

SWORD
SORCERY

Ravenloft

*Dark & Disturbing
Tales
Legends*



A Ravenloft® Campaign Setting Supplement

Dark & Disturbing Tales Legends

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Dark & Disturbing Tales Legends

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Introduction



One of the keys to the continued success of the **Ravenloft** game setting is the way its writers take horror stories we all know and love (to dread), and puts unique spins on them. From its earliest incarnation as a stand-alone **AD&D** game adventure, the **Ravenloft** setting has been about bringing horror stories to your gaming table. We've drawn from classics in the genre (*Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*), from historical terrors (Jack the Ripper and Vlad Tepes), from radio dramas and movies (such as "Donovan's Brain" from *Suspense* and films such as *The Plague of Zombies* and *Cat People*).

With this book, we turn to even more prevalent tales and make them part of **Ravenloft**, tales that often formed the foundation for the novels, radio plays, and movies we drew inspiration from: the horrific folktales and legends that exist in a dozen different forms the world over and which are told and retold by children and adults alike.

Everyone reading these words has either sat around a campfire or been in a room of friends during a sleepover and swapped horror stories. Everyone has heard some variation of "The Hook" (teens sneak out for a bit of necking and narrowly avoid falling victim to

a hook-wielding maniac... or maybe they *don't* avoid becoming victims), "The Hitcher" (where a traveler picks up someone by the roadside, only to hear a radio bulletin about an escaped lunatic who resembles the increasingly twitchy stranger sitting next to him), or "The Bride" (where a vengeful spirit of a woman slain is devoted to warning or killing future wives of her still-living husband). We can add to this mix any number of ghost stories, vampire tales and werewolf yarns. We can probably even add more than a few scenarios used in roleplaying games over the years. These are the stories that changed the way we think of the dark, and these are the stories from which other, more elaborate and artful works intended to send shivers down your spine have sprung.

In the following pages, you will find five **Ravenloft** takes on classic horror folktales. We start with "The Bride" and "The Hook" and other of the archetypal horror story foundations and build adventure hooks, characters, magical items, and even full-blown adventures around them. The chapters are structured in such a way that the DM can take the material and incorporate it into their ongoing campaigns within the Demiplane of Dread, or even use the material to add terror to other imaginary realms of the *d20 System* multiverse.





Who is This Book for?

Dark Tales and Disturbing Legends provides some excellent stories to entertain both players and DMs. This supplement also contains much useful information exclusively for DMs, demonstrating how these stories can be adapted for use in fantasy games. Players who are thinking about trying their hand at DMing can find many suggestions in these pages, providing them with insight into how to go about creating an adventure from a story or folk tale. Such players should make sure their DM doesn't intend to use any of the tales within these pages before reading it, however.

The appendix, as in most Ravenloft supplements, contains information for the DM's eyes only.

How to Use This Book

Dark Tales and Disturbing Legends is a sourcebook that provides supernatural and horror story hooks and adventure elements for incorporation into any **Ravenloft** campaign or any other horror/fantasy game. In order to gain full enjoyment of this product, you need the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, **Ravenloft DM's Guide**, and **Denizens of Dread**. The **Ravenloft Tarokka Deck** may also add greatly to the usefulness of this product, but it is not as crucial as the aforementioned books.

Each chapter in this supplement presents a different legend or story, followed by possible locations for using the story in a campaign as well as adventure suggestions spun off from that legend. As is the case with most **Ravenloft** setting material, the ideas offered here can be transported from the Demiplane of Dread to any other game world that the DM wishes to infuse with a bit of darkness and terror.

Some chapters include more straightforward adventure material, but in all cases, each chapter is rich in source material and a variety of elements that can be incorporated into ongoing **Ravenloft** games.

The **Introduction** provides you with an overview and some general hints as to how to use this book.

Chapter One: To Inherit Eternity shows that when a stranger proffers a gift, one should be certain it is something one really needs before

accepting. One never knows who stands to gain the most: the giver or the recipient.

Chapter Two: The Curse of Ashington Manor brings to life the story of a curse. Decades ago, a young Vistani died at the hands of a brutal nobleman. With her dying breath, she placed a curse upon Ashington Manor and all who enter it. Now, the curse is coming undone, and strange magical energies sweep the player characters into a nightmare house they may never leave alive.

Chapter Three: The Brood of Blutkalte provides an intimate look at horror in an unexpected setting. In every community, one can find a family that taints the well of harmony and performs foul deeds while the people sleep. At least, one hopes such a family can be found, for if they operate in total secrecy, the evil they spread may know no bounds.

Chapter Four: To Honor and Obey takes shape around the occasion of a wedding. In Souragne, marriage is a happy occasion as it is in so many other lands. However, when dark obsessions bubble to the surface, one particular marriage ends with murder.

Chapter Five: Noises in the Night explores the horrors that prey upon even the wariest people in the dark of the night. A Lamordian folklorist discovers to his regret that some tales are more rooted in fact than fiction and that their subjects don't appreciate prying scholars.

The **DM's Appendix** provides new rules, monsters and magic, spotlighting new feats and other rules, spells, magic items and monsters that are introduced in the previous chapters.

Chapter format

Each chapter follows the general structure outlined here. Some chapters are weighted more heavily toward one element or another. The appendix collects rules-related material in one place, organized by chapter.

The Story

Here you'll find a legend—a tale told around campfires or in taverns when the moon is dark and the wind is howling outside. Some of these tales have more truth than others. The material that follows allows you as DM to let your storytelling abilities shine. Tell your story or legend as if you had an audience. Any number of possibilities exists for starting your chapter to create the proper atmosphere for horror.

The Truth

This section of the chapter reveals the truth behind the legend, which is sometimes quite far





removed from the tale as initially presented. It is here that what really happened is exposed. In some chapters, this takes the form of a second narrative, but in others, it serves as the heart of the adventure and presents additional source material.

Using the Story

This section demonstrates for the DM how the story and the truth can be spun to create an adventure. In some chapters, a number of possibilities are presented in the form of outlines, while in others more fully developed adventure threads are offered. In all cases, an effort has been made to present the material in a modular fashion so the DM can mix and match elements as appropriate to his campaign and the tastes of his players.

Variations on a Theme

This section shows how the DM can customize the story for his campaign, as well as how he can reuse it in many different forms — even within a single campaign. The simplest examples show how to adjust adventures for different levels. In some cases, we show how the story can be relocated to different environs and backdrops. In others, we show how switching around the main actors of the

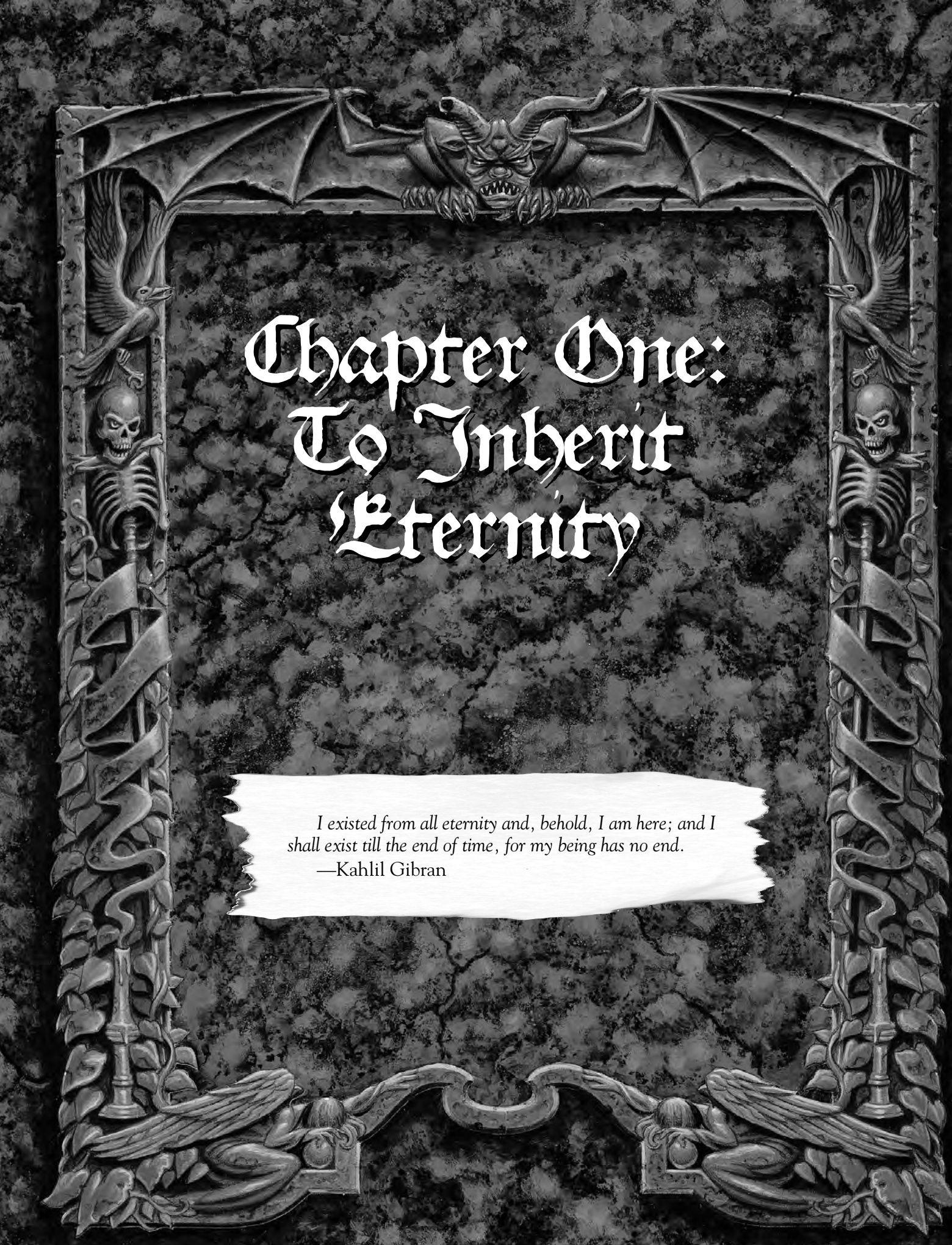
tale can change it significantly. In one chapter, we even show how the map can be reused as five different places in one elaborate adventure. (We happen to display it in the context of a single adventure, but the example can be extrapolated to pretty much any map from any adventure or sourcebook.)

The goal of this section is to demonstrate that a good story is worth a thousand adventures, and it is our hope that we give you ideas not only to reuse the material in this book many times over, but help shed new light on material DMs already own and that they may yet be able to find fresh uses for.

Closing Thoughts

The stories we tell and retell on dark nights become part of our imagination and spark the creative urge in all of us. Tales of terror let us peek behind the locked doors and secret places where we have always been told not to go, to stand on the edge of a bottomless chasm and contemplate, from a safe place, what lies in the dark. We hope you find in the stories and adventure ideas in **Dark Tales and Disturbing Legends** a wealth of material to bring a touch of classic horror to your games.





Chapter One: To Inherit Eternity

I existed from all eternity and, behold, I am here; and I shall exist till the end of time, for my being has no end.

—Kahlil Gibran



In the dark, we hope to distance, distract and defend ourselves from terrors that haunt the twilight by huddling in our houses before the fading evening fire and telling each other tales to occupy our thoughts till dawn. We recount legends of valiant quests and faded glory, fallen heroes and dark justice, tragic villains and ancient horrors. Then the old folk recall the time-worn tales, grim sagas known throughout the realms from Darkon to Invidia, Mordent to Barovia; narratives of suffering and shame, of trials and tribulation and ultimately of tragedy for hero and villain alike. For in these tales we find warning and caution, hope and solace, and a chance that we might yet avoid a similar fate.

The Realms' greatest legends, however, are more than mere musings of an imaginative mind. Though these fables may vary with each rendering, the characters, themes and lessons remain the same as if drawn from the very pages of history, for, after all, at the heart of every legend lies a foundation in truth! It is this very kernel of veracity that inspires some and entices others to seek to discern the fact from the fiction and drives them on through the torments of life with the frail hope of proving the tale true and claiming the prize for themselves. But, one must be careful when seeking to learn the legitimacy of a legend lest one becomes trapped within that very saga, facing the same grim fate as its hero. *To Inherit Eternity* is one such story.



Time has a way of devouring all men. Nothing remains but formless dust and faded memories that make us doubt they ever existed. Life's curious tale winds past trials and triumphs to tribulations and tragedy. Like a river that bubbles from an unknown wellspring, an individual's life flows past rocky shores toward fertile fields, negotiating obstacles or sweeping them up in its flood and carrying these burdens along until at last it reaches its terminus. There it ends...at least for most people. But for some...

The Lord of Eldron Manor, landlord to hundreds of impoverished citizens of this region, was such a man. In public opinion, he was the wealthiest and most powerful man in this territory. By popular reckoning, he was well approaching the centennial anniversary of his birth. He was also a most reclusive soul and had not been seen the locals for nearly three decades, leaving his chief steward and a battalion of solicitors with the daily

duties of seeing to his estate. Some thought he would never die. Then came the notice from Master Ramirez, his steward, announcing his lordship's demise and the holding of a very exclusive private auction of "Sundry Curios, Fancies, and Objets d'Art" from the collection of Sir Eowin Tierny Tytian Allyn Makepiece Theone III, the proceeds to benefit heirs and appointees. With that, the oldest man of many a generation was dead—or so it seemed.

The night is oddly still as if in hushed reverence at the passing of this great man. The crickets and tree frogs creep timorously to their logs and bogs, seeking the succor of their cold hearths rather than the seductive undulation of the chill mists dancing slow between the hills and low in the vales. Something in the air, subtle, alluring and enticing, waits in the gray of the gloaming promising intrigue, dark pleasures and excitement before this night is through. The night will not yet open wide its inky mantle to reveal any of its hidden secrets, not until the time is right. But it will be soon...soon.

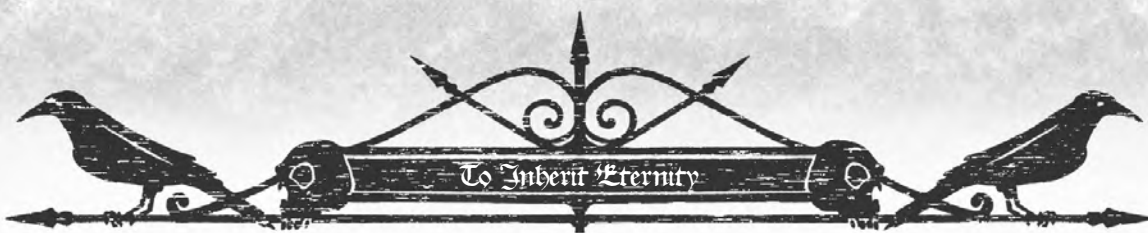
Eldron Manor lies a league from the nearest village, its stony lands segregated by hedgerows and woven briar fences so that the only proven path is a narrow road that meanders to and fro, thus providing the land's steward the opportunity to survey his holdings. Dim graying light from the westerling moon casts long dark shadows beneath the scattered trees. What lonely spirits once claimed this grit and gravel as their mortal forms? None recall.

From a carpeted knoll rising above the surrounding hills, Eldron Manor watches the intruders' progress, patiently waiting for the guests to draw nearer. In the shadow-laden light, the mansion boasts a towering central structure wreathed by several low twisted wings. In the dark, lanterns wink like lunatic fireflies lighting the way up the final drive to the welcoming front doors and the watchful presence of smartly dressed guards. You have arrived.

As the Vistani are fond of saying, however, "Fate is a devious mistress, teasing and tempting, offering forbidden fruit, but delivering little and never what we truly expected." Thus, even as the warmth of hearth and host are within reach, the sinister night decides it is time to play:

Editors' note: Passages marked in the beginning and end by bold-faced letter indicate passages that may be replaced by randomly selected elements. The DM





may make changes to the details in order to vary the game's clues and key events.

[A] A dark shape scampers from beneath the looming manor walls and pauses on the path ahead to stare with night-candled eyes. The ebon feline's tail twitches with unexpected interest as it yawns, baring needle-sharp fangs as if daring the intruders to trespass. With a gust of wind, the shadowy presence dissolves into the void of night leaving only the cold chill of its claws prickling your spine. That was no ordinary cat, nor is this likely to be an ordinary evening. Things are not always what they seem.

"Well come and welcome, my friends," the gentleman garbed in the warm burgundy suit favored by barristers firmly grasps each proffered hand, "I am Señor Hector Elissar Ramirez, your host for the evening and steward of Eldron Manor. Your journey was pleasant and uneventful, I trust? If you will be so kind as to present your bonafides to my clerk, Mr. Charoan — Alistair — will verify your credentials and letters of credit so that we may retire from the chill of the night air." He directs your attention toward a small table and stool and an unassuming man you had not noticed before.

Mr. Charoan is soft-spoken, but professional, efficiently reviewing papers then requesting the letter of credit or requisite financial deposit. He is a slim man, dressed in a slate gray jacket and smoky waistcoat; his features are so thin they could cut paper and his hair, while still a shiny black is thinning too, combed back over his gleaming pate. His eyes are small and dark behind wire-rimmed glasses, darting back and forth to keep up with his nimble fingers. In contrast, the host for the evening, once a tall man, has been shrunk by age, his wine-stained suit and drawn sallow skin tight against an underlying frame that attests to a once well-muscled form. Still he holds his graying head high with dignity, his kind smile offsetting rheumy eyes. A drake-capped cane attests to the infirmities of his age. "Here you are, sirrah," murmurs the clerk handing back the papers, "I think you will find everything there." The thin man's gaze seems strangely steady.

"That's fine. Thank you, Alistair," the host beams, "And now, one final matter, if you please...security. I am afraid we suffered a recent break-in and the unfortunate murder of one of my guards, a brave man by the name of Calvis — may he be long remembered. For your safety and the





safety of all our visitors, we request the surrender of all weapons here. My guards will secure them until our business is concluded.” He indicates several locked chests beside the entryway. They will do you no good anyway, for I have had the hall warded against the use of weapons. This is merely a gesture of good will to your fellow guests.”

Reluctantly the weapons and, if desired, armor, are surrendered. A key to the locked strongbox is given in return. As documents are recovered from where they were set aside an unfamiliar scrap of paper is discovered; surreptitiously it is unfolded and the message within read.

“Please, I count on you to keep my trust and reveal nothing of this to the others. I fear that one or more of our guests has a different agenda and are not who they purport to be. Indeed, I fear not only for the safety of the collection, but also for the welfare of my master. He is not well and a base betrayal could bring a regrettable spell. For now I ask that you be observant and help avert any trouble. And if anyone seeks to harm my master, I beg that you defend his life, if not his honor.

[B]*Know that you may trust me. Your willing servant, AC”*



With a satisfying thump, heavy oak doors shut out the cold clinging mists of evening. A blazing fire in the granite hearth warms the room, banishing any lingering chill. Its light merges with the steady flame of numerous lamps to illuminate the dark wood paneling and rich green brocade of inviting divans and armchairs. Nearly a dozen individuals wearing formal garb gather in twos and threes adding patches of color to the earthen tones of the room, like flowers on a newly dug grave.

A single figure dressed in sanguine servant’s livery stands as still and erect as his stoop-shouldered form permits. His coarse hair, beetled brow and protruding lower lip acknowledge a pre-human lineage. “If you would, my servant Hugo will attend to your cloaks,” the host offers. “Hugo, say hello to our guests.”

With a stuttering effort, the man replies, “He...ell...hell...o!” and offers a hand. Then, in afterthought, “M...m...my dad died!” he declares as if in confidence.

Señor Ramirez smiles with sad indulgence, “Yes, Hugo, they know. Would you please hang these visitors’ wraps and then bring them something warm to drink?” Hugo nods, scowling in thought and shuffles off to the cloakroom. “You

must forgive, Hugo, his brain moves slowly, but he is a gentle soul. A misfortune of birth I’m afraid. His father was the night watchman who was killed during the break-in. I am all the family he has left. Now, while Hugo brings some mulled wine, permit me to introduce you to the other guests. Nearly all have arrived, though we await one final party.”

Stepping to the center of the room, Señor Ramirez raises a hand for quiet, “May I have your attention, please? You already know who these fine gentlemen are, at least by reputation, but most of you are strangers to them. Permit me to make some introductions.” He leads the way to a tall, dark man with black hair dressed in a priest’s cassock and cap, golden buttons and a gem-encrusted star of his faith belie a vow of poverty. “This is Father Daniel Marcus Franklin. Father Daniel is with the Order of Eleazar, a small sect that takes pride in the pursuit and preservation of the arts and sciences.”

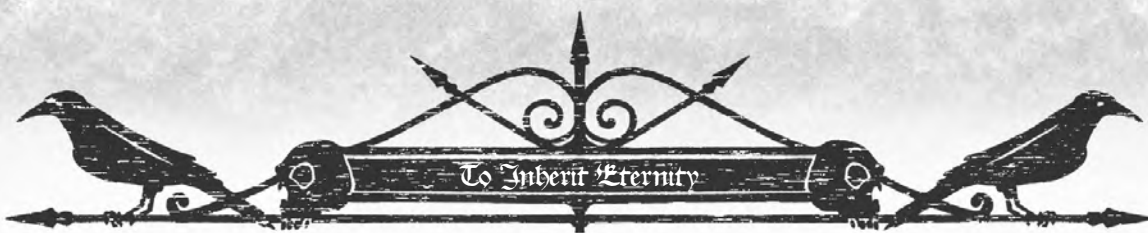
A deep hearty laugh erupts from the swarthy giant. “Ah, Señor Ramirez, not so; pride is a sin! Let us say we have a passion for knowledge and beauty in our efforts to bring enlightenment to the world and in our never-ending battle against the forces of darkness.” His handshake is as warm and firm as his laughter, in counterpoint to his black robes.

The host turns to the next guest. “This stalwart soldier is Captain Ferril Conklin Harrow.” The gentleman is obviously a veteran of war, wearing the dress uniform of an officer. A chest-full of metals rattles as he steps forward. His bushy brows seem an extension of the tawny mane of hair and full beard that lend him the air of a great lion. A milky right eye framed by angry burns peers glassily from beneath tousled bangs and his gauntleted right hand hangs stiffly at his side. He offers his left hand in welcome. “Captain Harrow is the victor of Gunnagan Gap and vanquished the Beast of Barstow.” The veteran harrumphs as if in protest, though a look of delight twinkles in his good eye.

“True it is, sir; but if it weren’t for Lord Theone I would nay be standing here today.” His brogue is thick, “He saved me he did and gave me back my life. Would that I could have returned that favor.”

A small stout fellow with long hair, dressed in the rich blues of a merchant and wearing a garish gold chain, one end stuck into his tunic, pushes past Señor Ramirez impatiently. “I am Currin Klein de l’Ombre,” the unctuous gentleman’s clasp is cold and clammy, his smile vague and insincere. “As a fellow collector I am anxious to view Lord Theone’s collection, as I am sure you are. I have





heard some interesting tales associated with his treasures. Really, Hector, are these delays necessary?"

"As I have explained, Master Currin, there remains one party yet to arrive," the host notes with an air of annoyance. "I am sure you will find a variety of items to make your patience profitable." He turns toward the visitors. "Master de l'Ombre is a merchant and master tradesman, as well as a collector of fabled relics and curios such as Lord Theone." The merchant turns away dismissively to rejoin two men, one burly brute decked in aquamarines who stands with arms crossed in boredom and the other, a small and dusky man wearing a navy cloak who sprawls on a divan. "And those are his associates, Mister Gar and Mister Kantall, I believe."

"Ah and here is Hugo with the mulled wine I promised," Señor Ramirez seems relieved at the reprieve. The red-clad servant shuffles forward offering steaming mugs to each and bellowing, "You're welcome," whether given thanks or not. As he turns toward the host and his recent arrivals, his swaying gait brings him precariously close to Master de l'Ombre and, in inflated outrage, the merchant gives the clumsy fellow a shove. Like an ancient tower crumbling with age, Hugo topples into the guests, wine pelting down like a warm summer rain.

A cry of anguish erupts from the crooked man, as he tries desperately to sop up the spilled wine with a woefully inadequate napkin from across his arm. Señor Ramirez rushes forward offering apology to all and trying to quiet the howling servant. But it is with some surprise that de l'Ombre steps up, neatly snagging two serviettes from a nearby table and pulling a voluminous handkerchief from some pocket to sponge the wet spots from his new acquaintances' garments, all the while muttering regrets. "I am so sorry...my fault entirely. The clumsy fool annoyed me, but I fear I acted rashly. Here, let me get that for you! No, no, keep the handkerchief, I have a dozen."

In short order, everything is made right, except for the muffled sobbing of Hugo. Señor Ramirez tries to comfort him, "Accidents will happen. Things are all right now. No one is mad at you." The humbled servant looks up hopefully with furrowed brow, swiping at his runny nose with his sleeve. "Now make your apologies and then see to the dinner." An awkward smile brightens the crooked face as with bellows of "Sorry!" and un-

comfortably strong hugs, Hugo apologizes to all, before shuffling off as conversation returns to the room.

Seeking a distraction, the señor leads the way to a well-dressed couple chatting in lowered voices. The gentleman possesses aquiline features and a slim, well-toned body nicely filling a tan silk suit and paisley waistcoat, his mustache thin and trim, hair slicked back in the style of young aristocrats. His female companion, garbed in an understated ivory and cream full skirt and lace-adorned jacket, seems small and ill-at-ease, her eyes cast down, her mousy brown hair gathered up into an attractive, if disheveled beehive with a white flowered comb, errant strands straying across her pale, shy features. She clings to a small leather folio as a drowning man would a scrap of wreckage.

"Sir Edwin Kent, a distant nephew of Lord Theone, I believe," the young man nods as Señor Ramirez makes the introductions, "And Miss Natalie Warren Wellbue, a friend of the family."

"As I understand it, Nicky here is a bit of an aspiring author," the young man notes with amusement. Miss Wellbue offers a curtsy and extends an alabaster hand, shuddering at the courteous kiss it receives. "I have made it my mission to entertain this charming young lady and insure that she has a delightful and memorable evening, if she will permit me." Sir Edwin declares, eliciting a murmured protest. Miss Natalie appears extremely uncomfortable with the attention.

"Miss Wellbue is in attendance at the family's request to prepare a biography of Lord Theone's lifetime of accomplishments. I'm certain she would appreciate any assistance you can provide, but please, do not distract her from her responsibility." The host's plea elicits an amused laugh from the young man, but he smiles and bows obligingly, as he turns back to his evening's quest.

"Nonsense, your grace!" the loud voice draws attention to an unfamiliar, disheveled man dressed in green arguing with Father Daniel, "Man is not born evil; he is *tabularasa*—a blank slate upon birth. It is only through conscious choice and social pressures that he actively rejects good and embraces evil!"

Father Daniel is taken aback, his face flushed. "Umm ... I'm, I'm sure the Doctor meant no disrespect to your order or tenets, Father. He is rather passionate about his theories," the young beardless man wearing a verdant checked suit is obviously an aid to the good doctor. "He believes





that through knowledge and a well-built moral center, mankind can achieve amazing things.”

“Only if one can break free of the judgments of society and find a way to overcome the restraints of age,” the doctor, oblivious to any insult he may have offered, brushes back the graying hair at his temples and tugs absentmindedly at his goatee.

“Ahem!” the host interrupts, “This is Doctor Melrose Elliot Cameron and his aid, Mr. Thurrow.”

“Call me Darren. It is a pleasure to meet you!” the young man eagerly shakes hands. Doctor Cameron nods, stepping forward to offer a welcome when raised voices from the entry hall interrupt.

“...way! Get out of the way! My sister needs air!” commands the trembling tenor voice. The doors are flung wide and Alistair helps a short gentleman assist his young lady companion to a sofa. The small man scans the room, pausing momentarily on Father Daniel and then fixing his eyes on Ramirez, “I say, sir, what kind of party are you hosting where guests are confronted by a corpse on your doorstep?!”



After fending off the flurry of questions from fellow guests, the young man makes sure his sister is resting comfortably. Father Daniel stares thoughtfully at the newcomers, but it is Dr. Cameron who steps forward to offer his aid, quickly declaring that the woman suffers from shock. He prescribes a small sherry to calm her nerves. Their host provides warm drinks, a seat by the fire and completes introductions once the lady has regained her composure. The pair are Charles and Ilsa Tempiere, brother and sister, their garments, traditional garb for followers of the Cult of Light, complement each other — his a rich dark plum, hers a more delicate lilac with violet vest. He is small and fine boned, while she is Rubenesque.

When nerves are at last settled, Charles discusses their discovery. “Perhaps it was nearer a half mile than a hundred yards, but it was very unsettling,” he admits. “My sister does not handle traveling well and was feeling rather indisposed, so we halted for a moment to let the dust settle.”

“I was stretching my legs when I heard a stone groan, or what I took for granted was a boulder. On closer approach I found a man with a fatal wound gasping for his final breath,” she recalls grimly.

“Who was he, do you think?” questions the doctor.

“There was nothing to identify him,” Charles explains. “The man appears to have been waylaid for his possessions and clothing, though he bore the scars of several battles, so I daresay he was an experienced warrior. He tried to speak, perhaps to tell us who had done this deed with his dying breath.”

[C] “Yes, he said that it was someone dressed like my brother,” Ilsa adds, “‘As your garb,’ he said, didn’t he? ‘He wants life and means to claim the prize for himself.’ It was all very confusing and upsetting. Perhaps he meant dark clothing or dressed like one of the faithful.” All eyes turn toward Father Daniel.

“Really, I protest,” the priest declares, “I came here in the company of your clerk Señor Ramirez!”

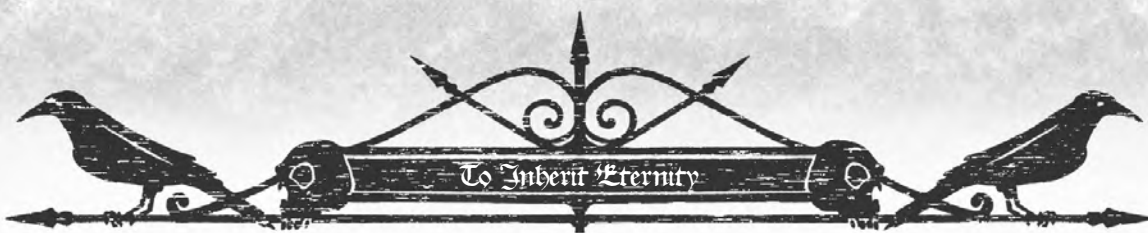
“Just so.” their host replies, “I fear, my friends, there is a murderer in our midst!”



The dinner is marvelous — fresh baked breads and creamy potage, steamed legumes and summer squash, smoked game birds and roast viands, tempting cakes and crisp green salads complemented by an excellent cellar of wines. But the unsettling news casts a pall over the festivities. The conversation is muted and low-keyed with sideway glances at unfamiliar strangers and an almost strained avoidance of the subject of the discovered body.

Ilsa and Charles Tempiere keep their own counsel though Mr. Thurrow tries to offer polite discourse. Dr. Cameron finds a willing ear in Captain Harrow who listens to the doctor’s lectures on ancient battle sites and answers questions about more recent campaigns. Seeking to avoid the constant flirtations of Sir Edwin, Miss Wellbue finds refuge in the solicitous attention of Mr. Charoan, and it becomes clear there is a history between these two. Not put off by her gentle avoidance, Edwin lavishes his anecdotes and clever banter on all members of the company, his laughter seeming uncommonly loud and inappropriate considering the circumstances. Only Señor Ramirez deigns to speak to Father Daniel who is oddly introspective. The host divides his interest between the quiet priest and the other guests, while Hugo stands stoop shouldered to the side, refilling glasses and clearing the dishes as the meal progresses. And a pensive Master Currin engages his associates in banter about their travels while casting vague smiles at everyone and trying to steer discussions





toward past adventures and the treasures rumored to be part of Lord Theone's collection.

Samples of the priceless artifacts that comprise Lord Theone's estate have been placed on display in the dining room in small glass cases atop alabaster pedestals. The eclectic selection includes a multi-faceted mirrored box balancing on a spindle like a miniature carousel as well as an ivory fan, the thin veins carved with delicate detail depicting windswept shores, mountain peaks and billowing clouds. Five colorful polished semi-precious stones with iconic engravings rest upon a velvet bag near a miniature stone flask sealed with an elaborately crafted crystal and silver stopper. The last item is the hilt and shattered blade of a sword with a pale blue stone in its pommel and a cobalt blue patina. The showpiece of the collection hangs in an antique gilded frame above the head of the table: a large painting of a misty moor under the light of a ghostly moon. The artistry is so exquisite that the image seems almost real with silvery clouds drifting and golden grasses swaying in the night wind.

With the completion of the evening's repast, Señor Ramirez pushes back from the table and clears his throat to gain the attention of the assemblage.

"Ahem...Let me once again thank you for attending this evening. I think you all know why you are here. Over the years, you have each come to the attention of Lord Eowyn Theone, either as friends or friendly rivals or your exploits and adventures attracted his interest. Lord Theone gave instructions that, in the event of his death, his collection of rare and ancient artifacts was to be offered first in a private auction to this select list of individuals who understand and respect their special value."

Murmurs of acknowledgement ripple through the group.

"I have sorted his collection into a variety of categories, establishing displays of each grouping in individual rooms throughout the manor. I will provide a tour after which you may submit written bids on any items that interest you. I am sure you will find a number of pieces of unique interest to each of you for the Master went to great lengths to add each item to his collection."

"My great-uncle was a powerful and influential man, and I have no doubt that many of the items were gifts from grateful benefactors," Sir Edwin notes pleasantly.





"He certainly was rich enough to afford whatever he desired," Master Currin adds with sarcasm, "It must be nice to inherit a fortune and not have to earn it through honest labor."

"I beg to differ there," interjects Captain Harrow, "He was a great warrior and champion of many a battle defending this realm. I am sure he earned due rewards for his service and sacrifice."

"I have heard tales that he was the lone survivor of a legendary adventure and returned with a fabulous treasure of untold value and power from a mighty hoard that lay hidden there," Dr. Cameron offers.

"Indeed, he was an uncommon and uncommonly fortunate man," Charles opines with a hint of irony.

"Not so fortunate, I fear," Father Daniel's statement draws stares demanding explanation. "I believe he suffered great misfortune and tragedy in his life. On numerous occasions he told me he was doomed!"

"Whatever did he mean by that, I wonder?" Darren marvels aloud.

"It sounds to me like it was those around him who suffered," de l'Ombre mutters a bit too loudly, "Throughout the years, those who associated with him have either met their demise or misfortune."

"He certainly was a charmer. He had the innate skill to convince others to take risks," Sir Edwin smiles.

"Perhaps he was the victim of a curse," Ilsa offers, her face pale at the thought.

Señor Ramirez interrupts the speculation, "There are many stories about the man, some real and many imagined. It is often difficult to sift the grains of truth from the chaff of fiction. Still, the influential must also pay the wages of time and even the mighty fall. We are all mortal after all."

"I wonder ..." Sir Edwin murmurs.

The steward raises a quizzical eyebrow, but continues, "Miss Wellbue is writing a chronicle of my Master's exploits. She knows the history of many of his treasures and can delight and entertain us with those stories. Perhaps we might prevail on her to share a sample of these tales. Nicky?"

Miss Warren Wellbue gazes around the room at the various artifacts on display, though she speaks to Señor Ramirez, "Perhaps if you could select one of these items?"

"How about that one over there? I have always been curious about it."

"Very well, I will endeavor to tell you the story as it was told to me."



[D] The Writer's Tale – Lyrian's Reflection

The young author stands beside the display case housing the be-mirrored carousel, staring at it lost in thought. "This was owned by a maiden named Lyrian né Ternal, made in memory of her lost fiancé from the shards of a magical mirror he owned. Her grand niece told me this story after her aunt slit her wrists with a broken glass at the Heimler Sanitarium."

The golden-haired maid stood in front of the antique mirror, admiring her figure and radiant face. She looked down at her hands where she held a letter-opener and the post she had just opened from Dr. Rellion, one of the finest physicians in the realm. The news was marvelous. Roberto's malady had passed, though the good doctor was at a loss to explain how. But Lyrian knew the reason and she had finally made a choice.

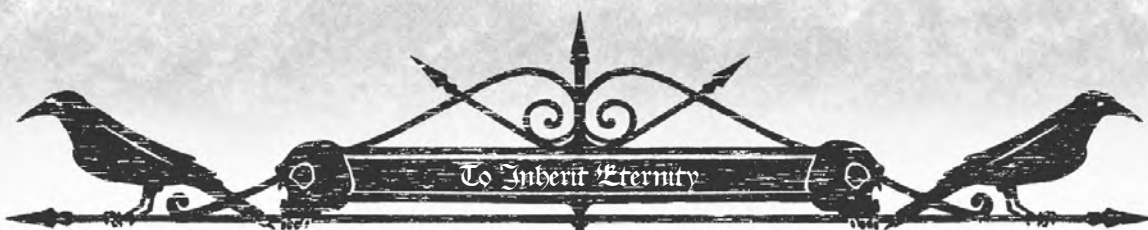
She loved him, her Roberto, although he was nearly twice her age and feared the chasm of his advancing years, feared losing her too soon. He was obsessed with his age and advancing infirmities, staring into this bizarre mirror at each wrinkle and gray hair. If only, he would say, if only there was a way to turn back time's wheel and reclaim his youth, then he would gladly ask for her hand in marriage.

For months, Roberto feverishly pored through ancient volumes and sought strange tonics and odd remedies, consumed tiny magnets and built bizarre generators, but nothing could stem the advance of time. He had purchased this dressing mirror from the estate of a lord who was rumored to have lived the span of three lives. He had taken to pacing in front of it while reading to himself in some foreign tongue, stopping now and again to examine his reflection.

She waited patiently, attending his obsession, knowing that love could overcome any obstacle. She believed that she could show him through small acts of devotion that age did not matter, and that they could be happy with what time was granted them. Love would endure beyond that. Slowly he began to improve. There was a new bounce in his step and enthusiasm in his tasks. He began to smile furtively, and she knew she was winning the battle.

Soon, she knew, he would pledge his love to her. Still, this mirror, this cursed mirror was a constant reminder of his flaws and the advance





of years. She knew what she must do, knew that he would forgive her this little thing.

It was done, and her crooked reflection smiled back at her. The sound of the opening door drew her from her reverie and she went to meet Roberto as he entered the room, a puzzled expression in his eyes. "Darling," she greeted her love, "I have the most marvelous news from Dr. Rellion." She held forth the letter, "He says you are well again with the heart and body of a man half your age! Isn't that wonderful?"

The look of incredulity that lit his face was reward enough. He looked across the room toward the mirror as if he might race there to confirm the prognosis. She deftly stepped between him and the object of his obsession. "No dear, you don't need to stare at your reflection. What does it matter? I love you and will always love you, whether in sickness or in health. Set aside your incessant studies and love me back, let the light of my eyes be the only reflection you ever seek again!"

The look of happy puzzlement warmed her heart. She stepped forward to accept his embrace, but as she did his gaze passed beyond at the prism light staining the ceiling and down to

its source. Thrusting her aside, he raced across the room to stare at the destroyed silvery plane.

"Nooo!" he cried out, the sound fading like a man falling to his doom. "You don't know what you have done!" he whispered, looking at her with small, pitiful eyes. Then she saw the gash on his cheek; he must have been cut with a shard of glass. Smiling, she took the handkerchief from her sleeve and dabbed at the wound. There was no blood, only the scar, which seemed to be growing longer, new cracks radiating from that central wound.

Behind her came a crackling like winter ice in spring thaw...and then she knew. Turning in shock she gazed at the mirror, stared at the spreading cracks, twin to her love's wound, stared at the letter-opener she had stabbed into the mirror. With ever quickening pace, like a jagged bolt of lightning the glass divided into myriad planes. Panic seized her heart and squeezed her eyes as she whirled to behold Roberto, head thrown back in agony, a sad, faraway look glazing his eyes. He stood in rictus, his body laced by countless cracks. And then to the sound of breaking glass, Roberto's life and body shattered, glistening shards spinning away to eternity.





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Stunned silence greets the end of the tale as several of the guests exchange troubled glances.

