

Helmsberg



During the dark ages, Bergsburg had a deserved reputation for relative safety. Many Hochlanders, and some from further afield, who had lost their livelihood to the many dangers of the age, flocked to Bergsburg in order to make a new start. Soon the small, fortified city was full and so the poorer refugees made their makeshift homes in the shadow of a small fortress and barracks, sat atop a craggy hill, some way from the city wall.

Eventually, the city walls were extended to include this area, which has become known as Helmsberg, after the fortress that encouraged the original settlement. The barracks of Helmsberg was partially dismantled to supply stone for the new wall, but to this day, its ruin can still be seen, dominating the district and overlooking the activities of its people.

Although the levels of deprivation are nothing compared to the poorer areas of big cities like Middenheim and Talabheim, because of the poverty and crime of the area, Helmsberg has acquired a reputation in Bergsburg for great danger. However, contrary to what most Bergsburgers think, the main thoroughfares and square of Helmsberg are perfectly safe, during the day at least. The mazy back alleys however should always be treated extremely cautiously, especially by outsiders.

Ruhigerstrasse

Over looked by the craggy hillock that gives the district its name, Helmsberg is bounded on the north side by the Ruhigerstrasse, one of the town's main roads, where the hustle and bustle of everyday life is among the most vibrant in the whole city. Many shops and Inns line the street. The fare is generally of poor quality but the prices are low. Many now respectable, and sometimes wealthy, citizens have clawed themselves up via small businesses here.

Many beggars are based in this area, and ply their 'trade' here before moving on to other parts of town where the pickings are generally richer. As well as the beggars, here, various street entertainers find it a good place to come, often attracting large and enthusiastic, if not wealthy, crowds

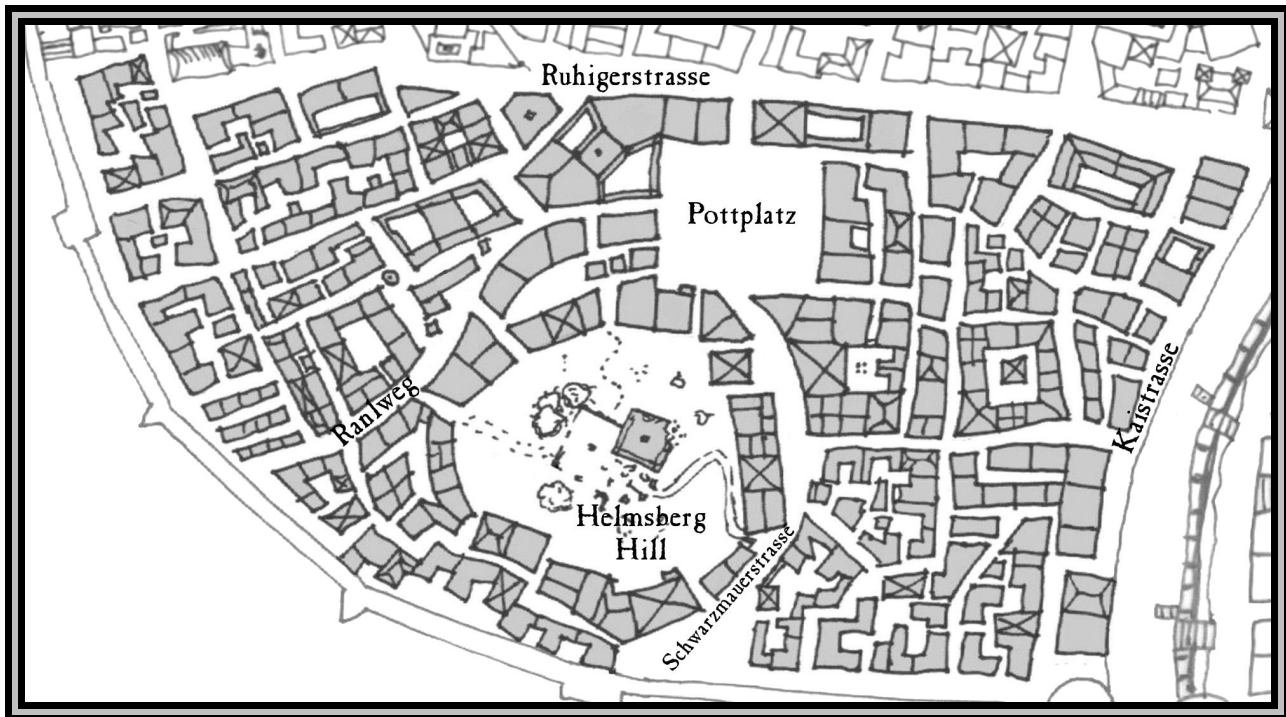
The watch keeps a heavy presence on the Ruhigerstrasse, the patrols are large and many. They are probably over compensating because except for a quick inspection of Pottplatz, they rarely patrol south of here.

