

THE MENAGERIES



SUMMARY

RANKING AND SENIORITY

Thrall

Shadow

Nightstalker

Regent

Underlord

LOCALES

THE OUBLIETTE

Of all the guildhalls within the Menagerie, few have as sinister a reputation as the Oubliette. Where exactly it can be found is a source of much speculation, but many believe that it is in a place not wholly unfamiliar with woe and suffering - the town of Dresden in the Dusklands. When the Shardmount erupted, Dresden was one of the towns hit hardest. Already a remote location, after years of falling ash, the land became barren and anyone who had held out hope of living a normal life abandoned the town. But some stayed behind and life, of a sort, continued to exist there. It became a refuge for the outcast, the forgotten, and those who wished to be forgotten. The Cirque saw this as a unique opportunity to establish a base of operations in the North for its less than legal activities and in the last decade, Dresden has become a haven for crime and the Black Market. Few go there without good reason. There is no law in Dresden save the Cirque menagerie, the dreaded Blood Belly Butchers and their leader, Little Doll.

The Oubliette is said to lie within the old keep of Dresden's former lord, a mockery of the order that used to reside there. Somewhere, well-hidden and guarded, lies a trap door that leads into what used to be the keep's dungeon. Below, lies a twisting series of pitch-black tunnels and passages laced with traps and ambushes that one must navigate if they want to reach the menagerie's lair. There, Little Doll dispenses pain and agony from her seat in the Court of Flesh. Every day, a litany of suffering is written upon the flesh of those who scream and die for the pleasure of the menagerie. Some die quickly, while others take many days. Nevertheless, it is said that the torturers of the Court of Flesh are some of the best in Arnesse. It is not

uncommon for those who want to learn torture to seek the Oubliette and request apprenticeship. Some are accepted, though others become involuntary training assistants.

The Oubliette also serves as a base for the massive Black Market operation running out of Dresden. Deep within the dungeons lie storage rooms, offices, and vaults. The market itself runs out of the town but most of the goods, especially those of value, are kept secure in the Oubliette. It is also said that Little Doll has a particularly large collection of relics from the ancient world. Some have speculated that she even has one of the Shards of Angrist, a piece of a legendary weapon once wielded by the titans in the Elder Days. The Oubliette is off limits to those not in the menagerie and those caught trespassing usually become the evening's entertainment. It is also said that those with enough coin can pay to come and witness the shows at the Court of Flesh or for even more coin, be given their own victim upon which to visit their own dark, sadistic desires.

NIGHT WARREN

Located somewhere around the town of Grimvorne in the Southern Hearthlands, the Night Warren is a subterranean network of earthen tunnels and sewer passages that are home to the Cannibals menagerie and their Underlord, Little Fool. How or why the Warren was built has been lost to time, but now it has fallen into the hands of a band of savages who use it as their hideout, den, and playground. Those few who have visited the Night Warren and returned say it has more than one entrance; all are guarded and well hidden. The tunnels themselves are narrow, flooded, and full of dead ends. Many of the Cannibals are owners of exotic and dangerous pets such as crocodiles, alligators, wild dogs, and the like, which they often let run wild in the Warren, adding to the dangers. The Night Warren is designed to keep out, delay, or kill those who don't know their way around and more than one group that has tried to penetrate them has found themselves hopelessly lost, only to be picked off one by one.

Deeper into the tunnels, hidden somewhere near the heart of the Night Warren are the living and training quarters of the Cannibals. In the center of the Warren is a place known only as the Pit, a massive earthen hollow that serves as a central meeting area, feasting hall, and fighting pit. On a regular basis, the Cannibals host battles of man versus man or man versus beast. Some combatants are willing participants and others are graciously given an opportunity to fight for their lives. The Warrens also have been known to host the carnival known as the Menagerie of Blood when it is in the area. The Cannibals also host bloody event called the Rabbit Run, where one or

more victims are kidnapped from the local community, blindfolded, led to the Pit and then let loose to run in the Warren. If they can escape the Warren before they are hunted down by the Cannibals and their animals, they are free to go. There is no record of anyone surviving the Run.

But this is not even the darkest side to the Night Warren for it said to be a place tainted by a spirit of insatiable consumption. The human and animal bones that litter the earthen floors are signs of those who came before and were not only killed but devoured. While some may say it was the animals that ate them, few are under any illusions that the Cannibals have not lived up to their moniker on more than one occasion. Other parts of the world may talk about survival of the fittest but the Night Warren exemplifies this on a primal level; the strong literally eat the weak. Rumors persist that the Cannibals extort the local villages into sending them sacrifices to “feed the Warren” and tales are told that the tunnels might actually be sentient, driving those who walk within to the brink of sanity, turning them into ravenous beasts hungry for flesh.

HALL OF MIRRORS

Somewhere beneath the ashen badlands of Northern Tarkath, likely near the sirat of Serapis, is the Hall of Mirrors. Here, the Grotesque oversee the menagerie known only as the Freaks. From this hidden location, they run the largest drug operation in the Kingdom. While the Freaks are based in the South, they have agents and operations established in every major city of Arnesse, especially those closely associated with the Black Market. The Freaks are also said to be heavily involved in the highly illegal trade of slaves. Serapis is known as a place that one can acquire human flesh for coin. This Hall of Mirrors is unique among the guildhalls of the menageries in that it is not inherently sinister. While the Freaks may be at times alarming to look upon, in some ways those deformities have allowed many of them to keep a shred of their humanity, a trait sorely lacking among the Cirque of the underworld. For them, the drugs and slaves are about business and finding their way in a world which has all but rejected their kind. One would be foolish to underestimate the Freaks or think them weak, for they are no more welcoming of the uninvited and no less dangerous than other menageries.

Few know the actual location of the entrance to the Hall of Mirrors for it is a well-guarded secret. Those that happen to find their way inside have said it possesses a dark, otherworldly beauty, almost as if one were walking through another place and time. The legends say it was made by the Sheitan, malevolent creatures of the ancient world who once ruled the

wastes of Tarkath. This place and its twisting passages are said to have been used by the Sheitan to ensnare and torture humans who came to hunt the treasures supposedly contained within. Still others say this once was a pocket carved out by the Fae as a refuge when they visited this world. The very walls of the Hall of Mirrors are laced with black, reflective volcanic glass that gives them an opalescent sheen when lit but also ensures that without light, this place is consumed in utter darkness. Countless mirrors have been added to those walls and braziers placed at key points to create optical illusions, false passages, and infinite tunnels. Without a map, it is possible to wander, lost for days, never find the way out; some have been driven mad in trying to do so. It is said that many of these mirrors are two way and that the Freaks can keep track of those within the maze, choosing to strike them through a number of hidden access panels or let them die of exposure.

As one goes into the deepest areas of the Hall, they know they are on the right track because of the many of the mirrors that are often broken and cracked, a sign of the Freaks. Complete with living quarters, workshops, offices, and storage, it is here that the Freaks carry out their daily affairs and run their business. Near the center of the guildhall itself is the central meeting area known as the Gallerie of Light; a massive cavern that has had mirrors set into the walls, covering every inch of stone. Hanging from the top of the cavern is a crystalline chandelier that is illuminated with hundreds of candles. When lit, this gallery is flooded with a riot of candlelight that creates a spectacle like few others in all the Kingdom. In recent years, many of these mirrors have been broken by the Freaks, changing the light patterns to be more chaotic; more maddening. It is within the Gallerie that the Freaks host a yearly masquerade ball known as the Freak Ball, to which select, high powered members of the underworld are invited to attend. Many plans are laid and new business deals are struck at the Ball. Though too, no small number of plots and secret murders are set into motion.