“Well told,” their host declares with delight. “Thank you, Nicky. I am certain our guests found your tale entertaining.” A smattering of applause and congratulatory words rewards the blushing writer. “Now, if you will finish your drinks we will be on our way. Mr. Charoan, the catalogs, if you please.”

Someone coughs once, twice and, to the sound of breaking glass, erupts into an exhausting hacking interrupting the pleasantries. Master Currin is doubled over by the debilitating bout, his face a strangled gray in contrast to the blue of his suit.

“What’s happening?” Ilsa cries out in dismay.

The guests crowd closer with looks of concern and uncertainty. Captain Harrow expertly thumps the man squarely between the shoulders, a blow mighty enough to rattle teeth, but to no avail. At Dr. Cameron’s instructions, the man is laid on a couch and he listens to his chest, looks at his pupils and smells his breath. The good examines the floor, retrieving a piece of the broken goblet. He sniffs the remaining liquor and tastes it with the tip of his tongue. “Burnt anise and ginger...mariposa bloom, unmistakable,” he mutters to himself. “Quickly, Darren, Ealium’s panacea!” he declares holding out his hand impatiently. Darren searches frantically, but shakes his head in dismay.

The doctor shrugs, “Not there? Very well smelling salts and essence of arsenic. Someone fetch a glass of dark ale...and a shot of whiskey!”

The physician loosens the top on a small ointment jar and holds it beneath the nose of the suffocating man. With a sudden gasp, Master Currin inhales and color slowly leaches back into his face. Dr. Cameron places three drops of an oily tincture into the ale. “Here, drink this down.” Master Currin obliges and slowly his thready breath returns to normal. The doctor takes the whisky for himself and downs it in a single gulp.

“Tell me doctor, what was the malady?” Sir Edwin voices the concern on everyone’s mind.

“Hmmm?” The doctor seems distracted, “Poison, I believe...most likely nectar from the deadly night lily, also called mariposa. In sufficient potency the distillation can be quite toxic.”

“It seems a bonny chance for Master Currin that you were here then!” the captain notes.

“Perhaps...” Señor Ramirez interjects, “Where do you think the poison came from doctor?”

The physician’s steepled fingers press his lips and he looks toward the floor, “I suspect it would be...mine,” he says in a flat voice. “Deadly night lily is useful in small doses for calming palpitations of the heart and night tremors. And my vial seems to be missing, along with the common antidote.”

“Interesting!?” Miss Tempiere’s voice verges on hysteria, “a man nearly dies and *he* calls it interesting?! Who? Who would do such a thing?!”

Charles moves to calm his sister. “I would think the same one who slew the man on the road. Strange, don’t you think that this man carries toxins with him?” He looks shrewdly at the doctor.

“Now then,” states the host, “I doubt very much that if Dr. Cameron would both poison someone and then save his life.”

The merchant struggles to a sitting position.

“He is right,” the merchant pants, his strength slowly returning. He raises one hand to fend off Hugo who has brought another glass of brandy, “I think not! I’m fine. Besides, I would think our host is suspect as well. It was his liquor after all that nearly poisoned me.”

“That hardly seems a credible line of reasoning,” Sir Edwin muses, helping the merchant to his feet. “If this is more than a mere accident, the perpetrator would need to have a motive, a reason to kill.”

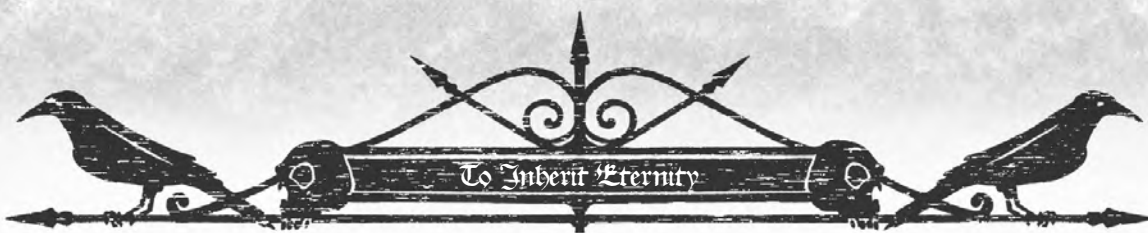
“Motive?” Master Currin eyes the gentleman thoughtfully, “Perhaps someone who stands to gain the most, such as a direct heir to Lord Theone’s estate.”

Sir Edwin stares at the man before erupting with laughter, “Really? Then it might prove a surprise that my great uncle left me out of his will. On the other hand, if I wanted to throw off suspicion, I would invent an attack upon myself.” This time it is the merchant’s turn to laugh.

“This is not a laughing matter,” Charles remonstrates. “Someone just tried to kill you, and did kill that unfortunate soul on the road. Perhaps one of us is not what he seems,” he says eyeing the priest. “Isn’t it the calling of all clergy to offer aid and succor to the injured? Twice now, Father Daniel has done nothing.”

“Who are you to judge?” the priest replies, his eyes burning with indignation. “Not all clerics pursue the healing arts. My order is devoted to study and teaching. Besides, how do we know you





found a body? Where is it? Perhaps you fabricated the story.”

“Now, now, this is accomplishing nothing, except dividing us.” Master Currin’s bravado, false though it may be, is nonetheless reassuring.

“Besides,” Miss Wellbue adds with muted voice, “That may be just what the killer wants — for us to distrust one another.” Mr. Charoan nods his agreement.

“Indeed, all this speculation is doing us no good and distracts us from our purpose. We best be about our business, and quickly then before any other incident,” recommends Señor Ramirez, “I propose we move into the manor proper, which is better warded against attacks. We should be safe enough there.”

With little discussion, but many furtive looks at each other, the guests gather their things and follow.



Señor Ramirez steps up to the oak doors to the great hall. “Through here we will begin our tour. Each of you possesses a catalog of the objects for sale, prepared by the capable Miss Wellbue. If there is something that interests you, please tender your bids to Mr. Charoan or Miss Wellbue, who will dutifully record them. The highest bid will secure the item in question against your deposit. If bids should exceed letters of credit or deposits, the buyer will have twenty-four hours to return with sufficient funds or else the item will be sold to the next highest bidder. Are there any questions?”

Dr. Cameron’s young assistance clears his throat, “Please, excuse my ignorance, but I wonder what could be so deucedly valuable in this collection that would warrant murder?”

“A great number of items are of considerable value, Señor Ramirez says after a moment’s hesitation. “ Lord Theone paid a dear price for several sculptures and works of art. Several arcane artifacts belong to the collection; their powers are not completely understood. Perhaps some one who knows the true nature of one of these relics is murderously eager to acquire it?” he offers.

“That could be a possibility,” Dr. Cameron muses, “What do you think Miss Wellbue?”

The young lady shivers nervously, but dutifully glances through her notes “There might be a problem with the artifacts. While I have cataloged these items in the collection, most have a bleak history of misuse and misfortune. Each artifact

seems to have curses as well as blessings associated with it, making each item of dubious value as a weapon or magical tool.”

“Perhaps it is not so much something he possessed, as it is something he sought,” suggests the priest.

“Really?” Charles says disdainfully, “why would someone want something Theone never had?”

“Because,” says the doctor as the light of understanding fills his eyes, “it’s not the item, but clues vital to locating the actual prize that our mysterious assailant seeks. Señor? Was anything taken earlier?”

“No, we assumed that his encounter with Calvis, may he rest in peace, scared him off before he could steal anything.”

“I understand,” Ilsa declares. “Do you see, brother?,” she adds, “he did not have time to find the information he sought, so he has returned to look again. Whoever it is does not want any competitors...or witnesses!”

“Now then Miss, do not upset yourself,” comforts Sir Edwin, “No need to construct nefarious schemes. My uncle had many enemies who wanted him dead or discredited. It could be any of them seeking to reclaim a prize they felt he stole. As a matter of fact I am surprised that he did not die a long time ago.”

“The lad speaks the truth,” the captain agrees. “Enemies he had, but I warrant he outlived them all. No man was as lucky as Lord Theone, surviving wounds that would have proved mortal to a lesser man. At times I thought he would live forever.”

“There are rumors about that, you know,” Father Daniel mumbles to himself, but somehow the words reach everyone’s ears, stopping conversation momentarily.

“Rumors, what rumors?” Darren ventures innocently.

“Well...,” Father Daniel hesitates, “Some say that Lord Theone lived longer than any man had a right to. Some circles suggested that he could not die. Not that he was immortal, mind you, but that he was able to hold back the scythe of death either through some uncanny good fortune or a mystical device that renewed and maintained his health and vitality.”

“I have heard similar stories,” Mr. Kantall’s sibilant voice hisses like a snake’s, “suggestions that he sought a fount whose waters possessed amazing restorative powers.”





"I heard he was invulnerable!" growls Mr. Gar. "No natural force could harm him."

"Fairy tales, gentlemen!" a smiling Master Currin admonishes, "But there are tales that he was a champion of light, holding evil at bay with a legendary weapon that could cleave through armor. Perhaps it is this weapon that our sinister plotter seeks. Let me say right now, I have no interest in weaponry."

"Really now!" Señor Ramirez interrupts the speculations, "One must not give credence to rumors and tales made up by common folk who have nothing better to do."

"Still... rumor may still motivate an individual to perform insidious acts." Dr. Cameron notes.

"How did my uncle die?" Sir Edwin asks.

Señor Ramirez stands quietly for a moment, his eyes peering guardedly from beneath a furrowed brow. At last, having weighed his options he replies, "I do not know that he did."

The cacophony of querulous voices expressing their amazement and shock at that remark makes it clear that all are interested in this answer.

The steward shrugs off their questions with few words, "He departed on a personal quest nearly two decades ago, leaving written instructions to dissolve his estate and distribute the proceeds to his heirs after a reasonable period of time had passed without his return. Tonight he would have been 101 years old. What man do you know that has lived beyond five score years?"

"A quest? At his age," Theone's nephew sounds perplexed. "How could he possibly undertake a quest?"

"Your uncle was a remarkable man, with the vigor of a man half his age," the host states with pride. "Since I have known him, he has possessed an interest in time its effects on man. He became obsessed with the secret for prolonging life. It was in pursuit of this dream that he undertook his final quest from which he never returned. But if you are suggesting that someone is seeking to follow in his lordship's steps, I assure you he was a very private person and had no close associates, nor left any clues to where he was going."

"You are right, Señor," concludes the captain. "Such a quest is the madness of dreamers and fools. And our murderer is no fool."

"Whatever our musings may be, the defenses of Eldron Manor are secure, and we outnumber any intruder. Eventually he will make a mistake and be

apprehended. Therefore," pronounces Señor Ramirez, "let us be about the evening's business." With a flourish, he opens the doors.

Two statuettes on porphyry pedestals flank the entrance to the great hall, grotesqueries more gargoyle than manikin with wicked beaks, feral eyes and reptilian wings. "Step along, if you please," invites the host. "We have much to see and the hour is already late."

In ones and twos, the guests file past the eerie idols and into the richly appointed corridor filled with works of art. Master de l'Ombre pauses a moment to rap the head of one statue, as if to assure himself of its inanimate nature. But, as the violet-clad siblings seek to pass, the statues' eyes blaze red and a wail fills the hall. Three guardsmen come running to encircle the confused couple.

"What's this, now?" The din of the alarm muffles Charles' protest. The steward hobbles back, all eyes upon him and the bewildered duo. He leans toward the nearest statue and murmurs something while subtly gesturing. The alarm fades into silence.

"My pardon, young sir," Señor Ramirez says, his face a portrait of serious determination, "but did you not surrender all your weapons before entering?"

"Of course we were told," Charles says indignantly. "We are not warriors. We left our daggers at the gate."

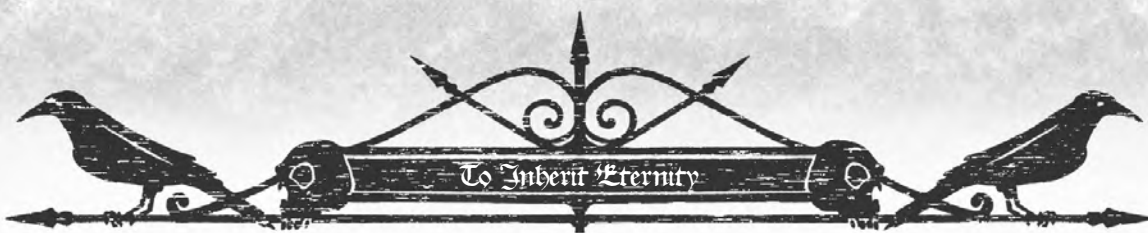
"Then I regret I must request permission to search you and your sister. The warding only reacts to the presence of weapons."

With clear reluctance, the two acquiesce. After a thorough search, the señor holds up a folded napkin recovered from the lady's handbag.

Ilsa avoids his inquiring eyes and stares close-lipped at the floor with stoic resolve. All eyes watch as Señor Ramirez shakes the napkin open and there is a collective gasp as a silver carving knife clatters to the floor. With arched brow, the steward examines the keen blade and studies first the young lady, then lets his gaze pass among the other guests.

With a tone of grim warning Señor Ramirez addresses his guests, "It would seem that one of you did not accept my promise for your safety during your visit. Let me assure you once again that the entire manor is warded against the use of weapons. I will not tolerate another breach of security, I have already buried one too many! Let this be a fair and final warning to all!"





The hour passes quickly. Señor Ramirez had instructed his guests that the manor's art collection was on display throughout the corridors and passages and they should feel free to explore the halls and make their selections. Only he, however, possessed the keys to the magically locked and warded doors to several of the rooms. He would, in due course, lead the tour through several chambers displaying items collected into other categories, but to conserve his energy, he should remain by the grand staircase until the group had had an hour to peruse those items accessible to all. Cautioning them to avoid wandering through the mansion alone, he awaits their return.

The mood is rife with tension and suspicion. Alliances quickly form: the Doctor and Darren keep company with Captain Harrow. The Tempieres accept Master Currin as a companion while his associates separate: Mr. Kantall joining Sir Edwin and Miss Wellbue while Mr. Gar offers to go with Father Daniel and Mr. Charoan. Invitations to accompany them are tendered by the doctor and Sir Edwin, but Señor Ramirez proposes an alternative, "I know that you gentlemen did not come here tonight for an art collection. Perhaps you would care to wait here with me? I am sure we can find a topic to amuse us until the others return. If not, you are welcome to browse this hall." Inevitably, the lure of some private discussion with Señor Ramirez wins out.

The hall offered an eclectic selection of art objects as well as the ubiquitous gargoyle mannequins that identified the manor's enchanted warding. These objects include a traditional marble statue and an urn set to either side of the staircase, a grim portrait titled "The Execution" opposite an ornate china platter both hanging in alcoves, and a painted folding screen counter-posed with a beautiful Vistani tapestry. But the most amazing piece is a moving sculpture representing the Four Seasons performing lazy orbits in the center of the room. The steward seems amused by his guests' fascination with these treasures and for a time the conversation revolves around artistic masterpieces and pleasant diversions.

At last, the conversation turns to the unpleasant events of the evening.

"I suppose the criminal could be anyone," Ramirez sighs. "I am not overly familiar with any of my guests. Their names were provided in instructions his lordship left behind and these are only those who replied to my inquiries. I am not overly

satisfied with their motives, and feel that more than one's trustworthiness is suspect. So, I took the precaution of adding your names to the list, for your reputation as champions of justice and honorable individuals precedes you. Let me tell you what I can about your fellows.

"I have known both Mr. Charoan and Miss Wellbue for years. Alistair is absolutely loyal and Nicky has a timid soul but a beautiful mind. Father Daniel seems committed to the preservation of art and knowledge, but he loves the good life too much. Lord Theone mentions in one of his journals of saving Captain Harrow's life, whether for ill or good considering the old soldier's injuries. Master Currin is the only one of three of his lordship's rivals who replied. He seems too oily and willing to change his mind to be trusted, but that seems a common failing among merchants. Dr. Cameron is one of the scholars Lord Theone corresponded with in his quest. I was surprised to see his reaction to the discussion of immortality, for surely he knew my master's interests, though perhaps he is forgetful.

"As for the others, I met Sir Edwin a year ago when he stopped by to pay his respects to his great uncle, though I suspect he wanted to put the touch on his lordship for a loan. A sealed letter from his mother made it clear that the lad had been written out of the will. However, what he does not know is that as the only surviving male with direct bloodlines to Lord Theone he stands to inherit a sizeable stipend and certain properties and titles. That leaves the Tempieres. They never met my master for they were sent as representatives of the Order of Light, which frequently consulted with his lordship about their quest for this immortal Evil One. The church will receive a sizeable financial gift from the estate with the proviso that the Order continues to send monthly updates on the progress of their quest. Thus, as you can see, anyone might have had a reason for wanting to obtain a larger portion of the estate. But there is no need to commit theft and murder. I am convinced there is something more sinister afoot tonight!"

The old man leans forward to speak in hushed tones, "To be candid, I do not know if he lives, but I do know that I will not be able to care for his lordship's properties much longer, for my years betray me and I fear I do not have many days left." He heaves a great sigh and for the first time it becomes apparent how belabored his breathing is and how shriveled his form. "I had hoped that if





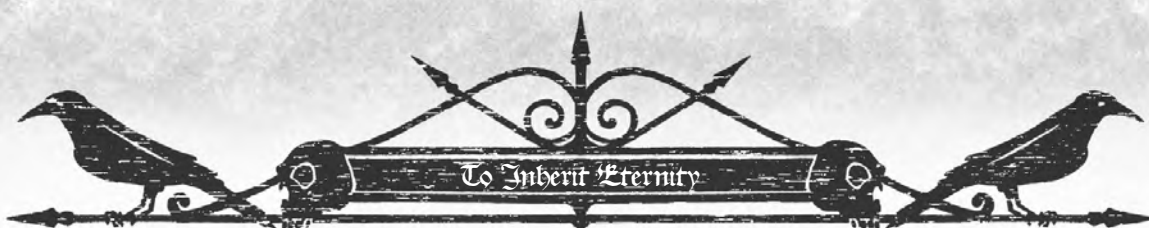
news of his celebrated demise reached the master, he would return before it was too late. I know it sounds incredible that he may yet live, but he believed in his quest, that somewhere there exists a very elusive immortal that was once a man. I do not know if he ever found this creature, but if any could Lord Theone is the one. When the master did not return it occurred to me that perhaps this immortal might come here to make sure that no evidence was left behind that might identify him. It is my fervent hope that he or she is here tonight!"

"It is my conviction that this creature is not malevolent, merely reclusive," Señor Ramirez pauses as he wrestles with his thoughts before he continues, "but, if I am right then it is not the immortal who threatens us, but one opposed to the creature's designs, his nemesis. If the first exists, then so does its counterpart. Therefore, we may well have two halves of a whole here tonight, hidden behind masks. Even if I am wrong, there may still be a rival of Lord Theone who plays the same role as this hypothetical nemesis, not here for wealth, but conspiring to thwart all efforts to learn the secrets of eternity."

Señor Ramirez studies his guests' faces. "It is a shame that one cannot know evil by its appearance," he says thoughtfully, "but evil is the great deceiver and disguises itself well. In fact, we may be seeking someone who does not consider himself evil, but believes fervently in the righteousness of his actions. We all wear masks to hide our true self, the trick is for us to see through those masks tonight to the truth.

"Take for example this vase," notes Señor Ramirez. "The urn presents a frieze of a running maiden, a racing hideous creature and a charging valiant warrior. Depending on how one looks at this vase one might see a champion fighting a monster harrying a damsel in distress. But if we start with the monster, we see a man pursuing a noble quest while the woman chases him to capture the hero's heart or perhaps the man seeks to evade the maiden who is compelled by the fiend. It's all in the perspective." His audience nods in thoughtful reflection. "Much of his lordship's collection is of a similar nature, often revealing two perspectives, one light and encouraging, the other grim and foreboding. Perhaps if we look for something that





represents Lord Theone's qualities, we will realize its counterpoint." The host looks about finally resting his eyes on what may be the perfect simile.

[E] The object selected by the steward is the statue carved from white marble depicting a young boy and a warrior. The youth stands to one side holding the warrior's helmet reverently, staring at the man with adoration. The scarred soldier is partially clad in armor, his shield leaning against one leg as he works the straps of his breastplate and gazes sadly down at the lad. "This statue shows the contrast between a lad excited by adventure and a warrior with a mission. Is this a lad welcoming his father home from battle and a return to the idylls of peace, or is this a father preparing for war and the end of an age of innocence; peaceful pleasures or the burdens of duty and honor? Perhaps that is what we face tonight — the enthusiasm and passion for adventure versus honor and duty."

When the hour was thus spent, the others returned. First came the siblings and the merchant chatting amiably regarding a fascinating amphora from Pharaia, followed by Sir Edwin and Miss Wellbue with the hissing Mr. Kantall debating the value of an ivory figurine from Hazlan. After a quarter hour more had passed, the sound of approaching voices heralded the arrival of Dr. Cameron's party.

"Our apologies," Darren says, speaking on their behalf while the doctor and soldier continue their heated discussion. "We encountered a most puzzling conundrum and it gave us pause. We lost track of the time."

"Look here, sir," Dr. Cameron interrupts addressing his host, "Did you know that his lordship had an original painting by Tytian?" Señor Ramirez nods, but the doctor cuts off his reply, "and did you know that it bears a dedication '*To my good friend Eowyn*' above the signature? That is impossible! Sayn Tytian died over a century ago and the painting is no forgery, I would stake my reputation on that."

"Surely, doctor, it only means his lordship had a distant relative named Eowyn," the captain states.

Miss Wellbue's face takes on a puzzled expression as she studies her notes. "I'm afraid there's nothing to indicate that," she says, shaking her head in negation.

The steward regards him with raised eyebrows, "I am sure there is a reasonable explanation," he

says, "but we must be moving along now. Has anyone seen Father Daniel's party?"

"Can you imagine? If someone could live that long what it would be like?" the doctor continues.

"It's unnatural!" Ilsa declares with vehemence, "Our humanity arises from the knowledge of our own mortality. Laws would be as nothing to one who could not die. Any immortal would quickly come to the conclusion that he is superior to mortal men and would become an evil tyrant!"

"Tush, madame," the doctor's face is red with excitement, such a man would have lived and learned more than you could ever hope to know. The lessons he could teach us, the secrets he might share could make a better world for everyone!" His thoughts are racing, "Mr. Thurrow! My journal, we must record this train of thought while it is still fresh!" Smiling sheepishly, Darren fumbles for a quill and notebook.

"Mr. Ramirez!" the doctor suddenly declares, "is there a rendering of Lord Theone, a painting or portrait? I never met him, though we corresponded for years. It is important that I know what he looks like, if my theory is right!"

"My uncle did not like to sit still for portraits, or so my mother told me," Sir Edwin offers. "I do not think there is one picture of him, which is a shame. Imagine including a color miniature in your book Miss Wellbue. That would be a real capper!"

"Well, actually..." she starts, but pauses at the señor's frown. "I was going to say... I wonder what happened to Father Daniel? He and Mr. Gar and Mr. Charoan are overdue from their explorations." As if in answer, a moan echoes down the hall as a limping duo appear. Miss Wellbue cries out and rushes to the clerk's side, concern filling her countenance.

The party assists the battered twosome to a bench in the hall. Mr. Gar sports a bump on his head and several bruises while the clerk's nose and forehead are bloodied and one arm is in a sling. Mr. Gar waves off help from the physician, noting that he has suffered worse before. "We had an accident," he says brusquely. "But where is Father Daniel?"

"He is not with you?" Señor Ramirez seems seriously distressed, "Alistair, tell us what has happened."

"A china cabinet fell atop us," the clerk begins ruefully. "We were looking at an interesting set of ceramic miniatures when Mr. Gar suddenly shouted, 'Look out!' He tried to prevent the cabinet from



Chapter One



toppling over, but the weight was too much. We barely escaped being crushed, though we were unconscious for a time. Father Daniel was gone when we woke, so we thought he had gone for help.”

Mr. Gar shrugs, “I thought I saw someone behind the cupboard before the accident, but I did not get a good look in the dim light. It could have been anyone.”

Señor Ramirez turns to the others and asks, “Was anyone separated from their party for a while?” The implication is ominous.

“Master Currin wandered away for a brief time,” Charles Tempiere notes.

“They wanted some privacy,” the merchant asserts. “Besides, we went to the east. Father Daniel’s party went to the west. I would have to be terribly fast to cross over, topple the shelf and return!”

“I lost my way, for a while,” Captain Harrow confesses.

“Oh, but I found him and took him back to where the doctor was waiting.” Darren attests.

“And I stopped to rest for a moment,” Nicky admits, “while Mr. Kantall continued down the

hall to examine some pottery. Mr. Edwin brought him back when I felt rested.”

The steward looks pensively at them all, shaking his head in dismay. “At least you were not seriously hurt. I think I will summon Hugo to look for our wandering priest. He can catch up with us later so we do not lose more time waiting for him.”

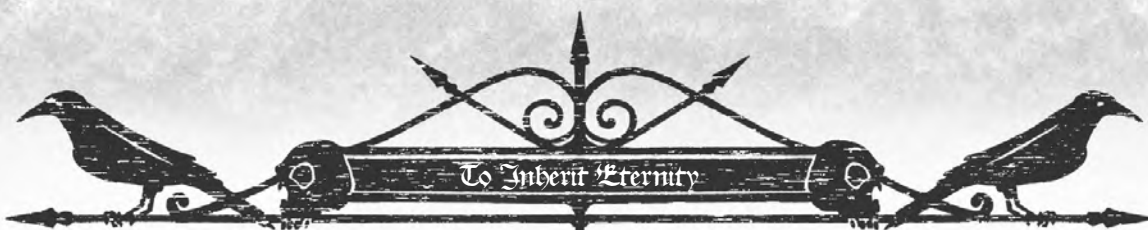
As Ramirez leads the group farther into the mansion, a moaning emanates from deep within the building, startling several members of the group.

“It is nothing,” Señor Ramirez assures the party, “this mansion is old. Its foundation settles and its timbers bow. With the night wind, Eldron Manor sighs or groans, almost sounding human at times. I have always found it charming.”

“Nay, there is nothing charming about old age,” Captain Harrow grumbles. “Tis pain and weakness!”

Sir Edwin smiles, “At least it was fun getting there. One must grow used to it.”

The howl of the wind elevates the distant groan to a mournful lament as if the whole building is warning of danger abroad. Despite himself, the



gentleman shivers. "I hope nothing has happened to Father Daniel. We could use his jolly company to lighten the mood!"

"I am sure he will join us when he can, but for now let us proceed," the steward says. Unlocking the oaken doors with a big brass key, the steward ushers all into the room. Rainbows of color dance across the floor, their light coming from intricate stained-glass windows with lanterns swinging beyond them in the night. Their luminescence joins with light from a crystal chandelier hanging above a round table in the center of the chamber. Each window depicts a chapter in an adventure story arranged from left to right. The first window shows the death of a nobleman in a castle garden, with a grim man dragging away a mourning child in noble garb. The second displays the grown boy in rough cloth laboring in a smithy while the grim man sits astride a horse in noble attire. The third illustrates the lad sleeping in the hay; a ghostly double of the boy stands before the forge as a small fey man pushes the anvil back to reveal stairs down into a golden realm. The fourth reveals the lad stealing through a magical cavern filled with the sinuous form of a sleeping dragon to steal a sword, and then

confronting the dragon who has one eye open as it offers obeisance. The fifth depicts a glorious battle with the boy astride his draconic mount devastating an army and cornering the grim man. The last portrays a happy ending, for the lad is dressed as a king in the castle garden and the dragon transforms into a beautiful maiden with love in her eyes.

The rest of the vast chamber is filled with polished furniture and carved wooden screens, large oriental carpets and rich velvet drapes, while on every table, shelf and cabinet are collections of ornately crafted and masterfully painted, hand-tall figurines depicting buildings, landscapes and a variety of heroes and mythical creatures. "Everything in this room may be bid upon, not just the figurines. Lord Theone acquired some of the best one-of-a-kind furnishings and craftsmanship available in the realms and this is the most noteworthy."

"This was Lord Theone's favorite retreat," the steward explains, "He would retire here for hours to read or paint and mount new additions to his collection or to build miniature dioramas. Mr. Tempiere, you and your sister inquired about a dragon room that you heard about. I suspect this is the one."





“Really?” Sir Edwin asks the siblings, “and why is that? This hardly seems in keeping with a quest for immortality — or was it for youth? What among these toys could interest you?”

“These are not toys,” Charles sounds offended at the suggestion as he admires a miniature unicorn. “Each figure is a work of art and represents an historic event or legendary person. It is the most comprehensive collection I have ever seen.”

“You must forgive him, he is very passionate about his hobby,” Ilsa notes. “Brother!” The man does not seem to hear her call. “Charles!” She raises her voice. At last he looks up. “If it is anywhere it is here,” he says.

“What is it you are seeking?” inquires Captain Harrow. Charles glances up, his face pale. He looks to his sister and there is a brief whispered discussion.

“We should tell them!” Ilsa proclaims. “We can use the help or else we could be here all night!”

“Tell us what?” Master Currin prompts.

Charles gazes across the room, studying his companions before nodding acquiescence. “We have not been entirely candid about our reasons for attending this evening. For several years now, Lord Theone has corresponded with our order concerning his quest for the secret of immortality. We know a being exists that cannot die from natural causes. Unlike his lordship, however, we believe this creature is exceedingly evil. Our Order has dedicated itself to finding and stopping the Evil One’s machinations. Our history tells us this creature is responsible for the enslavement or deaths of thousands, betraying kith and kin, performing abominable rituals, desecrating sacred relics, and associating with unnatural fiends. He is responsible for the murder of our Order’s founder so we have sworn to bring him and his minions either to redemption or destruction.” He pauses to make sure the others are taking this all in.

“We believe that Lord Theone, either knowingly or by chance, crossed paths with the Evil One and was corrupted by that tempter. The Evil One tempts innocents to their doom with the promise of their greatest desire. But he perverts and twists that desire to his own nefarious purpose, damning the lost soul for eternity.”

“Nonsense,” the doctor declares, “a person must choose evil for himself. He cannot be tricked into it! Pursuit of knowledge and enlightenment is not evil!”

“Ah, you would be surprised by the desires that lie in the heart of man,” Master Currin remarks, “I would have to agree with Mr. Tempiere that many men are fools!”

“Not Lord Theone!” Señor Ramirez declares with certainty. “My lord would never be a pawn of darkness! He is a good man, a beacon of enlightenment!”

“Is?” ponders Dr. Cameron, and for the first time this night their host looks startled.

“His lordship continues to live in my memories, Dr. Cameron. Señor Ramirez turns back to Charles, “What does your revelation have to do with your presence here?”

Charles sighs in resignation, “I am loathe to share our secrets with non-believers, but I see no other way. Whether or not Lord Theone knew the truth about the Evil One, he has most likely become an unwitting ally in his nefarious games. The Evil One, however, is predictable. Once he recruits an ally, he provides a guide, a compass to help lead a candidate to the path of corruption. We believe that a clue to this key or guide is somewhere in this house. The Evil One frequently associates with dragons, once calling himself Drake and another using a family crest that featured a rampant dragon argent. When we learned of Lord Theone, we knew we must follow in his steps if we were to stop the Evil One.”

“But how will you know where to look for this clue?” the merchant insists.

“His candidates,” the sister interrupts, “are marked with the sign of darkness, a blackened sun in full eclipse. That mark shows the way!”

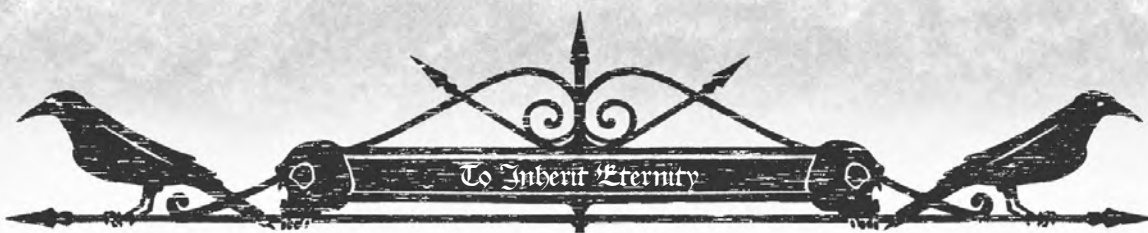
“Then if we find this darkened sun, we will find the clue!” the scholar exclaims. With Señor Ramirez’s permission, the guests search the room, moving furniture, opening drawers and cupboards opened, moving aside hangings and lifting rugs, and studying every figurine, all to no avail.

“Are you certain we are looking for a dark sun?” one of the searchers complains, “perhaps you misunderstood.”

“The Evil One spoke of phrase ‘*the sun that shines through the dark of night*’ in a letter to his last candidate. What else could it mean?” states a frustrated Charles.

“That shines through the dark of night?” Dr. Cameron studies the room, talking to himself. Once, twice, three times he looks at his surround-





ings, and then his eyes fix on the crystal chandelier. He nods.

"I think I may understand," he says. "Darren, climb up on that table for me and extinguish those candles, if you will. Be careful not to move any of the figures on the table. Now if the rest of you will draw the drapes, we shall see what we shall see."

"Brilliant," mutters Master Currin, quick to help plunge the room into inky black.

"What do you see?"

"Nothing, you?"

"What are we looking for?"

"I do not know," sound hidden voices.

"Wait," comes the reassuring sound of the scholar's voice. "Look, in the center of the room!"

Within the shroud of darkness, a pale crystal orb glows like the ghost-light of fireflies, its cool, green radiance shining down upon a lone figure mounted on a wormwood pedestal.

"Open the curtains!" the doctor calls. Quickly, guests fling back the drapes to let in the light.

Sir Edwin is the first to reach across the table and lift the trophy to examine it, clicking his tongue as he turns it over. Finding nothing noteworthy, he hands it to Charles, who wipes the sweat from his palms and gently examines the figure, poking and prodding to no avail. He looks to the others for advice.

"The base seemed light to me," Sir Edwin suggests, "maybe there is a secret catch."

As Charles begins his examination a second time, Mr. Kantall speaks.

"Let me give it a go, he suggests. "I used to be a...locksmith...in a former career. Perhaps I can discover its secrets."

Charles hands him the figurine.

"I would be careful if I were you," cautions Sir Edwin, but Mr. Kantall is too busy to hear.

His fingers caress the base, and he smiles. "Clever! But not clever enough," he gloats. With a quick move, he adroitly raps the base. The bottom drops open to reveal a hidden box. Within lies a small scroll and two other items.

Mr. Kantall unrolls the tiny piece of parchment and reads the brief instructions: *Congratulations seeker! This is the first step on your path to enlightenment. Seek ye first the guide I have prepared for you. It lies beneath a monument to past glory in the realm of this figure. Beware, there is danger here, for it is warded to protect it from thieves and chance discovery!*"

Shrugging he hands the note to the doctor and turns to examine the figure and its hidden contents.

[F] The figure depicts a handsome, muscular, ruddy-skinned man bearing new scars, the surgeon's stitches still visible. He has a wind-whipped mane of black hair and piercing black eyes. The figure stands beside a broken tree on a rocky slope littered with what looks like a tangle of vines, but on closer review is a nest of twining vipers.

"Odd," the merchant mutters, "There is an inscription. "*Beware the jaws that bite!*" Wonder what that means?"

Within the recess are two other items: a sketch of an odd looking sextant and a pewter ring with its stone missing.

"Ow!" Mr. Kantall exclaims, holding up a bloodied finger. "Now how did I miss that?" A sharp needle has sprung from hiding, its tip dripping a dark ichor. Mr. Kantall's breathing comes in short gasps. His tongue swells as a dreadful seizure wracks his frame. He falls to the floor in convulsions. Finally, he lies still, his body twisted by the poison in a rictus of pain.

A deadly stillness fills the room except for the stifled sobs of Ilsa and Natalie.



"He could not be saved," Dr. Cameron remarks, "at least it was quick!"

The guests had moved on, not knowing what else to do and troubled now by the sense of urgency the sudden death had placed upon the evening's search. Mr. Kantall was beyond their power to aid, except for the drape Master Currin placed as a shroud over his fallen comrade. Tight-lipped, he rejoined the party.

They were now in a room their host referred to as his Lord Theone's den. Stacks of books, piles of papers and scattered scrolls filled every shelf and surface. The doctor and Darren, excited by the find, attacked the piles of notebooks and personal papers, creating stacks of books and journals that interested them. The others examined the few curios and artifacts on display, including the pen that wrote by itself on a never-ending scroll, the living map of the realms that glowed with the faint lights of towns in the night's darkness, the large port window mounted on a swivel arm that magnified the image of things beneath it and books that closed and shelved themselves if left unattended for long. There were also less valuable items includ-





ing a clay pipe with a bowl carved to resemble a wise old man and smelling of cherry smoke weed, several pair of discarded spectacles and broken pen nibs.

"I tried to warn him," Sir Edwin cannot abandon his complicity in the man's death. "You heard me."

"Yes, you did," Captain Harrow reassures him. It was not your fault, diabolical trap that it was." But the gentleman will not be comforted and stares unseeing at the piece of jewelry in his hand, the self same item they had recovered from the hidden coffer. It is missing the stone that should be set in it.

"Can you understand why we call him the Evil One?" Charles repeats. "He is death and destruction."

"That seems an unfair evaluation," the doctor interjects. "He probably never expected anyone other than a candidate, as you call them, to find the clue. Why would he seek to slay an ally? Besides, there was that warning. I still say it was a defense against random discovery and a clue to the warding of this key."

"Would you have us believe this immortal is a misunderstood fugitive?" Ilsa asks with dismay.

"I did not say that, but we should refrain from assigning nefarious interpretations without evidence to the motives of a subject. It is only common sense," the doctor lectures.

Ilsa turns away in disgust.

The doctor continues, "I choose to believe better of an immortal, for with age comes wisdom. Such a creature would have experienced and learned much over its many lifetimes and would develop a higher moral sense than the common man. But, because he is different, he is hunted and hounded by the fearful masses and thus develops the necessary skills to conceal and defend himself."

"Would not an eternal consider himself superior to mere mortals and above their laws?" the merchant challenges. "Is not immortality of greater value than any mortal's life?"

"Really, Master Currin, I would expect better of an educated man," an exasperated Dr. Cameron replies. "An immortal would value mortal life more highly knowing how truly brief it is."



“What is it you are looking for?” Señor Ramirez asks from the chair where he rests to conserve his strength.

“I am looking for his lordship’s last journal or any notes he may have made before he departed, Dr. Cameron says somewhat distractedly. “I corresponded with Lord Theone for years and found him to have a keen mind. He once confided in me that he thought it was possible to extend man’s life beyond the natural three score and seven years. Ancient texts mention men who lived as long as the fey folk. He believed that the secret could be discovered from those rare few who lived beyond five score. His quest was to examine the oldest living man, and he apparently knew where to look!”

A stack of books crashes to the floor, evoking a gasp of dismay from Miss Wellbue. Alistair rushes to her aid.

“Please be careful, Miss,” Darren smiles sympathetically as he restacks the books. “A little knowledge can be a dangerous thing.”

“Sit and catch your breath, Nicky,” Mr. Charoan says in a solicitous manner, “I can search for you.”

“I have a habit of stacking things on top of what I am working on,” Miss Wellbue says somewhat timidly. “I thought maybe his lordship might have done the same thing.”

“I found nothing when we sorted his papers earlier this week, my dear,” the steward notes.

“Maybe he put it out of the way,” she smiles shyly at her rescuer, “so that others would not find it.”

“Out of the way?” the clerk muses. His analytical eye scans the room, noting and dismissing each potential site. His gaze comes to rest upon the top of a tall bookcase, its shelves bowed beneath the weight of overflowing stacks of books. “Mr. Gar, will you help me for a moment, please?”

The towering brute nods his assent. “If you would hold the bookcase steady,” Mr. Charoan instructs, “perhaps I can climb up these shelves to reach the top.”

“Be careful! It does not look very secure,” Nicky protests in alarm. Alistair smiles at her concern.

“I will be fine,” he reassures her. “Mr. Gar, a boost if you please.”

