

Dead Laws

Book of the Dead

Pg. 177

Geb has three classes of residents: the dead, the quick, and those forced to work in the fields. These last include both living enslaved people and mindless undead who do little more than moan and flail unless given direction. Truthfully, there is little distinction between the two beyond their ability to comprehend the nature of their place and service.

Our nation is governed through a vast collection of edicts called the Dead Laws, which dictate just about everything from the width of our streets to the weight of our coins, but the most important components detail how the dead and the quick interact. Bluntly, living enslaved people who work in the fields have no rights, and the dead in Geb view them as either a source of food or expendable labor.

The dead and the quick have certain enumerated rights, such as the right to practice a trade, to require witnesses if accused of a crime, to receive recompense for lost or damaged property, and so forth. The living and undead are also restricted from interacting with one another in specific ways: it's a crime for one of the dead to feed upon the quick except in certain circumstances, and the quick are prohibited from using positive energy at any time. The dead are responsible for the actions of their spawn, just as the quick are responsible for actions of their children. Keeping a tight rein on whatever creatures you bring into this world is universal, I suppose.

Probably best state it plainly: the Dead Laws provide the quick with some protection, but it's a paper shield at best. Ghoul bandits don't care about your status when they're hungry. A vampire who thinks bleeding you dry will advance her social station is going to be powerfully tempted, regardless of what the Dead Laws say. The local military might arrest or even punish these criminals, but that's little solace for those who've lost loved ones to the hunger of the dead.

Pg.179

Literacy is also very high. Knowledge should be passed along over many long years, and writing is best for that. Necromancers, both quick and dead, keep their lore written on old papyrus, baked clay, or stone tablets, and they use their writings to instruct apprentices or advance their own skills. Also, it pays to know the law. Copies of the Dead Laws, along with local rules and tax codes, are found in every village to keep things civil. Seek these out, and peruse them when convenient to you (and, importantly, when it's not inconveniencing officials). Know the languages, too: most people in Geb can understand Necril, even if it's unnerving for a living mouth to speak it.

Impossible Lands

Pg.10

Legalists in service to Abadar and Pharasmin insurgents seek greater understanding of the nation's Dead Laws, so as to better make sense or war against the unliving and their capacities. Living souls in need of stewards and saviors to liberate them from a life destined for butchery will eye any foreign traveler with pitiable despondency and what little coin they can offer, ever hopeful for a hero.

Pg.27

By law, every living person who dies within Geb's borders, citizen or foreigner alike, can be raised as undead to sustain this workforce, allowing a continuous surplus of replacement labor.

Pg.77

Alkenstar Ice Wine

Brewed from grapes that flash froze in one of Alkenstar's unseasonable magic blizzards, Alkenstar's ice wine has found an unusual market in Geb. Jaded vampiric sybarites and fashionable ghoulish trendsetters savor each rare import with impatient delight. Demand for this beverage in Geb comes from that nation's Dead Laws, which forbid channeling positive energy. Alkenstari ice wine's refreshing effulgence comes from trace amounts of positive energy created by planar essence released by the Mana Wastes' wellspring surges of wild magic. These positive energy fragments are absorbed by the grapes and retained in the wine. Thus, undead drinkers have a slightly reduced immunity to this alcohol's effects, allowing them to enjoy the sensations of inebriation.

Pg.132

While the creation of the Dead Laws gave equal rights to the nation's living (referred to as the quick) and undead citizens, very few rights are afforded to those the undead deem as food. In addition, those who perish on Geb's soil forfeit their right to bodily autonomy, having their corpses animated as a mindless undead to join the country's worker force. This has led to interesting migration patterns and new types of contracts with the dead to circumvent such fates.

Pg.134

While some might see Graydirge's macabre construction as a cruel warning to those who defy the Dead Laws, others see the city as a respectful memorial to agency in death.

Pg.136

Kulenetts organize themselves by their dozen settlements within Geb, with each dwarven clan claiming home to a natural oasis or spring underneath Gebbite soil. A settlement of particular note is Ferdoz, an under-mountain spring oasis with waters that supposedly have strong regenerative properties.

Due to the nation's Dead Laws banning the use of positive energy, Ferdoz's location, and its springs, is a highly guarded secret. Adventurers who wish to visit Ferdoz or gain access to its waters will need to do a great act of service for Ferdoz first.

