz as his successor. This shocking turn of events has sent waves of panic through the ranks of the Würstmeisters; noblemen comprising the High Council & government of the Empire.

As the Empire faces its future dictated by the whims of a dying child, the Würstmeisters are divided between the Jester Emperor's supporters determined to stubbornly follow the letter of the law & those who plot his downfall in secret or openly oppose him & refuse to recognize his appointment.

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Sensing imminent civil war & open rebellion, Emperor Shaygets Shvantz has moved quickly to secure his rule, establishing a tight-knit bodyguard & secret police force to eliminate his enemies through assassination & public displays of brutality.

Each bloodbath serves only to swell the ranks of the opposition & the Jester Emperor is seen by his people as a cruel despot; an unpredictable mad tyrant known for ordering mass executions on whim or in a sudden fury. Meanwhile, the members of his council struggle to stay on his good side, each hoping to manipulate him for their own ends.

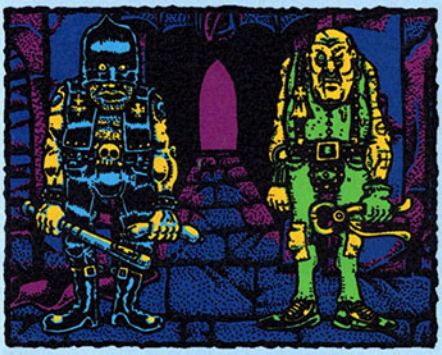
Many see Emperor Schvantz's rise to power as an opportunity to cast off the old system of hereditary Imperial power & replace it with a brave new era for humanity. Others revel in the chaos his regime brings & regard him as a harbinger of the eagerly awaited end of the Empire.

GOVERNING OF THE WÜRSTREICH

Entrenched in year upon year of convoluted laws & amendments, the administration of the Würstreich is a bloated, sprawling mess; a failing system grinding slowly towards its inevitable death. Corruption, bribery, embezzlement, exploitation & incompetence are ways of life in a society built on human greed.

The prisons, gallows & torture racks of the Empire are filled to the brim as the magistrates & judges strive to impose order on this chaotic realm filled with unwilling & oppressed subjects struggling for survival. The Würstreich is an Empire at war with its own people.

The governing body is made up of countless factions & competing interests vying for financial & cultural dominance. Assassination, subterfuge & intrigue are commonplace at all levels of society, but none more than at the top, where the administration is infested with spies, killers, double-agents & personal avarice.



Imperial Schläger & Jailor

CRIME & PUNISHMENT IN THE EMPIRE

A complete understanding of the Laws of the Realm & dizzying array of Puritan codes of conduct & taboos would take the labor of a lifetime for the scarce few with access to such texts & sufficent education to read them. This, combined with the danger & unreliability of long-distance communication, the legendary corruption of the Imperial justice system & the decline of Imperial power have resulted in a bewildering & disastrous chaos. Laws change between each province, district & town. Local authorities impose their own unique & contradicting rules, lining their own pockets, fighting personal crusades & scheming on behalf of hidden loyalties.

Punishments vary wildly from district to district based on the percieved severity of the crime. Fines, imprisonment, branding, banishment, public humiliation, slavery, torture, mutilation & many forms of public & private execution are all common practice throughout the Lowlands.

In Brüttelburg, the laws & codes of the fortress-city's magistrates are recorded in a series of volumes known as the *'Fleischwolf'*, or

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Meat Grinder. This is enforced by squads of deputized thugs known as the Schläger, who travel the streets in force, beating suspects senseless with specially weighted clubs. While the Schläger lack the authority to execute a suspect outright, their primary tactic is to beat their victim into a jellied heap of bruises, helpless & ready to be hauled away in chains. These bludgeoned & brutalized suspects are known as Schlägenwurst- their skin beaten red & purple to resemble blood sausage.

Each squad of Schläger reports to a veteran Uberschläger promoted from the rank & file for exemplary service & covered in the medals & scars of a long & violent career. Wealthy & successful Uberschläger are often accompanied by a law-reader & chained book dwarfs - *'Buch Zwergen'*, who carry hand-copied & edited volumes of the Fleischwolf - often containing personalized, modified & updated or outdated versions of Imperial Law. The law-reader's role is to inrerpret the Fleischwolf in the field & mark the squad's freshly beaten Schlägenwurst with the Uberschläger's personal seal & a list of the suspect's crimes.



Fortress City Brüttelburg

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FORTRESS CITY BRÜTTELBURG

The Fortress City Brüttelburg stands as an armored bulwark against the tittering terrors, driveling daemons, gibbering goblins & wailing witches lurking within the haunted & hazardous wilderness beyond the crumbling Easternmost edges of the Würstreich. In the face of total chaos the city's Imperial rulers once united under the mighty battle-standard of imperiousness, a resounding blast of the war horns of the Würstreich against the relentless threats of witchery, disease, deformity & perversion. Safe in their fortress towers, the well-guarded aristocracy of Brüttelburg grow more corrupt & decadent with each passing year while those zealous followers of the Holy Order that remain true to their Puritan code only become more violent & sadistic.

This walled city of truly massive proportions was built by a long lost civilization of wizard-giants who carved their own titanic faces into the solid rock of the fortress walls.

The tribes of the Borderlands left this place alone, declaring it a forbidden zone haunted by evil spirits or the ghosts of the things that built it. Long abandoned, it was quickly siezed by the Imperial War Machine as they moved Eastward to conquer the Borderlands. Here they established their metropolis in the East - an impregnable stronghold of Imperial Power. Buildings of wood soon covered the ancient & immense stone edifices & bizarre alien architecture of the giants.

Even today, the descendents of the Borderlands tribes remember the warnings of their ancestors & steer clear of the big city. They inhabit the rural farmlands surrounding the city, their distrust for city-folk reciprocated by the Imperials within the city's walls.

DISTRICTS OF BRÜTTELBURG

The vast city-fortress is divided into layers & districts by the immense fortifications & maddeningly complex design of the ancient stone walls & corridors. Ages of rapid expansion & slow decay layered on top of the alien stonework form a labyrinthine sprawl, its only maps long gone out of date.

THE UNTERSTADT

The lowest levels of the fortress city are known as the Unterstadt; a vast maze of claustrophobic corridors, filthy back alleys & bustling thoroughfares where the downtrodden common folk live out lives of servitude & desperate poverty.

While the upper layers are well-patrolled by Magistrates & Inquisitors, the Unterstadt is far too vast & overcrowded to police effectively. In the dark corridors & shadowy dens of this maze-like sprawl, criminal gangs, cults, covens & rebel enclaves gather & scheme.

The Unterstadt is comprised of numerous neighborhoods & shanty villages constructed from scrap along twisting corridors of stone - the irrigation & sewage tunnels of the ancient giants who built this place, still home to massive ancient rusting machinery beyond the understanding of mankind. Each rainy season, scores of homes are destroyed by flooding & in many districts, the filth & waste of the Midenstadt seeps down into the lower levels, forcing those below to wade through the excrement of those above. As a result, the Unterstadt is a cess pool of disease & the frequent target of raids by the gas-squads of the Imperial Plaguefinders.

While those who die in the layers above are commonly sent to the Necropolis for processing by the Grave Monks, people of the Unterstadt can rarely afford the fees required for a proper Puritan burial.

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Instead, they bury their own dead in abandoned areas. The danger of disease & neromancy posed by these caches of corpses have prompted the Holy Order to send periodic expeditions into the abandoned & desolate parts of the Unterstadt hunting for bodies to burn, often provoking violent outrage from locals.

Other areas damaged by fire, violence, rot, unrest or floods of acid & filth from above remain too dangerous for human habitation - home now only to vile creatures that breed in the darkness & live on stolen scraps & unwary stragglers.

Much of the city's industry is found in the Unterstadt, where the noise & noxious stench of factories & machinery can only disturb the poor & the slave laborers brought in from the Dungeons below.