Pottplatz

The main square of Helmsberg lies just to the south of Ruhigerstrasse. By day it moves to the sound of a myriad of traders and barrow-boys who set up market in the middle of the square. They sell mostly food and necessities; there is little demand for the luxuries that can be found elsewhere in town. The merchandise here will be mostly legitimately gained, but if you need something more exotic, or illegal, the traders can point you in the right direction. By night the sounds are more raucous as the Inns fill and drunks spill out into the square.

The most notable building on the square is the Church of St. Gerris, where Pavlo Nemitz runs his soup kitchen and doss house. Needless to say, this attracts many of the city's dregs to the area.

One of the most common sights in Pottplatz and along Ruhigerstrasse are the soup monkeys. These boys carry large buckets of unfathomable broth, which they sell for a penny a mug. Although they will claim the soup is made from many good things, usually alliterative, to help with their spiel, Beef, beer and broccoli, or Rabbit, radish and rhubarb, it is probably best not to know exactly what goes in. However, you could live off a diet of only these soups, and many people do.



Ranlweg

Every town has a street that gets an almost mythological reputation for danger. In Bergsburg that street is Ranlweg. Bergsburgers have many phrases that use this myth. 'You're going up Ranlweg, now.', might mean you are going to get yourself into trouble. 'He went up Ranlweg', means he's dead. 'He went up Ranlweg and came back, twice', he's a very brave fellow, etc. If someone is asking for directions at Pottplatz, a local who didn't take kindly to them might direct them 'straight up to the end of Ranlweg and turn left.', only as a joke, of course.

Ranlweg leaves the west side of Pottplatz and climbs up the hill towards the city wall. The squalour is there for all to see and anyone who might have a few pennies spare will be followed by a throng of hungry waifs. The western end of the street is the exclusive demesne of Magnus (See the Kreuzers, below).

Kaistrasse

Kaistrasse follows the river Drak up to Ruhigerstrasse and St Skulda's bridge. It is more of a quay than a street, being lined on one side by many warehouses and on the other by the river itself. Although the majority of the goods landed here are legal and have had its full duty paid, a lot of it is not. It is a good idea to keep yourself to yourself, down here, and not pry into other people's business.

Schwarzmauerstrasse

The schwarzmauerstrasse runs from the south of Pottplatz down towards the south wall, bending around Helmsberg Hill. It gets its name from the section of the south wall made from the reclaimed stone of the Helmsberg barracks, which is noticeably darker than the stone used on the rest of the wall. The residents around here live in fear of an excessively violent group of young footpads.

Helmsberg Hill

All that remains of the old barracks on this dome shaped craggy outcrop are a few low walls and a single tower that is now only about fifteen feet high. The watch used it as a lookout post for a few years after the new south walls were built, but soon abandoned it. There are common rumours that the hill is haunted and many locals, who would otherwise brave the dangers of deepest Helmsberg, will not venture up here at night. For this reason, partly, the properties at the foot of the hill are the cheapest in Bergsburg.

