



VIGILANTE'S GUIDE TO MALBORN

IN THE CITY OF MALBORN, POWER IS BOUGHT,
MERCY IS WEAKNESS, AND JUSTICE WEARS A MASK

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VIGILANTE'S GUIDE TO MALBORN



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ON THE COVER

A vigilante stands atop one of the city's tenement buildings.

Disclaimer: The authors accept no responsibility for anyone inspired by Malborn to become a masked vigilante, join a criminal syndicate, smoke lotus, purchase bottled memories, or settle civic disagreements from a rooftop. The city is populated by killers, addicts, thieves, revolutionaries, and vigilantes with an alarmingly flexible understanding of due process. These are excellent ingredients for an RPG and terrible instructions for real life. Commit your crimes with dice.

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INTRODUCTION

FIGHT FOR THE CITY

THE WORLD OF MALBORN IS INSPIRED BY MASKED avengers, gothic crime stories, and cities consumed by corruption. Its foundation brings together two strong concepts: the pulp heroes' grim urban vigilantism and the decaying fantasy city-state where justice has failed.

These concepts were never truly separate. Every great city eventually creates its own monsters. Some wear crowns. Some wear uniforms. Some wear masks.

One of the most enduring ideas in fantasy is the lone figure who stands against a corrupt system knowing they cannot truly win. A masked vigilante staring down criminals from a rain-soaked rooftop. A detective walking through alleys where the law has already surrendered. A hero forced to decide whether justice can survive in a city built upon greed, fear, and exploitation. This book builds upon that idea.

The city of Malborn is not a realm of noble kings and shining courts. It is a towering metropolis built within the skeleton of a dead volcano, where wealth rises toward the heavens while misery sinks into the Pit below. Noble houses rule from vast estates above the clouds. Beneath them sprawls a city of overcrowded tenements, criminal syndicates, corrupt officials, and forgotten people struggling simply to survive.

This book allows you to create characters who move between two worlds: the ordinary face they present to society, and the masked identity they take on when the city descends into darkness. Some seek justice. Some seek vengeance. Some simply wish to survive long enough to drag a few monsters down with them.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The *Vigilante's Handbook* gives players the tools to create heroes shaped by the brutal world of Malborn. You might play a masked vigilante hunting escaped criminals through the streets of the Pit, an investigator uncovering corruption within the Upper City, or an inmate struggling to survive the violent prison culture of Old Hunger.

Characters created using this book are designed for play in the adventures contained in the two Malborn books *City of Masks* and *Old Hunger*.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

CHAPTER 1

This chapter introduces Malborn, the City of Masks. It explores the city's history, districts, laws, religion, and social hierarchy, along with the rise and fall of the Owlfather and the Nine Sentinels.

CHAPTER 2

Explore the Pit, Malborn's sprawling undercity of gangs, thieves, monsters, and desperate survivors. This chapter details the Pit's districts, criminal factions, daily life, and notable figures. The chapter also includes the short story *Pinned to the Hook*, which captures the brutal atmosphere of Malborn.

CHAPTER 3

Explore the Upper City, its important locations, noble houses, and powerful figures.

CHAPTER 4

Create a vigilante character suited for adventures in Malborn. It introduces Civilian Identities, Vigilante Identities, secret personas, vigilante origins, and more.

CHAPTER 5

This chapter provides tools for creating inmate characters, including reasons for confinement and guidance for playing criminals trapped within Malborn's infamous prison fortress.

CHAPTER 6

Choose from new subclasses inspired by Malborn's corruption, vigilantism, criminal underworld, and brutal urban environment.

CHAPTER 7

This chapter introduces the playable species of Malborn, including goblins, gygans, kobolds, malborne, and spriggans.

CHAPTER 8

This chapter presents new equipment used throughout Malborn, including vigilante gear.





CHAPTER 1

MALBORN, CITY OF MASKS

NESTLED WITHIN THE SKELETAL REMAINS OF A dormant volcano, the city of Malborn rises from the ocean's vast expanse. Its towering spires of stone and steel claw at the sky, some stretching more than five hundred feet, remnants of a civilization that was once the greatest in the known world. Its people trace their heritage back millennia, inheritors of ancient magic and powerful bloodlines. But the glories of Malborn have rotted. Above, the Upper City gleams like a citadel of privilege, where oligarch families dine beneath chandeliers forged from plundered treasures. Their estates overlook the Pit, Malborn's sprawling undercity, where misery festers in alleyways, industries, and overcrowded tenements. Down in the Pit, crime lords rule the streets streets, and the City Watch offers violence in the guise of protection.

THE OWLFATHER

Generations ago, Malborn's decay seemed unstoppable, until the rise of the Owlfather. Born in this city but exiled young, he returned as a man of purpose and extraordinary means. While nobles gorged themselves on stolen wealth, he waged a silent war for Malborn's soul. Hidden behind a mask he stalked the rooftops and shadows, hunting the corrupt and the cruel. Officials who sold justice and gang leaders who thrived on suffering fell to his campaign. Over time, his following grew, and he founded the Nine Sentinels: a vigilante order that drove Malborn's worst criminals into Old Hunger, the fortress prison feared across continents.

For a time, hope returned. Children whispered the Sentinels' names like prayers, and the Pit could breathe again. But everything eventually has to end. The Sentinels fell into a violent schism when the Owlfather was betrayed by his two most gifted protégés: Strixdaughter and Kruger. Their conflict tore the order apart. In the aftermath, the Owlfather vanished without a trace. Kruger resurfaced as the ruthless leader of the Street Bailiffs, enforcing his own brutal vision of justice. Strixdaughter became something far worse, a shadow that hunts and destroys those who dare to do good. Without the Sentinels, Malborn began to rot again.



ARCHITECTURE AND LAYOUT

Malborn is not just a story of fallen heroes and rising crime. It is a living place, shaped by its structure as much as its people. This city is built with purpose by the forces that guide its hand.

The city is enclosed by a seawall built atop natural coral reefs, with a single fortified harbor regulating all incoming ships. From there, buildings rise steeply along the inner walls of the caldera, carved directly into the stone or extending outward over open space on layered platforms and scaffolds.

Construction quality varies sharply by elevation. Upper levels are built from reinforced stone and metal, designed to last generations. Lower levels rely on wood, rope, and salvaged materials, where fire and structural failure are constant risks.

Light is a defining factor. The density of towers, airships, and overhanging structures blocks sunlight from reaching the lower districts, and the few forms of artificial light are a poor substitute. As a result, areas closer to the caldera walls are more desirable.

At the lowest point lies the Pit, a basin of tangled walkways and accumulated debris. Refuse, criminals, and the city's forgotten dead all end up here. Miasma from the depths and sea spray from the ocean fill the air, much like workers and residents pack the streets. The Pit is the most densely populated and least controlled area in Malborn.

Public executions are carried out from the upper tiers, with condemned criminals cast into the depths. This practice reinforces the city's hierarchy and has shaped settlement patterns below, as residents avoid open drop zones and cluster along walls and sheltered areas.

REGIONS OF MALBORN

THE SEA WARD

Located at the waterline beyond the caldera's rim, the Sea Ward serves as Malborn's sole point of contact with the outside world. Deeply paranoid about foreign contagions, the city funnels all incoming vessels through the ward's fortified harbor gate. Cackle Fever, a fatal disease that destroys muscle coordination and forces bursts of laughter, nearly destroyed the island's population millennia ago. The malborne never forgot.

And so, outsiders are detained here under strict scrutiny, held until Malborn's authorities decide whether they are diseased. Taverns, warehouses, holding pens, and customs halls dominate the ward, which functions as marketplace, screening ground, and quarantine alike. The officers there are undoubtedly corrupt, with Generallissimo Ghorst, the hobgoblin in charge, being especially fond of bribes in the form of unusual food he nonetheless never seems to eat.

MALBORN STATISTICS

Population: 30,000 (50% malborne, 5% dragonborn, 5% feyborn, 6% dwarf, 32% human, 2% other)

Climate: Temperate year round

Government: Democratic government led by Mayor Illonar Frosch

Defense: The City Watch commanded by Marshal Major Dragan Phobas

Exports: Artifacts, black lotus, fish, golden lotus, phosphate, sugar kelp, white lotus

Imports: Cloth, coal, livestock, lumber

Organizations: Ascended noble houses, various criminal syndicates

Religions: No official religion, though worship of the Maker is common amongst the poor

MURDERER'S ROW

Murderer's Row is a canyon pass stretching from Malborn's city docks into its urban heart. Once a prestigious district, its towering cliffs are now webbed with broken bridges, rotting beams, and shanties built atop crumbling stone. The desperate and impoverished crowd its narrow heights and alleys, where criminals hunt for easy prey.

THE PIT

Also known as Trash Town or the Bowels, the Pit lies at the lowest and most central point of the city. It is a lawless sprawl of narrow streets, crowded tenements, and tightly packed buildings where the desperate collect, hoping to build a roof over their heads and a bed to sleep on until the next day's work hours.

Tunnels lead miners into increasingly depleted, privately owned deposits of gold, silver, copper, and phosphate that none dare steal for fear of losing their hands. Roads bring fisherman and divers to the city's few sources of food. The few who escape Malborn's industries often resort to crime, as the Bowels are filled with petty thievery, addiction, and violence, led by the criminal syndicates that rule it. The destitute reality of the Pit is that almost anyone will do almost any job, if it pays.

Meanwhile, the City Watch usually doesn't bother with even a token presence among these streets. When it appears, it does so in overwhelming force, chasing either a rare criminal or just any criminal for the thrill of it. They know that no matter how meagre the scraps the Pit gets are, money will flow back up anyway.

Malborn is a city where power is measured by elevation, morality is negotiable, and justice wears a mask.

—Aranna Gildar, Voice of the Nine Sentinels

UNDERCITY

Below the city of Malborn, within the very stone of the island it is built on, lies a maze of forgotten tunnels, tombs and chambers known as the Undercity, to those who know of it at all. The full extent of this descending maze is unknown. Nobody has been able to reliably map it. Sketches of small sections certainly exist, but so do forgeries that reflect nothing at all of what lies below but promise imaginary treasures.

And treasures there certainly are. At least two ancient civilizations have left their ruins beneath Malborn, cemented over with volcanic ash in ages beyond recording. Their wealth and their magic are all theoretically sealed beneath the city, awaiting only a dungeon delver skilled and resourceful enough to excavate them. Beyond this, and theoretically more accessible, many magnates, crime lords and madmen of Malborn have descended into the Undercity with their fortunes and hidden them away to keep them from rivals, grasping family members or acquisitive enemies. Some say that, rich as the city is, there is more gold hidden beneath than can be found even in the palaces of the Upper City.

Beyond mere greed, the ancient ruins below promise secrets both arcane and historical that attract scholars from across the world. There are singular and legendary artifacts allegedly lost down in the dark, enchanted crowns of ruined kingdoms, demon-slaying blades, wishing rings crammed with obedient genies. And for every prized relic there will be a dozen Malborn rogues happy to sell you a map to precisely where it might be found.

*I don't wear this mask because I think I'm better.
I wear it because I know what I am without it.*

—The Owlfather

Actually, accessing the Undercity is simultaneously difficult and easy. There are a handful of known and reliable accessways. The best known route is deep within the rank tunnels of the Pit's Cesscourt district, if adventurers can brave both the smell and that principality's natives.

THE UPPER CITY

Ringling the caldera walls, the Upper City is home to Malborn's established families and political elite, as well as enough distinguished workers to attend them. Those who earned the privilege of operating their stores and cleaning their floors. From their towers, these once noble families rule both figuratively and literally over the city below, choosing which industries thrive and perish, which politicians have the means to be elected, and what substances are sold to placate the masses.

Those who dwell beneath mock the Upper City with names like Tall Town or the Lofts. Stealing from it is the dream of many young thieves, and those who pull it off are worshipped like heroes.



THE AIRSHIPS

Remnants of a failed age of artifice, the tethered airships are massive, decaying hulks anchored to the tallest towers. Most are abandoned, though stories abound of wondrous tech, lost vaults, and even ghosts trapped by divine curses. The limp dirigibles are, after all, the closest Malborn has come to the heavens ever since the alleged destruction of their grand tower by the Maker.

A handful of these airships remain inhabited by ancient families who claim lineage and secrets older than the city itself. They stand above the other oligarch families, controlling merchandise that defines Malborn itself.

HISTORY

Malborn's self-image is part truth, part propaganda. Its history claims that its ancestors once ruled a vast empire and were chosen by the Maker—the god who shaped the first spark of existence—as stewards of creation. From this core belief grew their desire for conquest, wealth, and pride.

Among their triumphs was conquering an island paradise at the heart of Oceanus. It rested within a dormant volcanic caldera claimed by metallic dragons. When the malborne came to the island millennia ago, they slaughtered the dragons for blood and eggs, then rebuilt the island into a mighty port city powered by the minerals beneath its stone.

At the height of its ambition, the Malborn Empire was shattered by a cataclysm whose cause remains fiercely debated. Some traditions claim the malborne murdered their god, the Maker, freeing themselves from divine rule but unleashing the destruction of their empire in the aftermath. Others maintain that they raised a colossal tower to reach their god, only to be struck down for their arrogance. Scholars advance countless other theories, from civil war to forbidden magic. When the devastation finally ended, only the island remained, renamed Malborn in memory of the fallen capital.

A thousand years ago, buried dragon eggs were unearthed and hatched by noble houses, briefly restoring Malborn's might. These Dragonlords soon departed to seek conquest abroad, most famously in the mythical land of Thylea. Today, Malborn has become a city of sin, haunted by the ruins of its former greatness.

CITY OF OPPORTUNITY

Malborn presents itself as a city of invention, scholarship, and boundless opportunity. Agents of Malborn's most predatory companies, including the Verdant Exchange and the Malabrate Dominion Company, travel widely as recruiters, promising high wages, apprenticeships, and access to knowledge unavailable elsewhere. Foreign laborers arrive expecting prosperity, only to discover that passage, housing, tools, permits, and food have already been charged against their future earnings. Most begin their new lives in debt and remain trapped there.



The city's mines, foundries, docks, and construction works consume labor at a relentless pace. Dangerous jobs are assigned almost entirely to outsiders, while malborne citizens control ownership. Wages are sufficient to survive but rarely enough to escape the Pit. Those who protest risk replacement by newly arrived workers.

This constant migration has transformed the Pit into a crowded mixture of peoples, languages, and traditions. Yet diversity does not create unity. The promise of upward mobility keeps the impoverished competing against one another for slightly better wages, safer work, or admission into the servant class. A fortunate few become household retainers, providing visible proof that advancement is supposedly possible.

The malborne call this freedom. In practice, Malborn offers outsiders countless ways to climb and ensures that nearly every ladder is missing its final rungs.

THE MALBORNE

The malborne are a sturdy people renowned for their mastery of stonework, often compared to dwarves. Some scholars suggest a shared ancestry, though any link is long lost. Unlike dwarves, the malborne favor the surface world, raising cities of immense scale and complexity.

They possess a deep affinity for magic and have long embraced power drawn from blood. In ancient times, their greatest spells were fueled by dragon blood, harvested during a brutal campaign that reshaped the world. While elves claim to be the first civilized race, the malborne dispute this, insisting their empire broke the dominion of dragons and giants and ushered in the first true age of civilization.

Malborne are compact and broad shouldered, with expressive features and little body hair. Hair colors range from blonde and red to brown and black, with eyes spanning amber, blue, green, hazel, brown, and gray. Albino malborne are not uncommon and are often treated with reverence.

They are exceptionally long lived, often reaching three to four centuries. Time hardens them, and grudges rarely fade. Children are educated for decades and are not considered adults until forty.

Culturally, the malborne are defined by ambition and power. They distrust outsiders, and their society is steeped in corruption, with wealth and secrets guiding authority. Yet they are not without compassion, and some work quietly to ease suffering.

Though the malborne venerate the god they call the Maker, most do not pray to him. Instead, they bargain for favor with outer-planar beings. Customs include finger cutting to honor the dead and face and neck tattoos marking citizenship, which foreigners are forbidden to bear.

Power is their highest ideal. It was first embodied by their empire, then by their noble houses whose scions once became Dragonlords, and it shows today in the conceited visages of their oligarchs.

OTHER SPECIES IN MALBORN

Humans are the most numerous outsiders in Malborn, filling every level of society below the malborne, from laborers and servants to merchants, mercenaries, and gang leaders. Their short lives make them appear reckless but also ambitious and adaptable.

Dwarves share an uneasy kinship with the malborne. Both species prize stonework, endurance, ancestry, and monumental architecture, and some scholars often claim the two share a common ancestry. Dwarven masons and engineers are respected more than most other foreigners, yet respect seldom grants equality. They are routinely sent into the deepest mines and most unstable tunnels, extracting gold, phosphates, and ancient relics beneath the city. Their expertise makes them valuable; their foreign birth makes them expendable.

Gygans are rare and impossible to ignore. Once brought to Malborn as slaves, they now endure as dockworkers, heavy laborers, sailors, and pit fighters. Their size sees them treated as public property, and employers expect them to perform work that would kill smaller laborers.

Elves are valued as tutors, artificers, physicians, and scribes, but are excluded from meaningful authority. Their talents are purchased while their traditions are dismissed as foreign arrogance.

Halflings and gnomes thrive in the city's hidden spaces, serving as messengers, clerks, machinists, smugglers, and spies. Their small stature makes them useful in cramped workshops and tunnels.

Orcs, tieflings, and stranger beings live at the margins, judged more harshly as their appearances and customs grow further apart from those of the malborne. They are watched closely, blamed readily, and often pushed into criminal work.

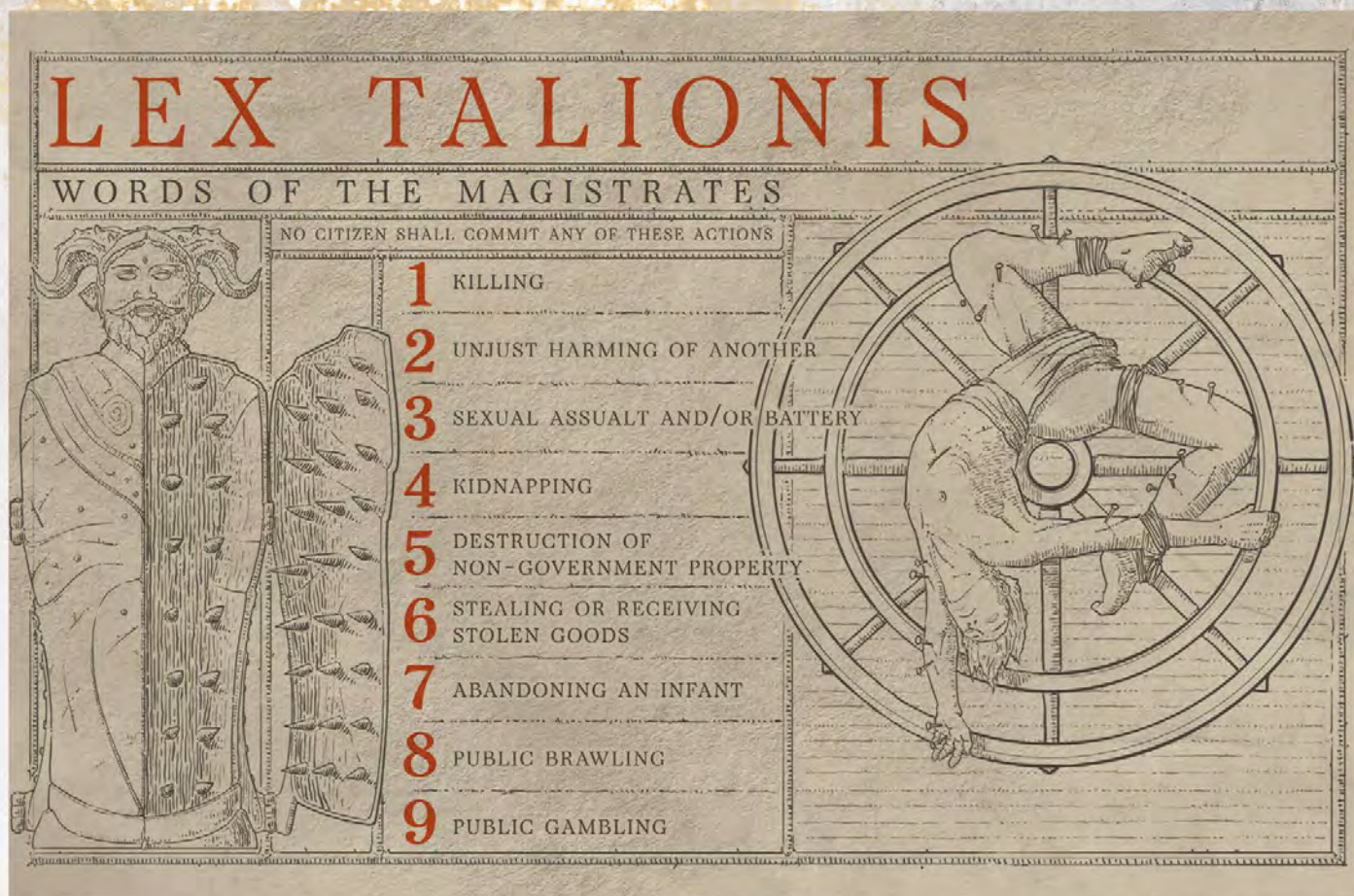
LAW AND CRIME IN MALBORN

LEGAL CODE

The legal system of the city of Malborn has a central tenet known as "Lex Talionis", which roughly translates to "an eye for an eye, blood for blood". This is the primary law held above all others. All laws are inscribed on slabs of obsidian, and it is forbidden to copy them upon anything else. The legal system differentiates between two classes of people: natives of the city and foreigners. Foreigners have far fewer rights than natives.

*Lex Talionis? Eye for an eye? Good.
I'll take the whole fucking head.*

-Sister Mercy



COURT SYSTEM

Justice in Malborn is administered by magistrates, all of whom must be malborne. A magistrate serves as both judge and final arbiter of the law, possessing broad discretion in interpreting Lex Talionis and determining punishment. Trials are often brief, with testimony and reputation carrying as much weight as physical evidence. Citizens may retain advocates from one of the city's many legal firms to argue their case or negotiate settlements before trial, but there are no public provisions for those who can't afford it, and one seldom finds an organization whose services are both charitable and competent. The most prestigious firms, such as Usgath & Associates, specialize in exploiting obscure legal precedents, negotiating with magistrates, and navigating the countless exceptions buried within Malborn's legal code. Among the wealthy, a skilled advocate is often as valuable as an armed bodyguard.

OLD HUNGER

The custodians of order in Malborn have tried multiple different deterrents and solutions to the tides of crime that perennially wash through the city's streets. Some regimes have instituted draconian policies where the least dissent or disorder is met by death. Some regimes instead tried to unmake villains through invasive chemistry and magic. In a few rare occasions, kinder forms of

rehabilitation were attempted, but the resources for such programs always ended up devoured by the greedy and the crooked.

Then came Gordrene the Mason, whose statue can still be seen outside the Halls of Justice where the Upper City meets the Pit. Gordrene was a malborne of visionary purpose and unmitigated pride who would provide the city with the solution to its teeming criminal population: a prison like no other. No mere set of holding cells or correctional facilities, but a fortress designed to hold the most dangerous criminals the city could produce. Her most famous words were carved above its gates: "Malborn possesses an eternal hunger for wrongdoing. In these halls we shall starve it." Hence, within a generation, to high and low alike the prison fortress of Malborn became known only as Old Hunger.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Many members of the City Watch are recruited as youths from Malborn's large orphan population, particularly those who lost their families to criminals or lotus addiction. The City Watch are also forbidden to marry. This is to ensure that members of the Watch are less likely to have family ties that could be exploited or influence their judgment.

LEX TALIONIS

THE FIVE DISRESPECTS

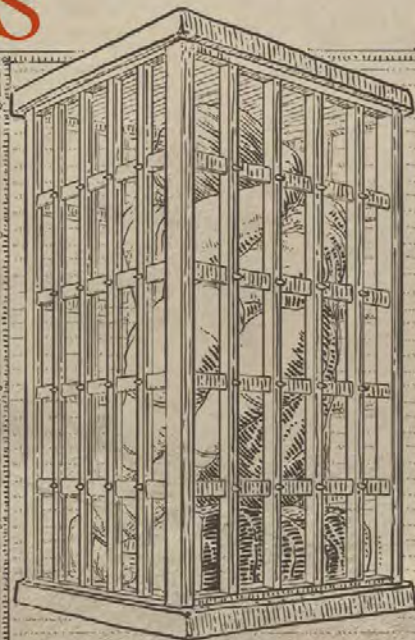
1 DISRESPECT OF THE STATE
THIS INCLUDES FORMULATION AND EXECUTION OF REBELLIONS AND TREASON, AS WELL AS EXTREME DESTRUCTION OF GOVERNMENT PROPERTY; ALSO EXTENDED TO THE THEFT OR FORGERY OF SACRED OBJECTS AND GOVERNMENT PROPERTY.

2 DISRESPECT OF DECENCY
LOOSELY DEFINED AND LARGELY UP TO MAGISTRATE DISCRETION; FOR EXAMPLE, KILLING THREE OR MORE MEMBERS OF A FAMILY NOT GUILTY OF A CAPITAL CRIME, DISMEMBERING BODIES, KILLING WITH SORCERY, OR KILLING WITH POISONED FOOD/DRINK.

3 DISRESPECT OF ELDERS
THIS INCLUDES BEATING OR INTENTIONALLY KILLING ONE'S ELDERS; FOR EXAMPLE, PARENTS, GRANDPARENTS, MARITAL PARENTS OR GRANDPARENTS, AND THOSE CLOSELY RELATED AND CLOSE IN AGE TO THE AFOREMENTIONED PARTIES.

4 DISRESPECT OF MOURNING
THIS INCLUDES KILLING OR ACCUSING AN INDIVIDUAL KNOWINGLY WITHIN THE PROCESS OF MOURNING, OR WIVES AND HUSBANDS THAT, UPON HEARING OF THEIR PARTNER'S DEATH, BED OR MARRY ANOTHER DURING THE MOURNING PERIOD.

5 DISRESPECT OF KNOWLEDGE
THIS INCLUDES WHEN AN APPRENTICE OR STUDENT KILLS THEIR MASTER; FOR EXAMPLE, SOLDIERS KILLING COMMANDERS OR STUDENTS KILLING TEACHERS.



VIRTUE MANDATE

Following the recent prison break, the Governor of Old Hunger convinced the mayor to enact an emergency measure to not only restore public order but forever nurture public morality in Malborn: the Virtue Mandate. Publicly presented as a system of civic accountability rather than a replacement for the courts, every citizen is assigned a numerical Virtue Score that rises or falls according to reports submitted by their neighbors. These scores, together with the Mandate's regulations, are recorded and published within the Virtue Ledger, a master register intended to measure a citizen's moral character over time.

Although magistrates continue to preside over criminal trials, a citizen's Virtue Score increasingly influences how they are treated by society. Lower scores allegedly suggest callousness, social degeneracy, and even propensity to criminal activity in a citizen, which leads neighbors to distrust them, employers to reject them, and even law enforcement to target them. Those with poor reputations find themselves scrutinized more closely, while those with exemplary Virtue Scores are often afforded greater trust.

VIGILANTES

In Malborn, vigilantism is not organized but an individual response to the injustice of the city. Since the disappearance of the Owlfather, brave people across the city have taken it upon themselves to act where the law fails. These vigilantes come from every walk of life: former soldiers, laborers, ex-thieves, and those driven by loss or anger. They operate alone or in small, short-lived partnerships, relying on secrecy, improvisation, and whatever tools they can acquire.

Most do not last. The streets are unforgiving, and without support, many are killed, disappear, or lose their way. Some become indistinguishable from the criminals they hunt. A few, like Sickie-Claw, cross that line entirely.

NINE SENTINELS

The Nine Sentinels no longer operate as the powerful vigilante order once founded by the Owlfather. Its members are dead, missing, divided, or pursuing their own paths, leaving behind little more than scattered safehouses, trusted contacts, and unfinished investigations. Today, the name survives as a legacy rather than a functioning organization. A handful of allies preserve what remains and occasionally assist independent vigilantes with information, shelter, or direction. They cannot confront Malborn's criminal powers themselves, but they may help new heroes take up the work the original Sentinels left unfinished.

RELIGION

The malborne tolerate the worship of gods, but not the building of temples or other places of worship, with the great Maker's Cathedral being the lone exception. While the malborne believe that gods exist, most do not worship them.

THE MAKER

The Maker stands apart from all other gods. Across the world, deities answer their followers with blessings, miracles, and unmistakable signs of favor. The Maker does not. No priest has ever called down healing light in the Maker's name or summoned divine wrath against an enemy.

Instead, the faithful claim that the Maker's will is revealed through conscience, revelation, and the hidden order of the world. To follow the Maker is not to wield power, but to trust that purpose exists even when it cannot be seen.

In Malborn, devotion survives most strongly among the common people of the Pit. Laborers, prisoners, widows, and the poor gather in cramped shrines and crowded homes to pray for strength, forgiveness, and deliverance. Their faith offers dignity in a city that treats them as disposable. Many believe that no soul is beyond redemption, although those who knowingly reject mercy must ultimately face the Maker's judgment.

The noble houses regard such beliefs with contempt. Most openly dismiss the Maker as a comforting fiction for the desperate, while others tolerate the faith only because it keeps the poor obedient and hopeful. Among the Upper City elite, public devotion is considered embarrassing or even fanatical. They pride themselves on reason, wealth, and self-reliance, viewing the faithful as deluded zealots clinging to promises that have never been proven.

This divide has deep roots. Many commoners believe the cataclysm that destroyed the Malborn Empire was the Maker's judgment upon its rulers. The noble houses reject that interpretation, unwilling to admit that their ancestors' pride and cruelty might have invited divine punishment.

SEVEN VIRTUES

The central tenets of the religion are the Seven Virtues: charity, courage, faith, honor, hope, humility, and prudence. Together they teach that righteousness is measured not by isolated deeds, but by the steady cultivation of qualities that reflect the Maker's design. Charity calls the faithful to protect the weak through mercy and compassion. Courage demands that they face fear and suffering with steadfast hearts. Faith requires loyalty to the Maker despite his silence. Honor guides them to act justly and give others their due. Hope sustains belief in the ultimate triumph of righteousness. Humility restrains pride, while Prudence tempers courage with wisdom and restraint.