The Undercity Dungeons

THE UNDERCITY DUNGEONS

The layers of dungeon cells & torture chambers beneath Brüttelburg are so vast that the magistrates have lost count of the population of prisoners dwelling below the city's surface in the endless corridors & chambers of the prison. This subterranean labyrinth is a district of the city unto itself; home to hordes of heretics, maniacs, bandits & prisoners of war.

In the upper levels of the dungeon, there are rumored to be secret access tunnels that connect with the city's sewers & with various cellars throughout the Unterstadt. These are used to smuggle goods in & out of the undercity & sometimes as an escape path for well-connected prisoners.

Huge areas of the prison have been lost to decay & seismic activity. In some of these abandoned areas, escaped prisoners have formed secret communities & in others, vile creatures spawn & feed on detritus & lone wanderers.

The dark & decrepit lower layers of the dungeon give way to ancient natural caverns & tunnels below, where things hunt unseen in the pitch blackness; eyeless, crawling things with too many legs & obscene near-human faces.

Each layer of the Undercity Dungeon is administered by a High Magistrate & his staff of jailors & torturers. The most dangerous offenders are kept in the lower levels, as far as possible from the streets of the city above. In the upper layers live those prisoners conscripted into work teams & military service. The magistrates also run fighting pits; forcing prisoners to compete in brutal bloodsports for the entertainment of their guards & visitors from above. Many Magistrates line their pockets by selling prisoners as slaves or gladiators to representatives from the Noble Houses.

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THE WAR OF THE WHIP

An infamous incident in Imperial history, the War of the Whip was a prison uprising led by a well-organized coalition of pit fighters & convicted war veterans. Inspired by insurrection in the Highlands, the prisoner rebellion took off like wildfire & spread across the Lowlands, where it was joined by hordes of commoners, fugitives, bandits & former slaves who set upon their masters' garrisons, plundering arsenals for the war effort & turning stolen weapons on their masters. During the chaos, a sect of the sinister Necro Coven set to burning the Holy Order, destroying much of the Order's Holy complex in the South, where many of these buildings lay in ruin even to this day.

After a short campaign the rebel forces were encircled & defeated in siege by the household troops of Houses Schadenfreude, Bäredräck & Fleischgebäck. They were mercilessly slaughtered, save for the ringleaders, many of whom were taken alive to be tortured in the deep levels of the Undercity. Though the rebellion was short-lived, the slaves & prisoners of the Lowlands remember & harbor hidden hopes for liberation through open conflict & bloody insurrection.



Streets of the Midenstadt

THE MIDENSTADT

The monstrous Mouth-Gates of the fortress city lead into the Midenstadt; the largest layer, where trade is conducted in immense plazas & crowded rows of shops.

Peasants, artisans, merchants, guardsmen & low-level government & religious officials all live in the Midenstadt, along with a large population of visitors conducting business in the city.

As Brüttelburg is the center of Imperial culture in the Borderlands, the Midenstadt is the cultural center of the city. Numerous fighting arenas, temples, brothels, ale-houses, public meeting spaces & festivals can all be found within the walls of Midenstadt.

The Noble Houses of the Würstreich maintain bases here, each administering its own territory while scheming & struggling for domination over its neighbors.

The Midenstadt is famous for its Schweinachbarschaft - *'Pig Town'*, where livestock is brought in from the fields to be slaughtered & transformed into sausage. The smells of fresh blood & slaughter mix with roasting meat & spices to create the unique overpowering aroma of Pig Town. Thousands gather here for the annual Würstfest, when prize swine are led into the market square & ritually slaughtered, their blood & guts running through the ancient causeways of the Midenstadt. The celebrants of the festival don sheets & smocks to frolick in the blood & rejoice in the bountiful harvest. During festival time, the streets are choked with throngs of revellers, merchants & thieves. Cunning

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con artists prey on visitors from abroad, as do hordes of scratchers selling souvenirs for inflated prices.

Clicking Skrakerlak beetles & swarms of rats infest the Schweinarchbarschaft during festival time, creeping up out of the Unterstadt to feed on the scraps & detritus of the event. Drunken revellers lost in the narrow side streets of the Midenstadt or passed out drunk in alleyways have been set upon & devoured by these voracious pests, forcing the Noble Houses to contract cadres of vermin hunters to conduct sweeps of the city during & after the celebration.

Smugglers, gamblers, wenches, performers, artisans, poets & travelling Gütter caravans also flock to the festival each year to earn coin on the streets, while the mendicants of the Deprived Brotherhood attend to beg & protest the vulgarity of the celebration. Schläger squads stalk the streets for this sort of riff-raff, seizing their earnings & beating them into Shlägenwurst.

THE OBENSTADT

The upper levels of the city are dominated by the high towers of the aristocracy - the Brüttelmeisters & Ministers of the Order who rule over the city below. The chateaus, palace-towers & opulent gardens of the Würstreich's noble houses are found here, where the wealthy elite live in relative safety, well protected by magistrates & mercenaries from the desperate criminals of the lower districts.

Armed troops guard the gates to the Obenstadt, ensuring that only the wealthy & their servants are allowed into the district. Despite this, there are many secret & unofficial ways to enter the Obenstadt for well-connected & resourceful infiltrators.

The Obenstadt is also home to numerous gambling halls, brothels & drug dens serving the hedonistic lifestyles of the rich & powerful. Here can be found diversions for even the most perverted & debauched tastes.

SAVAGERY IN THE NIGHT

Although not officially acknowledged, all who dwell in the upper districts know that an invisible killer stalks through the palaces & plazas of the Obenstadt. While assassination by poison, stiletto, garrote & crossbow are common in the Obenstadt, this killer is known for its savagery, striking seemingly at random & leaving its victims in a bloody mangled heap.

While some claim the killer is a vigilante from the Unterstadt, hunting the wealthy as retribution for a past injustice, others whisper that the killer is a Daemon conjured through the Void by the forbidden rites of some secretive sect of sorcerers operating at the highest levels of Imperial society. Still others claim that a coven of Vampyrs infests the Obenstadt, based on rumors of bizarre bloodletting rituals & cannibalistic masquerade orgies in the pleasure halls of House Schadenfreude.

Whatever the truth may be, the establishment refuses to honor such claims & no official investigation has been conducted.

THE ALCHEMICAL FURNACE TOWERS OF THE OBENSTADT

Alchemical furnaces shaped like orbs sit atop the high towers ringing the battlements of the Obenstadt. Within these towers are the laboratories of the High Alchemists - Imperial scholars & wizards of vast power & resource. Many of these are known as agents of one of the Noble Houses, while others harbour unknown hidden loyalties.

In times of unrest, these immense furnaces can belch a flood of acid flowing through cleverly designed

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channels & ducts built into the layers of the city, allowing the alchemists to burn the streets of the lower layers clean of rioters. The horribly melted bodies & street debris reduced to sludge issue forth from the city's great mouth-gates into pits & ditches surrounding the fortress battlements.

In times of war & siege, the High Alchemists use the magical properties of the furnace towers to defend the city, spewing streams of acid onto invading armies & projecting searing hot beams of light from the 'eyes' of the towers.

During peacetime, the Alchemists keep busy in their towers, working on concoctions & mystical experiments for their patrons. Hissing, bubbling, crackling & booming sounds echo out over the city from the great furnace towers. Jets of noxious liquid, irridescent smoke, arcing electricity & flashes of colored light periodically emit from the furnaces, sending waves of panic through the streets below.

The inventions & formulae developed by these wise masters are among the most valuable commodities in the Empire & the Houses have been known to pay a small fortune for the secrets of their rival's Alchemists. Of course, few thieves have managed to find their way into these towers & fewer still have lived to tell the tale, for the towers are well-guarded & filled with alchemical traps both ingenious & deadly.