The Gangs

Two gangs dominate life in Helmsberg. Any trader, smuggler, or even thug will probably be affiliated to one of them. For the most part one tolerates the other, although it is not uncommon for a conflict of interests or misunderstanding to lead to some blood letting or arson. Both gangs realise that it is in their interests to keep these petty squabbles to a minimum until they can deliver the knock out blow to their rival. A certain amount of conflict must occur, though, in order to remind the people of their presence and to convince them of a need for protection.

The Kreuzers

This is a family oriented gang, with family members taking up almost every position of power. They are based to the west of Pottplatz on the Ranlweg and deal mostly with protection and thievery. The head is Walter 'Magnus' (after the emperor) Kreuzer. He is well known for his ruthlessness and will not hesitate to order the death of any that cross him. Any body turning up in Helmsberg will often be referred to as 'a friend of Magnus'.

The symbol of the Kreuzers is a simple cross. Their victims will often have a cross carved on the forehead, before death, if possible. The Kreuzers control a lot of thieves who work and live outside of Helmsberg, also.

The Hovenbachs

The Hovenbachs is the name given to a loose confederation of illegal outfits, mostly smugglers. It was formed as a defence against the growing power of the Kreuzers. It is headed by Gustav Nils a prominent smuggler, although he doesn't have the power of Magnus, he is well able to unite the disparate groups under him and wield that power effectively. The Hovenbachs were named after Manfred Hovenbach who united them originally. His skull, with a cross carved into it, is now incorporated into Magnus' 'staff of office'.

The symbol of the Hovenbachs is a fish. They control most of the smuggling in and out of Bergsburg, and therefore have power throughout the city. They are based east of Pottplatz along the Drak, in both Helmsberg and Sudentor. The Hovenbachs also run a lot of the begging throughout the city, ensuring that their beggars get the best pitches etc.

The People

Outsiders are always viewed suspiciously here. The consensus is that 'Nobody ever gave a Helmsberger a helping hand, why should we do anything for them.' Indeed, Helmsberger is a derogatory term elsewhere in the city. Between themselves though, a community spirit is evident and although no one is going to be generous with what little possessions they have, Helmsbergers are free with their time for their friends and neighbours in need.

Many normal people fear the gangs, and sensibly so. Although most people have little direct business with them, short of paying 'insurance' and 'taxes', and buying cheap stolen goods, the threat of the gangs always seem to be present and people have learned to watch what they say. The gangs propagate the myth that it is they that keep the Helmsbergers safe and create wealth for the area, in reality the reverse is true. Some individuals decide that a career within a gang, not unreasonably, is their best hope of success, it is also their quickest means to death.

The Mission of Shallyan Mercy

This large stone building on the Ruhigerstrasse houses many of the destitute of Helmsberg. It is run by Goodwife Heidi Kremel, a Shallyan cleric in her forties. She is proud of her work here and of the reputation that the mission has earned in Shallyan circles throughout The Empire. As long as they obey the basic rules of the house, anyone is welcome to stay here. Heidi will also help people to get jobs and move on, for there are always many others waiting for a place at the mission. Heidi relies on the influence of the Temple of Shallya's Falls to find work for her charges.

The Cross Hands

The Cross Hands on Ruhigerstrasse is supposedly a members only club owned by Hardi Kreuzer, Magnus' cousin. The shutters are always pulled and a thick wooden door bars the way. At night, much noise can be heard coming from within.

The String o' Pearls

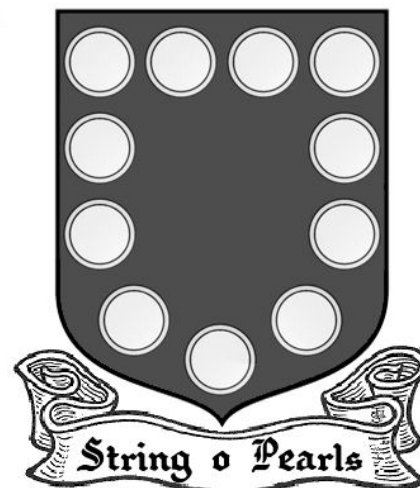
Over looking the river, the String of Pearls is a rowdy hangout for the bawdiest of stevedores who work along the Drakwasser. Part of this warren-like establishment is set aside for use by the leaders of the Hovenbachs.