SYMBOLS

The most common symbol of the Maker is a pattern of seven interlocking circles, each representing one of the Seven Virtues. Their unbroken design signifies that no virtue stands alone; each draws strength from the others.

RITUALS

The faithful begin each morning with the First Thanks, a brief prayer offered before work. Before meals, they observe a moment of silence in gratitude for the Maker's gifts. At day's end, believers reflect upon their failures, seeking forgiveness and the strength to act more virtuously on the following day.

Before undertaking an important task, believers may also make a public promise to the Maker, declaring what they intend to accomplish and leaving a token of the vow at the Maker's Cathedral. The token cannot be reclaimed until the promise is fulfilled. As a result, the cathedral has accumulated shelves of abandoned rings, tools, weapons and keepsakes belonging to those who failed, lost their nerve or simply never returned.





COMMON SAYINGS

The faithful often say that anyone can believe in a god who answers every prayer. The Maker instead asks his followers to choose goodness without proof, justice without reward, and mercy without certainty that anyone is watching. To them, that choice is the truest expression of faith. Many common sayings arise from this belief:

- ♦ “The Maker needs no witnesses.”
- ♦ “Every soul is still being shaped.”
- ♦ “A good deed is its own prayer.”
- ♦ “No soul is beyond the Maker’s reach.”
- ♦ “The Maker’s silence is not his absence.”

HERESY

Several of Malborn’s most corrupt noble houses believe the malborne murdered the Maker and freed themselves from divine rule. Because this heresy is fashionable among the powerful, it is rarely condemned. Each New Year, these nobles celebrate the Maker’s death with feasts, masks, and great fires symbolizing destruction, purification, and renewal. Before midnight, however, the revelry takes a darker turn. A procession descends into the Pit bearing a captive celestial creature, most often a unicorn. At the final stroke of midnight, its heart is cut out and cast into the flames, honoring the moment mortals supposedly destroyed their god and claimed dominion over their own fate.

MAKER’S CATHEDRAL

The Maker’s Cathedral stands unfinished at the edge of the Upper City, a monument to both faith and failure. Designed by Irinar Thegn and funded by wealthy patrons, it was intended to symbolize Malborn’s renewal. Before its completion, however, a fire swept through the cathedral during a citywide upheaval, killing most of those inside. Thegn vanished, funding disappeared, and public devotion faded. Today, Fistan Gol preserves the ruined structure and leads its surviving congregation. Under his care, it remains Malborn’s only sanctioned temple to the Maker and the center of the faith’s fragile revival. Several powerful houses regard that revival with open contempt, using their influence to undermine Fistan’s standing and encouraging younger scions to vandalize, mock, or otherwise profane the cathedral with little fear of consequence.

CLERGY

In recent years, Fistan Gol has sought to rekindle devotion to the Maker within the cathedral’s empty halls. To aid him, he invited the College of the Voice, a small religious order from distant Lyonesse, to establish itself in Malborn.

The College teaches that the human voice is a sacred instrument through which divine truth may reach the soul. Its members are not priests in the traditional sense, but guardians of doctrine, liturgy, and sacred song. To them,

the Maker's silence is not absence but perfection, for his truth is too pure to be expressed through ordinary speech.

Initiates are selected young for vocal clarity and discipline. Upon completing their training, they become Cantors, who lead hymns and guide congregational responses. Eparchs administer sacraments, enforce discipline, and oversee worship. Above them stands a single Archimandrite, charged with preserving doctrine throughout the city. Fistan Gol holds this office in Malborn, making him both the cathedral's guardian and the leader of its clergy.

Preaching is reserved exclusively for members who have completed their ordination.

FUNERAL CUSTOMS

For most residents of Malborn, funerals are quiet affairs. Families wash the dead, wrap them in plain cloth, and consign them to the flames. Before the body is burned, a wax impression is taken of the deceased's face and fashioned into a mask, which is hung above the family doorway for a year. Tradition holds that, through it, the dead continue to watch over the household.

Entombment is reserved for those wealthy enough to afford it. At the Maker's Cathedral, noble patrons are sanctified, transformed into stone, and sealed within the walls, reflecting the malborne belief that flesh may be purified through transubstantiation after death. Interment fees remain one of the cathedral's chief sources of income.

OTHER SECTS

Other minor sects exist within Malborn that embrace darker interpretations of faith. The Reborn seek judgment through transformation, believing that guilt is purged in radiant fire and that their petrified remains become part of the city itself. Others belong to the Cycle of Salt, a secretive sect devoted to desiccation and preservation. Its adherents embrace a wasting affliction known as the Salt Sickness, carrying bells to warn others of their presence. Both sects view suffering not as punishment, but as the path to rebirth.

CURRENCY

Like any great city, Malborn mints its own currency, and taxes, fines and official fees must all be paid in Malborn coin. Its monetary system is based upon the gold sovereign, supported by the silver argent and the humble brass penny, one hundred of which are worth a single sovereign. Two other denominations exist but are seldom encountered in everyday trade: the platinum regent, worth ten sovereigns and used chiefly for large commercial transactions, and the bronze halver, worth half a sovereign. Foreign coinage is readily exchanged at the Bank of Malabrate, though the Bank charges a fee of 10 percent for the privilege. Responsibility for minting new coinage also rests with the Bank.



THE BANK OF MALABRATE

The Bank of Malabrate is the greatest financial institution in Malborn, with clients drawn from every species and social class in the city. It possesses little direct political or military authority, yet few organizations wield more influence. The bank can finance a merchant fleet, ruin a noble house, or decide whether some ambitious enterprise ever gets beyond a set of plans.

LOANS

Almost anyone can borrow from the Bank of Malabrate: craftsmen, ship captains, tavern owners, nobles, criminal syndicates, and even the government itself. When the bank loans out sovereigns, each is marked with an authentication enchantment that causes its date of issue to glow faintly when examined correctly. More importantly, the enchantment allows the Bank to track the coin. While this enchantment can be dispelled, it is a laborious process, for each coin must be separately disenchanted. Worse still, when the enchantment is destroyed, either through dispelling or if the coin is melted down, the coin produces a magical expiry-cry recorded in the master ledger of bank.



THE PIT

THE PIT, ALSO KNOWN AS TRASH TOWN OR THE BOWELS, represents the nadir of Malborn society. Not just poor and destitute like the streets that surround it, but a festering hive of criminal activity where the watch seldom dares to venture, and even then, only in force and with magical backup. The confirmed villains of Malborn venture from the Pit to raid the respectable, whether to extort the lowly or make daring assaults on the wealth of the upper city. They retreat back into Trash Town's crooked maze of streets when the law is on their heels. Those within the bounds of the Pit are mostly safe from legal retribution, but fall victim in droves to worse villains, from greater criminals to monsters to savage vigilantes.

The Pit is not a single, uniform slum, but a collection of distinct districts, each shaped by its own character and the factions that control it. The seven major districts below are explored in detail throughout this chapter.

Circus District: The Circus District is dominated by Toad's Castle, a labyrinthine slum ruled by the Grand Circus and crowded with the Pit's poorest residents.

Citadel District: The Citadel District contains the City Watch's fortress headquarters and Rook House, seat of the city's most powerful thieves' guild.

Hunger District: Overlooked by Old Hunger, this district houses lawyers and mercenaries and conceals the elusive Safe Street.

Market District: The Market District surrounds the Covered Market, where nearly anything can be bought.

Tenement District: Four immense tenements dominate this district, housing thousands of the Pit's inhabitants.

Twister District: The brightly painted district resembles a carnival by day, but its crooked streets belong to the malicious Twister Gang after dark.

The Cesscourt: The Cesscourt occupies the sewers beneath the Pit, where monsters dwell alongside those who have made the place their home.

The Pit's honest, at least. Smells like shit, looks like shit, and tells you exactly what it is. Can't say the same for Tall Town.

—Carderon, the Invulnerable

DISTRICTS OF THE PIT

CIRCUS DISTRICT

The Circus District is Malborn's poorest and most wretched quarter, a sprawling ruin of leaning tenements and endlessly expanded and rebuilt structures that have swallowed whole streets into enclosed warrens. Overcrowding, neglect, fire, and generations of careless construction have reduced much of the district to a precarious maze. The desperate crowd into every available chamber, while thieves, vermin, monsters, and worse flourish in the spaces abandoned by the city.

TOAD'S CASTLE

Toad's Castle encompasses a series of streets that have been added to so often, and so randomly, that they have effectively become a single hideous building. The nested and labyrinthine chambers of Toad's Castle are home to vast numbers of the most wretched of the poor, and are ruled over by the Grand Circus, one of Malborn's two major associations of thieves.

AIVENOR'S CURIOSITIES

This cramped shop is overflowing with trinkets said to come from distant and exotic lands, drawing collectors, travelers, and the merely curious into its cluttered aisles. Every shelf promises some forgotten history or strange provenance. Rumors whisper that *Lagstones* smuggled from Old Hunger sometimes pass through the shop, though no one knows how they arrive or who is permitted to buy them.

THE GRAND CIRCUS

This factious and divided entity is united only in its hatred of the well-off, and of its rival thieves' guild, the Rooks. A new leader of the Circus seems to take command every other month, and yet the whole ramshackle association of crooks retains a strong hold over much of the Pit, and the city beyond. Toad enforcers, recognizable from their green armbands, patrol the Covered Market, and most of the Cesscourt magnates pay at least lip service to them. In general, the thieves of Toad's Castle deal with bulk goods of lower quality, with gangs of thugs and opportunistic crimes.

MELIANTHROPE'S GARDEN

Doctor Melianthrope is wealthy but reclusive, the last scion of an eccentric family that has faded from Malborn society over the last several generations. Melianthrope is an authority on natural history and often consulted by other academics both from within and outside the city. He is a master of toxicology, with antidotes both mundane and magical, a master herbalist and a powerful druid in a city not known for them.

Visiting Melianthrope is difficult, as even though he is believed to reside somewhere within the Circus District, no one agrees on the exact location. Invitations are sparingly dispensed to fellow scholars or influential Malborn elites whose influence Melianthrope grudgingly seeks to court. Occasionally, though, unusual individuals catch his attention—especially those of birthrights and species not often seen in the city. They may find themselves in receipt of an unexpected invitation and escorted to the gardens by one of Melianthrope's strange servants.



LAGSTONES

Wondrous Item, Uncommon (Requires Attunement)

Lagstones are bits of rock chipped from the walls of Old Hunger. Each stone is said to contain the soul of a criminal that died in the prison. While attuned to a *Lagstone*, a creature gains proficiency in one skill. The skill varies from stone to stone, supposedly depending on the talents of the unfortunate soul trapped within.

ANGEL BREATH AND THE UNSOULED

Malborn has many secrets, but one in particular is spoken of only in hushed voices or not at all. Amongst the countless vices of the city this one is one imported straight from the lower planes, a toxic pleasure fit for fiends themselves. The unsouled are the horrific by-product of this indulgence—its pitiable victims. Or, to those who indulge in it: the inconvenient evidence of their hideous, addictive appetite.

The unsouled haunt the poorest neighborhoods of Malborn, but they are most common in the Circus District, whose overcrowded warrens and crumbling buildings provide countless places for them to be abandoned or concealed. They are humanoid, but grey, slightly translucent and utterly faceless, stripped of all individuality. Each is the final remnant of a victim consumed by the forbidden vice known as *angel breath*.

Practiced by some of Malborn's most wicked citizens, *angel breath* uses rituals and implements consecrated to fiendish powers to syphon the souls of others, drawing out their memories and experiences like smoke to be inhaled. Their victims are usually servants and their families, or else the poor lured in off the streets with a promise of a pittance payment.

Even in corrupt Malborn, the practice of *angel breath* is profoundly and explicitly illegal. Unsouled have been discovered across the city, though nowhere more frequently than amid the squalor and collapsing structures of the Circus District. Each discovery, often of creatures locked away or walled up by those who have used them, is not just a threat but a clue towards breaking up another ring of callous exploiters. The creatures themselves, however, have thus far proved to be beyond help, beyond the efforts of wizards, alchemists and doctors to restore.

See the *Malborn* adventure books for more on the Unsouled.

Angel Breath is one of those ideas only Malborn could love. Steal a poor man's memories, bottle the ruin, and sell it to rich pricks as transcendence. Elegant bit of evil, that.

—Cardaror, the Invulnerable





CITADEL DISTRICT

The Citadel District owes its safety to an unlikely arrangement: the fortress headquarters of the City Watch stands across the street from Rook House, seat of Malborn's most powerful thieves' guild, and neither tolerates disorder near its doorstep.

CITY WATCH

The Citadel is a fortress-like building that is the headquarters of the City Watch. For generations this police force has walked a very particular line in Malborn.

In the Upper City. Here the Watch acts ruthlessly to protect the property, lives, and sensibilities of the wealthy. They are swift to discipline any lower types who dare to offend the social order of the city, to exclude unwanted elements of society, and to combat the incursions of the lower districts thieves, kidnappers and other rogues. This endless fight against the lower districts has become a war for the soul of Malborn itself.

With various changes of command, the Watch has been brutal, and it has been cunning. It has tried many tactics—a zero tolerance policy, deals and arrangements with lower districts' crooks, investing in manpower and magic—yet at no time has the Upper City been able to live in idyllic and untroubled peace.

The Watch counts coins. The Sentinels count victories. I count sins; and yours are fucking many.

—Sickle-Claw, Terrorist Vigilante



In the Lower Districts. The Watch in the lower districts traditionally exists solely to ensure that the poor districts function to provide the Upper City with what it needs: goods, domestics, service, and entertainment. In all of this, very few Watch marshals have considered other avenues—avenues such as addressing the innate corruption of the Upper City or policing the whole of Malborn for the benefit of all who live there.

The Watch is not uniformly corrupt. Many officers are slaves brought into Malborn as children, trained to believe that strict enforcement of Lex Talionis is the only barrier between order and chaos. Some genuinely wish to protect the city, while others pursue promotion, bribes, or simply survival. Even the well-intentioned, however, serve a system that grants foreigners fewer rights and allows wealth and influence to shape how laws are interpreted.

The Citadel contains barracks, armories, interrogation rooms, court offices, and crowded cells for prisoners awaiting judgment. Only the most dangerous or politically troublesome offenders are sent to Old Hunger.

THE ROOKS

The Rooks consider themselves the pre-eminent thieves of Malborn. They conduct themselves in what they feel is a more professional manner, and have invented a whole system of ranks, titles, medals, and honors for themselves. Their leader is the duke, and there are counts and barons and knights, all of them just rank villains but carrying themselves with a swagger as though they were scions of Upper City families temporarily down on their luck. The current Duke, Pertwen IV (as dukes often take the names of past leaders when stepping up to the post) is an elegant Malborn duelist noted for his skill with a sword, his magical talents, and his political acumen. He has held onto the post for almost ten years.

The City Watch recognize that the Rooks are potentially better than most of the alternatives, and if the organization suddenly fell then worse would ooze in to take their place. In many parts of the city, where the Watch has little influence, having the Rooks on your side is often better than any viable alternative. The Rooks also operate on the longstanding basis of 'don't crap where you eat' and so those districts of the Pit around

Rook House, their headquarters, are generally untroubled by their predation, and in turn provide a variety of support and services for the gang.

The Rooks and the Grand Circus are constantly at each other's throats, and those living and trading in the Pit must keep careful track of which faction they are paying off on any given day. All the varied gangs of Malborn have an arrangement with one or both of the guilds, or else go renegade and are at open war with both. If anyone was able to unite all the thieves of the pit under a single banner, then they would practically run the city by default.

The Rooks play at nobility. Dress a rat in silk, it's still a rat when I crush it.

—Sister Mercy



HUNGER DISTRICT

The Hunger District takes its name from the grim fortress of Old Hunger, whose entrance lies within the district. The massive prison is carved directly into the northern face of the caldera, its dark stone walls looming over the surrounding streets.

Some believe the name of the district is also a reflection of the insatiable hunger for wealth of its merchants and refiners. The district is the epicenter of Malborn's lotus trade, an industry that has enriched the city while destroying countless lives. Its towers house merchants, refiners, lawyers, mercenaries, and others who profit from the drug.

THE NAUGHTY DRAGON

The Naughty Dragon is one of the Hunger District's most popular taverns, valued less for its drink than for the anonymity it offers. Smoke hangs thick beneath faded murals of the titular indecent reptile painted across the walls and ceiling. Criminals, lawyers, mercenaries, and lotus traders all drink here, making it one of the best places in Malborn to overhear dangerous rumors.

THE MENAGERIE

The Menagerie draws both children and adults with its collection of creatures gathered from distant lands. Every beast is kept in a cage, and nearly all are for sale. Some are trained to obey simple commands, while others remain dangerously wild. Visitors are warned not to reach through the bars, regardless of how harmless a creature appears.

LOTUS ADDICTION

Beyond the tenuous sanctuary of Safe Street, the Hunger District remains consumed by the trade that sustains much of its wealth. To many who live in the district, lotus flowers have become both refuge and ruin. It offers a fragile, fleeting escape from lives that feel otherwise impossible to endure.

Merchants, refiners, lawyers, and mercenaries who built their fortunes upon the lotus now wander the streets in the same slow haze as their customers, their ambitions dulled and memories blurred. Families watch loved ones disappear into smoke-filled rooms, while entire towers sink into quiet stupor and the most disciplined traders continue counting their profits overhead.

Lotus flowers are a special type of Malborn violence. It is gentle, slow, and profitable, but no less painful in the end. For more on the flowers and their uses, refer to the Lotus Flowers section in chapter 8.

NUMANI'S COMPONENTS

Numani's Components is a cramped, dusky shop filled with materials sought by alchemists and spellcasters. Its proprietor, Heilan Numani, is a frail elf whose body shows the weight of extreme age while his memory remains sharp. He has operated the shop for more than nine centuries, making him one of Malborn's oldest living residents.





SAFE STREET

Safe Street is another landmark in the Pit, famous enough that many beyond Malborn have heard of it. If you can make it to Safe Street, they say, then you can stop running. Nobody will raise a hand against you. And, while this isn't exactly true, there is a tenuous safety to be found there. Finding the place is the problem, of course. The majority who live in the Pit don't know exactly where it is, and many who offer to sell its location are just leading their patrons into a trap. Most agree, however, that Safe Street lies somewhere within the Hunger District.

Safe Street is so named because it is where the Malborn assassins' guild the Sharp Rondel convenes.

Sharp Rondel. These assassins call themselves the Sharp Rondel, referring to the symbol of a wheel of outward-facing knives that can be found scratched over the doors behind which they meet. They have within their ranks a great many highly skilled killers, and they do maintain a certain reliability that allows the powerful and immoral to engage their services without fear of being bilked or betrayed.

The Rondel is very jealous of its reputation, and those members who offend the guild's sense of its own honor can expect to become hunted in turn. Safe Street is so named because, by longstanding tradition, no murder is to be done within its bounds without the express order of the Rondel. The leadership do not, after all, want a mess on their own doorstep. This tradition has led to a variety of odd characters taking up residence there to escape the retribution of their enemies, many of whom end up offering their specialist services to the Rondel for want of any other employer. The assassins therefore have a wide range of experts and magicians to call on for unusual jobs.

*They sell pleasure in this city like it's freedom. It's not.
It's a leash ... tied tight to your worst instincts.*

—The Owlfather

The Covered Market promises everything. It is honest in that regard. It simply fails to mention that the cost is always you.

—Ypo, the Maw

MARKET DISTRICT

The Market District is the busiest and most cosmopolitan quarter of the Pit, drawing merchants, criminals, nobles, and foreigners into its crowded streets. Beneath the patchwork canopy of the Covered Market, nearly anything can be bought, while Bridgetown sprawls across the rooftops overhead. Wealth and opportunity flow freely here, but so do fraud, violence, and disappearance, making the district both the Pit's greatest attraction and one of its most dangerous traps.

COVERED MARKET

The Covered Market is a nest of thronging streets covered with patchwork canvas to become the fronts of hundreds of businesses, selling everything from food and drink to exotic beasts to the proceeds of a thousand crimes. A shadow to the Gilded Streets of the Upper City, the

Covered Market is known to all as the place where anything can be bought and sold, and many of its visitors are the agents of powerful magnates and families, or foreigners lured to the city by that specific promise.

Those seeking strange cures, unholy artifacts, or bizarre experiences flock to the Market from across the world, having exhausted all other options. Sometimes they find exactly what they are looking for, and sometimes they're never seen again. It is very easy for an incautious visitor to go from buyer to being bought in the Covered Market. In amongst the countless stalls of rubbish and treasure are fortune tellers, renegade magicians, clerics of forbidden gods, and sly bards who know exactly what someone needs to find out, if they have the coin.

Behind these purveyors of the indefinite are even more bizarre vendors, found down shadowed alleys or operating out of the back of theatres and taverns. Psionic surgeons who can rid people of troubling memories or compulsions, alchemists whose potions transport their drinkers into a perfect dream world more addictive than the fiercest drug, backstreet wizards who can transplant the loyalty of a conjured familiar, cold and lonely devils exiled from Hell who need to make their quota of contracts and will offer almost anything in exchange for a signature on a piece of paper ... The Covered Market sells everything, but the buyer better make sure they find it before the wolves find them.



Musini/18

THE STREET BAILIFFS

The Street Bailiffs control a heavily fortified building in the Market District known as the Bailey, from which they launch raids against rival factions in the Pit or any targets that draw their attention. Their leader, Kruger, claims the group continues the work of the famed vigilante Owlfather, bringing order to streets long abandoned by the law.

Following the prison break, the mayor entrusted the Street Bailiffs with enforcing the Virtue Mandate throughout much of the Pit. Bailiffs collect accusations, inspect neighborhoods, question residents, and punish those whose Virtue Scores mark them as threats to public morality.

Kruger's idea of order is a brutal regime designed to put the city in fear. He explicitly states that it is better for the innocent to suffer the fate of the guilty than for the guilty to escape unpunished. His people are also not above taking from those they "police," and to the regular denizens of the Pit and the poorer districts, they are no better than any other gang.

Kruger is an uncompromising and fanatical creature, convinced of the righteousness of his cause. He regards his formidable strength as a divine mandate from the Maker himself, granting him the authority to act as he sees fit.

PATAGIANS

Patagians are small, long-tailed humanoids, of an appearance somewhere between a lemur and a kobold. They live in packs of related individuals and have a basic ability to fashion tools such as knives and spears, mostly from junk discarded by the regular citizens of Malborn.

Troupes of patagians are noisy, raucous rooftop neighbors, constantly squabbling and fighting amongst themselves. They live in tribal groups with webs of alliances and rivalries with others. Each troupe will usually claim a particular stretch of roofs and defend it against all comers. The city around and below them is considered fair game for hunting and scavenging.

Sometimes a particularly nasty patagian will take over several troupes and style themselves as warlords, arming the strongest of their followers with stolen weapons and armor and turning whole blocks into contested territory where the city's authority is not welcome. The usual response to this is to either hire adventurers to kill the troublesome leader, or sow dissent between the different troupes within the alliance. Such unions usually collapse relatively quickly as the chaotic patagians seldom cooperate with one another for long.



MARKET DISTRICT CROSS-SECTION

VERTICAL LIVING

Most buildings in Malborn rise five stories or more, with many exceeding ten. Shops, workshops, and other services usually occupy the ground floor. The crowded middle levels house most families of the Pit, while the upper stories are claimed by wealthier residents and malborne of means who lack the status to live in one of the city's towers.

BRIDGETOWN

A webwork of wooden, rope and spiderweb bridges crisscross between the leaning roofs of the Pit's slanting, slumping buildings. These are a community all to their own, occupied equally by the most agile of the larcenous aristocracy, fugitives who wish to make their pursuers' lives that much more difficult, and those so wretched they cannot afford a few yards of space down at ground level. One unique and unwelcome element of Bridgetown is the infestation of gliding menaces known as Patagians.





THE ASCENT

This is the main connection between the lower regions of the city and the upper city. It has a darker name, however: the Three Shadows. This is where the good people of the Upper City go for entertainment, shopping and more. Here there are a froth of at least arguably legitimate outlets—elegant casinos, mostly-honest theatres, concert halls, and the like. Behind them is a whole stew of establishments that cater to any vice a monied malborne might wish to practice. Drinking and gambling in profusion, frequently in the company of a variety of hosts and hostesses. Alchemical parlors with the latest in recreational substances, brothels, lewd and exotic shows, and places that cater to darker pleasures still.

COVERED MARKET

At the center of the city sprawls the Covered Market, where almost anything can be bought for the right price. Exotic beasts, stolen goods, forbidden magic, illicit cures, and stranger services fill its alleys.

You pack people in tight, give them nothing, and put thieves on top. That's not a district. That's a fucking trap.

—Sister Mercy

TENEMENT DISTRICT

Named for the towering tenement blocks that dominate its skyline, the Tenement District is home to thousands of the Pit's inhabitants. Four immense twelve story buildings rise over the district, some of the tallest structures in the Pit, their stained walls packed with narrow rooms and crowded apartments.

Despite the poverty within the Tenement District, it is not the most dangerous part of the Pit. Families live here, as do laborers, petty traders, and migrants who could afford nothing better. Life here is harsh, noisy, and cramped, but it remains one of the few places in the Pit where ordinary people still attempt to live something resembling a normal life.

TENEMENT SPECIES

A variety of mundane animals have found their way to Malborn, and a few have both thrived and mutated within its streets. Now these creatures form a whole novel ecosystem within the Tenement District, to both the annoyance and the benefit of those who live there, with the most notable being skipcats and confessor birds.

Skipcats are descended from ordinary felines drawn to the Tenement District by the rats infesting its many towers. They possess more than a touch of the Shadowfell and can step from shadow to shadow, passing through walls and locked doors with a freedom the district's residents can only admire. Like ordinary cats, they readily cadge handouts from soft-hearted locals and are often semi-domesticated. Some are trained to carry messages and small objects throughout the district as part of a secret neighborhood grapevine.

Confessor birds are flightless, raven-like creatures that creep about the streets and rooftops on their talons and sinewy wings. They have developed a kind of malign intelligence and love to curse and mock residents and passersby from a safe vantage. Many have a limited ability to cast minor curses, and others have an uncanny gift for impersonation, taunting people with their own voices or those of their loved ones. They can be domesticated by those who give them more opportunities for cruelty, and a mean-spirited spellcaster can teach them further magic to make everyone else's lives worse.

More information about these species can be found in the *Malborn* adventure books.

POTSHERD COLLECTIVE

One of the most powerful organizations in the Tenement District is the self-styled guild known as the Potsherd Collective. To Malborn's mundane authorities, it is merely another street gang, albeit one with strong contacts within the airship docks and warehouse districts, active in smuggling and distribution across the city. Criminals bringing goods in and out of the city often end up working with the Collective, and their capable heavies often clash with the law and other gangs moving in on their turf.

The men and women of the Collective tend to be simple, physically tough, drawn from the workers of the city. Humans, malborne, and a cosmopolitan scattering of others, their chief badge of membership is a shard of baked clay set into some part of their body, sometimes hidden beneath clothes, sometimes proudly displayed on forehead or the back of the hand.

TENEMENT TRADES

The crowded towers of the Tenement District are home to laborers whose trades reflect both Malborn's poverty and its peculiar needs. The following are among the workers most commonly encountered within the tenements.

Elevator Mechanic: Maintains and repairs the ancient lifts in the city's towers, keeping the machinery functioning despite age and constant use.

Gong Farmer: Empties and cleans privies and cesspits in places without access to functioning sewers.

Kelp Farmer: Cultivates, harvests, hauls, and dries kelp for use as food, lamp fuel, and trade goods.

Living Ornament: Attends elite gatherings as a decorative performer, wearing elaborate paint, costumes, and lacquered masks.

Miner: Performs dangerous physical labor extracting phosphate, gold, and other valuable minerals from beneath the island.

Phrenologist: Claims to determine a person's character and destiny by examining the shape of their skull.

Plague Bearer: Collects and burns corpses that are infected with dangerous diseases to prevent their spread.

Sin Eater: Performs funerary rites in which mourners eat from her body, allowing her to symbolically absorb the sins of the deceased.

Tosher: Searches through sewers and their refuse for valuables, salvage, and useful scrap.

TWISTER DISTRICT

Once known as the Fey District, this neighborhood earned its current name after the rise of the Twister Gang, a malicious band of Fey who now dominate its crooked streets during the night.

The district's high rises are painted in bright, clashing colors, their walls layered with murals, banners, and half-faded graffiti. At first glance the place almost resembles a carnival. Satyrs lounge in smoky doorways, sprites flit overhead, and strange laughter drifts from shadowed alleys.

Most of Malborn's major festivals either begin or end here, drawing revelers from across the city into its riotous streets.

FESTIVALS

New Year is a celebration of new beginnings, when old things are destroyed and purified through fire. In addition, it is a time for new ideas to be unveiled such as new clothing styles or new food recipes. Many streets are lined with stalls where these new items are displayed for sale. During the festivities, certain noble families descend into the Pit to sacrifice a creature in commemoration of their god's murder.

The Masquerade of Shadows is a holiday that takes place on the night of the winter solstice. It is a time when the people of malborne don masks and costumes, disguising themselves from the world. The night is filled with music, dancing, and revelry.

THE HEALER'S HOUSE

The Healer's House treats mundane illnesses, magical afflictions, and injuries throughout the Twister District. It is overseen by Vulsidar Geremt, a brilliant but embittered malborne physician exiled from Upper City society after a political dispute. Her sharp tongue and relentless standards make her difficult company, but few question her skill or fairness. The formidable Father Broen serves as the establishment's protector and ensures that neither criminals nor dissatisfied patients intimidate its staff.

ANGEL ARTISAN

Angel Artisan is one of Malborn's most celebrated body-art studios, drawing wealthy patrons from the Upper City into the Twister District. Its fey proprietor, Angelica, specializes in the beauty customs favored by the malborne, including citizenship tattoos, scalp designs concealed beneath powdered wigs, filed or blackened teeth, and pungent cosmetics made from animal dung.

