

BANTAM STRIFE

Worldbuilding Brief by Patrick Laffoon

Context: This worldbuilding document is for an unreleased tabletop war game, Bantam Strife, that's designed to take place in the player's very own home. All related characters, settings, and concepts of Bantam Strife are the intellectual property of Patrick Laffoon, and all rights over its content belong to Patrick Laffoon.

SETTING

"This house has become a warzone. Where there was peace, there is now conflict and blood. Where there was order, there is now chaos and division. The Great One that once called this place home, wandered its halls, cooked in its kitchen, and slept in its bed has perished. There is no longer an almighty power to keep the peace, provide resources, or prevent the outside world from getting in. A haven no more. A kingdom no more. The God of the Bantam is dead, and there is no other to take its place. But many will try..."

In the world of Bantam Strife, every house in the world is home to the tinyfolk, very small people and creatures who secretly live within walls and under floorboards. These tinyfolk, known as the Bantam, normally make do by quietly borrowing items from the humans who live in each home. But in this particular house, a war has broken out following the death of the sole human dwelling there; an old woman who had no one left in her life to check on her or even notice that she was gone. No one is coming to reset the balance and fill the power vacuum left after her passing, and it has thrown the entire house into disarray. What was once a peaceful kingdom has become a broken world of various factions embroiled in a merciless war. The tinyfolk of the house fight for control over territory and dwindling resources, seeking power at any cost.

At first, the old woman's corpse was left undisturbed. Many tinyfolk prayed, begging for her return, or for the coming of another. But as food sources ran low and more tinyfolk immigrated to this strange, godless world, the taste of godsflesh was gradually learned. Piece by piece, most of the old woman's body was eaten, hacked apart and traded, or stored in hidden places. Those who were ignorant and impatient consumed tainted godsflesh and became the Fleshmad, tinyfolk overcome with the desire to continuously ingest uncooked flesh. However, some of the highest ranking members of a religious order discovered that once consecrated via a sacred and secretive rite, the godsflesh granted wondrous powers. Not only would consecrated godsflesh prevent insanity, it gave the consumer the godsense, psychic powers that allowed the user to penetrate the mind of others and kill them without lifting a finger.

But the tinyfolk weren't the only ones who managed to consume godsflesh. Rodents, insects, lizards, and other creatures managed to sneak bites here and there, and those that did were not driven fleshmad, but awoke from beasthood to become intelligent beings themselves. Beforelong, the kingdom became even more fractured, and the War for the House began.

FACTIONS

Bantam of The Holy She

The Holy She was once the primary religious sect of the Bantam tinyfolk. It centered around worship of the giant god, an old woman, who ruled over the house. After her death, The Holy She fractured and many of the former high-ranking leaders declared themselves the Bantam of The Holy She, wholly devoted to the god, even in her death. They seek to control the deteriorating godscorpse and keep others from accessing her flesh, both in an effort to curb fleshmadness, and so that they maintain control of the consecrated godsflesh, which provides incredible psychic powers. Some Bantam tinyfolk pray for another god to come and bring order to the house, but the Bantam of The Holy She would rather rule over the house themselves.

Bantam Concord

Any of the powerful clans of the Bantam tinyfolk kingdom who refused to join the newly-formed Bantam of The Holy She joined forces to create the Bantam Concord, a loose alliance of all Bantam who have hopes for a new god to come and rule the house. The Concord is composed of soldiers, former priests, clan leaders, farmers, diggers, travelers, shopkeepers, and other Bantam that refuse the tyranny of The Holy She. These tinyfolk long for the old ways and natural order a house god brings, and despise how The Holy She has laid claim to the godscorpse and her sacred godsflesh. Where they lack in psychic powers they make up for in strength of numbers, robust alliances, and wartime ingenuity.

Fleshmad Drovers

Hidden amongst all walks of Bantam life are the secret droves of fleshmad tinyfolk who have tasted unconsecrated godsflesh and are gradually driven insane. The fleshmad have an unstoppable desire to eat raw flesh, any raw flesh, but they do not act like mindless zombies as long as they can keep satiating their hunger. Not only are they aware of their affliction, they act like normal everyday tinyfolk—friends, neighbors, shopkeepers, fellow soldiers—except they will do anything to convince a potential meal to be right where they want them so that they might kill and eat them in secret. Despite their unstoppable desire, the fleshmad can tell each

other apart from normal tinyfolk and they do not eat each other, but the reason for this is unknown. However, if a fleshmad is unable to consume raw flesh for long enough, they will eventually deteriorate in both mind and body, a state known as “ravenous ache,” and transform into a zombie-like revenant. Once they feel the ravenous ache, there is no going back.