THE LABYRINTH

Deep in the badlands lies the forgotten town of Moligant. Once named Gargya it was a thriving trade village and stop on the way to the Free City of Orn. That was until the Cirque menagerie known as the Wraiths came to Gargya in 717. Led by the mysterious and enigmatic figure known only as the Shadow King, the Wraiths moved into the town and slowly began to take over. Things began quietly at the start, but one by one, those who opposed the menagerie began to disappear. In 719 a few local leaders tried to rally the people and drive the Wraiths out. They gathered a mob and attacked their guildhall.

Only the withered husks of their bodies were found on display in the town square the next morning. After that, many local people, terrified of the Wraiths and the Shadow King, left Gargya and it became little more than a ghost town.

Construction on the Labyrinth began in 721. The Wraiths pressed a great many of the local townspeople who remained into servitude and purchased hundreds of slaves from the markets of the Free City of Orn, one of the last holdouts of the reviled trade. While construction on the Labyrinth still has yet to be complete, the edifice has been under construction for the better part of forty years. In the process, the town of Gargya was surrounded and swallowed whole by the maze. Renamed Moligant, the remains of Gargya lie at the center of the Labyrinth and are now a base of operations and guildhall for the Wraiths. The Labyrinth itself is imposing and extensive, with walls over fifteen feet in height and crafted of a smooth, black stone mined from the foothills of the Sheol Mountains to the East. It is the single largest maze in Arnesse and few have ever tracked the distance of the passages within, but it's said that the walls extend at least three miles in every direction from Moligant. Some have even said that the plans for the maze are not even of this world, stolen from an architect in another, otherworldly domain known only as the Undercroft.

The Labyrinth is not like many guildhalls in that the Wraiths and the Shadow King prefer their privacy and do not often accept visitors. They are an organization who values secrecy and anonymity above all else. Few have ever been taken to Moligant and those that have are blindfolded on the journey so they cannot retrace their steps. Stories that have come out of the Labyrinth say that Moligant still exists, but its people are little more than the living dead, going through the motions of life yet utterly in the service of the Shadow King and his minions. There, the Wraiths oversee their intelligence and espionage activities throughout Arnesse. With agents spread all over the continent, the Wraith's network rivals even that of mighty House Aragon and there are few things that go on in the Kingdom or Orn of which they are unaware. Though this is normally the dominion of the Veil, it's said that for enough coin the Wraiths are willing to defy even Death itself. In the years since their founding, the Wraiths have grown to become the strongest of the menageries and while there is no true leader in the underworld, the Shadow King's word carries more weight than any other's. Though he rarely betrays his will or desires, most individuals scramble to do what they can to obey them. It is said that the rising power of the Shadow King has caused friction with the Prophet, who sits less than a hundred miles away in the Free City of Orn. There is a feeling that if the tensions continue to rise, that the Cirque's battle lines would be

drawn between the camps of these two enigmatic leaders.

MAJOR MEMBERS AND FIGURES

Little Doll

Lady of the Oubliette

Age: 32

Where Little Doll came from or what her real name is, have long been lost, or perhaps never existed in the first place. What is known of her is that she runs the Blood Belly Butchers and the Black Market operations out of the town of Dresden in the Dusklands. Little Doll is also known to be a total sadist and enjoys little else than inflicting pain and suffering on the willing and unwilling alike. She earned her name because she is a little person, often dressing like a child's doll and painting her face in a similar manner. But those who mistake her diminutive stature as weakness quickly find out that for what she lacks in size, she makes up for in a cruelty that is absolute and a nearly insatiable lust for blood. Little Doll is known to be brilliant, cunning, and very pragmatic.

Her 'brother', Little Fool, is Underlord of the Cannibals and between them, they have a choke hold on the underworld in a good portion of Northern and central Arnesse. Many have speculated that Little Doll and Little Fool are actually not really brother and sister, but the tales say that they once were prisoners in a travelling carnival and spent years in the freak show being tortured and used a source of amusement by others. It is said that the two started an uprising in that carnival and that one dark night, the owners and a great many of the guests at the show met with a horrific and grisly end at the hands of their own performers. Since then, Doll and Fool have been as close as family – she is the brains and he is the brawn. The two have worked together to rise quickly within the Cirque, leaving a trail of blood and horror in their wake.

Doll has made no effort to hide that she has committed herself to the project of building herself a new body. Thus, she's had the Bloody Butchers scour the land looking for the prettiest girls and bringing them back to the Oubliette. There, once they've met Little Doll's exacting standards, the girls are tortured and then vivisected alive. After death, their body parts are harvested, and Little Doll personally incorporates them into her construct. The Butchers have quietly taken to calling Doll's project "Jane" when they speak about her and in a strange way, this grotesque collection of body parts has already begun to take on a life of its own. Little Doll believes that once she has assembled the body, she can use some of her impressive

collection of rare relics and artifacts to trade a necromancer for their services and transfer her animus into the new body. Thus, she will be able to have a “real body” like the other girls and become both immortal and stronger than other humans. Little Doll also has a hobby and near obsession with history and the past, particularly ancient artifacts. She has one of the finest collections in all Arnesse of lost relics and texts, all of which she acquired through the Black Market.

Little Fool

Lord of the Night Warren

Age: 36

Little Fool is the Underlord of the Night Warren and head of the menagerie known as the Cannibals. He is a massive specimen of a man, almost seven feet tall and over four hundred pounds of muscle and fat. Though he’s not old, his hair is already sparse and falling out, leaving him partially bald. Most times he wears white face paint, eyes accented with black, and lips smeared with crusted red that bears a strong resemblance to dried blood. To more intensely horrify those who see him, Little Fool has filed his teeth into points, giving his mouth the appearance of a shark’s maw rather than a man’s mouth. Most times he is sweating profusely, causing his make-up to run and giving him an unpleasant, sickly look. Little Fool is incredibly strong and there are those who claim to have witnessed him crush a man’s skull with his bare hands.

It’s said that Little Fool suffered head trauma when he was kept in the freak show with his “sister” Little Doll and as a result isn’t all that smart. Though he is cunning, possessed of near animalistic senses, utilizing his primal instincts to great effect. The injury also made him extremely prone to emotional fits and rage that can be lethal to anyone who is around him or gets in his way. The only people who can calm or soothe him are Little Doll and his companion, a woman named Lady who won Little Fool’s trust by suffering through years of savage abuse by him. Lady is always at his side and speaks on Fool’s behalf or interprets what he says.

Little Fool runs the Cannibals through strength alone. None in the menagerie will dare to stand up to him. Those that have spoken up in the past are typically killed on the spot, usually torn apart and fed to the group, or thrown to the sewers. Lady is the de facto second in command of the Cannibals and serves to help Little Fool navigate more difficult decisions or will simply make them on his behalf. Fool does not hide that he’s a cannibal and has quite a few times eaten both enemies and friends alike. While not all the Cannibals regularly devour human flesh, Little Fool has acquired a bit of a taste for it and

believes that the spirit of those he consumes gives him strength and virility. He has several children, some by Lady and others by women in and outside of the Cannibals. Fool is known for only allowing his strongest children to live, the others meeting untimely grim ends shortly after they are born. Being so purely terrifying to look upon and an infamous villain, Little Fool rarely leaves the Night Warren. When he does it is often under the cover of darkness, accompanied by a large pack of Cannibals.

Of all the menagerie leaders, Little Fool appears to be the only one with no plan. That is not to say he doesn’t have one, but it certainly isn’t obvious to anyone. Little Fool and the Cannibals act as shock troops for the menageries. They are savage, inhuman, well-trained, and no one knows how many of them there are. The fact that such a dangerous band is operating in the Hearthlands, so close to civilization, is alarming to the local powers. Both the Vellatora and House Corveaux have made several unsuccessful attempts to root the them out, all at great and bloody cost to the attacking forces.