THE HOLY ORDER

The Holy Order of Puritans is the official faith of the Würstreich; devoted to various hero-saints from Imperial history & myth. Most citizens of the Würstreich observe the customs, holidays & rituals of the Holy Order, at least on the surface.

SAINTS OF THE HOLY ORDER

The origins of the Holy Order date back the founding of the Würstreich, when the Seven Saints of the Order led their armies of fanatical zealots against the heathen Gütter tribes of the Borderlands. The names of two of the Saints have been long lost or stricken from history, but the remaining five are revered as the greatest heroes of the Empire.



Saint Wienerbröd

SAINT WIENERBRÖD

Saint Wienerbröd was a great philosopher & theologian who established the moral code of the Puritans. His sermons have defined what is Sin & what is Virtue.

He was beheaded by a frenzied mob of revellers during the Kürbisnacht. His body was recovered & interred, but his head was never found.

Today, his writings on moral conduct are printed on the presses of House Furzgerausch & sent far & wide across the Empire & beyond. He is revered by a fanatical Puritan sect known as the Sin Eaters, who seek to embody Puritan virtue & punish those they consider wicked.

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Saint Spanferkel

SAINT SPANFERKEL

Called the Great Missionary, Saint Spanferkel was famed for his endless dedication in spreading the True Faith & Puritan ideals to every corner of the Borderlands. He was a gifted public speaker with a nearly supernatural ability to sway the minds of men & mesmerize the populace with his sermons. Swearing to bring the heathens of the Hexenwald into the fold, he boldly strode into the Witchwood with nothing but a simple robe & shepherd's crook, accompanied by his loyal manservant Pavel & a local guide. As the legend goes, Pavel emerged alone from the wood over a month later, half-dead & half-insane. He claim they'd been led into a trap in which the Saint was boiled alive & eaten by the hags of the wood. Pavel died within the week, a swarm of black spiders erupting from every orifice; their offspring still infest the ruined & disused towers of Brüttelburg to this day.

Today, Saint Spanferkel is revered as a martyr & symbol of the Puritan crusade against heathendom & witchcraft. In sculptures & Puritan imagery, he is typically portrayed giving a sermon whilst hog-tied in a cauldron over a roaring flame.



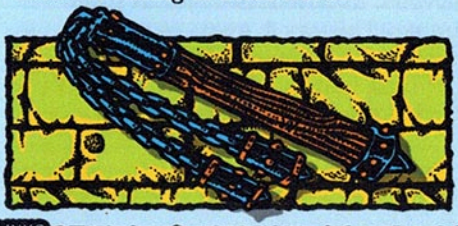
Saint Schlachtschüssel

SAINT SCHLACHTSCHÜSSEL

A towering giant of a man, it is said that Saint Schlachtschüssel stood at over eight feet tall & he is never pictured without an elaborate tall mitre atop his head that only serves to reinforce his imposing aspect.

As the father of Puritan Necromancy, he was known for an unparalleled understanding of the mystic arts. It was he who built the Necropolis & established the Puritan Laws of Death. He founded the Order of Grave Monks & taught them to raise the dead & command them using the ancient language of the Celestials.

The Holy Scriptures suggest that he 'ascended to the realm of the Celestials & became immortal', though theologians disagree on the actual meaning of these words.



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Saint Kaiserschmarren

SAINT KAISERSCHMARREN

Saint Kaiserschmarren was known as the Great Administrator & it was he who wrote the first laws of the Empire into the Imperial Tome of Law - an immense & intricate work containing thousands of pages of rules, regulations, contradictory clauses & obscure esoteric language. Kaiserschmarren is the patron Saint of scribes, scriveners, magistrates, judges, tax-collectors & the Order of Executioners. He served as Grand Vizier to the first Emperor Otto Die Schrecklichen at the founding of the Würstreich.

History has not recorded the manner of his death & some say he still yet lives - preserved by ancient techniques of Puritan Necromancy, a secret advisor to the Emperor & hidden hand controlling the Order of Executioners & guiding the Holy Order from the shadows.





Saint Pastete

THE DREAD SAINT PASTETE

The Dread Saint Pastete is the spiritual father of the Inquisition; a blind warlord famed for burning the ringleaders of the Pumpkin Cult alive atop Witch Hill & subjugating the Gütter peoples of the Borderlands.

His remains are enshrined in a tomb somewhere in the Old Necropolis, save for one finger which once bore the holy Ring of Dread - a powerful relic said to have been used by the Dread Saint to grant him a sort of mystic vision & the ability to 'see the lies of the heretic'. This valuable artifact was stolen from the Saint's corpse by common thieves & sold on the black market, its whereabouts now lost to history.

THE CELESTIALS

The Saints of the Order are said to have been gifted with holy vision & virtue by a mysterious host of spirits known as the Celestials. These beings dwell in some misty realm beyond the borders of the physical world, but are said to visit the gifted & devout during epiphanic rites, offering cryptic guidance or flashes of divine inspiration. Details from the texts are vague & it seems that many writings have been lost, destroyed,

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or hidden away in the rumored secret libraries of the Order. In frescoes & etchings they are depicted sometimes as a glowing orb of light, a shimmering cloud of smoke, or as a towering human-like floating figure clad in flowing robes.

To this day, zealots, madmen & mystics still claim to have witnessed visitations of the Celestials, though these are often later proved to be tall tales or refuted by official proclamations of the Order.



High Inquisitor & her Smelling Dwarf

THE INQUISITION

Formed by the Dread Saint Pastete in the early days of Imperial expansion, the Inquisition is a militant Puritan sect within the Holy Order tasked with ridding the Empire of heretics & witches, whom they pursue relentlessly & punish mercilessly. This religious police force performs frequent raids & sweeps across the Lowlands with specially-trained Witch Smellers & Smelling Dwarfs who sniff out the faint traces of devilry on the wind using special nose masks designed to enhance their olfactory senses. For this service, they exact a staggering fee from locals, but only after they've confiscated the personal property & wealth of the accused. For this reason, many Witch Smellers driven by avarice have taken to extorting travellers on the road in the guise of righteous vigilance.

The many agents of the Inquisition include the Order of Torture Monks, who are trained in myriad forms of cruel & unusual interrogation & punishment. A fate worse than death befalls any witch caught in the clutches of these sadistic zealots.

With the power & authority to imprison nearly anyone, the Inquisition is a massively influential political force unto itself. Often, the Inquisitorial eye falls on political enemies of the Inquisition & its allies, or those unwilling to pay the customary bribes. The major Noble Houses pay exorbitant fees to ensure that their agents can travel unmolested & with little scrutiny - an arrangement that lesser houses can scarcely afford.

Having endured years of extortion & thuggery at the hands of the Inquisitors, most common folk of the Lowlands both hate & fear these brutal oppressors even more than the witches they hunt, particularly in rural areas on the outskirts of the Empire. Even when faced with very real danger of malicious witchcraft, one must consider the cost levied upon the accuser & their community for inquisitorial services rendered.

While the lower-level agents of the Inquisition busy themselves with rooting out minor heresies, hunting relatively harmless practicioners of natural magic & extorting wealth from the populace, these are commanded by an elite force of sorcerer-priests, well-practiced in the arts of Puritan Necromancy, Daemonology, Divination & Exorcism & well-studied in various fields of Esoteric Lore. These High Inquisitors are sent against the direst threats of daemonic possession & heretical Necromancy, their arms & armor inscribed with sigils representing the names of the Saints to ward them from injury by the dark powers. Members of this cadre of veteran Inquisitors form the Inquisition's administrative body.

