



FORBIDDEN BLADES

Being a Short Treatise on the Cursed Swords of the
Rawenfeuer Family

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Foreword

For a warrior his sword is his life. Often one can hear many fencing instructors and sword masters go as far as to claim that a sword is the warrior's soul; a swordsman's ability and character are reflected in his sword. A shiny and well-kept blade with a sharp cutting edge that is wielded against the servants of the Ruinous Powers speaks volumes of its wielder's integrity, character and disposition. A warrior with a noble character wielding a sword forged by a master craftsman is truly a champion of the Empire and guardian of its citizens.

But like all men are not noble and good, so it is with swords. Some blades carry an ill reputation and bring harm to their wielders. The foulest of all these weapons are the ones touched by the Ruinous Powers, and wielded by the servants of the Dark Gods. But there are also swords made by man that are cursed and yearn only to spill the blood of one's fellow man. The author has taken upon him the thankless task of writing about one order of such swords, forged by the infamous Rawenfeuer family of Middenheim during the Age of the Three Emperors.

Such is the story of these notorious weapons that most people would be unwilling to know the true nature of these instruments of death. And as some of these people represent powerful, religious organisations they might be even less inclined to learn the truth why these weapons are of such ill repute, and why some people might have had an interest in promoting the emergence of such reputation. Consequently, the author has taken it upon him to convey as objective and truthful account of the history of the Rawenfeuer family of weaponsmiths and their downfall as possible. Verena blesses those who seek the truth; hence the author feels it is his duty to pass on the results of his investigations. Also, let it be known that as the author is worried some fanatical members of the clergy might not see the true value of such historical accuracy he has accepted an offer from a prestigious university in Tilea and will henceforth pursue his scholarly ambitions therefrom.

History of the Rawenfeuer Blades and the Origins of Their Ill Repute

According to old journals and taxation records the Rawenfeuer family was forging weapons as early as the 1700's. Naturally the weapons of the time were cruder and did not exhibit the traits the swords of future generations would. But from what can be gathered from sources of the time Rawenfeuer weapons were considered durable and well-balanced even then. The

swords did not become sought-after until early 2000's though, when Kristoff Rawenfeuer befriended a well-known Dwarf smith (unnamed in any records); the Dwarf, according to local legends, perfected Kristoff's technique in return for a favour. There are several variations of the legend and the nature of this favour, but taking into account the secretive nature of the Dwarfs and the zeal they guard their knowledge with, the significance of the favour cannot be disputed.

Henceforth the Rawenfeuer swords became epitomes of craftsmanship in Middenheim and greater Middenland area. There are numerous records of swords forged by the Rawenfeuer family being wielded in battles where they claimed countless lives in the name of Ulric and Middenheim. But this fame was not meant to last. The Age of the Three Emperor's was a very tumultuous time in the Empire's history; in the later stages the conflict came to have strong religious overtones when the quarrel between the Church of Sigmar and the Cult of Ulric escalated.

This conflict between these two religious factions also marks the beginning of Rawenfeuer blades' downfall. From circa 2050 on the superior Rawenfeuer blades were wielded against the supporters of Sigmar. Consequently, many devout followers, agitators, and priests fell under their bite. The records from that time tell of many such incidents. For example, the journal of Doktor Kaltenhauser describes how he treated a Templar of the Fiery Heart who had been mortally wounded on the outskirts of Averheim by a zealot wielding a Middenheimer sword of superior quality. In a similar tale Lord Hieronomus von Nussloss, a devout and vocal Sigmarite, was stabbed in the crotch with a Rawenfeuer claymore. The wound left the noble unable to procreate and thus the Nussloss line ended with him.

If one investigates contemporary common dictums one is able to perceive how the name Rawenfeuer was a source of pride - or fear - depending on your religious persuasion. To illustrate this point some examples are presented below:

As fire has tempered my trusted Rawenfeuer so has my faith in Ulric tempered my spirit. - A saying from Middenheim.