The Rat and Shovel

This is a large and popular bar on the Pottplatz. There is a sawdust ring out the back where many unsavoury sports like bear baiting and pit fighting take place.

Bil's Bazaar

A famous landmark on the Ruhigerstrasse, visited by people from all over the city. This shop contains a myriad weird and wonderful objects. They say the feisty little halfling, Bilberry Meadowbank the proprietor, will buy



anything. And he'll sell it again too. For some reason, the gangs just seem to leave him alone.

Altfeld Coopers

Spalte Altfeld runs his successful coopers business in premises on Ruhigerstrasse. As well as a few skilled workers, he employs the unskilled, cheaply, on a day to day basis for menial tasks. At first light, there is always a queue of hopeful applicants forming outside Altfeld's premises.

Oberon Klee

This preacher can often be found at his shrine, way down the Swarzmuerstrasse.

The Chapel of St Gerris

Not much more than a converted stables, this is a doss house run by Pavlo Nemitz, a disillusioned cleric. Not much worship goes on here. In fact, rumour has it that there was never any such saint as Gerris.

Rat and Shovel Inn

The Rat and Shovel is a sprawling bar that dominates the south of Pottplatz in Helmsberg. It is owned and operated by Gregor Blutkost, a sour, miserly fellow who has never married. His help consists of the dour doorman Arek Änufson (a failed pit fighter), Derrick Ostertaun (also head of the somewhat legitimate Rat-Catchers' Guild), Wren (Derrick's homely wife and a constant chatterbox), and Tamara (an orphan who sleeps in the rafters and helps tidy up in the mornings).

The bar itself is the unofficial sports capital of Helmsberg, often visited by the rowdy boys and men after a game of snotball in the streets, and most famous for its pit-fights in the sand circle out back. It also fronts for the real arena in the area, The Pit under Helmsberg hill. The popularity of the entertainment The Rat and Shovel hosts has also had a positive side-effect. The bar is generally considered neutral territory by the Hovenbach, Kreuzers, and other criminal organizations of Bergsburg. Instead of waging war across the barroom, factions at odds will usually support pit-fighters or bet heavily against each other, also using The Rat and Shovel for occasional "negotiations." A cadre of bouncers are unnecessary at The Rat and Shovel. Except for a brawl every now and then, it's agreed by everyone that, generally, people should keep the peace here.

The Building

The Rat and Shovel is built of scorched brick with a timber, wattle, and daub upper storey, and a poorly shingled roof. It is almost as wide as it is tall, with a

shambling, haphazard appearance. The second floor even overhangs the doorway, causing many dwarven patrons to curse under their breath whenever they step inside (indeed, a number of them will refuse to enter, insisting that the roof will cave in on their heads). Grimy windows are placed at different heights along the front wall, flanking a severely beaten oak door. The popular establishment is clearly signed with a large rat's head bisected by a shovel engraved on a plaque that swings wildly from the second storey. It is said the design was invented by the original proprietor who created it with a Skaven corpse and his trusty spade. To the left of the bar is a dark and threatening alley leading to the sawdust ring and Helmsberg hill behind.

The interior of The Rat and Shovel is dominated by its large, open common room. This stretches along the left wall all the way to the rear of the building. The ceiling is low with hanging candles, lanterns, partial beams, and pit trophies, causing tall patrons to bump their heads regularly. The only respite is near the bar where a void leading all the way to the patchy ceiling opens up above the common room. Agile felons are occasionally hoisted up into the dark rafters of the void to escape notice by enemies or particularly brave watchmen.

The windows let in little light and the place is often very smoky and claustrophobic. The furniture is made up of stitched-together benches and long tables, mismatched and randomly scattered around the common room. The bar stretches along the right wall with a doorway at either end leading back into the "kitchen." Behind it are stacked barrels of cheap grog. To the right of the bar is a black curtain that hides the private booths. To the left of the bar, towards the rear of the pub, the wall recesses giving enough room at the back for impromptu brawls. A rickety staircase in the rear-right corner leads up to the "balcony" while oak double doors lead out the back to the sawdust ring.