BEGGARS

The least of the major underworld associations belongs to the beggars of Malborn. They have no dedicated district, being of a necessity spread out across the Pit and beyond, but their leaders meet at Navek's Canteen, a seemingly unassuming eatery in the Twister District.

The beggars of Malborn have no single beggar king to rule them. Instead, and by arrangements of ancient and arcane complexity, the various districts of the poor city and the Pit offer up representatives, who form loose parties and put forward their own spokespeople.

What meets in Navek's Canteen is therefore a curiously egalitarian mix of the mad, the corrupt, the bold, and the benevolent, who share bread and information as equals, and make plans to protect their vast and widespread congregation of unfortunates. The chief commodity and leverage of the Beggars' Parliament (as it is known) is information. Beggars are everywhere and hear everything. They make use of these secrets to punish those who victimize their people, and they also bank favors by trading what they know.

TWISTER GANG

The Twister Gang is a malicious group of Fey that finds nothing more entertaining than sowing chaos and tormenting the innocent. They keep to the shadows, using their powers of invisibility to spy on and harass those that make the mistake of wandering into their territory. Often, the only thing that betrays their presence is the sound of their hysterical giggles and hissed insults.

When visible, the twisters are very childlike in appearance and mannerism. The largest of them hardly reaches more than three feet tall, and they all possess soft features with wide, gleaming eyes. The unwary might be charmed by their innocent looks and miss the mad glint of malevolence in those huge eyes.



TENEMENT DISTRICT CROSS-SECTION



APARTMENTS

The middle floors are packed with working families, laborers, migrants, and petty traders, often with several generations sharing only a few rooms. Communal privies and wash-rooms serve entire floors, while rats, insects, and other vermin thrive in the walls. Worst are skipcats, which slip through barriers to raid food stores and nests. Specialized pest controllers make a living hunting the various infestations.

KITCHENS

Most of this floor is devoted to sprawling communal kitchens serving the feast hall below. Cooks, scullions, and servants work from before dawn until late at night, turning kelp, fish, imported grain, cheap meat, and whatever can be bought in the Covered Market into enormous quantities of food.

FEAST HALL

The feast hall is the social heart of the tenement, filled with long tables where residents, laborers, travelers, and guests eat shoulder to shoulder. Meals become occasions for gossip, hiring, gambling, and quiet business, including discreet deals between lotus sellers and their customers.



HIGH-END APARTMENTS

These spacious apartments offer private baths, privies, running water, and enough room for servants—extraordinary luxuries by Pit standards. Their occupants include prosperous merchants, gladiators, assassins, lotus dealers, fences, and other residents whose fortunes were made through trade, violence, or vice. Living here grants comfort without the lineage required for admission into the Upper City.

ELEVATOR AND STAIRS

Screw-driven elevators haul residents, goods, and livestock between the tenement's many floors, maintained by mechanics whose livelihood depends on keeping ancient machinery alive through constant repair. Breakdowns are common enough that most residents know the stairwells well. These cramped flights also serve as shortcuts, meeting places, escape routes, and occasional territory for thieves or creatures that have wandered in from Bridgetown.

GROUND FLOOR

The ground floor opens directly onto the street and is crowded with workshops, taverns, cheap shops, food sellers, repairers, money-lenders, and stranger trades peculiar to the Pit. Elevator mechanics, leatherworkers, phrenologists, toshers, and other laborers advertise their services here. With customers constantly arriving from surrounding streets, it is noisy, crowded, and one of the easiest places in the building to disappear into a crowd.



THE CESSCOURT

The Cesscourt is the name given to the sewers beneath the streets of the Pit. Even the sewers of Malborn have been colonized by villains, and in the Pit the streets have collapsed in at least six points to give ready access. At these points, the Cesscourt is always in session, with a variety of stinking magnates dispensing justice and lolling on their rubble thrones.

Whilst there are plenty of native Malborn desperate enough to hide out in the Cesscourt, its grand figures tend towards those creatures who find the environment more congenial. Kobolds, goblins, and the occasional more sociable trolls can all be found there. It is a long-standing Cesscourt tradition to have a dangerous pet or two to feed dissenters to as well as several specialists breed carrion crawlers and otyughs to keep order.

Aside from being the final and worst hiding place a desperate citizen might seek out, the Cesscourt represents another way to get across the city for those not picky about the smell. A reliable Cesscourt guide can find a way up into the lavender-scented ducts of the Upper City, or into Old Hunger itself. However, assessing the reliability of such guides is an art in itself.

DIMENSIONAL HERMITS

A shimmer in space in the mouth of a bag, a crate, even a pocket. For the larger ones, a doorway or window, even just the empty frame. Unfolding itself impossibly from far too small a space comes a clutch of armored legs and pincers, waving feelers and stalked eyes.

Like many similar crab-like creatures across beaches everywhere, dimensional hermits have a soft and vulnerable body. Instead of hiding within a shell or some other physical container, some twist of magic in their nature allows them to conceal themselves in an other-dimensional space akin to a portable hole or bag of holding. All the creature needs is some sort of physical boundary to anchor itself to, and any inanimate object incorporating a hole with an unbroken edge can serve. With its legs retracted, the hermit is entirely invisible and outside the material world. When it chooses, it can extend out into the material world and scuttle about to feed.

Dimensional hermits are a common encounter on the streets and sewers of Malborn. Just what ancient experiment or conflict of magical forces gave rise to the creatures is forgotten, but the majority of them are entirely harmless, and perform a useful scavenging function, jostling with the rats and oozes to devour the constant tide of rubbish cast away by the city's inhabitants.

Their magical nature means that the hermits are sporadically fished for and harvested. Poor citizens and their children descend into the sewers, rubbish heaps, and other derelict places where the hermits are plentiful. Finding and trapping the crabs is an easy enough endeavor given their curious nature, that is if one can stomach to venture into the stinking sewers underneath the city. Despite the unpleasantness associated with the task there is a determined underclass of hermit-takers found here. Often, they set out inviting boxes and bags for the creatures to move into, which they can later come back and gather up. Hermits can offer up useful ingredients to mages and alchemists, and some inadvertently accumulate valuables as they scavenge.

Hermit crabs may be easy to lure but they are known to turn the tables on the harvesters. The crabs grow as they age, and there is no maximum size they can reach. Deep in the sewers, or at the heart of Malborn's oldest junkyards, there are crabs as big as carriages nestled in their unseen extradimensional homes. These massive crabs will make a meal out of a less than careless hermit-taker. When they emerge from abandoned doorframes, spokeless cartwheels, tunnel mouths or hanging loops of frayed rope, they are more than big enough to seize and devour incautious human prey.

See the *Malborn* adventure books for more on dimensional hermits.





NOTABLE FIGURES OF THE PIT

ARANNA GILDAR

Aranna Gildar is widely regarded as one of the most disciplined and capable members of the Nine Sentinels, the loose order of vigilantes who operate in the shadows of Malborn. Unlike some of her more flamboyant counterparts, Aranna is rarely seen in dramatic confrontations or public displays of heroics. Instead, she has gained a reputation as a careful planner and organizer, the steady hand behind many of the Sentinels' coordinated efforts against crime.

Before joining the group, Aranna was already known in certain quarters of the city as a lone vigilante who pursued criminals in the darker districts where the City Watch seldom intervened. A Malborne warrior with a strict personal code, she built a reputation for patience, restraint, and relentless determination. Stories from the time speak of her crossing paths with other masked figures of the city's underworld, sometimes as rival, sometimes as uneasy ally.

Within the Nine Sentinels, Aranna is believed to act as a central coordinator, gathering information and ensuring that the group's actions serve a broader strategy rather than scattered acts of vengeance. Many observers assume that she now plays a leading role within the order, particularly since the mysterious disappearance of the Owlfather.

MARSHAL MAJOR DRAGAN PHOBAS

Marshal Major Dragan Phobas is the current commander of the Malborn City Watch, a position long associated with protecting the interests of the wealthy districts above all else. When she first assumed the role, most citizens of the Upper City expected no different from her. Some believed she would prove corrupt like many Watch commanders before her. Others assumed she would simply maintain the traditional arrangement: harsh policing of the lower districts while ignoring the excesses of the powerful.

Instead, Dragan has surprised both allies and critics. A stern woman with nerves of steel and a reputation for discipline, she spent many years traveling beyond Malborn before returning to her homeland. These experiences shaped her belief that lasting order requires genuine justice rather than simple repression.

Since taking command, Dragan has attempted to reform the Watch from within. She has tightened discipline among officers, appointed new commanders in the lower districts, and argued publicly that the security of the Upper City depends on improving conditions elsewhere in the city. Her policies have reduced some of the more visible crime in wealthy neighborhoods, and many respectable citizens now support her efforts.

Dragan Phobas is trying to fix the Watch. Admirable. Also stupid as fuck. Malborn doesn't reward honest repair work.

—Carderor the Invulnerable



FILIGREE

Filigree is Malborn's most infamous thief, a flamboyant figure who robs the city's wealthiest citizens with effortless precision. No lock, ward, or guard seems able to bar their way. A gilded long-nosed mask, broad-brimmed hat, flowing cape, and mocking laughter are often the only signs of their passing, along with empty vaults and humiliated nobles. Filigree displays an uncanny familiarity with elite households, leading many to suspect a traitor born among the Upper City's great families. No proof has ever surfaced.

Active for decades, Filigree's true identity and origins remain unknown, even to themselves. They recall little of their own past and seem driven less by greed than by compulsion. Clever, theatrical, and unnervingly evasive, Filigree trades barbed wit with pursuers and disappears before retribution can fall. For all their bravado, those who cross paths with Filigree sometimes sense a hollowness beneath the charm, as if the thief steals not just treasure, but meaning itself.



GENERALISSIMO GHORSHT

Generalissimo Ghorsht serves as the leader of the Varanji. They are a force of hobgoblin mercenaries, responsible for maintaining order within the Stockade—the area of the Sea Ward where newcomers to the city are quarantined. A hobgoblin by birth, he is notable for standing several inches shorter than most of his kind, though he compensates with an imposing uniform heavy with medals, braids, and ceremonial armor. His most distinctive feature, however, is the towering shako he wears at all times. This remarkable hat, known among the Varanji as the Capitani, has become almost as famous as Ghorsht himself.

Among the soldiers under his command, the Capitani is treated with unusual reverence. Guards often salute it with the same respect they offer their commander, and some even claim the hat possesses a kind of presence or authority that commands attention. Visitors to the Stockade quickly learn that conversations with the Generalissimo frequently involve remarks directed toward the hat as much as the man beneath it.

Ghorsht himself cultivates an image of rigid discipline and martial grandeur. He is known for dramatic speeches about duty and order, and for enforcing strict rules within the Stockade. Some describe him as theatrical, even vain, but few doubt his dedication to maintaining control over the volatile population under his watch.

KILLER ROACH

No one knows where Killer Roach came from. He simply appeared one day on the edge of Malborn, a towering insectoid with rust-colored chitin. Rumors claim he is the last of his kind; not because of extinction or war, but because he devoured the future of his people. It's said he consumed the unhatched eggs of his species, then slaughtered the elders when they sought vengeance. Whether this story is truth or nightmarish fiction, no one has found another like him.

Roach arrived in Malborn riding a trail of blood and mutilation, killing with such ferocity and creativity that even the city's hardened criminal underworld took notice. The Sharp Rondel, Malborn's infamous assassin's guild, always hungry for talent, recruited him despite his strangeness. For a time, he served them, taking contracts and executing targets in his own gruesome fashion. He preferred drawn-out kills that included cat-and-mouse games, torment, and dismemberment. His signature weapons, razor-sharp throwing stars coated with paralytic venom, were as likely to cripple an innocent bystander as they were to land true. He didn't care.

The guild tolerated his eccentricities until he murdered one of their own, a high-ranking operative whose only mistake was criticizing Roach's lack of subtlety. The kill had no strategic purpose; it was simply fun. With great reluctance, the guild leader banished him, warning all members to steer clear or risk the same fate.



KRUGER

Once the youngest ally of the Owlfather, Kruger became disillusioned with his mentor's restraint. Where Owlfather sought justice, Kruger craved fear. After Owlfather's disappearance, Kruger embraced brutality, founding the Street Bailiffs, a vigilante gang that enforces order through violence and extortion. To the poor, these protectors are indistinguishable from criminals, demanding payment and escalating cruelty to prove devotion. Kruger tolerates no dissent, making gruesome examples of those who accept bribes or show mercy. He assumes the Upper City is inherently virtuous and allows elites to weaponize his followers against their rivals. Surrounded by sycophants, Kruger believes himself righteous, blind to the harm he inflicts.

Mercy is how rot survives. If one innocent man suffers so ten guilty men learn fear, that is not injustice. That is the price of order.

—Kruger, the Bailiff



DUKE PERTWEN IV

Duke Pertwen IV (leaders of the Rooks traditionally take a new name when they assume the post) is a rakish figure, a malborne man no longer young but making up in experience what he lacks in youthful energy. He is a wit, a strategist, a master of the duel, and has led the Rooks successfully for ten years, longer than many of his predecessors managed. He is constantly on the lookout for capable talent, whether local or foreign. He always has some job on the back of his mind that would make a good audition piece for aspiring thieves keen to join his court.



STRIXDAUGHTER

Strixdaughter is Malborn's most infamous manipulator, a nemesis to the vigilante Owlfather and a force that destabilizes the city from within. Her origins are deliberately obscured; she has claimed to be victim, curse, outsider, and spirit of Malborn itself, often contradicting herself. Whatever the truth, she is no longer wholly mortal and has returned from apparent death many times.

A master of illusion, alchemy, and mind alteration, Strixdaughter reshapes perceptions with surgical precision, driving individuals and communities to ruin through their own choices. She infiltrates every level of society, from noble houses to criminal gangs, orchestrating intricate schemes in which innocents become unwitting instruments of her designs.

Strixdaughter is not motivated by wealth or rule. She seeks to remake Malborn through radical intervention, though what the final result is to be is only known to her.



THE OWLFATHER

The Owlfather was Malborn's most feared vigilante, a masked figure who stalked the city's nights during its darkest years. Clad in black armor and marked by the sigil of an owl, he struck without warning, dismantling criminal syndicates, exposing corrupt nobles, and delivering offenders to Old Hunger rather than granting them the mercy of death. To the poor, he was a grim protector. To criminals and predators, he was a living nightmare.

Unlike other vigilantes, the Owlfather showed discipline and strategy. He targeted systems rather than individuals, breaking networks of crime instead of indulging in slaughter. His campaign brought order to districts long abandoned by the City Watch, forcing even the Upper City to acknowledge the rot within its walls.

The Owlfather's crusade ended abruptly after a devastating confrontation with the elusive villain known as Strixdaughter. The Owlfather vanished, presumed dead by most. In his absence, his allies fractured, and the city slid back into corruption. Whether the Owlfather was a man, a movement, or something more has become a matter of debate. What remains certain is that Malborn has never truly recovered from his disappearance.

WIFFLEMOON

Like all twisters, Wifflemoon bears the shape of a mortal youth with soft features; but something in Wifflemoon is unmistakably wrong. His smile lingers too long. His laughter comes too late. Once, he was said to be the cleverest riddler of the Fey folk, delighting in wordplay and wit. After his twisting, that brilliance curdled into obsession.

Unlike other twisters, Wifflemoon does not kill in a frenzy. He lets hope bloom before he snuffs it out. He is cruel even by the standards of the Twister Gang, quick to turn his riddles on disobedient kin. In the gutters and shadowed alleys of Malborn, his giggle is a death sentence.

ROGUE'S GALLERY

The Rogue's Gallery is a collection of Malborn's most feared criminals, their names whispered far beyond the city to frighten children into obedience. Among them are:

The Abbot. A preacher who fuels hatred.

Carderon, the Invulnerable. A metal-devouring enforcer cursed with a decaying body.

Killer Roach. A deranged insectoid assassin who stalks homes.

Mr. Owl. A silent, ancient shadow that hunts the lost.

Sickle-Claw. A ruthless vigilante who slays both criminals and the wealthy.

The Viper. A calculating master of thieves and poison.

Ypo, the Maw. A scholar turned infernal crime lord consumed by endless hunger.



Every thug and mastermind in the Rogue's Gallery is a reminder. A reminder that in the darkest corners of Malborn, there's a line they shouldn't cross.

—The Owlfather



KILLER ROACH



MR. OAT



SICKLE-CLAW



SISTER MERCY



THE VIPER



YPO, THE MAW





CHAPTER 3

THE UPPER CITY

THE UPPER CITY IS HOME TO THE MALBORNE ELITE, those who look down on the rest of the city, figuratively and literally. Those of lowlier address call it by such nicknames as 'Tall Town', 'The Lofts', whilst ambitious burglars refer to 'The High Nests' in the hope of making it home with a few stolen eggs.

The lowest part of the Upper City is the commercial and administrative district, where the poor-but-necessary can clamber up from below to perform their service as clerks, shop assistants, and domestics. The first thing that any such visitors see is the imposing Hall of Justice where serious crimes are adjudged. It is well known to any poorer denizen of Malborn that such cases very seldom result in an acquittal.

Beyond the Hall of Justice, which stands as a stern caution to any would-be miscreants, stretches the Seven Gilded Streets, as the Upper City's commercial district is called. Here are restaurants, jewelers, purveyors of high fashion and magical services, and boutiques for every other legitimate form of goods that the rich might directly concern themselves with.

Needless to say, a great many of the emporia of the Seven Gilded Streets are the stuff of legends amongst the criminals of the lower districts, and daring gangs plan all manner of heists, raids and cons to get in and out with armfuls of priceless jewelry, magical goods, and art. None of the high-end sellers are short of protection, however, with mundane and enchanted traps, guard beasts, and well-paid sentries all present to complicate the life of the working criminal. Small wonder that those gangs and lone thieves who are successful become legends. Legends both to the poor, and—more covertly—to the very denizens of the Upper City, who love a bit of daring so long as they weren't actually the target.

Behind the Seven Gilded Streets, tastefully out of sight, are the Three Shadows, a dark mirror to the golden décor of the legitimate commercial district. This is where the good people of the Upper City go for entertainment. Where the districts meet is a froth of at least arguably legitimate outlets: elegant casinos, mostly honest theatres, concert halls, and the like. Behind them is a whole stew of establishments that cater to any vice a monied Malborn might wish to practice. Drinking and gambling in profusion, frequently in the company of a variety of hosts and hostesses. Alchemical parlors with the latest in recreational substances fresh from the ingenious minds of the lower-city Brewer's Guild. Brothels, lewd and exotic shows, and places that cater to darker pleasures still.

UPPER CITY LOCATIONS

CHYLIM'S EYES

Along the caldera rim stands a ring of watchtowers known as Chylim's Eyes, built to watch the night sky for falling stars. The towers are maintained chiefly by Houses Calenhad and Hyb-Halorin, whose fortunes are closely tied to recovering and working the precious material these celestial falls leave behind: stardust.

Stardust consists of minute particles shed by Chylim's Bracelet, the vast ring of silver debris that gleams in the night sky. For most of Malborn's long history, its uses were limited, but a few centuries ago artificers discovered how to harness it within selenikinetic flywheels. These enchanted mechanisms now power everything from clockwork artifices to metal-clad submersibles.

In Malborn, some children and adults venture out during the early morning wearing enchanted goggles that reveal the faint gleam of newly fallen stardust. The fields and steep slopes surrounding Malborn's caldera once provided rich harvests, but generations of gathering have reduced these to thin pickings. These days, the richest finds come when a falling star plunges into the shallow waters around nearby islands, setting off a frantic race as rival houses launch ships determined to seize the fragments before anyone else can lay claim to them.

CHYLIM'S BRACELET

Chylim's Bracelet is the glittering ring of silver dust that encircles the world, believed by astronomers to be the remains of a shattered moon. According to legend, Chylim was once a living moon, perhaps a goddess or a servant of the Maker, who placed herself between the world and something vast and terrible falling from the outer dark. Whatever descended upon the newborn world would have destroyed it. Chylim stopped the catastrophe but was herself shattered in the struggle. Her fragments still circle the world, casting their silver light across the lands her sacrifice preserved. What became of the thing she opposed is unknown.

FARBOZZI'S

Farbozzi's is Malborn's most prestigious dealer in antiquities, relics and curiosities, importing treasures from abroad and purchasing artifacts recovered from the endless ruins beneath the lower caldera. Its elegant galleries attract nobles, scholars, and wealthy collectors, while private rooms are reserved for appraisals, auctions and negotiations over particularly valuable pieces. Its owner, Essene Farbozzi, is a celebrated philanthropist and influential broker between rival factions, renowned for smoothing disputes through carefully chosen gifts and favors. Possessing something purchased from Farbozzi's is itself a mark of status amongst Malborn's wealthy.





HOUSE OF A THOUSAND KNIVES

The House of a Hundred Knives is the city's bloodiest fighting pit, hosting a level of savagery that the criminal arenas of the lower districts would blink at. The proprietor, the mustachioed dwarf Kaleb Thumbcrusher, runs a lively trade in unusual beasts, conjurations, prize fighters from the lower districts and even prisoners smuggled out of Old Hunger via deals with the governor. The fights are almost always to the death, and the House is the greatest open secret in the Upper City, known to all and yet never cracked down on so long as Kaleb pays off the right members of the watch.

PELLOMY'S HOUSE OF MIRRORS

A discreet and highly sought-after establishment offering companionship tailored to a patron's desires. Guests can spend an evening with partners who seem perfectly suited to their fantasies, whether familiar or imagined. Popular among the lonely, wealthy, and curious, the House is both alluring and quietly controversial within Malborn's social circles.

PALACE OF THE DRAGONLORDS

These ruined halls once served as the seat of Malborn's ancient Dragonlords, powerful figures bonded to dragons. Abandoned for centuries after a catastrophic fall, the shattered palace now stands as a symbol of lost power. Few dare approach it, as rumors persist of lingering spirits and other unsettling presences within.

TIDE CISTERNS

The world's many moons exert a powerful and shifting pull upon its oceans, producing dramatic tides along coastlines across the globe. Nowhere is this more pronounced than around Malborn, where the shape of

the coast and seabed funnels incoming waters through narrowing channels and greatly magnifies their rise. When several moons move into conjunction, these forces combine to produce immense high tides that can rise by as much as sixty feet. To most such surges would be a danger to be endured. The malborne, characteristically, have found a way to make them useful.

Tide Cisterns are vast, reinforced reservoirs built throughout the Upper City to store the power generated by the sea. Tidal barrages and turbines have been constructed along the city's shores, capturing the rise and fall of the water and converting it into mechanical power. This energy drives a sophisticated network of high-pressure pipes beneath Malborn's streets. Much of the network is made from harvested sea bamboo, whose hollow, jointed stems are chemically hardened and joined with heavy metal collars.

The pressurized water can be tapped wherever mechanical force is required. Hydraulic elevators carry residents and cargo through buildings as tall as fifteen floors, allowing the city to build upwards without requiring every citizen to possess the legs of a mountaineer. The same system powers the pumps that keep Malborn's separate fresh-water network under pressure, forcing clean water into districts far above the shoreline.

At the docks, enormous hydraulic cranes lift cargo directly from ships and submersibles onto the quays. In the city's factories, water pressure drives looms, cutting machinery and massive metallurgical presses. It also operates the bellows and fans that force air into blast furnaces, allowing Malborn's foundries to burn hotter and work metals beyond the reach of lesser furnaces.

The system is one of the city's great engineering triumphs, although those living above seldom think about the miles of groaning pipes beneath their feet. They notice only when a pressure line ruptures or an elevator fails.

NOBLE TOWER CROSS-SECTION

PATRIARCH'S APARTMENTS

These spacious apartments are reserved for the highest-ranking members of the noble family, including the Patriarch, their spouse, children, and closest relatives. They offer private bedrooms, baths, sitting rooms, and servants' access, along with the finest furnishings in the building.

BANQUET FLOOR

Grand and opulent, the banquet hall is designed to host spectacular feasts, with floor to ceiling windows giving spectacular views of both city and ocean.

MINING ELEVATOR

Accessible from the public tunnels of the Caldera levels, this heavy-duty elevator carries miners, tools, and ore between the city and the workings below. Malborn's noble houses exploit deposits of gold, silver, copper, and especially phosphate, while deeper excavations occasionally uncover rarer minerals or relics buried beneath the ancient volcanic stone.





EXTENDED FAMILY DWELLINGS

These floors house the lesser branches of the noble family: cousins, widowed relatives, unmarried scions, dependents, and those important enough to retain the family name but not its finest apartments. The levels below are reserved for servants, whose cramped dormitories, shared washrooms, kitchens, and storerooms keep them close to the work that sustains the household.

PUBLIC FLOORS

These levels connect directly to the public tunnels running around the caldera walls and serve as the tower's principal working entrances. Servants, miners, tradesmen, messengers, and suppliers pass through them each day without entering the family quarters. They also provide access to the Ascent, linking the tower to Malborn's main route between the Pit and Upper City.

STORAGE

The lowest floors are packed with goods awaiting sale or redistribution through the city. Common stores include imported timber, cloth, livestock feed, grain, spices, luxury foods, foreign wines, alchemical ingredients, finished metalwork, paper, and preserved provisions, alongside Malborn exports such as phosphate and processed lotus products.

NOBLE HOUSES

ARKELANDER

Where the Seven Gilded Streets meet the rim of the Caldera stands the Arkelander Academy, an establishment that trains domestic servants for work in the houses of the mighty. Its students are taught not only the practical demands of household service, but also literacy, mathematics, history, music, etiquette, and other accomplishments expected of those serving Malborn's wealthiest families. The Academy is the province of the Arkelander family, one of the oldest and proudest of the Tall Town lineages. For as long as anyone can remember, the Arkelanders have worked to improve Malborn. Mostly this takes the place of bequests for institutions within the Upper City—a new theatre, a watchhouse, a monument, all for the benefit of the wealthy—but the family does fund a range of soup kitchens, poor schools and other charitable institutions below. The Arkelander way is one of genuine benevolence, although their distance from the needy means that some of their actions are viewed as ineffectual and ill-informed.

The Arkelander family name is of sufficient weight that other families often turn to them as mediators and arbiters of disputes. They hold a disproportionate number of public offices, and in general are above the corruption,

self-interest, and bribery otherwise so rife in the city. The Academy is a genuinely philanthropic institution, taking the gifted from the lower districts and giving them a chance at an education and a better life.

Old family stories also remember Telamok and Estor Arkelander, two of the dragonlords who followed Xander Huorath across Oceanus into the legendary land of Thylea.

CALENHAD

Much of the house's influence rests upon its control of Malborn's primary food supply. The Calenhad estates oversee vast underwater farms, cultivating great kelp forests that help sustain the city's population. They are also among Malborn's foremost miners of stardust. Their long experience working beneath the waves allows them to reach fallen stars in the surrounding shallows more quickly than most rival houses.

CORSAR

House Corsar has prospered for centuries through shipbuilding, and its dockyards produce vessels used by merchants, explorers, and some of Malborn's wealthiest trading families. Corsar craftsmanship is widely respected, particularly among sailors who trust the family's ships to survive long voyages and dangerous seas. The house's name, however, is also associated with Lirin Corsar, the notorious governor of Old Hunger, Malborn's infamous prison.

ELMERE

For millennia, House Elmere has produced Malborn's finest metalwork. Hydraulic bellows drive their blast furnaces to temperatures lesser smithies cannot match, allowing Elmere craftsmen to work metals others can barely soften and produce exceptionally strong weapons and armor. Every apprentice bears an Elmere seal beneath the tongue. Protected techniques may be discussed inside the forge, but revealing them elsewhere causes the seal to burn, blistering the mouth and eventually stealing the offender's voice.

GOL

House Gol is unusual among Malborn's noble families for its deep and public devotion to the Maker, a faith many of their peers regard with indifference or outright contempt. Its patriarch, Fistan Gol, serves as head of the Maker's Cathedral, giving the family considerable religious prestige throughout the city. The Gols are also prominent patrons of theatre, music, and magical education, funding playhouses, public performances, and academies for promising students. Their productions often blend lavish spectacle with religious or moral themes, making them popular even among citizens who care little for noble piety.





HUORATH

The greatest sky-landmark over the Upper City is known as the High Parks and is the province of the Huorath family. A string of huge floating platforms linked by ropes and ladders and stairs, the High Parks are as picturesque as the Clasp is ugly, for each has been planted with a verdant riot of plant life, including mazes, fountains, pavilions, and follies, as though a grand park from some ground bound noble estate had been carved up and scattered vertically across a dozen broad decks. The highest of these holds the Huorath family residences, and below the greenery of others are servants' quarters, retreats, and lodges for guests.

The Huorath are a very old and wealthy family, with much of their fortune flowing through the Huorath Verdant Exchange. Through the Exchange, they dominate Malborn's lotus trade, controlling much of the supply consumed within the city and exported across the wider world. Five centuries ago, the family produced Xander Huorath, the celebrated last Dragonlord who led an expedition into distant Thylea.

HYB-HALORIN

The decline of House Hyb-Halorin began centuries ago, when its legendary appetite for excess culminated in several members embracing vampirism. Most were destroyed in the violence that followed, though a few remain imprisoned within Old Hunger to this day. The house never fully recovered. Once dominant in Malborn's stardust trade, it has since been overtaken by rivals such as Calenhad. Yet the Hyb-Halorin response to dwindling wealth has remained characteristically unchanged: greater extravagance, greater scandal, and ever more elaborate attempts to persuade Malborn that nothing has been lost.

ISSIKAR

House Issikar was once an unremarkable noble line, but its reputation has darkened considerably in recent decades. Rumor claims that its tower shelters members of the Sharp Rondels, and some whisper that the mysterious Grandfather of Assassins himself resides in the penthouse. The family's legitimate business is considerably less sinister: paper. Issikar mills turn old linen, sailcloth, and other discarded fibers into much of Malborn's writing paper, while their workshops produce vellum and parchment from animal skins.

MALABRATE

The oldest Malborn family, bar none, is the Malabrate clan, a name that turns up in the city's oldest records. The ancient blood of the city's people has always run strongly in them—because, the uncharitable say, they are profoundly inbred. They are tall, pale, faintly luminous, and it is said some are born with twisted, vestigial wings. The younger scions of the clan are active in city society, elegant and beautiful and incalculably wealthy.