He is as sharp as a Rawenfeuer. - A person he has a sharp tongue, especially regarding religious or political commentary.

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He has Rawenfeuer eyes. – A person who cannot be trusted.

He seems to be armed with a Rawenfeuer. – An unlucky person.

Bleeding like a Rawenfeuer wound. – Harboring a grudge.

With the rising threat of Chaos and the emergence of Magnus the Pious people of the Empire put their religious differences aside and stood united against the Incursions of Chaos. The Ruinous Powers were defeated and the Empire was once again united under one Emperor. With Magnus of Nuln as the new Emperor, the Sigmarites found themselves in a relatively strong political position. Bitterness over the past conflicts with Ulricans was still bubbling under the surface though; some of the priests felt that the Church should use their advantageous position to fortify their grasp to power. It was felt among these men that the best way to go about this would be to undermine the power of the Cult of Ulric and their powerbase in Middenheim. They figured that they should choose a target that could not be claimed to be a direct offence on the Cult of Ulric but would still have a strong symbolic as well as practical meaning. The dreaded Rawenfeuer swords turned out to be the perfect target.

The priests figured that the Rawenfeuer swords were a source of pride to Middenheim. Also, the blades had an ill reputation among the worshippers of Sigmar and it was believed these blades thirsted for their blood. As the swords already had a reputation in and around Reikland of being cursed it was easy to build up on this image and claim they were indeed damned and would bring bad fortune to their wielder.

As it happened, ten years before Magnus the Pious started his pilgrimage, Mortus Rawenfeuer had taken his father's place as the head of the Rawenfeuer family and master weaponsmith. It was a well-known fact that Mortus was interested in the dubious Art of Alchemy, and often used his knowledge to his benefit when forging a blade. After Magnus became Emperor the Sigmarites quickly seized this opportunity and accused Mortus Rawenfeuer of being a heretic and a worshipper of the Ruinous Powers. In 2305, after exhaustive questioning, Mortus Rawenfeuer was burned at the stake in Altdorf. Any attempt by the author to view the records of the questioning has been met with refusal from the Initiatic and Holy Order of the Templars of Sigmar on the grounds that the evidence is simply too blasphemous for untrained eyes to see.

After the execution, by the order of the Grand Theogonist, some of the best lawyers in Altdorf were given the task of drafting an edict that would establish the Rawenfeuer swords as forbidden in the Empire. This edict, which is printed below, banned the Rawenfeuer family from forging any more weapons, and their smithy in Middenheim was torn down. Also, anyone was forbidden to carry or wield a Rawenfeuer blade of any kind. Punishments for failing to comply with this edict ranged from severe flogging to burning at the stake. Some sources that have survived in Middenheim suggest that this edict was actually intended to be the first in a series of such resolutions all intended to weaken the powerbase of the Cult of Ulric.

Henceforth all swords and blades forged by the Rawenfeuer family from Middenheim are considered illegal within the Empire of Sigmar. Any person in possession of such a sword is ordered to immediately relinquish their weapons to the nearest Temple of Sigmar. Furthermore, all citizens of the Empire are hereby ordered to notify the authorities immediately when learning of a whereabouts of a Rawenfeuer sword. Failure to comply with this edict will be met with most severe judgement for heresy and trafficking with the Ruinous Powers against Sigmar and his Church, the Emperor, and the good citizens of the Empire.

During the years an aura of mystery and ungodliness enveloped the Rawenfeuer blades. People started regarding them as cursed swords that bring bad fortune to whoever wields them. Today, they are seen as evil swords that yearn for the blood of the Sigmarites and any mention of them is a bad omen. Some even whisper that Mortus Rawenfeuer, the last of the family's weaponsmiths, was a Chaos magus and chanted blasphemous rites when forging the blades, tempering them with Wyrdstone. Conversely, in Middenheim the Rawenfeuer family enjoys a good reputation to this day, and their unfortunate fate is seen as a martyrdom of sorts.