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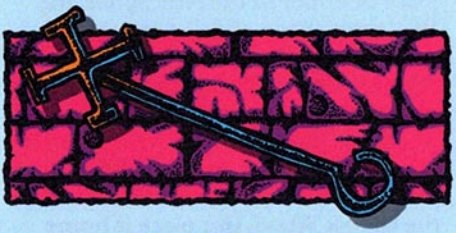
TORTURE MONKS

These devout Puritans are trained in the arts of interrogation & torture. They know uncountable ways to inflict pain on their victims, while they seemingly feel nothing themselves. Whether they are convinced of moral absolution for their gruesome deeds or simply cold sadists is anyone's guess, but ultimately irrelevant to the screaming victim of their vicious artistry. The mere mention of these hated torturers is enough to strike fear in the hearts of the common people, for their skills are legendary.



THE HEXENMARK

Those found guilty of religious crimes are met with all manner of punishments that vary from precinct to precinct. Among the most common of these punishments is the ritual branding of the accused with a holy sigil, called the *'Hexenmark'*.

The Hexenmark serves as a warning to all good Puritans that the bearer has been tainted with the sin of Heresy & is not to be trusted. Furthermore, if inscribed correctly, the Hexenmark is a powerful warding spell wrought to impede its bearer from doing further harm through sorcerous acts.

The Hexenmark is commonly used at birth when a child is born deformed, misshapen, or mutated. The mother is often also forced to endure the brand & may fall under investigation for witchery unless she can name a likely scapegoat or pay an adequate bribe.



Büschknecht & Zealot of the Sin Eaters

SIN EATERS

The Sin Eaters are devotees of a Puritan sub-sect dedicated to enforcing the moral tenets set forth by Saint Weinerbröd. Denying themselves all worldly pleasures & comforts, they castigate their own flesh with whips, hooks, chains & nails in disturbing rituals that grant them an almost supernatural strength of will & resistance to worldly terror.

Gifted thus with an unswerving resolve, they hunt relentlessly for the purveyors of vice, sin & moral terpitude. Women captured by the Sin Eaters for moral crimes are given the option to avoid torture & punishment by submitting to undergo training & indoctrination into the ranks of the Büschknechten; shock troops who wield guns & ammunition inscribed with prayers & the symbols of the Saints against the enemies of Puritan virtue.

Though they do not report to the High Council of Inquisitors, the Sin Eaters are widely considered as one of the sub-sects making up the ranks of the greater Puritan Inquisition.

THE ORDER OF EXECUTIONERS

The Order of Executioners is an elite sect responsible for disposing of those sentenced for crimes seen as unreedeemable by the Inquisitors.

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The Executioners are kept masked to protect their identities, making them well-suited for clandestine tasks - namely spying & assassination against the political enemies of the Inquisition & its allies.

It is well known that the Executioners of the Order are the among the most ruthless & skilled killers in the world, though their secret role is not officially acknowledged.

THE NECROPOLIS

The rapidly mounting death toll of the Empire's war of conquest against the Gütter tribes of the Borderlands created a need for vast tracts of consecrated ground in which to bury the Empire's loyal fallen in a manner worthy of their sacrifice. Furthermore, the remains of the fallen had to be protected from Gütter witches, who were known to use the bones & flesh of the dead in their dark magics.

To solve this growing problem, the sorcerer-priest Saint Schlachtschüssel ordered the construction of a vast & sprawling Necropolis - the Totenstadt; a city of the dead that grew over the years to engulf the Southern reaches of the Borderlands.

Building atop underground catacombs of blue-black glistening rock carved in the strange dream-like patterns of the ancients, Saint Schlachtschüssel's servants covered the land in gravestones & crypts, interring the bodies of the dead in sacred ritual manner as prescribed by the Saint himself.

The ancient areas of the catacombs where giant & inhuman bodies were found have been sealed off to prevent access by any save the highest ranks of the Holy Order through secret access corridors that are both hidden & protected by strange machinery.

Great cataclysmic disasters devastating the Northeastern reaches of the Empire caused flooding that destroyed much of the Necropolis as the land shook apart, forcing the Stinkendblüt to burst ancient stone dams & causeways, forming the Wetlands & submerging half of the Totenstadt in what is now called Tomb Lake. The lakebed is still covered in algae-coated old stone graves & sunken remains disgorged from their tombs, picked clean by carrion crabs & other eaters of the dead that lurk in the depths.

While the bodies of devout Puritans & heroes of the Empire were given a place of honor in the Necropolis, the Western portion of this sepulchral sprawl was dedicated to the corpses of criminals & heretics; the enemies of church & state. Once cloaked in woodland, the trees here were felled to erect a vast field of gallows where the unwanted were left to rot. Known as the Gibbet Wood, this place is home only to rotting remains, clouds of flies, carrion crows, packs of feral ghouls & the sad ghosts of the dead wailing through the mist.



Grave Monk & Imperial Necro Slave

GRAVE MONKS OF THE TOTENSTADT

The grave monks are devotees of the Holy Order whose duty is to serve in the Necropolis, purifying the corpses of those with wealth & status. Commoners are burned on massive pyres tended by orphans & petty criminals forced to serve the

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Holy Order for a lifetime as *'corpse burners'*. Only the most devoted & loyal of corpse burners can earn the opportunity to become a grave monk of the Order. They are required to wear skull masks to identify their morbid station.

Another duty of the corpse burners is to render corpses unusable to necromancers & heretical cults, but some corpse burners have been caught supplying remains to agents of the Necro Coven in exchange for coin, drugs, or favors.

Unlucky corpse burners are sent in squads to collect corpses in the Gibbet Wood, making room for new offenders to be posted on the poles for the carrion birds & ghouls continually hunting for fresher meat.

The burning of corpses is a relatively new custom - a reaction to cult activity, the outbreak of diseases & the growth of the Skinwalker population throughout the Lowlands. Many of the graves of the old Necropolis are still filled with the bones of 'impure corpses', including those coating the lakebed beneath Tomb Lake. As these are considered a potential threat & source of occult power to the enemies of the Würstreich, many corpse burners have been tasked with identifying & digging up these old graves to burn the disinterred remains on massive pyres. The remains of those deemed worthy by the grave monks are returned to the Holy Order to be properly enshrined in the ossuaries of the Holy Complex.

Keepers of the secret arts of Puritan Necromancy passed down by Saint Schlachtschüssel himself, the grave monks derive power from the bodies of the dead. Through obscure rites & eldritch alchemical forumulae they can raise the dead & command them to serve again. These clerics of death walk the line between the sacred & profane & the Necro Coven's ranks are said to be filled with apostate monks fallen into heresy.

PATH OF THE PILGRIM

Sandalled footprints criss-cross the Lowlands, left by devout pilgrims on their way to visit the various shrines & holy sites dedicated to the Saints. Some travel alone, having sworn a vow of solitude, while others band together for safety & solidarity forming large beggar colonies.

Living in self-imposed poverty, these Mendicant Orders beg for their basic needs, spreading the teachings of their faith by preaching in town squares & distributing catechisms produced for them by special agreement with House Furzgeräusch. Their ranks are swelled by slaves seeking to escape from bondage through conversion; it is prohibited for a Puritan to own another Puritan as a slave & if a slave joins a Mendicant Order, they must be freed as long they can pay compensation to their former owner.

Many of the Mendicant Orders are led by charismatic preachers whose impassioned sermons inspire zealots to follow their cause. These leaders walk the line between orthodoxy & heresy; the Inquisition has been known to excommunicate those who become too influential & threaten the centralized power structure of the Holy Order. Such apostate preachers are labelled as heresiarchs & along with their flocks are hunted by the Inquisition & punished severely for challenging the authority of the Order.