The Grotesque

Lord of the Mirrored Hall

Age: 47

Those who would look upon the misshapen features of the Grotesque may think him no less a beast than his fellow Underlords and Underladies. They would be wrong. Physically, he is malformed enough to invoke pity in some and revulsion in others. His appearance is as if the Gods themselves took a man, then twisted and melted his body. The man’s face is twisted and sagging, eyes bulging, hair sparse and patchy. Forced to walk with a cane due to his hunched back, even the Grotesque’s fingers are twisted and different lengths. While the Grotesque’s real name has long been forgotten, it is said he was once assistant to an old Magister, who took pity on the young, crippled man, taught him how to read and write, and gave him a formal education. The Grotesque had been given so few things in his life that he took the training he received for what it was - a precious gift that was to be treasured. When the Magister died, the Grotesque was freed from his bonds and sought refuge within the Apotheca but was rejected from membership, very likely because of his deformity. Enraged, he fled the civilized world and went to work as an assistant in the Rakes, a menagerie of the Cirque. There, he turned his education into a weapon to serve the ends of his Underlord, Graham Six-Gun. All the while the Grotesque harbored a grudge for how he and those like him were treated. He dreamed of making a refuge for those who had been afflicted by deformities and give them a life free of mockery and rejection.

He hatched a plan, executing it over patient years, the Grotesque was able to siphon off enough coin to hire Little Doll and Little Fool to help him take over the Rakes and murder Six-Gun. They were successful and to this day, the Grotesque bears a scar where one of those guns left its mark on him; a reminder of the price of his betrayal. The Grotesque immediately moved to change things within the menagerie. First, he renamed the group the Freaks and himself, the Grotesque. All existing members were given the choice to remain, but those who did were to become deformed in some way. Many left, but some stayed, choosing instead to mutilate themselves in solidarity with the menagerie. The Freaks inherited Arnesse's largest drug trade from the Rakes and since then the Grotesque has worked hard to ensure that business not only prospered but flourished.

With the encouragement from some of his regents, the Grotesque also expanded into the slave trade, working with the fallen House Pyon of Serapis to supply the North with labor and servants. The Grotesque has little love for the crimes he perpetrates but views the work as service to a higher cause. The Grotesque feels that if he can gather enough money, power, and influence, he plans to purchase a palace to fulfill his dream of a place where the deformed can be free of ridicule and prejudice.

The Grotesque is known to be brilliant, well educated, and surprisingly urbane. He enjoys the theater, poetry, and art, and while he rarely attends such events in the cities of Arnesse, he often has such performers and artists come to the Hall of Mirrors as his guests. He is known to be a kind man and encourages all the Freaks to not let their insides be as ugly as their outsides. Still, when it comes to business, the Freaks can be as brutal and unforgiving as any menagerie and quite often are. The Grotesque has a lover by the name of Claudio who serves as one of his key advisors and muse when he dabbles in the performing arts. Were it not for the rise of the Shadow King in the last few years, many feel that the Grotesque and the Freaks would be the strongest menagerie in Arnesse and leader of the underworld. This fact has led to quite a few tensions between the Wraiths and the Freaks. Tensions which may soon lead to conflict if the Shadow King continues his current course.

Shadow King

Lord of the Labyrinth

Age: ???

The Shadow King is the mysterious and enigmatic leader of the menagerie known as the Wraiths. The Shadow King has rarely been seen in public and is assumed to spend much of his time

within the Labyrinth. Those few who have met him describe a tall, lithe man typically wearing dark attire and an onyx mask. At his side is a fine longsword that is said to be made of the rare and mystic metal known as mithryl and likely crafted by a master smith; certainly, a weapon befitting a king. Much speculation has come as a result of the artifact, some being of the mind that it is stolen, while others contend this underworld boss may be more than he appears to be. What the Shadow King actually looks like is unknown and there is much speculation that he dons multiple faces and travels the Kingdom in disguise. This has led to him becoming a bit of an underworld boogey man; a figure about whom tall tales are told, who lurks in the shadows, waiting to strike down those who stand in the way of his plans.

Those who have spoken with him at length have stated he is a man of education, intelligence, and strategy who has ambitions beyond merely being the leader of a Cirque menagerie; they say he wants to rule the Kingdom. Such a feat might seem impossible were it not for how quickly the Shadow King has risen to power in the last decade. The systemic way he removed his enemies, made allies, and seized territory was worthy of any noble or monarch who ever seized the throne. Today, all the menageries respect and fear the Wraiths and begrudgingly obey the Shadow King's will. The Lord of the Labyrinth has spent the last year consolidating his power base. Unlike the Prophet, he has vastly diversified the Wraiths and set them up in intelligence cells known as "haunts" in major cities throughout Arnesse. These local groups both keep watch in these regions and work to enforce the Shadow King's will. They maintain communication via their own network of messengers who are solely responsible for ensuring that information flows between haunts and back to the Labyrinth.

The Shadow King, interestingly, may be the most law abiding of all the Underlords and while it is said the Wraiths may engage in assassinations for coin, even those seem to be chosen with some larger design or plan in mind. The Wraiths very rarely engage in other types of criminal activity such as drugs, slaves, or even the Black Market. It is said that the Shadow King even punishes those who break the King's Law. Even darker rumors circulated about the Shadow King in the years since he has come to power. Some have said he is a witch or necromancer who is capable of raising the dead to life and drinking the souls of the living. Others whisper that he is little more than a creature of the night himself, some servant of darker powers who seeks to wreak havoc upon the entire world.

THE TRADITIONS OF THE MENAGERIES

CARNIE CODE

The Carnie Code was changed in 647 when the Menageries were added to the Cirque. The troupes kept their old set of rules yet five were removed and five were added for the menageries. This was meant to reflect the different needs of an organization which did most of its business in the underworld. The menageries almost never respect the King's Law and the Carnie Code is about the only thing that keeps them in some semblance of honor. Even the Carnie Code is a struggle for some of their more disruptive members to follow, but, because of the danger that can be posed to the entire organization, the menageries are swift and brutal about responding to any violations of the tenets.

The concepts of justice and law are lost on many in the menageries, as is the idea of due process. As a result, quite a few disputes or violations of Cirque law are resolved "off the books" and usually result in one or more deaths. If one breaks the code or is accused of breaking the code publicly, they have a few options. In some cases, they may be allowed to admit their guilt in the matter and to "make good" for their transgressions. In the troupes this comes in the form of goods or money, but in the menageries, it is usually blood. The method of punishment is either determined by the highest ranking Cirque and the injured party can state what they would like the punishment to be. That can mean a body part of your own or someone you care for is cut off, or someone close to you is killed while you watch. A particularly cruel punishment is the requirement that you carry out the deed yourself.

The second resolution is to resolve the dispute by combat. The menageries do use the Ring of Blood as outlined above in the troupe's section. They may also participate in a Whisper Duel, in which two opponents will be given a week to kill the other. The only rule is that it must not be by their own hands. Whisper Duels can sometimes be quite extravagant, with the particularly influential taking the opportunity to show off how much they can humiliate or destroy a person before ending their life. A third commonly employed method of dispute resolution is to leave the matter entirely to fate and participate in the Ring of Bone, where the parties will sit inside a ring made of bones and do games of chance. These typically involve dice made of human bones, but the game which is used is entirely up to the duelists.

