



Episode 4 - Helluva Heliadog

The Lodge of Snakes

As the truce created by the Bloody Avenues Agreement grew longer and increasingly stable, the Interbellum Guard of the Serpentine Wall began to run into a growing problem. In truth, guarding the walls and the neutral zone between did not take too many mercenaries and it was largely boring and safe work. This caused many of the Serpents to grow complacent, or worse, bored. Further, there was still plenty of mercenary work required in and around Heliakon, but by the terms of the Bloody Avenues Agreement the Serpents were very limited in their ability to undertake it.

Thus the first major addendum to the Agreement was proposed by Strata Westwood and shortly ratified by both the Unfettered League and the Great Consociate; to allow for each side to cede a building and declare it to be a neutral zone in the care of the

Serpentine Guard under the Agreement.

In these places, soon called Lodges, an experienced member of the Serpentine Guard would act as a guild master to mercenaries acting under the authority of the Serpents but not actually part of the organisation. This sophistry allows their

presence within the bounds of the city but provides them the freedom to take normal mercenary work as or from private individuals. Under no circumstances are either governments allowed to make use of these mercenaries.

These adventuring mercenaries who were not quite Serpents became known colloquially as Snakes. As you might imagine, a great many of those who delve into the Deepvaults are Snakes, either hired to protect the delvers or treasure seekers themselves.

STRATA WESTWOOD

Read more about the Strata Westwood, Commander of the Interbellum Guard of the Serpentine Wall and once known as Stola Tamder in Episode 1 - Heliakonversations.

Sawtooth Lodge - also known as Meatgrinder Lodge

The Snake Lodge on the side of the Unfettered League is colloquially known as Sawtooth Lodge, headed by the tyrannical Basil Sawtooth. Basil is old, and Basil is cruel, and he runs the lodge like his small, personal kingdom. He plays favourites, allowing certain Delvers certain jobs at certain times. It is known that he has a stable of pet Delvers he likes to keep outfitted with the best equipment, and who often get the most lucrative contracts. He expects great things from his Delvers, and if they don't deliver he has been known to throw huge tantrums which have in the last decade led to the deaths of no fewer than eleven individuals. He has a temper. He's never happy. He takes bribes and he is completely and utterly protected from consequences by Stola Tamder, though no one is quite sure why.

In a way, many of the mercenary teams who come through Sawtooth Lodge become more powerful in a shorter amount of time than Delvers who utilise the other Lodges. No one has looked into it yet, but the mortality rates for novice teams are eye-wateringly high. Basil, if queried, would say that he is only encouraging the survival of the fittest. After all, one day this truce will break and when it breaks you'll have to pick sides again. And when you pick sides, he hopes you'll pick the right one. And it is true that the delicious mercenary cream rises to the top in this way, for Basil's methods are a study in cold-blooded brutality.

LODGEMASTER BASIL SAWTOOTH

Armor Class 16
Hit Points 136 (16d8 + 64)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	19 (+4)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Str +7, Con +7
Skills Athletics +7, Perception +5
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages —
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Bloodied Frenzy. While Bloodied, the Lodgemaster Basil Sawtooth has Advantage on melee attack rolls and saving throws.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Lodgemaster Basil Sawtooth makes three attacks, using Greataxe or Javelin in any combination.

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5ft, one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d12 + 4) Slashing damage. The target suffers an additional 4 bleeding damage that bypasses any damage reduction the target may possess and causes the target to continue bleeding.
Bleeding creatures take 4 damage every round at the start of each of their turns. The bleeding can be stopped by a DC 15 Heal check or the application of any effect that heals hit point damage. Bleeding damage bypasses any damage reduction the creature might possess.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5ft. or range 30/120ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (4d6 + 4) Piercing damage and the targets speed is reduced by 5 feet until the start of Basil Sawtooths next turn.

BONUS ACTIONS

Frenzied Rush. Each ally within 30 feet of Basil Sawtooth can take a reaction to move up to half the ally's Speed without provoking Opportunity attacks. Basil Sawtooth may do this too.

The tantrums? They're for show. It's useful to have people think you're a psychotic, barely-controlled fool. But Basil is a calculating man. His way of raising up some warbands and casting others to almost-certain doom ensures that the strong really do survive. And when they survive, they are rewarded and he makes sure they remember exactly who rewarded them. It is unclear whether Basil is making his own play at power or if he is merely a puppet for Stola, a means for her to achieve her dream of revenge.