Because of this, pilgrims are often met with distrust or outright hostility by locals. The Deprived Brotherhood, one of the largest Mendicant Orders, is widely regarded as a stinking mob of ruffians & vagrants who spread filth & disease wherever they go. Despite their strict code of non-violence, they have been outlawed as a public menace in certain parts of the

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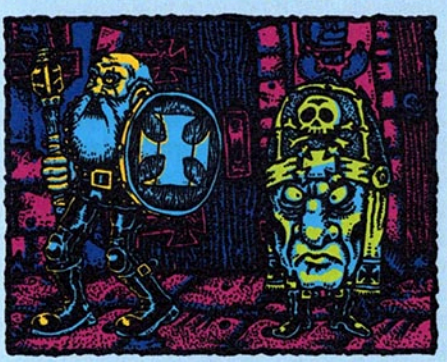
Lowlands. They are known for their refusal to eat meat, denouncing the sausage as a vulgar shape & subsisting on moldy old bread that they carry from shrine to shrine, eating only what they must to stay alive.



Leather Templar & Droning Dwarf

DRONING DWARFS

Deformed babies brought to the Holy Order & surrendered as unwanted abominations are raised by the monks of the Order as *'droning dwarfs'*. They are taught to endlessly recite the litanies of the Saints. This is considered an atonement for the 'impurity' of the dwarf's flesh - an atonement that ends only with death. Droning dwarfs often drone even in their sleep & they must communicate through a complicated system of hand gestures & body language.

Through this unrelenting muttering of holy invocations, the droning dwarf achieves a constant hypnotic state of devotion in which they display supernatural feats of strength & manifest the power to ward or banish daemons & evil spirits.

Because they are most commonly inducted from infancy, droning dwarfs are amongst the Order's most incorruptible servants. They are often used for missions that require the utmost loyalty; few question the motives of a droning dwarf.

Droning dwarfs are forced to 'hide their ugliness' from the eyes of the devout by wearing immense chewed paper Körpermaske fashioned in the likeness of the dwarf's supervising minister or one of the Saints.

THE LEATHER TEMPLARS

A tight-knit fraternity of burly, bearded holy knights who eschew heavy armor in favor of the protection of their faith & shun the embrace of women in favor of the companionship of their fellow templars-in-arms. They extol the virtues of supreme martial prowess & strive for physical perfection through rigorous exercise & discipline.

MILITANTS OF THE EMPIRE

Even in these days of division, disorder & decay, the military might of the Würstreich is indisputably a terrifying force to be reckoned with. Comprised of numerous auxiliary forces supplied by the various factions within the Empire, it is capable of raising armies of truly massive proportions, though these are just as politically unwieldy & unpedictable as the Empire itself.

The auxiliary troops that make up the bulk of the Empire's military forces consist mainly of citizen militias, zealots of the Mendicant Orders & conscripts press-ganged from the depths of the Unterstadt, from the Undercity Dungeon & from the many plague colonies of the greater Würstreich. Supporting this poorly-armed rabble are the professional soldiery; the knights & mercenary companies employed by the major Houses, House Bäredräck's hunters & woodsmen of the Hexenwald, the magistrates & Schläger of Brüttelburg, the forces of the Inquisition & most terrifying of all; the cold legions of necro-slaves commanded by the grave monks of the Holy Order.

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Flachjäger & Knockenkopf Hussar

THE FLACHJÄGER

The standing army of the Würstreich is made up of platoons of artificial puppet soldiers - the Flachjäger, animated through eldritch alchemical arts. These fearless & unflinching warriors of fabric, metal & wood follow commands without question or complaint. They can march tirelessly through day & night, though their complex mechanisms are prone to break & vulnerable to poor weather conditions. Because of this weakness, they are rarely used in the harsher climates of the Borderlands.

This valuable & eternally loyal military force is manufactured, maintained & housed in the factory-cities of the West, where they protect the Emperor from his enemies within & without.

KNOCKENKOPF HUSSARS

The Knockenkopf hussars are mounted troops that patrol the roads of the Lowlands, rounding up brigands & riff-raff while collecting road tax on behalf of House Patschesitzen, whom they serve. Infamous for their brutal tactics & notoriously corrupt, their skull banner strikes fear in the hearts of the Empire's citizens & enemies alike.

THE IMPERIAL BATTERY

The Imperial Battery bristles with row upon row of cannons, mortars, bombards & siege engines built in the factories of House Fleischgebäck. These thundering war machines were designed by the High Alchemists & are maintained & manned by the Imperial Battalion of Engineers; a veteran force of alchemist-soldiers skilled in strategy & subterfuge.

While the artillery is the pounding fist, the veteran Engineers are the fiddling fingers of war. The younger apprentices man the guns that shatter cities & rain death on armies in the field. The masters are used for strategic missions of sabotage, misdirection & psychological or chemical warfare.



Plague Cleanser & Plaguefinder General

IMPERIAL PLAGUEFINDERS

The Imperial plaguefinders are a force of apothecaries, physicians & scholars backed by armed troops & hired thugs. This organization reports to a council made up of several High Alchemists & important political figures representing the noble houses, the magistrates, & the Inquisition. They are charged with keeping the desperate, sick, deformed & plague-ridden masses of the Würstreich under control.

The plaguefinders carry gas sprayers to smother the unclean in jets of 'disinfecting' gas while protecting

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themselves with sealed masks soaked in medicinal tinctures & full body suits of leather armor designed to ward off the furious bites & claws of scratchers. One of their duties is to round up advanced-stage scratchers & deliver them to the Inquisition for 'rehabilitation' by the torture monks.

Many of the plaguefinders who devote themselves to discovery & study disapprove of the Inquisition's methods, while others are themselves members or agents of the Inquisition. There are many contending factions within the ranks of the plaguefinders & their commanders. As those tasked with checking provisions imported from the North report alarming signs of contamination in the grain, meat & ale, those representing the noble houses or on the take from the Guildsmen of Pigskin Port dispute this evidence in the interest of keeping trade flowing between the regions.



Prisoner & Plague Conscripts of the Würstreich

The commoners of the Lowlands live in fear that the plaguefinders will come kick in their door & haul their sick & feeble relatives away. In the towns of the Lowlands & the neighborhoods & shanty towns of the bottom city, plaguefinders are seen as thugs, bullies & murderers more than healers or men of wisdom.

THE NOBLE HOUSES

The vast majority of all property, production & commerce in the Lowlands is owned by the Noble Houses of the Würstreich; the descendants of men of influence & distinction honored with Lordship at the advent of the Empire. While the Lowlands are home to numerous minor Noble Houses - families elevated to lordship in more recent years, most of these have aligned themselves with one of the major Houses.

Each House consists of a wealthy family along with its entourage; servants, slaves, guards & agents. While the laborers toil in the fields, mills, lumberyards & mineshafts, the land-owning lords & ladies live decadent lives of leisure in palatial rural estates or the opulent towers of the Obenstadt. They travel between their holdings in the countryside under guard, surveying the work from the windows of their armored carriages, enjoying fine wines, pickled Scrog's eyes & the luxury drug known as Sniff.

It is customary for nobles to proudly display their wealth & status by dressing in elaborate & colorful attire. The ladies wear elegant jewelry & expensive perfumes, covering their faces with paper masks that hide them from the indecent lecherous gazes of their underlings & conceal the unsightly blemishes & sores that accompany Sniff addiction. The lords favor elaborate ruffled coats & curled wigs. For personal protection, they often carry ornate pistols & long, thin blades concealed within jewel-encrusted scratching sticks.

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HOUSE FLEISCHGEBÄCK

A house of wealthy smiths & ironworkers, they make the bells that ring in the steeples of the Holy Order, the breastplates of Imperial knights & the cannons of the Imperial battery. They own & operate numerous forges & ironworks in the factory cities of the West & the Unterstadt of Brüttelburg. They have a strong military tradition & solid ties with the Holy Order, but their history as defenders of the Empire now falls in direct contradiction with the Holy Order's opposition to the Jester Emperor. None know which side the mighty House of Fleischgebäck will take when the situation inevitably erupts into open conflict.