The older generations—of whom there are many because the line is very long-lived—retreat to their aerial estate, The Clasp, is a conglomeration of at least a dozen separate airships that hangs like a threat over the Upper city. The vessels are welded together in an asymmetrical mass, and the interior is rumored to be labyrinthine and confusing, housing an unknown number of increasingly weird Malabrate ancients and their centuries of accumulated wealth.

Much of that accumulated wealth was built through banking and long-distance trade, and the Bank of Malabrate and Dominion Company are known far beyond the city. Through the Dominion Company and their bank, they shape nations and wage economic war across the world.

FROSCH

The Frosch are only second-generation wealthy, and their story is that of a mercantile clan who did very well in trade with the wider world before becoming the newest noble house. Their account of those early years is tidy enough, though older residents of the lower districts tend to remember a rather rougher version.

The other families sneer at them, and the Frosch have discovered that the old families of Malborn can be as ruthless and vicious as any underworld gang. However, thus far they have maintained their place and are steadily achieving a measure of respectability. Their patriarch, Ilonar Frosch, surprised many by winning election as mayor, proving pedigree is not always necessary for influence.

ONDAR

The Ondar clan are a relatively recent addition to Malborn's highest circles, their wealth built upon a vast trading fleet that has become the city's maritime lifeblood. The Ondar Consortium exports phosphate and other Malborn goods to distant ports, returning with timber, livestock, grains, spices, and whatever luxuries the Upper City demands.

PHOBAS

Not one of the highest, but one of the largest estates in the High City belongs to the divided Phobas family. Traditionally the Phobas have a dangerous reputation: necromancers, dealers with demons, poisoners, and vengeful schemers. Their mansion has whole wings that visitors are not invited to enter—or at least not invited to leave afterwards. While their wealth has waned in recent generations their long history of wickedness ensures that the Upper City cannot just discount them.

However, recently the family has suffered something of a change. A scion of the last generation went strongly against type, turning to the Maker and the career of a paladin, and seeking to redeem their family line and clean up the city. Various of the current generation have followed in their footsteps, producing respected figures, including Dragan Phobas, the current Marshal Major of the City Watch. However, others of the Phobas clan have cloven absolutely to the family's traditional malevolence, which must make for awkward reunions.

SILVON

House Silvon is one of Malborn's premier families of artificers, supplying much of the machinery that keeps the city moving, from clockwork creatures to complex nautical devices. The house was founded centuries ago by Silvon, a paladin who broke from another noble house to establish his own lineage. He later stepped down as patriarch to govern Old Hunger, where the failure of his reforms passed into legend. Generations later, Silvon artificers created the first selenikinetic flywheel, the stardust-powered mechanism upon which most modern malborne machinery now depends.

TALVIR

House Talvir has long been celebrated as one of Malborn's great patrons of art and music, though their devotion to culture is often indistinguishable from indulgence. For centuries they have funded operas and traveling performers whose spectacles blur the line between refinement and decadence. Many of Malborn's most celebrated musicians owe their careers to Talvir patronage, and many more owe them darker favors. Their estates are notorious for extravagant concerts and masked revels that draw the bored elite of the Upper City into nights of excess that are spoken of only in whispers the following morning.

It is widely said that the Talvir have close ties to some of Malborn's most prestigious law firms. Whether these connections explain why so many Talvir scandals seem to disappear once they reach the courtroom is a matter of considerable speculation.

THEGN

House Thegn is one of Malborn's great architectural families, responsible for many of the towers, bridges, monuments, and grand buildings that shape the Upper City. Thegn architects are known for combining engineering skills with designs bold enough to satisfy even the most extravagant noble patron. The family's most famous recent member was Irinar Thegn, the visionary architect behind the Maker's Cathedral. His great project was devastated by the fire that raged within the unfinished structure. Irinar later withdrew from public life and eventually vanished.

VALENAR

House Valenar is one of Malborn's older noble lines, and until recently seemed destined for a comfortable decline. That changed when the family gained access to the secrets of the selenikinetik flywheel. Rather than develop the technology themselves, the Valenars cultivated the rising House Silvon through carefully arranged marriages, generous investments, and business partnerships that made them appear indispensable allies. By the time House Silvon realized how much they had shared, Valenar workshops were already producing their own machinery. The family's fortunes have since revived considerably.

SELENIKINETIC FLYWHEELS

A basic selenikinetik engine consists of two enchanted flywheels mounted beside one another on separate spindles and powered by stardust. Once activated, the wheels spin in opposite directions, transferring their motion through gears, shafts and pistons to drive almost any mechanical device. The power is not endless. As the stardust weakens, the flywheels slow and eventually stop until more is supplied.

The greatest artifices use dozens of flywheels working in concert, each controlling a different limb, joint, or tool. Every wheel must be enchanted to move in harmony with the others, while a broader enchantment impresses upon the completed machine the tasks it is expected to perform.

The more complex the movement, the greater the skill required. A nautical engine may require only a few coordinated motions. A clockwork animal that can walk, climb, and grasp without embarrassing its maker is another matter entirely.

Malborn's great talent has always been turning impossible things into ordinary machinery.

—Fistan Gol, Archimandrite

VINTNER'S SPECIAL

A famous elixir that was first introduced to the streets of Malborn under Vesseric Vintner. The stuff is absolutely banned, and everyone denounces its use, especially those who hide a bottle in their cellars. Since being banned, the supply of the substance has dried up, and remaining bottles are jealously hoarded, often by the great and powerful of Malborn.

Vintner's Special is generally found in small bottles, containing one large dose or a handful of smaller applications. It is an oily, viscous substance, that must be well-mixed with wine or some other strong liquid. It has neither taste nor smell.

Its purpose is to thoroughly corrupt the mind of the drinker with some new belief or idea, in order to ruin their reputation, win them over to a faction, or to force them to overlook some inconvenient secret that they might have uncovered. Because of the insidious nature of the substance, nobody truly knows how often it has been used, or what falsehoods it has promulgated throughout the city.

So common is the fear of Vintner's Special that citizens will often blame it for any sufficiently strange change in behavior, particularly when the alternative is admitting that someone has simply gone mad, fallen in love, or become an idiot.

VINTNER

House Vintner is an ancient and indulgent family famous for its extravagant feasts and celebrations. They operate breweries, wineries, and distilleries that produce ale, mead, and fine wines consumed throughout Malborn.

Once the house wielded far greater influence, but its reputation was permanently tarnished centuries ago by Vesseric Vintner, an ancestor who ruled much of the Pit as a criminal overlord. Though generations have passed, the scandal still clings to the family name.

YONG

The Yong family once controlled rich phosphate mines beneath Malborn, but new deposits claimed by House Frosch have pushed them into decline. Recently, rumors have spread that Yong agents are meeting with triton envoys from the underwater city of Sinsidre, ancient enemies of the sahuagin. This is no small matter: Malborn's harbors are protected by the Razor Shell Guard, a force composed entirely of sahuagin and one of the city's most important allies. If the rumors are true, House Yong may be placing that relationship in serious jeopardy.



NOTABLE FIGURES OF THE UPPER CITY

MAYOR ILONAR FROSCH

Ilonar Frosch is not from any of the great and powerful Upper City families. Instead, the Frosch have lurked around the outskirts of Malborn high society for generations, surfacing as mediators, advisors, intermediaries, and office-fillers, whilst never taking sides in a quarrel or giving themselves over to any one faction or patron.

In such a way the family has become a secure fixture of polite society with considerable troves of hidden wealth, enormous influence, and a healthy stock of other people's secrets. Some of the Frosch have been philanthropists and patrons of arts and culture, whilst others have been hedonists and wastrels. Ilonar, on the face of him, appears to be more the second, a short, plump, and happy little man who bumbles through life with a merry chortle, makes clownish mistakes, laughs at himself, and laments that the role of Mayor, which he has held on several separate occasions, never allows him to actually do anything.

Petitioners bringing their complaints to him can always be sure of a sympathetic ear and leave Ilonar's office convinced that he entirely understands them and would solve all their problems if only the wicked bureaucracy of the city would untie his hands.

Despite his harmless appearance, rumors persist that Ilonar is far more calculating than he seems. Critics accuse him of offering popular causes just enough support to claim credit while withholding the resources needed for meaningful change. Others point to criminals who receive warnings, corrupt officials who escape scrutiny,

and wealthy offenders whose interests are quietly protected. None of these allegations have ever been traced directly to the mayor.

Ilonar has survived numerous scandals and threats without lasting harm, often learning of plots against him before they unfold. Some whisper that he maintains contacts throughout Malborn's government and underworld, though his reputation remains remarkably clean. Reformers particularly hostile to his administration have occasionally vanished, but no evidence has ever connected him to their disappearance.

CASPIAR ARKELANDER

Caspiar Arkelander is the current head of House Arkelander, one of Malborn's oldest and most respected noble families. By tradition, he also serves as the master of Arkelander Academy, the great institution that bears his family's name and educates students from every stratum of the city and beyond.

Now well into his golden years, Caspiar is rarely seen in public. When he does appear, it is usually at formal functions tied to the academy or matters of civic importance, where he conducts himself with dignity and restraint. He is known less for grand speeches than for measured words and an unwavering commitment to the ideals his house represents.

Under his stewardship, the Arkelander legacy of service continues. The family remains closely associated with charitable works, educational patronage, and the mediation of disputes between rival houses. Many in Malborn still look to the Arkelanders as a moral counterweight to the city's more self-interested powers, and Caspiar is seen as a living embodiment of that tradition.



SILFIN MALABRATE-ONDAR

The ancient house of Malabrate dwells in their high floating mansion over the Upper City, the highest of the high. They are decadent, vastly wealthy but mostly withdrawn from Malborn society save for the youngest of their scions. The Ondar clan are a more recent addition to the higher echelons of society; their wealth harvested from expeditions to other lands and trade with foreign magnates. Their meteoric and gold-fueled rise brought them just high enough to touch fingers with the Malabrates' ancient privilege, and from that meeting a union arose, the child of which is Silfin.

Silfin, now, is a handsome malborne man, solidly built, combining Ondar charm and good looks with the Malabrate pallor and aristocratic mien. Refusing to just retreat from the world as his elder relatives might prefer, he remains a fixture in Upper City society, invited to the best parties, welcome in every mansion. His public reputation is impeccable. Which, in Malborn, means a hedonist possessed of a cruel wit, but very rich and good company. The influence that he wields ensures that most of the high town will go to great lengths to oblige him. Whilst some might harbor suspicions that there is more going on in Silfin's life than festivities, luxury, and the usual banal cruelties of the rich, accusations against him receive no support and doom the accuser to social exile—and possibly worse.

YPO USGATH

Ypo Usgath is the principal partner of Usgath & Associates, widely regarded as the most powerful and effective legal firm in Malborn. His rise from obscure beginnings to the center of the city's legal and political life has been nothing short of remarkable. Today, his firm represents an extraordinary range of clients, from merchant consortiums and guild leaders to some of the most influential noble families in the Upper City. It is said that nearly every major house in Malborn has relied on Usgath's services at one time or another.

Yet there is something unsettling about his success. Usgath & Associates does not simply win cases; it reshapes them. Evidence appears, disappears, or is reinterpreted with uncanny efficiency. Rivals find themselves entangled in complications they cannot easily escape. Clients who retain Ypo's services often discover that their problems vanish, though not always in ways they fully understand.

In the Pit, Ypo is regarded with a mixture of awe and fear. His firm occasionally represents those from the lower districts who can afford his fees, offering a rare path to justice in a place where such things are scarce. Yet rumors cling to his name. Whispers tie him to numerous illicit trades, including angel breath, forged documents, and contraband smuggled through the Pit. Whether true or not, his reputation for unquenchable greed is beyond dispute. Among the people of the Pit, he is known by another name: Ypo, the Maw.





CHAPTER 4

OLD HUNGER

WHEN THE CITY OF MALBORN WAS FIRST FOUND-
ed, its architects were giving form to a dream
of elegance and perfection. Were they not the
scions of angels placed amongst the merely mortal? Surely
their city would be a paragon of peace and wonder, the
envy of the world.

Just as their self-image failed to match reality, so the
city that they created fell short of their lofty ideals. Mal-
born is a wonder, certainly, but it is not a place of peace.
The malborne themselves, the people who raised its
towers to glorify their name, were already a deeply flawed
people when they first laid stone on stone. Factious, hedo-
nistic, selfish, and proud, they wrote their flaws into the
crooked streets of the city they built. Small wonder that
wickedness and dissent bred in every shadow.

Over the centuries the city fought two interlinked wars
against itself: the wealthy who made the laws and con-
trolled the resources against those they used and exploited
and constantly stamped back down; the forces of order
who maintained the structure and workings of Malborn
society against those who would eat away at the city's
foundations and bring everything crashing down. And
whilst, theoretically, those defenders of order should be
as concerned with corruption graft against the mighty
as they were with the hosts of the hungry and desperate
turning to crime to fill their bellies, historically it has
seldom been so.

The custodians of order in Malborn have tried mul-
tiple different deterrents and solutions to the tides of
crime that perennially wash through the city's streets.
Some regimes have instituted draconian policies where
the least dissent or disorder is met by death. Other
regimes instead tried to re-educate villains, either by
kindness or by magic, but the resources for such pro-
grams always ended up devoured by the greedy and the
crooked within government.

People think this place breaks you. No.
It just shows everyone exactly what you're
worth. Most don't like the answer.

—Olvarin Bloek, Crime Lord



Then came Gordrene the Mason, whose statue can still be seen outside the Halls of Justice. Gordrene was a malborne of visionary purpose and unmitigated pride. She would provide the city with the solution to its teeming criminal population. She would build a prison. No mere set of holding cells or correctional facilities, but a prison that would, in her words, “weigh on the minds of the people of this city, so that they feel it always as a pressure, a load on their backs. Let them never be free of the knowledge of what awaits them should they fall from grace.”

Her other famous quote, inscribed over the main portal of the prison she built, is “Malborn possesses an eternal hunger for wrongdoing. In these halls we shall starve it.” Hence, within a generation, the Carceral Fortress of Malborn became known only as Old Hunger to high and low alike.

You have to do something serious, to end up in Old Hunger. Learning from the lessons of harsher times, just stealing a loaf or getting into a punch up will not get a ruffian through the doors. Entry requires either a grievous enough crime, or a powerful enough enemy within the city. For centuries, the prison has devoured the unlucky, the rebellious, the determinedly criminal, and the truly vile. Since Old Hunger opened its gates, Malborn has by no means been free of crime, but Gordrene’s intent has come to pass. From the highest official taking bribes to the meanest thug drawing a knife in the streets, the thought of Old Hunger is always there. For every crime committed, there are many who draw back from the brink for fear that their lives will fall into the shadow of those walls.

LAYOUT

The exterior of Old Hunger is bleak, ugly, forbidding, and visible from as many points in the city as possible. The guilty minded find that Malborn’s streets constantly lead their gaze down vistas and alleys to some part of the prison’s jagged exterior. It is a panopticon in reverse. Rather than a constant surveillance of the guilty, Old Hunger derives its power from being constantly surveyed. Many of the prison’s towers, lamps, and walls are less concerned with keeping prisoners confined, or watching over them, and exist simply to stamp the fact of the prison on the city’s collective mind.

GENERAL PRISON QUARTERS

The main body of Old Hunger is made up of the ‘regular’ cells, those over which the guards still exercise a degree of control. This control varies a great deal depending on just who the big dog amongst the prisoners is, and a number of personalities vie with the guards and each other for influence over the prison. However, the bottom line for the main body of the prison is that the governor could bring down the full force of her staff and smash any kind of resistance. Those powers that exist in the prison, outside the Jungle, must respect that, and reach their individual accommodations.

The prison is laid out in a series of rings descending into the earth. The layout is intentionally confusing, and individual detachments of guards tend to be assigned to the same section of corridors and cells so that

they become familiar with their beat. Prisoners trying to escape into the wider prison often become lost and are soon recaptured or fall prey to some of the prison's more monstrous inhabitants. On top of this there are various punishments that the prison can deploy, and exhibit to the incarcerated populace at large, generally keeping the run of prisoners in line.

THE JUNGLE

Malborn attracts the powerful, the corrupt, and the depraved. The byzantine nature of the city's structure and society generates a disproportionate number of home-grown monsters and attracts many from outside who come seeking the wealth, power and knowledge of the people of Malborn. As if these criminals are not enough, there are even worse terrors that stalk the city's streets, monsters from other planes and horrors conjured by wicked—or ill-prepared—magicians. Any of these villains and monsters that are caught end up in Old Hunger, and as a result the number of prisoners holding great political, magical, or physical power proves a challenge for even the most capable governor. How to keep such formidable evildoers in line?

Almost two centuries ago one governor finally snapped. Faced with the risk of losing control over the entire prison to dangerous inmates the guards could not control, he abandoned an entire wing of Old Hunger to its own devices. From then on, this wing has been used to house the worst of offenders: psychopathic killers, supernatural terrors, powerful criminal overlords, and fallen scions of influential families whose incarceration had barely

blunted their ability to continue their business. Concentrating all these formidable villains in one place allows the prison administration to at least nominally keep their charges within the prison but they have abandoned the pretense that they actually control this part of Old Hunger. It is the wing the guards never visit, they only keep a strong watch over it. They call it the Jungle.

THE COOLER

Disciplining unruly inmates is a daily part of the prison staff's routine. Given the volatile mix consigned to Old Hunger, this often requires a good old beat down of insubordinate or aggressively feuding prisoners. Most consider this an unfortunate but necessary display of violence but plenty of guards actually get a sadistic enjoyment from abusing their power and single prisoners out simply because they dislike them. The prison has a variety of severe and public punishments available to control the populace, but when prisoners simply need a lesson to bring them back into line, they are taken to the Cooler. Sunk far deeper into the earth than the rest of the prison, and subject to some peculiar magical physics, being sent to 'cool off' in the Cooler is a sobering and alienating experience.

A great deal about the Cooler is mysterious, known only to Old Hunger's original founders. It is architecturally distinct and boasts a variety of peculiar features not common to the prison as a whole. Rumor suggests that, in delving deep, the institution's builders did not so much create as discover the region now housing the Cooler and came to an arrangement with its masters.





NOTABLE FIGURES OF OLD HUNGER

THE GOVERNOR

Old Hunger had many different governors over the years. Some were ardent reformers attempting to unpick the Gordian knot of venality, vice, and insanity that the prison has become. Others were petty tyrants who enjoyed lording it over the unfortunates placed in their care. Some even rose from the ranks of the guilty and others descended into those ranks after their excesses became known. The current governor, Surgeon General Lirin Corsar, is all of the above. Lirin was a crooked scion of a noble Malborn family who believed that she could uncover the secret to perfecting the moral fiber of the city.

Her experiments killed a great many before she was caught and consigned to Old Hunger. She never lost her high-city friends, and she never stopped writing her philosophical tracts. Rather than the quest for physical improvement common to many deranged academics, Lirin is obsessed with the unique philosophical standing of the malborne, viewing the angel-touched nature of her people as the gateway to moral perfection. Her experiments involved attempts to transplant, copy, and distil personality traits that could then be spread like a 'benign plague' to those districts of the city she considered unwholesome. In short, she tortured a great many paladins and philanthropists trying to isolate the quality of 'goodness'.

Lirin's writings remained influential despite her personal failures, and after the retirement of the then-governor, she was promoted to the role despite her criminal status. It was believed, by the city's governance, that she could do little to make Old Hunger worse, and perhaps turning the place into her playground might even do some good. What looked, on the face of it, like an appallingly irresponsible idea has yet to have catastrophic consequences.

SHMARALK THE SMELL

Shmaralk the Smell has run the kitchens of Old Hunger for well over a decade. Loose in the city, the troglodyte priest of the Eater sacrificed and devoured several victims before the Owlfather apprehended it. Within the structured bounds of Old Hunger, however, Shmaralk revealed a very different side of its nature. The Eater is a god of food, in a way, and the responsibility of feeding the prison apparently counts as a religious duty. Hence, while the creature is not regarded particularly fondly by anyone, it is tolerated for the curiously joyous enthusiasm it brings to running the prison kitchens, and thus far only a small number of kitchen staff have mysteriously vanished.



MOSTLY

The administrative records of the prison are also administered by inmates. These duties are overseen by Morselli Porlar, known as 'Mostly' to the guards. Once a powerful warlock running a gang in the city, she fell afoul of the Owlfather. During their confrontation, her failures angered her fiendish patron, who punished her by taking ... half of her. Mostly appears like a malborne woman illuminated to one side by a bright light, except those parts of her the light would fall on are simply not there, neither seen nor tangible. Whilst she can still walk around and function, the condition is sporadically inconvenient and impedes her magical abilities. She retains an organized mind and has proved an able administrator of the prison's records, such as they are. She is also extremely corruptible, and those seeking information about inmates within the prison's walls will find her bitter and eminently ready to be bribed.

Half of me's missing, and I'm still more complete than most people in here.

—Morselli Mostly Porlar

OLVARIN BLÆK

In contrast, Olvarin Blæk is the soul of pragmatism. He had a thriving career as a gang master and crime boss in Malborn, before the Owlfather brought him in. Olvarin, a man from the lowest of the stews, rose through ruthlessness and intellect to become one of the great players in Malborn's underworld. When the Owlfather put him away, the great and the good breathed a sigh of relief. The alliance of gangs Olvarin had brought together broke up and his menace was thought over.

Blæk never really went away, though, simply shifted his grip on the city. He does not directly control criminal goings-on above, but a great many daring heists, kidnappings, and silencing of witnesses happen to his plan. Lesser criminals smuggle gifts into Old Hunger to receive his blessing and advice, and it is said that if you need anything stolen, any secret uncovered, or anyone made to disappear, then Blæk knows someone who can make it happen. He has only grown richer since being imprisoned.

In the Jungle he has a whole court of bravos, thieves, and backstreet spellcasters to call on. In Old Hunger as a whole, half the population are beholden to him through loyalty, opportunism, or blackmail, a proportion that extends to the guards and staff. Blæk might have something on everyone, and the governor knows it. Additionally, Blæk is more palatable to deal with than most of his rivals, and so from time to time the governor shores up his power to prevent worse creatures from taking over.



STORY: PINNED TO THE HOOK

WRITTEN BY DAVID W. SNEE

Sewal squinted, clamping a ten-ex monocle between his brow and cheekbone. It enlarged his view as he torqued a screw to adjust the tension of a silver-jawed bear trap. He'd oxidized the silver, blackening it to match. His late wife would have chastised: you're supposed to polish silver. Worse, he'd melted her spoons. But what's a little guilt compared to cabinet space?

The bell above his door chimed. A young lady entered. Elfin features, though not an elf, or so said her ears. "Is this the secondhand tool shop?"

"That's what the sign says." He'd perfected the art of grumbling through a smile.

"I'm Treefrog," she said. "Or I will be once I get started." She wore a mint-green cat's eye mask over freckled cheeks. And a bright smile despite obvious jitters. "I came to get kitted out. They said this was the place."

He could not disagree. They chatted about the latest: sightings, rumors, bounties. He fitted her boots with detachable climbing spikes and checked the coil in her grapple for wear.

"I don't want to make a name so much as a difference," she shared, apropos of nothing. She wanted someone to know.

"Try it now." He returned her rappelling harness, which now snugly hugged her hind parts. He could sense his late wife's scowl. "What have you got by way of weaponry?" She was about the age his son had been when he first learned how to wield a blade.

She showed him a sleeve of darts and a dagger. He sold her a crossbow on credit. His way of hoping she'd survive long enough to pay him back. When the conversation lulled, her eyes locked on the gear in the case on the wall: glider cape, rebreather, darkvision goggles. A vision of pride and shame. "Whose?"

Sewal's face felt heavy. "He called himself Skyguard."

"What happened?"

"Look closer."

She did. Her eyes slowly found each detail, the stitched seams, the faded leather dye where blood had been scrubbed away. He could mend the shell but not the man inside. She turned inside the doorway as she left and gave a shy, hopeful wave. Then, with a rattle of bells, she was gone.

His thoughts drifted as a downpour pattered the roof.

A knock from the back proved a mercy. He hurried to open the door and found Vrek with the hem of his robe over his head in the alley. Showing skinny white legs and undergarments.

"Some umbrella."

"Can't all be decent." Vrek' yellow smile had more gaps than teeth. He pushed his way inside.

Sewal peeked under the tarp that covered the wheelbarrow outside. Dented bascinet, scimitar with a chipped edge, arrows whose heads were still flecked with red.

Vrek blew into his hands. "You got tea or something?" By "something," he meant ale.

Sewal's silence meant "no." He pulled a purse off the shelf and handed it to him.



As he left, Vrek called over his shoulder, "Constable Una sends word. Calling in a favor. She's got people stuck in a death contraption at Lotus Temple."

When he was gone, Sewal stood alone with the name. Una. She'd courted his son.

The past knew everything but mercy.

Midday shadows engulfed the high-walled city. More so lower, and he was bound for the bottom, where noon looked black as night. Lotus Temple: a monastery in the heart of the slums. The surrounding wooden fence, replete with barnacles, had once been a pier. Rusted crab traps still dangled from the corner mooring pillars.

In the muddy courtyard, opiated monks lounged on straw mats, chewing flower petals. Flat, canny looks in their deadened eyes. Something other than disinterest as they gazed at the cylindrical glass contraption with one of their own seated cross-legged at the bottom.

City guards were present at a comfortable distance, if not a safe one. They leaned against standard-issue halberds, overcoats slick with drizzle that hissed off lit torches. Rain helped with the smell at first, human odors and garbage, but would make matters worse when it passed.

Una, stern as ever, waved him through. Her perfect features came off more stony than beautiful. The last of her warmth fled with his son. She didn't bother with hello. "Artificers say it's mechanical, not magical."

Sewal nodded, then walked around the encasement. Two compartments, top and bottom. Below, a monk beaded with sweat, wearing stained yellow robes. He mumbled inaudible mantras with his eyes closed. Above, a stir of angry green fluid—acid, separated by a thin partition. "Not complicated," Sewal observed. It hardly qualified as mechanical. "More a feat of glassblowing."

Her flat stare found his appraisal unhelpful. "Feat of logistics too—how they'd move the materials? Get him inside?"

His mind combed the possibilities, more of them than she'd want to hear. He caught her watching him in his periphery. Her hand rested on the pommel of the rapier hung at her side. "You didn't ask me here for an expert opinion."

"Short list of people that could make a thing like this." Her reasoning was superficially sound. But her wounded tone betrayed a desire to punish something for the loss they shared. Why not him? He might even understand.

"My days haven't darkened that far."

A nod. She wore her melancholy well. "Third like this. Well, not like this exactly—"

Something whizzed between them and careened off the glass. Cracks spread in a branching web-pattern from the small circular impact crater.

Una drew her weapon. The guards began scanning the rooftops.

The monk inside flinched. He began thumbing prayer beads.

As Sewal searched for a way to get him out, he noticed a thin lattice of etching along the glass interior. Fault lines carved almost imperceptibly. The container had been designed to shatter, not to hold.

"Well?" Una said after sending a guard in the direction of the shot.

Sewal's heartbeat throbbed in his fingertips. "I'm thinking."

A crash against the glass on the other side. More cracks. This time, the projectile exploded into pebbles.

Una sent a guard in the direction of the second shot. "Think faster."

Inside, the monk's body wracked with trembles.

Sewal bent to examine the bottom. They couldn't lift it off. Too heavy. Connected. They'd destabilize the acid. Endanger themselves. The monk must have been lowered in from the top. Before the separator. Before the acid. No getting him out the same way.

Third shot, third direction. The cracks on different sides began to join, their spread sounding like snow underfoot. Acid shifted as the structure wobbled. A drop leaked onto the monk's palm. He gasped, screamed, stood, shouted. The fluid dissolved skin and flesh, exposing bone with a snake of black smoke.

Sewal spoke as fast as he could. "If we had time, I would raise it with pulleys and beams, then drill holes and remove him from underneath."

"We don't have any of that," Una said. She drew a spyglass from her pocket, extended it, and peered through the lens.

Sewal stared down the same facts, trying to force insight, but arrived at the same wretched nothing. Three shots from three sides impacted at once. Were there really six shooters? Cracks made the cylinder opaque. The foggy shape of the monk inside rose and began to pound on the glass, leaving bloody red circles where his hands hit splinters.

"Don't—" Sewal warned him.

Una dragged Sewal away by the collar. "Too late."

To his surprise, he found his feet struggling against her. Ineffectually, as it were. His heart sank when the cylinder collapsed. Jagged shards minced muscle and tendon. Acid bubbled with a froth of pink human mucus. The acrid burning smell produced bile in his throat.

He'd been too quick to dismiss the engineering. At first, he'd thought it sloppy, but cruelty was its function: suspense, futility, physical pain, mental torture. To that end, it was flawless.

Guards returned bearing miniature arbalests which had been pre-aimed on tripods—there had been zero shooters present. At each location, they found a piece of stained yellow hero's costume.

Sewal took a moment aside to settle his nerves, missing the calm of his shop.

Una approached. "Nothing?" An ache in her tone said she didn't want to be in it alone.

He shared what he'd seen of a maker's mark on some of the materials. To his surprise, she brightened, asked if it



were local. He shook his head and gave her a short list of import locations: "Start with the Ondar Emporium." Her smile made the whole thing almost worthwhile. She left without waving. His son always had good taste.

Then he wandered until he could doubt it had happened, savoring the pleasure of an empty mind. He rubbed at the ache in his arthritic knuckles, feeling washed by the disinterest of the passing crowd. Though it didn't last long. Pity wrenched his heart for a teenage girl, huddled beneath a blanket, selling curried rat from a clay bowl warming on ashes. She dished it into his cupped hand, she said, because she didn't have anything to put it in when he bought it from her. He smiled and said that's how he liked it best. Though the smell of the spices made him salivate, the reality of the meat kept his stomach locked up. He knelt and fed it to a stray dog a few blocks up, once the girl couldn't see him. The mutt didn't seem to mind a bit and even followed him.