Those who have merely been accused of a violation of the code usually must prove their innocence, but not through due

process. Most high-ranking Cirque will refuse to sit in judgment of another as it too much resembles the process employed by the nobility. Many times they will employ a Circle of Blood with a champion they choose, yet also have been known to use the Rabbit Run. The accused is typically given a head start before being hunted down by their own menagerie or the offended menagerie. If the accused makes it to a designated spot alive, they are considered innocent and set free. The accused may also undergo a physical trial such as being burned for an extended period or a gauntlet where they are beaten by their menagerie until they reach the end. If the accused survives the trial, they are considered innocent.

- I. Do not reveal your association with the underworld.
- II. Honor the code and no law before it.
- III. If you are caught, you acted alone.
- IV. Never betray the guild or its secrets to outsiders.
- V. Never steal from the guild.
- VI. Never sincerely aid or associate with the law or those who enforce it.
- VII. Never reveal more than you must.
- VIII. Always know who you are doing business with. You are responsible if that relationship causes problems.
- IX. Do not do business in the day markets.
- X. Defend the guild against all who would do it harm.

CARNIE CANT

Just as the troupes have a specific set of language they use among their own, so do the menageries. The menageries will use the troupes' terminology and the troupes' will use theirs, but it is more common to see these terms used in the underworld.

Red Lighted - When someone is gotten rid of, usually for good.

Vigorish - The interest paid on a loan to the Cirque, usually large in proportion to the overall loan.

Mark - Someone you believe to be a conspicuously easy victim. It can have a sinister intent to indicate someone to be killed.

Zanies - Cheap thugs who dress in make-up and are usually used for hits or intimidation.

Heavy - To be carrying a weapon.

Make One's Bones - Gain credibility by killing someone.

Message Job - Placing a weapon in someone's body such that a specific message is sent to someone. Usually done through the eye or mouth.

Deadbeat - One who does not honor his debts.

Fence - An individual specializing in moving stolen merchandise.

Pass - A reprieve from being murdered.
Pinched - To get caught by the King's men or Sheriff.
Gaff - A dishonest individual who habitually swindles, cheats and deceives.
Belched - Told it all; informed; gave up information.
Rat - One who snitches or squeals after having been caught.
Shakedown - To blackmail or try to get money from someone; to give someone a scare.
Shylock Business - The business of offering loans.
Shylock - The name given to a Cirque member who specializes in loans.
Shy - The interest charged on loans by shylocks.
Through the Mouth - A message job through the mouth to indicate that someone was a rat.
Barrel Murder - A murder method in which the victim is stuffed into a barrel and left to rot.
Broken - Demoted in rank.
Buckwheats - To die slowly and painfully. "He died buckwheats."
Headhunter - A hired assassin.
Ear Popper - Jamming a dagger into someone's ear and killing them that way.
In the Wind - Any individual who seems to have disappeared and can't be found.
Middling - Reselling stolen goods.
Stone Killer - A particularly efficient and cold-hearted killer.
Floater - A corpse found floating in a body of water.
Finger - To inform on.
Deal - To buy and sell drugs
Loot - Coin, treasure or other valuables.
Rabbit - Anyone who is trying to flee or evade capture.
Scag - A drug of any kind, especially illegal drugs.
Bilked - To be fooled or evaded.
Deck Hand - A domestic person.
Dead One - Person without any means or income.
Raven - A message.
Red Eye - An alcoholic drink.
Scratcher - Forger of documents.
Shadowed - To be followed or kept track of.
Stash - To Hide. Can also be used to refer to a cache of hidden goods.
Velvet - Easy.
Walk the Plank - Shown up in front of a group of people, usually superiors.
Wharf Rat - One who steals around the wharves on the river front.
Windjammer - A talkative person.
Wet Goods - Stolen Goods.
Hustler - Prostitute
Den - A place where criminals are known to congregate, relax,

and sleep.
Douse the Glim - Put out the light.
Fine as Silk - In good condition.
Durry Nacker - A merchant who shouts a lot.
Garbage Joint - A cheap tavern.
Garroter - A robber who strangles and uses force.
Giggers - Guards.
Highwayman - A thief who robs caravans and travellers on the road.
Jagged - To be intoxicated or drunk.
Jolly - To flatter someone.
Knocker - One who speaks against the interests of another.
Louse House - A cheap inn.
Lusher - A hard drinker.
Marble Heart - To get a cold reception, no attention, or a deaf ear.
Meat Cleaver - A knife or dagger, particularly a very large one.
On the Hog - To be financially embarrassed, broke, or left beating way about the country.
Shiv - A knife, razor, or other sharp or pointed implement that is easily concealed.
Troll - To look around an area in search of something.
Alley Rat - Thief who robs persons in alleys.

THE BLACK MARKET

The Black Market is an illegal organization run by the menageries of the Cirque. It is protected under no law or compact, but the Cirque does regulate the prices, what is available, and who can participate in the market, both buyers and sellers alike. Unlike the day markets, only trustworthy and known merchants can participate and sell goods within the Black Market. This generally means only members of the menageries can become shadow merchants, or those who deal in goods on the Black Market. The list of goods and services within the Black Market is maintained by Little Doll and sent through the network typically every three cycles of the moon. The Black Market is much smaller than the day markets and deliberately so, for everyone knows everyone else and it is very difficult for newcomers to escape harsh and thorough scrutiny.

The Black Market has all manner of goods and services available and surprisingly, even legal goods are available for purchase if one is willing to take the risk that they are more than likely fenced or stolen. Typical goods available for sale are poisons and drugs, but lore and other valuable items, from alleged relics to treasures possessed by famous figures, are also available. No small part of the Black Market is also made up of services. Forgery of paperwork and signet rings, people selling maps of sewer systems and the layouts of estates, people who

know who to bribe and how to make the city watch be somewhere else on a particular night, or to stop putting up pesky wanted posters are all available for the right price. There is also an active market for slaves, particularly in the South. Slavery is forbidden in Arnesse and especially reviled in Tarkath, but that does not stop unscrupulous nobles from using slaves in their own household or to work on extensive labor projects. Slaves are also purchased by various factions to be used in underground blood sport or other, more macabre amusements.

The King and his Sheriffs are constantly searching for ways to break up the Black Market. They are stymied by two forces. The first of which is that the underworld is very good at covering its tracks. The Black Market, in most places, does not truly exist as an actual marketplace. Deals with the Black Market are normally reserved between parties at a place set by the seller. To even purchase on the Black Market, the seller needs to be referred by someone who has a connection with the underworld and even then, it's unlikely the buyer will ever actually come into direct contact with the seller. The second barrier is that some powerful individuals in the Kingdom use the Black Market on a regular basis, including some of the King's nobles, highly placed gentry, and other wealthy figures. King Giles II has especially discouraged the use of the Black Market. The Crown generally wants to save itself the embarrassment of having to either arrest its own nobility or have those arrested reveal their business connections. Therefore, most arrests done in relation to the Black Market are selectively targeted and most focused on the lower class. It's said that the Crown or the Crown's agents have an agreement with the leaders of the Black Market that, should they maintain certain limitations, the King will take no action in their operations.

Because of all this secrecy, there is very little negotiating that goes on over the cost of an item. The seller sets the price and that is the price the buyer pays. Prices are often high and complaints are answered with a simple, "If you don't like the price, buy it someplace else." When there's nowhere else to buy, the price is usually paid. If the buyer shows up with less than the expected amount, the transaction is often cancelled. If a buyer earns a bad reputation among Black Market dealers, they are often put on the black list, which is a record of individuals that are not permitted to make purchases. This list is often shared throughout the Black Market network, so someone who gets black listed in one region could find themselves unable to make deals anywhere else in the Kingdom, even in the day markets. Doing business in the Black Market can be very risky. There's the real potential of being

arrested and imprisoned. But the far more real threat is that because the entire operation is run out of sight of the law, the amount of crime perpetrated upon shadow merchants is high and often lethal. Robbery is common and murder, while less common, is a frequent solution for a rival who undercuts prices or speaking ill of a fellow merchant.