Alistair steps on the trader’s knee and begins his perilous ascent, the shelves groaning beneath his weight. Nearly fourteen feet tall, the bookcase seems solid enough, but nonetheless, Mr. Gar braces

it. Master Currin moves to help. Like climbing a treacherous cliff face, the clerk moves cautiously higher until he can stretch out his hand to feel along the top. A look of intense concentration shapes his face. Finally, he lifts up a dust-covered portfolio.

“Marvelous, young man!” Dr. Cameron exclaims. “Can you hand it down?”

Panting from the exertion, Alistair extends his arm as low as he can reach, shifting his feet to a more solid stance on one shelf. With a small jump Master Currin catches the booklet and turns to hand it to the physician, who opens it and begins to scan the pages with relish.

As if in slow motion, the sound of groaning, snapping wood draws the attention of the company. With the suddenness of lightning and the cracking of thunder, the shelf on which Alistair stands, followed quickly by each of the succeeding shelves, break beneath the added weight. Mr. Charoan is thrown precipitously from the summit to crash through a small table at its base, a hail of books pelting him. Miss Wellbue screams his name in dismay and rushes to push the heavy volumes off the moaning form. Several of the guests help clear away the debris, as Captain Harrow examines the clerk’s twisted leg. “Doctor!” he calls, “It looks broken.”

“Hmmm?” is Dr. Cameron’s only reply, for his attention is focused upon the contents of the notebook. “Yes, yes, this is it! This is what we have been looking for! Listen to what it says.”

It is done. All is ready. I leave tomorrow at dawn and will first visit my friend and mentor for his advice, then on to my destination. I cannot wait for the others, but they should know where to look for me. I will leave a copy of my journal there, so that if they come late, they may follow in my wake.

[G]*First, to Borca, if I can convince them to permit me to cross its border, to find Peroistra Navio, once chieftain of the Kharikhan clan, a Vistani tribe that fled their homeland of Invidia to escape that country’s persecution of his kind. He lies in hiding in a cave in the dark forests in the south of Borca, fearing the huntsmen of Lord Malocchio who placed a bounty on his head. He claims he has the key that will at last set my feet on the right path. I fear that my rivals may beat me to him. I can only pray that my comrades take the precautions I insisted on or I am sure my rivals will follow them to me.*





"Really, Dr. Cameron, that can wait! Your assistance is needed right now," demands Señor Ramirez. With a sigh the doctor hands the notebook to his aid in exchange for his bag. For now he will tend to the injured, but soon he will know everything needed to follow in Lord Theone's footsteps.



With his leg broken, Mr. Charoan cannot accompany the guests farther. Miss Wellbue refuses to abandon him until the guards arrive to carry him back to his quarters. The pair make their apologies to the guests, seeming almost relieved that they are escaping the threat of a still unidentified intruder and murderer. Darren agrees to take on the clerk's duties to record each bid and attempt to provide any answers from Miss Wellbue's records concerning the history of an item. Sir Edwin seems devastated at Miss Wellbue's early retirement from the field of battle, his conquest denied.

"It seems that misfortune dogs our heels," Captain Harrow notes grimly.

"I fear that is my family's curse," Sir Edwin says, shaking his head. Seeing the concern in the other guests' eyes he adds, "Not a real curse — though sometimes I wonder about that — but the Theones have a reputation for misfortune and tragedy suffered by those who know them. My uncle was the sole survivor of the Battle of Cutter's Pass, every last man-jack of his unit mowed down by the Golden Horde. All mother's suitors, except my father were claimed by the plague of '76 and my father's father tripped on the stairs and split his head open on the eve of my parents' wedding."

"That proves nothing, young man," the physician scolds the gentleman. "All life ends in a tragedy, and it is mankind's wont to assign to random events a pattern that does not exist."

"Like this evening's misfortunate series of events?" the senior Tempiere mutters ironically.

"That is different, I think," Master Currin proposes, "since it involves murder and attempted murder."

"And who do you suppose is behind it?" questions Darren.

"That is the thousand gold piece question," the merchant replies.

"If you ask me, it is Father Daniel," snarls Charles. "He does not act like any priest I know, and once his attempts to slay you went awry, he

goes missing. Then all these accidents occur. It is too convenient!"

The company grows quiet, reflecting at this speculation as Señor Ramirez opens the doors to the next room.

Within this parlor are the family belongings — silver services, golden goblets, collections of china and more. There are ivory and silver hair-brushes, combs and mirrors, statuettes and vases, crystal decanters and sterling liquors and a variety of personal jewelry including cuff buttons and cameos, lockets and pendants, three elegant pocket watches, rings with large stones and bracelets, necklaces and watch chains. The parlor also holds portraits of the lord's men dressed in archaic garb and women from ages long gone. A portrait of a beautiful woman and her son holds a place of honor.

"Who is that?" Darren asks indicating the beauty.

"That is his lordship's wife and son, Lady Penelope Erwyn Theone and Master Marvin," their host answers. "They died a tragic death in a boating accident shortly after the lad's twentieth year and my master was so overcome with grief he never remarried."

"I assume these are the scions of the Theone line," comments Captain Harrow, indicating the other portraits.

"No, Lord Theone comes from a common family, most presumed dead in the pox at the turn of the century. These are madame's forefathers, for she comes from the Erwyns of Salay."

"Odd," the doctor muses. "Which one is Lord Theone? Though we corresponded, I have never met him."

Señor Ramirez smiles gently. "His lordship did not like to have his portrait painted. He only sat for one painting in all his years."

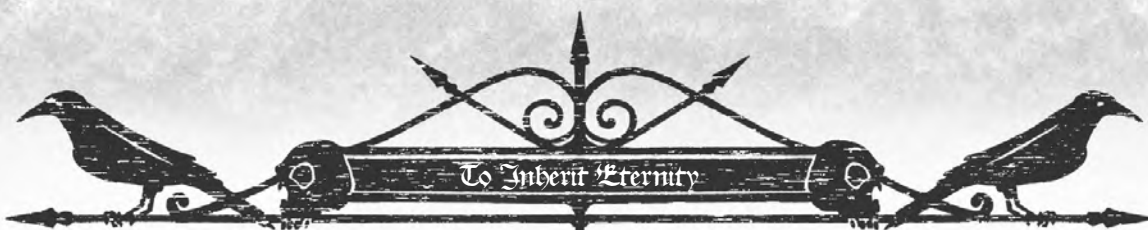
"And what became of that?" Charles interest seems to rise.

"In time, honored guests, it awaits us in the last chamber for your viewing pleasure."

"Is it for sale?" Ilsa at last enters the conversation.

Their host only nods, his reply never reaching his lips as a man standing hunched beside the fireplace shivering like a whipped cur captures his attention.





"Hugo! Here? But where is Father Daniel?" Shaking as if the room has suddenly filled with the arctic chill of winter, Hugo points at the stuffed chair in front of him, its back toward the door. With swift strides, the steward crosses and the room and looks down at the still form slouching immovably in the chair, its neck grotesquely twisted, its windpipe crushed. "We have found our missing priest," Señor Ramirez whispers, shaking his head.

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This time the doctor sacrifices his jacket to cover the priest. All are at a loss for words, and the most anyone can get from the shaken Hugo is "My...my...my dad died!" Charles paces angrily while Ilsa withdraws from the others. Master Currin studies the room's offerings, discussing their value with Mr. Gar, while the captain and Sir Edwin stand in awkward silence watching as the doctor and Darren finish an examination of the corpse. Señor Ramirez settles the shocked servant onto a sofa far from the body and speaks to him in reassuring whispers.

"What did you discover, doctor?" their host asks upon Dr. Cameron's return.

"He appears to have been strangled and his neck broken, His scalp shows post-trauma bruising," he answers matter-of-factly. "I would say the assailant would have to be big and powerful to overpower such a large man, though I suppose Father Daniel could have been surprised. What did you learn from your man-servant?"

"Not much, I am afraid. He found the good father's body at the foot of the stairs in the library, so I would surmise the killer stood on a higher step. There was a knotted rope around Father Daniel's throat. Not knowing what else to do, Hugo decided he should bring him here to wait for us, as instructed. He apologized profusely, saying he dropped the body several times, because he was so big," the host reports.

"That would explain the bruises and broken neck," Dr. Cameron said, "in which case, anyone could have killed him."

"That is what I thought as well," the steward replied, exhausted from the events of the evening.

"It would seem to negate your theory on the murderer," Darren notes to the approaching merchant.





"I return to my original theory," Charles growls, looking at Hugo, who has calmed from the steward's soothing words. "This is the second time that servant has been present when a body is found. How do we know this is not all an elaborate ruse by Señor Ramirez on his master's behalf to elicit retribution for some imagined wrong? Perhaps he was corrupted by the Evil One and wants to stop our Order's sacred duty!"

"Preposterous!" snaps the steward. "You are free to leave at any time if that is how you feel!"

"You would like that would you not? For me to separate myself from this company, to become an easier target," Charles sneers.

"Now gentlemen, relax," Sir Edwin intercedes, "I understand nerves are raw, but we are safe for now."

"I concur," Master Currin agrees. "It seems that someone wants to stop us from completing this tour, so I recommend we finish our business with all due haste, after which we may be away to the safety of our own beds before the murderer can strike again."

"That makes sense to me as well," Captain Harrow responds, offering his support.

Looking at his guests, Señor Ramirez receives sullen agreements from all, and the group disperses to examine the room's treasures.

Mr. Gar seems very interested in the contents of several of the flasks. "I would be willing to stake my life that these contain alchemical concoctions," he remarks. "This one is a fine oil and this tonic smells of camphor and castor. That one glows in the dark. I cannot determine the nature of this one that smells of sulfur and worse."

Shortly, all complete their selections and Darren duly records their bids. Sir Edwin seems agitated and unhappy. "Its not here!" he mutters to himself. "Where could it be?"

"What is it you are looking for," his host offers congenially. "Perhaps I can help."

"No, I think not," Edwin sighs in resignation. "I should have known better."

He looks up at the steward's puzzled face. "You know my father disinherited me, but for a while I was in my uncle's good graces. I hoped if I could find my uncle's seal, his heirloom, and show that I was responsible, my mother would forgive and let me return."

"Heirloom?" Mr. Gar asks.

"When we found that piece of jewelry hidden in the figurine," Sir Edwin explains, "I had hoped to find what I sought, but the stone was missing. There should have been a gemstone engraved with the image of the muse of wisdom. It was very special to his lordship, for he told us it held all his best memories. He used to write long letters to my mother after my aunt died. But she was too distraught to answer them, and his tales of seeking the secret of eternal life angered her. Too late, is all she would say and throw them at me. I particularly liked the ones that told of a legendary Well of Life in something he called the Heart of Darkness. He used to write about what one might find there if the legends were true."

[H] "The path is impossible to find without the guide," Sir Edwin recited, "but with it, the way will open as a path through the ether to the Heart of Darkness. The quest is not an easy one, for the land itself wars against the challenger and works to turn back or slay intruders. Beware the dark, for even the shadows will conspire to deny the prize of eternity, the power to heal and re-knit torn flesh, thus turning back death for a time."

"And you believed him?" asks an incredulous Master Currin, "Would it be worth dying for?"

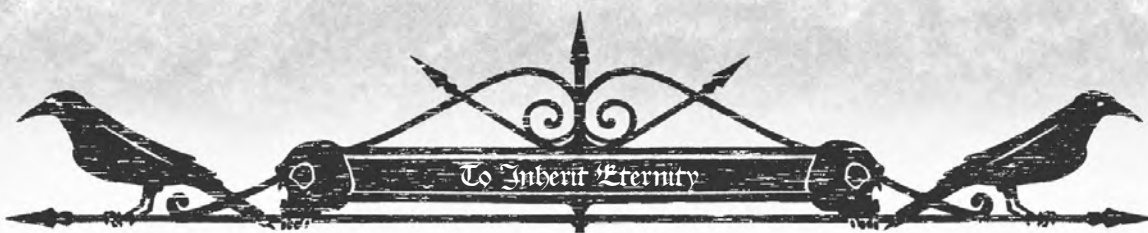
"I do not know if it is true, but I know what I would do if I was braver and had the wherewithal. I would chase that rainbow. Life is too short. Why not take the risk for such a prize?" Edwin's eyes took on a distant look, as if gazing inward at that elusive possibility. "Think of the good one could do. I would share the prize with others."

"Fools!" shouts Charles. "Dreamers and fool, has not one of you been listening to me? Are you already falling beneath the Evil One's spell? Vampires are immortal, and so are liches and fiends. No good can come of eternal life! You have lost your mind if you would actually consider pursuing this curse of immortality!"

"Come now," Mr. Gar says stepping forward holding the flask he has been puzzling over. "What's the harm of the lad dreaming? One needs to have a hope to become great."

"Dreams? Hope?" Charles rages, in his fury seizing the flask. "Do you not think those souls the Evil One destroyed had dreams and hope? He used their dreams, corrupted their hopes and made of them a lure drawing those souls to damnation. Greed! Avarice! Pride! These are the fatal temptations of man. Do you think this means something,





this treasure? It means nothing but a fall from grace." To punctuate his outburst, Charles heaves the flask into the fire. The resulting explosion and concussive wave throws him across the room like chaff before a gale!

"No! No, my love! This cannot be! It cannot end like this," Ilsa wails more distraught than ever a sister was, and to more than one in the company it is clear that these two were not true siblings, but something much closer. There is nothing they can do for Charles, his burns are too great, his seared lungs cough up bloody foam, and swiftly his life ebbs away. Angrily Ilsa pushes the others away from Charles' blistered body. Only Darren is allowed to approach with a glass of water and his good intentions.

"Star juice! Dragon Fire! That's what it must have been," mumbles the shocked trader. "If I had dropped it or shaken it, or the gods forbid, drunk it I could have been blown to bits!"

"Is this the price of your glorious quest, this blessing to mankind?" she rails at all present.

"No, my dear," Señor Ramirez tries to comfort her. "It was an accident, just an accident. I am so sorry."

"I do not want your sympathy, I want Charles back! Oh Charles!" Ilsa's words dissolve into tears.

"What do we do now?" Darren asks, "Do we turn back?"

"Perhaps the young man is right," the steward admits. "There has been too much violence."

"No, I say we go on," Master Currin declares. "I have survived poisons and attacks, traps and explosions, and I will be damned if I turn back now so close to the end."

"We may well be damned if we continue," Captain Harrow growls. "I vote for calling it quits."

"I must disagree, Captain. Master Currin is right," Dr. Cameron interjects. "If tonight is to be worth anything, we must finish."

The merchant nudges Mr. Gar who looks up bewildered, but shakes his head, "It is over."

Master Currin looks peeved, but then a thought occurs to him, "It's a tie, two in favor and two against. It is up to you, Señor, though I doubt your master would have wanted you to abandon his last request."

"No! It is up to me!" Ilsa demands, her voice strident. "I still represent my Order; it is my vote that decides." She ignores the group's looks of

concern as she continues, "I say ...we go on. Charles would have wanted us to do so, and it is what my Order demands, to look into the eyes of evil and put a face to the Evil One at last."

"She is correct. It is her right to cast the deciding vote." Señor Ramirez pauses to consider, "Only two collections remain for us to view, and then we will be done."

Ilsa accepts Darren's proffered arm for support as the party wends its way to the next room, one that hosts an odd assortment of items, among them a great transparent globe portraying the heavenly canopy circling the realms at its heart and illustrating each of the constellations. The five-foot globe rests in a brass stand with an iron arrow as its axis thrusting up toward the northern star.

A stringed harp, brass horn and other musical instruments, a beautiful writing set and countless medallions and honors are also on display. Lord Theone's coat of arms depicts a winged serpent rampant on an indigo charge with three stars to either side of an eclipsed moon arcing above a great wyrm. The oddest item is a dark suit made of the finest charcoal gray silk with a matching vest hanging against one wall.

"Tis passing strange," Captain Harrow comments. "Though a fine weave it is indeed, why is this suit special?"

"It was to have been his funerary garb," his host responds quietly. "It was never worn."

"Nor likely to ever be, I warrant," the soldier notes. "So this is what it is all about, a final shroud never to be worn? I am sure Lord Theone would find irony in that."

"You knew my uncle well?" Sir Edwin inquires.

"Aye, I knew him and owe him my life, what little is left. I owe your uncle a great debt, and that is why I pray that he failed at his quest. He would have hated an eternity crippled as I am and cut off from the life I loved. Forever is misery. I would not wish such a fate upon another, which makes what I must say it very difficult."

"Your pardon, captain," Sir Edwin says in surprise, "what do you mean by that?"

"Your uncle made me promise that if he should die," the captain said, "I was to seek out his heir and tell him this. The secret of eternity is not for everyone. He feared that one day an evil man might abuse the gift of immortality to spread fear and destruction. No weapon but one can harm





such an immortal. It is the secret of that weapon I was to share.”

The old warrior looks pointedly at Ilsa, but continues, “He told me, if ever eternity should fall into evil’s hand, you are to find this weapon and use it to free humanity from its tyranny.”

“He told me *Evard’s Dark Bane* is hid in a locked box with neither key nor lid; this blade of inky blackness can part the light of an eternal’s spirit and take it from sight, to be imprisoned deep within, hidden from the face of man, never to be seen again.”

“What did you say?” Ilsa exclaims, “You know, do you not? You know the Evil One is real and all this time you knew the means to defeat him and you did nothing?”

“I could not do such a thing with this broken body,” the captain disclaims.

“Coward!” Ilsa replies scornfully. “You may not have lost your life, but you lost your nerve! My Charles might yet be alive if not for you. All of you are to blame!” Her voice grows louder and more vehement as she faces the others. “One of you is a murderer, and the others are too weak to stop him. Well, I am not too weak. Tell me which of you is the one I seek, or are you too cowardly to face a

woman? Is it you, or you, or you?” She directs her steps toward first one guest, then another and finally stops before Mr. Gar, her body quivering with rage.

“I think she’s right!” Master Currin agrees with her, to the amazement of the others. Mr. Gar gapes at the accusation, but Currin continues, “It all makes sense. I waited for my associates to join me at the front gate. Mr. Gar poured my drink after dinner. Then while he was with Father Daniel and Mr. Charoan he tells of a mysterious person no one else saw. He had plenty of time to dispatch the good father while the clerk lay unconscious, and the doctor said it took a man of great strength, such as Mr. Gar possesses. And did he not hand Charles Tempiere the fatal flask?”

“What are you saying?” sputters the outraged trader.

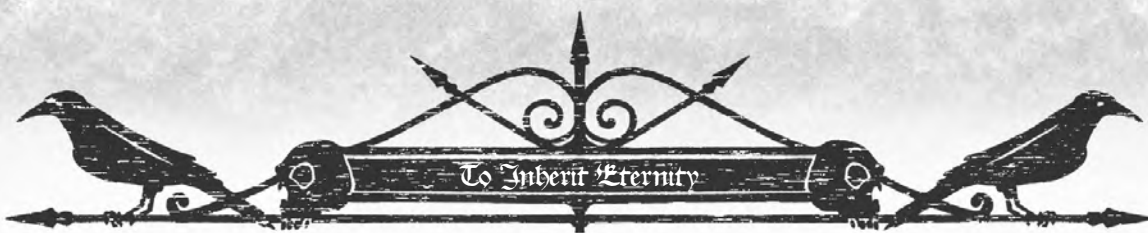
“Admit it, you are the scoundrel who has terrorized us all evening!” the merchant shouts.

“Is it true?” Ilsa descends on Mr. Gar like a vengeful fury. “Did you kill him?”

Mr. Gar is speechless and retreats from her attacks.

“Then it is true!” she affirms. “You did kill him, you murderer!”





The trader raises his arms to fend off her furious blows and steps back into Master Currin, who shoves him away. Off balance with arms windmilling, Mr. Gar trips, reaches out to steady himself on the nearest object, but makes a fatal mistake reaching for the globe. It slips from beneath his flailing hand, spinning away. The ill-fated trader falls hard across the heavenly sphere and the steel axis pierces his heart!

Ilsa gasps at what her rage has wrought and faints dead away.



"What... what happened?" Ilsa mutters dazedly as she pushes the foul smelling salts away from her face. Quickly, her fevered brain returns to recent events and she is overcome with trembling.

"There, there," Señor Ramirez says softly, patting her hand, "You can rest more easily. It is over. The murderer suffered the fate he planned for us."

"How can you be certain?" she asks weakly.

"Master Currin found these in Mr. Gar's pocket," Captain Harrow shows her two ceramic vials.

"Mariposa — deadly night lily and Ealium's panacea, stolen from my bag," Dr. Cameron confirms.

"Then it really is over?"

"It would seem so," her host confirms. "Are you strong enough to continue on — or would you rather retire for tonight?"

Ilsa's expression betrays her inner conflict.

"One more room remains," Señor Ramirez says. Ilsa bobs her head in acquiescence and takes the steward's elbow to steady herself as she stands.

"Very well," Señor Ramirez announces, "if you will follow me, we will finish our tour."



The company files in quietly; somehow it seems improper to violate the room's sanctity. The chamber is brightly lit with lamps hanging from wall hooks. This room has the feel of a gallery. Four paintings of Eldron Manor from different angles and in different seasons grace the right wall. In the center of the room stands a narrow table with a blue cloth runner covering its top. Upon the table rests a pair of ornate bracers, a dagger with the image of a gargoyle on its hilt, a pewter singing bowl with pestle such as those used to call to order a legal court, a polished wood flute with ivory stops and a locked iron coffer chased with gold. Beyond the table stands a draped easel in a curtained alcove. To

the guests' left, a suit of dress armor supported on an armature holds Lord Theone's banner, a shield with Theone's crest hangs to one side of the armor and a bastard sword rests in a cradle on the other.

"Did you not say that the manor was warded from weapons?" a surprised captain asks.

"I did," their host confirms. "No weapon may be drawn while under the aegis of the ward. However, the alarm only sounds within five steps of the foci. That is why we took pains to set the foci beside the entry. My lord's blade is beyond their reach."

Dr. Cameron and then Master Currin pause to verify this.

"Now, if you will gather around, two tasks remain to finish the evening," Ramirez says.

The doctor, Darren and Ilsa step to the right of the table while the captain, Mr. Currin and Sir Edwin choose the left. Hugo and the others gather before the table. "Before you rest my lord's most prized possessions. All may be bid upon after the unveiling," he indicates the draped easel, "all, that is, except the coffer. Within that box lies my lord's dearest possession, the *axis of time*. When combined with *Eon's compass* it can navigate the corridors of time and the realms of possibilities. Though he never found the compass, he stipulated that only the master of Eldron Manor should possess the axis of time. Thus, it is not for sale. First, there is something I must do, and after that I have a tale to tell."

He motions Sir Edwin forward. "Sir, your uncle was hard but fair, a man of grace and character who knew his duty. Since he left no living child, he stipulated that, in the event of his demise, the oldest living male of his wife's lineage should be provided for. Thus, I have made the proper arrangements. You, Sir Edwin, are to be named patron of your clan and master of your mother's estates. You will receive a sizeable stipend annually and be granted deeds to a small house and some 2,000 acres. Oh, and one last thing," Señor Ramirez says, removing a handkerchief from his pocket. "I think this is yours."

Edwin opens the cloth and gasps at the polished carnelian carved with the image of the muse of wisdom.

"The heirloom!" he whispers in awe as he fingers the cool, bright stone. He fumbles through his pockets and removes the piece of broken jewelry. The stone fits the barren mount precisely. A strange light fills his eyes and he says in wonder, "I remember now! I remember! There was so much I





had forgotten.” He turns to Señor Ramirez, “Thank you sir, you will not regret this.”

“I will not regret many things in a few month,” his host mutters grimly. “See that you honor your uncle’s memory!”

He takes a deep breath and addresses the company. “I fear I have not been completely honest about my motives this evening. As some of you may suspect, I am not well and it is more than the infirmities of advancing age. My surgeon says I have a cancer for which there is no cure; he offers no more hope than a year until I must depart this mortal coil. This may explain my haste in gathering this company.”

He pauses to sort his thoughts. “To be true to my master, I must choose my successor, the heir to Eldron Manor and its estates. This task comes not lightly, for it must be a person of character and resources to care for his lands and their people. I selected all of you, for I hoped that one of your number would prove your worth. None knew of this charge save myself.”

“I first hoped I could learn my master’s secret and save myself, but I know that this is not to be. Thus, I offer each of you who is willing a chance to take this charge. Whoever completes Lord Theone’s quest and is the first to return with either the secret of immortality, proof of the existence of an immortal, or evidence of his lordship’s death, shall be named master of this manor and lord of its estates.” He examines the expression on each guest’s face. One by one, each guest agrees.

“Excellent, I have already filed the necessary papers with the courts, naming each of you as a candidate. Now that it is agreed, let me read my master’s final words.”

“To my good and faithful servant — Greetings and Farewell,

I begin my trek tomorrow without knowing if I will ever return. I leave my estate in your capable hands and trust that you will care for my property and heirs as if they were your own. If misfortune should befall you in my absence, I know you will do what is right and find a worthy successor to your office.

Though others scoff, I believe in my quest. I believe man was destined for better things. The constraints of mortal flesh need not be a prison, but rather a chrysalis awaiting transformation. I believe in an eternal creature that escaped the shackles of mortality and who holds the secret of mankind’s future. Perhaps I may find the secret of eternity at the fabled Well of Life, if I can best the final challenge. I believe I know the way!”

[J] *“This quest is a test to prove one’s worthiness. I must choose my companions with care.*

[K] *“Greed, self interest and pride are the banes of mankind. Beware your friends and allies, for the final danger is the green-eyed monster within us all who will betray each and every one to claim the prize for itself! To pass this test of worthiness, you must not seek the prize out of fear or pride or greed or lust, but must be willing to sacrifice all, even this quest, to become a servant to others. Only thus can the worthy one face the Light and receive the inheritance of eternity.”*

“I must depart. Thank you for your years of faithful service, for your loyalty and trust, for your sage counsel and advice, but most of all for your friendship. You have been more than my servant and steward; you have been my companion and family. I wish you good fortune and pray that I will one day return victorious. Until then, go with the gods. Your brother, Eowyn Tierny Tytian Allyn Makepiece Theone III”

Thoughtful silence fills the room as the guests take each others’ measure. Even the half-wit Hugo studies Sir Edwin and the heirloom he wears. “Now, if you will all tender your final bids to Mr. Thurrow,” Señor Ramirez states, “I will conclude this evening with the unveiling of the only portrait ever painted of Lord Theone, that you may know him when next your paths may cross.” Each guest presents his final bids to the young man and turns toward Señor Ramirez.

“Thank you for coming, my friends,” the steward says with a hint of finality to his voice. “This has been a harrowing evening, but with the gods’ grace we few have survived great hardship. Look then, my worthy guests, on the face of your benefactor.”

Señor Ramirez lifts the drape to reveal the portrait of Lord Theone. He is a handsome man with dark curled locks and beard wearing a noble’s uniform that sports a dozen medals. His features are finely chiseled — sharp nose, high cheeks, thin lips and disturbingly piercing eyes that seem strangely familiar.

“Soldier, diplomat, lord and father, he was a veteran of war and life; a man with secrets, he earned the right to possess them. He was also a lonely man who suffered much tragedy.” Señor Ramirez seems to fight to control his quavering voice. “If life is a hardship, imagine the burden immortality must demand.”





"So, he was a man after all," Master Currin sighs, "But, a man with a prize worth winning."

"It makes me sad to look upon his countenance," Sir Edwin says. "If only he had claimed the prize, then we would be hosting a homecoming rather than a wake."

"I see the face of a man," Captain Harrow eulogizes, "a friend who faced endless hardships and earned the right to eternal rest."

"I think we may be looking at eternity," Dr. Cameron says quietly, "and all the mysteries of the world. For in every man lie the roots of eternity. Imagine the things an immortal could teach us!"

"You are all wrong," Ilsa's words are charged. "That is not a man. We are looking at the face of evil!"

"M...m...master?" Hugo stammers, but he is not staring at the portrait. Instead his eyes are fixed on the jewel in Sir Edwin's hand. Hugo looks into the face of the gentleman, his brow knitted in concentration. Suddenly, his eyes widen and his mouth opens in a broken toothed grin. "Master!" He cries, without a stutter as a far-away look fills his eyes and drool drips from the corner of his mouth. Spittle stains his chin and shirt the crimson of berries and pomegranates and roses, the dark fluid of life. As if in response to the gentle rain a scarlet blossom fountains on his chest and he tumbles off the sword piercing his back.



Danger hangs like a haze in the room. Time slows as all eyes focus on the bloodied blade and the one who snatched it from its cradle. The killer breathes slowly and deeply, a look of madness in his azure eyes.

"Impossible!" gasps Señor Ramirez.

A thin smile crosses Master de l'Ombre lips as he hefts the weapon. "Obviously not, your honor. In fact it was quite simple thanks to your incessant warnings, though I must admit the interminable wait to reach this room almost killed me with boredom. Luckily I found ways to amuse myself."

"But how? How did you do it?" his host demands, but his attention is focused on his dying servant. Dr. Cameron hesitates, but Darren slips quietly behind his master and reaches for the door handle.

"You showed me how!" he says. His pleasant expression turns dark for a moment as he catches sight of Darren. "That door is locked," he sneers. "Call it a precaution." He returns to Ramirez'

question. "I placed the knife in Miss Tempiere's handbag. When you disarmed the warding...well, let us say I have excellent ears."

His look arrests the steward's advance. "Now, now Señor," he growls, "stay where you are. Do you think I will let you near your precious foci?"

"You planted the poison on poor Mr. Gar and faked the poisoning," the doctor accuses.

"True. It seemed a clever ruse to remove suspicion from myself."

"But the others, they were your own men," Ilsa exclaims with dismay.

"Oh, you know the saying about honor among thieves. Besides, only one may claim the prize I seek."

"Why?" It is Captain Harrow's shortest speech.

"Why?" Currin repeats. "I have had a long and illustrious career as a highwayman and burglar. My guise proved the perfect ruse to explain my frequent travel. But my most daring exploits would not have been possible without this!" Master Currin draws the gold chain from beneath his shirt.

From his fingers hangs a circlet with the markings of a sundial, but there is a hole where the gnomon should stand casting its shadow on the ring. "With this I can make time race. Sadly this trinket's powers command a steep price. Each time I invoke the power, it steals years of my life. Ironic, is it not? How old would you guess I am? Twenty? Thirty? Would it surprise you to learn that my physical age is 92? Thanks to a gift from my mother, I carry my years well." He lifts his hair to reveal slightly pointed ears.

"Once this sundial is whole, I may bend time to my will, for this is the *arc of time*, Eon's compass! I am certain you understand why I covet the secret of eternity. Now, if you please," he addresses his host and holds out his hand impatiently, "I believe that the coffer holds the key."

The host leans heavily on his cane, his strength abandoning him. He reaches into a vest pocket and removes a set of keys. Toying with a small brass key, he considers the situation, glancing first at the waiting hand, then at his guests. Nodding in apparent acquiescence, Señor Ramirez offers the key ring. As he does so, he looks down to stare at Hugo's still form.

Confident of victory, Master Currin seizes the keys in his left hand as the sword in his right dips toward the floor. With the grace of a man years younger, Hector Elissar Ramirez raises his cane and





slashes it across the murderer's face. Currin shrieks in both pain and outrage. As if with a life of its own, the cane twists in the steward's grasp and neatly hooks the keys, sending them soaring toward Dr. Cameron. Too startled to move, the doctor stares at the missile hurtling toward him. Suddenly a hand reaches from behind the doctor and neatly snags the keys in mid-air.

"Open the door, quickly!" the host calls as Darren fumbles with the keys. "Summon my guards!"

Distracted by the flight of the errant keys, Master Currin never sees the flurry of attacks directed at him. The amazing cane pokes here and slashes there, smacks a shin and cracks an elbow. When he moves to defend his head, the cane connects with his ribs; When his guard drops low to defend his midriff, the pewter knob smashes him between the eyes, blurring his vision with pain. Ramirez anticipates his opponent's every move, finally hooking the man's ankle and pulling his leg out from under him. The killer falls, clinging to the sword like a lifeline.

Panting, Señor Ramirez stands over his fallen foe, his cane raised, his arm trembling with rage.

"No more!" he shouts, "You have trespassed, slain my guests and stolen that which is not yours. And more, you have slain this innocent fool who was like a son to me!" The cane descends with the fury of vengeance, only to slow as if churning through thickening cream as the host is brought to an abrupt halt. He gasps and claws at the blade now embedded in his belly. Then he is falling as his nemesis rises angrily, his sword dripping fresh blood.

"Me? You sought to best me? No one hurts me like that! No one!" the merchant snarls. A deadly calm washes across his face as he lowers the sword to his foe's throat. "Now," he says, directing his words to Darren, who holds the keys to the door, "if you would save this man's life, you will hand me the keys," the good man's shoulders slump in defeat as he reluctantly steps up to hand over the keys to Currin.

"So what is to happen to us?" Sir Edwin asks bluntly.

"There will be no witnesses," the thief responds, tightening his grip on his weapon hilt.

"You can't hope to slay us all! It's monstrous!" Ilsa is incredulous. Master Currin smirks and nods.

"We won't run from you, murderer. We outnumber you. You cannot hope to stop us all!" the old soldier's spirit awakens. As each member of the

company weighs the odds, the merchant smiles wickedly. Suddenly the sword is a blur, weaving a wall of blades, driving the guests back before his onslaught, all save one.

Ilsa slides back along the table, her hand reaching out as if seeking help. With a cry of vengeance, she seizes on the iron box and heaves it at the wall of blades. A metallic clang resounds as the sword is knocked from Currin's grasp. The thief falls beneath the weight of the iron box and writhes in pain.

With sullen resolve, Sir Edwin retrieves his uncle's sword from where it fell and moves to stand over the killer. He looks at Hugo's body and then at Ramirez, who lies gasping for air. He can no longer hold his anger in check. He trembles and his cheeks flush with rage as he raises his sword.

"Do it!" Ilsa hisses, "Kill the murderer!"

Sir Edwin hesitates, for something is not right.

[L] Edwin suddenly realizes that the man at his feet is not cowering in terror; rather, he is smiling! Then Edwin sees the key lying on the floor and next to it the open empty coffer. He does not hesitate but completes his downward swing, slashing viciously at the killer. The blade passes through the man as if he were a ghost. The grinning murderer rises and all the assembled can see that the amulet is now complete, a small hourglass spinning at its center.

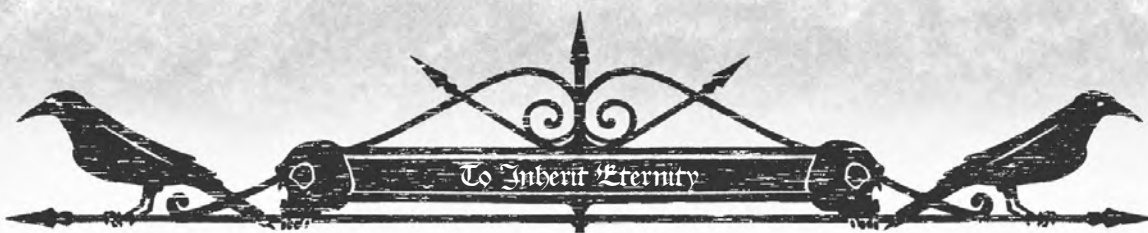
"Too late! You cannot stop me now," declares the merchant triumphantly. "No weapon forged by mortal can harm the wearer of *Eon's compass*. Now, it is past time to end this!"

His laughter sends a chill down the spine, and an echo answers it from the draped gloom. From the curtained alcove steps a man of shadow, so like the killer as to be his brother. "One who controls time is never truly alone!" The gray man advances on Sir Edwin passing right through the table between them even as the gentleman's blade whistles through the dark mist that is his body. A shadowy hand reaches out and caresses the man's arm and with a cry of pain, the sword falls free from numb fingers.

Suddenly a figure thrusts a lamp is at the phantom, which shimmers in the light.

"Back!" Ilsa shrieks, "Go back into the darkness where you belong!" The phantom's form diminishes until only twilight cobwebs float in the air. Turning, Ilsa screams in rage and hurls the lamp at the thief. So swiftly that he seems a blur, her foe bats aside the lamp, which crashes to the floor and sends flaming oil pooling across the floor toward the curtains.





"You have annoyed me for the last time!" Master Currin turns his baleful glare on Ilsa. Two new phantoms step forward from the shadows to either side. The first seizes the lady's wrists as the second plunges its hands deep into her chest. Her scream becomes a fading echo as the shadowy creature drags a dark shape from Ilsa's body to disintegrate like snow before a blazing sun. Her limp body falls to the floor and the gray men turn their attention to the other guests.

Snatching two lanterns from the walls, Captain Harrow stands between the company and the advancing phantoms. Suddenly, the two creatures become four.

"Flee while you still can!" the captain calls. "Put your backs to some use!" Darren and Dr. Cameron put shoulders to the door until the sound of splintering wood heralds the door's imminent surrender.

"Don't look back! Just go!" Captain Harrow shouts as he charges his foes and the first of four dissolves before the dancing light. A phantom's touch drops the warrior to one knee, and shadowy hands chill reach forward. Though a second foe winks out of existence, the lamps fall to the floor, followed by the soldier's crumpled form as his soul is torn from its roost.

With a desperate groan the doors part from their hinges and fall into the hall. Though freedom seems but a few paces away, he shadows of the beckoning hall a squadron of gray forms emerges from the shadows of the hall, barring the way and herding the guests back into the room.

"What, leaving so soon — and without your host?" the killer mocks from the center of the room. "How unchivalrous of you!" His eyes look toward the portrait's alcove where Señor Ramirez lies surrounded by a ring of blazing oil, the curtains smoldering with flames along their edges. Within the light of the fire, hope lingers, for their host still lives.

Seizing the lamps from the floor, Sir Edwin thrusts one at the doctor and then faces toward the relentless approach of the phantom thieves. "Rescue him if you can, I shall try to hold them off!"

The table provides the needed height to clear the flaming river of oil. Reaching the steward in one leap, Darren and the doctor take Ramirez under his arms and, with their backs against the wall, slide slowly toward the exit.

Sir Edwin stands ringed by a dozen shadow warriors. Edwin stares at the phantoms as he calls challenge.

"Merchant, if you seek the true heir of eternity your business is with me!" Sir Edwin states, authority in his voice. "Take me if you can!" He retreats until he bumps into the table and someone touches his good arm. Turning in a cautious circle, he finds Master Currin's smirking face.

"Is that any way for the heir apparent to act with guests? Here, let me help you!" the merchant leans forward and blows out the lamp. The shadows surge forward and restrain their foe. Relishing his victory, Master Currin steps before his victim and sneers.

"It seems such a shame for the heir to die unrecognized," he sneers. He reaches into the gentleman's pocket, removes the family seal and fixes it in place. "There, much better I think." He stares into Sir Edwin's eyes, surprised to find only foolish belligerence, brave resignation and — something else. Beneath his hand the heirloom grows warm.

"Take him!" Currin orders and, in response, one of his wraiths reaches its hand into the Sir Edwin's chest. A grim look of resistance creases the man's face and the creature falters. Another creature and then a third add their strength to the struggle, but to no avail.

"All together!" the thief commands. The tug-of-war is intense, but still Sir Edwin resists. At last, to the relief of the watchers, the killer relents.

"Very well," he says with mock kindness and steps close to Sir Edwin. "If not this way, there is always another." Edwin gasps as Currin slides a dagger slides between his ribs. He slumps forward. Snorting with derision, Currin withdraws the blade and turns to his remaining foes.

"Murderer," Sir Edwin's voice is soft, but strong. He raises his eyes and in them shines a pure, white light. His skin glows from within like a translucent shell. Tearing free from his captors, he stands defiantly. Light blazes brightly and the bloody gash in his ribs closes. A look of disbelief crosses Currin's face as he motions his shadow selves to dispose of this pest. As they step forward, Edwin raises his hands and beams of light shine forth from his fingertips, cutting down the phantoms as quickly as they are summoned until none remain. Edwin faces his tormenter, and, for the first time, hesitation fills Currin's eyes.

"I am of far greater stuff than my doubles," the killer proclaims, retreating until his back





presses against the table, now ablaze with merry flame.

"You do not frighten me, whatever you are," he states with bravado, "for no weapon forged by mortal may harm me!"

Sir Edwin presses forward, his nose mere inches from his enemy's. "I suppose that depends on what you call a weapon," he returns, punching the man in the chest. The thief staggers back at the blow.