"What's your name, boy?" he asked the dog, but if it wasn't food, the dog wasn't interested. He stood to find a hooded stranger barring his path, pale with unremarkable features: gray eyes, some stubble, shaggy hair. He could be anyone, yet Sewal knew him for the killer. Something unkind about his quiet demeanor.

Anger bristled beneath his flat, even voice. "I see we understand each other."

Fear clenched Sewal's body. "I'm Sewal." His voice shook in the saying.

"I know who you are."

Had the man been monitoring the scene at the monastery, his handiwork? Had he followed Sewal out? From vanity, concern? Enjoyment or covering his tracks?

Sewal did his best to look harmless, which wasn't hard at his age. Without any enthusiasm, he offered his hand. "What should I call you?"

"Nothing at all. I'm just a collector of masks." The stranger took his hand and clasped it tightly. Sewal was surprised to find it warm.

He withdrew his own and wiped it, now as wet with sweat as dog slobber and curry. A look around told him running wouldn't get him far, not with his knees. And every passerby had enough problems of their own. "Do you mind walking an old man back to his shop?"

From his look, the stranger understood the question for what it was: a request not to die bleeding in the street. "Certainly." No harm in that past the harm intended. He linked arms and rested a palm, almost tenderly, on Sewal's bicep. A performance for the crowd, who would not look close enough to see anything but a loving son, doting on his father.

Meanwhile, his real son lay dead and buried. Sewal drew strength from the outrage and did nothing to hide the trembling in his body. He set their pace, a slow stroll. "The monk was a vigilante?" He hadn't seemed so, but why else would he become the target of a mask collector.

The stranger huffed by way of laughter, then considered whether he would play along. Whether threat was worth amusement. Finally, a nod.



"What about the other two?" Sewal recalled what Una told him.

"More than two." Tone gave the air of understatement.

Sewal couldn't help but shake his head. "For what reason?"

A flash of anger in the stranger's eye gave warning. He would not stand for insults or, worse, being compared to any other. "Someone has to protect the criminals from crime fighters." He tried to make it light, but it sounded heavy.

Sewal took a winding path that avoided alleys, hoping the stranger didn't know the way or was too distracted to notice. The stray dog's forepaws clacked the cobblestones behind them.

"It's the righteousness?" he asked. "Their superiority."

The stranger shook his head. "If I killed all those, who would be left?"

Neither could manage a laugh.

"Maybe a few old men whom time has robbed of their illusions?" Sewal tried.

"They're not so different than monks." The stranger gave a sinister smile.

Sewal swallowed, remembering the last monk he'd seen, and couldn't find words.

"Only a jest, old fellow."

Right, they shared a trade, or something thereabouts. "The trap, I admire your craft."

"Self-taught."

"A prodigy, then."

The stranger shook his head but accepted. "Needs must."

The words rang of honesty. How had he learned? Sewal considered possibilities: a hunter, a soldier—pest control. He imagined a hungry child paid a pittance to play rat-catcher. Absent entertainments past his own contraptions.

"You've gone quiet," the stranger observed.

Sewal perked, stammered. He knew he would only live for as long as he could stave off the man's boredom, a killer's inner emptiness. "Sorry, I'd been distracted by a rat—half the size of a cat, it looked."

The stranger tensed. "No crimes against those." He gazed at passersby when he said it.

Time for a risk: "Perhaps you should name yourself Ratcatcher?"

The stranger halted, tightened his grip, eyes seething.

"Never," he said through gritted teeth.

Sewal felt the sharp prick of a knife against his ribs. He drew breath, inadvertently, though the image in his mind was not of his own death, but his son's. Lives converging.

"How much further?" the stranger demanded, and Sewal released the breath, feeling his skin ease back toward the knife. His gambit revealed the stranger didn't know where they were headed.

"Just about there," he said, wishing it brought comfort. He willed his beating pulse to abate as he led them to the docks. Had Una believed him and gone? His life now depended on whether she'd taken his advice seriously.

The stranger slowed as they approached the bustling waterfront. Movement: of waves on the water, the crowd on the street, the gulls in the sky. And all the sound that goes with.

Sewal gently dragged him forward, pretending not to notice the stall. "I rent a warehouse loft. Plenty private—they leave me alone." He couldn't tell which of them was the worm but had to keep it pinned to the hook to catch what would come.

The stranger reasserted himself, prodding Sewal forward. They entered under a sign that read: ONDAR EMPORIUM. As they stepped inside, Una cast a confused look in their direction. She had been leaning over a table, checking logs.

"What's this?" whispered the stranger. Knife bit into skin.

"Relax." Sewal winced. "She probably just has follow-up questions."

"Send her off."

Before she could speak, he said, "What brings you to my office?"

Una canted her head.

The stranger plastered a smile on his face and kept glancing around.

"I wanted to invite you for dinner," she said. Awkwardness sold the lie. "You seemed lonely when we spoke, but I see you've found a friend."

The stranger raised his free hand in a wave.

"I've found two friends." Sewal slowly knelt to pet the dog and felt the knife tip slide down his spine. This forced the stranger to withdraw it to keep it concealed.

The dog buried his face in Sewal's hands. Rubbing its ears, Sewal tipped his head toward the stranger. "My son spent his life seeking such a friend." With that, he wrapped the dog in a hug and suddenly rolled forward. Coward that he was, he closed his eyes. And when he landed on his ass past Una, he turned to see her posed in a lunge, the scabbard at her side empty. The line of her arm flowed through to the rapier that pierced the stranger's chest.

A knife clattered on the warehouse floor. The stranger hit his knees. A red line marred his dumbfounded expression, leaking from a corner of his lip. Sewal met his stare and did not hate him but could not find pity either. The dog scrambled away without looking back, having eaten the costliest handful of food in its life.

When the stranger collapsed, Una withdrew her rapier from his corpse and gave Sewal a hand so he could stand. "What have you done?"

Sewal blew air, then confessed, "Built a trap out of conversation, I suppose." It took a while to explain. By then, the rain had stopped. He avoided his reflection in the puddles, rushed through his shop to the back, and found himself sobbing in the alley as he ran shaking hands through the pile of new goods at his stoop. Sewal relaxed, at last, when he failed to find a mint green cat's eye mask.



CREATING A VIGILANTE

THIS CHAPTER IS DIVIDED INTO TWO SECTIONS: Vigilante Backgrounds and Vigilante Guises.

The Backgrounds section presents backgrounds suited to vigilante characters in Malborn. Each background determines your Profession and Anchor, defining your place in the city, the contacts you can rely upon, and the enemies who stand against you.

The Vigilante Guise section provides guidance for creating the identity your character adopts while fighting crime. It helps define the vigilante's name, appearance, costume, methods, and reputation. These choices are entirely cosmetic and grant no additional game features.

VIGILANTE BACKGROUNDS

A Vigilante Background determines your character's Secret Identity and Anchor. Together, these define the life they lead outside their vigilante identity and the person who keeps them connected to that life.

Each Vigilante Background includes all the elements of a standard Background, with the addition of the following:

Secret Identity. Your Secret Identity is the work your character performs when not operating as a vigilante. It determines how you earn a living and provides useful contacts, resources, and legitimate access within Malborn. A detective might enter a crime scene, a pit fighter could enter a hangout favored by criminals, and a journalist might question witnesses while investigating a story. Your Secret Identity gives you opportunities to pursue criminals without revealing your vigilante identity.

Anchor. Your Anchor is a trusted confidant who connects you to your ordinary life and reminds you that there is more to life than vengeance and justice. Your Vigilante Background determines your Anchor and the practical services or assistance they can provide during the adventure.

CUSTOMIZING YOUR VIGILANTE BACKGROUND

With your DM's permission, you can replace your Secret Identity or Anchor with one provided by another Vigilante Background.

CRUSADER

Ability Scores: Charisma, Wisdom, Strength

Feat: Tough

Skill Proficiencies: Religion, Intimidation

Tool Proficiency: Mason's Tools, Smith's Tools

Equipment: Mason's Tools, Healer's Kit, Blanket, Basket, Fine Clothes, Common Clothes, 10 GP

You were once someone of principles. Obey the Words of the Magistrates. Avoid the Five Disrespects. Pray to the Maker. Be the first to work and the last to leave. But this city has a way of whittling away at such men, as criminals spit on the law, the police grow corrupt and inept, and fiendish elites grow ever fatter from your own blood, sweat, and tears.

You are now someone of imperatives. Law, personal ethics, and even religion are guiding lights this place has abandoned for far too long, and it has nothing but rot to show for it. You will restore these non-negotiables to Malborn, by force if necessary.

For players who love: Batman, Rorschach

Goal: Shut down every lotus den in the Hunger District.

SECRET IDENTITY

City Watch Officer. During the day, you are a part of Malborn's police force. Despite the overwhelming filth spread around the Pit, most of your days are spent in idleness, as most of your colleagues look the other way in return for bribes or simply enjoy lazy pay checks. Whenever there is an important enough crime, however, you are the first to move, easily gaining access to crime scenes, even if witnesses in the lower districts rarely trust you and your uniform.

A law that protects the strong and arrests the starving isn't law. It's a club. I've got two fists, and I'm happy to argue the point.

—Duorende



CRUSADER ANCHOR

Duorende is a folk hero to Malborn's poor and a menace to its criminals. Towering and broad as an ogre, he has spent years defending the oppressed with nothing but his fists, reducing overwhelming gang enforcers and corrupt watchmen alike through overwhelming strength and indomitable resolve. Though branded a wanted criminal, many in the lower districts shelter him, believing the city needs men like him more than its laws.

Even the Owlfather himself fought beside Duorende as often as he opposed him. To you, the old man is an inspiration: someone who sees the rot even among the police force, and doesn't care about going against the law if it means acting on what he believes in.

When you visit Duorende, you can purchase items from the Vigilante Equipment table found in chapter 9.

JUDICATOR

Ability Scores: Dexterity, Intelligence, Wisdom

Feat: Tough

Skill Proficiencies: Investigation, Perception

Tool Proficiency: Calligrapher's Supplies, Thieves' Tools

Equipment: Thieves' Tools, Crowbar, Hooded Lantern, Flask of Oil, Common Clothes, 10 GP

You once served the law and believed it could protect the innocent. Then the Sharp Rondel made an example of someone you loved dragging them from their home, torturing them, and leaving them mutilated as a warning to anyone who informed on the assassin's guild. You built a case against those responsible, only to watch officials lose interest. The Sharp Rondel could do whatever they want in Malborn and make the law look away. You no longer wait for judgment. You deliver it yourself.

You no longer wait for judgment. You deliver it yourself.

For players who love: The Punisher, Dirty Harry

Goal: Destroy the Sharp Rondel.

SECRET IDENTITY

City Watch Detective. You still use the skills the law taught you, even if you no longer trust the system to finish the job. As a detective, you investigate crimes by questioning suspects, reconstructing events, and gathering evidence. Your skills and credentials sometimes grant you access to crime scenes and authority to question witnesses even when the case is already under the City Watch's jurisdiction, though that doesn't stop them from squaring you up. By day, you follow procedures and build cases.

JUDICATOR ANCHOR

Your Anchor is Chan Issikar, one of Malborn's foremost legal minds. Unlike most members of the prestigious Issikar family, who rarely concern themselves with life beyond the Upper City, Chan has built his reputation representing clients from every corner of Malborn, from wealthy merchants to the destitute poor of the Pit. His integrity and compassion have earned him respect within the city's courts and among its clerks, magistrates, advocates, and record keepers.

When you yourself needed representation, Chan was there, no matter how much or little you could pay. The investigation that did take place only went as far as it did because of his insistence. He reminds you that there are glimpses of honesty and humility in Malborn, even among the rot of the City Watch.



LEGAL SERVICES

Service	Description	Cost
Alarm Order	Up to six locations of your choice are placed under the effects of the <i>Alarm</i> spell. If any alarm is triggered, you receive a message through the <i>Sending</i> spell. You can only have one such order in place at a time.	250 GP
Messenger's Writ	Court couriers deliver one message anywhere within Malborn, duplicating the effects of <i>Sending</i> .	50 GP
Open Order	Choose one locked door, gate, chest, or similar object. Within 1d4 hours, an authorized agent opens it.	150 GP
Truth Examination	A magistrate compels one willing or detained creature to answer questions while under the effects of <i>Zone of Truth</i> .	100 GP

The Upper City smells better than the Pit, but I wouldn't call that an achievement. Perfume over shit is still shit.

—Cardron the Invulnerable

REDEEMER

Ability Scores: Strength, Constitution, Charisma

Feat: Lucky

Skill Proficiencies: Athletics, Persuasion

Tool Proficiencies: Calligrapher's Supplies, Painter's Supplies

Equipment: Calligrapher's Supplies, Painter's Supplies, Parchment (10 sheets), Traveler's Clothes, Costume (your vigilante persona), 15 GP

You grew up with the rarest boons one can get in Malborn: love, safety, and dreams. Due to the effort, skills, and unusual luck of your parents, you were untouched by the horrors of the city, but, as you grew up and left home, the city's many afflictions became obvious. You know it's not right, none of it, and that the people deserve better. They can grow, they can change, and they could turn the blighted stones of rotten Malborn into glimmering marble if given the chance. You want to give them that chance.

But you know the city will fight back. Criminals and rogues won't give up without a fight. The parasitic powers that mold Malborn will never give up their privileges.

For players who love: V, Che Guevara

Major Goal: Steal or destroy the master copy of the Virtue Ledger.

Minor Goal: To lead at least one of Malborn's villains to redemption.

SECRET IDENTITY

People's Journalist. During the day, you work as a freelance journalist with a unique spin: while the city's tabloids might gorge on the horror and violence of the Pit, commodifying pain as entertainment, you spread the word on the people's efforts for good. Political movements, entrepreneurial innovation, or just a kid who saved a cat from thugs, it doesn't matter: the people should know.

GUDENE'S INFORMATION

Service	Description	Cost
Gossip	You know the last whereabouts of one creature or NPC of your choice. You have Advantage on all ability checks meant to track that creature or NPC. This benefit lasts for 24 hours.	10 GP
Protection	Gudene's Laundry takes in one creature or NPC of your choice for 3 days. If they are male, they will be dressed as a woman and hidden but will be kicked out at the first sign of misbehavior. The creature or NPC cannot be found by natural means. In addition, you have Advantage on all ability checks made to hide the creature or NPC's location or avoid giving away that information. These benefits last for 3 days.	25 GP
Disguises	Gudene finds you clothes of any type of person in the city, including the signifier of a gang or cult, a badge of the City Watch, or the uniform of an industry or nobleman's estate. You have Advantage on all ability checks made to disguise yourself and generally pretend to be someone using the clothes provided to you by Gudene.	50 GP
Fresh Clothes	Gudene's Laundry does impeccable cleaning for you and keeps all secrets of vigilante outfits. Special ointments and soap keep clothes unusually fresh.	100 GP



Even when you do chase after crime stories, it's in hopes of keeping the public safe, bringing the truth to victims, or revealing heroes who save their fellow citizens. All of this makes you unusually well-liked.

REDEEMER ANCHOR

Gudene is the owner of Gudene's Laundry. The business doubles as a refuge for women, and the matron and her workers are strict about never allowing men inside. The community fostered within leads to a lot of vulnerability and sharing of information about what's happening around the Pit, and Gudene says the clothes say a lot themselves, with scandals clear on stained, ripped, or unusually clean cloth.

In the end, Gudene reminds you of your own mother, and her corner of the Pit reminds you of home.

PENITENT

Ability Scores: Dexterity, Intelligence, Wisdom

Feat: Observant

Skill Proficiencies: Insight, Intimidation

Tool Proficiency: Thieves' Tools

Equipment: Thieves' Tools, Manacles, Crowbar, Hooded Lantern, Flask of Oil, Common Clothes, 10 GP

You once belonged to the people you now hunt. Perhaps you were a thief, assassin, smuggler, or hired killer, but something finally made the cost impossible to ignore. You were paid to transport Awakened creatures between hidden workshops and criminal buyers, telling yourself they were merely cargo. Then you saw the drugs, conditioning, and terror used to keep them obedient. You abandoned your employers and turned your knowledge of Malborn's underworld against them. Escaping your old life was only the beginning. Now you intend to undo some of what you helped create.

For players who love: Elektra, Jason Bourne, the Winter Soldier

Goal: Apprehend the creator of Malborn's Awakened creatures and free them from conditioning and drug dependence.

SECRET IDENTITY

Confessor. You learned long ago that criminals rarely surrender the truth willingly. As a confessor, you use pressure, observation, and a deep understanding of weakness to expose what others conceal. Officials sometimes grant you private access to suspects and witnesses when ordinary questioning fails. Your former life makes you especially dangerous across an interrogation table: you recognize criminal lies, coded threats, and evasions because you once relied upon the same tricks yourself.

PENITENT ANCHOR

Sayana is one of the most respected fences within the Rooks, the ambitious thieves' guild that rules much of the Pit from the shadows. As the wife of the guild's leader, Duke Pertwen IV, she occupies a position of considerable influence, though few mistake her authority as something borrowed from her husband. Every stolen jewel, smuggled relic, exotic poison, or forbidden luxury that passes through Rook House is eventually appraised by Sayana's discerning eye.

That knowledge has come at a price. Years spent testing the purity of lotus and other narcotics have left her hopelessly addicted to the flower's embrace. She hides her dependence behind wit, impeccable manners, and the aristocratic airs so beloved by the Rooks, but those closest to her recognize the quiet desperation beneath the polished exterior.



When you visit Sayana, you can purchase items from the following tables found in chapter 9:

- ♦ Lotus Petals and Seeds table
- ♦ Lotus Elixir table
- ♦ Lotus Oils table

In addition, she offers items from the Illicit Substances table.

ILLICIT SUBSTANCES

Item	Book	Cost
Antitoxin	<i>Player's Book</i>	50 GP
<i>Carrian Crawler Mucus</i>	<i>Dungeon Master's Book</i>	200 GP
<i>Essence of Ether</i>	<i>Dungeon Master's Book</i>	300 GP
<i>Malice</i>	<i>Dungeon Master's Book</i>	250 GP
Poison, Basic	<i>Player's Book</i>	100 GP
<i>Potion of Poison</i>	<i>Dungeon Master's Book</i>	100 GP
<i>Serpent Venom</i>	<i>Dungeon Master's Book</i>	200 GP
<i>Torpor</i>	<i>Dungeon Master's Book</i>	600 GP
<i>Truth Serum</i>	<i>Dungeon Master's Book</i>	150 GP

Lotus is vulgar when taken in public and exquisite when served on silver. That is the Rooks' great gift: making ruin look respectable.

—Sayana

PREDATOR

Ability Scores: Strength, Dexterity, Charisma

Feat: Tavern Brawler

Skill Proficiencies: Arcana, Investigation

Tool Proficiency: Gaming Set, Thieves' Tools

Equipment: Alchemist's Supplies, 2 Flasks, Hooded Lantern, 2 Flasks of Oil, Common Clothes, 10 GP Something inside you has always been wrong. You feel the urge to hurt, perhaps even kill, and long ago accepted that it would never disappear. So, you gave it rules. You hunt only those you believe deserve it. Many in Malborn fit that bill, but tonight, one prize has risen above all others: those involved with angel breath. When you learned of wealthy patrons consuming stolen souls before returning to their cushy lives without consequence, you knew they—and their supplier—had to go. Others may mistake what you do for heroism. You know better. Malborn simply provides an endless supply of people you can hunt without regret.

For players who love: Dexter

Major Goal: Destroy the angel breath trade and identify every Upper City patron who has consumed stolen souls.

Minor Goal: Find out if you can be changed after all and, if so, whether you really want to.

SECRET IDENTITY

Pit Fighter. You once fought as a gladiator in the House of a Hundred Knives, surviving long enough to earn fame among Malborn's fighting crowds. Though you have left the arena behind, many fighters, trainers, bookmakers, promoters, and spectators remain old friends or acquaintances. These connections still provide useful information and introductions. Your reputation also opens doors normally closed to someone of your station, as wealthy patrons, criminals, and officials are often eager to meet a celebrated former gladiator.

KALEB THUMBCRUSHER SERVICES

Service	Description	Cost
Know Their Routine	Name one criminal known to operate in Malborn. Within 1d4 hours, your Anchor uncovers the target's usual movements, habits, and schedule. You have Advantage on Initiative rolls against that creature during your first encounter with it.	100 GP
Arrange a Meeting	Your Anchor arranges a private meeting with a fighter, trainer, criminal, or patron connected to Malborn's arenas. During the meeting, you have Advantage on Charisma checks made to gain information, negotiate, intimidate, or persuade that individual.	25 GP
Bloodhound	An experienced tracker helps hunt one creature whose identity you know for up to 8 hours. During this time, you have Advantage on Investigation and Survival checks made to locate or track that creature. If the creature is in the district you are searching, the tracker also reveals its most recently known location.	100 GP
Ring Physician	A trusted arena physician treats one creature, duplicating the effects of <i>Lesser Restoration</i> .	200 GP



PREDATOR ANCHOR

Your anchor is a part of Malborn's gladiatorial elite, the proprietor of the bloodiest fighting pit in the city: Kaleb Thumbcrusher, mustachioed dwarf of the House of a Hundred Knives. He trades in unusual beasts, conjurations, lower-city prize fighters, and even prisoners smuggled from Old Hunger through deals with its governor. The fights are almost always to the death, and the House remains the Upper City's greatest open secret, protected by bribes paid to the right members of the Watch.

Kaleb is cruel, greedy, but he has always treated you with a strange paternal affection. He gave you your first important bout, never cheated you of your winnings, and protected you from promoters who would have used and discarded you. Kaleb does inspire you to be a better person, but he remembers who you were before the crowds began chanting your name, and his brutal honesty keeps you grounded when fame threatens to consume you.

WATCHMAN

Ability Scores: Charisma, Strength, Wisdom

Feat: Inspiring Leader

Skill Proficiencies: Animal Handling, Survival

Tool Proficiency: Leatherworker's Tools, Poisoner's Kit

Equipment: Leatherworker's Tools, Hunting Trap, 50 feet of Rope, Hooded Lantern, 2 Flasks of Oil, Traveler's Clothes, 10 GP

You come from a place where decent people lock their doors early and know better than to interfere. The authorities may arrive after blood has been spilled, but rarely before, so you decided your neighborhood deserved someone who would be there when danger came. The Twister Gang turned those streets into a place of beatings, disappearances, and barred windows, teaching residents that survival meant silence. As fear spread from house to house, you made protecting those streets your responsibility, whether anyone asked you to or not.

For players who love: Daredevil, Robin Hood

Major Goal: End the Twister Gang's nighttime rule over the Twister District.

Minor Goal: Find a cure for Father Broen's curse.

SECRET IDENTITY

Pest Control. Protecting a neighborhood means understanding every danger that moves through it, not merely humanoid criminals. You track, capture, relocate, or destroy creatures that threaten Malborn's streets and homes. Landlords, merchants, and the City Watch seek your expertise when strange beasts appear. Your work teaches you the city's rooftops, alleys, tunnels, smugglers, trainers, and hidden territories. Few people know your neighborhood better, whether following a monster's tracks or a criminal's escape route.

WATCHMAN ANCHOR

Your Anchor is deeply involved in Malborn's charitable community, maintaining relationships with hospices and shelters throughout the city: Father Broen, caretaker of the Healer's House in the Twister District. He is an enormous man who towers nearly seven feet in height, also a werebear. If ever fully overtaken by his curse, he would become a ravaging monster who could pass his affliction to others. Under a regimen of alchemical medication, however, he retains his mind and can transform at will into a controlled form that carries no risk of creating other berserk beasts.

Beggars, laborers, orphans, and the sick know him as a protector and advocate, but you see him as a great hero. When any group or individual takes too many liberties or preys overmuch on the poor, Father Broen steps in to correct the balance, housing victims of criminals and lawmen alike, destroying hostile architecture with hammers and his own two hands, and even getting into fistfights to save others.



When you visit Father Broen, he can provide the following:

- ♦ Cast *Cure Wounds* on you and up to five of your companions. They can only do this once per day.
- ♦ Cast *Detect Poison and Disease* and analyze up to a dozen creatures. They can only do this once per day.
- ♦ Cast *Purify Food and Drink* on a single target. They can only do this once per day.
- ♦ Cast *Gentle Repose* on a single target. They can only do this once per day.

In addition, your Father Broen can sell you the items on the Healing Services table.

HEALING SERVICES

Service	Cost
Holy Water	25 GP
Potion of Healing	50 GP
Potion of Healing (greater)	200 GP
Potion of Healing (superior)	2,000 GP
Spell Scroll of Lesser Restoration	200 GP
Spell Scroll of Remove Curse	2,000 GP

VIGILANTE GUISE

Your vigilante identity is a disguise that you use to protect your civilian identity. This is not an identity your character already possesses. You are encouraged to pick a name and a disguise that complement each other. Should inspiration strike later, you are free to revise your alter ego before revealing it in the story.

Any hero can use a vigilante identity, not just a hero with a vigilante background.

ART OF MASKS

The people of Malborn understand masks well. Long ago, they learned the art of hiding ambition behind piety, cruelty behind civility. Even today, the highest nobles paint their teeth black with ink and coal, scent their bodies with the musk of beasts, and conceal sacred tattoos under powdered wigs. To live in Malborn is to master the art of masks, both literal and spiritual.

When it's time to break into a corrupt noble's estate, sneak through sewer tunnels, or confront one of Malborn's most dangerous criminals, your vigilante persona is the better fit. These identities allow you to operate outside the law, strike fear into your enemies, and take bold action. Most vigilante missions are easier at night, when shadows and silence are your allies.

PERSONA AND DISGUISE

In Malborn, a disguise is more than a precaution. It is often the only thing standing between you and a knife in the dark.

When you move through the city, enemies may be watching. Malborn's infamous assassin guild, the Sharp Rondels, is among the deadliest in the world. Those who attract attention without protecting their identity rarely live long.

A disguise should never exist on its own. It must be paired with a persona. The mask, armor, paint, or altered features you wear are the outward symbol of a larger identity you create. Your persona includes your name, manner of speech, reputation, and the role you wish others to believe you play in the city. When done well, witnesses remember the legend of the figure they saw.

The disguise shapes how others see you, while the persona explains who that mysterious figure is and why they act as they do. A silent avenger might wear a dark mask and speak only in whispers. A flamboyant champion might appear in bright colors and announce their presence boldly. The stronger the persona, the more convincing the disguise becomes.

Below are several common styles of disguise used by masked figures in Malborn. Use them as inspiration when crafting both your appearance and the identity that goes with it.



ALTER SELF



You can gain access to the *Alter Self* spell through the Origin Feat: Magic Initiate. With this magic, you subtly reshape your features to better match the persona you wish to project. A grim avenger might sharpen their expression into something fearsome, while a radiant champion might appear noble and inspiring. The spell alters details of the face, voice, and bearing, allowing your chosen identity to feel convincing and larger than life.

ALTER SELF DISGUISE

1d6	Disguise	Persona
1	Your features soften into an entirely nondescript appearance.	You present yourself as a quiet and forgettable stranger.
2	Your features grow sharp and predatory, with cold eyes and a cruel smile.	You present yourself as a feared assassin who hunts the wicked.
3	Your features become extremely heroic, with a square jaw, gleaming teeth, and a dramatic wind-blown hairstyle.	You present yourself as the greatest vigilante alive, feared by all criminals.
4	Your features take on an unsettling symmetry and unnatural beauty.	You present yourself as a supernatural being touched by divine power.
5	Your eyes glow faintly green and your features grow wild and untamed.	You wield nature's pure wrath to cleanse corruption.
6	Your skin pales and your eyes darken, giving you the haunted look of one touched by death.	You present yourself as a grim revenant who has returned to deliver vengeance.

*I've seen men devour lives the way others devour food.
The end is always the same ... emptiness.*

—The Owlfather

SIMPLE MASK



This disguise consists of a small mask that covers the eyes and upper face while leaving the mouth and jaw visible. The mask is usually crafted from leather or lacquered wood and may be painted in bold colors or adorned with subtle patterns. It is often paired with a hood, cloak, or wide-brimmed hat. The result is a mysterious figure whose gaze is visible, but whose true identity remains concealed.

SIMPLE MASK DISGUISE

1d6	Disguise	Persona
1	A dark cloth mask conceals the eyes and brow, leaving the lower face exposed beneath the shadow of a wide hat.	You present yourself as a daring champion of the common folk.
2	A pale mask in the shape of a crescent moon.	You are a mysterious watcher who appears beneath the night sky to punish wicked deeds.
3	A tiny mask barely covers the eyes, leaving most of the face completely visible.	You present yourself as a master of disguise.
4	A sleek black mask wraps tightly across the eyes and nose, creating a sharp and mysterious silhouette.	You are a mysterious figure of the night that punishes those who believe themselves untouchable.
5	A delicate mask of red lacquer and gold filigree rests lightly across the eyes, lending its wearer a noble look.	You are a flamboyant noble with charm, elegance, and theatrical bravado.
6	A weathered black mask paired with a broad hat and long coat gives the wearer the look of a feared raider of the seas.	You present yourself as a feared sea raider, who is whispered about in every port.

You called it a necessary evil. I call it the reason you're about to fucking die.

—Sickle-Claw, Terrorist Vigilante

FULL-FACE MASK



A full-face mask completely conceals the wearer's features, transforming them into a distinct and imposing figure. These masks are usually formed from leather and molded to give the face a striking and memorable shape. Some have smooth, expressionless surfaces, while others feature exaggerated brows, sharp cheek

lines, or stylized visors over the eyes. By hiding every trace of the wearer's true appearance, the mask allows the persona to become larger than life. When worn with garments that are of the same theme, the result is a figure that feels almost mythic.

FULL-FACE MASK DISGUISE

1d6	Disguise	Persona
1	A smooth mask of black cloth webbed with silk thread covers the entire head.	You present yourself as the spider at the center of a web, patiently waiting for criminals to wander into your trap.
2	A sleek helm shaped like the head of a great cat hides the entire face except for gleaming eye slits.	You are a relentless predator, stalking criminals through the shadows until the moment comes to strike.
3	A smooth blank mask with no mouth opening forces you to mumble everything.	You are a brooding hero whose dramatic speeches are unfortunately incomprehensible.
4	A black helm shaped to resemble a death's head skull.	You are death, come to gather the souls of the evil and corrupt.
5	A pale mask carved with a calm smile and narrow mustache hides the wearer's face.	You are a symbol of defiance, who speaks boldly against tyranny.
6	A smooth mask painted deep blue with wave patterns curling across the cheeks.	You are a hunter from the depths who drags the wicked beneath the tide of justice.