Wildlings of the Outers

Not all tinyfolk live in houses. In fact, most of them live in the Outers—in forests, fields, yards, and gardens. Legend has it that before any tinyfolk moved into the houses of gods and became the Bantam, they all lived as the Wildlings amongst nature as an amalgamate of tribes. Many of these ancient tribes still exist and live simply off the land, beyond the reach of any Bantam politics. They never needed any god. However, the War of the House has begun to affect them and their ways, and they won't stand for it. The fleshmad have somehow infiltrated their villages, their resources are beginning to be claimed by mobilized house Bantam in the name of war, and even some of the animals they hunt and breed have begun to awaken to newfound consciousness. This has led to talk amongst the tribes regarding a united front. Some leaders merely want to repel the invaders, while others believe they could take advantage of the war and bid farewell to the soft-footed, god-loving Bantam once and for all. They could bring nature into the house and create a new Wildling empire.

Skintail Throng

The first rodent to bite off a piece of godsflesh was a common brown Norway rat who swallowed a piece of the god's toe before being chased off by armed acolytes of The Holy She. The rat grew violently sick for hours before slipping into a brief coma. After a few days, the rat awoke both in body and mind. He was suddenly self-aware and as intelligent as any Bantam, then chose a name for himself: Hector. Before long, Hector grew lonely, and having been rejected by any Bantam he met, decided to create his own friends. At first, he snuck into the godschamber to steal flesh to bring to other rodents of the house. He would feed them, care for them, and any who lived would awaken the same way as he did, fully intelligent. The Bantam of The Holy She quickly grew wise to his flesh heists, so he changed tactics in his effort to create a new race of intelligent rodentia. He began to breed with the awakened females, a stud with a growing concubinage, and soon the folk of the Skintail Throng came to be. This awakened rodent horde includes both rats and mice working together for the betterment of all rodentia. They seek to claim the entire house for themselves, believing the Bantam to be unfit to rule due to their endless politicking and civil disputes. For the Skintail Throng, what's good for one rodent is good for all rodents.

Pact of Many Eyes

The rodents aren't the only animal life to awaken thanks to the power of the godsflesh. The many-legged like crickets, cockroaches, mantis, scorpions, and spiders have also become intelligent as well, though their methods of awakening have been much less organized—largely a product of the food chain. These many-legged creatures will not hesitate to fight for their survival if cornered, but they tend to avoid direct conflict and gain power via subterfuge, sabotage, intricate planning, and the trading of information. The spy network that is the Pact of Many Eyes will help anyone as long as they are deemed an important piece on the Pact's war table. That said, the many-legged are not interested in power grabs, as they tend to be more philosophical and high-minded. The Pact of Many Eyes seeks to sow discourse and prolong the battle for as long as possible. Neverending war means their skills are always useful, and they're less likely to go back to being a primary food and labor source. They rule by keeping the house from having a true ruler.

Endosauria

In addition to rodentia and the many-legged, some of the reptiles of the Outers have awakened as well. Though the godsflesh granted the lizards and snakes of the yard some intelligence, their minds did not develop in the same way socially. The folk of the Endosauria, or Endos, are self-aware and much smarter than the average reptile, but they are mostly self-centered killing machines who have no ability to think beyond the now. If hungry, they eat. If tired, they sleep. If threatened, they kill. If bored, they destroy. The Endos have no leader or political structure, instead relying on a very loose, unspoken agreement to not kill and eat one another. That is, of course, as long as nobody gives anyone the wrong look. The Endos of the Outers are not impossible to cut a deal with, and they're often hired as mercenaries for various jobs, but it's always a gambit since they have a hard time pondering the future and what a little planning could bring. All folk of the house know to tread carefully around them.

TIMELINE

The Old Woman Dies

- The god of the house perishes in her sleeping chamber. Acolytes of The Holy She, who are tasked with monitoring and chronologizing her every movement, bear witness to her final breath and report it to the high priests. The Holy She is dead. Long live The Holy She.

The Bantam Gather to Mourn Their God

- All of the Bantam kingdom are informed of their god's death. A period of mourning begins, but so does a period of debate. After the Bantam realize nobody is coming to find their god, the tinyfolk begin to question their next move. Some want to figure out a way to make her death known to the god of another house, others want the Bantam to live in a house with no god at all.

The First of the Fleshmad

- No living god means no regular introduction of fresh resources. As the remaining resources begin to be regulated and rationed, some poor and starving Bantam seek out alternative sources of food.
- Some of them, tempted by the strangely appealing rotting smell, sneak into the godschamber to eat the very flesh of their dead god. This satiates them immediately, but comes at a terrible price. Those who ate of the godsflesh are driven fleshmad and will do anything to continue consuming raw flesh, regardless of the source.

