

VEIL OF THE ONCE-QUEEN

A FANTASY SETTLEMENT BY MICHAEL PRESCOTT

THE SITUATION

Deep in the forest stands Tanibel, a remnant of the long-dead Martoi empire: a tall citadel surrounded by a mockery of a living town.

Using their magic to straddle the veil between the worlds of the living and the dead, they survive in a dream of their vanished reign.

From the side of death they draw their patience and eternal nature, from the side of life, their vigor.

THE VEIL

Tanibel exists on both sides of the veil, and appears differently to each.

To the living, it seems to be a ruin, overgrown and filled with animals.

To those who have crossed over the veil (even temporarily), it appears as it did in its prime: a thriving town of artisans, culture presided over by a glorious nobility.

CURSE OF THE MARTOI

The Martoi, too, have a dual nature. When they outnumber the living, they are regal, tall and smooth-skinned. They have long, flowing hair, strong noses and angular jaw lines.

When the living outnumber them at a *distance close enough to converse*, their true form is revealed (this varies, see later).

Several factors modify the count:

1. Martoi mounts and favored

pets (but not beasts of burden) count as Martoi for these purposes.

2. A character with a bleeding injury (e.g. having half hp or less) counts as three extra living beings.

3. Characters willing themselves to see one side or the other may

5. Anyone who has drunk the **black draught** recently counts for nothing.

Except via special magic or abilities, all members of adventuring parties will see Tanibel and its inhabitants in the same way as the others.

If the veil is crossed, the shift itself is almost imperceptible, as if things had been this way all along. Refer to the new forms without introducing them. (e.g. "The badger shuffles uncomfortably." "Badger?")

THE PENUMBRA

The mile-wide region where the town bleeds into the surrounding forest is the *penumbra*.

All sources of water in the penumbra are contaminated by the **black draught**.

Merely being in the penumbra counts as 4 for the Martoi side. This tends to drag visitors across the veil, forcing them to see this place as it was.

Tanibel consumes no real food, so where most towns of its size would be surrounded by farms and cultivated forest, the penumbra has only mushroom gatherers, hunters, hermits, and tinkers. Most will be encountered near their homes; various shacks or humble cottages.

Roll a d10 on the **townsfolk motive** table to determine what they want—the result holds so long as PCs perceive them in their preferred form.

If their true forms are revealed, roll again on the motive table, this time using a d6.

The true forms of these folk and their dwellings are, variously:

- Talking animals—large foxes, badgers, or owls, in cramped dirt burrows dug out under the roots of large trees, or hollow fallen trunks.
- Gnarled imps and hags, flesh as hard and dry as wood. Either short, ancient, stooped, or all three.
- Bog stranglers: aquatic psychopaths whose homes are actually dark pools, choked with lilies and rushes. Any who realize this after accepting an invitation inside will find themselves 15' underwater. All the food they serve is infused with the **black draught**.

GARLEG, LORD OF TREACHERY

Garleg has many spies in the penumbra, and unless adventurers are careful to avoid encounters, Garleg will soon hear about them.

Using his mastery of both stealth and tracking, he will attempt to place himself in the adventurers' path to be "discovered," in a moment of disadvantage (perhaps pulling on his boots) and at close range, so he appears in his true form: a gnarled, limping imp.

He is also one of the three Lords of Memory who rule Tanibel. His task is to ensure the security of the citadel by fostering rebellion in a manner that allows him to monitor it.

He will attempt to persuade the adventurers to participate in an upcoming coup. If they are keen, he will guide them to the citadel by way of the home of a **traitor**.



d10	Townsfolk Motive
1-2	Introduce to someone further in who they think will find you useful
3-4	Money—offer a service, or sell you something
5-6	Trap you and eat you
7	Beat you and rob you
8-9	Revelry, ideally to the point of incapacity
10	Find allies to rebel against the Once-Queen

If they are not, he will encourage them to accompany him to “those who need their aid,” by which he means the victims of the **Once-Queen’s gray proctors**.

THE WALL DISTRICT

The next ring of Tanibel is a majestic wall, topped by penants in all manner of greens and yellows.

Merely being in the wall district counts as six for the Martoi side.