Pg.138

To those new to Geb, its society is generally divided into three strata: the living (known as the quick), the intelligent undead (known simply as the dead), and living thralls and mindless undead forced to work as laborers. To protect the large undead population from being smote by good-aligned divine spellcasters, and to protect the living from being randomly preyed upon, a set of rules and regulations between the two were created, known as the Dead Laws. These laws also regulate certain aspects of necromancy and outline the prohibition of positive energy within Geb. There are always a few who think they're exempt from these laws, however, and mortal visitors are cautioned while traveling within the nation's borders. Within Geb, the Dead Laws are absolute.

While the rights of the quick and the dead are mostly protected, those forced to work in the fields have none. Anyone who dies on Gebbite soil forfeits their bodily autonomy, and their corpses are reanimated as a mindless undead to serve the nation as it sees fit. The quick with sufficient means can circumvent this end by willingly transforming into one of the dead. While these loopholes aren't just tolerated but encouraged by the dead, it does create a large population of intelligent undead who lack any true power beyond creating more of themselves but are cognizant enough to see themselves as superior to the mindless workers. These undead refuse to partake in any of mindless tasks, as they consider such work beneath them. Mortal necromancers aren't bothered with any of those concerns, as they have the privilege of magic and the knowledge to stay one step ahead of Geb's predatory elite. The most ambitious among them often eventually join the ranks of Geb's Blood Lords.

There has been a recent movement among the newly reanimated and younger necromancers for an updating of the Dead Laws. This group, known loosely as the Quick-Dead Coalition, seeks to remove some of the morally questionable and archaic sections of the codex, bringing it to modern sensibilities.

They're striving for stronger regulations on the creation of mindless undead as well as better conditions for laborers in the field. Given that many of the living today enter into temporary contracts of service with the undead in return for money, knowledge, or favors, they argue that a similar program of corpse donation after death should be implemented. No longer should it be assumed that any death on Geb soil offers consent—they need to opt-in to this donation program before they die for it to be valid. Otherwise, their remains must be put to rest as per the individual's wishes.

Other demands from the Quick-Dead Coalition include stronger regulations on contracts created between the living and the undead. They say that under current laws, especially due to the decrees on death on Geb soil, there's an imbalance of power that's heavily weighted in the dead's favor, creating undue exploitation. They've also asked for the complete ban on channeling positive energy within the nation to be changed to a heavily restricted allowance for use of healing for the living. The response to these demands has been a mixed success. While the entire coalition was initially laughed off as a prank, the increasing number of supporters in Mechitar and the surrounding areas have made some of the upper echelons of the Blood Lords reconsider the coalition's value, if only as political pawns. The allowance of positive energy casting, however, has been met with universal opposition among the ruling class. Even those dead who share some sympathies with the coalition usually suggest a higher import of alchemical healing agents than risk their sense of safety.

Pg.143

Those seeking more dangerous samples of high culture might find a hand-written invitation to certain masked balls and gatherings. Hosts clad in animal masks see to the comfort of the quick and attend to their every need at these affairs before the vampires join the gatherings, taking their picks for consumption. Sometimes, a vampire with wealth finds a particular mortal's blood especially tempting, and lucrative contracts can be negotiated under the Dead Laws.

Pg.146

Working up from the bottom in Mechitar presents no easy task, and the process can take several decades, requiring a level of dedication few mortals can sustain. A much easier path is to sign a contract under the Dead Laws, binding oneself as a source of sustenance, service, or by performing some other tasks for an undead patron over some period. With supply saturating demand, those who do gain contracts generally do so with steeply compromising terms.

Achieving higher station only provides a brief sense of satisfaction because there's always something better to aspire to. No matter how high they climb, the quick will forever be second-class citizens in Mechitar. Aside from a binding contract of service with a powerful Blood Lord, service in the Bellator Mortus, gaining ranks in the cult of Urgathoa, and offering prominent research in the Ebon Mausoleum remain common paths to power. With so many competing hands all clawing for limited spots, it isn't uncommon for aspirants to turn on each other to secure their place.

Pg.148

Most know Geb for its vicious, centuries-long war with Nex, even if the actual events are millennia old. While much of the country remains a hostile land, Mechitar is the one place its rulers have tried to mend that reputation through diplomacy, softening its application of the Dead Laws and accommodating the quick to a reasonable extent. With Nex to the north posing an ever-present danger, the city chooses to let other parts of the country prepare for war while it continues to build bridges where possible. It's vital for Mechitar's overlords to maintain their appearance as a welcoming and nonthreatening entity. As far as Mechitar is concerned, it continues to hone and project its image as a center of culture, a living necropolis that can host the quick and the dead side by side.