Basil Sawtooth is a human of great size. He stands over two metres tall, he is broad-shouldered and uncommonly muscular for an older man. He must be in his seventies and yet it appears that nothing is able to slow him down. In the past year, rumblings about rewriting the laws of neutrality with regard to the lodges largely because of Basil's increasingly volatile behaviour have been quelled by Stola and her allies. And it does appear his outbursts have subsided. For now.

The Secrets of Magic

Though the origins of magic are long lost to the civilisations of Delmarin it is generally accepted that savage blood magic was the first form of magic discovered and practised. They are quite correct as the barrier between the world and the realm of magic can be as thin as a person's skin. This is the first secret of magic; that while many will never see a spell, meet a magic-user or touch something enchanted, magic is a dagger-stroke away.

The second secret is that while there are now a vast number of magical praxes and countless ones forgotten by history, they all share a fundamental structure. To cast a spell or any sort one needs:

- Access to raw magic
- A desire or intention
- A passion or drive for that intention

One might reasonably ask why all the strange words and gestures? Sigils and runes? Tattoos and scars? Staves and wands? And so on and so forth. What role does such bewildering complexity serve if magic is fundamentally so simple?

Because simple is not the same as easy.

The trouble lies in how people think. Folk think in words and words are inherently fluid and layered in meaning. Their very impreciseness and imperfection is what gives rise to everything from the complexity in meaning of poetry and prose to the humour in puns and witticisms. Therein lies the problem when one is trying to make one's passionate intention a clear channel through which the magic will flow. Because the way the mind of all sapient creatures works is to be simultaneously aware of double meanings and possible homophones. This is how those previously mentioned puns and poetry can work. But it is a terrible danger to an unwary spellcaster for all it takes is a moment's distraction or even an unconscious desire to make magic cast awry.

Students at the Wraithworks Disciplinary in the Great Consociate's capital are told a tale passed down through the millennia about a young apprentice to an ancient blood mage, shunned by their people but not yet respected and feared. The young apprentice wished for their people to know how they were truly like on the inside, feel the apprentice's zeal and strength of will. But their desire was unclear and so surrounded by a dozen dead men and women, the channel the magic burned through was forked by double meanings and the caster successfully broadcast their emotions...and turned themselves inside out.

The bored and jaded students would then be led into a sealed room deep in the bowels of the Wraithworks Disciplinary, where they are assailed by the terrible agony and keening madness broadcast by the still living mound of flesh and bone and brain.

Every magical tradition and practice is designed to allow a spellcaster to have a method to reduce the risks and dangers of magic. I will discuss a few in the next section.

But before I do, the last difficulty that users of magic have that I will discuss is that channelling magic into reality is always exhausting. In the same way that extended periods of even physically unchallenging artforms still exhaust the mind. As a magic user grows in skill through practice, they are able to act as a channel with greater ease, allowing them to summon more magic at once or smaller amounts for longer.

Wraithquartz and Wizardry

We've already discussed some practices of magic, both of a bardic sort, Symphomortology and the Brachenbards. I want to quickly discuss how they fit into this scheme before introducing some Wizard practices.

Symphomortology

The surgery that etches the runes upon their fingers gives the Conductor a permanent though small trickle of magic at all times. Insufficient for any of their rare but more dramatic spells but more than enough to conjure the music of the dead and it is that magic-born music that allows a skilled symphomortologist to summon more magic as the expression of any artform is a way to pierce the membrane between the real and the magical.

To ensure that the intended magic occurs, Conductors subsume personal desires utterly into the music they play. This limits how much they direct their spells, although avoiding most of the effects simply requires one to deafen oneself while the ghostly music plays. Those Conductors that commonly use their magic around allies or for them can define a number of people as their 'choir' through a short group ritual explained further in the Symphomortology sub-class section.

The surgery is a complicated and often-botched procedure, and it isn't just about carving runes upon the fingers. The flesh must be peeled back and the symbols must be carved into the bone of the Conductor. Furthermore, small metal rods are attached to one or two of the finger bones. These vibrate at barely perceptible frequencies and allow the Conductor more finesse - the drawback is that it is a complex process which can lead to nerve damage and either constant pain or lack of feeling. Both of these are less than ideal. The best Conductors are also the ones lucky enough to have had the surgery performed correctly and without complications, something that is still a developing art / science.

