

Custodians of the Wolf

During the Black Age, when Haelia Cousland began a crusade against the werewolves of the central Coastlands, many Fereldens found themselves at odds with the conflict. The infection spread by the werewolves corrupted many otherwise innocent people and the friends and families of the victims were torn between their compassion for their loved ones and their enmity for the monsters that infected them. While most Fereldens saw the infection of those close to them as a tragic loss, others empathized and did what they could to protect the newly-formed werewolves. There are countless stories from this time of uninfected citizens fighting against those waging war against the werewolves, such as their love and empathy for those they had once known.

In the city of Highever and the surrounding freeholds a society of such sympathizers formed, calling itself the Custodians of the Wolf. The Custodians worked to subvert the campaign launched against the werewolves and provide assistance to their infected brethren. Working in secret, the Custodians were made up of commoners and nobles alike and their numbers swelled as more fell victim to the curse. Many of the Custodians were discovered and killed, but the society endured even when the last of the werewolves was driven from the central Coastlands.

Following the victory of Haelia Cousland over the werewolves, the work of the Custodians continued. They sheltered the few remaining werewolves in the region but suffered greatly as many were rooted out and executed. By the end of the Black Age, the Custodians were all but wiped out with those that survived going into deep hiding. Over the next few centuries, the Custodians would rise again, each time gaining momentary power and influence before being discovered and wiped out once again. Each time the Custodians would resurface, they would bring with them new tools and threats against the people of the central Coastlands as individual Custodians sought to exact revenge on those that once drove their people from the lands. Some Custodians would ally with demons, while others would use powerful artifacts once thought lost and still others would return with the descendents of those werewolves driven away so long ago. But each time, the soldiers of Highever and the people of the central Coastlands would defeat them once again, though often after much suffering and death.

The Custodians of the Wolf have not been seen since the early Blessed Age. Over the centuries, the Custodians have unlocked many dark secrets, nearly all of which have been lost to the ages. Many believe they have been defeated once and for all, but the people of Highever are always wary of their return.

Festival of Wolves

The Festival of Wolves is a local holiday celebrated in the city of Highever and the surrounding freeholds. The festival began in the early Exalted Age to celebrate victory over the werewolves by Haelia Cousland during the Black Age. Since that time, on the first full moon of the third month of the year (Drakonis), the people of Highever gather together in celebration to honor Haelia Cousland and the brave men and women that drove the werewolves from their lands. The holiday also honors the werewolves themselves, as local superstition believes that honoring these creatures will prevent their return.

During the Festival of Wolves, the people of the central Coastlands gather together in cities and towns in the spirit of festivity and engage in song, dance,

storytelling and the reenacting of Haelia's defeat of the werewolves. Traveling merchants, street performers and the like come from all over Ferelden to the city of Highever for these celebrations. Locals often dress up in wolf masks and pelts and the settlements of the region are adorned with banners, streamers and other decorations. In many freeholds that celebrate the Festival of Wolves, an animal is sacrificed in offering to the spirits of the werewolves, so as to prevent their return for another year. Local Banns often speak in their communities and the Teyrn of Highever always addresses the people of the city during the festival. Though the primary festivities only last one evening, extended celebrations begin during the week of the full moon.

Mendonich Holze

Mendonich Holze is a merchant and caravan master recently arrived in Ferelden from Orlais. Born deep in the Bannorn of Ferelden over thirty years ago, Mendonich spent most of his life in Orlais, his family gaining wealth as honest merchants. After being away from the land of his birth for more than three decades, Mendonich gathered a large supply of trade goods from Orlais and made the long and dangerous journey back to Ferelden. Holze's travels have taken him from Val Royeaux to Orzammar and now to the town of West Hill in the western Coastlands. Holze intends to travel along the North Road to Highever, then to Amaranthine and finally to Denerim before moving along the West Road and into the Bannorn.

Mendonich Holze is a human male from Ferelden in his late thirties. He has brown hair, blue eyes and is small of stature. He is a skilled merchant, quite adept at negotiations and very knowledgeable of his wares. Mendonich is an opportunist, always on the lookout for a chance to earn some extra money or strike an important deal. As such, he trades in a variety of goods from weapons to cloth; no merchandise is overlooked. In addition to supplies, Mendonich also trades in information and often carries messages for interested parties.

Due to his Orlesian upbringing, Mendonich Holze is considered an outsider in Ferelden. Despite being born in the Bannorn and spending the first seven years of his life in Ferelden, his Orlesian accent often works against him while traveling and trading in Ferelden. This stigma has given Mendonich a soft spot for other outsiders and he often hires mercenaries and laborers others will not. Mendonich seems to have a more antiquated ideal of magic and religion and does not subscribe to the beliefs of the Chantry or the Circle, though he rarely thinks on such subjects for very long. Mendonich is a pleasant man and a fair employer, easy to trust with very clear motives.

The caravan Mendonich Holze leads through Ferelden is made up of two large covered wagons, each drawn by two draft horses. Holze uses one wagon to live out of and keeps the most valuable goods transported by the caravan in locked chests within the locked wagon. Holze has hired three wagon-drivers and four teamsters since arriving in Ferelden. Holze owns two dogs that he uses as pets, scouts and lookouts. Holze's only companion from Orlais is a large man he calls Barrett the Mute. As Holze tells it, Barrett is a loyal man-at-arms for his family who had his tongue removed after speaking ill against an Orlesian lord. Barrett is Holze's chief bodyguard and is clearly a skilled warrior who does little apart from stand silently, watching for trouble.

Wolf's Blood Elixir

The Wolf's Blood Elixir is a secret potion discovered by the Custodians of the Wolf in ancient texts found in the tunnels and sewers beneath the city of Highever. It was created to instill upon the drinker the power and fury of the werewolves for a brief period, after which they will return to their normal state. It was the hope of the Custodians that created the elixir that, through its use, it would seem the werewolves of the central Coastlands had returned while shielding those using the elixir from discovery. For some unknown reason, the elixir was never used or its secret never discovered by those outside the Custodians.

Crafting the Wolf's Blood Elixir requires a number of rare ingredients, making it difficult to create. Water is mixed with the fresh blood of a wolf, a pinch of lyrium dust and ground petals of the Moon Lily – a flower that only blooms during the full moon. When imbibed, the concoction begins an immediate and painful change in the subject, who then takes on the features of a werewolf. Clothes and armor are torn away as the subject grows in size; fingers elongate into vicious claws and the nose/mouth transforms into a vicious maw filled with sharp teeth. Those taking the elixir nearly always enter into a state of bloodthirsty frenzy and are rarely able to communicate or keep hold of their mental faculties. The transformation lasts for only a few short hours before the subject painfully returns to their natural form, often with little memory of what took place during their transformation.

It is important to note that while under the effects of the elixir, subjects are not carriers of the curse normally associated with werewolves and lack any supernatural abilities normally attributed to werewolves. It is thought however, that if werewolf blood is used in place of wolf's blood during the creation of the elixir, the change will become permanent and the subject will take on the features of a true werewolf.

- Changes: Gain the following focuses Smelling (Perception), Claws (Strength); Gain the following adjustments to abilities +2 Dexterity, +2 Constitution, +3 Strength, -2 Cunning, -2 Communication; Gain claw attack, Crazy (re-roll morale checks), Bloodthirsty (must attack/kill, berserk), Increase size