Pg.149

Geb's lush and fertile plains are a false promise of hospitable pastures unsullied by the wild magic of the region. Mindless undead work the fields, and without the proper protections offered by their more intelligent masters, a vagrant wandering into a field is more likely to be devoured by necrotic maws than questioned. The Blood Lords of Geb are fickle, and those who catch their gaze with ill intent might find themselves stripped of what little protection the Dead Laws provide, for such laws apply to citizens foremost and then all others upon the basis of personal whim and discretion. To be accused of a crime in Geb could lead to endless prison labor, either in this life or the next.

Pg.150

A nation where the dead overwhelmingly outnumbered the living needed a new set of laws that could mediate between the two groups. The Dead Laws were documented thousands of years ago and continue to be implemented with few changes to their original clauses. However, the implementation of these laws and how strictly they're applied varies throughout the country. Applying the Dead Laws as written couldn't possibly work in Mechitar while allowing visiting dignitaries, diplomats, traders, students, sailors, and visitors any sense of security that they need for the city to flourish. Leniency was afforded for the quick to have some protection from the dead. Citizens are off-limits for consumption through overt means, as are students, traders, and dignitaries. Those who press too deeply into Mechitar's affairs find that the city's leniency has a sharp boundary, however, and it only takes a stray step too far in any direction to summon the Bellator Mortus and be brought before a judge.

Pg.152

Mechitar - Indeed, though any display of positive energy is a capital crime, even under the Dead Laws, violators are seldom taken by the Bellator Mortus. Worshippers of Pharamasma are particularly reviled, and suspected Pharasmins are often murdered, sacrificed, or mutilated beyond recovery before the guards can do anything to stop the Urgathoans. After Geb, Rinnella Brenon is the most powerful and feared creature in Mechitar, but she seldom puts that power to overuse, allowing displays of her control over the city to speak for themselves. The Blood Lords have left her and the hundreds of ghula (upper ranked members of her cult) alone to conduct their business in nearly an ungoverned manner, forming a sort of theocratic circle outside of Mechitar's government.

Pg.164

Yled - The friction between the quick and the dead is constant, but the Dead Laws are clear, and the quick learn to adapt, finding that the friction is easiest to bear if they consider the difficulty faced by the dead in almost any other city in the world.

Any living person choosing to settle in Yled or even stay for more than two nights must be sponsored by a dead citizen in good standing, or else be bound (normally, by formal employment) to a dead institution. This agreement is made physical with tokens serving as minor necromantic brands. Contract documents and jewelry are the most common tokens, but more overt signs of bondage are also seen occasionally. The quick are, quite literally, under the control of their contract holders, beholden to them for good behavior lest they find themselves without protection. The contract holders are technically responsible for any crimes committed by their wards, but such cases seldom reach a court, as the dead quite efficiently dispose of offenders to safeguard their own reputations.

Despite this obvious yoke placed upon them, once the contracts are written, the vast majority of the quick assimilate into the city without much fanfare. The tokens of sponsorship become a part of everyday life, carried with little thought, and life—as it were—goes on. Over months and years, the notion of being a secondhand citizen takes on an ever-present but dim awareness, and many quick who remain in Yled after completing their initial purpose find undead partners, lovers, or friends who are willing to sponsor them, even if they have difficulty finding an employer to sponsor them.

To be a member of the privileged undead in Yled is to experience life from the other side of the mirror. There might be some mild resentment simmering among the undead in the city about the fact that the quick live with more privilege in Yled than the dead would receive in any living city. Yet the sense of control over every living creature due to sponsorships affords a sense of security that's impossible for the dead to find anywhere else. True, there are towns and small cities in Geb bereft of the quick entirely, places where living creatures vanish overnight with no questions asked, but to live alongside the quick and have the roles be reversed is a unique experience. There's some debate about how a city of the dead should properly rule over the living, but in general, Yled's firm laws have broad appeal for prioritizing the dead, especially compared to Mechitar's leniency. This sense of security, and even superiority, allows the dead go out of their way to treat with the living in a genial manner, better perhaps than if there was doubt about their loyalty. The contracts are two-way agreements, and either party can end it voluntarily, allowing the quick some sense of independence and allowing the dead deniability when accused of subjugating their city's living citizens.

Pg. 167

Legal Exemption

A succinct prohibition in Geb's Dead Laws bans the use of positive energy. Positive energy is so dangerous to the undead citizenry that its use is a serious crime. **Narrow exceptions exist, and one of these is granted to the twilight sages who are in pursuit of their dangerous studies. This is no gift to the quick: twilight sages who use healing magic aren't ever likely to do so as a kindness, but only to prolong suffering or to force a victim to dangle in that borderland between life and death for as long as possible.**

Pg.169

Despite being the biggest city in Geb, Yled follows a governmental structure akin to how a military unit might be arranged rather than a civilian settlement. This fundamental organization guides all decisions when it comes to governance. Just as the quick and the dead are treated separately under the Dead Laws, their implementation in Yled is far more severe than in other parts of the country.