Though stunned, Master Currin feels no pain. Snarling at his foe, he takes a staggering step forward, realizing that something is wrong. Puzzled, he wipes his eyes as if to part a veil of shadow and looks down at his chest. He sees something thrust through his amulet and into his chest, something wooden with ivory stops...the flute!

"Odd, it does not hurt," his voice is thin and wistful. "What is this sifting from the flute...sand?" The realization dawns as he recognizes sand from an hourglass! He feels precious moments slipping through his fingers as he feebly tries to stop the trickling sands of time. The grains continue to fall through a rapidly growing hole in his hand. With strange detachment he watches as his hand, and then his arm disintegrates. As the amulet crumbles to dust, so does the villain.

Sir Edwin's sad gaze falls on the doctor and then on those trapped behind the wall of flame. Darren pulls frantically at the doctor's sleeve and drags him toward the open door. "We must go for help! There is no way they can cross that fiery wall."

The doctor struggles, staring at Sir Edwin. "But how—?"

Sir Edwin bites his lip and absently taps the glowing heirloom. He looks toward the other guests.

"Go quickly, Dr. Cameron. Bring help. I will do what I can."

After a moment the doctor nods and flees, but Sir Edwin does not move to lend the remaining guests a hand. Smiling sadly, he stoops and lifts Hugo's still form and sets it on the blazing table, a pyre of honor.

"Farewell, good and faithful servant," he sighs. Turning to the remaining guests he says. "I must thank you for your efforts to defend my home. Alas, though the end is not what I wished, you have done me a service far greater than you can imagine. You have given me back my memories," he says indicating the gleaming jewelry. "It is a debt I hope to one

day repay. But for now, I must be going. I would recommend that you seek some other means of escape. Farewell."

With a smile his fingers play across the gemstone. Motes of light fly up to form a nimbus around him. Then he is gone, and all that remains are flakes of ash and drifting embers.



Flaming timbers crash from the burning ceiling, barring the exit. Señor Ramirez raises a feeble hand. "There is another way. Look to the alcove!" Frantic hands tear at the burning drapes and discover a door concealed by the hanging fabric. A swift kick opens it wide. Beyond lies a narrow, carpeted hall. "The servants' entry," Ramirez says, gasping. "There are stairs."

Darren pulls frantically at the doctor's sleeve and drags him toward the open door. "We must go for help! There is no way they can cross that fiery wall."

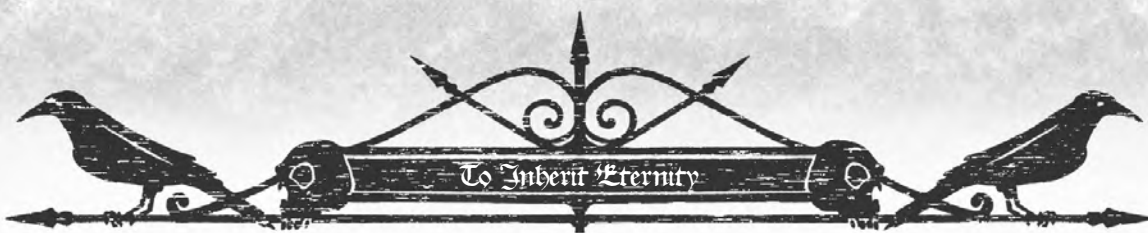
Fire ravages the room. Darren drags the wounded Señor Ramirez from the conflagration in an attempt to save at least one soul this night. Quickly he realizes that even this effort is doomed to fail for the steward's wounds are too deep. Darren looks back toward the blazing chamber. By the dancing light of burning curtains, the last remaining portrait of a legend, of Lord Eowin Tierny Tytian Allyn Makepiece Theone III, blackens in the blistering heat, consuming first the frame and then the shoulders, chin and hair, till all that remains is Lord Theone's reedy nose and piercing eyes. At last, it becomes clear!

How had it been missed? The same aquiline features, the same amused stare and tilt to the head. He had been here all along, yet everyone had failed to see through the façade. The resemblance is unmistakable; Lord Theone still lives, no matter how unbelievable that seems. Yet if Lord Theone and Sir Edwin are one and the same, that would mean he had never aged. That would mean the stories were true. Lord Theone had claimed the prize of eternity for himself, and the fire has just swallowed the only proof of his existence.

Señor Ramirez wheezes in pain. "I was wrong," he pants, "I see that now. I sought to save myself, but at what cost? A grim price indeed—."

The painful cough returns, and blood stains his chin. "Go, now!" he whispers. "Save yourselves! What value has treasure when life has fled? If I have learned nothing else, it is not to cling so desperately to life that you lose sight of the true





prize. The gift of immortality is not mine to give, but I can give you another gift even more valuable. I can give your life purpose. If he lives, find him.

Only you now know what Lord Theone looks like. Only you know his secret.” Ramirez is seized by a fit of coughing. When the attack subsides at last, it is clear that death is calling to him.

[M]With glazing eyes, Señor Ramirez gasps, “I know where he will go. He has been obsessed for decades with learning the way to Vechor. He thinks he will learn his purpose in that land, but I fear...he is mistaken. ... All that lies there is betrayal He needs a friend to lead him back to the light. Only he can turn the tide in the battle against the Dark.”

The burning air swallows his last breath, and Hector Elissar Ramirez speaks no more, his face strangely peaceful in death. Behind him, timbers crash as the floor gives way to the conflagration. Fingers of fire stretch into the corridor, igniting the carpet and forming a crimson wreath around the fallen steward.

Flight is all that is left, but it is too late! A fiery wall blocks the path to the stairs. There is no way out!

The greedy flames advance on the fallen form, licking at his flesh, animating his wine-red suit, feasting hungrily on the fatty tallow beneath.

One of the survivors spots a window at the end of the hall! A flaming chair makes short work of the glass, and the fire roars its pleasure as the evening breeze feeds its insatiable appetite. The fire races toward the fleeing intruders, but they leap to safety onto the cool earth below. One last image burns itself into the fleeing refugees’ minds to haunt them for many a sleepless night: As the flame devours Eldron Manor returning it to the ash and dust from whence all things spring, Ramirez’ grin remains at the heart of the conflagration — or perhaps it is just his flesh melting away as time consumes the man.



Uncovering the Truth – The Overture

Every legend begins in truth, and so it is with Lord Eowyn Theone; he is all that the tales tell, and he is nothing like them, for in the truth of his creation lies wonder and power beyond imagining, as well as great tragedy.

How did it begin? How could he forget? Forget the anguish of his dying companions, forget the horror of the living dark, forget the terror that threatened to consume him as he huddled before the guttering torch, his last refuge from that thing? It hovered before him, shimmering and shifting its form like a restless puddle of light. He did not want to die, not the way his friends had — Terri carried off by the howling dark, Kimber sliced into myriad segments like a shattered mirror, Cawthor swallowed by the hungry earth. He wished they had never heard of the secret of eternity nor set out on this fool's quest. They had been fools indeed to pursue a dream into this realm of nightmares!

They had only to find the Well of Life hidden away in the Heart of Darkness, overcome its guardians and prove their worthiness to the oracle to claim the prize. Instead, they lost everything. What did it want, floating there in the dark?! It was unnatural, impossible, unfathomable, how did one reason with that?

What was it waiting for? He was doomed, he knew these were his last minutes to cry and plead insanely not to die, to be allowed to live, to be free from this place. He would be good! He would be kind and charitable! He would never take life for granted!

But what was it doing? The light in the pool was filled with eddies and whorls, miniature storms of color as the thing elongated and then grew pinched in the middle, until there were two. And then one descended upon him and swallowed him, or did he swallow it? He could not remember, but the light shone from his eyes and ears, his mouth and nose, even from his fingertips. And he knew he had the power... the power to be free of this place and never return. In a blinding moment he stood no longer in the dark, but at the doorstep of his home and the welcoming arms of his loved ones.



His loved ones, where had they gone? He remembered long and long ago, remembered their deaths and remembered their loss to the sands of time. His wives, his children, his companions were all gone. How could he go on beneath this burden of grief? He wished that he could give up his life to be reunited with the spirits of those dear ones. But that possibility had been denied

long ago. He had been mortified when he was first slain in battle against the marauders, unable to prevent the slaughter of his band! How he had rejoiced when he first awoke and found his body whole again. He had exulted in the fact that he would never have to leave his loved ones again. He had not thought about watching his wife and children grow old and die before his eyes, though he could not.

For a time he took solace in their memory, and then he found a new love and thanked the gods for their blessing. Now he cursed them and his fate. How many wasted lives, how many graves? Must he always watch those he cherished succumb to the ravages of time and the tragedies of life? Never again! No more would he accept this pain. From this point on he would vow to make a difference in the world with his gift. He would help others wherever he went and share the joy of others, but he would never grow close to another again.



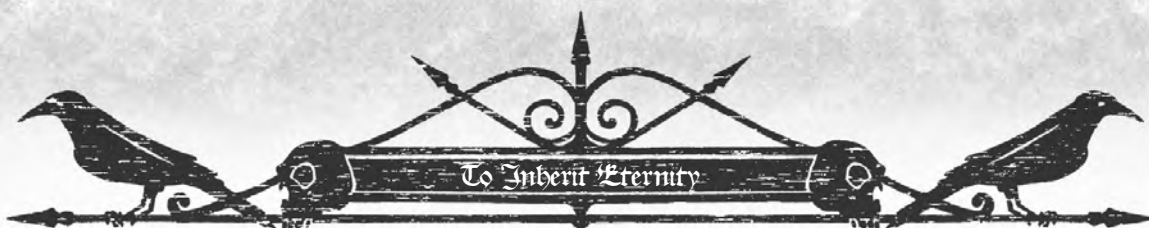
What was it the priests taught — happiness is forever? Not for him, it seemed. For a time, those he helped befriended him, but eventually that changed. When he did not age, did not wither, did not die, his fair-weather friends became suspicious, then fearful, then angry that he alone should escape their fate. Every one of them betrayed him, hunted and hounded him, desperate to steal his gift for their own or destroy him if they could not have it. Once he had given in to Lytos, a faithful companion dying in his arms. He shared part of his gift with his friend. The glow of the Light infused his still form, and he opened his eyes in vague confusion that though he was dead, he lived again. That gift proved only a mockery of life, for the body still bore its fatal wounds. Though Lytos could think and move, his heart no longer beat and with the passing days, his flesh began to rot, so that he suffered a living death. Lytos pleaded with him to end his suffering, and though he tried, he could not take back the gift he had bestowed. Only the flames of cremation at last released the tortured soul.

He vowed he would never again be tempted to stay the reaper's hand. It was his gift to Lytos that undid him, however, for he was branded a necromancer and forced to flee, a bounty on his head. He reasoned that if even friendship was denied him, he would seek happiness in power and wealth; surely these would withstand the test of time.



Jaded and heartsick for the friends he had lost and the years of hiding as a fugitive from the heirs of Lytos, he at last told himself that none of it mattered. Why should he settle for the meager existence of an exile?





Was he not immortal, like a god among men? Why should he accept the constraints of mortal society? So he set his sites on fortune and power.

First, he chose to marry into wealth and outlive his patrons, but that proved too slow for him. Next he acquired wealth through influence, cheating and stealing it from others and eventually helping others on to their eternal rest in order to seize their estates. For nearly a century, he built his fortunes and the power that came with it. For over a hundred years, the mention of his name struck awe in the heart of mortals, for he would be denied nothing. He became a warlord and a tyrant, and all cowed in fear of the undying man.

Nothing could topple him, no one defeat him, or so he thought. But the heirs of Lytos had not been idle. They formed a religious order, a cult of light to challenge a lord of darkness. In the end, his general and allies had betrayed him. His empire was dismantled as the spoils of war. At first his captors tried to kill him through agonizing, executions. His nature betrayed him, healing his wounds and remaking his body. Finally, they imprisoned him for all ages in a tomb, there to suffer death by boredom.



Ages passed until no one living remembered his crimes or recalled his legacy, except as a tale told to frighten children at night. But children are a strange breed, and what is terrifying to an adult is inspiring to a child. The stories of his deeds of horror had destroyed his legends of heroism and sacrifice. Slowly, even those stories dissolved until little was left except rumors of the great treasures his empire had once gathered. Seeking easy fortune, a great grandson of his general broke into his tomb to rescue the treasures. His only reward was a slow and torturous death, buried alive for the sins of his fathers.

Finally free, he methodically meted out his vengeance upon the heirs of his betrayers until the last of their bloodlines were destroyed. Too late, the Cult of Lytos, the Order of Light, realized he had returned and loosed their hounds to bring him to bay. Fleeing "redemption," he fled into a forbidden land and found himself overwhelmed by mists. When they parted, he found he had been transported to these doomed realms, here to wander forever.

But fate had a grim sense of humor, for his reputation preceded him as his pursuers, these so-called agents of Light, spread tales of his misdeed and began the laborious task of refilling their ranks. They will never be satisfied until they have him locked away again in an eternal prison.



As generations passed, he hoped for a chance to find peace. He lived like a mortal and moved about to conceal the fact that he did not age. He made friends and found escape from his relentless pursuers. But always, just as happiness was within his grasp, the hunters came, and he had to flee, leaving everything he had fought for —, until that fateful day of his epiphany.

He knew happiness among mortals would ever be denied, but if he could find other immortal to be his family through all eternity, that would be a victory. Thus, the Game was created. If he could not find another immortal, then he would help others to follow in his footsteps and win the prize, the gift, the curse that had been lavished on him. He began the search for worthy souls, testing their mettle and, once they proved themselves, sending them forth on the same quest that he took so many eons ago. Surely one would succeed, one would survive.

In the generations since he conceived the game, none has claimed the prize. There have been many promising candidates, but none have returned. Inevitably, some one will win. It is just a matter of time, and he has plenty of that!

Using the Story: Conducting the Sinister Symphony



here are several ways in which a DM may use this legend of a man who sought immortality to create an adventure for his players: placing them in the story, placing them after the story, pursuing

Eternity's private saga, encountering the story through a side trek, or taking up the quest for immortality.

Inside the Story

The DM may place the heroes in the midst of the story in the role of one of the honored guests and confidant of the evening's host. Changing this telling into a series of story events is a simple task.

First, the DM must consider how to invite the heroes to the evening's gathering. They may be heroes with their own legend or perhaps one of their number or a friend is a former rival of Lord Theone. One or more may be potential heirs to his fortune. Another The heroes may have heard rumors of the existence of an immortal or about the quest for immortality and may have finagled an





invitation to verify the veracity of their information.

Next, the DM should familiarize himself with the cast of NPCs present at this soiree to better understand each personality and its motives. Then the DM may use these characters as a foil to move the adventure along in the direction of the story. Character profiles are presented in the appendices at the back of this book.

The key challenge of each event must be identified and converted into a game element to challenge the players. Each challenge must be presented in such a manner that the heroes must find a solution and confront the danger, rather than have an NPC resolve the problem. Do the heroes tussle with the guards when they first arrive? Perhaps the heroes examine the first body for clues. The heroes' actions and leadership should be instrumental in saving Master Currin from choking. Clues and rewards presented in the story should require actions of the heroes to discover them, rather than relying on automatic events.

The DM may introduce additional characters, explorations and nefarious events including murders to transform the story into a murder mystery. The new characters take the role of victims and distractions to mislead the heroes about the identity of the murderer. A priest may be added as the prime suspect only to disappear and turn up murdered several encounters later. The merchant can have a couple of associates who are slated to die in a series of unfortunate accidents. A writer or clerk may become a temporary ally and source of information. Explorations of other rooms in the manor may reveal clues for the master quest — where to find Lord Theone's journal and his *memory stone* or where to look for a guide to the *Well of Life* or a weapon that may defeat an evil immortal. Mysterious events such as a falling bookshelf, a booby-trapped treasure or a terrible fall can result in raised tension, anxiety, distrust, injury and even fatalities. Any of these events may serve as a stage to reveal more about an NPC's history and motives.

Finally, the unfolding of key events should be choreographed to heighten the drama — foreshadowing the climax, presenting danger in a sly and sinister manner, and ending with a surprising and danger-filled grand finale that fills the players with a sense of horror and dread.

The DM may want to create an adventure that is less predictable through changing the location

and nature of clues and items, such as assigning a different location to the weapon that can harm an immortal or the resting place of Lord Theone's journal. Furthermore, the personalities and motives of other characters in this story may be reassigned to new identities and guises. The three key characters — the murderer, the immortal and the guardian — may hide behind other guises besides the merchant, gentleman and soldier. Possible alternatives that may be used to change this story into a different adventure are presented in the section *Variations*.

The Dinner Party

The DM can change the original story into an adventure to introduce heroes to the Legend of Eternity. Here is one possibility of how this may be accomplished. Elements described in *italics* may be changed from story to story or as the result of a random die roll or card draw. The DM creates the clues.

Getting There

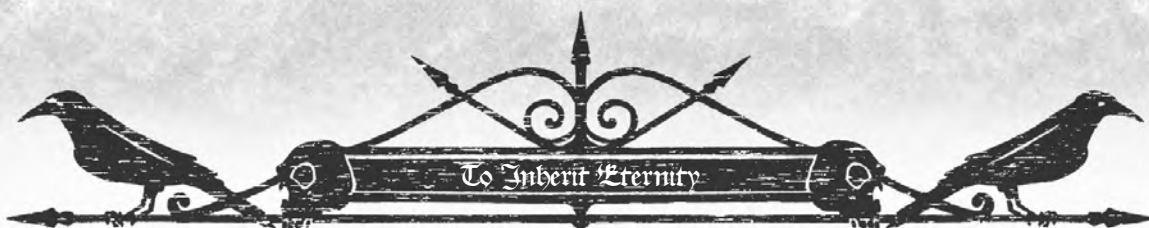
One of the realm's oldest patrons has died and the heroes receive an invitation to attend a private auction of "Sundry Curios, Fancies and Objets d'Art from the collection of Lord Eowyn Tierny Tytian Allyn Makepiece Theone III within the week. Instructions are presented on obtaining letters of credit and papers necessary to prove their identities. The trip is cold and mist-filled as they cross the spooky lands leading to Eldron Manor. This episode ends with an omen offering a clue to the story's message as they reach the gatehouse of the manor.

The story's message may be: *things are rarely what they seem, there is always hope, fate is a cycle, good and evil is a matter of perspective, beware evil's lure, or all life ends with tragedy — what matters is how we face it.*

The Arrival.

Upon arrival at the manor, the characters are greeted by their host, Señor Hector Elissar Ramirez, his clerk Alistair Charoan and the manor guards. They must present their proof and surrender their weapons, for a break-in attempt the previous night resulted in the death of one of the guard. The host says the manor has been warded against the use of weapons; they will betray their wielder. As the encounter ends, the clerk secretly hands one of the characters a note warning of possible imposters and





mentioning someone they may trust either by description or their actions.

Allies may be *the clerk, an acolyte, a servant, a scholar, a priest or a gentleman.*

Introductions

Their host introduces his servant Hugo and the other guests, including: Father Daniel Marcus Franklin, a jolly but cowardly collector; Captain Ferril Conklin Harrow, a scarred veteran who owes the lord his life; Master Currin Klein de l'Ombre, a blustery rival merchant; his associates, the brutish Mr. Gar and the weasel-like Mr. Kantall; the congenial gentleman, Sir Edwin Kent; Miss Natalie "Nicky" Warren Wellbue, a terribly shy but knowledgeable biographer; Dr. Melrose Elliot Cameron, a dedicated scholar and seeker of truths; and his pleasant young aid, Darren Thurrow. Late to the party are the supposed sibling devotees of the Cult of the Light, the reticent, calculating Charles and the emotional Ilsa Tempiere. On the way to the party, the Tempieres stumbled upon a dying man who had his throat cut. They could not save him, but they learned a clue about the perpetrator of this crime.

The dying man's last words described his as-sailant and his purpose as: *a traitor (trader) seeking release from a curse; a curer (curator) seeking dark justice; a hideous monster (veteran) wanting to deny the truth; a scowler (scholar) hoping to protect a fugitive; a deceiver (Cult of Light) lurking to destroy the dark; and a bright being (Eternity) trying to protect the light.*

The Dinner

After dinner, Ramirez speaks of Lord Theone's obsession with immortality and admits that many of the treasures for sale are linked to prolonging life or manipulating time. He announces that Lord Theone believed that a man existed who had made the transition from mortal to immortal and that he possessed the only portrait ever painted of this immortal. He then explains the bidding procedure and the detailed catalogue of items prepared by the writer.

Samples of collected objects for sale are displayed here and the author tells the tale of one such artifact, foreshadowing the danger the heroes face at the end of the adventure. Possible items and their stories include: *a mirrored carousel reported to once prolong life until it shattered time; waters that bestow animation and taught an abused child a lesson*

in life; a fan that can release the winds but loses control of the hurricane; a painting able to open a door to the realms but unable to restrain the hounds of justice; a set of stones able to guard against many dangers but coveted by a beast; and a broken sword and phantom blade able to slay the dead.

With the conclusion of the tale, one of the guests begins choking and must be saved from the effects of a paralytic poison. Accusations abound and all present had the opportunity to slip the poison into the drink.

Alarums and Excursions

As the tour begins, the guests set off an alarm when they pass two statuettes with glowing eyes. One of them tried to sneak a carving knife onto the premises and their host must reset the warding. A guided tour follows, after which the guests divide into small groups to explore the gallery on their own, while the heroes remain behind to keep their host company. He uses the opportunity to confide in them his suspicions about the other guests' motives and confesses Lord Theone's obsession with immortality. He speculates that the immortal his master sought may be present among the guests, and he fears this entity was followed by another seeking to thwart his design (The One and the Guardian).

He also speculates on the masks each might be wearing, one the yin to the other's yang like the two faces of a piece of art: *a boy and soldier portraying peace and duty (gentleman and veteran); a painted platter of just rewards depicting either a craftsman or a miser (clerk and merchant); a tapestry of a hero climbing a cliff to reach a prize illustrating the romance and trials of an adventure (writer and servant); a marvelous moving model of the four seasons inspiring wonder and analysis (student and scholar); a painting of a family pleading for mercy from a stern judge showing compassion versus the law (priest and cult of light member); and a painted screen depicting a rose growing on rocky soil symbolizing the stubborn persistence of life and its amazing adaptability (soldier and gentleman).* As the discussion ends the others return. One guest has made a suspicious discovery linking Lord Theone with an artist who died nearly 100 years ago. Another guest goes missing when separated from the party by an accident.

Shedding Light

The entire group enters a room filled with excellently crafted furniture, rolls of rich oriental





carpets and thick velvet drapes. On every table, shelf and cabinet are painted ceramic miniatures of houses, landscapes, people and creatures. A massive crystal chandelier lights the room along with torches placed outside six stained-glass windows that depict the saga of a deposed prince freeing an enchanted dragon and winning her heart and his kingdom.

The cult members reveal their belief in the existence of an amoral immortal they call the Evil One, a being responsible for countless deaths and desecrations. This being lures innocents to pursue a quest for immortality. The cult's purpose is to follow in Lord Theone's wake in order to track down this creature. They believe that the Evil One always leaves clues for his followers in the lair of a great wyrm hidden by a dark sun. The heroes must realize that the dark sun is not a mark, but a crystal in the chandelier that will shine upon a small figure on a pedestal if the room can be made dark.

The identified figure provides a clue to where to look for a guide or compass to lead questers in pursuit of the secrets of immortality while the inscription and contents of a secret space in the pedestal reveals warnings of dangers that must be overcome. Inside the pedestal is also a piece of jewelry missing its stone. This item is the symbol of Lord Theone's clan. Unfortunately, the pedestal has a deadly trap similar to the warding of the key and it will kill whoever opens it.

Possible clues include: *the image of a flesh golem (Lamordia) battling vipers in which is concealed a poison spine and a ring; a sarcophagus of a warrior (Darkon) standing amid rubble that hides an amulet and triggers a deadfall; a wolf (Verbrek) cowering before a bonfire that conceals a hat or hair pin and a delayed blast fireball; a huntress chasing a stag with a faceted crystal in its antlers (Dementlieu) that hides a watch fob and darts; a man standing in a pool that casts a distorted reflection (Nova Vaasa) and that conceals a locket and acid spray; and a large catseye crystal (Tepest) that floats above a curved mirror and hides a pendant and magical paralyzing dust.*

Master's Den

In Lord Theone's private den, the doctor seeks a clue to where he has gone. The doctor declares his belief that an immortal could be the greatest discovery of the age as well as a boon to mankind. One of the guests spies a notebook atop a high shelf and climbs the shelf to retrieve it. Unfortunately, the shelves break and so does the nimble climber's leg.

The notebook contains Lord Theone's last words before he left and where to look for his journal as well as clues about the quest if his companions become separated: *with an exiled Vistani chieftain in Borca hunted by rivals; in the rat-infested catacombs of Richemulot; in a library in Dementlieu under attack by cultists; within a monument in Nova Vaasa in the midst of a battlefield; in a tomb in Tepest harried by undead; and in a wizard's tower in Hazlan cursed by a fiend*

Parlor Tricks

In this room are family belongings — silver services, goblets, china and more. There are ivory combs and mirrors, jewelry and watches, alabaster busts and vases, crystal decanters and sterling trays, fine wines and liquors as well as unknown potions and substances in a variety of flasks. Speculation is high as to who the murderer may be and most point the finger at the guest who went missing in the art gallery.

They discover they are wrong when they find Hugo waiting inside with the body of the missing guest, another murder victim. While the murder is investigated by those so inclined, the others may explore the contents of the room, many speculating on the contents of the unmarked flasks. The gentleman is looking for something and becomes frustrated when he fails to find it. He explains that he is seeking his uncle's seal, a large engraved stone that fits in the piece of jewelry they found earlier. It held all Lord Theone's favorite memories and was necessary to validate any inheritance. He almost wishes his uncle was still alive because he does not want the estate's tenants to be cast out of their homes. He speculates on the prize of immortality and says how he would share the prize with others if it was his to claim.

He recalls stories his uncle wrote to his mother. His favorite tells the story of the Heart of Darkness and what treasures one might find there: *the mists and the dark will try to thwart trespassers but the prize is the healing touch (power to heal); the land and their past will war with intruders to deny them the power to use the talents of others (power to borrow abilities and skills from others); the non-living and the undying will raise their hand against your reaching for the prize of invulnerability magic needed to hurt); the trusted and the angry will betray you to claim the charm for themselves (power to charm monster); the lost and your greatest fear stand between you and the power of knowledge and enlightenment (legend lore); others*





covet the battle to struggle with the light to claim a renewed life (regeneration). This episode ends with one of the guests dropping a flask and releasing its dangerous contents: *explosion, phasing, berserk rage, stinging mites, poisonous gas, hallucinations*. This action results in the death of another guest.

Study in Shadow

This room boasts an odd assortment of items including a giant globe of the heavenly canopy with an iron arrow as its axis, several musical instruments, a silver writing set and countless medals and ribbons. Lord Theone's coat of arms — a wyrm rampant on an indigo charge with six stars argent and a silvery moon center arcing over the serpent — hangs on one wall and on the other is a gray funerary suit, never to be worn.

The captain reveals that Lord Theone charged him with a final mission in return for saving his life. Lord Theone feared that one day an evil man might seek the prize of immortality, and if he succeeded there was no weapon made that could stop him except one. The captain then informs the guests of Eternity's Bane: *an ebony blade or claw hidden in a box with no key or lid and that can sever the silver cord; a vulnerability to sulphur that places an immortal in a coma; a weapon that will drain his life energy making him weak and old; the secret of his identity so that he has nowhere to hide; a guardian wyrm (or dragon) that he fears and will flee from; an awakening that destroys his mortal shell and leaves him a disembodied light*.

Ilsa is furious that the captain knew all along how to defeat the Evil One and did nothing about it. She starts accusing everyone of being corrupted by the One until the murderer focuses her attention on a more likely suspect. Attacking that suspect, he turns to flee and slips, impaling himself on the globe's arrow and dies. A search turns up evidence to convince everyone that this was the murderer.

Taking Arms

The final room holds the promised portrait as well as his lordship's armor and sword, paintings of the estate, a pair of bracers, a dagger, a pewter singing bowl and pestle and a flute. There is also a locked metal coffer without a key. Within the coffer lies a piece of a treasure that when complete can manipulate time, but the vital amulet is missing so it is only a potentially dangerous item.

The steward explains that no heir was declared and presents a challenge that whoever completes his master's quest or can bring evidence

that his master is really dead, that one will be granted stewardship over his estates and their people. He then acknowledges the gentleman's right to a smaller inheritance and the position as head of the clan and gives him the heirloom stone that he has had in his pocket all along. When he takes the stone, Sir Edwin begins to remember who he is.

The steward completes his final tasks, reading his master's last notes that reveal the quest's final challenge: *this is a test of worthiness; beware — greed and pride will betray you; be fair and a servant to all; the dark — beware the dark, for in everything there is a shadow, a hint of evil that will consume you; do not be deluded or misdirected — the secret lies in the light not within yourself; understanding and communicating is the key, that and patient perseverance; time is your enemy and will writhe and squirm to avoid your grasp; be steadfast, use your inner light, for only with enlightenment can you hold back the dark*.

Following his reading, the host reveals the portrait of an immortal and everyone looks at it in awe, sharing their musings of what they see in that face: a lonely man, a misunderstood man, an unfortunate man, just a man, and the face of evil. Hugo recognizes the painting as that of his "master." As all attention is on the painting the steward is stabbed and falls at the feet of his attacker, the murderer!

Finale

In the final scene, the identity of the murderer is revealed. He suffers from advanced aging due to his frequent use of an artifact that alters time for him. If he can capture the prize of immortality, he will be immune to its effects. He explains he learned the deactivation phrase for the warding when he planted the carving knife and can now handle the weapon without danger.

The veteran soldier tries to talk the guests into rushing the murderer, but the villain shows what he can do by striking so fast that he wounds the warrior. Then swinging his sword like a wall of steel he advances. One of the guests picks up the metal coffer and knocks him down, disarming him. The soldier recovers the weapon. The doctor and his aid are sent to summon the guards.

While everyone is distracted, the murderer opens the coffer and completes his amulet. He seizes a lamp and shatters it before the door so that none can flee. Then he advances on the warrior. Here the final battle takes place with the villain





revealing some special power to bend time to his will with horrific effect: *creating time fugued duplicates; time stop to set up obstacles and trap; , blinking about; time flies (hastes self), time loop to replay a round; time dilation to slow opponents.* Each use of time makes him immune to normal attacks as if incorporeal.

One by one he slays all but the heroes in some horrifying manner, such as ripping one's spirit free or withering an opponent or rusting weapons so it breaks. One of the other NPCs may evoke some fearsome form of attack in an attempt to defeat the foe, each method echoing the writer's story from earlier that evening: *using the power of the light to resist the attack and then attacking with the flute to shatter the hourglass and turn the villain to sand; the steward reactivates the weapon ward so that the weapon animates and turns on the villain; the guardian's agent dies, but his severed hand crawls through fire to open the door letting a trellkin — a troll beast the guardian controls — to enter and attack all in the room; scholar returns to summon the darque hounds who attack everyone but drag the villain screaming into the shadows; cult members releases the hungry wind, a dark void that sucks everything not anchored down into its void until it claims the villain; , the curse of the misfortune of the Theones protects the gentleman until a lucky blow releases the light, and as it looks like he will be destroyed, an animated servant captures the villain who shrivels to dust when his amulet is removed.*

With the dispatching of the villain, The One turns to the heroes and thanks them for their help and promises to one day repay them. With the heirloom he can recall so much he had forgotten. He recommends that the heroes find some means of escape and that he already has his. Then he strokes the heirloom and teleports to safety.

Epilogue

The heroes find another exit and drag their host to safety, but he is dying. With his last breath he tries to give them a commission to follow and a place to start. Places for the heroes to start and possible goals include: *Vechor to free The One from Mad Eason; Richemulot to bring Lord Theone back to save his estates; Invidia to prove they did not kill him; Falkovnia to help Theone hide and recover; Borca to escape the Cult of Light; or Hazlan for his wealth of knowledge.* With his death the fire threatens to consume the heroes, who must make their escape. They must also flee the guards who believe they killed Señor Ramirez and set the Manor ablaze.

Other Variations

A second avenue for adventure is to take up the cause after this story ends. The heroes may either be survivors of this night of murder or may assume one of many roles. Perhaps they are related to one of the murdered victims. They may encounter one of the factions featured in the story and become willing agents to pursue that faction's private goals. For instance, working with the doctor to prove an immortal exists or with the Cult of Light to stop the Evil One. Or the heroes may become enmeshed pursuing one of the lesser goals presented during the story, such as finding the missing journal or *Eternity's Bane* and find themselves drawn into a much larger saga.

In a third variation, the heroes may pursue the immortal and become involved in his private saga — his personal endeavors to save a friend, avoid capture or test a potential candidate to quest for immortality. The heroes may not know the tale of Eternity at the start, but by the adventure's conclusion, they learn the story and may embark on any one of these possible scenarios, including the original story. In this last situation, the story they discover may be excerpts from Eternity's own personal story.

Other minor side scenarios can center on an item, creature, mystery or event from the story. Many of the treasures detailed in the appendix present adventure hooks. The characters may try to determine the guardian's nature and expose other minions he controls.

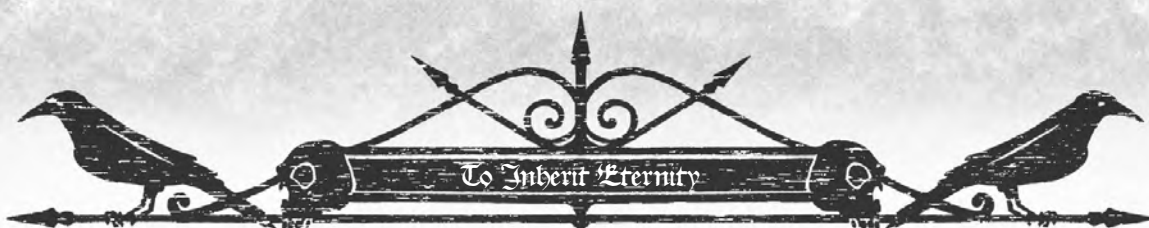
All side treks are related to this story and eventually lead back to it. For example, Señor Ramirez might be interested in buying an item in the characters' possession or one of the major factions may approach the heroes to act as their agent at this ill-fated dinner party.

Ultimately, all adventure avenues lead to taking up the quest for immortality either for personal reasons or as support for a non-player character obsessed with the quest. Adventuring in the company of an NPC is perhaps the best choice, for it creates possibilities for a tragic ending to the tale as is traditional with **Ravenloft** adventures, while providing a satisfying conclusion for the characters.

The Quest for Immortality

Ultimately all lesser tales spawned by the legend of Eternity lead to a quest for the Well of Life and the Eternity's secrets. This section pro-





vides the DM with a framework with which to create her own adventure. Details of where the original story takes place were intentionally vague so that a DM could place the adventure in any realm, integrating it with her own campaign.

Other elements may be imported from a DM's campaign to personalize the adventure for the characters. A recurring villain may learn of this quest and compete for the prize. Alternately, the villain may adopt the motives and goals of one of the competing factions such as the Cult of Light or the merchant.

Campaign-style adventures have a large scope and contain several lesser adventures. As a result, a DM could use this saga as a vehicle for the heroes to tour Ravenloft's many realms, visiting several realms to collect important clues and items necessary for the completion of their quest. In the process, the players gain a taste of each realm's story and of the shadow of darkness that haunts each land.

Before designing this adventure, consider the following questions: Where does it take place? How are the heroes drawn to the adventure? Where do they start? And who and what are the forces or factions that the heroes must interact with for a successful completion of this adventure?

Set-Ups

Earlier in this chapter, several ideas were discussed on how the heroes might become involved in this adventure. Ultimately the path to this saga journeys through a lesser adventure, such as playing the story, pursuing the survivors of the story, being caught up in a side adventure regarding a magic item or event related to the story or just becoming involved with the immortal One. The best starting point is presented in *To Inherit Eternity*. This story also defines the start of the quest, which requires the heroes to interact with the realms they pass through.

Interference

The original story features four factions striving against each other. The One seeks capable candidates and encourage them to go on this quest. The Last or Guardian wants to thwart The One's efforts, preventing the creation of any more eternal abominations. The Cult of Light strives to identify, capture and imprison the Evil One and redeem or slay anyone corrupted by it. The scholar desires to locate the immortal One, protecting him from

harm. Other candidates, agents of the Guardian, Cult members and scholars may also interfere with the actions of the characters.

The DM may add lesser characters and creatures to the adventure to oppose or at least interfere with the quest. These unexpected opponents may include denizens of the lands they cross, bounty hunters chasing the characters in connection with the manor fire, brigands looking to steal from the heroes and failed contestants. The DM may also introduce distractions and decoys to confuse the characters. Possible distractions include amused disbelievers who think the heroes are chasing a fairy tale, clueless treasure hunters and natural distractions or forces of nature.

Wanderings

Before the gate to the final quest may be opened, the characters must complete one or more adventures to find the way to the hidden realm. *To Inherit Eternity* presents clues to two items — Lord Theone's journal and the mystic compass that can aid this search. The journal presents clues to the nature of the quest and how to defeat key challenges along the way. The compass can follow in the footsteps of previous questers and open the final portal.

Descriptions of these items are presented in the appendix. The DM should create adventures for each realm that hides an item. The characters should interact with the natives, experience the land's dangers and, perhaps, have a fleeting encounter with the realm's darklord. Once they discover the location of the item, the characters should face some challenge to win the prize. This challenge may range from difficult negotiations to performing a service or saving a life. Finally, the heroes must discover how to use their prize.

For example, the original story suggests that the compass lies in Lamordia in a vale of vipers. The heroes must travel to Lamordia to find this hidden valley, descend into the vipers' pit and battle its denizens to claim the prize from a precarious perch before it falls into the bottomless darkness. Another clue leads the heroes to Borca to find the exiled Vistani chieftain and barter for the journal, perhaps performing a service, such as rescuing captive clan members from Invidia.

The heroes may pursue other prologue adventures such as finding a treasure map leading to three landmarks that are guideposts to finding the portal. Or, perhaps the player characters must track down



The One and win his gratitude and an invitation to undertake this quest. He brands the candidates and tells them where to begin their search for the portal. He does not accompany the heroes, because his inner light, that which makes him immortal, blinds him and bars his way to the path of shadows. In the original story, The One flees to Vechor seeking answers and becomes trapped by Easan the Mad, who is obsessed with learning the secrets of the immortal soul. He has been torturing The One and questioning him about each death and rebirth. Easan does not want to part with his trophy easily. Further, the heroes will need to recover the *heirloom* for Lord Theone to remember the way to the portal.

Whatever adventures lead to the portal, the heroes should face competitors and agents of the other factions. The DM may create a series of challenges that the characters must overcome in order to reach the gate, since portals are rarely left unguarded. This final quest might go something like this:

The Summons — When the heroes finally reach the locale for the gateway, they find only the landmark and nowhere else to go. A small shrine contains a statue to a god of time and an offering box. The pedestal upon which the statue rests is hollow, but tampering with it triggers a series of escalating traps: webs are thrown 20 feet, steel bars slam down, trapping the characters and a fountain of sand fills the shrine. Nothing remains in the pedestal but the mechanisms for the trap. In the offering box are four crystals and a wooden disk that assemble into a wind chime. When the chime sounds a *veil* is lifted that hides the Beacon.

The Beacon — On an isolated island off the shore of an unknown land is a beacon with a lonely caretaker in a haunted tower. The heroes must bargain for the key and ascend the tower, fending off the restless spirits and the living tower to light the lamp. The path it lights with its beam forms an oddly solid bridge to the mainland.

The Ravers — These people guard the way. The characters must fight a patrol and prevent an alarm or raver patrols with hounds and horns strive to capture or kill them until they pass the gateway. Those captured are tested in a pit battle and either die or are forced to drink a potion to *charm* them, causing them to forget their past and become ravers.

The Ascent — The heroes must climb up a mountainside or down into the depths of the earth,

confronting rock falls, slippery slopes, narrow passages, native animals, waterfalls and more. In addition to the natural dangers, the ravers may be hunting the characters, setting traps or ambushes to waylay them.