The "kitchen" of The Rat and Shovel only really provides soup, most of which is sold to the Soup Monkeys to push out on the Pottplatz. To that end two rusty cauldrons dominate its western wall with a slipshod chimney funneling the smoke out. A long table sits askew in the middle of the room for preparing "meals" while a trapdoor in the north-west corner leads to the small cellar. Food and beverages for The Rat and Shovel's more affluent clientele are stored in the cellar. The rest is stacked under the staircase on the kitchen's southern wall. The staircase leads up to the the second floor. On the north wall is a small door that most humans must crouch to enter. It leads to the booths.

There are only four private booths at The Rat and Shovel. The curtain from the barroom hides a cramped, curved corridor that turns directly towards the kitchen. On the left is one small booth with a round table usually reserved for bookies who take bets on pit-fights. To the right are two veiled booths that are generally empty. Occasionally members of the Hovenbachs or the Kreuzers may be found "negotiating" here, but in general they are used for quick, quiet, and quasi-legal transactions. The last booth has a large "RESERVED" sign hanging in it. In reality the table therein tips up to reveal a hidden passageway to The Pit under Helmsberg hill.

The upper floor of The Rat and Shovel is generally accessed from the kitchen. The stairway there leads up to a corridor that bisects the building. On its northern side are three doors. The first leads to the living room/kitchen/dining room/common room of the pub's proprietor, the second to a short corridor that leads to three cell-like bedrooms. Although large, the residence is in a sorry state of disrepair. The common room has mismatched tables and chairs and a fireplace linked to the chimney rising from the kitchen below. Three good-sized but filthy windows look over Pottplatz. Some handed-down drawers and a collection of jury-rigged shelves line the south wall, while on the west wall, beside a curtained archway leading to the bedroom annex, is a dilapidated desk for the proprietor to balance his books at. The

bedrooms are in better condition, each with a small window looking out onto the Pottplatz and a bed. The most western of the three bedrooms, which belongs to the proprietor, has a compartment hidden in the ceiling in which his profits are hoarded. The Rat and Shovel has been doing brisk business in comparison to the poor effort put into its upkeep, so there is a tidy sum hidden up here. The eastern two bedrooms used to be one room and the hastily constructed wall between the two is painfully obvious.

Further along the main corridor lies the former master bedroom. Now converted into a meeting-room of sorts, it still boasts the frame of a once impressive bed. The Rat-Catchers' Guild meets here with broken furniture and empty crates adorning their "board-room." It is also occasionally rented out as a neutral meeting-place to gangs, guilds, or other parties, should they need some quiet negotiating time. Between the master bedroom, the main corridor, and the bedroom annex is the void that can be seen from the bar below.

On the southern side of the main corridor is a storeroom, a bedroom for rent, a short corridor leading to the balcony, and a dormitory for visiting entertainers (pit fighters and worse). The storeroom is a spacious but dark room with ominously creaky floorboards. Shelves line the walls and a few crates are usually piled in the center. In the far left corner is a secret panel that slides back to view the hidey-hole hidden behind the bedroom through which food can be passed. In general the stores here are slim.

The bedroom is a nasty little room with no windows and nothing but a flea-infested bed against one wall. It is occasionally rented to travellers or drunken patrons, but is in reality just a front for the hidden room between it and the balcony. Pulling the bed away from the wall reveals a pedal which in turn releases a secret door. This opens up into a hidey-hole equipped with a mattress, a blanket, and no source of light which is loaned to needy individuals who need to escape notice for a couple of days. It is actually a well kept secret with only a couple of well-paying clients using it in the past year. Food and messages can be passed into the hole from the storeroom, avoiding the need to disturb anyone who rents the legitimate room. The secret room has not been used to assassinate or rob anyone who sleeps next door, primarily because the bed in the other room has to be shifted almost out of the door in order to reveal the entrance.