Brachenbards

Those who successfully complete the onerous 7 year training and become a Brachenbard take a very rare approach to magic; rather than clarifying their intentions near perfectly like the wizards or submerging their desires into music or similar, the Brachenbards make every utterance magical and protect themselves by strictly limiting the amount of magic they call upon. When the vagaries of thought and language cause their magic to go awry, it can only do so in small and not directly lethal ways. Usually. As the Brachenbard grows more experienced, they naturally grow their connection to magic and thus increase their ability at the risk of greater consequences. more experienced

Vaesta

Old when the Konkordate ruled Delmarin and beyond, Vaesta has long been thought of as the language of wizards. A constructed and artificial language believed to have drawn words and letter shapes from at least half a dozen languages, Vaesta is kept static and unchanging for its purpose is clarity. Each word has a very specific and singular meaning with its own unique glyph and are bound together with iron-clad laws of grammar and syntax. Even though its varied root languages allows Vaesta practically every phoneme humanoid sapients can make, it still wouldn't be enough, so a crucial aspect of speaking Vaesta aloud are the gestural elements of each word that trace out shapes. Both elements make up the word. As you can imagine, Vaesta's vocabulary is immense and the full dictionary is over dozens of substantial books. Study of the language is an ongoing and lifelong endeavour.

OTHER MAGICAL TRADITIONS OF DELMARIN

Storn

A written runic language of magic originally developed by Dwarves and powered by lawbreakers and captured foes sacrificed on stones carved with the runic glyphs. In the age of Wraithquartz, the glyphs are carefully carved into palm-sized or smaller stones called *stornlin*.

Weftenfray

Spells are tied into knots, captured in hastily constructed webs called *cratches* or woven into tapestries with a loom. The tradition began with the halfings who are said to have taught the other folks to work with thread and fibre. Many of their practices are used without any sacrifice with no effect, though there are many who believe otherwise.

Karnafia

The Way of Flesh is part philosophy, part cult and all scary. Practitioners eschew wraithquartz entirely to become especially adept at wringing every drop of power from blood and meat. They are said to be able to twist the flesh of others and themselves, taking the shape of beasts and command the elements like no other Wizard.

In practice, Vaesta sentence-spells are tremendously long, full of specifics and particulars. So much so that coming up with them on the fly is a slow and laborious process and difficult to achieve at the best of times let alone during times of stress or in an emergency. So a Vaestari Wizard will have a collection of pre-written sentence spells and will take time to memorise them and then practise reciting and gesturing the words at speed substituting only a handful of words to fit the circumstance.

A Vaestari still requires access to a source of magic. In the time of the Konkordate, this

would be a blood sacrifice of life and the Vaestari would coat one or both hands with the

blood to trace the somatic elements as they cast. In the modern era, most eschew this wasteful and slower method to use Wraithquartz. The accepted standard practice is to have a charged piece of wraithquartz at the end of a wand (more rarely a stave, rod or simply hold a piece in the hand) and use that to make the gestures. A small effort of will sacrifices a sliver of life to the crystal and that allows access to the magic stored within.

Those Vaestari unable to speak instead cast via the representational glyphs the language is written in, tracing the wraithquartz in the air or on paper to write the sentence-spell out.

The sentence spells are akin to a type of reality-programming, containing clauses and subclauses, dozens of conditional statements as well as a framework describing the flow and pathways for the magic to take, but there is another mode a Vaestari can utilise. This is a dangerous proposition, and few can make it work. I refer, of course, to the Path of the Poet. There are those Vaestari who can compress a great deal of meaning into very few words. Very often the magical words are spoken as a type of short-form poetry. The secret to this way of casting lies in storage tomes. Upon their person, a practitioner will usually have a huge magical tome. This is in a very real way the mystic processing unit for the caster's magic. Vast amounts of information must be sequestered inside of such a book, defining almost every aspect of the possible spells and desired 'output' in contrast to the outside world - the parameters of which such a Poet must also magically define.

If such a spell goes wrong, the consequences can be devastating. Much of the magic drawn upon in such a way simply loses direction and explodes outwards taking the unlucky practitioner with it, as well as whoever may have been standing next to them. As a practice, therefore, the Path of the Poet is seen as a dangerous one, a direction that only the very intelligent can take magic (though if they were wise instead, they probably wouldn't).