The House patriarch is Dieter Fleischgebäck, a veteran officer of the Imperial Battery, he now rules his house with an iron fist; literally, as his left hand & most of his face were destroyed by an exploding powder charge & replaced with metal prosthetics. Dieter is a famously stern & humorless disciplinarian who runs his affairs with military precision. His personal bodyguard is made up of fiercly loyal veteran warriors who have served with him for decades.

House Fleischgebäck retains the services of at least two of the High Alchemists of Brüttelburg who busy themselves creating new weapons & war engines to be sold to the Imperial military & the other Houses for a considerable profit. While they wield tremendous power & influence over the Würstreich, their industry relies on a steady supply of raw ore secured through contracts with the Highlands Guilds; a tenuous arrangement easily disrupted by bandit activity & worse as the North quickly descends into chaos.



HOUSE PATSCHESITZEN

Owning vast tracts of land in the Fields & parts of the Foothills, house Patschesitzen dominates agriculture & food production in the Lowlands, cultivating & processing crops that fill the grainstores & sustain the people of Brüttelburg. To facilitate the transport of goods into the city, they've established a network of wagon routes guarded by their private force of road wardens known as the Knockenkopf Hussars. Their armored carriage service transports the wealthy through the countryside in relative safety, allowing the Patschesitzen to keep informed of the comings & goings of the lesser nobles.

With control over many roads & trade routes, this House has become heavily involved in the import & export of rare goods. Infamous for double-dealing & shady business, House Patschsitzen's imports include spices of the Wetlands & Badlands, pickled scrog's eyes, exotic meats, animal organs coveted by witches, goon grass, witch weed & many illicit items to be sold on the black market at a substantial profit. They produce & export grain, bread, meat, textiles, fruit, ales, wines & ciders.

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The House has grown prosperous in recent days as a result of food shortages in the North driving up the price of grain & forcing the Highlands Guilds to turn to the Patschesitzen for provisions. Nevertheless, the identical triplet brothers who head the House look to the future with trepidation, as supplies dwindle & demand swells. Already, mobs of angry starving peasants have set upon & plundered storehouses in the Foothills. The three brothers, whom no one can tell apart, profess loyalty to the Jester Emperor, though they are notoriously fickle & underhanded.

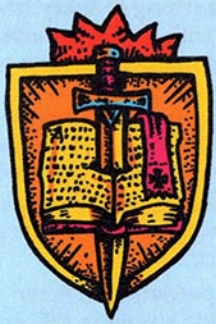


HOUSE SCHADENFREUDE

The lords of House Schadenfreude are the indisputed masters of vice in Brüttelburg. Their alehouses, drug dens, gambling parlours & brothels keep visitors to the Midenstadt entertained & thoroughly intoxicated. Above, in the Obenstadt, the House makes a killing catering to the bizarre & perverted appetites of the aristocracy. Below, smugglers maintain a steady flow of Scratch to satisfy the growing population of Scratchers living in the filth of the Unterstadt.

A mysterious & elusive figure known as Baron Coagula rules this House & has done so as long as anyone can remember. None outside the upper echelons of the House ever see him & the lion's share of administration is handled by the Baron's various wives & concubines, who buy & sell secrets overheard by their numerous agents in the streets. Wild rumors about the Baron are abundant, including claims that he is an alchemist who discovered the secret of eternal life, a daemon-worshipping warlock, a deformed & subhuman ghoulish creature, or perhaps even all three. Many of these unsubstantiated claims can be traced back to House Schadenfreude's closest rivals in House Furzgeräusch, who seize every opportunity to condemn the amoral & unholy practices of the Baron's household in their pamphlets & catechisms.

With a keen understanding of the value of information, this House employs a massive network of spies whom they leverage to stay one step ahead of their rivals & detractors.



HOUSE FURZGERÄUSCH

Styling themselves as the cultural authority in the Lowlands, the nobles of House Furzgeräusch think of themselves as morally & socially superior to all others. To assert this superiority & impress their values on others, they maintain a number of printing presses from which they produce pamphlets, propaganda & literature in the language of the Empire.

Providing printed catechisms free of charge to their allies in the Mendicant Orders, House Furzgeräusch has cleverly inserted themselves into Imperial society as puppetmasters

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of the endless throngs of common folk whose only knowledge of the world outside their hamlets & villages comes directly from the Furzgeräusch. They've cemented the common people's loyalty by passing out free bread to the poor of the Unterstadt & to starving vagrants & plague colonies scattered across the Fields. The Furzgeräusch are beloved by poor Puritans for this reason, despite persistent rumors of mass druggings & poisonings.

The patriarch of the House is in fact a matriarch - she disguises her gender to avoid the prejudices of her Puritan allies.



HOUSE BÄREDRÄCK

The ancient & infamous House Bäredräck controls & maintains East Bridge, the Hunt Lodge & a small portion of the Witchwood. They trade in timber, furs, leather goods, meat, game & foreign slaves, while levying a heavy tax for use of the river between East Bridge & Tomb Lake.

Though relatively few in number, the nobles of Bäredräck command a large force of slaves & servants, including many Gütter people from the Witchwood & the Wetlands. While the nobles claim to be the strictest adherents of traditional Imperial culture & values, their strange hedonistic rituals are in fact partially derived from the heathen rites of the Gütters. Their fondness for game hunting, decadent celebrations & elaborately sculpted facial hair is legendary, as is the megalomania of their patriarch, a man who spends his winters posing for portraits & the rest of the year hunting in the wood. Less well-known is the House's fervent opposition to the Jester Emperor & strong ties with the Secret Brotherhood; a treasonous nest of rebel conspirators.

Though they appear weak in relation to mighty Houses Fleischgebäck & Patschesitzen, they have proved they are not to be underestimated. In one famed incident known as the *Fleischwolfnacht* - the Night of the Meat Grinder, they destroyed their ancient allies-turned-rivals House Füdlibürger in a single night of ruthless & horrific carnage.



HOUSE FÜDLIBÜRGER

Once a prosperous major House with control over the riverways from Pigskin Port to Tomb Lake, Haus Füdlibürger was methodically dismantled, illegalized & executed by Haus Bäredräck in the terrifying Fleischwolfnacht, or Night of the Meat Grinder.

Those who once served this great House now hang for the crows & ghouls of the Gibbet Wood, rot in the cells beneath Brüttelburg, or live out their lives in the Highlands in secret exile. Their name once stuck fear into the hearts of their rivals, it now serves only as a reminder of the vicious retribution awaiting those who would attempt ot expose the treasonous schemes of House Bäredräck & the Secret Brotherhood.

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THE WITCHWOOD

The Lowlands were once covered in dense woodland. During the time of Imperial expansion, much of the forest was felled to make way for farmland & grazing fields. The last rebellious Gütter were driven across the river into the remnants of the forest & for this it has been named the the Witchwood, or the *Hexenwald*.

The Western border of the Hexenwald is relatively well-travelled by woodsmen, trappers, loggers, hunstmen & nobles on their way to & from the Hunt Lodge. The remainder of the wood is a gloomy place shrouded in fog, hidden from the sun & haunted by a host of angry spirits & stalking beasts. The strange & mystical properties of the wood are legendary, for it is home to many secrets; the dens of monsters, sacred groves of witches, lost shrines to the Saints, ancient standing stones & roving communities of Gütter outcasts are but a few of the strange & dangerous wonders of the Witchwood.

Lattices of spider-webbing coat the tree limbs where the eery voices of the enomormous bloated & hairy Singing Spiders echo through the gloom. With bizarrely mammalian faces, they hide in hollow logs, hypnotizing their prey with whispered melodies before cocooning them in a think tangle of webbing. The Gütter legends say that the Singing Spiders hum lovingly to their victims, lulling them into a deep sleep from which they will never awaken.

The black goats of the Hexenwald tramp through the wood, searching for mushrooms & giant albino worms to eat. Frolicking under the cursed, gnarled trees, their moronic bleating call summoning predators out of the darkness. These deformed beasts are a staple food for the Singing Spiders & the nomadic Gütters.