The Black Market has several more public fronts through which it operates. While neither of these locations are easy to find, someone looking for the underworld might get directed there.

Crow's Feast – Located in Dresden, in the Dusklands, this is the most public and accessible Black Market front in the Kingdom. For all intents and purposes, Crow's Feast looks like a legitimate market, selling the common goods and wares of the Kingdom. The truth is that most of them are stolen or "found" wares and that the shop stalls are often fronts for deeper, darker markets that lie hidden beneath the surface. Those who ask around about the Black Market carelessly are likely to either be ignored or directed to Crow's Feast. Here, potential buyers are tested to see if they are trustworthy and not one of the King's men. Those that pass gain access to the hidden market that lies beneath the town. Crow's Feast is known for having a wide variety of goods as well as some of the best access to stolen goods, particularly artifacts, art, and lore. The town of Dresden is also well known as a place one can go to find a variety of services both legal and illegal, as well as nefarious individuals looking to ply their trade, such as mercenaries, thieves, or assassins.

Undermarket – The so called Fourth Market of Taliesin, Undermarket lies beneath the city in a complex series of tunnels and catacombs. Undermarket requires a member of the Cirque within Taliesin to vouch for a person, though it's said that other high-ranking Cirque of other cities can also provide a reference. Once one gains access they would find a whole world of vice, crime, and pleasure is hidden beneath the Golden City. It is said that the finest brothels in all the Kingdom can be found here if one knows where to look. The Undermarket sells all manner of goods but is primarily known for its drug dens and apothecary merchants. Those who are seeking some of the most exotic and deadly poisons in the land need to look no further. There is also said to be those in Undermarket connected with the slave trade and while no actual slaves are sold there, if one asks the right people they could be put in touch with those who could make that happen. Undermarket can be quite a dangerous and is full of thieves and ruffians looking to take advantage of a wealthy individual caught in a drug-induced stupor. The Undermarket is said to be run by the

Freaks, but the Kraits are said to have a stake in the operation as well.

THE ZANIES

The Nagas are well known to be the mercenary company employed by the Cirque to defend their goods and interests. What is less commonly known is that the Nagas don't work for the menageries. Part of the agreement that was made in 647 when the menageries were formed made it clear that in order to keep a clear separation between the themselves and the troupes, the Nagas could not be seen as working for both groups. In order to bolster their forces, the menageries were empowered to recruit their own defense forces. But since the menageries knew they needed to be more exclusive than many troupes due to matters of security, they needed to find another way to get shock troops and soldiers. Enter the Zanies. The menageries recruited and essentially created a gang of thugs that they put on permanent retainer. The Zanies have some sort of presence in nearly every major city or town and all told, they number a bit more than four thousand strong throughout the Kingdom.

The Zanies can be easily identified by the white face make-up they wear that is often decorated with blacks and reds on the lips and the eyes, often in the manner of a jester or fool. They sometimes dye their hair in wild colors and though many are dressed in commoners' garb, their leaders favor festive clothing with stripes, dots, or other patterns. One can tell a Zanie's rank by the suit of the card they have pinned to their lapel. The lower the card number the lower the rank, queens, kings, and aces being the highest. The Zanies are well known for being general rowdies and roustabouts in town, frequently harassing and cajoling people, but otherwise seemingly harmless. They have also been tied to more nefarious activities like muggings, robbery, vandalism, and even murder. Most significant crime is considered beyond the Zanies and most, including the menageries, consider them to be blunt instruments with limited use.

Most local rulers consider the Zanies to be a nuisance, with their prevalence among the lower class districts leading to no shortage of arrests. The menageries use the Zanies for any number of tasks, from guard duty, to vandalism, to physical threats, and even murders. Zanies are usually paid for the work on a per job basis but also receive a small stipend every moon cycle for just being a loyal member. The Zanies are active in most regions of Arnesse but generally stay clear of Corveaux and Innis lands due to the regions' strict stance on gangs and roustabouts. They are also generally unwelcome in the extreme Southern parts of Tarkath or Northern Everfrost, where climate and culture would discourage such vulgar behavior in

outsiders.

PRIVILEGE

The matter of Privilege among local Cirque can be a hotly contested issue and is generally why both troupes and menageries don't operate in the same locales. A troupe or a menagerie is free to claim a territory and if they can hold it against any challengers, it is theirs from which to extoll Privilege under the auspices of the Artis Compact. Where things can get more complicated is if both a troupe and a menagerie set up in a single area or one group tries to siphon off some Privilege for themselves. The latter event usually ends with the offending parties being driven off or killed.

It is possible for both a troupe and a menagerie to live in one area, especially if that place is particularly wealthy or profitable. These groups typically coexist under a strict arrangement as to how each will behave and to that which each is entitled. Usually the most hotly contested element is Privilege and the arrangement almost always outlines from whom each group may collect or what kind of split the total Privilege will take.

The menageries are very interested in getting a portion of the take as they need to pay Privilege to their leaders as well. That Privilege is currently paid to the Shadow King and his messengers come around every three cycles of the moon to regions with active menageries to collect the dues. As with the troupes, those who fail to pay or come up short are dealt with accordingly and in some cases, permanently. While competition over Privilege can be fierce, all local parties are sufficiently motivated to work out any disagreements if for no other reason than to ensure they avoid not being able to pay their dues to the guild leadership.

THE DARK ARTISTS OF THE MENAGERIES

THRALL

A thrall is a warrior or soldier of the menageries. More than many troupes, the menageries are prepared for a fight and thralls are their foot soldiers and shock troops. The troupes may be trained to brawl and street fight, but thralls are trained to maim, kill, and sow terror. Indeed, it is the possibility of a bloody and gruesome conflict that keeps most from garnering the ire of the menageries and its goons. Most thralls have little in the way of morals to stop them and most are deliberately destructive as they not only have a disregard for the King's Law

but an outright hatred of it. In addition, most thralls are hardened by years of street combat, the underworld lifestyle, and general abuse. In life, they are unafraid of death and far more intimidated by the consequences of failure than anything that might happen to them in a fight. Even the most hardened soldiers in Arnesse flinch when faced with the possibility of having to face a band of drug-addled thralls in combat. Thralls often have the easiest time hiding their allegiances, doing so by hiring themselves out as a sell sword or bodyguard.

SHADOW MERCHANT

Not to be confused with a standard market merchant, these traders only deal in Black Market goods and services. Almost all shadow merchants are members of the Cirque as few non-guild merchants would be trusted with the requisite information and knowledge. It would be hard to find someone who knew the underworld better than these fel peddlers and it is not uncommon for a shadow merchant to be among the most well-connected members of a community. Unlike other merchants, they often pose as other professions entirely to throw people off as to their true business and allegiances. Many shadow merchants spend a great deal of time and money to cultivate personal layers of protection so they can find and trade with buyers and sellers while still remaining entirely anonymous. Often a shadow merchant spends as much time evading and managing local law enforcement as they do selling their goods. It is not unusual for a given shadow merchant to remain undiscovered for years in a community, all the while providing a steady supply of illegal, Black Market goods to its consumers, likely all of whom have no idea their good friend is also their supplier.