The Stygiad Council

The Stygiad Council is the secretive spy organisation of the Great Consociate Empire. Their claimed history is long and stretches back to the Konkordate itself when the Children of the Stygiad - as they called themselves back then - were a mystery cult concerned with the hoarding of ancient knowledge. It is hypothesised they worshipped a goddess credited with gifting mankind the secrets of fire and sorcery, but no further information has survived to the modern age. In the current era, they still function more

or less like a religious organisation of the classical period, slowly inducting adherents into ever more secretive circles of knowledge. They pray at the altars of the faceless Stygiad, and they leave secrets as offerings to the Tongueless Masters - the inner circle of the fellowship.

At the same time, the Stygiad Council is beholden to the split crown of the Twin Conarchs, acting as information gatherers and spies throughout the continent of Delmarin and beyond. Indeed, it is said (only half-jokingly) that if the Matriarch of the Chasm City-States at the bottom of the world farts in the morning then by noon the Conarchs will know its sound and scent and by the ending of the day an artist would be able to create an accurate portrayal of its effects upon a canvas simply from the descriptions of the Stygiads. Though not as interested in the ways that foreign monarchs pass wind as the common folk, it is true that the information networks cultivated by the Stygiad Council are both deep and widespread.

As for the Councilors themselves? There is not one type of person who can be said to embody the organisation. They can be anyone from any walk of life. Members of this spy network have been kings, beggars, dignitaries, chefs, carpenters, wanted criminals, priests and madmen. This fact is well known to the population and in certain circles it has led to an extreme paranoia in the city of Heliakon specifically. The representatives of the Unfettered League who rule the northern part of the city hold frequent and public purges, followed by quick trials and executions, excising the anti-Luminarchist and counter-revolutionary elements from society - often labelling such unfortunates as 'Stygiad Collaborators', 'Council Dogs' and 'Consociate Spies'. Whether few or many of those charged and executed actually *were* members of the Stygiad Council is up for debate, and it has been pointed out that if such accusations were true in every case then the Unfettered League's half of Heliakon must be absolutely swarming with spies.

The head of this spy network, first among the Tongueless Masters, is supposedly a Tiefling woman named Dharvani Yavshri. But Dharvani has always denounced such rumours. She is a Regional Advisor to the Great Consociate Empire's top generals and claims she counsels them on geography, culture and logistics. Nevertheless in the popular view of the public she is known as the Spymaster General, the Tongueless Tiefling and the Prime Stygiad. Several attempts on her life in the last decade have all failed, something she attributes to 'good fortune' as a result of 'honouring the right gods'.

The Stygiad Council are the true inheritors of an ancient religion and power.

Back in the days of the Konkordate, the Children of the Stygiad were known not as spies but as seekers of lost lore as they sought to revive their small, but no less dead pantheon. Their gods died at the end of the epoch prior to the one the Konkordate arose in, but unlike most of those dead gods they still seemed to have a fragment of power left. Dead but not gone. Only in the last centuries of the Konkordate did they gain official favour and position as the rulers of that time sought any power to serve their selfish ends. Some even knew their epoch was ending and sought to survive the same way, or ideally better, than the Stygiad had. Much of what the Great Consociate knew of the Children of the Stygiad comes from this time.

The Stygiad Council are frauds.

The Children of the Stygiad and their dead but not gone gods ended along with the Konkordate and the fall of Heliakon. It was more than a century after Gruvold ceded his power to the Righteous Conarchs that the two rulers of the time decided to create a single and controllable espionage organisation after a collection of the previous ones had attempted a coup. They took the rites and rituals of the Children of the Stygiad and used them to give the new organisation a false air of drama and importance, twisting the old teachings to ensure loyalty to the Righteous Conarchs and emphasis the knowledge gathering in terms of spycraft rather than the study of lore.