The Bantam Deliberate

- The debates intensify into blustering arguments. The introduction of the fleshmad has split the Bantam into two clear philosophical camps: those who think the godscorpse must be removed, and those who think it's a sacred site that must be guarded at all times. Either way, something must be done to quell the fleshmad, but the situation proves difficult because the fleshmad are not easily identified until they're attempting to eat someone.
- Some of the fleshmad, having a hard time acquiring the raw flesh they need inside the house, begin to wander into the Outers and prey upon the Wildling tinyfolk that make their home in nature.

Bantam Priests Discover the Godsense

- While the Bantam clans deliberate the best way to handle the godscorpse and the future of the house, the upper ranks of The Holy She begin to conduct secret experiments. Imprisoned criminals are forced to eat various parts of the godscorpse to see if there are different outcomes, but they all lead to fleshmadness regardless of what anatomy is consumed.
- One ambitious acolyte, Sabina, begins secretly conducting her own experiments on

kidnapped Bantam orphans, believing the preparation of the godsflesh is the key. She turns out to be right, and the process of consecrating godsflesh to be safely consumed is brought to the high priests.

- What Sabina did not realize, however, was that the orphans she had experimented on now possessed psychic powers—the godsense. One of the angry orphans kills her with only a thought, but the high priests of The Holy She manage to convince them to join their ranks before anyone else is killed.

The Beasts Awaken

- While the Bantam argue and The Holy She experiments, the beasts of the house manage to get their own nibbles of the godscorpse, despite tinyfolk guards' best efforts. Curiously, the godsflesh seems to not cause fleshmadness in beasts, but instead awakens them to be intelligent beings like any other tinyfolk.
- Starting with rodents, a variety of beasts become sentient, including insects and reptiles. Beforelong, the house begins to see new factions forming.

The Bantam Disagree and Divide

- The Holy She declares themselves the ruling party of the house, which initiates the first violent conflicts amongst the Bantam. Riots occur in various places around the house, and a large group of Bantam invade the headquarters of The Holy She in an attempt to overthrow them. But the conflict is settled quickly when The Holy She unleashes their secret weapon: tinyfolk children with the godsense who can kill anyone with a thought. Many invaders are killed, but the overwhelming numbers still manage to kill a few of the orphans before they are repelled.
- After the dust settles, The Holy She reveals their new psychic power, the godsense, and declares they will continue to train some in their ranks to use it to maintain order. The failed attempt to overthrow the religious sect becomes known as the "Godsflesh Massacre," and a declaration of power from The Holy She ignites the beginning of a civil war amongst the Bantam.

Resources Dwindle for All

- As skirmishes amongst the Bantam break out, more and more sentient beasts begin to plant their own flags in various regions around the house, leading to fewer and fewer resources.
- The Wildlings also begin to incur on the house, seeking a way to stop the fleshmad plaguing their villages, and possibly to stop the untrustworthy indoor Bantam once and

for all. As they push in, they bring more nature with them, breaking windows and carving out doorways.

- More tinyfolk, more creatures, less food, more desperation. It's only a matter of time before fighting becomes about far more than ideological differences. Soon the fighting will be about survival.

Forces Gather

- Sensing the dark times ahead, factions begin to form with proper hierarchies and battle plans. The Holy She becomes The Bantam of The Holy She, claiming rule over the house. All remaining indoor Bantam form the Bantam Concord, and the tribes of tinyfolk living in the Outers unite under the flag of the Wildings of the Outers.
- The rodents have bred their way into becoming the Skintail Throng, the insects and arachnids have built their spy network known as The Pact of Many Eyes, and the reptiles seek to sow chaos and pursue hedonistic pleasures as Endosauria.
- All the while, the Fleshmad Drones continue to grow and eat, and eat, and eat...
- During this dark, morose calm before the storm where espionage and small coordinated strikes take place, each faction manages to learn the secrets of consecrated godflesh—secretly equipping themselves with the “godsense” that once only belonged to The Holy She.

The War of the House Begins

- In their first act of overt war, The Bantam of The Holy She attempts to destroy a Bantam Concord base hidden in the kitchen, using their acolyte soldiers and a small group of psychic warriors. But they were not expecting the Concord to have their own warriors with the power of the godsense.
- And neither side was expecting a simultaneous ambush from the Wildings and Skintail Throng, both groups having been informed of the base by the Pact of Many Eyes. With heavy losses on all sides, the “Battle of the Pantry” became the first of many in this War of the House.

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