BODY AND FACE PAINT



This approach transforms the wearer through color and symbolism rather than a physical mask. The face may be painted with bold lines, unsettling smiles, tribal markings, or dramatic patterns that make the expression appear unnatural or theatrical. This disguise involves applying elaborate paint before each appearance, creating a ritual transformation into their alternate self. In dim light or at a distance, the effect can be striking or even terrifying.

BODY AND FACE PAINT DISGUISE

1d6	Disguise	Persona
1	A stark white face is smeared with a crimson grin stretching across the lips, while dark rings of black paint circle the eyes in a manic jester's smile.	You are a playful trickster, masking a desire to protect the innocent beneath laughter, and a whirlwind of chaotic energy.
2	White paint covers the face while black covers the eyes, forming the grim visage of an avenging spirit.	You are a spectral figure who appears without warning to punish those who have done terrible wrongs.
3	Gold paint forms a radiant sunburst around the eyes, with glowing lines spreading across the cheeks.	You are a radiant herald who burns away corruption and darkness wherever it hides.
4	Your face is painted bright yellow with a permanent cheerful grin.	You present yourself as an unstoppable hero powered entirely by positive thinking.
5	Half the face is painted pure black and the other half bright white, split sharply down the center.	You are an agent of balance who punishes both cruelty and corruption wherever they appear.
6	Deep green paint spreads across the cheeks and brow, with sharp leaflike patterns framing the eyes.	You are an emerald champion who brings nature's purity to reveal the wicked.

The City Watch insists I am a criminal. I prefer to think of myself as a critic of poor vault design.

—Filigree, Thief Acrobat Extraordinaire

STYLIZED HELMET AND ARMOR



This disguise involves wearing distinctive armor and a helmet designed around the identity the wearer wishes to embody. The helmet typically covers the entire face, often shaped into a dramatic visor or sculpted mask. The armor itself may be polished, engraved, or built with bold contours that create a powerful silhouette. Some designs emphasize elegance and heroism, while others evoke dread and intimidation.

STYLIZED HELMET AND ARMOR DISGUISE

1d6	Disguise	Persona
1	A weathered helm with a narrow visor and heavy armor creates the image of a warrior bound by an ancient code.	You are a lone knight who appears wherever injustice must be challenged.
2	A brutal iron mask with slitted eyes and engraved runes gives the wearer the appearance of a conqueror.	You are a figure whose ruthless strength crushes any criminal that dares stand against you.
3	A helmet shaped like a roaring dragon with smoke occasionally puffing from the nostrils.	You present yourself as a terrifying dragon knight, though the smoke makes you cough sometimes.
4	Black robes and a hooded helm make the wearer appear like a ghostly rider from the underworld.	You are a harbinger of doom, who emerges from the shadows to punish the wicked.
5	A black suit of armor with jagged edges and a horned helm that casts a monstrous silhouette.	You are a terrifying demon-knight who hunts criminals through the night.
6	A gleaming white suit of armor with a smooth, featureless visor reflecting the light.	You are an unstoppable guardian who stands as an unbreakable shield for the innocent.

*They look at what others have and call it injustice.
I look at what they do ... and call it truth.*

—The Owlfather





NAMING YOUR VIGILANTE

This section offers ideas for your character's vigilante name, the identity by which the city will come to know and fear you as your legend spreads.

ABSURD NAMES

These names mock danger and confound enemies, using humor or strangeness to make your vigilante identity unforgettable.

ABSURD NAME

1d8	Names
1	Polite Knife
2	Forgettable Man
3	Fool of Justice
4	Great Pretender
5	Muffled Avenger
6	Nobody
7	Laughing Gallows
8	Smiling Sentinel

DIVINE NAMES

These names evoke celestial authority and moral judgment, suggesting that your actions carry the weight of divine justice.

DIVINE NAME

1d8	Names
1	Silver Sentinel
2	Lantern Martyr
3	Gilded Witness
4	The Saint
5	Ninth Bell
6	White Censor
7	Brass Seraph
8	Radiant Stranger

FLAMBOYANT NAMES

These names are dramatic and theatrical, crafted to captivate the crowds and ensure your legend spreads through spectacle.

FLAMBOYANT NAME

1d8	Names
1	Black Corsair
2	Dark Masquer
3	Crimson Reverie
4	Laughing Marquis
5	The Gentleman
6	Midnight Swordsman
7	Scarlet Gentleman
8	Velvet Duelist

PRIMAL NAMES

These names draw power from beasts and the wild, presenting you as a relentless predator stalking the streets of the city.

PRIMAL NAME

1d8	Names
1	Abyssal Hunter
2	Emerald Wrath
3	Midnight Panther
4	Gutter Fang
5	Street Lion
6	Thorn Maw
7	Vermin King
8	Wild Warden

SHADOWED NAMES

These names embrace secrecy and fear, marking you as a phantom who strikes unseen and vanishes into darkness.

SHADOWED NAME

1d8	Names
1	Black Fang
2	Third Shadow
3	Dreadmark
4	Ghost Walker
5	Phantom Horseman
6	Red Hand
7	Black Lintel
8	The Spider

VENGEANCE NAMES

These names promise retribution, declaring that you are the instrument of punishment for those who prey upon the innocent.

VENGEANCE NAME

1d8	Names
1	Bone Judge
2	Warhound
3	The Harvester
4	Dreadknight
5	Horned Terror
6	Iron Tyrant
7	The Judge
8	Final Knock

My advice? Keep it short. Owlfather works. Sister Mercy works. 'Bread Lord of the Eternal Gutter' sounds like a fucking pub act with a cape.

—Cardron the Invulnerable





CHAPTER 6

SUBCLASSES

THIS CHAPTER PRESENTS A FULL SUITE OF SUBCLASSES, with one new option for each class found in the *Player's Book*. These subclasses are designed to reflect the tone of Malborn, offering heroes new ways to engage with the city's intrigue and moral complexity. You are free to select one of these subclasses when your character reaches the appropriate level, as normal.

When creating your character, it is worth thinking ahead about which subclass you may wish to choose. By aligning your character's past with their future specialization, you create a more cohesive and immersive story.

These subclasses are not the only options available. All subclasses from the *Player's Book* remain fully compatible and can be used without restriction. They may represent more traditional paths or origins from outside Malborn, offering a contrast to the city's unique archetypes.

If you wish to use a subclass from another source beyond these, it is recommended that you discuss it with your Dungeon Master first. Malborn has a distinct identity, and not every option will fit seamlessly into its themes.

Malborn's vigilantes are wonderfully diverse. You have grim ones, holy ones, theatrical ones, murderous ones, and the truly deraanged fellows who think a second cape improves the first.

—Filagree, Thief Acrobat Extraordinaire

BARD

COLLEGE OF THE VOICE

There are bards who speak to entertain, and there are those whose words command obedience. The College of the Voice traces its lineage to an ancient order devoted to preserving divine truth through sound. To them, the voice was not merely a gift, it was a key to the soul.

Initiates are chosen young, tested for clarity of tone, memory, and self-control. They spend years in cloisters of silence, learning to still the body and discipline the mind. Through meditation and ritual speech, they master the art of persuasion so completely that their words seem to bypass reason and pierce directly into the heart. Many emerge as scholars or advisors to the powerful. Others wander the world, seeking those who might be turned toward enlightenment.

Members of the College of the Voice believe that every utterance carries spiritual weight. They train to infuse their words with conviction and power. In combat, they can command enemies to falter or obey through subtle harmonics. In peace, their presence alone can sway the hearts of crowds or unravel the secrets of the unwilling. Though their order preaches humility and service, few who hear a true Voice forget the sense of awe that follows.

LEVEL 3: CANTOR

As a Cantor, you lead the song of the congregation, guiding chants, hymns, and responses. You maintain correct liturgical melodies.

You gain proficiency in History, Insight, and Religion.

If you are already proficient in one of these skills, you can instead choose another skill from the Bard skill list.

LEVEL 3: MAKER DOMAIN SPELLS

Your connection to the Song of the Maker ensures you always have certain spells ready. When you reach a Bard level specified in the Maker Domain Spells table, you thereafter always have the listed spells prepared.

When you cast a spell from the Maker Domain Spells table you only need to use the Verbal component.

MAKER DOMAIN SPELLS

Bard Level	Prepared Spells
3	<i>Command, Healing Word, Suggestion, Zone of Truth</i>
5	<i>Fear, Mass Healing Word</i>
7	<i>Compulsion, Phantasmal Killer</i>
9	<i>Dominate Person, Geas</i>

DRAWN TO MALBORN

A bard of the College of the Voice travels to Malborn because it is a city shaped by lies. Power here depends on controlling what people believe and what they dare to say. For a true Voice, this makes Malborn a place where words still matter. Vigilante work offers access to someone who can cut through propaganda and intimidation. Malborn's courts and ministries no longer respond to reason, but influence can still be applied person by person, moment by moment. In a city where violence speaks loudly, the disciplined Voice becomes a dangerous tool.

LEVEL 3: DOMAIN VERSE

When you cast a spell from the Maker Domain Spells table, you can expend one or more of your Bardic Inspiration dice to improve the power of the spell. This can be done in two ways.

Saving Throw Adjustment. If the spell requires the target to make a saving throw and the target succeeds on its saving throw, you can expend one of your Bardic Inspiration dice and reduce the saving throw of the target by the number rolled. You can expend more than one Bardic Inspiration die if there are additional targets, using each additional roll on a single target. When you expend a Bardic Inspiration die on a creature and the roll is not high enough to change the outcome, the die is not expended.

Healing Enhancement. If the spell restores Hit Points, you can expend one of your Bardic Inspiration dice and add the number rolled to the amount of Hit Points restored. In addition, if the spell is a single target spell, the target gains Temporary Hit Points equal to the number rolled.

LEVEL 6: EPARCH

As an Eparch it is your duty to administer sacraments, govern college discipline, and guide liturgy. Your extensive training allows you to do the following:

Steadfast Will. If you fail a saving throw, you can expend one of your Bardic Inspiration dice and add the number rolled to your saving throw result.

Purifying Breath. You can expend one of your Bardic Inspiration dice to end one of the following conditions on yourself: Charmed, Frightened, Poisoned.

Hymnal Memory. After you have finished a Long Rest, you can choose one skill and gain proficiency with it. You retain this proficiency until you finish another Long Rest.



LEVEL 14: ARCHIMANDRITE

As an Archimandrite it is your duty to safeguard doctrine and liturgical life. You have mastered all aspects of training within the College.

Ancient Memory. After a Long Rest you can choose one skill and gain Expertise with it. You do not need to be proficient with this skill. You retain this expertise until you finish another Long Rest.

Voice Beyond Flesh. You can expend one of your Bardic Inspiration dice to end one of the following conditions on yourself: Incapacitated, Paralyzed, Stunned.

Voice That Binds. When you cast *Geas*, the casting time is 1 round. While a creature is affected by your *Geas*, it has Disadvantage on saving throws against your spells. If it takes damage for defying your command, add your Bard level to that damage.

Voice that Humbles. A creature Charmed by your *Compulsion* spell falls Prone at the end of any movement it takes on its turn, unless you choose for it to remain standing (no action required).

MONK

LOTUS WARRIOR

In the shadows of Malborn, a secret order known as the Way of the Lotus emerged centuries ago. Its followers pursue mastery by surrendering to sacred poisons that alter perception and strip away ordinary limits. Over time, they learned to cultivate and refine the lotus plants, including the white and golden lotus, but it is the black lotus, rare and deadly, that defines their discipline.

Through controlled rituals and disciplined intoxication, Lotus Warriors dull pain, sharpen awareness, and push their minds beyond natural boundaries. These substances are not used for pleasure, but to break old instincts and rebuild the self under extreme strain.

Those who walk the Way of the Lotus are not simply fighters. They rely on altered perception to anticipate danger and endure suffering, even as the cost to their bodies and sanity grows.

LEVEL 3: LOTUS BLOOM

Through ritual intoxication with the sacred golden lotus, you have awakened senses beyond mortal limits. At the start of your turn, you can expend 1 Focus Point to heighten your awareness for 1 hour, or until you are Incapacitated. While this effect is active, you gain the following benefits:

Tremorsense. You have Tremorsense out to a range of 60 feet. If you already have Tremorsense, its range increases by 30 feet.

Heightened Awareness. You have Expertise with the Insight and Perception skills.

Golden Lotus Immunity. You are immune to all standard effects of the golden lotus, both beneficial and detrimental.

LEVEL 3: LOTUS FLURRY

When you use Flurry of Blows, you can expend 1 or more Focus Points to cause a 10-foot Emanation exhalation of golden, white, or black lotus. All creatures within the Emanation, including yourself, must make a Constitution saving throw or be subject to the effects on the Lotus Flurry table below.

When you reach certain Monk levels, you gain Immunity to the effects of certain Lotus Types as indicated by the Lotus Flurry table.

LOTUS FLURRY

Lotus Type	Focus Cost	Effect	Immunity at Level
Golden	1	Gain the Poisoned condition for 1 minute. While Poisoned in this way, the target has the Blinded condition.	3
White	2	Gain the Poisoned condition for 1 minute. While Poisoned in this way, the target has the Blinded condition and Disadvantage on Charisma, Intelligence and Wisdom D20 Tests.	6
Black	3	The target takes Necrotic damage equal to four rolls of your Martial Arts die or half as much on a successful save.	11

LEVEL 6: WHITE BLOOM

You have mastered the use of the white lotus, refining your senses to a sharper edge. You can now expend up to 2 Focus Points when you use Lotus Bloom. If you expend 2 or more Focus Points, you receive the following additional benefits while the effect is active:

Blindsight. You have Blindsight with a range of 30 feet. If you already have Blindsight, its range increases by 30 feet.

Discern Falsehood. You can attempt to detect lies. You can take a Magic action to force a creature you can see within 30 feet of you to make a Charisma saving throw. On a failure, you know if the creature is deliberately lying when it speaks for the duration of the effect while it is in range. On a success, the creature becomes Immune to Discern Falsehood for 1 hour.

White Lotus Immunity. You are immune to all standard effects of the white lotus, both beneficial and detrimental.

LEVEL 6: BREATH OF THE WHITE LOTUS

You burn the sacred white lotus, weaving your mind into others. As an action, you exhale a euphoric cloud that psychically binds nearby allies. Up to two willing creatures within 5 feet of you are linked for 1 hour. You can link additional willing creatures by expending 1 Focus Point for each creature beyond the initial two. While linked, you and the chosen creatures can communicate telepathically within 100 feet, even if you do not share a common language.

LEVEL 11: BLACK BLOOM

You have mastered the use of the black lotus, granting you unparalleled perception beyond the veil of reality. You can now expend up to 3 Focus Points when you use Lotus Bloom. If you expend 3 or more Focus Points, you receive the following additional benefits while the effect is active.

Truesight. You have Truesight out to a range of 10 feet. If you already have Truesight, its range increases by 10 feet.

Spatial Awareness. Your Tremorsense can now locate creatures that are not moving and not in contact with the same surface as you or in the air. In addition, you learn the creature type of any creature within your Tremorsense.

Black Lotus Immunity. You are immune to all standard effects of the black lotus, both beneficial and detrimental.



LEVEL 17: FINAL BLOOM

You have surrendered fully to the most lethal of the sacred blooms. As a Bonus Action, you can expend 3 Focus Points to master every sense for 10 minutes or until you are Incapacitated. During this time, you have Advantage on all D20 Tests, and other creatures have Disadvantage on attack rolls against you.

Additionally, you can use an action to exhale the breath of the black lotus into one willing creature within 5 feet. If you do so, that creature gains the benefits of your Final Bloom for 1 minute, and you immediately lose its effects and gain one level of Exhaustion.

LOTUS FLOWER

The rare and potent lotus family of flowers thrives only under very specific conditions: water rich in volcanic minerals, abundant seasonal rainfall, and a mild temperate climate. In this, the city of Malborn is almost unnaturally perfect. The crumbling caldera walls that ring the city trap moisture and warmth, while the mineral-rich shallow waters nourish the lotus plant that would wither elsewhere.

This unique environment has led to a thriving trade in lotus-derived substances, both legal and illicit. Over the centuries, an entire underworld economy has grown around the cultivation, refinement, and sale of lotus products, feeding both apothecaries and black-market dream-merchants alike.

There are three known varieties of lotus: the common golden lotus, the more elusive white lotus, and the rarest and most coveted, the black lotus. Each has distinct properties, and each can be prepared in multiple ways. The seeds can be chewed for a slow, simmering effect; the pollen can be snorted for a sharp, immediate high; the petals can be brewed into tea or smoked; and the distilled oil can be absorbed through the skin for gradual, creeping intoxication.

What makes the lotus unique among all flowering plants is not just its potency, but how its preparation can entirely change its effects. Different methods of consumption often produce radically different results. A tea of golden lotus may sharpen focus, but its smoke may summon visions. A black lotus oil brushed upon the skin may grant prophetic dreams or plunge the user into waking nightmares.

PALADIN

OATH OF THE OWL

Paladins who swear the Oath of the Owl become watchful guardians of the night. Like the silent hunter whose eyes pierce the darkness, they vow to see what others cannot and to strike where evil believes itself hidden. Criminals may mock the laws of the day, but they learn quickly to fear what hunts after sunset.

Those who take this oath often conceal their identity behind a mask. The mask is more than a disguise. It is a symbol. In time the people forget the face beneath it, remembering only the watching eyes that appear in darkness whenever injustice spreads. The paladin becomes less a person and more a presence, a silent watcher that criminals whisper about in fearful tones.

To the innocent, the Owl is a protector who sees danger before it arrives. To the guilty, it is something far worse. They know that even in darkness, even behind locked doors or hidden alleys, the Owl may be watching.

These paladins share the following tenets:

See All Things: Darkness hides nothing from those who are vigilant.

Be the Silent Wing: Strike quietly. Let the guilty realize too late that they have been found.

Let the Mask Endure: The symbol is greater than the person.

Hunt the Wicked: Those who prey upon the innocent must never feel safe in the dark.

LEVEL 3: OATH OF THE OWL SPELLS

The magic of your oath ensures you always have certain spells ready. When you reach a Paladin level specified in the Oath of the Owl Spells table, you thereafter always have the listed spells prepared.

OATH OF THE OWL SPELLS

Paladin Level	Spells
3	<i>Disguise Self, Silent Image</i>
5	<i>Darkness, Pass Without Trace</i>
9	<i>Fear, Nondetection</i>
13	<i>Greater Invisibility, Locate Creature</i>
17	<i>Mislead, Modify Memory</i>

LEVEL 3: PROTECTOR OF THE NIGHT

You gain proficiency in the Stealth skill. In addition, while wearing Medium armor, you ignore the Disadvantage penalty if it has one.

LEVEL 3: CHANNEL DIVINITY

You gain the following two Channel Divinity options.

Eyes of Midnight. As a Bonus Action, you expend one use of your Channel Divinity to awaken the Owl's sight for 10 minutes:

- ♦ You gain Darkvision out to 120 feet. If you already have Darkvision, its range increases by 60 feet.
- ♦ Your Darkvision can perceive through magical darkness.
- ♦ You have Advantage on Wisdom (Perception) and Wisdom (Insight) checks.

Mask of Dread. As a Bonus Action, you expend one use of your Channel Divinity and fix your gaze on creatures of your choice within 30 feet. Each target must make a Wisdom saving throw with a DC equal to 8 + your Charisma modifier + your Proficiency Bonus. On a failed save, a creature has the Frightened condition for 1 minute.

While a creature is Frightened by you, it doesn't benefit from the Invisible condition and whenever you hit it with an attack, it takes extra Radiant damage equal to your Charisma modifier.

A Frightened creature repeats the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

LEVEL 7: AURA OF THE WATCHER

Your vigilance radiates outward, making it difficult for evil to vanish into shadow. Creatures within your Aura of Protection gain the following effects:

Advantage. You and your Allies have Advantage on Initiative rolls and Wisdom (Perception checks).

Suppressed Invisibility. Hostile creatures can't gain the Invisible condition and it is suppressed while they are within the aura.

LEVEL 15: SILENT WING

When a creature within your Reach teleports, you can make an Opportunity Attack against that creature.

In addition, when you hit a creature with an Opportunity Attack, you can cause the attack to deal additional Radiant damage equal to your Paladin level and if the Opportunity Attack was prompted by a creature teleporting, the creature must make a Charisma saving throw against your spell save DC, and on a failure the teleport fails and the Action, Bonus Action, or Reaction used to teleport is wasted. You can do this a number of times equal to your Charisma modifier and regain all expended uses when you finish a Long Rest.

The Oath is not permission to become a monster in the dark. It is a promise to remain watchful there, when no one else is willing to look.

—Aranna Gildar of the Nine Sentinels



LEVEL 20: NIGHT'S JUDGMENT

As a Bonus Action, you become the Owl made manifest for 10 minutes. Once you use this feature, you cannot do so again until you finish a Long Rest. You can also restore your use of it by expending a level 5 spell slot (no action required).

For the duration, you gain the following benefits:

Wings of Silence. You gain a Fly Speed equal to your Speed and can hover.

Eyes That Pierce. You gain Truesight out to 60 feet.

Terror in the Dark. When a hostile creature that can't see you or has the Frightened condition enters or starts its turn in your Aura of Protection, it takes Psychic damage equal to your Paladin level.

THE OWLFATHER AND BLACK FEATHER

The first paladin of this oath was a masked vigilante known as Black Feather, a protégé of the Owlfather and a sworn member of the Nine Sentinels. Under the Owlfather's guidance he learned to hunt the rooftops of Malborn, striking swiftly from shadow. When Strixdaughter betrayed the Sentinels, Black Feather fell in the bloody night that destroyed the order. Yet his art did not die with him. Before his death he secretly trained several apprentices, passing on the silent discipline of the Owl.

In the years since, these teachings have spread quietly among vigilantes. Those who master the forgotten techniques swear the Oath of the Owl, donning the mask and mantle of the watcher in darkness, a silent hunter who ensures that even in the night, justice never sleeps.

RANGER

GAOLER

In the darkest corners of the world, there are warriors who do not fight for glory or for coin, but as enforcers of brutal justice. The Gaoler is a master of pursuit, capture, and punishment, trained to ensure that no one escapes judgment. Born in brutal prisons like Malborn's Old Hunger or raised among the merciless gaols of distant lands, Gaolers understand the minds of the desperate and the cunning, because many once lived that life themselves.

Gaolers craft cruel snares and mechanical devices designed to cripple and break their victims. Volatile substances like white phosphorus, known in Malborn as White Gold, often lace their creations. In their hands, every alleyway and ruin becomes a killing ground, where escape routes vanish and hope dies on rusted iron teeth.

LEVEL 3: INSTRUMENTS OF VENGEANCE

You have mastered the art of preparing for the kill. You gain proficiency with the Stealth skill and Tinker's Tools.

You gain special benefits when using one of the following items: Ball Bearings, Caltrops, Hunting Traps, and the Grappling Gun (see the Vigilante Equipment section in chapter 9).

Item DC. Any saving throw or ability check required by these items has a DC equal to 8 + your Dexterity modifier + your Proficiency Bonus.

Ball Bearings. It only takes you 1 minute to recover the Ball Bearings.

Caltrops. The save DC for entering the area of the Caltrops is equal to 15 or your Item DC, whichever is greater. It only takes you 1 minute to recover the Caltrops.

Hunting Trap. You can modify Hunting Traps into Gaoler Traps. It takes 1 minute to modify a single trap. You can only have a number of Gaoler Traps equal to your Wisdom modifier.

Grappling Gun. The save DC for a creature attempting to break the grapple is equal to 15 or your Item DC, whichever is greater. While a creature is Grappled, you can use a Bonus Action to reel a creature that is Large size or smaller toward you by 30 feet.

LEVEL 3: GAOLER SPELLS

When you reach a Ranger level specified in the Gaoler Spells table, you thereafter always have the listed spells prepared.

GAOLER SPELLS

Ranger Level	Spells
3	<i>Entangle</i>
5	<i>Cordon of Arrows</i>
9	<i>Slow</i>
13	<i>Grasping Vine</i>
17	<i>Hold Monster</i>

GAOLER TRAP

As a Utilize action, you can set a Gaoler Trap in an unoccupied space beside you. A Gaoler Trap has the Invisible condition. If a Large sized or smaller creature steps into the space where it has been placed, it must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or take 1d8 Piercing damage and have its Speed reduced to 0 while caught in the trap. A creature can use its action to make a Strength (Athletics) check, freeing itself or another creature within its reach on a success. Each failed check deals 1d8 Piercing damage to the trapped creature.

A Gaoler Trap remains Invisible until triggered or recovered.

LEVEL 7: INSTRUMENTS OF TORMENT

You gain additional special benefits when using one of the following items: Ball Bearings, Caltrops, Gaoler Traps, and the Grappling Gun.

Ball Bearings. A creature given the Prone condition by your Ball Bearings must make a Dexterity saving throw to stand up while in the 10-foot-square area of the Ball Bearings.

Caltrops. When your Caltrops deal Piercing damage to a creature, that creature has the Poisoned condition until the end of its next turn.

Gaoler Trap. When your Gaoler Trap deals Piercing damage, it deals additional Poison damage equal to your Ranger level. In addition, if you can see the triggering creature, and it is within 90 feet of you, you can cast or move your *Hunter's Mark*, targeting it as a Reaction.

Grappling Gun. If the Grappling Gun isn't being used to grapple, you can reload a Grappling Bolt using a Bonus Action.

In addition, your Caltrops and Gaoler Traps now cover a 10-foot-square area.

LEVEL 7: AMBUSER

You are an expert at setting up ambushes using your spells and traps.

Rapid Deployment. When you roll Initiative, you have Advantage on the roll and may immediately place Caltrops or a Gaoler Trap in an empty space within 15 feet of you (no action required). In addition, when you use the Attack action, you can replace an attack with a Utilize action to deploy one Ball Bearings, Caltrops, or Gaoler Trap.

Cordon. When you cast *Cordon of Arrows* each arrow uses d8s instead of d4s for damage. When a creature that you can see is hit by an arrow from your cordon, and it is within 10 feet of one of your Ball Bearings, Caltrops, or Gaoler Traps, you can push that creature into a space that triggers that trap.

LEVEL 11: INSTRUMENTS OF MAGIC

You imbue your traps with magical energy. When you take the Utilize action to place your Ball Bearings, Caltrops, or Gaoler Trap, you may expend a spell slot. If you do, the items have the following additional properties until triggered or recovered.

Ball Bearings. When a creature is given the Prone condition by your Ball Bearings, the Ball Bearings explode. The creature takes Fire damage equal to 1d10 per level of spell slot used to imbue them with magic, plus your Ranger level. They become coated in glowing powder for 1 minute. While covered, the creature is Blinded and sheds dim light in a 10-foot radius. The Ball Bearings cannot be recovered.

Caltrops. Your Caltrops deal an additional 1d6 Force damage per level of spell slot used when imbued with magic. When your Caltrops give a creature the Poisoned condition, that creature has the Paralyzed condition while Poisoned in this way.

Gaoler Trap. The trap deals an additional 1d10 Force damage per level of spell slot used when imbued with magic. In addition, a creature is Restrained while caught in your Gaoler's Trap. If a creature fails an attempt to escape the trap, it takes Force damage equal to your Ranger level.

LEVEL 15: MASTER OF TRAPS

A target has Disadvantage on any saving throw it makes against your Ball Bearings, Caltrops, or Gaoler Traps.

When you use Rapid Deployment to place a trap when you roll Initiative, you can choose to place two of them instead, and the range at which you can place them is increased by 5 feet.

HUNGER GAOLER

The feared Hunger Gaolers, known more commonly as Hungers, are the last line of defense for the prison called Old Hunger. If a prisoner escapes the prison, it is not the City Watch who are dispatched. It is the Hungers.

Hungers are drawn from the prison's own ranks, convicts who, for reasons of cunning or brutality, were offered a bargain. In exchange for service, they could escape the degradation of the common prisoner. Their primary role is simple, hunt the escaped. Few understand a fugitive's mind better than those who once harbored the same desperate dreams. Hungers know where the weak will hide and how fear dulls judgment.

Hungers are taught the grim craft of trap making, tools meant to cripple or kill those who would cheat Old Hunger of its due. In some ways, a Hunger is little more than a rat catcher, but one whose quarry walks on two legs and pleads for mercy. They do not bring fugitives back gently.

Despite their origins, Hungers are not trusted, even by the prison masters who employ them. Each Hunger wears a heavy iron torque around their neck, bound with magic. Should a Hunger ever disobey, the collar ensures a swift and terrible death.



ROGUE

UMBRA

Umbra are the unseen guardian, the punishing hand that strikes from rooftops and alleyways. They operate outside the law, using fear and intimidation to bring justice to the wicked. They master stealth not for theft, but for vigilance, turning darkness into a weapon. Criminals whisper about the silent watchers who mete out punishment when no one else dares.

Their talents extend beyond the shadows. They are expert tinkers, often ex-machinists, skilled in the art of crafting deadly tools and intricate devices to aid their missions. They adapt ancient mechanical traditions into weapons of fear. These include Grappling Hooks, Tether Bolas, Wall-Walker Pads, and Sticky Nets.

LEVEL 3: SHADOW DEVICES

You gain access to a collection of customized combat tools known as shadow devices. These represent the esoteric training, alchemical knowledge, and magical artifices used to gain an edge in combat.

When you complete a Long or Short Rest, you can build a number of shadow devices equal to your Dexterity Modifier. You cannot have more shadow devices than your Dexterity Modifier allows; however, you can replace your shadow devices at the end of any Long or Short Rest. You can only have one of each type of shadow device. Only you have the training needed to use the shadow devices.

Shadow Device Save DC. Any saving throw or ability check required by these devices has a DC equal to 8 + your Intelligence modifier + your Proficiency Bonus.

Charges. Some shadow devices can be used multiple times.