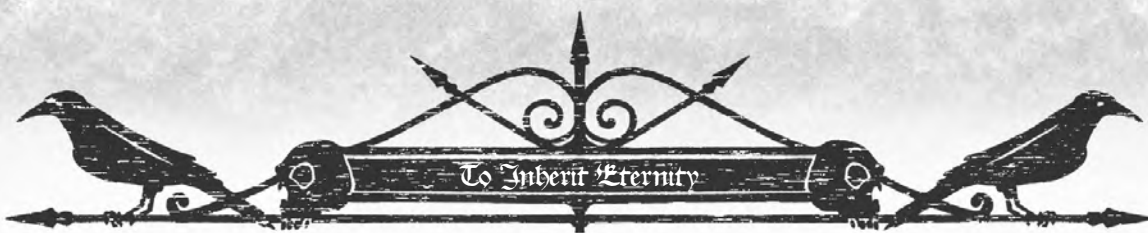
The Unwelcome Lands — The characters must cross a dangerously hostile, living land, facing obstacles such as hazardous terrain, natural dangers and deadly flora and fauna. For example, the characters might encounter the “Burning Lands,” a hot lava field of fumaroles, lava flows, steam vents, poison gas, toppling stones, exploding rocks, broken terrain and eruptions — all lorded over by salamanders. Or they may cross the “Frozen Wastes,” with snow fields, an icy glacier, treacherous crevices, ice bridges, dangerous climbs, narrow ledges, sudden storms and avalanches ruled by great winged wyverns.

The Gateway — Deep in the heart of the Unwelcome Lands, the characters at last find the Gateway. This portal is not a gate at all, but a pool with a dark, unbreakable surface like black ice. Several rune-bearing stones lie around the pool — each a line from an incantation. If the characters place the runes in the correct pattern, they provide the vital clue for opening the portal. This pool swallows heat, fire and light. With a great enough source of light or fire, the pool remains permeable for three rounds. The *compass* may discern the correct pattern and may even act as the key to activate this portal. This pool *teleports* the heroes to a new realm formed from the Mists.

The Lost — Once the Gateway is crossed, the land gives way to the “Dance,” a place filled with swirling mist and stony ground. Here the heroes face their greatest challenge, coming face to face with their past. This realm is home to The Lost, a race of creatures that can read minds, reshaping the Mists and their own forms to recreate events from the characters’ past. The characters may become lost to wander forever reliving their mistakes or falsely believing they have completed their quest. Creations of the Lost last less than an hour when removed from their presence. The purpose of this challenge is to discourage the characters, making them turn away from the quest.

The Verge — As they pass through the “Dance,” the characters have several encounters with an apparently insurmountable obstacle. This is the Verge; it may take many forms — a raging river, a flooded plain, a briar patch, razor-sharp broken ground, a perilous chasm, a treacherous





climb or a steadily advancing danger such as a forest fire, rising waters or a swarm of locusts. The Verge may appear near most major events turning back travelers or redirecting them to one side. While the Verge may be crossed by flight or magical travel, the only way to proceed with the quest is confront it directly. The chance of injury for trespassers equals an attack at +8 or a DC 20 Fortitude save. The amount of damage suffered grows by 1d4+1 points per round up to four times, causing 1d4+1 the first round, up to 4d4+4 on the fourth round. After that the damage decreases by the same increments until it reaches zero. When a character reaches the other side, he is swallowed by the Verge and deposited in a craggy land bare of vegetation and filled with shadow.

The Quickening — This enchanted land is devoid of the Lost, the swirling Mists fill it. As the characters cross the land, it reshapes itself in response to the emotions and subconscious desires of those who pass through it. Strange foliage springs from curling mists, odd creatures flit about like butterflies and motes of light or serpentine ribbons. A mire forms, embodying the heroes' frustrations; a razor-sharp hedgerow reflects their anger. Strange

phenomena abound — a rain of fire, a trembling land, a cacophony of sights and sounds and bizarre shape — all to challenge the characters, who must learn to control their thoughts and emotions. Once they succeed, the manifestations dwindle and then fade.

The Hollow — At the center of the Quickening lies the Heart of Darkness, barren and rocky with thinning mists, skittering shadows and inky pools of blackness. The ground is uncertain, broken and filled with slippery patches and pits. The ebony pools are dens for creatures of dormant living shadows called the Darque. They may attack an intruder who draws too close, dragging the victim down into the darkness with obsidian tentacles. They do not pursue the characters until they trespass at the Well of Life, when they answer the Guardian's summons and attack. Any one falling into a shadow pit may be lost for a time only to emerge from another.

The Guardian — At the Heart of Darkness lies the Well of Life, a narrow fissure, barely a hand's width, cutting into the rock. Cooling vapor streams from the crack and forms an oily slick and a frost of lime on the surrounding rocks. An oddly





pleasant, yet pungent scent, like roasting spiced almonds, infuses the air. The water is greasy and has an iridescent sheen on its surface. Inhaling the vapors causes dizziness. A dim, shimmering light shines from the crevice, illuminating the waters far below. Next to the well lies a coil of rope, a discarded helmet and a metal dipper smashed flat beside what resembles a scabrous severed arm. The only other mortal who succeeded in the quest protects the Well. Referring to himself as The Last, this creature had its life extended without the rejuvenation of the flesh. Horrified by his fate, The Last took on the duty of guarding the secret of Eternity so no other would ever have to suffer as he has. The guardian's putrescent flesh regenerates like a troll. In addition, he can continue to sense and control his own severed flesh as if it was still attached. When attached to another living creature, The Last can communicate with and manipulate the host through *telepathy*. Thus, though he has sworn never to leave this realm, he may send agents to other places to turn heroes away from this quest. The severed hand beside the well sounds an alarm to alert its creator by banging the helmet with the ladle. The Last uses its power to stop intruders, including summoning creatures of the Darque to attack. The Last cannot be permanently slain, but his minions can be destroyed and he can be driven off for a time, providing the characters with a chance to claim the prize.

The Well of Life — The *waters of eternity* seep forth from a wellspring deep within a narrow fault in the substrata of the misty land, forming a deep black well. The warmed waters pool 15 feet below the narrow gap beyond arms-reach. Something the size of a fist may be lowered into the crevice to draw water or the vapors may be collected on a cloth and wrung out. A danger is associated with this natural fountain, however, for once an hour the pressure builds and a geyser of scalding water gushes skyward for three rounds. This geyser also erupts if something weighty or liquid is dropped into the well. The cascading waters spread a gleaming dew on everything and make the ground slippery, requiring a DC 15 Reflex save to stand or flee the area. The fluids pool in hollows of nearby rocks, seeping into the ground and evaporating in ten minutes. This water possesses only minor curative powers and frequently causes delusions in those who drink it.

The Ambient — The glimmering light of the pool and dew is actually a living entity, named the

Ambient by The Last. The Ambient is the true source of immortality. When anyone tampers with the *waters of eternity* or if the Well erupts, the creature rouses. Playful at first, the Ambient toys with intruders, dazzling them with light shows and manipulations of the Mist. Eventually, the creature coalesces into a floating blob of light as the play becomes more challenging. It may provoke an attack from the characters. If attacked, the Ambient becomes more aggressive. It absorbs any creature it slays, gaining 1 point of energy for every hit point its victim had. It also feeds on energy attacks (1 point per point of damage), spells (5 points per spell level) and magic items (5 points per charge, 10 points per magical plus). Once the ambient becomes satiated (150 points), it stops attacking and grants one creature's desire, then retreats. Since this entity does not comprehend human desires, its gift of immortality this time takes the form of trapping the chosen one forever in the form of a silver statue, aware but unable to move or speak for all eternity.

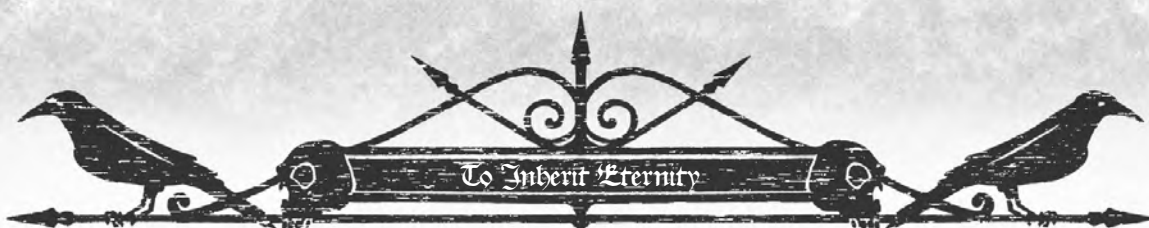
Escape — Once a gift is given, the guardian returns to send the survivors home through another shadowy portal or on the back of one of the Darque. He keeps the new immortal by his side since only he can hear the being's thoughts.

Epilogue — Once the characters return home, they discover that the *compass* is missing. Without it, they can never return. They have not left empty-handed, however, for each has been given a piece of the light, which affects each individual in a different way permanently. Some changes the DM might consider include gaining a sixth sense (the character is never surprised), acquiring an immunity to *charm* spells, developing an ability to see as if possessing *darkvision*, or 1d4 permanent increase of one ability score. Though a character may not repeat this quest, she may become involved with one of the factions searching for The One or else quest to find Eternity's Bane.

Variations on a Theme: Stage Directions



story is only a framework, it is not an adventure. A DM and her players should interpret a story in much the same way that a director and his actors approach a play, adding costumes, makeup, scenery, lighting, props and stage sets to produce a story with a unique vision. A DM should adapt the tale



must to fit her campaign as well as the players' interests and styles. The story-turned-adventure needs careful choreography that creates sense of growing horror and mounting tension while providing just enough rewards and unveilings to give the characters hope and keep the players interested. Most importantly, the DM may alter the story to make the adventure her own creation. This section explores some of the possible ways *To Inherit Eternity* may be transformed into a heroic quest.

Character Levels

Since a story does not define the level of challenge, the DM needs to create or modify each encounter to challenge his players' characters. The DM should consider the number and type of opponents the heroes encounter, the amount and nature of potential damage plus any special attacks that antagonists may inflict, the chances to rest and recover between events and the value and frequency of clues, treasures and other rewards by utilizing the creature Challenge Ratings and event and special attack Difficulty Class. Other factors may help create a satisfying, but not overwhelming adventure to match the heroes' levels. Consider the following:

Low-level adventure parties — These groups have limited resources and are easily slain. To compensate, the DM should emphasize storytelling, role-playing and drama over combat and death traps. Consider replacing deadly encounters with implied or potential danger. Imagine what novice adventurers would do if they saw a dragon fly past — most would seek cover and pray that the dragon flies away. Instead of the heroes facing death directly, the DM should have them encounter the aftermath of deadly combat. The characters may discover bodies or suffer injury rescuing others from accidents. Heroes can receive able assistance from other characters to help keep them alive. The DM can reduce fatalities by altering the effects of damage — knockouts instead of death, restraining traps instead of impaling stakes, paralysis instead of petrification. Poison could cause delirium or weakness instead of ability drains or death. With reduced dangers, the DM should also reduce magical treasures. Rewards should be commensurate to the challenges faced: a flask containing an exploding alchemical concoction instead of a magic weapon.

With low-level heroes, the DM should insert more ominous but not deadly events, such as omens,

warnings and threats. For the dinner party adventure, consider replacing some of the murders with incapacitating injuries and traps that make it impractical for the victim to go forward. Injuries such as a concussion or broken leg, or a poison that puts its victim to sleep or makes him too sick to continue can serve to create a feeling of impending doom in the preliminary stages of the scenario. The DM may weaken or eliminate creature attacks, if necessary. Damage against characters may be halved or changed to subdual damage, resulting in knockouts instead of death. Provide each creature with a weakness or phobia, something to demoralize them or cause them to flee, such as fire or a deity's name. The DM can have a creature concentrate attacks against an unimportant NPC, dramatizing that character's death to underscore the real danger to the characters. Instead of fighting to the death, the heroes may have the option of fleeing or hiding. A desperate chase and near discovery raises tension without endangering the characters. Instead of being crushed by a falling cabinet, the character may attempt a Reflex save to avoid injury entirely. Failure might mean bruising damage and a narrow escape from death. Saving throws can be a useful tool to help keep a hero alive. If an attack or hazard would kill the character, permit a Fortitude save, with success meaning the character is stunned for a number of rounds equal to the damage he would have suffered and failure rendering the character unconscious for the same amount of time. Either way, the character survives. Another way to create a sense of fear is to alter the environment — plunge a room into darkness, and the heroes will not know what is happening, allowing the DM to pull his punches. Rewards should be reduced for low-level characters, replacing permanent magic items with single-use items, such as scrolls or potions. Encourage the characters by letting them gain vital information or clues and warnings of the next encounter so that they may plan a winning strategy. The DM should give reasonable solutions a good chance of success. Here are some things that may be altered for a low-level adventure.

Dinner Party — The heroes should have the chance to perform heroic deeds, such as saving the poisoned victim, deciphering the dark sun clue and finding his lordship's notebook. In the final scene, permit one of the PCs to disarm the murderer with the thrown coffer and then resolve the finale with each hero fighting their own incarnation of the villain. It requires a coordinated attack to defeat their foe.





Quest for Immortality — The heroes should have the opportunity to save their guide's life; he shows his gratitude by saving them again and again. The DM can choreograph a desperate chase across the Unwelcome Land using its natural dangers to create an obstacle course. Failed ability checks and saves should place the characters in peril, but they should be able to survive after several minutes of terror. The Lost may recreate a hazardous encounter for the heroes, but a clever strategy should eliminate this danger easily. The Quickening should present only a cinematic distraction but have no real affect on the heroes. The DM may modify the final scene so that the characters suffer no real danger or achieve a real reward. For instance, they may never cross the Verge, thus making the final scene just another illusionary event of the Lost to misdirect the characters and make them think they have won. The characters may never encounter the Ambient, having to deal instead with the Guardian and a field of animated fallen limbs and darque pools that expel the heroes in the end. Lastly, if the DM desires to play the master quest through to the end, he should give the prize of immortality to one of the NPCs by apparently transforming her into a metal statue or a millenium tree that lives 1000 years. This transformation is actually a shell created around the victim from the Mist's proto-matter.

Mid-level adventure parties — Designing for mid-level characters requires a balancing act. On the one hand, characters have more resources and hit points to aid in their survival. On the other hand, they usually possess a limited amount of magical equipment and have limited choices, which make predicting their responses to any encounter difficult. Mid-level characters also tend to resolve everything with combat or by through Ability or Skill checks. The DM should encourage other solutions, such as negotiation, retreat or problem-solving. In response to character actions, the DM should show the players how their choices effect not only a single encounter but the rest of the adventure. A choice to aid an NPC can create an ally who may later help the heroes or whose troubles or danger draw the characters into another adventure. Making another character look like a fool may earn his animosity and ultimately his betrayal later during the adventure. In this manner, the heroes become active participants in the story and not just pieces in a combat game.

With mid-level characters, the DM should provide several avenues for resolving each encounter. For instance, a potential accident, such as a cave-in, could leave a character in a perilous situation from which he must be rescued. To do so, players must develop different solutions that will minimize risk and injury to both the victim and the rescuers. A trap may possess a series of dangers and triggers that must be discerned and disarmed. A hostage situation may be resolved through negotiation, subterfuge, surprise or a trap instead of combat. A creature may need to be defeated twice, possess an unknown power or summon unexpected help. With more clever solutions, the DM may want to provide better rewards, such as an extra dose of *healing potion*, a hidden chamber filled with rubies in the pommel of a dagger or an additional clue. The DM may require additional actions in order to obtain the prize, but this encourages players to view solving a problem as the best reward. Here are some specific things the DM can change for a mid-level scenario.

Dinner Party — The DM may alter the murders to make them events the heroes may strive to prevent. Any plot-necessitated murders may occur offstage, giving the characters the feeling that they have prevented some murders without destroying the believability and cleverness of the killer. The DM may elevate accidents to make them more deadly and traps to make them more devious. While heroes are likely to investigate any attacks or accidents to determine their cause, the villain can be busy planting evidence on others and helping mislead the heroes with his suggestions and false clues. The storytelling technique for mysteries consists of pointing all evidence in the direction of one suspect only to provide an alibi for or the suspect or have the main suspect become another victim. This requires that the investigation start over with a new suspect. Often the true villain will make himself look like a victim to throw the heroes off his trail. A likely trail of suspects is Charles — who found the first body, Master Currin — who, though unpopular is then poisoned, Father Daniel — who disappears only to resurface as a corpse, the clerk — whose knowledge leads to his incapacitation and one of the merchant's associates, who is always nearby when someone dies. For the final battle, the heroes should be stunned and paralyzed when they try to attack the villain, but should be the ones that notice he avoids the NPC wearing the heirloom. They can then encourage that one to attack their common foe.





Quest for Immortality — In this epic quest, the different factions should react with intelligence to the characters' actions and take steps to deny them vital clues or to steal important items. The characters experience delays when they must then detour from the quest to recover important clues and treasures. The DM should add one or two competing forces either just behind or just ahead of the characters. These opponents might be rival questers or cult members seeking to "redeem" the heroes or a posse pursuing the heroes for some imagined crime. These forces make it harder to secure vital information and items. They also serve as delaying tactics or distractions. In some instances, the opponents may themselves become victims, enhancing the feeling that the challenges are deadlier than they are. The Ravers can provide a constant threat once the heroes step onto the path to the Heart of Darkness eventually. Seeing this group perish in a titanic battle while the characters cross the Unwelcome Lands provides a boost to the danger factor without directly placing the characters at risk. The Lost and the Verge should present a bit of a conundrum resulting in several failed attempts to pass through. The Darque can assume several forms, from living terrain to shadow warriors to ravening hounds. The Guardian should mount a clever stratagem of hit and run with his minions until the Ambient is summoned, after which they fade away. The final prize should involve the corruption of a *wish* or the effects of time dilation on the recipient. Upon leaving this realm, the affected individual either suffers a "Rip Van Winkle" effect or finds himself many years in the future — with or without his companions as the DM chooses.

High-level adventure parties — High-level characters pose a challenge for the DM because that they are harder to kill, possess many more curatives and have access to powerful magic and weapons. It is often difficult to threaten them without resorting to overkill— even more powerful foes and too many rewards. This leads to an unsavory escalation that soon takes away the DM's gentle control of the adventure and leads to heavy handedness. Thus, high-level adventures need to focus more on the players' participation in the story-telling aspects of the game. The DM should develop wily strategies and feints for any event, creatively using the powers and resources available to the creatures encountered. Concentrate on the entertainment value of an encounter; use misdi-

rection. Present events that require problem-solving and occasional bouts of action.

Keep the players on their toes by assigning the game statistics of one creature to another creature (who has been shapechanged). Make potential allies look like threats and dangerous creatures seem friendly. Another way to challenge high-level characters is to use attacks and threats that either have higher Challenge Ratings or that ignore ability bonuses, armor or both. Traps have the best chance to threaten high-level heroes. Gas, heat, cold, sonic, magic and deadfalls pretty much ignore armor. Drowning, pit traps, falling and burial beneath an avalanche or cave-in turn armor into a disadvantage. Energy-draining and magic-eating creatures are more attracted to powerful characters. So are brigands and con men. Magic and binding prove effective despite a victim's armor. Treasures can possess both advantages and disadvantages, forcing high-level characters to cope with such objects as a sword that can slay lycanthropes but also buzzes in the presence of a shape-changer and may even summon werebeasts so that it can slay them. Here are some specific changes to make with the adventures based on *To Inherit Eternity*.

Dinner Party — The player characters may become the targets of assassination attempts. The murderer tries to form a secret alliance with one or more of the characters in an effort to ferret out the villain. In addition, multiple plot lines may interact simultaneously. For example, the Guardian may attempt to recruit more agents by using his fingers or his eye to control of a lesser NPC in an effort to protect the innocents and discover the villain. When one of his agents dies, however, the characters can discover the symbiotic flesh and may think that the Guardian is behind the killings. The immortal does not know of the existence of the Guardian; therefore any information that he might gain would prove incredibly valuable to him. The characters might choose some of the variable elements of the story through their actions. For instance, the writer's tale is based on an item she selects. Instead, permit the heroes to select one of the six items and plan an appropriate story around it. In the final battle the DM should be as creative as possible to challenge his players. What if the villain can utilize two of the time manipulation abilities instead of just one, catching himself in a recurring loop as a result. Alternately, the heirloom might fall into a player character's hands,





causing him to share some of The One's memories and to believe that *he* is the immortal until, in the end, the true immortal picks up the heirloom. The DM may select other events for the final encounter. The ultimate prize would be to save the curator's life and salvage as much of the manor as possible.

Quest for Immortality — With high-level characters, the DM may use the complete array of factions available for this adventure, even including the Darklord of any realm the quest crosses. Present each episode or encounter in layers that the characters must slowly peel back to discover the true nature of the event. For example, at the beacon, the heroes may at first believe the place abandoned. They must avoid "accidents" that are really animations of the lighthouse. They might mistake the keeper for some frightening creature, eventually coming to accept him as benign and even helpful. He has been chased from the lighthouse and needs to get the light lit again to drive off the bad spirits. Not until the keeper makes peace with these spirits of the ones who have gone before will the heroes be able to complete their task. Final encounters in this saga should be complex and personal, directed against each hero's strengths and weaknesses. Ultimately, the price or curse of immortality should fall on one of the player characters if they can beat the challenge despite the communication gap.

Stories and Associated Adventures

While the DM may create variations on the premise of this saga. Perhaps the immortal is a shape-changing fiend who has lost his memory and thinks he was once mortal. The Ambient might have created the "quest" to bring it prey and playthings. Immortality may be living many different lives through different incarnations and times. Alternately, the role of the Immortal may be an office passed down from one family member to the next. It may be a plot by a mobile dark lord to select replacement bodies when his current mortal shell fails. Thus, it is really the immortal who inherits the body of one of his candidates marked with his symbol of the eclipsed sun rather than a hero who claims the prize for himself. Here are some other possibilities for variations on this story. The faction served by the story appears in parentheses after the story's "title."

Crossing Evil's Path (Cult) —The One is evil and does seek to corrupt others by convincing them to perform questionable acts in its service.

The Great Lie (Cult) —For the One's amusement, the heroes must face a deadly challenge that the One could easily defeat on his own.

We Hate What We Don't Understand (Scholar) — The heroes are caught up in a mob mentality, hunting The One until he saves their lives and rewards them with the secret of realm crossings.

The Fugitive (Scholar) —A helpful stranger saves the characters' lives. They feel a need to help him evade those pursuing him, thus becoming fugitives, too.

Forever is Misery (Guardian) —The Guardian leads the characters in discovering the existence of a beneficiary of The One's light that has left him alive forever, but in a body that is slowly rotting and in agony. They must bring an end to his suffering.

The New One (Guardian) — This one is evil and must be stopped. Since he cannot be killed, he must be weakened by *Eternity's Bane* and then placed in an eternal prison somewhere.

The Unluckiest Man (The One) —Falling into the company of this man, we learn how misfortune befalls all who befriend him, because he steals their good luck in order to survive. There is no karma life when death comes calling.

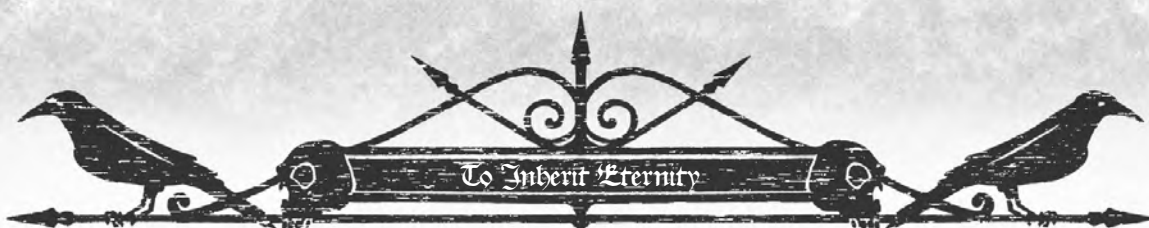
The Last Survivor (The One) — A rescue is necessary because the villain is still alive and winning. All but one of his opponents are dead. The remaining hero must make sure the enemy is not the last survivor. This works particularly well for solo-adventures or with a party of characters coming to the rescue of one near-death NPC.

The Gift of Eternity (Curator) — While this story begins with a quest to help save someone who is dying of old age or disease, ends with self-sacrifice and giving to others: "*The gift you seek is not mine to give; but I can give you another — meaning! Fear not death, fear insignificance.*"

Settings

This adventure may occur in any realm that possesses towns to provide heroes with access to the basic necessities and supplies for adventuring. European-based realms such as Borca, Darkon, Dementlieu, Hazlan, Invidia, Nova Vaasa and Richemulot are excellent starting points. More bizarre realms and corrupt lands such as Tepest, Vechor, the Sea of Sorrows or Markovia lend themselves to settings for later events in the saga. The final part of the adventure is set within a





region of the Mists that is no part of any known realm and must be accessed via a magical portal hidden in one of the fey realms, such as the Shadow Rift, Keening, the Nocturnal Sea, or one of the floating realms including the Clusters, The Islands of Terror and the Shadow Lands. The DM should decide which realms he wants his heroes to visit. If the adventure requires the heroes to cross a realm's border, the DM must introduce some story element to explain how this is easily achieved. For instance, a Vistani elder might agree to act as a guide for the heroes; alternately, once the magical compass is located, it may use its power to temporarily open a closed border. (If this is the case, make certain the compass "disappears" when the adventure is complete!)

The start of the final adventure should be placed in an awe-inspiring hidden realm especially designed by the DM for this saga. Present awesome vistas such as towering mountain peaks or an emerald oasis cupped between gently drifting dunes. At once both alien and unknown, this mini-realm should possess an inherently dangerous quality. Some possible locations to consider are: The Narrow Sea — a land of subterranean canals; The Endless Woods — gigantic prehistoric jungle; The Dreaming — a land of drifting sands, mirages and projected images; The Sunken — a realm hidden in the watery deep; — an impossible land that floats in the sky; The Crag — a windy aerie built on the side of jagged cliffs; The Unseen — a vast ruin with phantom, but very real dangers; The Cauldron — a mile-wide crater veiled by bubbling mists; The Summit — a perilous climb to a mystical shrine; The In-Between — a place lost between the borders of two realms in the veiling mists; and Reflections — a dream land of mirrors.

Character Identities

Though the original story casts the immortal One and his counterpart, the Guardian, in the roles of a gentleman fop and a scarred veteran respectively, the DM may wish to change the masks they wear to create some unpredictability. In this event, the DM should use the character profile presented for the guise these characters adopt in conjunction with the personality of each immortal. For instance, The One may assume the roles of clerk, writer, apprentice, priest or soldier, while the Guardian may wear the mask of the merchant, servant, scholar, cult member or gentleman. Coinciding with any changes, the killer should adopt another guise as well. As a matter of fact, the DM

may reassign all the roles with any of the personalities present. Any alterations in identities requires the DM to make any adjustments necessary to insure the desired outcome of the adventure.

Story Perspective

Though a play restricts the actors' roles and lines, characters encountered in an adventure need not be so restricted. As each player adds his or her own perspective to the story and the hero's actions, the DM may also provide major characters with backgrounds and motives that spurs them to follow their own agenda, whether on stage or not. While The One may choose to encourage new candidates, either overtly or clandestinely, his influence is felt throughout an adventure. The DM uses the other three factions to shape the challenges the heroes face. Members of the Cult of Light may pursue any and all leads in their efforts to destroy the Evil One and purify any who may have been misled. Agents of the Last seek to intercept, infiltrate and dissuade anyone from pursuing this quest. And, of course, the kind Dr. Cameron will attempt to follow any who have encountered the One in order to lend assistance to the immortal and hinder the heroes.

Ravenloft adventures pioneered changeable sagas through the use of randomized game elements using a storytelling device to foreshadow and select the nature and location of elements in a specific scenario, thus making the adventure new every time it is played. Another way the DM can alter a story so that it is different with each play is to change the perspective from which the tale is approached. The original story premise has the heroes retracing the One's fateful quest either to unravel his mystery or to claim the prize for their own. But this story may be told from other points of view. The heroes can be initiated into the secrets of the Cult of Light to help fight the machinations of the Evil One. They might, instead, become willing accomplices of the Last and his agents to save The One's latest dupes from their folly. Consider casting them in the role of hired help for the doctor. Imagine his delight when he learns there is not only one immortal, there are two!

Changing Elements: Their Nature and Location

A common device used to create suspense and a sense of dread in a horror story is to present the protagonists with a foreshadowing of their future.



Ravenloft adventures use different devices to foretell the future and to randomly select and place a variety of key elements in the paths of the heroes, such as a fortune telling with the Tarokka cards, the reading of a villain's journal, a storyteller's musings, or a session with a mesmerist. Each method presents a multi-plot story with several points where the players, the DM or a randomizer, such as rolling dice or drawing a card, determines a specific element in the story.

To *Inherit Eternity* may use story interruptions where key elements are determined by changeable clues. The DM may choose which clue to use or may draw a random card from the Tarokka deck. Another way to choose involves rolling 1d6 (to select a suit) followed by 1d12 (to select a numerical value). On a roll of "6" or "12" the DM chooses which clue to use or uses the original story element.

If a six-sided die is used to determine the suit: 1 = Coins, 2 = Swords, 3 = Stars, 4 = Glyphs, and 5 = Fortuna Magna or the high arcana. These represent: 1 = rogues, dwarves, craftsmen and treasures, 2 = warriors, weapons and fire, 3 = wizards, scholars, deduction and wind, 4 = priests, spirituality, law, intuition, emotions and water, and 5 = fate, chance, eldritch powers, and light or energy.

If the Tarokka deck is used to pick a number from 1 to 10, and a low arcane card is drawn use the card's value. If a Fortuna Magna or high arcane card is drawn use the following numerical assignments: The Dark Master = 1, The Artifact = 2, The Horseman = 3, The Hangman = 4, The Spirit = 5, The Broken One = 6, The Raven = 7, The Innocent = 8, The Marionette = 9, The Prison = 10. The last four cards are assigned the number 11 and are masters of one of the suits of the lesser arcane: The Temptress = 11 (Coins), The Mists = 11 (Stars), The Beast = 11 (Glyphs), and The Hero = 11 (Swords).

The Gift

The gift of the Ambient is capricious and never manifests itself the same way twice. Its form may depend on the circumstances of a candidate or a character's mindset at the time immortality is claimed. The DM should decide what form this power takes for one who claims the prize. Regardless of the variable nature of this supposed blessing, the result is that the gifted one cannot die, at least not in any common manner. The new immortal

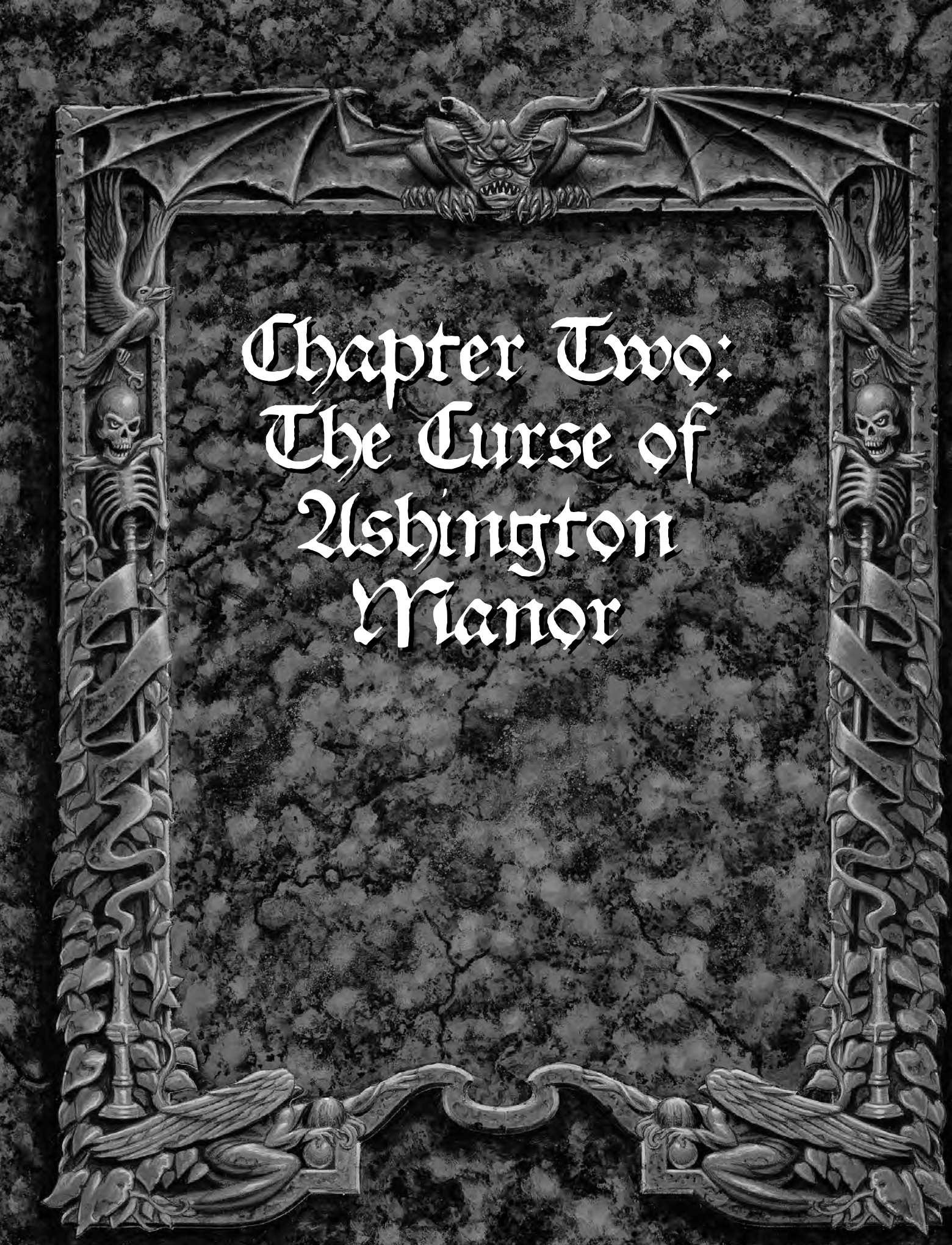
still feels all the pain and suffering of mortal injuries and may even develop new phobias as a result, but she eventually recovers from their finality in some manner that allows her to continue her eternal struggles. Since the realms of Ravenloft are rife with irony, the DM should select a form for this gift somehow linked to the character's fears, nemesis, past struggles or the type of vulnerability that the immortal will suffer from for all eternity. Here are a few corruptions of this gift that the DM might consider:

- The body becomes debilitated, scarred and crippled with age, afflicted by new frailties. The candidate becomes obsessed with healing arts or finding a new body.
- The character becomes an undead creature, plagued with the attendant curses and limitations, or an incorporeal creature, unable to act directly upon the physical world other than to offer counsel or by temporarily possessing another creature.
- The character is magic-jarred, imprisoned in some form as a statue or gem or changed into something with a long existence, such as a tree, tortoise, symbiote or mountain. The candidate acts through confederates or bonds with another creature to see and act through their body.
- The character claims immortality by stealing life from others, either in the traditional manner of an energy-draining creature or through cannibalism or bargaining for or stealing souls. This life theft should require performance of some unsavory action that might be viewed as monstrous by mere mortals such as desiccating a corpse, drinking blood or shedding one's skin.
- Life is not really endless only the eternal existence of the soul is. The candidate's spirit can never know rest. Either it is fated to continually repeat the cycle of its original tragic life or it is reincarnated in the body of a blood relative, evicting the resident soul and dooming that creature to a ghostly exile until their mortal form at last dies. The evicted spirit often haunts the candidate.

The final Movement

Even with the completion of the major quest, the DM may continue to permit this saga to influence his heroes' lives for years to come as they are sought by other questers and hunted enemies of immortality. What happens next is just a matter of time.





Chapter Two:
The Curse of
Ashington
Manor

The Story



Uou have the look of a treasure seeker or monster hunter, if I'm not wrong? You know, the sort of bloke who wanders the domains in search of wrongs to right and maidens to save. I know of a place where you might find monsters and treasures, but the maiden has long been beyond salvation. Her undead rage continues to claim victims, and so it will forever be until her spirit is laid to rest.

"Not far from here stands a house that once was home to the last member of a family long since fallen from nobility to the depths of evil and corruption. Lord Herod Ashington by name, this dark hearted fiend and his equally corrupt fellows would ride the surrounding countryside in search of maidens to terrorize and brutalize for their amusement.

"One night, Ashington and his minions came upon a lone Vistani girl who had been separated from her clan, and they captured her and brought her back to Ashington Manor. Ashington was a dabbler in black magic, and he knew counter charms that protected him and his friends from the Vistani girl's evil eye.

"Instead of merely taking her virtue, Ashington and the others decided to take advantage of the Vistani in other ways. Ashington was having a party that night, and he promised her freedom if she would tell his guests' fortunes with her tarokka deck. She begged him to not make her use her tarokka deck in a frivolous fashion, tried to make them see that the mysterious forces that give Vistani their foresight do not appreciate being taken lightly. Ashington promised her that she would welcome death if she didn't do what he asked, and the fearful girl acquiesced.

"As the Vistani girl turned the cards and interpreted what Fate had in store for her captors, futures containing nothing but death and misery emerged. Ashington's friends grew fearful. Furious, Ashington demanded that she use her mummery in a way that would entertain, not terrorize, his guests. He said he would give her one last chance and commanded her to tell his fortune and instructed her to make it a bright one.

"The girl again pleaded with Ashington, trying to make him understand that the dire predictions were not her doing but instead a reflection of the forces he was making her toy with. He would hear nothing of it, however, and commanded her to entertain her betters or suffer dearly.

"Trembling with fear, the girl started to lay the cards. Every card she revealed was from the Fortuna Magna, the most powerful cards in the tarokka deck, and they were the cards that represented the darkest of



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fates. As she was about to reveal the final card, Ashington's patience ran out. He never stood for his peers defying his will, so he wasn't going to allow a Vistani wench to do so either. He pounced upon her with a drawn dagger, and drove the blade deep into her chest. As life fled from her body, however, she uttered a curse: "You will never escape the bond of tarokka, Herod Ashington, until the last card is laid, and no one will ever leave alive unless I do."

"Ashington laughed as the girl breathed her last, but his guests began to panic. They believed the power of the Vistani was stronger than the minor magic commanded by Ashington. Already caught up in bloodlust, Ashington turned on the guests and slew them all for siding against him with the Vistani girl. Some of the guests fought back, and Ashington himself was mortally wounded. The servants of the house fled the slaughter, leaving their "betters" to kill one another. When they returned with men-at-arms from a neighboring fief the next day, they found nothing but the dead in the house. Mysteriously, Ashington and the Vistani girl's body were both missing, as was the tarokka deck the girl had used. The magical tomes and items that Ashington had collected over the years were missing as well.

"A likely explanation, of course, is that between the flight of the servants and their return, is that the Vistani girl's clan managed to find her, and they took her body with them as they looted the house. The claim that Ashington, too, was missing might be just so much elaboration to make the story seem more sinister. However, there is more to it than just this. A curse rests over the house, a curse that manifests itself every fifteen or so years to claim all who live within its walls.

"Years after the deaths and disappearances, a pious cousin of the family tried to convert the manor house into a hospice and center of worship devoted to Hala. These kindhearted souls were the first to be claimed by the curse, as their leader apparently went mad one night and murdered everyone as they slept. Then, a local highwayman tried to mend his wicked ways by starting an honest business that converted the old Ashington Manor into an inn. It operated for a decade before guests and staff were all mysteriously slain in a night of brutality. Finally, a doctor from Dementieu tried to use the place as an asylum for the insane. One night, the doctor himself was seized by madness and he led the most dangerous of patients in an attack against the rest of the staff. The building was set ablaze, and no one but a few hopelessly mad people lived to tell the tale. The building is now an abandoned, crumbling and flame-ravaged hulk. Only vermin and the most desperate of outlaws venture near the place.