It worked. The common members of the Council are true believers but as one gains rank and progresses through the layers of Mystery within the cult, a Councilor learns the

RANKS WITHIN THE STYGIAD COUNCIL AND THE REQUIREMENTS TO ADVANCE

Initiate: Six trials of obfuscation, Traversed the Reverse River, Counted the Starlings in the Evening Murmuration, Kept the Secret of the Unbroken Cup of the Stygiad

Novice (First Circle): Obstacle of Burning Tongues, Secure the Arrogant Idol in the Nine-fold Temple, Kept the Secret of the Backward Eye of the Stygiad

Adept (Second Circle): Memorised the Seventh Tome of the Secret Mysteries, Uncovered the Existence of the Deep State Guild in the Senate of the Great Consociate Empire then Disprove the Very Possibility of its Presence

Proficiad (Third Circle): Mastered the Trial of the Stygiad; Goddess Most Holy, Break the Unbreakable Trance of the Slumbering Queen in the Grave of the World, Pray for a solar year in the Temple of the Predecessors

Prime Pyramid: ???

The Tongueless Masters: ???

Prime Stygiad: ???



Please note that the veracity of this information is currently in doubt as the source has gone quite insane and captured documents reflect entirely different hierarchies and terminologies.

truth, that they are the elite of the Great Consociate and that perpetuating the lie serves them as well as it has always served the Stygian Councils masters.

But the Sygiad Council **are** the true inheritors of an ancient religion and power.

One should not toy with rites and magics of bygone ages without knowing if such things still hold power. Dharvani Yavshri is truly the Prime Stygiad and truly the spymaster for all the Great Consociate. There are many who know this and virtually none of them are convinced that she is anything more than a figurehead or distraction from the true master. This elaborate double-bluff is characteristic of Dharvani and an outgrowth of her new...or perhaps old faith.

When she became the Prime Stygian and undertook to conduct rites for various lower members, she did them better and with more drama and passion than any before her had...and awoke something. Somethings. The dead but not gone Stygiad gods responded and Dharvani felt them. Felt their presence, their power, their divinity. The faith she once abandoned to join the upper echelons of the council, she has found once again. A faith she continues to share with certain others within the Council, showing power and knowledge not seen since the last age. Another layer within the layers.

The Heliadog

One of the most remarkable cultural contributions to come out of the city of Heliakon is the Heliadog. It's delicious, it's semi-nutritious, it's not fictitious. Simply put, it's a peasant staple which has gained popularity across the world. It is made of one slice of Elven salted longbread wrapped tightly around a sausage and dressed in a thick, beefy gravy. Heliadogs were popular just in the city before the war which ended in its partition, but at the time they were called Heliakon Sausage Wraps. The name change occurred over the years of the conflict when more palatable meats were difficult to acquire and food shortages meant that one could find almost anything inside their wrap. The rumour that sausages had to be made of stray dogs became prevalent and the Heliadog was born. After the war ended, the idea of the Heliadog became spread by soldiers returning to their home cities once it became clear the truce would hold.

Now, many years later, the Heliadog is popular in the North and South, both sides claiming to be the pioneers of their particular styles of this food. In the South, the Heliadog is often accompanied by fried onions and carrots while the North has done away with the gravy altogether and is famous for a mild chilli and onion relish. Often the

salted longbread here is baked with various seeds, giving it a distinctly provincial flavour. In the South, beef and pork are the main ingredients for Heliadog sausages, whereas the Northern partition's street dog-slingers favour the avian flesh of turkeys and sewer eagles (the latter a clever solution to frequent infestations).

The people of the Great Consociate Empire consider the Heliadog a great triumph of patriotic ingenuity in the face of adversity, with many attributing the level-headed decision making which led to the Bloody Avenues Agreement a direct result of easy access to Heliadogs.

The Unfettered League see the Heliadog as a revolutionary meal for the modern age, able to feed a citizen in a new fast-paced world. In the lands claimed by the League, a plethora of flavours and styles has arisen, each accentuating some aspect of the area which transformed it.

The Gallengulp goblin clan are the most successful street vendors of Heliadogs in all of Northern Heliakon, though the market is a volatile and busy one. They have been able to keep the costs down, along with the quality of the meat it must be admitted, as most of the vendors are happy even with a pittance of a profit as that is more than they've ever had. Many of the vendors are goblin members of the clan, but just as many are adopted members of other species. They are so ubiquitous that it's hard to go anywhere in North Heliakon without being able to hear the cry of "Go on and gulp a Gallengulp Heliadog! Go on, you know you outta!"

The entrepreneurial leaders of the Gallengulp clan want to find some way to expand their business South into the Great Consociate half and are only looking for a steady and safe supply route and eager entrepreneurs on the other side.