Countless scores of towers have been built on both sides of the wall, some squat and short, others tall and narrow, connected to the wall (and one another) by bridges and catwalks of all shapes and sizes, some low to the ground, some soaring high.

Wherever a bridge pierces the wall, there is a gate, some massive and fortified, others mere doorways—all in all there are hundreds.

This makes no sense defensively, but Garleg (if present) will explain that the Once-Queen’s true defense is her great cruelty (which is why she must be overthrown).

TOWNSFOLK OF THE WALL

During the day, the wall district is full of activity: dozens of people in dapper, brightly colored liveries dart back and forth along the bridges, carrying loads of food, goods, messages.

Many cry out in wordless song (or merely humming), busy chattering on inane topics, or proclaiming the virtues of their particular tower or bridge.

RETURNING FROM THE VEIL

In truth, the inhabitants of the wall district are squirrels, families of deer, marmosets, skinks, weasels and birds of all sorts. All can speak.

The ‘towers’ are actually trees, and the ‘bridges’ their mighty boughs.

The wall, on the other hand, is a real wall, albeit a crumbling ruin. In places it reaches its full height, in others it is a tumble of stone barely rising out of the undergrowth.

The many gates are choked with the webs of the **gray proctors**. (Some of the bridges are webs, too.)

THE GRAY PROCTORS

Typically are fat, long limbed, leather-clad, placid of body, and predatory of gaze, they loiter by the gates (claiming to ‘guard’ them), and accost any passers by.

They claim to be authorities on the workings of the citadel, and will attempt to intimidate anyone passing by into their schemes. Most involve tying visitors up in bureaucratic red tape, making complex arrangements for audiences, contracts, visas, applications and petitions.

These arrangements are always complex and time consuming, involving at least two other parties, usually more.

They proffer made-up titles (“Secretary to the Underpetitioner for pre-noon applications via the Western upper gate”), and grow angry with anyone attempting to push past them. This will draw more proctors to the scene.

Pale, withered citizens pleading to be let past as they sign document after document are common sight.

In truth, they gray proctors are giant spiders. On the living side of the veil, their webs form impenetrable barriers across the gaps in the ruined wall.

The silk-wrapped carcasses of their victims are everywhere.

Under no circumstances will they bother Garleg or anyone with him.

INSIDE THE WALL

Between the wall and the citadel is a narrow strip, overbuilt with teetering houses, overhangs, raised walks and walled gardens.

During the day, the streets are thick with nobles and artisans (determine motives as usual).

On the living side of the veil (which is very hard to reach when the streets are busy), the city of death is revealed: its citizens are skeletal shamblers and wisp-like ghosts, the streets cobbled with broken skulls.

THE CITADEL

In life, a ruin no taller than a house, yet in death the citadel towers above the forest with a trio of magnificent towers.

ALASNIA THE ONCE-QUEEN

Like her sister, Vesarcha, Alasnia’s only goal is to enrich her city with new subjects to remind her of the glorious history of Tanibel.

TRILEMMA ADVENTURES

She demands oaths of service, consummated by drinking the black draught.

She wears the **Crown**. Also like her sister, she is a skeletal wraith when seen truthfully.

VESARCHA, LADY MEMORY

Master of poisons, a nick from her blade sends you into a dreamless slumber; a kiss bewitches.

LORD OF TREACHERY

If Garleg appears here, he adopts his deathly form, Garleg, Lord of Treachery—a tall, beautiful man with raven-black hair. Servants immediately drape him in embroidered linens and cloth of gold.

If Garleg can convince an outsider to assassinate (either alone, or at the head of an armed insurrection), the eternal spell of this place is nearly complete: the next person who wears the Crown of the Once-Queen vanishes, replaced by a youthfully restored Alasnia.

THE CROWN

A delicate confection of ice-cold silver, it is the crown that moves the veil. If it ever leaves Tanibel, its power is broken forever.

THE BLACK DRAUGHT

Made from Lady Memory’s tears over her fallen realm, it suffuses all there is to eat and drink here.

Any who partake for more than a week become night-eyed

and no longer count toward the living. Any who stay a month join the ghostly citizens in eternal un-death.