SHADE

The most secretive members of the menageries, some shades remain unknown even to all members of the local Cirque. They are trained to be everyone and no one, blending seamlessly into a crowd, and performing a variety of roles. Thus, it is exceptionally hard to spot a good Shade. While they may be good at remaining hidden, they have a variety of other skills that make them truly useful. In particular is their ability to gather information in a community and then utilize that information to their advantage. A shade is one who deals in information as a merchant might trade in silks. Once they have information that is deemed useful, they can sell it to the highest bidder or simply use it to advance their own position. Shades are often talented in the arts of espionage and are adept at both gathering and manipulating local rumors. Most local Cirque leaders expect shades to communicate and coordinate with them, however many walk their own path and serve many masters. This path can be a dangerous one, as to be a keeper of

secrets is to become a target for those that want them for themselves or ensure that they can never be told to anyone else. A shade's greatest defense is their anonymity and ultimately the greatest secrets they end up keeping are their own.

THE MENAGERIES OF THE CIRQUE

Though there are literally dozens of menageries within the Cirque both major and minor across Arnesse, some of the strongest and most well-known groups are listed below.

BLOOD BELLY BUTCHERS

The Blood Belly Butchers are widely regarded as one of the most sadistic and cruel menageries in Arnesse. They are comprised of almost a thousand members scattered mostly around Dresden and the Dusklands, though a good number of them are located in Grimfrost and as far South as Ember and the Hearthlands. The Butchers typically recruit from among the ranks of mercenaries and sell-swords who are already all too familiar with the ways of death. The menagerie actively encourages its members to indulge their darker impulses and do what they do best. They foster an environment where torture and abuse are not only accepted but encouraged. It goes without saying that almost every member of the Blood Belly Butchers is a sadist, masochist, or both. Given the backgrounds of many thralls, they are one of the most militarized and well-trained menageries. As a result of this, the Blood Belly Butchers are a particularly feared band and few would risk inciting their ire or even gaining their attention. While they are not usually heavily armored, their weapons are of a high quality and they know how to use them. A Butcher is easily spotted as they tend to wear dark red colors and stain their clothing or armor with the blood of their enemies, often in the form of a bloody handprint. Their symbol bears two crossed axes below a bloody handprint while the favored weapon of the menagerie is an axe or meat cleaver. Given their strong associations with the Black Market, a surprisingly large number of Butchers are also shadow merchants. Membership in this group is said to be fairly exclusive and during the initiation, a prospect is said to have to commit a murder in cold blood, preferably in a particularly grisly or spectacular manner.

CANNIBALS

The Cannibals are by far one of the most primal and savage groups in all the Cirque and possibly all of Arnesse. Their culture thrives on its deliberate separation from society and all its members eschew the comforts of cities, towns, and civilization in general. The Cannibals' exact numbers are

unknown but may number two to three thousand, hidden in and around the Hearthlands, Dusklands, and even parts of the Midlands. Though many make their homes in the Night Warren, others live in groups known as packs, usually in remote wilderness areas where they may go undisturbed. Life in a pack is almost tribal, with the strongest holding power over the weak, who are then put to work to serve in any way demanded. In many ways it resembles a pack of wild animals, and some Cannibals act no better than beasts. The Cannibals are also some of the most extreme in how they decorate themselves. They often don war paint which typically consists of white make-up applied to resemble horrific jesters or court fools. They also tend to wear and pierce themselves with jewelry made of the bones of their victims. Many also file and sharpen their teeth in order to better intimidate their enemies. Because of this extreme appearance, many Cannibals don't regularly wander into civilized areas and very few leave their packs without good reason. Cannibals use a variety of weapons but prefer those which can trip or harry their opponents, like nets, bows, and spears. Cannibals work as a group to isolate and injure their foes, especially if they are stronger. Quite often they will wound a foe only to run off and leave them to bleed and suffer. Later, they will use their tracking skills to hunt the person down and finish them off when they are weakened. Some Cannibals are in fact flesh eaters and it is not uncommon for enemies to be devoured, oftentimes while still alive and screaming. The Cannibals say the fear and pain flavors the meat. The bulk of all Cannibals are thralls, shock troops trained in fighting and little else. The menagerie has some shades but very few shadow merchants as they do not value trade or commerce in the traditional sense. Simply said, the Cannibals take what they want and most people are all too willing to give it to them.

FREAKS

One might look upon the Freaks and think them no less savage than the Cannibals or the Blood Belly Butchers, but most would be surprised that of all the menageries they are some of the most civilized. The Grotesque runs a strict organization and to join, one must meet two fairly strict criteria. First, the prospect must be somehow deformed, mutilated, or maimed in such a way that society at large may look upon them as inferior. Second, the person must have some kind of special skill or potential that shows they have some promise. As a result of these two criteria, they are actually the smallest menagerie, numbering less than five hundred members. They are mostly spread out between Taliesin, Tor Amnon, and Serapis and found few other places. They will often dispatch individuals to escort or oversee particularly valuable shipments or items. The Freaks also employ a larger than usual number of Zanies to help

fill any gaps left by their low numbers. The Freaks have no specific outfits they wear but most dress as little more than common beggars in robes, or often don some manner of mask to cover their faces. This has led some in the menageries to nickname them the "mendicants". The Grotesque has made sure that an education is made available to every member of the Menagerie who wishes it and there are a surprisingly large number who have taken him up on the offer. It is this reason perhaps that the Freaks have among the lowest number of Thralls and soldiers, instead relying heavily on obfuscation, their Zanies, and simply outwitting their opponents. Shadow merchants and shades are both popular professions and a large number of scholars are members as well, making the Freaks one of the shrewdest and most well-informed crime syndicates in Arnesse.

WRAITHS

One of the most clandestine organizations in Arnesse, the Wraiths are a highly secretive menagerie dedicated to the art of information gathering and primarily to espionage. Wraiths live in two worlds. When they first join the menagerie, they are recruited and trained in local cells throughout the cities of Arnesse called haunts. These cells operate in two states - active and inactive. When a haunt is inactive, its members continue living their daily lives within the assumed identities they have built for themselves. All members of inactive cells are encouraged to keep a journal of information they acquire while inactive. No Wraith representative or correspondences will be sent to inactive haunts. A haunt can only be activated by an order from the Shadow King and having done so, all members of the cell are expected to respond. A broad directive will typically be given, such as elucidating a piece of information, or stopping a certain event. When active, haunts will receive guests, have meetings, and receive correspondences, often through a series of secret drop boxes. How the Wraiths use the information they gather is unknown, though given their rise in power in recent years, one might assume they use it wisely. Haunts operate independently of the Labyrinth and few Wraith operatives will ever be invited there. Only those of high rank or singular talent are ever taken to Moligant, their ultimate fate, a mystery. Most Wraiths spend a great deal of time cultivating their personal identities, many operatives having more than one. The Wraiths, for obvious reasons, do not have any outward indication of their allegiances but members of the menagerie communicate with a variety of secret methods, including passing a single silver coin with its heads side marked up with a dagger. The exact number of the Wraiths is not known but many suspect they have somewhere around one to two thousand operatives scattered throughout Arnesse. It goes without saying that many of the Wraiths are shades by

profession, but also have a surprisingly large amount of thralls and shadow merchants due to their need to develop the skills required by an assumed identity. There are some dark rumors about the Wraiths and their practices within the Labyrinth that have led some to believe the menagerie is tampering with some manner of forbidden lore or dark arts. It is said that some Wraiths have even infiltrated the troupes.