The corridor leading to the balcony ends in a heavily locked door. There is usually little need for anyone to pass back and forth between the balcony and the regular rooms. The dormitory at the end of the hall is simply a swept bare room with enough space for a number of brawny fighters, trainers, or victims who plan on entering The Pit to rest before their night.



The balcony at the rear of The Rat and Shovel is an open platform reminiscent of the building's time as a warehouse. A burnt and damaged pulley system still adorns the apex of the roof. Now the balcony is usually used by patrons who risk the crumbling stairwell to get a breath of fresh air or enjoy a fight in the sand ring behind the bar from a better angle. When a popular contest is taking place the amount of people who crowd this upper deck causes the building to groan in protest, but no-one has fallen through to the bar underneath yet.

History

The Rat and Shovel began life as a hastily constructed warehouse circa 2224. It was generally filled by a low-rent clientele with little reason to worry about theft. However, in 2385 the current resident tried to burn it down for some unknown but decidedly nefarious reason, and largely succeeded. The blackened shell remained empty for a couple of years until Rog Blutkost began holding amateur pit fights in the ruin. The sport's popularity caught on with the down-and-out crowd of Helmsberg and it wasn't long before the self-styled promoter was able to officially purchase the land (for next to nothing) and build the bar around his "pit"(mostly with his own hands).

He named the bar after his first fight there, where he beat a captured Skaven to death with a shovel. The crowds grew larger, the fights more bloody, and Rog made a nice bit of gold from his venture. He passed the business on to his brother's family who carried it on successfully until 2457. It was that year that a visiting "entertainer" was brutally murdered after using The Rat and Shovel to stage bear-baiting. He was found with his nails torn out and vicious bite marks all over his face (rumoured to be the work of Elves, or fanatics of Taal). The sensationalized killing brought down some serious attention from the influential Shallyan Temple and the city watch, so much so that The Rat and Shovel almost closed down. In the end, to quell the crowds thirst for

blood, fist-fights, duels to first blood, and the rare bit of animal cruelty were permitted in a sand ring at the foot of Helmsberg hill, behind the bar.

In 2462 the young Darrien Warricker and Fredrich Neville discovered an open cave below Helmsberg hill and began using it to bring back the bloodier pit fights of years past. They soon discovered that the tunnels leading from this new arena passed very close to The Rat and Shovel and so reached an agreement with the current proprietor, Theodore Blutkost, to allow access through the basement of his establishment. This drew attention away from Helmsberg hill itself and provided the perfect front and betting parlour for the bloody sports (see The Pit). Theodore was killed as an involuntary pit fighter in 2495. Both his son and daughter had left Bergsburg so The Rat and Shovel passed on to his nephew, Gregor. It has since grown in popularity, although the food and drink served there is, and always has been, piss poor.

Gregor Blutkost

Description: Blutkost is 34 years old, but his downturned expression and years of barroom service make him look more like 50. He is a skinny man with an unhealthy complexion and lank, greasy hair. He always dresses in browns or greys with a faded, stained apron. His slender hands are bent and scarred, but still able to juggle multiple pints on a busy night. He plans on leaving Bergsburg as soon as he can count on his money being safe (which may be never).

Arek Änufson

Description: Arek gained his freedom from the pit-fighting circuit over 30 years ago, but kept fighting as it was the only thing he knew how to do. Rarely a winner he would often wake up in pits the morning after a fight, bloodied and missing another tooth or finger. Eventually the constant injury beat him down and he wound up sleeping in the corner of The Rat and Shovel. Gregor wasn't one to put up with freeloaders so he eventually put Arek to work watching the door. Now nearing 60 the old fighter just sits by the door with a foul expression on his toothless face, rarely interceding in any trouble and generally drowning his sorrows in pints of grog. Wiry, bent, and missing 4 fingers, Arek isn't seen as a threat by anybody. He usually falls asleep at the door, although occasionally makes his way upstairs for the night.