"Yes, the deadly events at Ashington Manor were decades apart, so one could claim that it is merely coincidence and happenstance that so much pointless violence and so many lives have been lost within the same walls. But there is linking factor. Over the years, clerics of Hala, guests and servers at the inn, and workers at the insane asylum all reported seeing a Vistani girl seated in what was the manor's grand hall, turning cards from a tarokka deck as though she was telling someone's fortune. If approached, she vanished. If simply observed, she vanishes before she places the last card. Obviously, her spirit is still there in the house, attempting to finish Ashington's fortune, as well as lending power to the curse she uttered so long ago.

"Hm? Treasure? Well, the missing arcana that Ashington once owned should be worth a pretty penny. Unless the Vistani did indeed swoop down on the place and carry off the corpses and magic, it's all got to be in the ruins somewhere, right? And there's always that ghost and the curse to get rid of. It would be quite a coup to find the treasure and rid that property of its curse, as well. Who knows? Maybe you could be the ones to actually claim the place successfully."

The Truth

Eighty-five years ago, almost to the day when the characters hear the tale of Ashington Manor, Lord Herod Ashington murdered 17-year-old Rozaleen, because he was upset by the fortune the Vistani girl was telling with her tarokka deck. With her dying breath, she cursed Ashington and all in the house. That might have been all, if it wasn't for the fact that Rozaleen's tarokka deck was far more powerful than a normal deck. The mystic energies that have been focused in the house because of the incomplete fortune have been causing a rough approximation of the final night of Rozaleen and Ashington to repeat itself every 17 years. Those same energies have been tearing at the very fabric of time and space and now, as the cycle repeats itself for the fifth time — the Five of Swords was to have been the final card placed — the deck's power has reached a boiling point. If the curse isn't resolved and the fortune completed this time around, Ashington Manor and all within it will be lost forever in the Mists of Ravenloft.

Using the "The Curse of Ashington Manor"

"The Curse of Ashington Manor" is a "haunted house" tale with an extensive twist. The restless spirit of a Vistani girl haunts the house due to a





curse she laid, but mystical energies brought forward by a tarokka deck of mysterious origins and even more mysterious power has empowered the curse to spectacular degree — the house itself has become a type of ghost. Four different hauntings take place within it, causing it to shift between the current, modern-day version and manifestations of the four previous versions where Rozaleen’s curse came to its full manifestation. As the energies focused by the tarokka deck fall in on themselves, the house transforms at random into previous versions of itself that are not inhabited by actual phantoms of those who were present but instead replaced by hybrid versions of those who were in the house when Rozaleen died. For the characters, the house becomes a strange kaleidoscope where clues to their escape commingle with deadly threats to their lives. As the characters move through the house, it keeps changing between the various incarnations it has seen. The house shifts from the present to multiple pasts, seemingly at random, causing it to transform from a burned out ruin, to the home of a nobleman, to an inn, to a hospice or to an insane asylum.

This scenario is structured in such a way to allow the DM to use the **Ravenloft** tarokka deck both as a prop and as a randomizer that determines what version of the house manifests when it changes, and perhaps even to determine the way to lift the curse upon the house (in a tradition that dates back to the classic Tracy and Laura Hickman adventure that inspired the setting).

Preparing to Use This Material

The first step the DM needs to take is to review “Chapter Four: Parting the Mists” in the **Ravenloft Dungeon Master’s Guide**. A tarokka reading is central to the events that have brought the curse down upon Ashington Manor, and the PCs may witness Rozaleen laying the Basic Cross pattern, either alive or as a haunt. Further, if the DM doesn’t have access to a tarokka deck but instead chooses to use a standard deck of cards or a tarot deck in its place, he needs to know which suits replace the references to the tarokka suits.

The next step involves reading this entire chapter. The ever-shifting nature of Ashington Manor requires that the DM be familiar with its incarnations and with those within it. Reading “What Has Gone Before,” the descriptions of the various incarnations of the characters populating Ashington Manor, and the descriptions of the house are particularly keys for

a successful use of the material. It also gives the DM a sense of whether he thinks an ever-rotating mix of five different versions of the same place is too complicated (or perhaps too frustrating for the players) for him to run. He can eliminate one or more of the versions—the two most important ones are the current version — The Ruins — and the one in which Rozaleen is about to be murdered by Lord Ashington. The others could conceivably be cut and reused at some future date — with, for example, the version of the house that is Dr. Ildgaard’s asylum being a completely separate location. Similarly, the DM can divorce the “Jack and Queens” inn from this scenario, instead holding it in reserve for a time when the characters take up lodgings at an isolated roadhouse.

To reduce the number of available versions of the house, the DM merely has to decide what the tarokka suits tied to the versions he gets rid of represent. These suits can either be reassigned to the versions of the house that are being kept, or they can be treated as “no change” — when they come up, no change is triggered, even though the description of the house calls for one.

What Has Gone Before: The full History of the Curse of Ashington Manor

The curse of Ashington Manor first formed when a teenaged Vistani girl named Rozaleen ran away from her family after an argument with her father. Rozaleen felt she was old enough to assume the mantle her mother had worn—that of a seer so powerful that even other Vistani would seek her out for advice. However, her father felt that she was not yet old enough to be subjected to the risks that came with that role, risks arising from the strange magic imbued in an ancient tarokka deck that had been in the family’s possession for as long as anyone knew. Fed up with her father’s overprotectiveness, Rozaleen struck out on her own, taking the heirloom tarokka deck with her.

The young Vistana was hoping to meet up with another Vistani caravan and ask them to take her in. Knowing the dangers facing a lone Vistani on the roads, she decided to call on the tarokka for guidance. The reading she placed for herself made her blood run cold. Many of the cards were from the Fortuna Magna, and no matter how positive a spin she tried to place on what the cards said, she knew her future was going to be a dark one.





Hoping to avert her fate, Rozaleen retraced her steps, but before she was safely back with her family, she encountered two noblemen who were on their way to a gathering of friends. Rostoff and Hanford were part of a small group of particularly decadent and vicious nobles whose twisted and perverted actions were mostly orchestrated by Herod Ashington. They felt the attractive young girl would add greatly to the night's festivities and captured her with little effort. (Rozaleen managed to fend off Rostoff with her evil eye, but Hanford knocked her unconscious with a single well-placed blow to her head.)

When Rozaleen regained consciousness, she was in the opulent, shadow-draped grand hall of Ashington Manor. She was lying at the feet of a darkly attractive female bard with strange pale blue eyes who was playing an upbeat tune on a lute.

Across the room, a group of finely attired men and women had opened Rozaleen's traveling bundle and were going through her meager possessions. From their mocking exchanges about her and her belongings, she gathered the names of the men were Hanford, Rostoff (both of whom she already knew as her captors), Blaumann and Ashington. The women were Hannah, Ivana and Melanie. From their conversation, she could also tell that she was going to suffer the sort of abuse at the hands of these *giorgios* that her father and brothers had warned her about. They were going to play dice over who got to "bed" her first. She could not help from shuddering and whimpering in horror.

"She's awake," the bard announced cheerfully. Rozaleen looked up at her, hoping that a mortu might be an ally in this situation, but as her dark eyes met the bard's icy-blue ones, she was gripped with a fear that almost overtook the one already growing in her. She knew this one was not human. With a knowledge that rose from the deepest corner of her soul, Rozaleen knew this one was a creature that was no one's ally, but a monster known as a Vehrteig — an enemy of all that was decent in general and of the Vistani in particular. "Don't fight them," it said softly, leaning forward, "and you may survive the night."

"Aren't you an attractive little thing," the one named Ashington said, striding to her and pulling her off the floor. He gestured to an amulet around his neck, and Rozaleen recognized it as a powerful charm that would protect him from her evil eye. He told her, "Don't even try giving me the eyeball. You won't like the results."

Over at the table, Ashington's friends had Rozaleen's silk-wrapped tarokka deck. When Rostoff and Hanford saw the cards, they announced that playing cards for Rozaleen would be better than dice. Ashington returned to them, holding Rozaleen firmly. She followed meekly, hoping the thing playing the lute was right. Ashington surprised her when he recognized the cards as a tarokka deck—she had never assumed a *giorgio* to be well educated enough, even one with charms against the evil eye. He berated his friends for their lack of refinement and education and then ordered Rozaleen to tell fortunes. "You and Hanford brought a rare and multifaceted addition to the party, my dear Rostoff," Ashington added.

Rozaleen asked him to reconsider. She even clumsily tried to avert his attention by offering her body, which she knew he intended to take anyway. But Ashington's mind was set, and his intoxicated friends thought a little gypsy telling their great futures would make this night of revelry complete. Ashington ordered Rozaleen to the table and sat next to her with an arm around her narrow shoulders. He placed her tarokka deck before her and magnanimously stated that she could tell her own fortune first. She reached for the cards, still holding out hope that maybe she would escape this night with only injuries that time would heal. There was even a dim wish in her mind that maybe the cards would give her reason to hope... maybe they would show a different fortune for her than they had previously. Even while wishing, she knew that it was a pointless wish. She knew this tarokka deck revealed the future with unfailing clarity. Furthermore, she knew that once a fortune had been told for a person, it remained the same until destiny had been satisfied. And the cards remained consistent.

The first card Rozaleen placed was the Missionary, the Two of Glyphs.

"This card represents me. It says that I am a person who can bring you insight and knowledge — which I of course I will as I tell your fortunes tonight. However, it is reversed. It shows that there may be dark times ahead for me."

Hanford crudely commented that they planned to "give her some insight and knowledge in bed" while Melanie tittered that the drawing on the card looked like Rozaleen, so of course it was she.

The second card turned was the Prison. It was in the reversed position, and when she first placed this fortune for herself, she had rejoiced in seeing it. The joy had been short-lived, however. She found



herself hoping against hope that the cards would come up different this time.

“This card represents my recent past, the events that brought me to my present place. It, too, is in the reversed position, showing that I recently underwent a major life-change — that I broke free from long-established traditions and set out upon a path that I walked alone and free from all cultural restrictions. It is a path in which nothing of my past life matters.”

Without pausing to allow for the predictable crass comments, Rozaleen turned the third card. To her distress, it was the Innocent, another card from the Fortuna Magna that had come up in that position before.

“This card represents my present. It shows that I am a person of great importance and great potential — and I am. I am my late mother’s only daughter, so I am the heir to all that she was, for that is the way among the Vistani.” She ignored more crude comments from the assemblage, continuing to speak. “But the card is reversed. It is saying that I am in great peril that I may not even recognize, and that I am in need of someone to come to my aid for I will not be able to save myself. It says that by striking out on my own, I have placed myself in the most dire of dangers.”

At this, Ashington squeezed her shoulders and said with his lips close to her ear, “You don’t have to play up the melodramatics, my love. We’re only going to show you a good time. It won’t hurt. Much.”

With a suppressed shiver and a weak smile, Rozaleen turned the fourth card. It was the card she had expected, dreaded to see — one of the direst cards from the Fortuna Magna: The Horseman.

“This card represents my future — and it appears as if it may be a dire one. The Horseman is a portent of misery. It foretells that sometime in the very near future, I will suffer greatly, and that I will lose something that I will never regain.” Rozaleen tried to keep the despair from creeping into her voice.

“I think the cards see she’s a virgin!” Hanford exclaimed, garnering gales of laughter from the others.

Rozaleen’s mind reeled. What exactly were the cards foretelling? Until now, she had feared some crippling injury or perhaps some other situation that would force her into the life of a mortu. Maybe all she was going to lose this night was her maidenhood, but that was something she might be

able to recover from. She threw a quick glance toward the thing by the fireplace. Or would she suffer a fate so terrible she couldn’t imagine at the hands of the Vehrteig? The fifth and final card would give her insight.

She turned the card. Despair seized her, but she tried to keep up a strong front. She knew that what little hope she had to last the night depended on providing entertainment for her captors. Still, with The Broken One from the Fortuna Magna lying on the table in front of her, as it had done several times before, her heart grew heavy.

“This fifth and final card tells us something about the outcome of my current situation. It seems that the path that has taken me away from the bonds of tradition has led me into peril and a dark future. The cards say that I will emerge from this night greatly changed and without something that I cherish.”

“You will be a woman, dear,” Melanie purred, to the giggles of the women and chuckles of the four men.

Rozaleen continued, “The fact that all the cards but one in this reading are from the Fortuna Magna indicates that the events unfolding tonight will have great significance, not just to me but to others as well. And those last three cards mean that we must be cautious in how we proceed.”

“My, aren’t we a little doomsayer,” the Vehrteig said from her perch by the fire, changing the tune issuing from her lute to one more sinister. “You seem to be forgetting the first rule of fortune telling — keep it upbeat so the customer will pay you at the end.”

“Maekon’s right,” Ashington stated in a friendly tone. “Now, you will tell Rostoff’s fortune. The more entertaining you are here, the later it will be until we retire to bed. Show us your tricks, girl.”

Ashington planted a kiss on Rozaleen’s temple as she shuffled the cards. She desperately looked for a way out of her situation, a way to cheat the cards. She was certain that her fate was going to be most terrible, even if she still could not envision how it would be these degenerate fools, or even the Vehrteig, who could bring about something so significant about that it was calling forth the Fortuna Magna. Maybe she was misreading the cards?

Rozaleen decided she would have to let her fate unfold, although she would take steps to lessen the anger of her captors, if possible. The Vehrteig has spoken the wisdom that her father and brothers had so often told her — that an amused *giorgio* is a generous *giorgio*. She would have to steel her nerves





and put on a show, just like her mother had taught her. Forcing a mischievous smile to spread across her face, she offered the deck to Rostoff to cut. "Infuse the cards with your life energy, Lord Rostoff. Cut the deck so that you may prepare my tarokka deck to reveal your future."

Rostoff reached for the deck, but then hesitated. He had seen the powers of this Vistani girl in action earlier and wondered if he really wanted to see more.

"Do cut the deck," Ashington ordered. "And spare us any superstitious second thoughts. I thought I had showed you all enough magic and trickery so that you could see through the games that this girl and her kin like to play."

Thus prodded, Rostoff cut the deck. Rozaleen turned the card thus revealed and placed it as the focus card for the reading.

That first card was the Guildsman, the Five of Coins.

"This represents you, milord Rostoff," Rozaleen said. "It shows that you are part of a tight circle of friends and that you share mutually in joy and misery. It is in the reversed position, which signifies that you and yours work almost entirely for your own benefit; everyone else is viewed as being there for your amusement and sport."

The second card placed was the Monk.

"Ah. The Ace of Glyphs. The card tells me that up to this point, you have lived your life boldly, confronting and overcoming every challenge you have faced with zeal. It, too, is reversed, which tells me that the challenges have probably been mostly related to wenching and drinking, but they have been challenges nonetheless. The cards say your life has been devoted to debauchery, milord." Everyone including Rostoff laughed. Ashington squeezed Rozaleen hard about the shoulders, stating, "Your mummery has some truth to it, girl. The cards are nailing Rostoff dead."

The third card was the Three of Swords, the Soldier.

"Interesting. The cards say that tonight you will be faced with a momentous choice, a choice that may determine how you spend all other nights that follow this one. The road to your fate forks ahead."

Blaumann laughed, saying "Yes . . . does he ravish you before or after he sates Ivana?"

"Or do I take them both at once?" Rostoff mused, again prompting much laughter among his

friends. Ivana said playfully, "Maybe the cards say that you will be spending every night alone from here on in."

Nodding and smiling, Rozaleen turned the fourth card. Her smile froze. The card, from the Fortuna Magna, was one of the most ominous cards: The Horseman. It was also in the same position as her own fortune.

"Milord, I fear your friends grow bored with this game. Shall we not play something more active?" Rozaleen said in a husky tone, directing her gaze seductively toward Ashington. The six nobles let out noises of protest, and Ashington squeezed Rozaleen's shoulders again. "Be calm, my friends. It is all part of the act. The lass is supposed to hesitate and seem fearful if this card appears. Is that not so?" Rozaleen nodded mutely. Ashington ordered her to continue, and she said in a quiet voice, "The cards say you must make the right choice tonight, Lord Rostoff. If you do not, I see nothing but misery and doom ahead for you."

Now it was Hanford's turn to laugh, as he said, "Better let me have a go with her first, Rostoff. The cards are saying Ivana's a jealous little vixen!"

Rozaleen turned the last card. It was The Broken One. Rozaleen had to fight back her panic, for she understood what the tarokka was telling her: Whatever the dark fate that awaited her, Rostoff would somehow share it.

"If you do not choose wisely milord, darkness awaits. The cards are very clear that a grim fate awaits you. Perhaps it is as milord Blaumann suggests and Ivana is a jealous woman. Perhaps you should leave me to entertain you with song? Your bard and I can perform a duet!"

Ashington laughed. "I thought that was your game, dear. No, you are ours to play with. The cards have already told you as much, have they not? I interpret them to mean that Rostoff has had so much drink that he will not be able to satisfy you or Ivana in the bed tonight!" Forcing a smile, Rozaleen replied, "You are wise in the ways of the tarokka, milord."

Ashington commanded her to tell Ivana's fortune next, just to see if she was indeed the "jealous vixen" that everyone assumed her to be. The deck was shuffled, the cards were cut, and Rozaleen started laying them.

The first card to appear was the Five of Coins, the same card that had started Rostoff's reading. Every card in Ivana's reading thereafter was identical to the ones that had been placed for Rostoff.





Fear and unease started to replace the raucousness among Ashington's six lackeys, and Maekon finally grew interested in the card readings, setting aside her lute and sauntering over to have a look.

Ashington ordered Rozaleen to lay another fortune, hissing to her that she had better be more entertaining with this one. Rozaleen replied that the cards themselves, not she, decided what faced they showed.

Ashington snarled that he was tired of her tricks. Rozaleen calmly turned to Hanford and asked him to cut the deck. Her fear was now gone, replaced by the calmness of someone who knew she was doomed, but who could take solace in the fact that her tormentors would somehow pay a price for their deeds. The tarokka had reassured her that the fates were still, ultimately, watching over the Vistani, even ones who foolishly leave behind the safety of their family in a fit of pique.

Rozaleen turned the cards mutely, quickly. Hanford's fortune was identical to that of Rostoff and Ivana. Ashington's temper flared and he slapped Rozaleen repeatedly across the face, insisting she stop playing card tricks if she valued her life. His friends, now somewhat sobered by the fear the tarokka cards had inspired in them, suggested he just forget it. Ashington ignored them and, holding a knife to Rozaleen's ribs, insisted that she foretell his future with a real reading. She shuffled the deck, he cut it, and the girl started laying the cards.

Ashington's foretelling was quite different and quite spectacular. As the cards were revealed, Rozaleen's voice grew strong with defiance while Ashington's attitude changed from anger to blind rage. He knew enough about the tarokka to know that what was emerging was a highly anomalous reading, even stranger than three identical ones in a row. All the cards were from the greater deck, the Fortuna Magna.

The first card revealed was the Dark Lord.

"This is you, Lord Ashington. You are a man of great power, the master of all within your grasp. Your friends view you with wonder, your enemies with fear."

The second card was the Temptress.

"This is your past, milord. Your whole life has been governed by your emotions and desires, and you have paid little heed to the noble code that your family once lived by."

The third card was the Beast.

"And on this night, this night of important choices and dire consequences, your passion will drive you to a rash decision that could spell doom for us all."

The fourth card revealed was the Innocent.

"But there is still hope. As lord and master here, you can save us all by making the right choice. There is a defenseless person who is at your mercy this very moment, a person who is important to the future of all who —

Rozaleen had started to draw the fifth and final card even as she was interpreting the fourth one, but she let out a sharp gasp and her eyes widened in pain and shock. A moment later, she let out her breath in a strangled cough. A red stain started to spread on the side of her white shirt as Ashington tossed his bloody dagger on the table. He took the next card on the top of the deck, shouting, "Enough of your pathetic games. Your last trick will never be finished!"

"It was no trick," Rozaleen gasped. She coughed, blood spraying from her lips. "None of you will leave this house alive unless I do, and you will never leave until your fortune has been told, Ashington. You have doomed every—

"Be quiet!" Ashington bellowed, closing his hands around Rozaleen's thin neck and dragging her to her feet even as her throat gave way and her windpipe collapsed. The unplaced card fluttered from her hand to the floor. Her blood-flecked lips continue to move as her eyes rolled back in her head and her hands scratched vainly at Ashington's forearms.

"Curse you," were the words her lips formed. *Curse you.*

Ashington's roar of anger drowned out the sound of Rozaleen's neck snapping. Still holding Rozaleen's limp form in one hand, he reached to the table and snatched the Innocent card. He shoved it violently into her mouth, shouting, "Take your image to your grave with you!" He threw the body to the floor and turned toward his ashen-faced friends. All but Maekon shrank away from his mad fury. "Dig the Vistana whore a grave in the cellar! By the time the sun comes up, I want nothing to remind me that she was ever here!"

Rostoff, Hanford, and Blaumann rushed to obey Ashington's orders. Maekon ushered the three terrified and weeping young noble women to their rooms upstairs and returned shortly to the grand hall. She found Ashington standing over Rozaleen's lifeless body with a tarokka card in his hand — the Five of Swords.





"It can mean anything," he muttered.

"It means that you have conquered her, milord. You should keep that card as a trophy." Maekon kissed him hard on the lips as if suddenly filled with boundless animal lust.

The next morning, all trace of Rozaleen was indeed gone, except for the Five of Swords card from her deck that Ashington kept turning over in his hand while brooding. Melanie wanted to leave, but Ashington insisted that no one would leave until he gave permission. The friends returned to drinking, but there was no merriment now. Maekon offered to play a tune to lighten the mood, but Ashington grabbed her lute and smashed it. He then demanded to know who had taken the tarokka deck, which he had just noticed was missing. When no one spoke up, Hannah started crying hysterically.

"The stories are true! A murdered Vistana's tarokka deck does disappear! She's cursed us! We're all going to die!"

"We are above peasant superstitions!" Ashington bellowed. He charged at Hannah and struck her. She reeled backward, striking her head on the fireplace mantle, leaving behind a red stain as she tumbled to the floor. Blaumann moved to stop further violence against her, but the crazed Ashington drew his sword and ran him through. "You will not turn on me, you bastards! The Vistani whore will not win! I am leaving this house!"

The ensuing fight was short and brutal. Ashington killed Hanford and Rostoff in combat, sliced Ivana's jugular when she tried to run for the door and chased Hannah upstairs and murdered her before she could barricade herself in her room. He returned to the common room to find Maekon gathering the pieces of her broken lute. Somehow, he had overlooked her while butchering his friends.

"Help me," he muttered, holding out a hand stained with the blood from the lethal wound Rostoff had inflicted upon him even as Ashington was cutting him down.

"You're beyond help," Maekon replied. "That is why I came here. And now you are dead, just as the Vistana promised."

"You! You are in league with her!"

"Hardly!" Maekon snickered. Ashington stumbled toward her, lifting his sword. She looked at him calmly, her pale blue eyes narrowing. "As I was saying, you're dead. Your magic protected you from her evil eye, but there is no protection from my gaze."

Ashington dropped without a sound. Maekon put the pieces of her lute in her backpack — next to Rozaleen's now-incomplete tarokka deck — and left Ashington Manor whistling merrily.

When the servants finally dared investigate the main house, they found their master in the middle of the floor, his hair white, a look of utter horror on his face, and the Five of Swords card on his chest.

For three years, Ashington Manor stood empty and abandoned. Tales of curses and vengeful Vistani started swirling around the place. Eventually, a distant cousin of the Ashingtons — Byron Ashington-Welles — decided he wished to cleanse the Ashington name. A follower of Hala, he convinced his fellow witches and warlocks to relocate their coven to Ashington Manor and establish a hospice. He insisted on calling it the Blessed Hall of Ashington.

Over the next thirteen years, the Blessed Hall of Ashington helped countless people. Eventually, the locals turned to the gentle healers more often for cures than they did the village priests. The dark tales of Lord Ashington's final night were all but forgotten. But the sole survivor of the events, Maekon, found herself drawn back to the place. At first, she thought that she would not find sustenance among such kindhearted men and women, but she sensed the stench of murder and evil on the leader of the men-at-arms that had been secured to protect the hospice from creatures of the night. It was seventeen years to the moment Ashington murdered Rozaleen that Maekon drove this dark-hearted warrior and his three most loyal soldiers to go on a murderous rampage through the hospice. As this slaughter progressed, Maekon amused herself by playing with Rozaleen's tarokka deck and laying mock fortunes. She had not really used the deck since she took possession of it 17 years prior, but had merely admired the grotesque artwork on the cards during dull moments. Now, she found to her surprise that every time she tried to lay the tarokka, the same cards kept coming up . . . the same four cards that had been on the table when Rozaleen was murdered. Maekon set this mystery aside, however, as her four pawns turned on one another and she finished them off with her death gaze.

Maekon moved on, and Ashington Manor was once again abandoned and made the focus of stories of dark tales and rumors. One of the few survivors of the night of horror said that she had





seen a ghostly gypsy girl standing in the main hall, so a belief that the Vistani cursed Ashington Manor was added to the mix.

A decade passed, and a highwayman named Jack Sallow looking to retire from the hard life on the road came upon the decaying building. None of the locals could point him to an owner but all knew the place was haunted. Not one to put much stock in the ramblings of superstitious peasants, he staked a claim on the house, poured money into repairing it, and within a few months had it converted into a fully functioning inn. Within four more years, “Jacks and Queens” had become renowned in the area as a den of vice and a good place for adventurers seeking information that might be otherwise hard to come by.

Jack, however, could not give up his wicked ways. His appetite for wealth did not permit him to settle for the income generated by a mere inn — even with gambling and prostitutes added to the mix. He took to murdering travelers he deemed would not be missed (or whose disappearance would not be traced to his establishment). Jack’s final victim, the teenaged daughter of a wealthy merchant, had run away from home to marry a young man her father didn’t approve of. Jack stole the jewels she had brought with her to finance her new life, and then gave her to his wicked friends. They buried her body in the cellar. When the girl’s fiancé arrived, they pretended never to have seen her.

The day after Jack and his partners in crime turned away the dead girl’s boyfriend, Maekon entered Ashington Manor’s courtyard for the third time, drawn there again by some subconscious force. This time she recognized the pattern — it was 17 years to the day since she had last been at Ashington Manor. In the years that had gone by, she had learned all she could about the tarokka deck she had claimed 34 years prior, and she had come to the conclusion that some strange cycle had been initiated when Rozaleen had been stopped from laying the final card. That was why in over 1,000 laying of cards over the past 17 years, the result had been the same every single time. Maekon didn’t mind that she too appeared to be part of the cycle, as it had no impact on her other than the desire to return to this spot every decade-and-a-half. And since twice now she had found men and women more than deserving of her attentions, she didn’t mind being a pawn of the supernatural one single bit.

The Curse of Ashington Manor

Maekon made short work of Jack and his shady associates and patrons, using her poison to turn them upon one another. As she had done previously, she sat calmly and turned tarokka cards while death and destruction unfolded around her. The cards never came up differently. When the last person at “Jacks and Queens” had either died or fled, Maekon gathered up her cards and once again faded into the night.

With a third inexplicable explosion of violence at the former Ashington Manor, the locals were now certain the place was cursed beyond all hope. Talk of the Ashington Curse took hold once and for all. However, even as the people in the area took to giving the place a wide berth, a Lamordian-born, Dementlieu-trained doctor named Karl Ildgaard was attracted to the place. Ildgaard held a firm belief that curses and prophecies were not the product of the supernatural but instead a product of human superstition and the power of belief. To prove his theory accurate, he abandoned his growing practice in Ludendorf and opened the Ildgaard Asylum in the old Ashington Manor. He initially had to bring in all his workers from outside the area, but as the years went by with no unusual events that couldn't be attributed to some of the inmates, Ildgaard's insistence that there was no such thing as the Ashington Curse bore fruit. Eventually locals came to work there in small numbers and menial capacities.

The power of Rozaleen's tarokka deck and her dying curse, however, could not be denied. Ildgaard had always been one to minimize expenses when it came to patient care, but as the years went by, he grew increasingly indifferent to the health and comfort of patients who had no relatives or whose family did not care for them. Eventually, all but the wealthiest of patients were treated as little more than animals and kept in barren cells once reserved for the deadliest of patients or those who might harm themselves. Those patients whom Dr. Ildgaard deemed incurable slowly starved to death whether they had family or not. The only exceptions were wealthy patients whose relatives paid astronomical rates for their treatment. Dr. Ildgaard never saw any evidence of the supposed gypsy curse, and the ghost that was reported to haunt the house was never seen by anyone but patients. Ildgaard continued to expand his mansion on Dementlieu's Sable Bay until it was one of the finest in all the domains.





Days before the anniversary of Rozaleen's death, a wealthy young woman paid a surprise visit to Dr. Ildgaard's asylum. While her father was being cared for better than most of Ildgaard's charges, she was appalled by what she saw. She told Ildgaard that she was going to hire men and have him relocated to another facility. Further, she swore that she would spread the word of the true state of the asylum and ruin him. Despite his great wealth and the fact that he had long since "proven" that there was no curse on Ashington Manor, Ildgaard could not allow the woman to unmask his depredations. He set two of the most violent inmates on her and then instructed the orderlies to bury her body in the garden behind his office.

As had happened twice before, Maekon arrived on the scene nearly simultaneously with the distorted replay of Rozaleen's murder. This time, she didn't even bother to learn the identity of the person in charge, but instead set about subverting the orderlies, releasing the inmates and spreading chaos. She killed Ildgaard by force of the curse rather than design, and laid two patterns with the deck to confirm their consistency with so many other previous readings. She left the asylum with a smile on her face as the lunatics set it ablaze, knowing that in another seventeen years, she would again find ready-made entertainment and sustenance.

The sudden eruption of violence at Ildgaard's asylum was the final incident needed to prove the haunting, the curse and every other rumor swirling around the old Ashington Manor. The widespread belief was that supernatural forces had reached out to punish Ildgaard for his arrogance in denying their existence, but a number of elderly in the area added more details. They remembered seeing the same dark-haired woman wandering the countryside around the time of each incident — and they had seen her again in the days before the Ildgaard disaster; she was drawn to the restless spirit of the murdered Vistani, they concluded. All this firmly ensconced Ashington Manor in local folklore as a place infamous enough that no one dared start another venture within it. The fire-damaged hulk of the once-stately house was left to the mercy of time and the elements.

Still, Rozaleen's curse reasserted itself. As the 17-year mark drew close again, a group of bandits decided to use the rotting structure for shelter and as a base of operations. When their leader decided he wanted a steadier source of healing and food, he decided to force a local shopkeeper and his murto



wife into assisting them. To prove they would not be safe until they helped him and his cutthroats, they kidnapped their teenaged daughter — a half-Vistani. Maekon is also drawing nearer, deciding to arrive early this time around so she can take advantage of the innocent death that will undoubtedly occur.

It is the final time that Rozaleen’s curse will manifest itself, and this is the point where the heroes step into the tale. They will either triumph, or they will be consumed as the house is forced into the Mists by out-of-control magical energies.

Introducing the Location

If “The Curse of Ashington Manor” is being used as a stand-alone scenario, bringing the characters to the house is fairly simple; they can come upon the building as they travel along a road. A storm or some other circumstance can drive them in.

Drawing a party into the scenario can be tricky in an ongoing campaign. We present five different story hooks for introducing the location in the game. Each one corresponds to a suit in the tarokka deck. The DM can select the one he thinks will be most likely to get his players interested, or he can randomly determine which method he wishes to use by turning a card from the tarokka deck. If the DM feels particularly adventuresome, he can have a player draw a card from the tarokka deck. This might be a good way to set the stage for what follows, perhaps helping to draw attention to the central role the tarokka deck plays in the events that follow.

Card Suit Location Introduction

Fortuna Magna	Family Honor
Coins	Maiden’s Rescue
Glyphs	To Root Out the Evil
Stars	Local Legend
Swords	Out of the Mists

Family Honor

One of the player characters has a questionable pedigree as far as bloodline is concerned. He or she is the illegitimate child of a nobleman, but the father’s identity is a secret his mother took with her to her grave. Until now that is.

After much detective work, an aged retainer of the presumed-extinct Ashington family has tracked

down the character and determined that he is the very last person with even a trace of the family’s blood in his veins. The former retainer’s agent relates the tale presented at the start of this chapter and says that if the party can resolve whatever curse lies over Ashington Manor and clear the name of the family, its holdings will go to the remaining heir (the character).

Maiden’s Rescue

Peter Vashon, a local shopkeeper of modest means approaches the party with a plea for help. His daughter, Miko, has been taken by a group of bandits that have been plaguing the area. They have demanded that he supply them with food and other goods for her safe return, but he knows that if he bows to their demands that they will probably kill her anyway — or at the very least continue to force him to help them. He offers to pay the characters the sum of 25 gp (all he can afford) and promises to help them any way he can when they are in the area. He warns the party that the site used for the bandits’ camp is rumored to be cursed, but that only his wife knows the details.

In fact, any “help” Peter offers is far more likely to come from his wife, Eliza. She is a Vistani mortu (Brd1/Exp5) who is a healer and wise woman of some repute in the area.

She has the following pertinent skills: Bluff +6, Heal +8, Hypnotize +8, Knowledge (arcana) +4, Knowledge (local) +6, Knowledge (religion) +6, Scry +4, and Sense Motive +4.

Eliza can relate the story that starts this chapter. In addition, she knows that the Vistani girl was of the Zarovan tribe and possessed a powerful rogue tarokka deck that vanished when she died.

To Root Out the Evil

A cleric of Hala with whom the party has a prior relationship (even if they haven’t recognized that the person is a servant of Hala until now) relates to them the story of Ashington’s demise, adding the additional detail that a few decades ago a distant relative of Lord Ashington tried to clear the family name by establishing a hospice in the building. Tragically, all the faithful and many of their charges died a few years later in an orgy of violence that reportedly made the original slaughter look like child’s play. The cleric wants the party to visit the site of the old Ashington Manor and defeat whatever evil dwells there.





Local Legend

While in a tavern or some other gathering place, or possibly attending one of the rare meetings of the Van Richten Society should any characters belong to that fellowship (see **Heroes of Light**), the party hears the tale featured at the beginning of this chapter. This is the most passive way to introduce Ashington Manor and its deadly mystery and works best if the DM is presenting it as one of several options for the party to tackle.

Through the Mists

The party can come upon Ashington Manor while lost in the Mists. If this method is used, we recommend using the Suit of Stars version without any additional set-up. If the party doesn't pass through the decayed gate into the courtyard beyond, the DM should have 1d4+1 mist horrors materialize. An additional 1d3 mist horrors form each round until the party goes through the gates. The mist horrors behave as described below in "No One Leaves Unless I Do!" in "Rules of the House."

Deciding Which Version to Use first

The way this scenario is structured, the DM can have any version of the house be the first one the PCs come upon, or he can eliminate ones he doesn't like. He can even dispense with the whole "time-shift"/"cursed" aspect of the location and just run an adventure where the party rescues a young woman from a terrible fate and save the other versions of the house for use as separate locations in future adventures. (If he chooses this option, he should have Maekon present in Ashington Manor when the party arrives, as they will be reaching it on the night that Rozaleen is fated to die.)

If the DM chooses to use all the versions, he can either pick the version he thinks will seem most enticing to his players, or he can allow the tarokka deck to decide by drawing a card. (If the "Local Legend" or "Maiden's Rescue" options were chosen to entice the party into seeking out the location, The Ruins or Ashington Manor are the versions that the party is expecting to find. However, it will lead to immediate heightened mystery if they reach the location and find that it is an inn or an insane asylum.

Variations on a Theme: The Rules of the House

The way in which Ashington Manor switches between its various incarnations is both random and specific. The house changes from one version to another under specific circumstances, but the version to which it changes is determined by drawing a card from the tarokka deck. The versions of the house and the suits of the tarokka deck line up as follows:

Card Suit Version of House

Fortuna Magna	Ashington Manor
Suit of Glyphs	The Hospice
Suit of Coins	The Inn
Suit of Swords	The Asylum
Suit of Stars	The Ruins

The floor plan for each of the versions remains the same, although some portions are destroyed in some versions, while others haven't been built in others. Detailed descriptions of all versions of the house are provided in the section titled "The House," which is keyed to the map on page 77. The following are quick descriptions of the house in its various states.

Ashington Manor

This is how the house appeared on the night Lord Ashington murdered Rozaleen before completing her tarokka pattern. It is the richly appointed home of a country lord. (Note: This version does not appear until after Maekon has joined the party; see below for details on this NPC. Until Maekon has arrived, the DM should redraw all Fortuna Magna results).

The Hospice

Founded by a cousin of Lord Ashington years later, this is a hospice operated by the Witches of Hala.

The Inn

Known as the "Jack and Queens," this inn is operated by a black-hearted and murderous rogue who preys upon the guests.

The Asylum

The building houses a hospital for the mentally deranged. A cruel and greedy doctor operates it.





The Ruins

The house has fallen to the ravages of fire and time, and has been abandoned.

Determining When a Shift Occurs

There are two ways the DM determines when Ashington Manor changes from one version to the next, by time limits and triggers.

Timed Shifts

The house only remains in a particular iteration for a period that is rolled by the DM each time it manifests. (The DM should make note of this and keep general track of how much in-game time goes by while the PCs explore the house and interact with NPCs.) No matter what the PCs do, a time-shift occurs when that particular time has passed. So, if the entire party stays in one room in hopes of preventing another shift, they will be hoping in vain. When the duration at a particular location expires, the DM should draw a card from the tarokka deck to see which version replaces it. If the card happens to be of the suit representing the current location, no shift occurs. The time period resets itself.

The period each version of the house remains stable are as follows:

- Ashington Manor (Fortuna Magna): 2d20 minutes. (Note: This version only changes when the time period it remains stable expires. Changes are never “triggered” through the method described below. Further, the Ashington Manor does not manifest until Maekon has joined the party.)
- The Hospice run by Worshipers of Hala (Glyphs). 4d6+10 minutes.
- The Jack and Queens Inn (Coins). 2d6+10 minutes.
- The Ildgaard Asylum (Swords). 1d10+10 minutes.
- The Ruins (Stars). 1d6+10 minutes.

Triggered Shifts

A second way to determine when the house changes from one version to another is to look at the map of Ashington Manor and track PC movement through the building. Several doorways on the map are marked with black dots. Whenever a PC crosses a marked door, the DM should turn a card from the tarokka deck. If the card is the Spirit from the Fortuna Magna, or the Four card from any of the Lesser Deck’s suits, no shift occurs. In all other instances, a time-shift occurs.

When a shift occurs, no matter how it is triggered, the entire house changes. If the party is split across several portions of the house, they all experience the shift as the house changes.

Shifts triggered by crossing through certain doorways only happen once every ten rounds (one minute). So, if the party is moving through different parts of the house and several of them pass through doorways marked on the map, only the first trigger every ten rounds is taken into account.

Physical Impact of the Shifts

When the shifts happen, the party experiences disorientation and vertigo. The more times they go through the experience, however, the less the physical sensations affect them.

The first time a shift occurs, party members are seized by a near-overwhelming sense of vertigo. Each character must make a successful Will save (DC28) or lose all actions for three rounds—until the world stops spinning around them. Any NPCs that “appear” when the house shifts to another version are not so hampered, so if the party has already made themselves a target to the version of Ashington and his henchmen, and one of them happens to be in the room, they may find themselves under an attack from which they won’t be able to defend themselves. If the save is successful, the party only loses actions for the round following the shift.

The second time a shift is experienced, the saving throw to resist the physical impact is DC20, with the third shift triggering a saving throw with a DC12. By the time the PCs are subjected to a fourth reality shift, they have become accustomed to it, and they no longer suffer any penalties.

“No One Leaves Unless I Do!”

Part of Rozaleen’s curse was that no would leave the house unless she did. Once the party has entered the grounds surrounding the Ashington house, the Mists of Ravenloft boil forth from the ground and sky and completely surround it. Whenever the party attempts to leave the grounds around the manor house—either through the gates, flying or climbing over the walls, or by teleportation magic, they find themselves engulfed by the Mists. Within three rounds, mist horrors start to materialize. 1d3 of the creatures appear, with an additional 1d3 arriving each round until the party returns to Ashington Manor.





Ending the Curse

The mists and the attendant mist horrors remain until the heroes have ended Rozaleen's curse. There are three parts to doing this.