Pg. 170

Life in Yled for the quick depends very much on their sponsorship, a piece of paper that denotes their status in the city through their relationship to the dead, though the quick are first to deny that the sponsorships denote any level of bondage. In theory, so long as the quick have filled out the necessary paperwork, they're free to enter the city without a sponsor, but the reality of walking Yled's streets is another matter entirely. Quick visitors without a patron lack any form of protection, and while the Dead Laws do protect them from being treated as cattle or used as raw material, there's little enforcement of the clause. People often disappear in the night, and the Iron Crown isn't inclined to pursue justice in such cases.

One way to gain sponsorship is to be bound to a dead citizen through duty or relationship. Quick with such contracts carry a token with a mild necromantic touch that the dead can easily recognize. Most often, these tokens take the form of a coin, but long-term residents can have custom jewelry or other tokens made in a similar manner. This loophole has created an entire industry specifically to allow the quick ways to enter Yled under the city's protection. As far away as Mechitar, undead beaus and necromancers stand ready to offer temporary companionship, and vampires are prepared to hire someone as a source of nourishment. The contracts are limited only by the imaginations of the people involved. Some have gone so far as to enter polygamous marriage contracts of a dozen living creatures wed to a single dead citizen who serves as their guardian, while others bind themselves into service contracts as clerks or agents of the dead. Once a contract and token are awarded, there's little to prevent the dead from trading the quick like any other asset, and it isn't uncommon for particularly valued citizens to find their contracts traded among the dead, though they see none of the revenue generated from such trades.

It's important to recognize that these contracts require both sides to enter the agreement consensually, and any hint of coercion—magical or otherwise—leads to annulment and even swift imprisonment of the contract

holder. The Iron Crown strives to remain above reproach when it comes to implementing the Dead Laws and its unique system of sponsorship, punishing both the quick and the dead equally for breaches.

Pg. 176

In Geb, all beings are governed by a unique system known as the Dead Laws. These laws cover not only typical crimes and punishments, but also go into great detail about life, death, and the ownership of bodies and souls. While most violations of the Dead Laws can be paid for with the exchange of servants and property, more serious crimes are punished with harsh curses that follow the victim until the aggrieved parties agree that proper restitution has been paid.

Blood Lords AP 5 of 6: A Taste of Ashes

USING LAW AND ORDER TO MAINTAIN TENSION pg.7

Throughout A Taste of Ashes, the characters may run afoul of Gebbite citizens who possess the full rights and protections accorded to them by the Dead Laws, the laws of the nation. As a GM, you should make it clear to the players that while they may find themselves at odds with various foes both quick and undead, simply fighting their way through every problem might carry serious consequences. Geb is a nation of laws, after all, albeit twisted ones. No matter how individually powerful the characters may be, they can't resist the entire justice system of Yled. Unless you and your players are interested in playing out various court cases and examining the city's legal system, here are some guidelines to help keep the adventure from running into unexpected problems.

- Their opponents follow the rules. A tense conversation early on will help drive home the idea that when tempers flare, even the most influential citizens of Yled respect and follow its laws. Showing some efforts at restraint from a citizen who is a type of undead creature not normally known for self-control (such as a ghoul around living characters) can make the point clear.
- Provide an in-character warning. As rising Blood Lords, the characters have growing influence that means they can avoid some of the troubles that might otherwise arise from their actions. A scene in which a law enforcement official has a discreet discussion with a character who oversteps their authority or breaks a minor law can provide a sense of how their actions are seen without immediately getting them thrown in prison.
- Newcomers get limited forgiveness. If the player characters make a misstep that would place them in trouble with the law, they might find themselves able to avoid the normal punishments by professing ignorance of local laws. This isn't something any newcomer could do, but the characters' status as Blood Lords gives them unusual latitude. It should be clear to the players, however, that this is a one-time event and that future lawbreaking might bring increased trouble.
- A Blood Lord ally might give advice. The supporters the characters have gained in the previous volumes have a personal stake in their continued success, as bad behavior on the characters' part can reflect poorly on their allies. A private meeting in which one of these allies discusses the characters' reckless actions can go a long way to creating pressure on the characters to follow the rules and work within the structure.
- Reputation Points might reduce. A warning that the party's reckless actions might decrease their Reputation Points with one or more factions could be a strong motivator to many players. Some of these penalties are expressly noted in various encounters in this adventure.