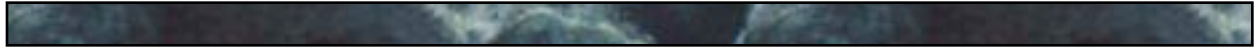


STORM KNIGHTS

DARK AYSLE

SOURCES AND INSPIRATION

JASYN JONES



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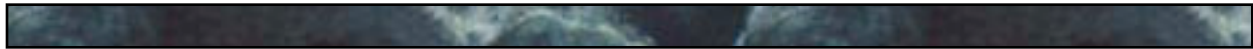
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These are original rules, intended for use with *TORG: Roleplaying the Possibility Wars*. The most recent version of these rules (and other TORG resources) can be found on the STORM KNIGHTS website:

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INTRODUCTION

Dark Aysle is a wasteland where the Corruption of the wicked is being deferred into the Land. The evil men do eats away at their hearts, but isn't visible in their visages (unlike the lands of the Light). Instead, it eats away at the land, befouling water, rotting crops, and causing livestock to become twisted and sickly.

In the strongholds of Corruption, even the monstrous forms of ravening beasts are masked, their malignancy and evil cloaked in a guise of innocence and purity.

The peasants, by and large, are not necessarily Corrupt, though no doubt many have chosen to worship the Dark gods of Aysle, but the rulers of Corrupt Aysle certainly are. Were it not so, Uthorion would have had them slain long ago.

Their innocence and beauty masks dark lusts and murderous desires. The more noble and beautiful the visage, the darker and more corrupt the heart, for in Dark Aysle Corruption ennobles and empowers.

SOURCES AND INSPIRATION

The theme of an outwardly noble but inwardly wicked ruling class who torments and tortures the commoners is a frequently explored one in Gothic horror, classic Gothic horror not the modern sort.

As with all Gothic horror, the social setting is very much Victorian or slightly

earlier. Translating it to Aysle's social setting shouldn't be too hard.

Here are some titles to start off with:

- Lewis Matthew, "The Monk", 1786
- Mary Shelley, "Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus", 1818
- Edgar Allen Poe, nearly anything

- Bram Stoker, "Dracula", 1897

The idea is that the wealthy are outwardly noble but inwardly rapacious. Though vampires are a near-cliché, the theme of a depraved aristocracy which indulges in secret abominations behind closed doors is essential.

Historically, Marquis de Sade, Elisabeth Bathory and the Borgias are good examples. Bathory is said to have ordered the slaughter of 650 virgins, in order to bathe in their blood. The following is a vignette giving insight into the character of the Borgias:

The papal guards forced the ragged prisoners into St. Peter's Square. They were shackled at the wrists and gathered in a close knot near its geographical center. The guards formed a phalanx at the broad entry into the square, preventing escape. The prisoners looked up at the Vatican windows, where, on a small balcony at one of the larger windows, the seventy-year-old Pope Alexander VI, formerly Rodrigo Borgia, stood with his twenty-year-old daughter, Lucrezia Borgia. Both were smiling. A few windows away, dressed completely in black velvet, was Alexander's son, Cesare Borgia. Beside him was a servant, also dressed all in black.

Were they about to hear words of mercy? Some generous dispensation for their crimes, which ranged from the serious to the trivial? Perhaps they were hopeful.

Suddenly, one of the prisoners fell, shot by Cesare. The prisoners scurried throughout the square, aware that someone in one of those windows was firing upon them. With each shot, the servant handed Cesare a new rifle, fully primed, and he fired again. Each shot was followed by a fresh rifle, and another shot. Within a matter of minutes, all of the prisoners were dead.

Alexander waved to his son. "Fine aim, my son," said the Pope. Cesare smiled and waved back, and he and his servant left the window and entered the Vatican apartment. Four men, pulling a cart, began to remove the bodies, tossing them in like limp sacks of grain. Cesare's harvest was taken away, to be thrown into the Tiber.

Some possible applications of the theme:

Perhaps the mayor gained his office because of a pact with a fiendish monster, and he now needs to sacrifice the village's young boys to the monster, in order to keep his wealth and position. One by one, they disappear from the streets of the hamlet, and no one knows why.

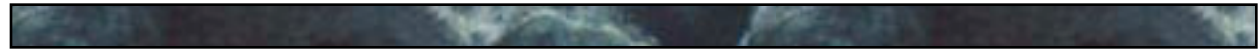
A prominent knight, outwardly a paladin, might actually be a bloodthirsty murderer, given to uncontrolled rages and battlefield atrocities. The slightest insult to his stilted notion of honor might bring murderous reprisals. What of the serving wench who accidentally spills a drink upon his tabard?

The honored priest might be a secret lecher, given to forcing the girls of the village to endure his foul advances. And what of those who refuse too steadily or to well? Might there not be some truth to the rumors that quiet crying can sometimes be heard emanating from his cellars?

The noble surgeon, working to heal the wounds of the village, may in fact conduct deranged experiments involving unholy science mixed with Dark magics. The fruit of this, of course, is health to the village, but at what price?

And as all of these Corruptions eat at the heart of society, the land darkens and twists. Monsters multiply. Crops fail. Rivers become twisted and darkened, bearing bitter waters nearly unfit for human consumption. Nearly.

One aspect of Dark Aysle is personal



Corruption and despotism. As well, the various gods of Corruption are likely to be enshrined as the official state religion, and worship should be mandatory.

There is a lot of material in Aysle left undeveloped. Certainly the worship of Corrupt gods is an area ripe for elaboration. Gamemasters could readily expand upon the worship of Endrak (the human god of Corruption.)

Worshippers of Moloch (a god of ancient Palestine and Carthage, 1400 BC or thereabouts) worshipped in this wise:

Moloch was represented as a huge bronze statue with the head of a bull. The statue was hollow, and inside there burned a fire which colored the Moloch a glowing red. Children were placed on the hands of the statue. Through an ingenious system the hands were raised to the mouth (as if Moloch were eating) and the children fell into the fire where they were consumed by the flames. The people gathered before the Moloch were dancing on the sounds of flutes and tambourines to drown out the screams of the victims.

Moloch was a sun god, and the sacrifices were to renew the fire of the sun. Endrak is the god of fire and darkness. The consonance with Endrak is easily made—fire is fire, after all. Certainly, Endrak’s worship involves human sacrifice. Like most maltheistic religions, the point is not necessarily worship but also propitiation.

A village in the Dark, a village of apparently normal people, has to sacrifice someone every new moon. They gather and lots are passed out (apologies to Shirley Jackson). The sacrifice is made, disaster staved off for another month, and the villagers disperse as the screams and flames die down. Of course, when Storm Knights arrive and disrupt the ceremony, what disaster befalls the village because Endrak was not propitiated?

History and fiction can give plenty of ideas for cold-blooded villains, or dark and vile worship rites. Simply transpose them into the fantasy setting and they become perfectly apt depictions of Dark Aysle.

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These rules are based (in part) on material published in the following TORG rulebook(s):

TORG Boxed Set

Original Mythos and Game Design: Greg Gorden

Mythos/System Development: Douglas Kaufman, Bill Slavicek

Additional Mythos/System Work: Christopher Kubasik, Ray Winninger, Paul Murphy

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