THE CARNIVALS

CIRQUE DU MORT

The Cirque du Mort never visits major cities or lands where they are unable to suitably hide their activities. When the Cirque du Mort arrives, those who are invited will find a handwritten note addressed to them mysteriously appear among their possessions. How guests are chosen is unknown but one common theme appears to be that they are all of the sort who might be interested in such a macabre spectacle. All guests are asked to remain silent about what goes on within the tent yet the rare rumor has betrayed a somewhat clear picture of the show itself. Piecing together the incongruous artifacts of speculation, the show is a litany of performances in which death is put on display in many forms. Some of them are circus stunts, some of them are artistic performances, and still others are magic tricks. It's said that some of the victims are willing and others are not. They say that half the anticipation of the show is who will die, when, and how. It's also said that the manner of deaths crescendos until it reaches a grisly climax in the last act, which usually involves multiple, insidiously extravagant and horrifically gruesome deaths. Why the Cirque du Mort does all of this or how they are able to pull it off is unknown, but it apparently all starts and finishes with the cirque's leader, the enigmatic Darksheer. Many rumors have circulated about the Cirque du Mort over the years, including the popular speculation that some or all of the performers may themselves be among the dead.

MENAGERIE OF BLOOD

The second of the well-known underworld carnivals is the Menagerie of Blood. This show travels around Arnesse throughout the year to a surprisingly large number of venues. Some of these venues are major cities who would deeply disapprove of the performance, yet often powerful and influential people work to arrange them without the knowledge of law enforcement. Invitations to the Menagerie of Blood are not exclusive and word often spreads quickly among the

underworld of an impending performance. Tickets come in three types - the premium seats called the Gold Tier, the less expensive seats, the Silver Tier, and the lowest tier called the Gallery. The Gallery can be a popular place to sit for some as it is from here that the show will often ask for audience participation. Those who are chosen are given the chance to survive in one of the acts and if successful, there is a reward paid in gold coins. Though there are few who ever collect this reward. The show itself is a mix of gladiatorial combat and animal performances. The Menagerie has one of the largest and most extensive collections of creatures in the Kingdom. Legal or illegal, the carnival works to acquire the most fantastic beasts in the land to star in its show. The Menagerie is known to have at least one basilisk, several wargs, and rumored to have even more fantastic, unnatural creatures like ghouls and even a werewolf. The show is run by Pallas the Beastmaster, supposedly of the Innis' Woodwards who turned from her profession as a hunter to the far more lucrative world of underworld performance art. The guests come to the show expecting blood and death, rarely failing to deliver it by the bucket-full. Be it men fighting men, men fighting beasts, or beasts fighting beasts, the show is a rowdy spectacle that is sure to satisfy all those looking to witness a savage display of violence and death like few others in Arnesse.

HOUSE RELATIONSHIPS

The Age of Kings has marked a new era for Arnesse. Each great house struggles to maintain its power and legitimacy through navigating the mazes of power. This process has led many to form unlikely alliances with old enemies and make new and bitter enemies where before there were none. The following details the current state of each relationship as they correspond to this faction. This information is to be taken as in-play by you and other members of this faction.

HOUSE RICHTER

House Richter was once a land where it was very difficult for the menageries. The Richter family was strict about enforcing the law and forbade obvious illegal trade in their protectorate. In the years since the Shardmount exploded, the once-great Dusklands have descended into lawlessness, poverty, and desperation. In the wake of this cataclysm, the menageries moved into the abandoned villages and began to use the Dusklands as a base to run their operations in the North. This was particularly beneficial as it placed them close to the freeport of Scyld, one of the hotbeds of the underworld in Northern Arnesse. While the Richters have always outwardly discouraged and decried the Black Market, not a few of their nobles make regular use of the drugs and other services

provided by the menageries to assuage their bouts of melancholy. Lately, the Richters have had far more to deal with than the underworld and though they are quick to stamp out any related activity, the menageries have almost had their run of the Dusklands in the last ten years. This, added to the fact that many of the people of the Dusklands have been increasingly turning to drug use and other vices, has made lands that were almost devoid of profit into some of the most lucrative and active markets in all Arnesse for the menageries. A wise thrall keeps in mind that Richters can be good customers but on a whole can have very mixed opinions about the Black Market and illegal activity. They are in the end, loyal to the King and his laws. To flaunt those laws in their face only forces them to do what they can to honor their oath.

HOUSE INNIS

House Innis has not welcomed the underworld into Thornwood and any agents of the menageries caught on their lands are usually immediately killed. The menageries have tried to get business going in Lydiard, close to the border with the Hearthlands, but with extremely limited success. Though they have not had good success with business in Thornwood, the menageries are keenly interested in acquiring some of the rare goods that come from there and have dispatched shadow merchants as hidden agents to do so. The underworld has been forced to use hidden agents and shades to do any business and gather information from the Innis. But the Innis have yet to be tested outside of their home in Thornwood. Their aggressiveness may be a result of territoriality and outside of their lands, they may have a different disposition. A wise thrall would still proceed with extreme caution around the Innis. They can have goods, knowledge, and other items that are useful to the underworld, but one would do well to acquire them under honest pretense and not make one's association with the menageries known to their agents.

HOUSE ROURKE

House Rourke has a conflicted relationship with the mainstream Cirque troupes but has a working business relationship with the menageries, mostly out of necessity. While House Rourke has some markets for moving goods in their freeports, the underworld is still their primary market to turn them into coin. Even in freeports, menageries are quick to buy most of those goods, for two reasons. The first is because they seek to maintain control over the prices of goods in Black Market. Second, when the Rourke raiders steal from the merchantmen ships, the menageries then buy those stolen

goods for a fraction of their worth, sending the goods right back into the hands of the Cirque. This relationship is far from without friction and these two factions regularly come into some level of conflict. However, both have accepted that the Rourkes control the seas and the Menageries control the underworld markets. Neither one of them trusts the other, but realizes that the business benefits of their arrangement outweigh territorial concerns. If one doesn't tread on the domain of another, things remain largely at peace. A wise thrall realizes the value in a business relationship with the Rourkes but also understands where they belong in the bigger picture. They also do not trust the Rourkes to honor their word or oaths.

HOUSE CORVEAUX

No House is more opposed to the underworld than House Corveaux. The menageries next to no business in the lands of the Corveaux save smuggling their goods through the Midlands. Should the Corveaux come across underworld or Black Market operations, they deal finally and harshly with them. Bribes and efforts to undermine the Corveaux's resolve on this matter have all proven unsuccessful, so the menageries have largely cut their losses and focused their efforts on other prospects. A wise thrall knows who the Corveaux are in their local area and works to avoid having any information about the underworld fall into their hands. If they become a problem, they are one of the few groups that may need to be dealt with harshly to end the threat that they pose to their operations.

HOUSE BLAYNE

House Blayne is a funny animal. A significant part of their house is dedicated to a religion that preaches ethics and virtues that are the antithesis of everything that the underworld represents. The Vellatora and their knights would see the menageries strung up and brought to justice at the first opportunity they were given. Luckily, the zealots of the Aurorym have their eyes firmly fixed in other places and it is easy for menageries to avoid notice or keep these white knights chasing their own tails on distractions. The other side is that cities like Scrow are hot-beds of illegal activity and it is easy for the underworld to move its wares there. The Ten Knives, the troupe in charge of Scrow, is extremely sympathetic to the cause of the menageries and as long as they get their kick-backs things go smoothly. Even as their own faith rails against the immorality of drug use, prostitution, theft, and greed, their people, desperate for some release from the misery of life, take to all those practices with an almost gleeful abandon. All the while, the nobles of House Blayne, desperate for coin to expand

their holdings, are willing to engage in just about any activity which is profitable. They are willing to look the other way and even participate, for the right price. The menageries are making good coin in the lands of House Blayne, but they are also extremely careful to not raise the ire of the Aurorym, lest they turn their attention on the underworld.