The Witchwood is home to enormous crows that lurk just above the reach of any ground-based creatures, aggressively cawing at anyone passing by & laughing to themselves as they shift from foot to foot, their intelligent

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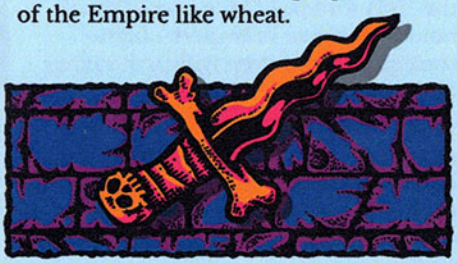
eyes glistening in the darkness. The crows wait near the webs of the Singing Spiders for scraps, daring the sticky strands for a taste of flesh.

Though the forest floor of the Hexenwald seldom sees the light of day, the giant albino worms known as the Hexenkinder somehow sense the fall of night & as moonlight hits the treetops, they squirm out of their burrows & writhe across the earthen ground for no discernable reason.

WITCH HILL

Witch Hill is a sacred site of the Puritans of the Empire as well as the Kürbisnacht cults of the Gütters & the fearsome Necro Coven. It is a mystical focal point, where the twisting roots of the trees form strange patterns & the branches are adorned with occult fetishes. Countless strange rituals & bloody feuds have been enacted around this haunted place & the ghosts of sacrificial victims & witches burnt atop the hill linger here, wailing in agony or vengeful fury.

Under the moon, cults still gather to worship & commemorate their martyrs, but when a red sun rises over the wood, the cultists scurry to their hidden dens as their brothers & sisters burn on the great pyres of the Inquisition. Waiting in their holes to reclaim the charred remains of their comrades, the Gütter cultists spit their curses in the direction of Brüttelburg & lay plans for the day when the mighty Hook Goat will come forth & stride across the land, reaping the sons of the Empire like wheat.



THE HUNT LODGE

The Hunt Lodge is a small village complex built around a large main hall that serves as a meeting place for the wealthy hunting enthusiasts of the Würstreich. While most noblemen stay here for only part of the year, most of the village is inhabited by various servants who work for the hunters, facilitating the hunts & the daily operation & upkeep of the Lodge. Many of these servants are Gütters from the Witchwood or the Rotting Swamp & most of these secretly despise their masters & harbor other loyalties.

The Lodge bristles with the skulls & pelts of stags, wolves, boar & other animals of the wood. The nobles of House Bäredräck hold decadent feasts & exclusive parties here for the wealthy elite of the Lowlands. In these great gatherings, deals are struck & intrigues hatched amongst the gentry.



Imperial Huntsman & loyal Snout Beast

THE SECRET BROTHERHOOD

While nobles of many Houses & factions visit the Hunt Lodge, its inner circle is thoroughly controlled by members of the Secret Brotherhood; an enclave of treasonous rebels. Supported by members of multiple Major Houses, the Brotherhood hopes to stage a military coup to overthrow the Jester Emperor & replace him with a new ruler of noble blood, thus strengthening the Empire &

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reinforcing the values of the founding fathers & the power of the Nobility.

The highly treasonous nature of this organization forces its members to conduct their communications through obscure rituals, codes & double-meanings hidden within the time-honored traditions, hunting rites & debauched celebrations of the Hunt Lodge practiced since the founding of the Empire.

THE GÜTTER

The heathen tribes that once thrived throughout the Borderlands before Imperial conquest are known collectively as the Gütter. The relentless advance of the Imperial war machine destroyed their armies & massacred them, driving the survivors into slavery, captivity, or exile in the wilderness. Many Gütters converted to the Puritan Order to avoid death or enslavement & their ancestors still serve the Imperials to this day.

Those who fled became nomads wandering the Foothills, Witchwood & Rotting Swamp in small, tight-knit family groups. They practice old & heretical customs banned by the Inquisition & for this reason they are a secretive people who tend to be distrustful of outsiders. The leaders of these wild peoples are witches, warlocks, shape-shifters & soothsayers.



Gütter heretics

CULTS OF THE WÜRSTREICH

The Lowlands are infested with all manner of secret cults, hiding their cultural & religious traditions from the scrutiny of the Inquisition. The larger & more widespread cults tend to lack a central doctrine or authority, resulting in numerous local permutations that share common themes & goals.

THE NECRO COVEN

In a land where life is cheap & death waits at every turn, the culture of the Empire is traditionally morbid & fatalistic. Some have taken this a step further; scholars, alchemists, mystics, apostate monks & witches dedicated to unravelling the great mysteries of life & death. While the Holy Order paints a righteous face on its own traditions of Puritan death magic, the Necro Coven operates in total secrecy, tirelessly hunted by the agents of the Inquisition. The Necro Coven's tactics include necromancy, curses, grave desecration, poisoning & the spreading of disease, corruption & heretical ideals. They venerate the Necromancer, although it is unclear whether they are in direct contact or if they operate independently.

SEVEN SECRET SORCERERS

The Seven Secret Sorcerers are the leaders of the Necro Coven. Their identities are unknown, but from the shadows they direct their forces to undermine the Empire & in particular the Holy Order. At least one of them holds a position in Imperial high society, perhaps even within the ranks of the Holy Order itself.

Each of the Seven Sorcerers has his or her own loyal followers within the coven & many of these are double-agents as the Sorcerers spy on each other pursuing internal rivalries & intrigues.

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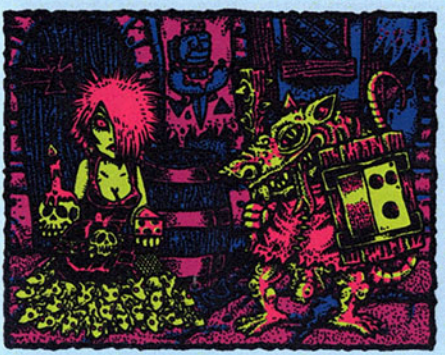
Harbingers of Doom

THE HARBINGERS OF DOOM

Four agents of the Würstreich were sent to confront & destroy the Necromancer once the true threat that the black wizard's existence posed became clear to the ministers of the Holy Order. Three Imperial paladin-knights volunteered for the mission, representing respectively the grave monks of the Necropolis, the torture monks of the Inquisition & the holy assassins of the Order of Executioners. These great heroes of the Würstreich were led by a High Cleric of the Order, armed with a consecrated holy dagger with which to sever the Necromancer's wicked tongue.

These four were never seen again, but in truth they were defeated by the Necromancer & their minds were scoured. These would-be assassins were corrupted & twisted into debased mockeries of their former stations. Now, they serve the Necromancer as lieutenants, travelling in secret across the Lowlands to gather allies, sometimes openly looting & burning across the Fields & warring against road wardens & local Imperial forces.

Following the Necromancer's example, the cultists of the Necrocoven now aspire to corrupt the agents of the Empire, thus humiliating & diminishing them in the eyes of the people.

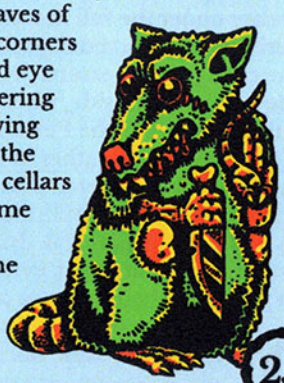


The Queen of the Rats & her Vermus Guard

CHILDREN OF THE VERMIN QUEEN

Some say she was born in the Undercity Dungeons, smuggled to the surface & left in the gutter on the streets of the bottom city. With no family to feed her, she relied on an innate power or evil blessing that granted her control over the minds of common rodents & vermin. Soon, she commanded an ever-growing legion of rats & sewer filth to feed & care for her until she came of age; Queen of a secret army of chittering followers & mad human devotees in awe of her mastery of witchcraft.