Brother Leon Gehrling

Description: Gregor hired Derrick as a potential heir to The Rat and Shovel throne. The young man was already making some money ridding shops on Ruhigerstrasse of pests, but with his marriage to Wren was in dire need of further funding. Thankfully his blabbering wife felt right at home in the kitchen and behind the bar, leaving the young man enough time to begin a meteoric rise to the top of the rat-catching society in Bergsburg (assisted by his ability to secure a "meeting"

room at The Rat and Shovel). Derrick is a well built young man with a blunt face and an easy grin. His wife, Wren, is a short, loud, and ugly woman. She has a bent nose, buck teeth, and has been getting a little round thanks to her recent pregnancy (the couple have petitioned Gregor for a bigger room, but are afraid to push if he might turn them out).

Tamara Althwistle

Description: Dressed in rags with unkempt hair and a filthy face, Tamara is as much a fixture of The Rat and Shovel as are all the lanterns and barrels. She is usually found dancing along the bar, serving drinks or rude jokes, until she retires to the rafters in the void in the ceiling. She will help clean up in the morning in exchange for a few brass from Gregor, then will disappear into the streets for the day, returning by nightfall to begin again. Everyone assumes she is an orphan, and most patrons of The Rat and Shovel will soundly beat anyone who can't handle one of her little pranks. Truth be told, Gregor can't remember how long she's been there or how old she really is. But then he doesn't pay attention to much except his money.

Adventure Hooks

Negotiations

The PC's are invited to "a meeting" at The Rat and Shovel where they are politely pressured into hurting a pit-fighter who is being backed by the rival gang (Hovenbachs vs Kreuzers or vice-versa). It would be easiest if the players were already in trouble with (or indebted to) one of the gangs.



"Oh, stand before me and proclaim your unworthiness of the great lord who resides deep within the being of only those that are worthy, for indeed, they shall be judged most righteous and in time to do his bidding for all that we are about to receive the lord god make them all together now."

Oberon is a mysterious character, wandering the city dressed in only a dirty grey robe. He wears a heavy chain around his neck seemingly adorned with charms and talismans of a religious significance. However, if examined, it is apparent that the charms symbolise no known religion.

Oberon also has a shrine in the Helmsberg area of town. It is no more than a pile of stones topped with an old cartwheel. Next to the so-called shrine is a rough tent where Oberon sleeps.



Oberon could easily be mistaken for an extremist ascetic of any of a number of religions, and indeed some locals do occasionally donate to the shrine.

Oberon also holds prayer meetings that attract a few of

Oberon Klee

Male Human

Initiate (Nonsense)

Main Profile

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
37	28	47	35	35	37	45	55

Secondary Profile

A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
1	11	4	3	4	0	8	0

Skills: Academic Knowledge (Theology - kinda), Blather, Common Knowledge (the Empire), Gossip, Perception, Read/Write, Speak Language (Reikspiel)

Talents: Sixth Sense, Public Speaking

Armour: None

Armour Points: Head 0, Arms 0, Body 0, Legs 0

Weapons: None

Trappings: Dirty Grey Cloak, Chain of Charms, Shrine, Tent

Insanities: Blasphemous Rage

the down-and-outs of the area. Superficially these meetings appear to be normal and Oberon does indeed have a certain presence and evangelical charisma, even if he does honour an unknown god. If scrutinised, however, it would be pretty clear that the 'priest' is in fact spouting nonsense.

Oberon spends much of his time touring the slum areas of Bergsburg looking for recruits for his faith, at which he very occasionally achieves success.

Adventure Hooks

Oberon can be used to help or mislead or just scare your PCs. In the street he will single out one of the PCs and stare into their eyes for a moment, and then as if in a trance he will come out with a seemingly profound and enigmatic statement. If the PCs need some help he can be used to give them a clue. Oberon can be quite scary, especially when his proclamation involves an event that hasn't happened yet, and that the GM makes sure will occur soon.

The PC's might decide that they need to find Oberon and use his prescient gifts to their advantage. In which case they shouldn't find him, or he tells them something that is very unhelpful. Oberon works best if he is sprung on the PCs without warning, from time to time, and the PCs have at least some respect for what he might tell them.



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