- Restore Rozaleen's tarokka deck to its complete state. This is done by retrieving the Four of Swords from Ashington and claiming the rest of the deck from Maekon (or waiting for it to manifest in the Grand Hall (area 5) the first time that version of the house manifests after Maekon joins the party.

- Finish the tarokka pattern Rozaleen was laying when she was murdered.

- Finding Rozaleen's body and either exhuming it, or performing appropriate funeral rites over it.

Once the curse is ended, there is one final time-shift, one that returns the house to whatever the present-day state it was in when the party entered.

The Cursed

The following NPCs appear in some form or another in most versions of the house. The strange curse upon the place is causing those who were present the night Rozaleen uttered it to "stand-in" for those who were actually present during the subsequent anniversaries of her death. Some undergo minor changes, but for the most part, they stay the same. The variable portion of their stats are mentioned in the descriptions here, along with the briefest of class and combat information, but the full statistics is presented in the Appendix of this volume.

Rozaleen, Doomed Vistani Girl

Rozaleen is a slender, dusky-skinned girl, some 17 years old. Her eyes are deep brown and her long hair is deepest black. She wears a loose-fitting white blouse and a colorful, multilayered skirt. Around her wrists and her left ankle she wears hoops that jangle slightly when she moves. She is barefoot.

Rozaleen is killed by Lord Ashington after he and his friends abuse and humiliate her during a night of drunken debauchery. He ultimately forces her to tell their fortunes using her Tarokka deck. In reading after reading, Rozaleen declares they will die. Before she finishes Lord Ashington's reading, he stabs her. Rozaleen pronounces a curse on her tormentors and killers, saying that this house will

be their prison until Ashington pays for his crimes and she is liberated. Ashington strangles her to death as she finished her curse.

Rozaleen in the House

Rozaleen only appears in Fortuna Magna version, or as a haunt at random times in map areas 5 and 13. In the other four versions, her corpse is buried beneath the stone floor of the cellar (area 13). She is described in detail in the Appendix.

Quick Stats: Exp1/Sor1; hp 8; AC 11; Init +1; Atk +1 (unarmed); F +0, R +1, W +5. Special Note: Rozaleen is a Vistani.

Lord Herod Ashington, Vile Nobleman

Ashington is a dark-haired man with sharp features. His bearing and diction mark him as a member of society's upper crust, and everything he does he does with the confidence of someone who considers himself the master of all around him. He wears the finest of clothes and carries the highest quality of weapons.

Ashington is a genial and generous host, but a dangerous temper lurks just beneath his polished veneer and it is unleashed on anyone who he views as making light of his authority. He is fundamentally a coward, however, and he will always attack the target of his ire when the subject is either unawares or already engaged in a fight with his three minions, Hanford, Rostoff, and Blaumann. In addition to his cowardice, Ashington is also a sadist who enjoys nothing more than terrorizing helpless victims.

Ashington in the House

In all versions except Glyphs, Ashington is the person in charge in the house. In all versions, he is evil through-and-through and has the eventual goal of killing the PCs, particularly if they start asking questions about dead Vistani girls and ghosts haunting the house. Ashington's statistics and full description appear in the Appendix, and the following modifications are applied to his character as it appears in the different versions of the house. In all cases, Ashington knows that he has buried a murder victim in the cellar, even if he believes it to be a different victim each time.

Every iteration of Ashington, except the one in the Ashington Manor version, carries the Five of Swords from Rozaleen's tarokka deck, the card he prevented her from laying when she performed her final reading. From time to time, he draws it from





a pocket and turns it absentmindedly in his fingers. If a PC asks about the card, he quickly puts it away and says the card is a reminder of a long-gone woman. (A successful Spot check of DC12 allows a character to see that the card portrays a Vistani woman with broken manacles on her wrists, on her knees before five sword-wielding figures emerging from the Mists. She is bleeding from several wounds, some of which are almost certainly fatal.)

Fortuna Magna: Basic version as he appears in the Appendix.

Glyphs: Ashington is a dark-hearted mercenary named Gavel who is in charge of the men-at-arms who protect the hospice. No change to his character, except that he wears +2 *chainmail*. A few weeks earlier, he raped and murdered a priestess. He and his lieutenants buried her in the cellar and convinced the other priests and priestesses that she ran off with one of the soldiers.

Coins: Ashington is the innkeeper, a violent rogue named Jack. His guests check in, but they often don't check out. He has them murdered, buries behind the inn, and shares the loot gained with his black-hearted lackeys. This version of Ashington is unchanged from the basic version in the Appendix, except that his background is that of a tomb-robber and highwayman who used his ill-gotten wealth to open an inn.

Ashington is targeting the PCs either because he wants their wealth, or because they are asking questions that make him think they are onto his activities. A few days prior, he raped and murdered a young woman who had fled her home intending to elope with her lover, and he fears that the party may be agents hired by the family in order to locate her.

Swords: Ashington takes the place of Dr. Ildgaard, the man in charge of the asylum. He appears as he does in the Magna Fortuna version of the house, but is usually wearing a spotless white coat over his other clothes. The Five of Swords is tucked in the breast pocket of this coat.

Some days prior, he murdered a young woman who wanted to take her wealthy uncle away from the asylum, after seeing the appalling conditions. The good doctor wasn't about to see control of a patient's wealth slip away, so he had his orderlies kill her and bury her in garden.

Stars: Ashington is the leader of a pathetic group of bandits who are using the decaying ruins of the house as a campsite. He is known as Dagger,

a name derived from his weapon of choice and the curved blade that is never far from his person. His fine clothing is threadbare and mud-spattered. His statistics are mostly identical to those in the Appendix, but in addition to his dagger, he carries a deception blade (+1 *shortsword* that grants him a +5 competency bonus to Bluff checks when his hand is resting on its hilt).

Continuing the distorted echoes of the terrible night when Rozaleen died, Ashington and his men have captured a young half-Vistani. She is still alive when the party first enters this version, but may not remain so for long. (See the description of map area 5 for details.)

Quick Stats: Ari2/Exp2/Rog4; hp 41; AC 13; Init +5; Atk +6 (long sword +2 or dagger +2, sneak attack +2d6 damage); F +3, R +5, W +7.

Rostoff, Hanford, and Blaumann, Black-hearted Lackeys

Rostoff, Hanford, and Blaumann are handsome and wealthy men in their mid twenties. Their appealing looks, however, hide truly twisted and evil spirits. They follow Ashington's every command and whim, delighting in taking part in every twisted act of evil or sacrilege he concocts. When Ashington murdered Rozaleen, they were planning a dice game to see which of them would be second in line to rape her once Ashington was done.

In all versions of the house, Rostoff, Hanford, and Blaumann are Ashington's partners in evil. Their stats remain mostly the same, undergoing only minor changes in the Swords version.

Fortuna Magna: The three nobles appear as described in the Appendix.

Glyphs and Coins: The evil trio is as they appear in the Appendix, except that they are dressed like typical sell-swords or ruffians instead of noblemen. They are Ashington's long-time lieutenants.

Swords: Rostoff, Hanford, and Blaumann are orderlies at the asylum. Their statistics are as they appear in the Appendix, but their ranks in Knowledge (royalty and nobility) are replaced by ranks in Healing.

Stars: They are not present in this version of the house, except if certain random events occur.

Quick Stats: Ari1/War1; hp 13; AC 11 (AC 15 in armor); Init +1; Atk +2 (long sword or dagger); F +2, R +1, W +2.





Melanie, Hannah, and Ivana: Women of Low Character

Melanie, Hannah, and Ivana are three wild young women in their twenties. In most versions, they are as cruel and vicious as their male companions, Rostoff, Hanford, and Blaumann. The three were equal participants in the abuses that were heaped upon Rozaleen, and they laughed and mocked her as Ashington choked the life out of her.

The stats for these three remain mostly the same throughout, undergoing only major changes in the Coins and Swords versions.

Fortuna Magna: Melanie, Hannah, and Ivana appear in this version as they are described in the Appendix—three decadent and thoroughly corrupt young aristocrats.

Glyphs: The three women are completely different in this version, even if their physical appearance are that of Melanie, Hanna and Ivana. In this version, they are kindhearted, 1st-level NG clerics devoted to Hala. They still have the refined manners and bearings of noble women, but in this version they have the noble spirits to go with their veneer. They can each prepare two divine spells each day.

Coins: The three women are beautiful barmaids of a particularly wanton and forward stripe. They wear skirts that are slit to show lots of thigh, and wear blouses that show lots of cleavage. One or more of them will try to seduce a PC. If the character falls victim to their wiles, they take him to one of the rooms (area 11), offer him drugged wine (DC19 Fort save or fall asleep; -2 penalty to attack rolls and skill checks due to grogginess for 8 less victim's Constitution bonus hours if the save is successful). They wait to see what Ashington's decision is regarding the character, but they are expecting to murder and rob him.

Swords: The three are absent in the Swords version, unless the DM wishes to add them among the lunatics. Perhaps one of them could be a dangerous maniac, in which case her stats conform to the ones presented in the map key under area 3.

Stars: Melanie, Hannah, and Ivana are absent.

Quick Stats: Ari2; hp 9; AC 11; Init +1; Atk +1 (dagger or unarmed); F +0, R +0, W +3.

Men-at-Arms

These men are present in all versions of the house. Their locations are noted in the map keys. Their appearances vary slightly from version to version, but their statistics are always the same.

Fortuna Magna and Glyphs: These are typical sell-swords, hired to protect the residents of the house. They obey Ashington's orders and will fight to protect him and the other named NPCs or guests of the house from attack.

Coins: In this version, they are a mix of inn patrons and guards hired by wealthier guests. They are not necessarily going to come to the aid of Ashington or other of the named NPCs, although it is possible that one of the barmaids may attempt to trick a small group of them into attacking a PC ("he insulted me" or "he called you weaklings") for the sake of malicious sport.

Swords: They serve as guards for the asylum. They come to the defense of the doctor and the orderlies when called. They also seal the place tight if an alarm is sounded, not allowing anyone to leave.

Stars: The men-at-arms are present as a group of bandits. They are filthy, lean, and they assault the PCs on sight. See the map key for their locations.

Quick Stats: War1; hp 8; AC 14; Init +0; Atk +3 (melee long sword or dagger, ranged short bow); F +2, R +0, W +0.

Servants and Travelers

These are bystanders in every location. They may serve as sources of information for the characters, but they never engage in combat except in self-defense. In fact, if the PCs seem suspicious in versions corresponding to the Fortuna Magna, Glyphs, or Coins, these characters are likely to alert Ashington about their activities. In the Swords version, these characters are those among the inmates who are harmless. The location and number of these characters are noted on the map key.

Like the named NPCs, these characters appear to be the same people in each version, but they undergo far more radical changes. These characters are "extras," both in the sense of their role in the adventure and in the role they are being forced to play in Rozaleen's curse. Ashington's servants are guilty of indifference toward Rozaleen's fate but none of them actively participated in the deed. They have been swept up in the curse almost by accident, and they play no direct part, so their numbers vary from version to version, depending on who was present on the final night of the cycle in question.

Fortuna Magna: These are the servants of the house—the butler, the footman, the maids, the





stable hands, the cooks, and so on. They are fearful of Ashington and his friends, and even more afraid of losing their positions in the household, so they will report any illicit activities on the part of the PCs they happen to notice.

Glyphs: These NPCs are the patients and travelers seeking help and rest at the hospice.

Coins: In this version, they are travelers who are either staying at the inn, or locals enjoying an ale in the tavern.

Swords: Filthy, clad in ragged sackcloth, and thin from malnourishment, the NPCs here are the pathetic inmates in the asylum. They are even more harmless in this version than in others, because they are lost in their own madness.

Stars: None present in this version.

Quick Stats: Com1; hp 4; AC 10; Init +0; Atk +0 (dagger, or unarmed, +0 damage); F +0, R +0, W +0.

Other Key NPCs in the House

There are two other nonplayer characters that are featured in the evil morass of Ashington Manor: the monstrous Maekon and the innocent Miko.

Maekon. Beautiful Creature of Darkness

Maekon is a dark-haired beauty with sharp features and large, expressive black eyes. She is dressed in practical traveling clothes and carries a small pack on her back and a lute by her side. Although she appears to be a human bard, Maekon is actually a Vehrteig, a rare creature who feeds off depravity and violence. (Vehrteig are described in full in the DM's Appendix. A more complete description, as well as full stats for Maekon can be found there as well.)

Maekon in the House

Maekon was present in the house on the night Rozaleen was murdered, and she is directly responsible for the deaths of Ashington and his cronies. She has carried Rozaleen's tarokka deck with her since that night, and although her kind is immune to curses and charms of all kinds—even those of the Vistani—the deck has been drawing her back to the house every 17 years so that distorted reflections of the events that night can be presented.

Maekon hasn't been swept up in Rozaleen's curse, so her presence in the house is like those of the party members. When the time frame of the

house shifts, she experiences the shift just like they do.

Maekon arrives at the house when the DM determines it best moves the story along. She is initially confused and disoriented. She quickly comes to realize that some bizarre merging of all the similar bloody situations that have unfolded in recent decades in the house is taking place, and then she becomes playful. Attempts the party makes to befriend characters they meet will be undermined by the bard through insults and jibes; she will pretend that she didn't mean to cause trouble if confronted. She will play completely ignorant of what is going on. If the party gives her too much trouble, she may turn her powers on them—although this is a last resort for her. She is having too much fun and will only attack if attacked first.

Maekon's playfulness comes to an end the moment she sees Rozaleen's tarokka deck on the table of area 5. A quick check of her pack shows her that the item that's been with her for so many years has somehow ended up back in the hands of Rozaleen. She grows nervous and fearful, encouraging the party to stop Ashington from killing the girl and retrieving the deck. She doesn't know what's happening, but she fears it can't be good. If the party presses her for more information, she will break down and reveal her inhuman nature to them. (She won't go into details about how she sustains herself, but will merely reveal that her kind is as much a part of The Land as the Vistani are.)

Quick Stats: Brd6/Rog4; hp 4; AC 10; Init +8; Atk +8 (dagger, or unarmed, +1 damage); F +4, R +13, W +6. Special Note: Maekon is a Vehrteig.

Miko, Innocent in Mortal Danger

This seventeen year-old girl is dressed in a tattered and dirty dress of the style favored by the town-based merchant class. Her dark hair, dusky skin, and shockingly pale blue eyes mark her as a half-blooded Vistani. She is a blooming exotic beauty who has inherited the best traits from her bloodlines.

The daughter of a small-town merchant and a mortu of Zarovian blood, Miko spent her childhood shielded from the horrors of the world. The shattering of her innocence started when she was abducted by the evil bandit-leader Dagger. Her sanity is being stretched as in the blink of an eye, Dagger and his men seemed to alter their appearance, becoming different people yet who still behaved as those who kidnapped her.





Miko is initially encountered in The Ruins iteration of Ashington Manor. While there was a better than even chance that she would have faced a horrible death at the hands of Dagger, once she was swept up in the collapsing magical energies surrounding Ashington Manor, her death was almost assured—she is the “stand-in” for Rozaleen. Only decisive action on the part of the PCs will save her life once they encounter her and her abductors.

Quick Stats: Com1; hp 4; AC 10; Init +0; Atk +0 (dagger, or unarmed, +0 damage); F +0, R +0, W +0. **Special Note:** Miko is a Half-Vistani.

The Variations of the House

Here is the key to Ashington Manor, as well as the events that take place in each area and time period.

The first paragraph in each entry provides the general description of the area, most often the elements of it that remain constant from version to version.

1. Gate

This gateway is the only easy access point through the 12-foot, solid stone wall that surrounds Ashington Manor.

Fortuna Magna: two massive oak doors that are reinforced with wide iron bands secure the gateway. Under normal circumstances, the gate remains open from dawn until dusk, but if there are dangers in the area—bandits, rumors of rampaging werebeasts or wandering undead—the gates are closed either by the command of Ashington or one of the older house servants. During the night, the gates are opened only for Ashington; others can die screaming just outside the wall without moving the hearts of those who dwell within. The gates are secured by placing a heavy wooden beam in a set of braces.

During the day, two men-at-arms guard the gateway. Unless they know the visitors or have been told to expect them, one of the warriors asks visitors to wait at the gate while the other notifies the butler who they are and why they are here. Ashington will agree to see virtually anyone, particularly if he thinks it can add to the entertainment of his friends.

After dark, the gates are not opened for anyone but Ashington.

Glyphs: As above, except the kindhearted Witches of Hala are willing to open the gates after

dark if someone calls to them. Ashington, Rostoff, and two men-at-arms are the ones who open it. Ashington closely questions the characters before giving the access. If the characters seem hostile or confrontational, he makes them stay in the stables until morning. He will cut the questions short if a mist horror coalesces, or if one is already attacking the party when he is called to open the gate. Unless a party member is wounded, or they claim to have a desperate need to speak with the leader of the hospice, he quarters them for the night in rooms above the stables (area 11).

Coins: As the Fortuna Magna result. The gates are closed at sunset and are not opened under any circumstances.

Swords: As the Coins result, except characters who are beaten into submission by the three orderlies are chained in one of the cells (area 3). If the characters severely injured any of the three (inflicting more than 10 points of damage), they are placed in a cell with one of the homicidal maniacs.

Stars: Broken boards that are gray with rot lie scattered beyond the gaping archway in a moss-covered stone wall. Twisted, broken and rusty hinges dangle uselessly from the arch’s sides. At its apex, someone has painted a crude symbol that has almost been worn away by wind and weather. (Successful use of appropriate skills, class abilities or spells reveals that it is a Vistani symbol that means “Danger.”)

2. Courtyard

A broad cobblestone courtyard stretches toward a stone building directly ahead from the gate and to a wooden structure on the left.

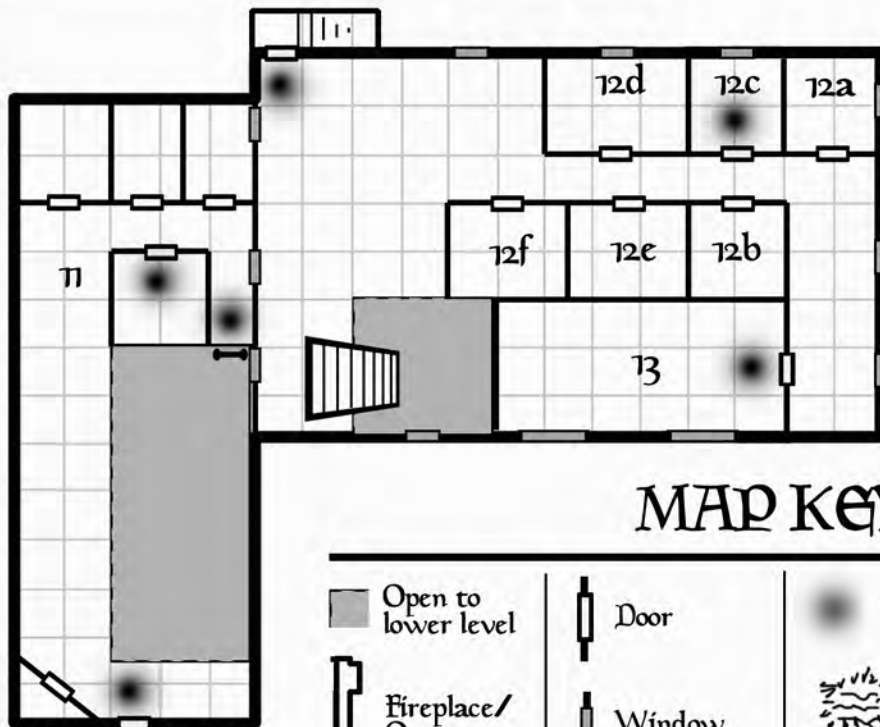
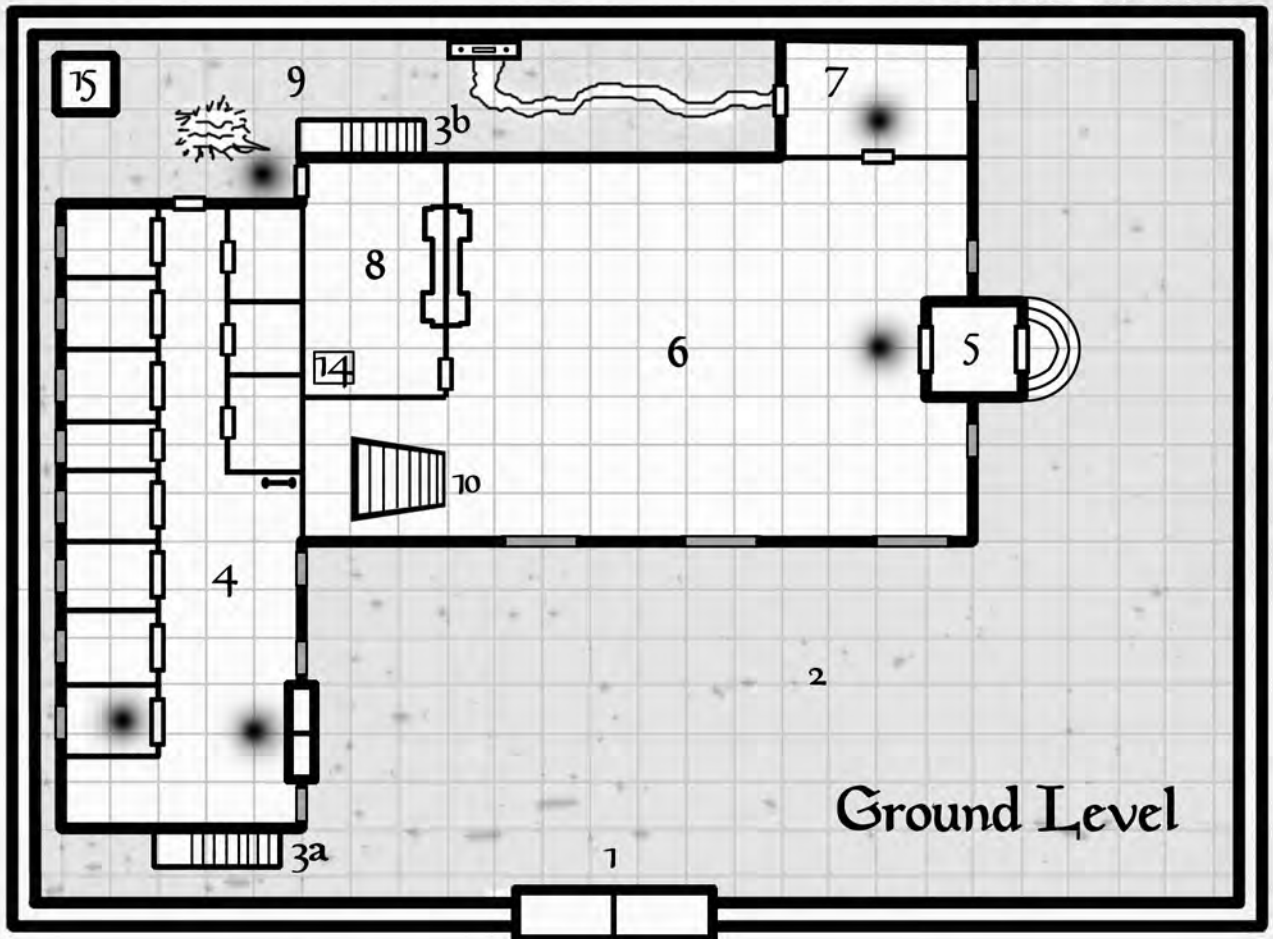
The stone building is two stories high, with a steep roof covered by black shingles. The windows are tall and plentiful, and a set of wide steps leads up to a large door that is flanked by columns. Gargoyles perch on the corners of the roof.

The wooden structure has the look of a stable.

Fortuna Magna: A carriage stands in the courtyard, and a handsome young servant is tending to the four white horses that draw it. Inside the carriage are upholstered benches and a brace holding a stoppered carafe and four wide crystal goblets. The wine in the carafe is of the finest Richemulot has to offer, although there is barely half a glass left. The goblets are wide enough that it is possible to drink from them without spilling if they are less than half full and the carriage is traveling along a decent road.




Each Square equals 5 Feet




MAP KEY


 Open to lower level


 Fireplace/Oven

 Shrine

 Door

 Window

 Ladder

 Time Shift

 Garden

 Stairs Up

 Stairs Down



The carriage belongs to Hannah, and it brought her and the other two women to Ashington Manor. The servant, Hannah's coachman, will not allow the PCs to enter the carriage unless they successfully use Bluff or Diplomacy on him (DC13 and a decent sounding rationale from a player) and he will call for help if threatened or ignored. 1d4 warriors answer the call within 1d8+2 rounds. If enough of a ruckus is raised, Hanford, Blaumann, and Rostoff will also emerge from the house. How they react depends on whether they have interacted with the PCs before.

Glyphs and Coins: During daylight hours, there are 1d8+2 random characters coming and going in the courtyard at any given time; the DM can include any of the six major supporting characters (Rostoff, Ivana, and so on) in the mix if he chooses. No one challenges the party unless they seem like they are injured, confused, or obviously out to cause trouble.

At night, there are 1d2+1 warriors in the courtyard, either just getting a bit of fresh air, or engaged in an argument. There may also be a couple of wagons (with trade goods) or carriages parked here. If so, the horses are in the stable. There is also a 50% chance that Rostoff or Hanford is in the courtyard (DM's choice). If so, the NPC may try to catch a lone PC off his or her guard and attack, depending on how previous encounters have gone.

Swords: During the day, there is a 50% chance that Hanford and Blaumann are standing near the gate, passing a flask of brandy back and forth and gossiping. There are 1d3+1 other random staff members coming and going in the courtyard. The PCs will always be challenged about what their reason for being there is, but Hanford and Blaumann will be hostile and suspicious in their stance when questioning the characters.

Stars: The courtyard is strewn with charred, rotting timber and other debris. It is deserted. A successful Listen check (DC 12) reveals the sound of laughter and rough voices coming from within the austere, soot-smearred main building (area 5 and area 6-12).

3. External Stairs

These narrow stairs climb steeply to a small door that gives access to the first floor.

Fortuna Magna and Glyphs: 3a provides access to the rooms above the stables. 3b does not exist, nor does the door that opens from it. The

door from 3a is flimsy and can be barred from the inside by placing a board in a set of braces but otherwise features no lock. (Inserting a sword between the doorframe and the door and sliding it forcefully upward can remove the board.)

Coins and Swords: 3a provides access to the rooms above the stables from the courtyard, while 3b gives access to the rooms above the main hall from the garden. The doors at the top of the stairs are sturdy and both fitted with simple locks. They are usually locked from sundown to sunrise in the Coins version, and always locked in the Swords version. In the Coins version, Ashington has the key, while in the Swords version, the doctors and orderlies all have keys. The door granting access to 3b likewise is only present in the Coins and Swords versions.

Stars: 3a is so badly rotted that even a slight breeze causes it to sway and creak. Many steps have already fallen to the ground below, and the stairs are so plainly unstable that it is not even necessary to roll any checks for a character to notice. If a PC or NPC tries to climb 3a, the structure will collapse, causing 1d12 points of damage to the character. A successful Tumbling check allows the character to halve the damage. 3b has been reduced to a small pile of charred, rotting timber among the weeds and wild potato plants in the back of the building. Where the door once stood is now just a dark, gaping hole.

4. Stables

A broad set of heavy wooden doors lead from the courtyard into a darkened building. Small, high-set windows allow a little light to filter in, while carefully hung oil lamps provide a little more. The wicks sputter within the lamps, causing shadows to move across the walls.

Fortuna Magna: The stables are being used as stables. Six of the finest riding horses are here—three belonging to Rostoff, Hanford, and Blaumann, and the remaining belonging to Ashington. (Ashington enjoys riding across his lands at least twice a week. Two of his guards accompany him on the other horses he owns, and often one or more of his friends will be along as well. The peasants in the area do not look forward to Ashington's "inspections.")

During the day, two servants are here—the stable master and the stable boy. At night, the stable boy is sleeping on a bed of hay in the stall furthest from the entrance.





Glyphs: Four light warhorses from Nova Vaasa are stabled here, along with 1d2+1 additional riding horses. If there are any wagons or carriages present, the draft horses that belong to them are stabled as well. The light warhorses belong to Ashington and his lieutenants. The other members of the mercenary company travel on foot.

During daylight hours, one servant and one warrior—a stable boy and one of the mercenaries—are in the stables. The servant sleeps here at night, on a bed of hay in the stall furthest from entrance.

Coins: 1d4+2 riding horses of varying quality are stabled here, along with 1d2+1 donkeys. Any draft animals belonging to carriages or wagons present in the courtyard are likewise stabled here.

During daylight hours, one stable hand (a servant) is present. At night, only the animals are present, some whinnying restlessly as if sensing some unseen threat. Unlike some inns, the “Jacks and Queens” does not allow the stables to double for cheap lodgings. Hanford does random checks (going to the stables on a 1 on a d8, with a check made every three hours) and if he finds anyone sleeping in the stables on the sly, he proceeds to beat the sleeper to death.

Swords: The stable serves as the main dormitory for the asylum’s inmates. The sounds of incoherent babbling and the stench of excrement and unwashed human bodies waft from the small windows.

Inside, the stalls have been converted to cells, each housing 1d6 lunatics of the same sex per cell. If a cell only contains one person, that indicates he or she is dangerously violent and will attack anyone who opens the cell. All cells have wooden walls with iron doors that are secured from the outside with sliding metal bars. A hinged metal plug, allowing a person to look inside without needing to open the door, covers a peephole in each door.

Stars: The roof has partially collapsed, burying the eight northernmost cells under a jumble of rotting, charred lumber. The doors to the other cells have fallen from their frames. There are no bodies in the southern cells, as the inmates were either freed on that final terrible night to rampage through the asylum, or their burned bodies have been dragged off and consumed by animals or creatures even more bestial.

5. Entry

A large, brassbound door made from dark wood stands nearly ten feet in height. A large brass knocker in the shape of a winged gargoyle is at its center, roughly eye-height of an average adult human male.

Beyond the door is a cloakroom with a black-and-white tiled floor and a high ceiling. Eight pegs shaped like clawed hands line the walls at shoulder height, and long racks run the length of the chamber at few inches above the floor, to the left and right.

Fortuna Magna: The door is unlocked. If the party knocks, Blaumann comes to the door. If the PCs aren’t immediately hostile, he gladly ushers them into the Grand Hall (area 5) and the presence of his friends and the captive Vistani girl. He hopes the party may be able to defuse Ashington’s growing ugly mood.

Three fine women’s cloaks and four men’s cloaks hang on the claw-shaped pegs. A pair of highly polished riding boots stands on the left rack.

Glyphs and Coins: In both versions of the house, a warrior is here when the PCs first enter; he opens the door if they knock, looking at them with a mix of confusion and irritation. He will take them to area 6 if the party asks to see whoever is in charge. (He takes them to the head of the Hala hospice whose office is in area 6, or to the bar—although he doesn’t so much introduce them to anyone as just ignore them completely once there.)

Cloaks and capes hang on the pegs—some threadbare, some fit for kings. The same is true of the boots and shoes on the racks. The clothes hang two or three deep on some of the pegs.

Swords: Several plain brown hooded cloaks hang here. (Asylum staff when they have to go from the main house to area 3 or other places outside the main building use them during adverse weather.)

Stars: The brass is tarnished and corroded and the boards are charred, rotted, and warped. The door is barely holding on the hinges. The floor within is caked with mud and offal and many of the tiles are cracked or missing. All the pegs are gone, and the boot racks have been reduced to so much charred kindling.

6. Grand Hall

An expansive, high-ceilinged room has walls and floors of dark wood. A huge fireplace capped by





a mantle made from black- and red-veined marble takes up much of the wall, while three tall windows stretch upward in another wall. Overhead, suspended by a series of chains and pulleys, at the exact center of the room, is a massive chandelier.

A broad set of stairs leads up to the second floor, while sturdy-looking oak doors lead to other rooms. A third oak door leads to the entry hall and the outside.

Fortuna Magna: The grand hall contains the finest of furnishings. Near the fireplace stand three overstuffed chairs and a small table with a snifter of brandy and three crystal glasses. A long table flanked by four high-backed chairs on each side, with a larger, more ornate chair at one end, stands directly below the chandelier. Near the windows is another table that is flanked by small benches and wooden chairs. On the wall, dozens of stuffed animal heads snarl down at inhabitants of the room—bears, boars, panthers . . . even a few strange reptilian beasts.

The first time the PCs arrive here, Rozaleen, Ashington, and the other main players in the curse are seated around the table by the windows. The chandelier blazes overhead, and the fireplace roars with a healthy fire, casting plenty of light in the chamber. Rozaleen is about to start on her final fortune. Ashington has just threatened to kill her if she doesn't start to entertain him and his guests. The arrival of the PCs buys Rozaleen more time, as Ashington and his lackeys will engage them in conversation.

Although this version of the house is almost as it appeared on the night of Rozaleen's death, Maekon is not sitting at the fireplace as she did. If she has already joined the party the first time they enter this version of the house, Ashington reacts with surprise to her appearance. He says she is familiar, asking if they've met before. Maekon turns on her most seductive charms, stating that she doesn't think they have, but she wants to get to know him know. (PCs present can make DC11 Spot checks to notice that the Vistani girl already seemed frightened, but that she recoils with even stronger terror from Maekon.)

Glyphs: Rows of beds stand in the end of the room closest to the fireplace, while three long tables flanked by benches stand at the other. There are three rows of three beds, and the long tables can seat ten people each. The area in front of the entrance is open and free of clutter.

The operators of the hospice allow needy travelers and patients who are not contagious or seriously injured to rest in the beds here. When the party appears in this version, lightly wounded people and one tired traveler occupy five of the beds. Four members of the hospice are eating along with three other travelers. (All the NPCs here have servant and traveler stats, although the DM can assume that the hospice members can each cast 1 0-level and 1 1st-level divine spell.)

When the PCs first appear in the common room, they are offered hospitality, as well as to have any injuries treated. The diners are discussing the rumor of a ghostly Vistana that appears to tell fortunes. The clerics of Hala state that they have heard no such rumors, and further add that the founder of the hospice is very hurt by the vicious rumors that circulate about his relative, Lord Herod Ashington. (The DM can relay the background of Ashington here if he wishes, although the followers of Hala will not bring up the rumors about his evil nature, because they know it offends their leader.)

If one or more PCs are alone in the common room late at night—aside from those sleeping in the beds—the DM should draw a card from the deck. If it belongs to the suit of Coins, Stars, or Swords (or Spades in a normal deck), Rozaleen's restless spirit manifests itself. She sits at the end of the table, which stands at the exact spot where Rozaleen laid her final tarokka patterns. The transparent image of the young Vistani girl draws cards from an equally transparent tarokka deck. The haunt turns the cards silently, a vaguely superior look upon her face as she lays out the basic cross. She then seems to be jerked about by an invisible force and interacts with someone the PCs can't see. The smug look on her face doesn't falter as she gathers up the cards, shuffles them, and waits while the invisible person with her cuts the deck. She then proceeds to lay another basic cross, her lips moving silently, mouthing words. Her expression suddenly changes, shifting quickly from smug, to shock, to pain. A red stain spreads rapidly across the side of her white blouse and her head angles back as invisible hands close around her neck. Her lips continue to move silently and then she suddenly blinks from view.

The ghostly vision is reenacting the last tarokka pattern that Rozaleen completed and her unfinished final one. If characters move close, they can follow cards as they are placed in the fashion





described in “What Has Gone Before,” from Rozaleen placing Ivana’s foretelling to her death at the hands of Ashington.

A character with ranks in the Read Lips skill can attempt to discern what Rozaleen is saying (DC15 skill check, because of the transparency of the image). The apparition cannot be harmed, nor can it be communicated with. It runs through its reenactment of Rozaleen’s final minutes, and then blinks from sight as suddenly as it appeared. The image only appears once per incarnation of the house.

Coins: This is the inn’s common room. Most of it is given over to tables flanked by benches (three can sit on each bench), although several chairs stand in a disorderly half-circle by the fireplace. The floorboards are worn, and they are stained in many spots either by spilled wine or blood.

When the party appears here, there is a bard sitting in one of the chairs near the fireplace, playing a tune on a flute while a scantily clad young woman dances seductively. Men at nearby tables leer and offer the occasional outburst and tossed coins. Eleven NPCs are seated at various tables around the room, and two waitresses in slitted skirts and barely buttoned blouses serve food and wine. All the NPCs conform to the servants and travelers statistics, except for the waitresses, who are Hannah and Melanie. One of the two women quickly acknowledges the party, welcoming them to the “Jack and Queens” and leads them to a table. Even before they are seated, she starts oozing seductive charms toward the best-dressed PC with the highest charisma. (If another character ends up paying the bill, she turns her attention to that one, while the other waitress picks up where she left off with the first target.)

If the PCs are by themselves in the common room late at night, the DM should turn a card from the tarokka deck. The phantasm of Rozaleen manifests if the card is from the suits of Glyphs, Swords, or Stars, and its appearance follows the details presented above, under the “Glyphs” option.

There is a danger in the grand hall that hasn’t previously been present. While it served as a hospice, a dying and hopelessly mad sorcerer cast spells that caused a hearth fiend to take up residence in the fireplace. Ever since then, a few embers have always smoldered within the cavernous hearth. Since the opening of the inn, the hearth fiend has caused numerous violent incidences, and its foul

intonations have heightened the evil of the inn’s owner and staff. It will encourage attacks against the PCs, by warriors in the common room, and by Hannah and Melanie.

Hearth Fiend: Cr2; Small Elemental (Fire, mists) (2 ft. 8 in. tall); HD 2d8; HP 9; Int +5; Spd 50 (10 squares); AC15 (+1 size, +1 Dex, +3 natural); Atk +3 ranged fire bolt (1d6 plus ignite flammables); SA Burn, fire charm; SQ Damage reduction 10/magic, elemental traits, immunity to electricity, Mists subtype, vulnerable to water; AL CE; SV Fort +0, Ref +4, Will +0; Str 10, Dex 13, Con 10, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 16.

Swords: In the asylum version, the grand hall is part dining room, part observation hall. A long table stands near the fireplace, a large almost thronelike chair at its head, with four chairs on both its sides. The area in front of the entryway is clear, and in the part of the room near the stairs to the house’s first floor (area 10) stands a large cage covered by a large red blanket. Inside the cage is a young woman in a colorful skirt and white shirt, clothes reminiscent of those favored by many Vistani. She is one of the lunatics in the asylum, and she believes herself to be a bird. When the cage is uncovered, she slowly stands up and starts singing a bizarre and hauntingly beautiful song. Dr. Ildgaard and his orderlies often use her as entertainment when they dine. (The DM can insert Ivana in the role of the madwoman.)

Dr. Ildgaard/Ashington and his orderlies (Blaumann, Hanford, and Rostoff) are taking their evening meal when the PCs first appear in this version. Ildgaard is immediately hostile and suspicious if they come from anywhere but the courtyard. If their story for being at the asylum makes sense (doesn’t involve time-travel or some other “insanity,”) he will allow them to stay in the guest rooms on the second floor (areas 12a-c). At the first mention of mysterious young women or ghosts or the same, however, he concludes they are somehow connected to the noble woman he recently murdered, and he orders his orderlies and men-at-arms to subdue them, disarm them, and confine them in a cell in area 3. The weakest-appearing characters will be put in cells containing violent inmates.

If one of more PC is by himself in the room late at night, the DM should turn a card from the tarokka deck. The phantasm of Rozaleen manifests if the card is from the suits of Glyphs, Coins, or Stars, and it behaves as detailed under the “Glyphs” option, above.





Stars: The grand hall is a dingy, soot-stained room that smells of mold, human waste, and sweaty, unwashed bodies. There are no furnishings in the room aside from some bedrolls and piles of moth-eaten, tattered blankets. It serves as the base of operations for Dagger/Ashington and his pathetic bandit pack.

Ten bandits (men-at-arms statistics) are here, playing dice, resting, or snickering as they watch their leader torment Miko, the merchant's daughter they have abducted.

Dagger/Ashington is near the fireplace where he is caressing the sobbing girl's cheek and legs while offering to "make her a woman." If the PCs have seen Rozaleen's ghost, or perhaps seen her in the Ashington Manor version of the house, they might mistake this dark-haired, dusky-skinned girl for her.