SHADOW DEVICES

Death's Door (Single Use). When you are reduced to 0 Hit Points but not killed outright, you can drop to 1 Hit Point instead. You gain the Prone condition and drop into a cataleptic state that is indistinguishable from death. For 1 minute you appear dead to outward inspection. You have the Blinded and Incapacitated conditions, and your Speed is 0. You can end this state at start of your turn.

Flash Bomb (Single Use). As an action, you throw a compact explosive at a point you can see within 20 feet. The pellet explodes and every creature within 10 feet must make a Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes Radiant damage equal to the extra damage roll of your Sneak Attack and has the Blinded condition until the start of its next turn.

Knock Bomb (Single Use). As an action you toss a compact explosive to a point within 20 feet. Creatures within 10 feet must make a Dexterity saving throw or take Thunder damage equal to the extra damage roll of your Sneak Attack and have the Prone condition.

Lurker's Cloak (2 Charges). As a Bonus Action you can use the Hide action with Advantage.

Master Key (2 Charges). As a Bonus Action, touch a mundane lock on a door, box, chest, set of manacles, padlock or another similar object. It becomes unlocked.

Rebreather (2 Charges). At the start of your turn, you can choose to activate your Rebreather and gain the ability to breathe underwater for 1 hour.

Smoke Pellets (2 Charges). As a Bonus Action, you throw a pellet at a point you can see within 10 feet. A 30-foot-radius Sphere of smoke erupts at that point. The Sphere is Heavily Obscured. The smoke disperses after 1 minute.

Sticky Net (Single Use). As an action you launch a net at a point within 30 feet. The net spreads out in a 20-Foot Radius against a floor, wall, or ceiling, that lasts for 1 minute. This area is considered Difficult Terrain. The first time a creature enters the Sticky Net on a turn or starts its turn there, it must succeed on a Strength saving throw or have its Speed reduced to 0 until the start of its next turn.

Tether Bola (Single Use). As an action you fire a dart and cable system at a creature that is size Large or smaller within 30 feet. It must succeed on a Strength saving throw or be Restrained for 1 minute. At the start of each of its turns it can make another Strength saving throw, breaking free on a success.

Wall-Walker Pads (2 Charges). At the start of your turn you can choose to activate climbing gear that gives you a Climb speed equal to your Walk Speed for 1 minute. The climbing gear also gives you the ability to move up, down, and across vertical surfaces and along ceilings, while leaving your hands free.

Wind Break (2 Charges). When you fall, as a Reaction you can give yourself a Fly speed of 30 feet until the end of your next turn.

LEVEL 3: TOOLS OF THE NIGHT

You gain proficiency with Tinker's Tools.

LEVEL 9: SHADOW STRIKES

You've learned specialized ways to use your Sneak Attack. The following effects are now among your Cunning Strike options.

Terror Mask (Cost 3d6). The target must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or have the Frightened condition until the end of your next turn.

Silence (Cost 2d6). The target must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or be unable to speak or use Verbal components until the end of its next turn.

You never see an Umbra coming. First the lantern dies, then your lenses stop working, then somebody whispers your full name from the ceiling. Sensible criminals retire.

—Aramna Gildar of the Nine Sentinels



LEVEL 13: DREAD STALKER

When you have the Invisible condition and you make an attack that ends that condition, you can choose to instill fear in all your enemies. Each enemy in a 30-foot Emanation must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or drop whatever it is holding and have the Frightened condition for 1 minute. A Frightened creature takes the Dash action and moves away from you by the safest route on each of its turns unless there is nowhere to move. If the creature ends its turn in a space where it doesn't have line of sight to you, the creature makes a Wisdom saving throw. On a successful save, the effect ends on that creature. Once you use this ability, you can't use it again until you finish a Long Rest.

LEVEL 17: FULL ARMAMENT

After you finish a Short Rest or Long Rest, you complete your arsenal, creating one of every shadow device.

MACHINISTS

In the teeming heart of Malborn, where the bones of old machines run as deep as the sewers and as high as the towers, the role of the Machinist has always been indispensable. Behind every functioning elevator, every secured vault, every chiming clock and concealed trap, there is the careful, silent work of a machinist. Without them, the city would grind to a halt under its own crumbling weight.

Machinists are the artisans of moving parts and hidden workings. They maintain the ancient lift systems that connect the lower districts to the heights of the Ascent, ensuring that goods can travel between worlds. They craft the locks that guard the fortunes of the Upper City, and the subtle traps that punish those foolish enough to test them. In the workshops beneath guildhalls and noble estates, machinists also turn their skills to darker labors: constructing the volatile furnaces that convert the city's prized phosphate into deadly white phosphorus, the so-called "White Gold" of Malborn.



SPECiES



MALBORN IS A CITY OF MANY SPECIES, THOUGH ITS hierarchy is sharply defined. The malborne themselves form the dominant class and largest population, shaping the culture and laws of the city. Beneath them exists a diverse tapestry of other species, each finding their place within Malborn's rigid and often unforgiving social order.

Humans and dwarves are the most numerous among these groups. Humans occupy nearly every level below the malborne, from laborers and servants to merchants, soldiers, and mercenaries. Their adaptability allows them to thrive in many roles, though true power remains out of reach. Dwarves, by contrast, are regarded with a peculiar respect. The malborne see in them a distorted reflection of themselves. Yet this respect does not translate into privilege. Most dwarves are consigned to dangerous mining operations beneath the city or employed as masons and smiths, their skills valued but their status tightly controlled.

Other species exist in smaller but significant numbers. Elves are viewed as both familiar and foreign, admired for their refinement and skill yet deliberately excluded from positions of influence. Halflings and gnomes flourish in the overlooked corners of the city, thriving in alleys and streets of the Pit.

More uncommon still are orcs, tieflings, and stranger beings who live on the margins of society. Some groups have carved out distinct niches beneath Malborn's streets. The goblins of the Skiffpole Gang and the kobolds of the Spiralhorn Scholarly Society both dwell within the Cesscourt, surviving and even prospering in the tunnels below.

Malborn is also home to a notable population of Fey, with spriggans being among the most infamous. Their presence adds an unpredictable and often dangerous element to the city's already volatile nature. Equally striking are the gygans, six-armed beings brought to Malborn as slaves five centuries ago. Though long since freed, they remain a common yet unsettling sight.

All of these species are available as playable options in a Malborn campaign. Others from distant lands such as Thylea or Grimmir may also appear, though their place in the city should be discussed with the Dungeon Master.

KOBOLD

Kobolds are fiercely proud of their draconic lineage, despite their small size. Their scales glint faintly in the light, most often in dull bronze or copper hues, though some display brass or even silver.

In Malborn, kobolds are rarely seen on the surface. Most belong to a hidden community beneath the city in the sewer network known as the Cesscourt. There they have lived for generations, carving out a self-sufficient society among tunnels and forgotten ruins.

SPIRAL HORN SCHOLARLY SOCIETY

The most influential group among Malborn's kobolds is the Spiral Horn Scholarly Society, an eccentric but dedicated fellowship of explorers and historians. This group has been studying the ruins beneath the Cesscourt, living self-sufficiently and entirely at home in the depths. The kobolds have something of the brigand and the sneak about them, but they are also scholars, and value those who bring them new knowledge, books or even just stationary supplies.

ELDER DRACONIC RUINS

The civilization that the kobolds are obsessed with existed at least partly underground even before it was buried. It is characterized by many different sizes of tunnel, from narrow squeaks that barely fit a halfling, to those fit for a large human, to colossal circular thoroughfares that would once have fed into huge arenas and squares beneath the open sky.

This is known as the Elder Draconic ruins, less from overtly dragon-inspired imagery, and more because many dragon skeletons and ash-preserved dragon mummies have been found there. The society was evidently once ruled by or venerating dragons and appears to have consisted of both dragonborn and kobolds in strictly stratified roles, hence the different sizes of tunnels.

The Elder Draconic culture obviously went through a period, many thousands of years ago, when it was extremely wealthy and powerful, and then some manner of curious decline. There are suggestions of a curse or plague, and unpleasant carvings showing dead dragons with kobolds hatching out of their flesh like maggots.

KOBOLD NAMES

Kobold names often carry the sharp, hissing cadence of the Draconic tongue. They tend to be short and sibilant, filled with clipped consonants and harsh syllables.

The kobolds of Malborn, particularly those belonging to the Spiral Horn Scholarly Society, sometimes adopt titles connected to their research or discoveries in the Elder Draconic ruins. A kobold who uncovers a fragment of ancient history might add a new honorific to their name.

Male Names: Drak, Krix, Nark, Rissk, Skarn, Sseth, Torg, Vrek, Zarik, Ziss

Female Names: Drissa, Kessa, Lirrix, Nessa, Rixxa, Sira, Tressa, Vesha, Zarra, Zissra

Honorifics: Cartographer of the Deep Tunnels, Discoverer of the Wrong Tunnel, Finder of Something Probably Important, Finder of the First Scale, Finder of the Very Old Bucket, Keeper of the Broken Tablet, Reader of Dragon Bones, Reader of the Upside Down Rune, Survivor of the Collapsing Corridor, Unsealer of the Hidden Door

KOBOLD TRAITS

Creature Type: Dragon

Size: Small

Speed: 30 feet

As a Kobold, you have the following traits.

Darkvision. You have Darkvision with a range of 60 feet.

Scholar. You know the *Mending* cantrip. You also always have the *Detect Magic* spell prepared. You can cast it once without a spell slot, and you regain the ability to cast it in that way when you finish a Long Rest. You can also use any spell slots you have to cast the spell.

Draconic Lineage. You trace your ancestry back thousands of years to the metallic dragons that used to make the island of Malborn their home. Choose a lineage from the Draconic Lineage table. You gain the level 1 benefit of the chosen lineage. When you reach character level 5, you learn an ability, as shown on the table. You can use this ability a number of times equal to your Proficiency Bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a Long Rest.

Kobolds have titles like 'Discoverer of the Wrong Tunnel.' Mock that all you like until the fucker finds the right tunnel into your cellar and inventories your silver.

—Cardron the Invulnerable



DRACONIC LINEAGE

**Lineage
and Level Benefit**

Brass	
Level 1	You have Resistance to Fire damage.
Level 5	As a Bonus Action, you can target a creature within 30 feet. That creature makes a Constitution saving throw (DC 8 plus your Constitution modifier and Proficiency Bonus). Creatures that don't sleep or have Immunity to the Exhaustion condition automatically pass this save. On a failure it has the Incapacitated condition until the end of its next turn, at which point, it must repeat the save. On a second failure, it has the Unconscious condition for 10 minutes. The effect ends early if the creature takes damage or another creature within 5ft takes an Action to wake it.
Bronze	
Level 1	You have Resistance to Lightning damage.
Level 5	When you hit a creature with an attack, you can choose to repulse it. The target makes a Strength saving throw (DC 8 plus your Constitution modifier and Proficiency Bonus), and it is pushed up to a number of feet equal to 5 times your Proficiency Bonus straight away from you on a failure.

**Lineage
and Level Benefit**

Copper	
Level 1	You have Resistance to Acid damage.
Level 5	When you hit a creature with an attack you can choose to slow it. Its Speed is reduced by 15 feet until the end of its next turn. The Speed reduction from this trait can't exceed 15 feet.
Silver	
Level 1	You have Resistance to Cold damage.
Level 5	You were born with vestigial wings. As a Bonus Action you can unfurl your wings and for 1 minute you have a Fly Speed equal to your Speed.

MALBORNE

Malborne are a short, sturdy people renowned for their mastery of stonework; so much so that they are often compared to dwarves. Some speculate there may be a shared ancestry between the two races, but if such a link ever existed, it has been lost to time. Unlike dwarves, the malborne prefer the surface world, where they have raised cities of breathtaking grandeur. Their architecture is considered unmatched across the known world.

Beyond their talent with stone, the malborne possess a deep affinity for magic. Unlike other cultures, they do not shy away from power born of blood. The most potent spells of their wizards are fueled by dragon's blood, harvested in ages past during a brutal campaign that reshaped the world.

APPEARANCE

Malborne are compact and broad-shouldered, bearing a build similar to dwarves. Males average around 5 feet tall, with females slightly shorter at 4½ feet. Their features are sturdy and expressive.

They exhibit a wide range of coloration: hair may be blonde, red, brown, or black in near-equal measure, and their eyes span from amber to blue, green, hazel, brown, or gray. Albino malborne are not uncommon, with white hair, pale skin, and red eyes, often regarded with reverence or suspicion.

They have little to no body or facial hair and take pride in their appearance. Malborne favor elegant, sharply tailored clothing in dark hues and adorn themselves with simple, beautifully crafted jewelry.

LONG LIVED

Malborn live exceptionally long lives, with the average malborne reaching 350 to 400 years of age. These centuries shape their perspective in ways that often bewilder shorter-lived races. For the malborne, time is not a rushing river but a slow tide. Their patience is legendary. Memories remain fresh for centuries, and emotional wounds rarely fade. Betrayals, slights, and lost loves haunt them longer than other species can comprehend.

Malborn children are educated thoroughly over many years and are not considered adults until the age of 40.

CULTURE

The malborne harbor deep distrust for outsiders, likely due in part to the manner in which their empire met its end. Corruption pervades malborne society, with secrets and wealth controlling the city's officials and leaders, leaving the common people to suffer in poverty. The wealthy elite indulge in lavish lifestyles, while the malborne's notorious criminal underworld, dominated by powerful guilds of thieves and assassins, holds immense influence

over the city. This does not make the malborne an evil people, as there are many amongst them who despise what their city has become and actively strive to improve the conditions of the poor.

All natives of Malborn have tattoos inscribed on the skin of their neck when they come of age. These tattoos mark them as natives. A foreigner having such a tattoo is a crime punishable by death.

MALBORNE NAMES

Malborne names often reflect their history and culture. Their given names are typically two to three syllables long and can be either gender-neutral or have a masculine or feminine sound. Malborne family names are inherited and usually contain one or two syllables.

Male Names: Azar, Calix, Darin, Eryk, Faren, Gavril, Jaxon, Kael, Lirin, Nael, Orin, Paxon, Riven, Sarin, Tavin, Varin

Female Names: Aria, Brin, Caela, Danika, Eira, Farah, Galia, Halia, Inara, Jael, Kaida, Lira, Mira, Nira, Oria, Saria, Tahlia, Vaela

Family Names: Akar, Barin, Caris, Dariel, Eryndor, Faelor, Galian, Halorin, Ildar, Jaren, Kaelis, Lirath, Nalor, Ondar, Paelis, Rivenor, Sarith, Tavir

MALBORNE TRAITS

Creature Type: Humanoid

Size: Medium

Speed: 30 feet

As a Malborne, you have the following traits.

Expert. You gain Expertise in one skill of your choice that you have proficiency with.

Stonecunning. As a Bonus Action, you gain Tremorsense with a range of 60 feet for 10 minutes. You must be on a stone surface or touching a stone surface to use this Tremorsense. The stone can be natural or worked. You can use this Bonus Action a number of times equal to your Proficiency Bonus, and you regain all expended uses when you finish a Long Rest.

Spell Scroll Affinity. You gain proficiency in either Mason's Tools or Calligrapher's Supplies.

- ♦ If you chose Mason's Tools, you can use spell scrolls from the Druid spell list.
- ♦ If you chose Calligrapher's Supplies, you can use spell scrolls from the Sorcerer spell list.

You must succeed on the ability check if the spell scroll is of level 6 or higher and is not on your spell list, or if it is of a higher level than you can normally cast.



SPRIGGAN

Some think spriggans are related to goblins who have somehow been gifted supernatural powers, while others think they are giants that have been cursed to live in tiny bodies. It is pointless to ask a spriggan what they are, because they don't care, and they don't know. Spriggans possess the ability to suddenly swell to the size of a large human or shrink to a size only slightly larger than a bumblebee.

WASP HILL MOB

A wild and unwelcome addition to the criminal landscape of Malborn, the Wasp Hill Mob have plagued the airship trade and conducted opportunistic thefts and raids across the city. Whilst several members of the gang have been captured and confined, their base of operations and home territory remain a mystery to the authorities.

The mob arrived a few years ago and has since become a considerable nuisance owing to their magical abilities. They are a band of spriggans from the Otherworld in Lyonesse. Their *modus operandi* is to ride wasps into battle, as the gang name suggests. The gang's faerie nature allows them to shrink down and slip unnoticed into hidden places to scout a target, then swell in size when the raid begins, often riding gigantic wasps scaled to match their sudden growth.

The Wasp Hill Mob are the most disorganized of organized criminals. When not robbing and committing criminal damage they drink, argue and brawl, going on benders through the taverns of the city that have already become legendary. Stopping them in the course of one of their raids is a challenging task. Tracking them down afterwards is often extremely easy. Every member of the gang is a spirited brawler, however, and apprehending them can often wreck whatever low dive they have settled in.

The Mob follows a lot of patterns familiar to scholars of Fey lore, and a knowledge of such customs has proved the best way to contain them. They keep to bargains they make, even those they are tricked into agreeing to. They love mischief and chaos, and don't hesitate to turn the lives of law-abiding citizens upside down, but they are not actively murderous or evil. They respect those who can put up a good fight, play music, take a joke, declaim a decent heroic poem, or match them drink for drink. On occasion they have been known to pitch in against worse threats to the city who lack an honest sense of humor.

The Wasp Hill Mob can shrink, grow, ride insects, drink a tavern dry, and honor a bargain. Frankly, that makes them more respectable than half the Upper City.

—Filigree, Thief Acrobat Extraordinaire

SPRIGGAN NAMES

Spriggans come from the wild faerie realms of Lyonesse, and their names reflect the mischievous nature of the Fey. A spriggan name is usually short, playful, and sharp to the ear, often built from one or two quick syllables.

Among the Wasp Hill Mob, names are often chosen for how they sound in a boast or a threat. Some take titles earned through mischief or notoriety, though these shift frequently as the gang's fortunes change.

Male Names: Bramble, Crick, Dallow, Fenn, Grindle, Kett, Lork, Marn, Puck, Rindle

Female Names: Bixi, Cora, Della, Fennel, Liri, Midge, Nessa, Perri, Tansy, Vixi

SPRIGGAN TRAITS

Creature Type: Fey

Size: Small

Speed: 30 feet

As a Spriggan, you have the following traits.

Change Size. You can cast the *Enlarge/Reduce* spell with this trait. You can only target yourself with this spell. Once you cast *Enlarge/Reduce* with this trait, you can't cast that spell with it again until you finish a Long Rest.

Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma is your spellcasting ability for these spells when you cast them with this trait (choose when you select this species).

Wasp Companion. When you reach character level 5, you can magically summon a **Giant Wasp**. When summoned, the giant wasp gains Temporary Hit Points equal to twice your level.

The giant wasp is Friendly to you and your allies and obeys your commands. It vanishes if you die. In combat, the giant wasp acts during your turn. It can move and use its Reaction on its own, but the only action it takes is the Dodge action unless you take a Bonus Action to command it to take an action in its stat block or some other action. You can also sacrifice one of your attacks when you take the Attack action to command the giant wasp to take the Sting action. If you have the Incapacitated condition, the giant wasp acts on its own and isn't limited to the Dodge action.

When you can cast the *Enlarge/Reduce* spell, you can make your giant wasp an additional target for the spell.

Whenever you finish a Long Rest, you can summon a new giant wasp, which appears in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of you. If you already have a giant wasp from this feature, the old one vanishes when the new one appears.

When you reach character level 7, whenever your giant wasp uses its Sting action it can add your Proficiency Bonus to its attack roll and damage roll.







VIGILANTE GEAR

MALBORN'S MARKETS OFFER WEAPONS, TOOLS, AND substances rarely encountered elsewhere in the world. Its artificers build intricate devices powered by costly stardust, while workshops produce white phosphorus for weapons as useful as they are dangerous. Even the city's notorious lotus trade has its practical side, with certain varieties distilled into oils and elixirs.

WHITE PHOSPHORUS

Among Malborn's artificers, few substances are more valuable than white phosphorus. It burns with a terrible intensity, clings stubbornly to whatever it touches, and has made Malborn's incendiary weapons feared far beyond the city's shores.

Beneath the city lie vast phosphate deposits formed from seabird guano accumulated over countless generations. Miners quarry the pale, foul-smelling stone from galleries beneath the extinct volcano. Most of it is crushed for fertilizer and exported abroad, but the finest deposits are reserved for artificers, who secretly transform them into white phosphorus.

Malborn sells some phosphorus weapons abroad for extraordinary sums, but vigilantes also make use of the substance in specialized incendiary equipment. Such devices are powerful but notoriously dangerous, and a damaged mechanism can prove as deadly to its owner as its intended target.

SELENIKINETIC FLYWHEELS

Many of the ingenious devices carried by Malborn's vigilantes are powered by enchanted mechanisms that convert the strange energy of stardust into mechanical motion. Tiny versions drive lockpicks, traps, and clockwork creatures, while larger assemblies power far more formidable artifices.

A typical mechanism contains two flywheels spinning in opposite directions, their motion transferred through gears, shafts, and pistons. More elaborate devices may contain several flywheels, each controlling a different limb, tool or function.

Such equipment is only useful while its owner can keep it supplied with stardust, which is increasingly scarce and can be expensive to obtain. As the particles lose their potency, the flywheels slow and eventually stop altogether.

LOTUS

Among Malborn's most profitable exports is the lotus, a beautiful and dangerously addictive flower whose different varieties produce distinct effects. Although best known as an intoxicant, skilled alchemists and brewers can distill its petals and seeds into specialized oils and elixirs.

Vigilantes sometimes use these preparations to sharpen their senses, dull pain, steady their nerves, improve concentration, or push their bodies beyond ordinary limits. Such benefits always come at a price. Lotus preparations frequently produce debilitating after-effects, and repeated use risks addiction.

AMMUNITION

ARROWS

Ammunition for Longbows and Shortbows.

BLEEDER ARROW

On a deep strike, tiny selenikinetic flywheels hidden within the arrowhead engage, forcing barbed sections outward inside the wound. The expanded head anchors itself in flesh, widening the injury with every movement and making removal both difficult and dangerously bloody.

On a Critical Hit, this arrow becomes lodged in the target. While lodged, the target takes 3 (1d6) points of Necrotic damage at the start of each of its turns and its Speeds are reduced by 10 feet as it bleeds. A creature can use an action to dislodge the arrow and stop the bleeding. This deals an additional 3 (1d6) Necrotic damage.

DROWSE ARROW

A living drowse octopus is secured around the arrowhead in a state of torpor. The violence of impact awakens it, causing the creature to cling instinctively to exposed flesh and release a powerful paralytic toxin through its skin, sometimes leaving the victim unconscious within moments.

A creature hit by this ammunition must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or have the Poisoned condition for 1 minute. If the saving throw fails by 3 or more, the creature also has the Unconscious condition while Poisoned in this way. The creature wakes up if it takes damage or if another creature takes an action to shake it awake.

FLASH ARROW

The arrowhead carries a sealed charge of white phosphorus. On impact, the casing fractures and exposes it to the air, producing a sudden flare of brilliant light accompanied by a burst of dense white smoke that can leave nearby creatures temporarily blinded and disoriented.

On a hit, every creature in a 5-foot Emanation centered on the target hit by the arrow must succeed on a DC 15

MALBORN AMMUNITION

Item	Weight	Cost
Arrow, Bleeder	1/4 lb.	5 GP
Arrow, Drowse	1/4 lb.	125 GP
Arrow, Flash	1/4 lb.	75 GP
Arrow, Lotus	1/4 lb.	75 GP
Arrow, Phosphor	1/4 lb.	30 GP
Arrow, Smoke	1/4 lb.	60 GP
Arrow, Starburst	1/4 lb.	250 GP
Bolt, Flare	1/4 lb.	100 GP
Bolt, Ooze	1/4 lb.	40 GP
Bolt, Phosphor	1/4 lb.	30 GP
Bolt, Shatter	1/4 lb.	35 GP
Bolt, Smoke	1/4 lb.	60 GP

Constitution saving throw or gain the Blinded condition for 1 minute. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

LOTUS ARROW

The hollow arrowhead carries a concentrated lotus extract that is driven into the wound on impact. Within moments, the toxin overwhelms the victim's muscles, leaving them rigid and helpless while the body struggles to purge the poison.

A creature hit by this ammunition must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or have the Poisoned condition and a Speed of 0 for 1 minute. The creature repeats the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending both effects on itself on a success.

PHOSPHOR ARROW

The arrowhead contains a sealed charge of white phosphorus, kept from the air until impact. When the tip shatters, the phosphorus is scattered across the target and exposed to air, causing it to ignite almost instantly and cling fiercely as it burns.

On a hit, the target starts Burning (see Hazards in the *Dungeon Master's Book*).

SMOKE ARROW

The arrowhead carries a sealed charge of white phosphorus. On impact, the casing fractures and exposes the substance to the air, where it ignites and rapidly produces a dense cloud of choking white smoke. Vigilantes use these arrows to conceal retreats, obscure enemies, or cover an approach.

On a hit, the arrow creates a 10-foot-radius sphere of smoke centered on the target. The sphere spreads around corners, and its area is heavily obscured. It lasts for 1 minute or until a wind of moderate or greater speed (at least 10 miles per hour) disperses it.

STARBURST ARROW

The arrowhead is fashioned from a large shard of stardust that fractures on impact, releasing a violent burst of energy. The resulting shock can stagger flesh and bone but is especially destructive to constructs.

On a hit, the target takes an additional 1d8 Lightning damage and if it is Medium size or smaller it has the Prone condition. If the target is a Construct, the additional damage increases to 2d8 and ignores Resistance to Lightning damage.

BOLTS

Ammunition for Hand Crossbows, Heavy Crossbows, and Light Crossbows.

FLARE BOLT

The bolt carries a sealed charge of white phosphorus that bursts across the target on impact. Exposed to the air, the substance ignites in several brilliant, clinging patches, outlining the victim in flickering light.

On a hit, the target is outlined in light if it fails a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. Until the end of your next turn, the target sheds Dim Light in a 10-foot radius. Any attack roll against an affected creature or object has Advantage if the attacker can see it, and the affected creature or object can't benefit from being Invisible.

OOZE BOLT

The sealed head contains a living fragment of a **Gray Ooze** held in torpor. On impact, the vessel shatters and the ooze adheres to the target, immediately secreting corrosive enzymes.

On a hit, the target takes 1d6 Acid damage instead of the weapon's usual damage. At the end of the target's next turn, it takes 2d6 Acid damage and the effect ends. A creature can end all Ooze Bolt effects on it early by taking an Action to scrape the ooze off.

PHOSPHOR BOLT

On a hit, the target starts Burning (see Hazards in the *Dungeon Master's Book*).

SHATTER BOLT

Tiny selenikinetic flywheels lie beneath the bolt's segmented steel head. On impact, they engage simultaneously, wrenching the armored casing apart with tremendous force and hurling its razor-edged plates outward in a burst of deadly fragments.

A creature hit by this ammunition takes 1d4 Bludgeoning damage, instead of the weapon's usual damage. Any creature within 5 feet must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d6 Piercing damage.

SMOKE BOLT

On a hit, the bolt creates a 10-foot-radius Sphere of smoke centered on the target. The Sphere spreads around corners, and its area is Heavily Obscured. It lasts for 1 minute or until a wind of moderate or greater speed (at least 10 miles per hour) disperses it.



Bleeder Arrow



Drowse Arrow



Flash Arrow



Lotus Arrow



Phosphor Arrow



Smoke Arrow



Starburst Arrow



Flare Bolt



Ooze Bolt



Phosphor Bolt



Shatter Bolt



Smoke Bolt



Constriction Bolas

You can fight fair if you like. Personally, I prefer tools, traps, dirty tricks, and watching some murderous asshole get what's coming to him.

—Sickle-Claw

WEAPONS

CONSTRICTION BOLAS

Three weighted spheres are joined by thin steel cables, with tiny selenikinetetic flywheels concealed inside each weight. When the bolas wrap around a target, the flywheels engage and rapidly reel in the cables, tightening them until the victim's limbs are firmly bound.

The Constriction Bolas have 3 charges. When making an attack roll with the bolas, you can expend 1 charge to activate the selenikinetetic flywheels. If the attack hits a Huge or smaller creature, the target must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or have the Restrained condition.

As an action, the restrained creature can make a DC 13 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, ending the condition on itself on a success.

Regaining Charges. You can spend 1 minute applying 10 GP worth of stardust to the Constriction Bolas to restore 1 expended charge. You must be proficient with Tinker's Tools to restore a charge in this way.

HEAD TOSSEr

The Head Tosser conceals a pair of compact selenikinetetic flywheels within its reinforced haft. Pulling a trigger releases their stored energy, driving a mechanism that violently ejects the axe head from the handle and sends it spinning toward its target. The head must then be retrieved and manually fitted back onto the haft before the weapon can be used again. Resetting the gears and preparing the flywheels for another launch is a delicate process, requiring about a minute even in experienced hands.

The Head Tosser has 1 charge. When you use the Thrown property, and have charges remaining, you can pull a trigger in the handle that hurls the head of the axe and expends 1 charge.

When you use the Thrown property, but before you make your attack roll, you can pull a trigger in the handle that hurls the head of the axe and expends 1 charge. On a hit, the attack deals an additional 2d6 Slashing damage.

It takes 1 minute to remount the head of the Hurl Axe after it is retrieved. The weapon cannot be used until the head is remounted.

Regaining Charges. You can spend 1 minute applying 100 GP worth of stardust to the Head Tosser to restore 1 expended charge. You must be proficient with Tinker's Tools to restore a charge in this way.