Closer Examination of Chosen Rawenfeuer Blades

Augenstenger – The Sword that Blinded Grand Theogonist Lothar Sodenstern

This sword is the most famous Rawenfeuer and the blade most of all responsible for the defamation of these weapons. Augenstenger was used in 2138 to blind Grand Theogonist Sodenstern. Sodenstern was addressing the crowds in Wurtbad, when Wulfgang Nagengast, a young student from Middenland, blinded him with a wound across the eyes. The Collegium

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Theologica, where Nagengast was had been studying, had been closed by the order of the Grand Theogonist a month earlier on the grounds of inappropriate theological doctrine¹. The students and scholars rioted in protest. During the riot Nagengast's girlfriend was accidentally trampled to death.

Seeking revenge for his girlfriend Nagengast sold his horse and all the books and tomes he had been able to take from the Collegium and with this money he was able to buy a genuine Rawenfeuer sword. When the Grand Theogonist was having his next public sermon the vengeful Nagengast was in the audience; he had hidden the claymore under his heavy cloak. At an opportune moment the student brandished his sword, attacked, and blinded the Grand Theogonist with a deep wound across the eyes. Before he was able to deliver a killing blow though, templars killed the young man.

Nagengast was a slender youth who had neither skill with a sword nor experience with weapons of any kind. Yet he was able to blind and almost kill one of the most influential men in the Empire. When it was discovered that the claymore he had used was a Rawenfeuer rumours spread like wildfire that because the youth was unskilled and weak it must had been the sword itself that had thirsted for Sodenstern's blood. Soon the blade was given the moniker 'Augenstenger'. It is widely believed that this sword was the first sword destroyed by the priests of Sigmar when the edict to ban all Rawenfeuers was passed.

Heinrich Steinschlager's Great Sword

Once the rumours of the evil Rawenfeuer blades started spreading they stroke fear into the hearts of many Sigmarites. One such man was Lord von Rosenheimer. He was supposed to lead his men into battle against Lord Heinrich Steinschlager's troops. The two armies were to meet at a field outside Hergig. The night before the battle Lord von Rosenheimer received a word that the enemy commander was armed with one of the notorious Rawenfeuer swords.

At daybreak the commanders rode out to meet each other on the field. Lord von Rosenheimer called out Heinrich Steinschlager with a challenge. Von Rosenheimer claimed that he was not afraid of his enemy or his blasphemous weapons. He then challenged Steinschlager to display the power of his blade. According to the legend, Steinschlager dismounted without saying

a word, walked up to a big rock that was standing on the field and with one mighty strike cleaved the rock in two. This display terrified Lord von Rosenheimer so thoroughly that he quickly fled the field of battle². Being left without their commander von Rosenheimer's forces were quickly disbanded. The fate of the great sword is unknown but it is believed destroyed. Some unconfirmed reports speak of a great sword with matching description surfacing in Middenheim during the Storm of Chaos.

The Burning Rawenfeuer of Nuln

Once the edict to ban all Rawenfeuer swords was passed a printing press in Nuln was busy printing pamphlets of this declaration. An anonymous supporter of the Rawenfeuer family found out that this particular printing press was making these pamphlets. One day this man appeared at the press, declared himself a friend of the Rawenfeuer family (there is speculation among historians whether this man might have actually been one of their relatives) and proceeded to demolish their equipment. While the printers fled in horror the man poured oil inside the premises and set the house on fire. Before fleeing the scene the man struck his sword at the doorway so no-one would dare to enter and put out the fire. Contemporary eyewitness accounts speak of a huge fire with only the menacing sword visible amidst the flames. The sword was destroyed in the fire.

Concerning the Typical Characteristics of These Swords

The Rawenfeuers forged an uncountable number of weapons during the centuries. The edict passed by the Church of Sigmar does not segregate the blades in any way but in practice it was understood to first and foremost concern blades forged by Mortus Rawenfeuer. In any event the swords did not display the characteristic features of a Rawenfeuer blade until as recently as after Kristoff Rawenfeuer's work. Estimates regarding the number of blades forged by Mortus Rawenfeuer vary from as little as three to as many as thirty. How many are left, if any, is anyone's guess.