HOUSE HALE

House Hale has largely represented a diminished opportunity for the Cirque in general. Many of the people there are not wealthy and don't have much of a call for the goods that the underworld sells. There has been an increasingly demand among some of the nobles in the Everfrost for exotic goods from the South, but that does not necessarily extend to illegal goods or services. The culture of the Winter's Vale and Everfrost are foreign and often not compatible with much of what the underworld offers. Thus, the menageries place very little focus in this area and do limited business there. Still, there is a growing underworld group in Grimfrost that has started to sow some seeds there, working in concert with the troupe guildhall to try to expand the general reach of the Cirque in Northern Arnesse.

HOUSE BANNON

The Bannons are the agents of the King, plain and simple. They have good dealings with the troupes, who make a lucrative business off legal trade, but almost no contact with the underworld. This is actually by their choice and part of the arrangement with the Cirque is that the Bannons won't go out of their way to deal with the Black Market and the menageries, but those groups will also do their best to remain hidden and moderated at a reasonable level. Simply said, the menageries almost always avoid dealing with House Bannon when they can and any wise thrall would avoid coming to their notice at all. There is some concern that given the King passing the recent morality laws, that he may be poised to begin a larger crackdown on crime throughout the Kingdom and break the long-standing agreement with the Cirque on the Black Market.

HOUSE ARAGON

House Aragon has a long and storied history with the Black Market and fully two of the main Menageries in the Kingdom hail from Tarkath and the South. The members of the Aragon family are strongly involved in the drug trade and they utilize the menageries, particularly the Freaks, to move most of their product out of the South and into Northern markets. In addition,

House Aragon generally tolerates most of the businesses of the underworld, everything save the slave trade, which is expressly forbidden in Tarkath. Given their stance toward most of their rival Protectorates, the Aragons and their vassals are also willing to purchase goods from the North, regardless of their source and with no question asked. Taliesin, Tor Arnon, and Tyranthis are cities that are considered friendly to the menageries and there are robust operations in all of them. Serapis, a smaller town in Eastern Tarkath, hosts the largest underworld presence in the South and there, one can openly procure all manner of illegal goods and services. The Aragons do not want their names associated with the underworld or the menageries, but they are reliable, friendly, and open to doing business deals. Their almost total regard for the King's Laws makes partnerships almost ideal. Wise thralls keeps their slave trade talk far away from an Aragon.

THE APOTHECA

The Apotheca is the single largest supplier of apothecary items in the Kingdom. While the menageries have a much lower interest in the decoctions and elixirs they create, poisons are of a keen interest to them. Given the Apotheca's general inexperience in the areas of criminal activity, the menageries stole the secrets of poisoncraft from them and passed those secrets down to their own apothecaries. They do not have full mastery of the creation of the deadliest poisons but they must no longer rely on the Magisters to ply their trade. The Apotheca generally stays on the right side of the law and very rarely comes across the Black Market. If they do, it is in pursuit of a piece of knowledge or an artifact. A wise thrall understands that the Apotheca has its uses, but these bookish individuals don't have experience or skill set to be good partners in any kind of underworld activity or even be trusted to keep a secret.

THE FAYNE MOIRAI

The Fayne Moirai are a powerful, enigmatic group who have many close associations with the nobles of Arnesse. The fact that their true purpose is not well understood makes them risky business associations. They also do not have a terrible need for the underworld and rarely use the services of the Black Market. That is not to say that the Fayne are not without their uses. Their oracular abilities are well documented and the Sisters are well known for being masters of martial combat. It is said that several of the Fayne have even worked with the menageries in the past, but that the two groups do not have a long-standing relationship. A wise thrall keeps close tabs on the Fayne Moirai and if they chose to enter a relationship with them, they fully understand the implications and ramifications of the arrangement. The Sisters

weave a complex and dangerous web that one should be careful not to become entangled in.

THE HEXEN

The Hexen are barely an organization the menageries have little contact with them. The Hexen also tend to not be a wealthy group, nor do they seek many of the goods and services available on the Black Market. Some Hexen will interact with the underworld from time to time, typically as clients seeking to acquire rare artifacts, lore, or components for their hunts, but they are rarely involved with criminal element in any sustained capacity. They also tend to be closely associated with the Aurorym faith, so a wise thrall keeps the Hexen out of their business if possible. Hexen have, from time to time, been known to make menageries targets of their ire. Stories exist of these warriors turning their blades on thralls they deem as too monstrous to live.

THE AURORYM

The Aurorym oppose everything for which the menageries stand. There is almost never a reason these two would need to interact and any member of the underworld who makes a business relationship with a faithful is taking a huge chance. Given the opportunity, the Aurorym faith would likely decimate the criminal underworld to root out the element that opposes their belief system. The King himself is now a member of the Aurorym faith and recently passed a series of morality laws that took aim at many of the goods and services of the Black Market. Many in the underworld fear that these laws will take hold and that the King, backed by the faith, will violate the long-standing agreement with the Cirque and start a Kingdom-wide crackdown on the menageries. A wise thrall would find a way to avoid detection by the Aurorym faith. They are zealots and easily distracted and have a poor information network at best. If they do start to cause problems, they should be dealt with, but carefully, lest their death make them a martyr.

PLAYING A THRALL

Here's some guidelines for playing a Cirque. Please lean into some of these, even if your character diverges greatly from the average.

The underworld is a diverse and often extreme place that exists in pockets hidden away from the surface world. Those who make their lives there have had to adapt to this environment, many becoming extreme themselves in order to survive. The world out of sight of the laws of the King and the order of civilized society is a lonely one in which the strong dominate the weak. This has forced many to become stronger themselves

or band together with others for protection. There are powerful forces that want to see the entire underworld society undone and destroyed. As a result, the most valuable qualities within the underworld are trust and reputation. Those who live there will do almost anything to maintain trust and a good reputation among their associates. Losing either of these things can not only cause someone to lose status but can be dangerous. Everyone understands the risks and if someone fails or places others in danger with their actions then the society will respond in kind, often with lethal force to ensure that they are protected.

Most residents of the underworld and the menageries have a reason why they are where they are. Many were rejected by the surface world and, much as the Cirque troupes do with their recruits, the menageries took them in, gave them a home and a purpose. Because of this, thralls tend to be very loyal to their menageries, to the point of being willing to die rather than fail them in any way. There is a stronger sense of fanaticism among the underworld than in other places, partially because the stakes there are so much higher there. Most thralls live in one of two states. The first are those who are able to live fully and freely in one of the underworld enclaves located throughout Arnesse. These individuals tend to be some of the most extreme, hedonistic, violent, and immoral creatures that anyone could ever encounter. The second are those who are a part of the underworld yet choose to keep one foot in the surface world. They live two lives and though they may have many of the same proclivities of their darker brethren, they must suppress those emotions and tendencies in order to both remain hidden and to survive.

Most thralls are talented and exceptional in some way. The underworld tends to eat the weak and those who aren't capable or are careless are not long for this world. They are generally immoral on some level or another as they have likely lived for years in a twisted, lawless landscape for some time. Thralls are almost always villains to those outside the underworld. Many are driven by two powerful goals: the acquisition of wealth and the acquisition of power. Those that have one or both are trying to protect what they have from those who want to take it. Most thralls have a strong dislike for authority and resent both the King and the nobility. The Cirque in general dislikes the power of the ruling class, while the menageries take this to the extreme. While they are not seeking an open rebellion, if a menagerie can see its way to harm a noble and get away with it, they will. Successful thralls tend to be cautiously ambitious, loyal to their superiors, not afraid to take advantage of a situation, and just a bit lucky. Strength is important but cunning can also go a long way towards one's success. Being well-informed and well-connected are powerful weapons in any

thrall's arsenal. Many are slow to trust others, but once that trust is earned they are often willing to lay down their lives to protect an ally. For all their lawless ways and wickedness, those who spend time among the underworld find that there is a strange kind of honor among thieves.