MALBORN WEAPONS

Name	Damage	Properties	Mastery	Weight	Cost
<i>Simple Melee Weapons</i>					
Splitstaff	1d6 Bludgeoning	Versatile (1d8), see description	Topple	5 lbs	75 GP
Vaulting Staff	1d6 Bludgeoning	Versatile (1d8), see description	Topple	6 lbs	150 GP
Wolfram Club	1d6 Bludgeoning	Finesse	Slow	4 lbs	30 GP
Wolfram Quarterstaff	1d10 Bludgeoning	Finesse, Two-Handed	Vex	8 lbs	125 GP
<i>Martial Melee Weapons</i>					
Head Tosser	1d8 Slashing	Versatile (1d10 Slashing), Thrown (range 20/60), see description	Topple	5 lbs	275 GP
Meteor Hammer	1d6 Piercing	Finesse, Reach, Two-Handed, see description	Topple	8 lbs	300 GP
<i>Martial Ranged Weapons</i>					
Constriction Bolas	1 Bludgeoning	Finesse, Thrown (Range 20/60), see description	Topple	6 lbs	50 GP
Iron Tether	1d10 Piercing	Heavy, Loading, Two-Handed, Ammunition, and Ranged 100/400, see description	Push	20 lb	250 GP
Three-Fold Grasp	1d6 Piercing	Finesse, light, thrown (range 20/60), see description	Slow	1 lb	200 GP

IRON TETHER (HEAVY CROSSBOW)

The Iron Tether is a heavy crossbow modified around a pair of selenikinetetic flywheels. When fired, the opposing wheels release their stored energy through a system of gears and pulleys, providing the tremendous force required to launch a heavy grappling bolt while trailing a reinforced cable behind it. Once the bolt strikes, the mechanism can be reversed, causing the flywheels to reel the cable back onto a spool beneath the weapon.

The grappling bolt can be driven into stone, timber, or other solid surfaces, allowing the cable to serve as a climbing rope or makeshift tightrope. Against living targets, the barbed bolt and tightening cable can restrain even large creatures.

This functions as a regular Heavy Crossbow. However, you can choose to shoot a grappling bolt instead of a regular bolt. The Iron Tether has 3 charges. When you fire a grappling bolt, the weapon expends 1 charge. Firing ordinary crossbow bolts does not expend charges.

Grappling Bolt. The maximum range of this bolt is 100 ft. When fired, a cable runs from the attacker to the target. On a hit, you can force a Large size or smaller creature to make a Constitution saving throw (DC 8 plus the ability modifier and your Proficiency Bonus). On a failed save, the creature has the Grappled condition (escape DC 12), and if it is moved more than 100 feet away from you or teleports, the Grappled condition ends.

The bolt can also be fired at a static object. An attack roll against AC 10 will successfully attach the bolt to the object. This can allow for climbing or tightrope walking.

Only one grappling bolt can be fired. It takes 1 minute to reload the grappling bolt if it is not being used to grapple a creature or attached to an object.

Regaining Charges. You can spend 1 minute applying 30 GP worth of stardust to the Iron Tether to restore 1 expended charge. You must be proficient with Tinker's Tools to restore a charge in this way.

METEOR HAMMER

A heavy iron ball covered in short spikes hangs from the end of a long reinforced chain. Skilled wielders keep the weight in constant motion, building momentum before sending it whipping around shields, limbs, and weapons. In cramped hands it is dangerous; in practiced ones, terrifying.

When you hit a Large or smaller creature with the Meteor Hammer, you can forgo dealing damage to wrap the chain around it. The target must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw against a DC equal to 8 + your Proficiency Bonus + the ability modifier used for the attack or have the Grappled condition. While the Meteor Hammer is grappling a creature, you can't make attacks with it. You can end the grapple at any time (no action required), and the grapple ends early if you are no longer holding the Meteor Hammer.

Meteor Hammer



Head Tossers

Iron Tether





Splitstaff

SPLITSTAFF

This reinforced quarterstaff is built around a concealed chain running through its hollow core. With a twist of the central locking collar, the staff separates into two weighted fighting sticks joined by the chain. A second turn draws the chain taut and locks the halves back together.

A Splitstaff has two forms. You can take a Bonus Action to change it from one form to the other.

Staff Form. The weapon functions as a Quarterstaff that deals 1d6 Bludgeoning damage and has the Versatile (1d8) property.

Split Form. The weapon becomes two connected fighting sticks. These sticks deal 1d6 Bludgeoning damage and have the Finesse, Light, and Reach properties.

While the Splitstaff is in Split Form, you can't wield another weapon or a Shield.

Three-Fold Grasp

THREE-FOLD GRASP (JAVELIN)

This weapon consists of three compact, axe-shaped weights connected by thin steel cables and wound around a central handle. When thrown, selenikinetic flywheels release the weights outward, causing them to spin rapidly around a target. On contact, the cables wrap around the victim while the flywheels reel them tight, binding limbs and dragging the three hooked weights firmly into place.

The Three-Fold Grasp has 3 charges. When you use its Slow Mastery on a Large or smaller creature, its Speed is reduced by 30 feet, rather than 10 feet. This expends 1 charge.

Regaining Charges. You can spend 1 minute applying 35 GP worth of stardust to the Three-Fold Grasp to restore 1 expended charge. You must be proficient with Tinker's Tools to restore a charge in this way.

Vaulting Staff

VAULTING STAFF

A compact selenikinetic mechanism is concealed within this reinforced staff. When one end is planted and the trigger pulled, a flywheel drives a telescoping piston outward with tremendous force, launching the wielder over walls, across alleys, or onto rooftops.

The Vaulting Staff has 3 charges. When you make a Long Jump or High Jump while holding the staff, you can expend 1 charge to activate it. For that jump, your jump distance is tripled, you don't need to move 10 feet beforehand to achieve that distance, and you have Advantage on any Strength (Athletics) check made as part of the jump.

Regaining Charges. You can spend 1 minute applying 35 GP worth of stardust to the Vaulting Staff to restore 1 expended charge. You must be proficient with Tinker's Tools to restore a charge in this way.

WOLFRAM CLUB

Malborn's artificers have learned to refine wolfram, an extraordinarily dense metal found within certain rare ores. A core of wolfram runs through the club's striking end, giving the otherwise compact weapon enough weight to break bone with frightening ease.

WOLFRAM QUARTERSTAFF

Wolfram metal is concentrated in carefully balanced sections near each end, giving the staff exceptional striking power while preserving its speed and precision. Unlike a standard quarterstaff, however, its weight and balance require it to be wielded with both hands.

ADVENTURING GEAR

AIRSPONGE MASK

An airsponge is a spherical coastal plant resembling an unappealing cross between a toadstool and a sea sponge. It clings to cliff faces and exposed rock, growing in some cases to five feet across.

The erratic tides of Oceanus regularly leave these plants submerged for hours or days at a time. During a major conjunction, when all five moons align and the sea rises to its greatest height, entire colonies may vanish beneath the water. Airsponges survive by filling their countless pores with air while exposed, storing enough oxygen to continue their cellular respiration until the tide recedes.

Human divers have found a more practical use for this adaptation. An airsponge harvested immediately before the rising tide has enjoyed the longest possible period in the open air and is therefore at its fullest. The plant is cut from the rock and sealed inside an airtight container.

A sponge can later be removed from its container and placed in a mask where it provides air to the user for a brief period.

Old or badly preserved sponges may release moisture, spores and a smell reminiscent of a flooded cellar.

While equipped with this plant, you can breathe underwater for up to 10 minutes. After that time, the plant dies and the Airsponge Mask can no longer be used. If the mask is removed and brought to the surface before 10 minutes pass, the plant refills itself with air after 1 minute.

Malborn praises the inventor and forgets the College that educated him, funded his experiments, preserved his failures, and taught his successor.

— **Fistan Gol**



MALBORN ADVENTURING GEAR

Item	Weight	Cost
Airsponge Mask	1 lb.	80 GP
Clockwork Engraver	40 lb.	1,000 GP
Dart Bandolier	2 lb.	150 GP
Dungblast	3 lb.	75 GP
Goldwing	250 lb.	3,500 GP
Injection Worm	1/4 lb.	100 GP
Iron Web	3 lb.	300 GP
Key Worm	2 lb.	200 GP
Phosphor Bomb	4 lb.	250 GP
Phosphor Censer	20 lb.	200 GP
Phosphorus Charge	1/4 lb.	60 GP
Roof Skipper	12 lb.	500 GP
Shrieker Box	12 lb.	500 GP
Stardust Goggles	1 lb.	150 GP
Starfire Paste	1/4 lb.	100 GP
Starflash Egg	1/4 lb.	75 GP
Sunburst Flask	1/4 lb.	100 GP
Trap Rat	15 lb.	150 GP
Urro Bomb	5 lb.	125 GP
Utility Belt	2 lb.	300 GP
Whisper Tick	1/4 lb.	175 GP
Widowcap Smoke	4 lb.	50 GP

CLOCKWORK ENGRAVER

This compact instrument uses selenikineti flywheels to guide an engraving arm with extraordinary precision. Once given a pattern, signature, seal, or illustration, it can reproduce the design on wood, metal, or stone. In skilled hands, it is equally useful for legitimate craftsmanship or producing convincing forgeries.

The Clockwork Engraver has 3 charges. When you activate the engraver, it expends 1 charge and can operate for up to 1 hour. During that time, it can reproduce a pattern, inscription, signature, seal, or illustration placed before it upon wood, metal, stone, or a similar solid surface.

Reproducing a simple design takes 10 minutes. Particularly intricate designs, such as official seals or detailed illustrations, take 1 hour.

A creature inspecting a reproduction made by the engraver must succeed on an Intelligence (Investigation) check against a DC equal to 10 + your Proficiency Bonus + your Intelligence modifier to recognize it as a reproduction.

The Clockwork Engraver cannot reproduce magical properties, magical writing, or other supernatural qualities of the original object.

Regaining Charges. You can spend 1 minute applying 20 GP worth of stardust to the Clockwork Engraver to restore 1 expended charge. You must be proficient with Tinker's Tools to restore a charge in this way.



Clockwork Engraver

Dart Bandolier

DART BANDOLIER

Favored by assassins, burglars, and fighters who rely on speed, this fitted leather rig holds a row of darts in angled loops across the chest and waist. Each dart can be drawn cleanly with one hand.

If you have an open hand on your turn after taking an action, you can draw a dart from the bandolier and make one attack with it using a Bonus Action. You don't add your ability modifier to this attack's damage, unless it is negative.

You can do this three times before the bandolier must be rearranged. Rearranging the bandolier with three darts takes 1 minute.

DUNGBLAST

This clay bomb contains a foul alchemical slurry of fermented guano, bitterroot resin, sulphurous salts, and other refuse gathered from Malborn's workshops. When the casing breaks, the mixture reacts violently with the air, releasing a dense yellow cloud so nauseating that even hardened fighters may be left choking and retching.

As an action, you can throw the bomb at a point up to 60 feet away. At that point a 10-foot-radius Sphere of yellow, nauseating gas is created. The cloud spreads around corners, and its area is heavily obscured. The cloud lingers in the air until the end of your next turn.

Each creature that starts its turn in the Sphere must succeed on a Constitution saving throw or have the Poisoned condition until the end of the current turn. While Poisoned in this way, the creature spends its action that turn retching and reeling. Creatures that don't need to breathe or are immune to poison automatically succeed on this saving throw. A moderate wind (at least 10 miles per hour) disperses the cloud.

Dungblast





Goldwing

Injection Worm

Iron Web

GOLDWING

This wondrous construction is fast and agile, but delicate and vulnerable to fire. Its four broad rotor wings are formed from canvas stretched over slender wooden spars, resembling those of a giant dragonfly. At its heart, paired selenikinetic flywheels spin in opposition, driving the wings through a complex system of brass gears, shafts, and pulleys. Additional flywheels govern pitch and balance, allowing the Goldwing to maneuver with surprising precision. The pilot sits in a leather-bound seat surrounded by brass instruments, while dark oak levers and pedals control the coordinated mechanisms. Keeping so many flywheels spinning consumes stardust at a prodigious rate, making the Goldwing expensive to operate.

Size: Huge

AC: 12

Hit Points: 50 (Vulnerable to Fire)

Crew and Passengers: 1 pilot, 2 passengers

Fly Speed: 40

Carrying Capacity: Cargo 200 lbs.

INJECTION WORM

Bred in Malborn's apothecaries, this pale parasitic worm survives by consuming toxins from the blood of its host. Swallowed whole, it quickly burrows into the stomach lining and begins filtering poisons from the body. Once engorged, the worm dies and is eventually expelled naturally.

This worm is eaten as an action and ends the Poisoned condition.

IRON WEB

This palm-sized device can be fixed to a floor, wall, or other solid surface. Once armed, its selenikinetic flywheels remain dormant until the mechanism is triggered. Several weighted cables then shoot outward, encircle the passing victim, and rapidly retract, binding them against the snare or entangling their limbs.

The Iron Web has 1 charge. As an action, you can attach it to a solid surface within your reach and arm it. The trap is not active until the end of this turn. When a Large or smaller creature moves within 5 feet of the device, the Iron Web expends its charge and activates, releasing weighted cables around the creature.

The creature must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or have the Restrained condition. A Restrained creature can use its action to make a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, ending the condition on itself on a success.

The cables have AC 15 and 10 Hit Points. Destroying them frees the creature.

Regaining Charges. You can spend 1 minute rewinding the cables and applying 30 GP worth of stardust to the Iron Web to restore its expended charge. You must be proficient with Tinker's Tools to restore the charge in this way.

KEY WORM

A hand-sized construct powered by several tiny seleniketic flywheels, each controlling a different pick, probe, or tensioning tool. Once placed against a lock, the mechanism methodically tests pins, wards, and tumblers until it finds the correct sequence. Its precision makes it invaluable to burglars, locksmiths, and vigilantes alike.

This item has 3 charges. As an action, you can place the Key Worm against a nonmagical lock and expend 1 charge. The construct immediately begins manipulating the lock with its picks and probes.

At the end of 1 minute, the next Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check used on this lock gains a +3 bonus or until the Key Worm is removed from the lock.

Regaining Charges. You can spend 1 minute applying 30 GP worth of stardust to the Key Worm to restore 1 expended charge. You must be proficient with Tinker's Tools to restore a charge in this way.

PHOSPHOR BOMB

This heavy iron bomb has a brittle, spiked outer shell surrounding a sealed charge of white phosphorus. When thrown, the casing shatters violently on impact, spraying jagged fragments through the surrounding area while exposing the phosphorus to air, where it ignites in a sudden burst of clinging flame.

As an action, you can throw the bomb at a point up to 60 feet away. Each creature within 10 feet of that point must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 2d6 Piercing damage plus 2d6 Fire damage and is Burning (see Hazards in the *Dungeon Master's Book*) on a failed save, or half as much damage only on a successful one.

PHOSPHOR CENSER

This reinforced metal vessel contains a carefully sealed supply of white phosphorus. Once deployed, controlled exposure to air produces billowing white smoke. Mal-borne soldiers use Phosphor Censers to conceal advances through streets and gateways, though damaged censers are notoriously dangerous.

As an action, you can ignite the phosphorus charge within the censer. It creates a 20-foot-radius Sphere of smoke centered on the censer. The area is Heavily Obscured and lasts for 1 minute. A moderate or stronger wind disperses the smoke.

Once activated, the phosphorus charge is consumed. Reloading the censer requires 1 minute and a replacement phosphorus charge.

Key Worm



Phosphor Bomb



Phosphor Censer

Roof
Skipper



Shrieker
Box



Sky Dog

ROOF SKIPPER

This backpack-sized contraption uses selenikineti flywheels to unfold and control a pair of articulated wings. Once airborne, the wheels continually adjust the angle and shape of the wings, allowing the wearer to steer while gliding. Vigilantes commonly use them to cross the gaps between Malborn's rooftops or escape from high places.

While wearing this cape, you have a Fly Speed equal to your Speed, but you can only fly horizontally. In addition, whenever you end your turn while in the air, you descend 15 feet.

When you land, you must make a DC 15 Acrobatics check. On a failure, you have the Prone condition and treat your fall as half the distance for the purposes of falling damage. On a success, you take no falling damage and land on your feet. You can't use this cape if you have the Incapacitated condition or are currently wear Heavy armor.

SHRIEKER BOX

This small brass box contains a stretched membrane driven by a pair of tiny selenikineti flywheels. Once activated, the mechanism produces a violent sequence of high-frequency vibrations that distort sound and send tremors through nearby surfaces.

The Shrieker Box has 3 charges. As an action, you can expend 1 charge to activate the box for 1 minute. While active, creatures with Blindsight or Tremorsense have those senses suppressed while within 30 feet of the box.

Regaining Charges. You can spend 1 minute applying 100 GP worth of stardust to the Shrieker Box to restore 1 expended charge. You must be proficient with Tinker's Tools to restore a charge in this way.

SKY DOG

A Sky Dog is a small airship designed to traverse the extreme vertical heights of Malborn. Built for high-altitude flight, it is commonly used as a lookout and spotter, watching the approaches to the city for incoming ships.

Its envelope is fashioned from the transparent skin of the King Mansala jellyfish, several of which must be caught, carefully skinned, and prepared by skilled craftsmen. The cured hides are joined to form an airtight, egg-shaped envelope filled with helium. With proper care, an envelope can last several months, being inflated before each flight and deflated afterward, before the skin eventually requires replacement. Beneath the envelope hangs a lightweight gondola built around a frame of sea bamboo.

Size: Huge

AC: 8

Hit Points: 30 (no damage threshold, Vulnerable to Fire)

Crew and Passengers: 1 pilot, 3 passengers

Speed: Ascend/Descend 20 ft. per round; Horizontal 5 ft. per round

Carrying Capacity: 1,000 lbs.

Starfire
Paste



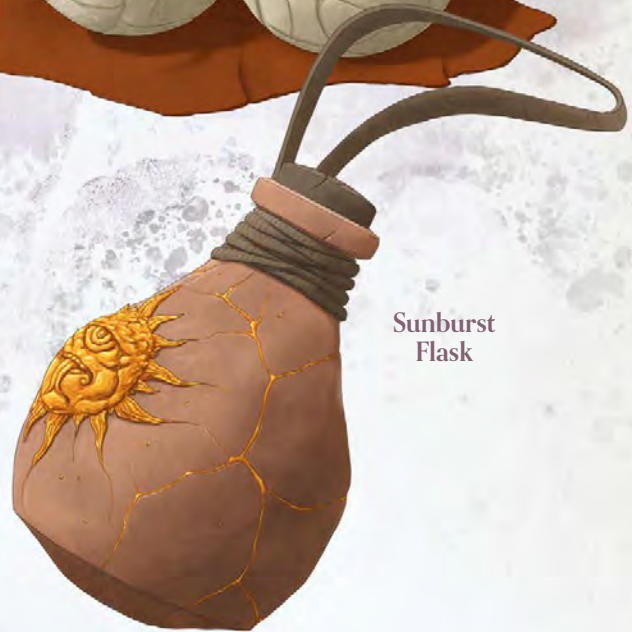
Starflash
Egg



Stardust
Goggles



Sunburst
Flask



STARDUST GOGGLES

These specialized goggles were developed to locate newly fallen stardust, whose minute particles are otherwise almost impossible to distinguish from ordinary dust and grit. When worn, the lenses reveal stardust as a faint silver gleam, allowing collectors to spot deposits before they are scattered by wind or washed away. In Malborn, children and adults sometimes venture out at first light after a celestial fall, sweeping streets, rooftops, and fields in hopes of finding enough stardust to sell to artificers who use it to power selenikineti flywheels.

While wearing these dark lenses, you have Darkvision out to a range of 40 feet.

STARFIRE PASTE

Starfire Paste combines white phosphorus with carefully prepared stardust to produce a thick, pale compound that burns with unnatural brilliance. Applied directly to an object before ignition, its concentrated heat can ruin locks, hinges, mechanisms, and even iron fittings without the indiscriminate destruction of a bomb.

As an action, you can apply the paste to an unattended object within reach and ignite it. At the end of your next turn, the object takes 20 Fire damage, ignoring Resistance and the object's Damage Threshold. The paste deals no damage to creatures.

STARFLASH EGG

This hollow ceramic sphere contains a carefully sealed charge of white phosphorus and other alchemical compounds. When the shell shatters, the contents ignite on contact with air, producing a brilliant white flash and deafening crack.

As an action, you can throw the egg at a point up to 60 feet away. Each creature within 10 feet of that point must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or have the Blinded and Deafened conditions until the end of its next turn.

SUNBURST FLASK

This sealed ceramic flask contains white phosphorus suspended from the air until its casing breaks. On impact, the phosphorus ignites and scatters across the surrounding area in burning fragments that cling stubbornly to clothing, wood, and flesh until exhausted or deprived of air.

When you take the Attack action, you can replace one of your attacks with throwing a Sunburst Flask. Make a Ranged attack roll against a creature within 30 feet, as if it had the Thrown weapon property. On a hit, the target takes 2d6 Fire damage and is Burning (see Hazards in the *Dungeon Master's Book*). On a miss, the flask shatters harmlessly nearby.

Trap Rat



TRAP RAT

A knee-high wheeled construct driven by selenikinetic flywheels, designed to travel ahead of explorers and vigilantes. Weighted rollers mimic the pressure of a full-grown person, while an articulated frame sweeps at human height to catch tripwires and hanging triggers. Its purpose is simple: trigger traps before its owner reaches them.

The Trap Rat has 3 charges. As an action, you can place the Trap Rat on the ground and expend 1 charge to activate it. It travels in a straight line at a Speed of 20 feet for up to 1 minute, stopping if it encounters an obstacle it cannot cross.

The Trap Rat exerts enough weight and pressure to trigger nonmagical traps that would normally be activated by a Medium creature walking through the area. Its articulated frame can also trigger tripwires, hanging cords, and similar mechanisms positioned up to 6 feet above the ground.

If a trap would normally target the creature that triggered it, the Trap Rat is considered the target instead. It has AC 13 and 15 Hit Points.

Regaining Charges. You can spend 1 minute applying 20 GP worth of stardust to the Trap Rat to restore 1 expended charge. You must be proficient with Tinker's Tools to restore a charge in this way.

Urro Bomb



URRO BOMB

Urro are hornets that have been selectively bred for centuries, producing a venom among the most lethal in the insect kingdom. Their fragile hives can be used as weapons: when shattered, they release their enraged occupants to attack anything nearby.

The hornets are nearly as dangerous to their handlers as to their intended victims. A hive broken prematurely can kill its owner and anyone standing close. To reduce this risk, each hive is sealed inside a small steel container supplied with air by a specially cultivated breed of airsponge. The plant keeps the hornets sluggish and docile until release, but can sustain them for only about 24 hours before they begin to suffocate.

As an action, you can throw the bomb at a point up to 60 feet away. At that point swarming wasps fill a 10-foot-radius sphere. The sphere's area is lightly obscured and difficult terrain. Any creature that ends its turn within the sphere takes 3 (1d6) Poison damage. The swarm lasts for 1 minute.

Malborn's workshops are branches of a much older tree.
Their strangest fruits grow from knowledge cultivated within
the College of the Voice.

— Fistan Gol



Utility Belt



Whisper Tick



Widowcap

UTILITY BELT

Designed for vigilantes, burglars, and fighters who need equipment close at hand, this reinforced belt carries potions in fitted loops and quick-release pouches.

While wearing a utility belt, you may forego an attack to drink a potion. You may only do this once before having to rearrange the utility belt for another potion. This process takes 1 minute. A utility belt cannot be worn with Medium or Heavy armor.

WHISPER TICK

Whisper ticks are pale, thumb-sized parasites born in bonded pairs. When separated, each instinctively senses the direction of its broodmate. Vigilantes exploit this behavior by secretly attaching one tick to a creature or object while carrying the other inside a small glass jar.

As an action, you can attach a tick to a willing creature or unattended object within reach. To secretly attach one to an unwilling creature within reach, make a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check contested by the creature's Wisdom (Perception) check. On a success, the tick is attached without the creature noticing. On a failure, the creature notices your attempt and the tick is not attached.

A creature carrying the tick's broodmate always knows the direction of the attached tick while it is within 1 mile. Finding an attached tick requires a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. After 48 hours, the ticks die.

WIDOWCAP SMOKE

Widowcap is a gray fungus harvested from the sewers beneath Malborn. When dried and burned, it produces a thick, acrid smoke that is relatively harmless to humanoids but intensely unpleasant to animals. Exterminators, hunters, and caravan guards commonly burn it to drive unwanted creatures away.

As an action, you can ignite a packet of widowcap. For 1 minute, it creates a 10-foot-radius Sphere of smoke that is Heavily Obscured. A Beast must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw to willingly enter the Sphere. A Beast that starts its turn inside the Sphere must use as much of its movement as necessary to leave it by the safest available route.

MALBORN WORLD PRIMER

MALBORN IS AN ANCIENT CITY BUILT INSIDE THE throat of a dead volcano far out at sea. Its black stone walls rise in rings along the crater, layer upon layer of streets and towers stacked above a deep sun starved abyss called the Pit. At the rim and upper terraces, nobles dine in glass walled mansions and drifting air ships. Far below, cramped alleys, crumbling walkways, and sagging bridges form a maze where the desperate and the dangerous struggle to survive.

THE CITY OF MALBORN

Malborn's skyline is a forest of needle thin towers, many more than five hundred feet tall, joined by bridges and platforms that cling to the crater wall. Old air ships from forgotten eras hang moored above the streets, their hulls turned into floating estates or private gardens.

True natives of Malborn, the malborne, are marked by sacred tattoos inked in shimmering dark pigment. The designs show lineage and secret affiliations. Unmarked foreigners stand out at a glance, inviting the attention of thieves, corrupt watchmen, and worse. In Malborn every stranger is someone else's opportunity.

LAW, ORDER, AND OLD HUNGER

Malborn is ruled through law that is both absolute and corrupt. The central principle is Lex Talionis, an eye for an eye, blood for blood. The law divides people into three castes: native malborne, native outsiders, and foreigners. A crime committed upward in caste is judged more severely than one committed downward.

Old Hunger is the heart of this system. It is a massive prison fortress that looms where the Upper City meets the Pit. The prison's official motto speaks of starving the city's hunger for wrongdoing. In truth, it became a place where criminal legends were forged and forgotten. When Old Hunger's walls finally failed, the worst of its inmates spilled back into the streets, dragging the city into a new age of fear.

NOBLE HOUSES AND THE ART OF MASKS

Eighteen great families rule Malborn from towers and air ships that overlook the crater. Each controls a vital trade: shipbuilding, gold, glass, necromancy, academies, phosphate mining, black lotus, enchanted arms, banking,

and more. House Malabrate is the oldest, its members tall and pale with hints of divine blood and twisted, vestigial wings. House Frosch rose on phosphate wealth and currently holds the mayoralty. House Gol oversees the great cathedral of the Malborn god.

Among the nobility, appearance is a weapon. Illusionists, surgeons, and alchemists reshape faces, skin, hair, and scent. Teeth are blackened and polished. Eyes glow with enchanted color. Perfumed wigs and painted tattoos hide as much as they reveal. To keep the same face too long is to admit stagnation or weakness.

Masks are not limited to nobles. Criminals, vigilantes, and secret societies all create larger than life alter egos and symbols. Names like Owlfather, Fat Cat, or Sister Mercy are spoken with awe or dread in the taverns of the Pit. In Malborn a mask can inspire a street, unite a gang, or terrify a magistrate more than any written law.

THE PIT

At the bottom of the caldera sprawls the Pit, a tangle of leaning tenements, collapsed bridges, and lightless courts where the sun rarely reaches. Here the City Watch patrols the streets in squads, if at all. Gangs, assassins, cults, and monsters carve out territory, claiming small corners like petty kingdoms. Many of Malborn's most infamous figures rose from this abyss, climbing the city on a ladder of blood and rumor.

For some, the Pit is a prison without bars. For others, it is the only place where a new legend can be born.

ROGUE'S GALLERY

The Rogue's Gallery is a collection of Malborn's most feared criminals, their names whispered far beyond the city to frighten children into obedience. Among them are Carderon the Invulnerable, a metal-devouring enforcer cursed with a decaying body; Killer Roach, a deranged insectoid assassin who stalks homes; Mr. Owl, a silent, ancient shadow that hunts the lost; Sickie-Claw, a ruthless vigilante who slays both criminals and the wealthy; the Abbot, a preacher who fuels hatred; the Viper, a calculating master of thieves and poison; and Ypo, the Maw, a scholar turned infernal crime lord consumed by endless hunger.

MALBORN FROM ABOVE



MALBORN DISTRICTS & LOCATIONS

MAKER'S
CATHEDRAL

OLD
HUNGER

UPPER
CITY

HUNGER
DISTRICT

CIRCUS
DISTRICT

COVERED
MARKET

UPPER
CITY

TENEMENT
DISTRICT

TWISTER
DISTRICT

UPPER
CITY

CITADEL
DISTRICT

UPPER
CITY

MURDERER'S
ROW



WANTED

DEAD OR ALIVE

FOR SEDITION & INCITEMENT



THE ABBOT

REWARDS

20,000 GOLD ALIVE
15,000 GOLD DEAD

WANTED

DEAD OR ALIVE

FOR ASSAULT & ROBBERY



CARDERON, THE INVULNERABLE

REWARDS

8,000 GOLD ALIVE

5,000 GOLD DEAD

WANTED

DEAD OR ALIVE

**FOR CONSPIRACY,
BRIBERY & MURDER**



FAT CAT

REWARDS

24,000 GOLD ALIVE

19,000 GOLD DEAD

WANTED
DEAD OR ALIVE

FOR BURGLARY & FORGERY



FILIGREE

REWARDS

10,000 GOLD ALIVE
5,000 GOLD DEAD

WANTED

DEAD OR ALIVE

FOR BURGLARY & MURDER



KILLER ROACH

REWARDS

10,000 GOLD ALIVE

8,000 GOLD DEAD

WANTED
DEAD OR ALIVE

FOR MURDER & PREDATION



MR. OWL

REWARD
20,000 GOLD
DEAD OR ALIVE

WANTED

DEAD OR ALIVE

FOR ASSAULT,
BURGLARY & VIGILANTISM



SICKLE-CLAW

REWARDS

5,000 GOLD ALIVE
4,000 GOLD DEAD

WANTED

DEAD OR ALIVE

FOR ASSAULT & VIGILANTISM



SISTER MERCY

REWARDS

8,000 GOLD ALIVE

4,000 GOLD DEAD

WANTED

DEAD OR ALIVE

FOR BLACKMAIL & BURGLARY



THE VIPER

REWARDS

6,000 GOLD ALIVE
4,000 GOLD DEAD

WANTED

DEAD OR ALIVE

FOR MURDER, FRAUD
& DRUG SMUGGLING



YPO, THE MAW

REWARDS

22,000 GOLD ALIVE
18,000 GOLD DEAD