There are several characteristics that are typical to Rawenfeuer blades, especially the ones forged by Mortus. First of all, the swords are either claymores or great swords. The Rawenfeuer family specialised in large swords that usually took more time to forge and demanded more raw materials. The need for such large weapons also

¹ According to 'The Religious History of Middenland' (by Hermann Matthauss) the Collegium was closed because one of the members of the faculty was suspected of being a member of the fanatical Ulrican sect the Sons of Ulric.

² Jurgen Herrikel, in his famous book 'Ulric in the Art of Swordmanship', uses this incident as an example how a sword can achieve a victory without resorting to bloodshed.

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reflects the Ulrican military doctrine of the time. Secondly, hand guards of these swords are usually decorated with Ulrican symbolism like wolf heads or fangs. This is typical to all Middenheim weaponsmiths. This symbolism is often seen on the pommel also. Thirdly, the superior quality of these swords is best evidenced in their blades. The heart of the Rawenfeuer technique is evident in the exceptional fullers, also known as central channels or grooves, which lighten the blade, yet make it stronger and more flexible at the same time. The endurance and balance of these blades is what makes them superior to most other swords. Finally, the most easily recognisable feature of a Rawenfeuer sword is the family crest engraved on the blade; the crest features a raven's head with flames surrounding it. Kristoff Rawenfeuer was the first to engrave this symbol on his swords. The crest was most likely meant to drive away evil spirits and frighten the opponent. Today, it is seen to depict the vile nature of these weapons.

Who, then, are able to recognise Rawenfeuer blades for what they are? In Middenheim there are many soldiers who have never actually seen a Rawenfeuer blade but have heard of them many times. Any Dwarf smith, or any weaponsmith, worth his reputation is able to recognise one. The priests of Sigmar have most likely heard the legend at some point; every witch hunter is most definitely able to recognise these cursed weapons with a first glance. In game terms, any character with **Trade (Weaponsmith)** or **Academic Knowledge (History)** is allowed a **Challenging (-10%) test** to recognise a Rawenfeuer sword. Also, Witch Hunters and the clergy of Sigmar and Ulric should be allowed a test. In some circumstances, Gossip or Common Knowledge (History) might allow for a test, if the GM deems it fit.

The Proper Method of Destruction

The Church of Sigmar has striven hard to eradicate these weapons from the Empire. A set of very strict measures has been developed to ensure the proper destruction of the blades. These measures must be followed every time such a sword is found. To destroy the weapon's evil and corruptive influence a priest of Sigmar must perform the following rite. First of all, when a Rawenfeuer sword is secured it should be kept in its scabbard at all times. Also, the sword and the scabbard should be covered with a black cloth until it reaches the nearest Temple of Sigmar.

Once there, two High-Priests should be present at all times during the following Rite of Purification and Destruction; no-one is to be ever alone with such an instrument of evil. The Rite begins with

the removal of the black cloth and the scabbard. Then the sword is rinsed with water to wash away any blood. This purification also symbolises the washing away of the sins committed with the blade. Then the sword is placed on an anvil. Next, a weaponsmith with a stout heart and purity of spirit is summoned. In the presence of the priests the smith removes the hilt from the blade, breaks the blade in two and finally melts all the metal into one lump. Once the lump has cooled it is taken to a segregated piece of land that has been previously purified with prayers and salts. There the lump is buried. Finally, the priests and the smith ritually wash their hands and feet and then pray together in silence to cleanse their spirits.

Of course, there are also those who believe that such items should not be destroyed but studied to better understand them and their evil. Such individuals quickly attract the attention of witch hunters though. Some nobles also find Rawenfeuer blades to be suitably eccentric for collector's items and are willing to pay handsome amounts for a genuine piece.