The vermin children gather & breed in the cracks, tunnels, cellars & dark places throughout the Borderlands, drawn to their Queen's power. Her human followers actively spread these vermin in human settlements out of insane devotion to their Queen & her mysterious goals. They leave handfuls of grain & loaves of bread in the corners & turn a blind eye to the scampering shadows moving swiftly along the walls as their cellars & attics become completely infested by the Queen's vast toothed horde.



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Celebrants of the Kürbisnacht

RITES OF THE KÜRBISNACHT

This Lunar festival is a remnant of the ancient traditions of the Gütter people of the Lowlands whose ancestors were subjugated or driven into the Witchwood to live out a dangerous nomadic existence. Even those that lingered West of the Stinkendblüt kept their old heathen traditions, practiced in secret despite persecution by the Holy Order. Today, the festival has come to represent resistance to the Imperial occupation of the Borderlands & a remembrance of the thousands who were burned by the Dread Saint Pastete during the bloody Pumpkin Wars, when the Inquisition gathered up priests of the pumpkin cult & put them to the torch at the top of Witch Hill.

To Puritans they are known as the *Kürbiskopf*, but they call themselves the 'People of the Pumpkin'. Secret worshippers of the pumpkin cult gather under the full moon & on various other sacred days marking the changing of seasons. Deep in the rural countryside, where the cult outnumbers the Puritans of the Holy Order, they gather in masks fashioned from carved pumpkins & other traditional ghoulish costume to parade, dance, sing & drink in hopes of warding away evil spirits & to proclaim their defiance to Imperial rule. These ceremonies often turn into full-scale skirmishes with road wardens or agents of the Inquisition. The ringleaders of the cult are said to possess the power to change their shapes into various bestial forms & the Inquisition offers a handsome bounty on their heads.

Those who cross the path of the revellers as they march through the countryside must join the procession or be ripped apart as an outsider & potential informant.

SPIRITS OF KÜRBISNACHT

High priests, warlocks & witches of the pumpkin cult don masks & costume invoking the Spirits of the Kürbisnacht; a pantheon of folk spirits who possess the bodies of their devotees during the sacred rites.

While the particular spirits & rites vary by locale, many strong recurring themes both ghoulish & frightening are found across the Kürbiskopf covens of the Lowlands.



The horrific Hook Goat & a masked Gütter youth

THE HOOK GOAT

The Hook Goat is an important & central figure of the rites of the Kürbisnacht, typically invoked by the

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high priest or priestess of the coven.

A towering, stilt-walking harvest spirit, it is covered in tattered robes fastened with numerous gaffer or butcher's hooks dangling on chains & ropes from the thing's lurching goat-headed frame. As the procession of celebrants dances in drunken revery, the Hook Goat thrashes & twirls about amongst the crowd, spinning its hooks wildly & snagging drunken worshippers who stumble too close, dragging them along screaming & bleeding to be offered up as sacrifice to the spirits at the climax of the celebration.

A common game amongst the heathen children of the Lowlands is to try to stick a pumpkin or similar offering from the harvest onto one of the Hook Goat's whirling barbs without being caught as a sacrifice. Those children clever & quick enough to present such an offering are blessed with luck & fortune by the spirits until the next Kürbisnacht.

THE STICK FISH

The Gütter children carry bottles of grog during the Kürbisnacht celebration to feed the Stickfish; an elder of the village who chases them with a sharpened stick unless they pour the grog into the gaping gullet of his bestial fish mask. As the festival rages on, the Stickfish becomes more vicious & belligerent, grog dripping from his toothy maw.

SLOPPOFACE

A feral bogeyman from the depths of the Witchwood, Sloppoface emerges to steal livestock & provisions from unprotected farmer folk. He is especially fond of baked goods & his name is taken from his messy & savage eating habits. The revellers offer him pies & pastries to satiate his hunger & keep his greedy fingers from their larders.

TOM VINEGAR

Tom Vinegar is a small horned imp or devil, invoked by a dwarf or child, or sometimes taking the form of a farm animal or a strange, small goblin-ox.

During the revelries, this spirit is given offerings of spoiled wine or goat's blood to tend to the animals & perform other chores around the farm, but if he is offended by an improper offering, he will send a pox to blight livestock or swarms of insects to infest a farm's provisions.



The Barn Imp Sacke & Tom Vinegar

HOUSEHOLD SPIRITS

Imps & benevolent but mischevious spirits are often represented by the household animals of celebrants, dressed in masks fashioned after dead ancestors who are said to enter the bodies of their family's animals during the Kürbisnacht, offering cryptic & mystical guidance from beyond the grave.

THE MOON

Invoked by a High Priestess-Witch of the cult, the Moon appears nude or clad in pale robes & her face covered by an ornate moon mask. She is given a place of high honor in the procession, often portrayed as either the bride or mother of the Hook Goat. She strides at his side, bestowing her blessings on her chosen children.

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CHILDREN OF THE MOON

Mutants, shapeshifters, lycanthropes & the deformed are all sacred creatures to the People of the Pumpkin. Known as the *Children of the Moon*, they are said to be gifted by the spirits & are given positions of high honor in the ceremonies of the cult.

The Children of the Moon are hunted relentlessly by the Inquisition & others who would harvest their body parts for witchcraft or Puritan Necromancy. The Children are hidden away & protected by the People of the Pumpkin in cellars, old ruins, haunted thickets & remote colonies across the countryside.



Scratchers; before & after rehabilitation

THE SCRATCHER EPIDEMIC

It is theorized by wizards & scholars that Skinwalkers congregate around enchanted & haunted places. These blood-drinking husks drift across barren landscapes guided by the impercetible flow of void energies coursing between ancient ruined & mystical sites scattered across the Borderlands.

Some say the Skinwalkers are the shed skin of a *'scratcher'* - a user in the later stages of addiction, returned with a will of its own to prey on human blood. Most consider this to be merely an old wives' tale invented to scare the children of the Würstreich away from *'scratch'* - an inexpensive & highly addictive stimulant sold on the streets & down the back alleys of Brüttelburg.



Whatever the truth may be, the cities & villages of the Würstreich are infested with hordes of sweaty, twitching Scratchers, fuelled with manic energy & an overwhelming burning need for their next fix.

THE FIELDS

The lanscape surrounding Brüttelburg is dominated by vast fields of crops & grazing ground maintained by the servants of the Imperial Houses.

Evidence of the age, grandeur, disgrace & decrepitude of the Würstreich is strewn throughout the landscape in various stages of decay. Old towers, walls & other stone structures are everywhere, home to secret gatherings of cults, rebels, robbers, scratchers, spirits & vermin. These old ghosts of the Empire remain as a reminder of the rise & fall of the once-great Würstreich & the futility of man's struggle against nature & the ravages of time.

As if compelled by a mysterious external force - the Pumpkin Cults travel lines through the Fields which, if viewed from high above, form enormous sigils. These are said to contain a narrative of the year & the Soothsayers of the Cult see into the future by interpreting the twisting paths through the eyes of black-winged familiars.

THE ORCHARDS

The blood-soaked dirt of the Fields works an unnatural effect on the flora of the Würstreich. The orchards have an almost bestial feeling to them as if the trees have become invigorated by the blood feeding their roots & their perfect apples swell under the blazing sun.

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Here, the Kürbiskopf covens steal apples from the orchards of House Patschesitzen & brew cider in the darkest corners of their barns. They add magic, wild yeasts & spiders to the mix to bestow wondrous visions on the celebrants of the Kürbisnacht & bring them closer to the hidden world of the spirits.

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Contained herein is an overview of the peoples & places of the Lowlands on the Eastern border of the great Würstreich, with special attention given to the layers & districts of the fortress city of Brüttelburg, the servants & sects of the Puritan Order, the major Noble Houses of the Empire & the rites of the ancient Pumpkin cult of the subjugated Gütter peoples; descendants of the old heathen tribes native to the area.



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