Game Stats

Rawenfeuer swords are not cursed nor are they magical. They are just Best Quality weapons that have a bad reputation. And it is this reputation that might affect the wielder. If the person wielding the blade does not know that he is actually wielding such ill reputed weapon the Rawenfeuer acts in his hands just like a Best Quality weapon of a given type. But men are often gullible and the mind can deceive itself. Therefore, if the person knows that he is in possession of a "cursed" Rawenfeuer he believes that he is indeed wielding a sword that will bring him bad luck. Furthermore, if his opponents know that they are facing an enemy who is armed with a "cursed" blade they will become bolder and more confident in their abilities. Also, the Rawenfeuers have an especially bad reputation among the followers of Sigmar, so facing such a weapon is a truly scary experience for them. A wizard examining such a sword with Witchsight would be affected by his beliefs as well. These game effects are summarized below.

Rawenfeuer Claymore

Modifier to WS Special, see below; Enc 135; Group Two-handed; Dmg SB; Qualities Slow (one-handed) or Impact and Slow (two-handed)

Rawenfeuer Great Sword

Modifier to WS Special, see below; Enc 225; Group Two-handed; Dmg SB+1; Qualities Impact and Slow

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Level of Information	WS Modifier*
Wielder does not know he is armed with a “cursed” Rawenfeuer	+ 5% to wielder’s WS
Wielder knows he is armed with a “cursed” Rawenfeuer	- 5% to wielder’s WS
Opponent does not know about the Rawenfeuer	No effect to opponent’s WS
Opponent knows about the Rawenfeuer	+ 5% to opponent’s WS
Opponent is a Sigmarite (Initiate, Priest etc.)	The wielder is considered to have the Talent Frightening (see <i>WFRP Core Rulebook</i>)

* These modifiers include the normal +5% Best Quality weapon bonus.

Adventure Hooks

The PCs are stopped at the city square where watchmen are conducting a search. They want to see everyone’s swords and confiscate all weapons that look suspicious to them in any way. To any inquiries the sergeant will tell them that according to rumours there is a Chaos-tainted Rawenfeuer blade somewhere in the city. Soon after this incident the PCs are approached by an elderly man who claims to be a collector of antiques; he would be willing to pay them handsomely if they could bring him the rare Rawenfeuer blade. Who has the blade, and why? And why does this collector want it so bad? Besides the Church of Sigmar and the PCs who else is looking for the blade?

The PCs are hired by the local Temple of Sigmar to find one Initiate who has gone missing after a trek to Middenland. The priest suspects foul play as the area can sometimes be hostile towards the followers of Sigmar. The Initiate has met an old scholar and learned that the sword he has been carrying for years is actually a Rawenfeuer. Now he believes he cannot return to the temple after committing such heresy. He does not want to abandon the blade as someone else might eventually find it. So, he has decided to leave the church and take it upon himself to be the guardian of the cursed sword until he finds a way to dispose of it. But he does not know that local Sons of Ulric have learned that there is a Rawenfeuer blade in the area and they want to find it. Can the PCs find the Initiate in time and help him dispose the blade?

A dispute has arisen between two noble families. They have agreed to settle the matter with a duel both sides using champions to represent them. One of the families hires the PCs as extra protection for his champion until the day of the duel. The champion’s sword is secretly exchanged for a Rawenfeuer blade before the duel. The champion wins using the cursed sword. The truth about the blade is discovered after the fight. If word gets out the noble’s reputation will be ruined and he might face the pyres. The noble holds the PCs responsible and demands that they find the real culprits – or he will have their heads. The PCs must find the guilty person before the truth is revealed. All evidence points at the other noble family but the real culprit is the nobleman’s own son. He has been studying magic and has become a member of a Tzeenchian cult. Now he wants to destroy his father so he, and the cult, will get the family fortunes.

Written by Sami Uusitalo

This article was inspired by the following sources: Old World Armoury, Sigmar’s Heirs, The Loathsome Ratmen, The Witch Hunter’s Handbook, and Samurai Executioner manga.