If the PCs hesitate more than three rounds, the girl panics and leaps to her feet in an attempt to flee. Dagger/Ashington loses his temper at this, and easily prevents her from getting away. He just as easily slits her throat with his knife. As the girl is drowning in her own blood, he starts stabbing her repeatedly, screaming that she shouldn't have defied him.

Hopefully, the PCs will intervene before it comes to this. As soon as they make their presence known, the ten bandits attack. Dagger/Ashington grabs the girl, presses his dagger to her throat and threatens to kill her unless the PCs surrender and drop their weapons immediately. If the PCs obey, Dagger/Ashington shrieks that they and the girl's stupid father condemned her to death when they tried to defy him. He orders his men to kill the party, and he slits the girl's throat. As she tumbles to the ground, gurgling and grasping her throat in a vain attempt to stop the bleeding, Dagger/Ashington leaps into the fray. (Again, if the PCs choose to act rather than follow the bandit leader's orders, they should roll initiatives against Ashington and the bandits.)

If/when the PCs rescue the young half-Vistani, she becomes subject to the time-shifts. She is the only NPC present in the house who starts shifting as the PCs shift. If she dies at the hands of Dagger/Ashington, her corpse remains in this version of the house.

7. Adjunct

This low-ceilinged wooden chamber was added later than the rest of the structure. A sturdy door

can be closed offering privacy. The molding running around the entire room under the ceiling displays carvings of dragon-prowed longships and strange runes.

Fortuna Magna: The chamber is a richly appointed study. It was added to Ashington Manor by the last Lord Ashington's grandfather. The dwellings of spellcasting warlords that he met in a distant, mistbound land inspired the look of the room. The room was the ultimate manifestation of the Ashington family tradition of dabbling in obscure magic.

The floor is covered with a soft, deep red carpet. A large desk and a comfortable chair stand at the center of the room, its surface holding documents relating to the financial state of Ashington's holdings (which are doing quite well). Heavy drapes cover the large window looks out upon the garden behind the manor. When the drapes are pulled back during the daytime, copious sunlight spills into the room. Two overstuffed armchairs flank a small table directly in front of the window. A golden snuffbox stands on the table, next to a small stack of books (all occult in nature; if the DM wants to introduce one of the Van Richten's Guides) in-game, this would be a good place to do so). A door leads to the garden, and a high-quality lock secures it. (There are two keys; the butler has one, and there is one in the desk drawer in area 13.

One wall of the room is covered ceiling to floor by shelves that are crammed with books and bundles of parchment. This is the occult library collected by four generations of Lord Ashingtons, and the texts are in every written language of the Core from Draconic to Mordentish. The books range in quality from total bunk to fairly accurate, although Lord Ashington will swear that all the texts are scholarly works about the occult of the highest order.

None of the books are magical in nature, although some may contain details on low-level spells, or on the creation of simple magical potions. The room itself, however, is a noteworthy bit of arcana. The runes carved into the molding under the ceiling radiate divination and transmutation magic. They radiate a magic affect that grants persons in the room a +1 competency bonus to all Decipher Script, Knowledge, Scry, and other research-related skill checks performed inside the room.





Glyphs: The room appears as described above, except that many of the more ridiculous and incorrect texts have been culled from the collection. It serves as the office for Byron Ashington-Welles, the head of the hospice. Here during the day, except when helping to tend to the sick and wounded, he retires to area 12 at night. When the PCs seek him out, he will be in the company of Ashington, or Ashington will escort the characters to see him. Although he was a 5th-level cleric in life, the echo of him in the distorted version of the hospice conforms to those of the warriors. If a PC is severely wounded, though, the DM should let him cast some cure spells.

If the PCs approach him about the shifting time they are experiencing, he recommends they rest for a while and then see what happens. (He assumes they are demented.) If the PCs quiz him about the Vistani ghost, he denies knowing anything about it, but the questions trigger suspicion in Ashington. He thinks the characters have somehow learned of the murder he has committed. He rounds up Rostoff, Hanford, and Blaumann with the intent of attacking and killing the party members. He will have one of his underlings lure the party to the stables under the pretense of having information about the Vistani ghost, and then will attack as soon as they enter.

Coins: The adjunct has been turned into the inn's tavern as no one recognized the significance of the carvings along the molding. The furniture that was here is gone, replaced by a four-seater bench and narrow table along the wall, and a sturdy wooden counter in front of the shelves. Four heavy stools line the bar. The books are all gone, and a variety of sacks containing dried meat or cheeses and bottles of alcohol stands arrayed where they were, along with mugs, plates, and bowls. The carpet is gone, and the exposed floorboards are worn. The door that leads to the garden is secured from the inside with a heavy wooden bar. The lock was broken some time ago, and the owner has not bothered to replace it.

Rostoff or Blaumann is here, tending bar. Hannah or Melanie is also here, looking for a mark to seduce and rob. The prices are in line with those charged at other isolated roadhouses, and the alcohol is not watered down. Food can also be ordered, although if the tavern is crowded, the bartender instructs the would-be diner to make their order in the common room. Payment is made as a drink is ordered; no one gets to run a tab at the "Jacks and

Queens." There are six guests present—two bodyguards to travelers dining in the common room (warriors), while the rest are local riffraff (servant statistics).

Swords: The chamber is back to being a study/office. The desk at the center of the room is not as large as the one that was here in the days of Ashington Manor, but it is high quality. A comfortable chair stands behind it, and two hardwood chairs stand in front of it for visitors. The bar, stools, bench and table are gone, and the shelves once again hold books. The collection is not as large as the one possessed by the Ashington family, but it is of higher quality. The collection features books by the greatest medical minds of the Core, with something touching on virtually every known ailment physical or mental. Both doors to the room feature exceptional quality locks, and the door to area 8 (the garden) is kept locked at all times. The door to the grand hall is locked when Ashington/Ildgaard is not in the office. Ildgaard/Ashington has the only key that will open the doors, and he carries it in his vest pocket.

Dr. Ildgaard/Ashington works here during the day, and for a couple of hours between dinner and retiring to this room for the night (area 13). When Ildgaard/Ashington isn't in his office, he locks the door.

Stars: The wooden room has collapsed into a pile of rotting, charred timbers. While sooty fragments of the ornate moldings can be found in the wreckage, the magic of the runes has been broken and they are now worthless. A torn, light blue blanket that is stained by a variety of unidentifiable substances covers the door from area 5.

8. Kitchen

The floor is covered in white ceramic tiles. It has a slight downward tilt to the center of the room where there is a small drain. The rafters are studded with steel hooks, and a floor-to-floor shelving unit covers the east wall. To the north, is a large black-iron oven and stove. A pair of roasting trays stand side by side on the rack at the center of the oven. A counter runs along the west wall, with two narrow oak cabinets standing in the southwest corner.

There are two exits from the kitchen—one featuring a set of swinging doors that lead to the grand hall, and another that leads to the garden behind the house. A third possible exit is the trapdoor in the floor next to the cabinets.





Fortuna Magna: The manor's kitchen is in its days of glory in this version. Iron skillets and copper pots of a wide variety of depths and sizes had from the steel hooks. The shelves are crammed with serving dishes and crockery. A wooden block with a dozen kitchen knives of varying size and use stand at the center of the wood counter. The top shelves inside the left cabinet holds a tremendous assortment of spices while the lower shelves hold trays with silver serving ware and flatware. The right cabinet contains a shelf with crystal wine glasses and goblets crammed closely together, ornate silver serving dishes, and fine china plates for every course of a formal dinner. The kitchen is immaculate. The door to the garden is locked by a simple latch-lock, which can be opened without a key from the inside. (In fact, the key to this door was lost long ago, and no one has bothered to even notify Ashington or any senior servants.) The trapdoor mentioned above opens to the black stone steps that lead to area 14, the Cellar.

During the day and evenings, at least two servants (the chef and his apprentice) are present, preparing meals or cleaning up after meals. At night, the apprentice sleeps on a pile of sacks near the cooling stove, so that if Ashington or any of his guests should wish to have a meal in the middle of the night, they can be immediately accommodated. (On the night of Rozaleen's murder, the chef, the apprentice, and two other servants are in the kitchen.)

Glyphs: A somewhat smaller collection of skillets and pots hang from the kitchen's rafters, but the majority of them tend toward the large size. A far narrower selection of spices is present. The flatware consists of glazed clay plates, and the silverware consists of tarnished spoons and nicked table knives. The same block of large kitchen knives stands on the counter, but one is missing and they are all in need of sharpening. A smell of fresh-baked bread seems to always hang in the room.

During the day, one servant (a low-ranking member of the order) is always here, and there are two present when it is close to mealtimes, cooking up simple yet delicious fare. The kitchen is empty at night.

Coins: The skillets and pots hanging from the rafters are all dented, scorched, and very much used and abused. They are all large in size, intended for institutional cooking. During the day, a pot with a thick, almost stewlike soup containing a mixture of

mystery meat and soggy vegetables stands bubbling on the stove, and breads are always baking in the oven. A small selection of spices stand scattered along the counter, and a couple dozen pewter plates and mugs are crammed into the cabinets.

Swords: Two large pots always stand on the stove, bubbling with a watery and tasteless gruel—the fare for inmates morning, noon, and night. The oven is used to bake roasts and other fine meals for the director and his staff. The cabinet houses clay plates, mugs, and spoons.

Stars: The counter and cabinets have been charred by fire, but they are still intact. There is nothing of value in either, and everything that could be moved has long since been looted. The one exception is the large butcher knife that has been driven into the countertop with monstrous strength; its blade is buried in the wood nearly to the handle.

The trapdoor to area 14 collapsed under its own weight as rot took hold. Fragments of wood cling to the oxidized hinges, appearing like broken teeth in a pitch-black maw.

9. Garden

A narrow path leads from the back of the house to a small shrine near a wall covered with ivy and vines.

Fortuna Magna: The garden consists of a spectacular, well-tended rosebushes and flowerbeds. A ten-by-six area near the backdoor from the kitchen is given over to a vegetable garden.

The shrine at the back of the garden is made from oak, and it appears like a small house with a steep roof and open front, perched atop a four-foot high pole. Inside is a figurine of a robed and hooded woman carved from the bone of a large creature (a giant's thighbone, actually). The figurine and its wooden housing originated in the same domain as the craftsmen who carved the molding in area 6. The carving is of a goddess worshiped in that faraway land. Ashington told anyone who asked that the carving was of Hala. Neither the figurine nor the shrine has any special properties.

Glyphs: The vegetable garden has been expanded to fill half the garden, and features carefully labeled rows of vegetables and healing herbs.

The shrine at the back of the garden has been subtly altered, and in this version, it radiates weak abjuration magic. Mystic runes have been carved in the sides of the wooden housing and a symbol of Hala has been engraved on the bottom of the



figurine. A witch or warlock of Hala who prays at the shrine for spells receives a +1 divine bonus to all saving throws for the following 24-hour period. If the figurine and housing are separated from one another, the magic is permanently disrupted.

Coins and Swords: The entire garden is an overgrown mess of weeds . . . except for a roughly six-by-four-foot area where the earth has recently been disturbed. In either version, the area is a different one. (The young victims of Jack and Ildgaard's murderous acts respectively are buried here. If the characters should have and pursue the opportunity to dig in either grave, the DM should turn a tarokka card. If the Horseman is revealed, the corpse of the girl bursts from the grave, her restless angry spirit having animated as a wight. She attacks any living being she encounters with blind, homicidal insanity.)

The shrine still stands at the back of the garden, and it still grants a +1 divine bonus to saving throws for a 24-hour period if a witch or warlock of Hala prays before it, but it is heavily overgrown with the same vines that cover the wall.

Stars: The statue and the shrine have been smashed to bits. Years of fallen leaves cover the pieces. No trace of magic remains.

10. Stairs

A broad set of wooden stairs, guarded by a solid banister, climbs from the airy hall to a landing and hallway on the first floor.

Fortuna Magna and Glyphs: In these versions, the walls that follow the stairs up are hung with portraits of the previous Lords and Ladies Ashington. The lowest portrait is the oldest, and the final one—a near-life-sized painting of the current Lord Ashington—hangs in the hallway directly across from where the stairs end. There are a total of eight paintings, and the images capture the progression of the family's nature. The oldest pictures show men and women who look out at the viewer with kind expressions, while the more modern family members appear haughty and cruel.

Coins and Swords: The stairs are as described above, even if the steps are starting to appear a bit worn. The portraits of the Lords and Ladies Ashington are no longer present.





Stars: The stairs are weak and partially rotted through; they creak and groan and shift noticeably even under halflings. Any time an adult human in medium or heavy armor (or carrying an equivalent burden) ascends or descends the staircase, there is a 20% chance the entire thing collapses. Anyone on the stairs suffers 2d6 points of damage from the fall and being struck by the breaking lumber (successful Tumble check against DC12 to reduce the damage by half). Anyone in any of the squares adjacent to the staircase on the ground floor suffers 1d4+1 points of damage from the falling wood (DC 8 Reflex save for half).

11. Rooms and Storage Area

A ladder leads up to the second floor of the stables to a large, dusty room that is open to below, and from which five narrow doors lead to darkened rooms.

Fortuna Magna and Glyphs: The large, dusty room serves a hayloft and bales of hay are stacked all over, with narrow paths giving access to the doors. 10a and 10b is each home to three young servants. 11c-11e are the quarters of three men-at-arms each. Each room contains the NPCs' personal belongings, but nothing among these is remarkable.

Coins: The large, open area still serves as a hayloft, but the rooms are disused. They contain a variety of junk and discarded personal effects. There is nothing here of use or relevance unless the DM wishes to seed information or items relating to the overall campaign.

Swords: The entire second floor is a storage area. Unless the DM chooses otherwise, nothing among the collection of junk has any use or value; it is the personal belongings of the asylum's patients along with a few left over items from the house's time as an inn.

Stars: The second floor of the stables has collapsed and no longer exists.

12. Rooms

A hallway leads from the stairs. Six doors, three on either side, open into rooms that contain a bed, dresser, small table, and a chair. Windows either look out on the courtyard or the garden. (Note: The basic furnishings described apply to all version but Glyphs.)

Fortuna Magna: In this version, the rooms are either in use by Ashington's guests, or his key servants.

12a is home to Ashington's butler/footman, while 12b is home to two young women who serve as upstairs maids, or servers when Ashington has guests. Both rooms contain meager furnishings and beds are modest.

12c-12f are for Ashington's guests, and each have a bed with a soft mattress and the finest bed linens. Rostoff and Ivana are sharing 12c, while Hannah and Melanie are in 11d. Hanford and Blaumann are in 12e and 12f respectively.

Glyphs: 12a and 12b are each home to two of the hospice's clerics, while 12c-f are reserved for severely wounded, dangerously delirious, or highly contagious patients. Those who are dying for one reason or another are also put in these rooms. A patient inhabits each room.

Coins: These are the guestrooms for the inn, except for 12f, which is shared by Hannah, Melanie, and Ivana. Each room contains a large bed with a straw-stuffed mattress and a single rickety wooden chair. The beds are large enough to hold three adults. 12f also contains a large chest, which contains the personal belongings of the serving wenches, along with 87 gp worth of coins and jewelry stolen from guests.

Swords: The rooms are reserved for visitors to the asylum, and for wealthy patients who either have family that visit often, or who Ildgaard feels can be easily cured. All but 12d are presently empty. The patient in 12d is a delusional young woman who believes she is the goddess Ezra. (This might be a good place to use Hannah or Melanie.) If the PCs "rescue" her, she promises to lead them safely through the Mists. (If she is taken up on this offer, the PCs merely find themselves under attack by Mist Horrors, as described in "the "Through the Mists" section.)

Stars: The rooms are all empty, except for charred wood fragments and scurrying vermin.

13. Master Suite

This finely appointed bedroom features a large four-poster bed with a gorgeous blood red, gold-fringed canopy and silken sheets. A roll-top desk and a comfortable chair stand by the window. A large wardrobe towers in one of the corners.

Fortuna Magna: This room is Lord Ashington's bedroom. It is kept in immaculate condition by his manservant and the upstairs maid. The desk is closed, and Ashington carries the key to the high quality lock in his vest pocket. Inside are a variety of chemicals, powders, strange liquids, and a selection of



beakers and measuring spoons, as well as notes on a potion that Ashington is hoping to create, a potion that weakens the willpower of the imbiber. A successful Alchemy skill check (DC11) reveals that Ashington may be onto something, but that much work is still needed. (If the DM wishes to include an extra clue about how Rozaleen is a key to escaping the house, he can include a diary kept by Ashington. It is a chronicle of his foul deeds. The last, hastily scrawled entry mentions that he ordered “the three idiots to bury the obstinate slut in the cellar.”)

The wardrobe contains a wide selection of fine clothing and footwear, all sized for Ashington. To the far left are three scanty nightgowns, kept here for young women who arrive at Ashington Manor unprepared for spending the night.

Glyphs: This is the quarters of Byron Ashington-Welles. The canopy is no longer on the bed, and the sheets are of a more modest cotton. The roll-top desk is open, and its top is covered with papers relating to the hospice, its finances, and its patients. Several stoppered inkwells, well-maintained quills are here as well. The wardrobe contains a variety of simple clothes and two sets of robes used in services to Hala. Behind the clothes is a set of +1 *chainmail* and a +2 *shortsword* with symbols of Hala etched in the blade and represented on the pommel.

Coins: This is the room of Jack/Ashington, the operator of the “Jacks and Queens Inn.” The bed is unmade and the sheets seem like they haven’t been washed in a while. A torn woman’s dress is on the floor along with an empty wine bottle. The roll-top desk is locked, and the key is in Jack/Ashington’s shirt pocket. Inside the desk are nearly a dozen pouches containing small gems and a variety of coins—recently acquired from guests who “vanished.” There is a total of 769 gp between them.

Swords: The room belongs to Ildgaard/Ashington, and it is almost obsessively neat. The bed is carefully made with fine linen, and the several stacks of pages of parchment covered with tight, spidery script. The pages cover a variety of subjects, ranging from notes on patients at the asylum to convoluted (and quite twisted) thoughts on how to cure mental illnesses and phobias. If the notes are examined carefully (Search skill check DC9), one page features angry ramblings about a “little bitch who is going to ruin everything I’ve built here.” There is no doubt that the writer intends to stop the woman in question, through homicide if necessary.

Stars: time and vermin have ravaged the furniture. The bed has collapsed under its own weight, and the mattress has been chewed to bits by rats. The roll-top desk has been broken open and its content is long gone. There is nothing of value here.

14. Cellar

At the bottom of a steep, narrow stone staircase, a low-ceilinged cellar stretches into darkness. The floor is covered with large dark gray flagstones. The walls are made from massive boulders of a similar color. The stones seem to almost absorb the light from torches or lanterns.

Fortuna Magna: A metal cabinet stands immediately next to the stairs. It holds slabs of meat—dried and fresh—hanging from hooks. Along one wall are shelves holding a variety of preserves and a range of rarely used tools and shovels, crockery and kitchenwares. Along another wall is a wine rack holding dozens of bottles of the finest vintages from Richemulot and Dementlieu, as well as several bottles of the exotic cloudberry wine from Tepest.

After Rozaleen is murdered, Ashington’s lackeys bury her under the flagstones directly at the cellar’s center. The grave is a shallow one, and only a few inches of dirt cover the body.

Glyphs and Swords: The contents of the basement is apparently the same, but the meats in the cabinet are mostly all dried and cured, and the bottles in the wine rack contain a range of brews and compounds used to treat various ailments—including a few bottles of strong alcoholic beverages.

However, a major change is that Rozaleen’s body lies buried at the basement’s center. Whenever a PC in the basement during this period, the DM should turn a card from the tarokka deck. If the card is from the Fortuna Magna or Glyphs suit, Rozaleen’s ghost materializes over her grave. There is a large bloodstain on the side of her white shirt. She looks at the PC with a pleading look, holding up a selection of tarokka cards—the Dark Lord, the Tempress, the Beast and Innocent (the four cards she managed to lay before Ashington murdered her). She then sinks to her knees, tears welling up into her large eyes. She sinks into the floor as her form dissolves into wisps of mist that then fade away.

If the party removes the stones directly below where the apparition appeared, and scrape aside a few inches of earth, they find a skeleton dressed in rotted scraps of clothing. A dirt-stained tarokka card juts from the skeleton’s jaw. It is the Innocent card from the Fortuna





Magna, dirt-stained and a bit worn around the edges, but otherwise unharmed by the decades spent in the ground. (Finding Rozaleen's body and the tarokka card provide the party with some of the possible means of ending the curse and escaping the house.)

There is a second body buried in the basement. If the party removes other stones, they find a corpse of a young woman wearing robes and a holy symbol of Hala around her neck. In the Glyphs version, she has been dead a week or two and worms and other burrowing insects are devouring her body. She obviously died from violence, as her throat is gaping open from a cut and her robe is stained with old blood. In the Swords version, the body is skeletal and the robes have mostly rotted away, and the holy symbol is tarnished.

Coins: The contents of the basement are apparently the same, but the meats in the metal cabinet is of low quality, and the wine is the cheapest Richemulot has to offer, as well as several poor quality varieties from Darkon.

Rozaleen's spirit appears to party members if a card from the Fortuna Magna or Coins suit is revealed.

Stars: The metal cabinet has been knocked over and the wine rack is empty of content. There is nothing of value in the cellar. Rozaleen's spirit appears to party members if a card from the Fortuna Magna or Stars suit is revealed.

15. Outhouse

This small wooden structure stands alone at the very back of the garden. A single door opens onto a bench with a hole in the middle. The stench of human waste wafts up from below. Any changes should be in keeping with the scene the party encounters.

Escaping the House and Spawning a Campaign

Once the party has broken Rozaleen's curse, the Mists retreat from around the house, and it returns to its ruined state (or whatever the "present-day" version for the party is). Any people who belonged in the present-day version revert to their normal selves—if the party killed Dagger/Ashington or any of his bandits, their bodies appear as they should, not as copies of the people in the house when Rozaleen died.

As for Rozaleen, if the party "prevented" her death at the hands of Ashington, she remains corporeal long enough to thank them for releasing

her. As her form starts to dissolve into mist, she asks that the party at least return her tarokka deck to the Zarovan; she now sees that she was stupid and prideful to take it in the first place. She also warns the party that they should not put too much faith in Maekon if she hasn't already convinced the characters of her true nature. Her spirit is then gone, never to be disturbed from its rest again. Locating the Zarovan is an adventure unto itself, but the party will gain powerful friends if Rozaleen's tarokka deck is returned to them. The gratitude will be even greater if Rozaleen's body is returned as well, or if the party at the very least tells them where she is buried. They will not ask for this information; the party will have to volunteer it.

If Miko is returned alive to her parents, the party will likewise gain friends. The merchant and his wife may not be as powerful as the Zarovan, but they can provide some aid and assistance when the party is in the area around their village. Miko is another opportunity where the party can be made aware of Maekon's hidden nature. She will attempt to get the PC with the highest Charisma who was kind to her away from the group and will tell him that she senses something very wrong about Maekon. She's not sure what, but she is convinced she is more evil than even Dagger was. (Maekon, naturally, stays away from the village, claiming that there is bad blood between her and some of the locals, but in truth, she is trying to avoid being detected by Miko's mother.)

If Maekon hasn't been killed or revealed as the evil creature that she is, she will ask to join the party on their future adventures. She promises to record their deeds and to use her "network of contacts" and "ability to sniff out trouble" to lead them to where their talents are needed most (if the party is of a heroic bent, otherwise she will attempt to give another reason for why they should keep her around). If the party doesn't rebuff her—perhaps because of Rozaleen's warning—Maekon will lead them into the darkest sinkholes of evil and against the vilest and worst villains the Demiplane of Dread has to offer. (She will naturally make herself scarce whenever the party encounters a Vistani, but the first time she is unable to do so, the Vistani in question will try to warn the party of her true nature, particularly if they returned Rozaleen's tarokka deck to the Zarovan.) If rejected by the party, she will instead begin to ally herself with evil beings and put them on the trail of party, again hoping for some easy feeding.





Chapter Three:
The Brood of
Blutkalte



The Legend



ut you go, vagrant!" shrieked the crone, proprietor of "The Last Resting Place" and one of the many unsympathetic souls in the city of Lekar. Her inn was bulging with pitiful refugees, evicted by the horrors that had recently overrun Neufurchtenburg, scarcely a day's journey away. If the innkeeper had a measure of compassion left in her dark heart, she would not spend it on a thief or a bard. She had no use for charlatans, and the ones who sang drove her mad.

"If the horrors come to this town, let them sweep the streets of the likes of you first!" she screamed as she slammed the door shut.

Wolfgang Saenger smirked, appalled by the woman's audacity. Clearly, the people in her inn needed hope as much as they needed the meager protection her wooden walls provided. If he could not give them hope, he could at least provide them the distraction of a comforting melody.

Saenger was a middle-aged man with a shock of black hair that he falsely attributed to Vistani heritage when it suited him. Prone to wanderlust, he had never gained any sort of following or reputation of note. His embroidered clothes were well worn, and he carried the distinct air of a performer past his prime, if he ever had one.

Heaving a pack upon his shoulder, Wolfgang strode across the dark street to a partially collapsed, half-timbered shop. The decaying remains of a fallen sycamore lay in the middle of the structure, uninhabited since the giant tree cleaved it in two six winters past. The tree claimed not only the shop but also the alchemist who had lived there. The man was crushed beneath the tree when it fell. The cretins that inhabited the dreary town looted the apothecary even as its owner lay bleeding to death under the sycamore.

In spite of its history, the place seemed to be the best available shelter for the traveling bard. While Wolfgang's talent was certain, his ability to earn steady pay for demonstrating it was not. So, the great Wolfgang Saenger was quite familiar with nights spent in "inns of convenience," as he liked to call them.

Seeing the front door boarded up, Wolfgang thought to enter the shop across the trunk of the sycamore. The rotted shell quickly collapsed under his weight, and he found his leather boots swarmed by termites. Cursing beneath his breath, Wolfgang bounded through the gaping crevice in the wall. He quickly drew a dagger and began to scrape the white pests from his boots.

As he sat to remove one boot and rid himself of the

last of the vermin, Wolfgang became aware that he was not alone. His eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness, and he made out several figures in the corner. "Hello?" he queried hesitantly, as he held his dagger in front of him.

"Stay down, children," murmured a woman's voice. "Be gone, sir. My children and I are staying here. We've no place else to go, and I won't be giving way on this matter."

"It's all right; I mean you no ill," Wolfgang softly intoned as he slid his dagger back into its scabbard. "I need a place to stay as well. Might I beg your hospitality, or if you have a price for a night in your inn, might I know it?"

The woman softened. "If you can light a fire in that hearth, it would be payment enough."

After making the fire, Wolfgang unrolled his blanket by the stone hearth. The woman and her two children approached, warming their hands in the glow. The children were perhaps ten and twelve years of age, and a bit awed by the fancifulness of the stranger's clothing.

"Mama, do you suppose he's a nobleman?" the older child asked.

Wolfgang chuckled. "Not a nobleman, but hopefully a noble man. No, I am just a performer, a teller of tales. Perhaps, with your mother's permission, I might share some with you tonight."

Wolfgang did his best to please the children. They were an eager audience, focusing intently on every word. Wolfgang found their innocence a bit shocking. Surely, children in a place such as this one must have faced a great deal of horror by this point in their lives. "Would you like to hear a frightening tale?" Wolfgang offered, unsure of what response to expect. The children grinned and nodded, while their mother murmured that she tried to protect her children from such things.

"Oh, they look old enough to me. Besides, there are much more frightening things to be found than a little story from me. Let me think — this old apothecary reminds me of an excellent story. So, have you heard of the 'Brood of Blutkalte'? No? I should like to take credit for fashioning this tale, but every word is true.

"In a land not far from here, in a large town not unlike this one, there lived a family named Blutkalte. The family lived in the poorest quarter of the town, and they practiced their trade on the wretched souls who lived there." Wolfgang paused, suddenly remembering his audience with a bit of shame.

Clearing his throat, Wolfgang continued. "Yes, well. The Blutkalte family trade was — death. From the moment the dark shroud first appeared until the last





bit of dirt fell upon the grave, the Blutkaltes played a role.

“The Blutkalte family was led by an aged and evil patriarch they simply call ‘the Grandfather.’ The Grandfather claimed to be a healer, but no patient of his ever recovered from his malady. He treated patients not to heal them but to watch them die. He carried ointments, potions and salves to treat all matter of illnesses. Yes, he had just the right concoction to make any current suffering pale in comparison to the effects of his treatment. Did I mention that he only came when the patient was alone and delirious in pain — in his most vulnerable state? By the time the victim’s relatives were aware that the good doctor had visited, the suffering was at an end. Often they never recovered from the guilt of abandoning their loved one, and the Grandfather relished it all the more.

“The Grandfather had a son, and the son had a wife. Of course, no sane woman would marry into a family such as the Blutkaltes, and sane this woman was not. Jutta Blutkalte was a seamstress and mortician. She carried the tools of her trades with her: scalpel, needles and thread. When Jutta came to visit you in your sleep, the nightmares had just begun. Quieter than your shadow, she sewed your blankets around you so tight that you could not raise a finger. You would probably wake when she shoved the bag of thistles in

your mouth and sewed your lips shut around it. No one would hear your muffled screams; she would have an iron grip upon your jaw. Jutta sewed your eyelids shut next, which at least spared you the sight of her pulling out the scalpel.

“Now, Jutta’s husband, Max, was as stupid as they come, but he was cruel enough to keep any sane man from thinking straight. He carved headstones with his hammer and chisel and dug graves with his spade. He kept his tools sharp as can be. Max was a man of few words and a smoldering temper. Nobody knew they had crossed Max Blutkalte until they felt his wrath. It did not matter if the offense was real or imagined, the consequence was the same: death for the offender. If Max was feeling merciful, he charged from the shadows and lopped off your head with his spade. If not, he knocked you out and buried you alive. If he had some time to prepare, Max carved you a headstone and then dropped it on your skull while you slept.

“Perhaps you were not aware that Max and Jutta had a son — Sebastian Blutkalte. Sebastian, the spawn of evil, was raised in torment and educated in murder. He served the family well. If his mother was choking a victim with her thread, Sebastian held the spool. If his father needed a distraction, Sebastian made the noise. If the Grandfather needed someone to hide under your bed and unlock the door for him at



night, Sebastian did the job.

“The Blutkalte family was driven from their home and from their town, which was good for the people who lived there. It was not good for the rest of us, though. For now, the Blutkaltes roam the land, looking for a place to call home, a place where they can continue their killing. A place like this.” Wolfgang paused for dramatic effect. The children’s eyes were wide open in the dim light.

“Hmmm. Your little brother here looks a bit like Sebastian Blutkalte. Has he ever done anything wicked?” Wolfgang asked. The girl smiled and nodded her head. *“Well, we had better be careful then. Let me teach you a little saying.”*

*“Blutkalte, Blutkalte, don’t come near;
Blutkaltes are not welcome here.
The healer’s coming, jingle, jangle;
The mother wraps you in a tangle.
Max will beat you with his spade;
Down in the ground you’ll be laid.
Sebastian laughs at your fate,
Evil people, filled with hate.
Keep quiet now, lest they hear,
I don’t want to die in fear.”*

The children’s mother snapped up, *“That’s enough of that. What sort of horrible person are you, telling stories like that to small children? Come children, put these thoughts away, and let us try to sleep.”*

Wolfgang shrugged. *Perhaps the children were too young to hear the tale. Perhaps anyone was. The aging bard wrapped his blanket around his shoulders and faded off to sleep.*

The vagrants’ bodies were not found for three days, when the smell carried across the street to the Last Resting Place. Two children and one man had met their end in the most indescribable of ways, unless of course, you had heard of the Brood of Blutkalte.

Uncovering the Truth



As you might suspect, the Blutkaltes were once a real family, at least in name. This is their true story.

Tobias Blutkalte **(“The Grandfather”)**

Tobias Blutkalte was the great ancestor of the Blutkalte family. Through his personality and deeds, the Blutkaltes were formed.

Tobias was a heavy-set man with breathing problems. His every labored breath sounded like the last gasp of a dying man. Breathing dried his

lips, and he licked them constantly to keep them moist. The breathing also kept him awake at night, so his dull brown eyes were always blood-shot. He frequently covered his tangled graying brown hair with a small cap. Tobias often wore fine ivory robes embroidered with black thread by his daughter-in-law. In his mind, these clothes appropriately portrayed his stature as a community “healer.” Around his substantial waist, he wore a leather belt with many tiny pouches filled with potions, ointments and medicinal herbs. When he walked, he made a slight jingling noise, like chimes in the wind.

Tobias, unlike most town healers, was not a welcome sight. His demeanor was neither kind nor sympathetic, and he treated his patients as if they were deserving of their condition, frequently accusing them of committing foul deeds that caused their illness. These accusations were particularly frightening for children, for parental punishment for the imagined deeds often followed the visit from the healer. Tobias’s motivation for healing was to establish his power in the community. He would use fear and doubt as potent weapons to secure his place. Without his help, he would claim, even a case of the sniffles would quickly become a merciless epidemic. Tobias’s clients were typically those who were uneducated, poor and impious, so healing from clerics was not usually an option.

Tobias’s treatments were generally ineffective, and, in some cases, more harmful than the illness itself. He had no formal training in alchemy or herbalism, but he had spent a lifetime learning by trial-and-error. He made a customized concoction for every patient, under the pretense that a tailor-made solution would be most effective. His true motivation was to prevent anyone else from copying and reselling his “cures.” The medicine was delivered along with a unique ritual that must be followed precisely. When the patient failed to improve or got worse, Tobias blamed the patient or caregivers for failing to follow his instructions. In truth, Tobias despised the sick; he found them revolting. As a bit of punishment for forcing him to cure them, Tobias laced his potions with foul flavors and his ointments with stinging and itching agents. The associated rituals could range from uncomfortable to masochistic, depending on the severity of his mood.

Tobias’s wife died during childbirth while under his treatment. Their son Maximilian survived.





Maximilian Blutkalte ("The Father")

Max Blutkalte was Tobias Blutkalte's only son. As little as Tobias liked being a healer, he liked being a father even less. Max grew up the target of that resentment; Tobias frequently reminded Max that he had killed his own mother, berating and beating the boy mercilessly. The punishment for lying or talking back was a taste of the foulest concoction his father could dream up. As a result, Max grew up a man of few words, with a seething temper under the surface.

Max inherited his physique from his mother. He was tall and lean, with a deceptive strength in his wiry frame. Though he could eventually easily overpower his father if he ever desired, he never did so. Max's fear of his father was replaced with resentful respect as Max developed a similar, sinister outlook on life. Max had long, tangled black hair, and soulless, sunken eyes that could stop a person in his tracks.

Tobias did not train Max to be a healer; instead, Max was responsible for all the duties of the house. When he came of age, Max worked at the local cemetery as a gravedigger, coffin-maker and eventually headstone carver. His headstone carvings were unusually beautiful, hinting at some kernel of humanity buried deep beneath his hardened exterior. When digging graves, however, Max attacked the earth with his spade with a pent-up fury that was frightening to behold.

Max met and married perhaps the only woman he could — Jutta Nadel, a mortician and seamstress.

Jutta Blutkalte ("The Mother")

Jutta's mother was a mortician, her father a tailor. Jutta was trained in both arts. As a young woman, she was tasked with sewing up the corpses in her mother's workshop. Eventually she took over the job of mortician and did tailoring work when the business of death was slow. Jutta had grown up around corpses. She was indifferent to death, and perhaps, to life. Her heart was very cold; she did her business in the most detached of ways.

Jutta was similar in frame to Max. She had a straight posture and extraordinarily strong hands. When she grabbed her son by the arm, there was no escape. Jutta's fingertips were so calloused that she did not even require a thimble when she sewed. Jutta had angular facial features that were accentu-

ated by her tightly pulled black hair. Her clothes were utilitarian, as were the clothes she tailored for the deceased when none were available. She felt there was little sense in decorating attire that would be seen but once at a funeral.

Jutta was one of the few people who would stand up to Max's father. They argued extensively.

Sebastian Blutkalte ("The Son")

Max and Jutta raised one son, Sebastian. However, Sebastian was not the son of Max. A dread doppelganger had infiltrated the Blutkalte's town, looking for a mate. Dread doppelgangers can mate with human men or women, but they prefer females since it defers the burden of pregnancy to their partners. This doppelganger chose Jutta one night when she was working late in her shop on a freshly arrived body. Jutta thought her "husband's" choice of timing to be a bit unusual, but she did not give a second thought to the inappropriateness of the location.

To all appearances, Jutta gave birth to a healthy human boy. Dread doppelgangers' shapechanging abilities do not manifest until adolescence, and they believe that they are human until that time.

Sebastian was subjected to perhaps the worst childhood imaginable. His father had inherited Grandfather Tobias's abusive behavior, coupled with a stronger hand and a shorter temper. Sebastian received the rage that could not be directed at Tobias. Sebastian's intelligence threatened Max, so Max demeaned Sebastian to keep him in check. If Sebastian was unruly, his father would beat him and then lock him in the mortuary to spend the night with the cadavers. Sebastian's mother had her own forms of punishment. Her instrument of choice was a sewing needle, jabbed into the palm, toe or tongue, depending on the offense.

Sebastian's worst days were when Grandfather came to visit, particularly if Sebastian was ill. Tobias ridiculed Sebastian mercilessly and treated him with the same cures as his other patients. Tobias always fought with Sebastian's mother and father, which led to more abuse for Sebastian.

None of these circumstances imply that Sebastian was an innocent victim. He was, beneath his human exterior, a dread doppelganger. Seldom do these creatures stray from their evil nature. However, they are usually the ones in control of their situation rather than the victim. As a child, Sebastian had many evil thoughts about how to escape his situation. He had planned his



parents' murder many times, but lacked the physical capabilities to carry out his plans. Sebastian hoped his mental capabilities would eventually free him. Sebastian's ability to read the thoughts of others developed before his shapechanging abilities. Unfortunately, this power contributed to the child's mental demise, for he was reading the hate-filled thoughts of the ones he should be able to trust the most.

The Fassbinder Massacre

At age thirteen, Sebastian had grown to resemble his mother. He had but one friend, a single ally in his dreary world. Philip Fassbinder was the son of a cooper and a bit of an outcast himself. However, his bond with Sebastian was real. Both boys' families despised one another. While dislike of the Blutkalte family was common in town, the Fassbinders were one of the few families who spoke openly of it. At every turn, they railed against the Blutkaltes' evil influence upon the town, only allowing Philip to associate with Sebastian in the misguided belief that their son might have some positive effect on Sebastian. In fact, Sebastian used his mind-reading ability to undermine Philip's conscience and lead him down a path of hooliganism.

The relationship between the Fassbinders and the Blutkaltes reached a breaking point when the Fassbinder's barrel-making business expanded to include making coffins. Clearly, the Fassbinders were threatening Max's livelihood. The Blutkalte family patriarch took it upon himself to devise a solution to this affront.

In a matter of weeks, Philip Fassbinder became ill, after one too many meals at the Blutkalte home. Tobias convinced the Fassbinders that he would put their past disagreements aside in order to save the life of his grandson's best friend. Tobias used his most vile techniques yet to increase the suffering of the Fassbinder family. He continued to poison their son and eventually succeeded in tainting the food of the parents. When the parent's began to show symptoms of the "disease," he quarantined them in their home. Tobias spread word about town that the Fassbinders did not want visitors. With a combination of political maneuvering and threats, he even steered away a traveling priest.

Grandfather Blutkalte's poison was not designed to kill, but merely to disable and inflict pain. Once the family was bed-ridden and incapable of resistance, the Blutkaltes came by for an evening

visit. Many unspeakable horrors were committed in the Fassbinder house that night, but none worse than when Max made Sebastian finish off his friend, Philip. Philip was in a pitiful condition by this point, and Max was almost able to convince Sebastian that he was being merciful. Sebastian understood, though, that his family was neither merciful nor were they protectors of the town. They were murderers, and now he would be one, too.

At last, Sebastian succumbed to the threats and coercion, realizing that Philip's fate was sealed, by his hand or his father's. With tears streaming down his anguished face, Sebastian drove the dagger into his friend's chest and waited for the gasping to stop.

Sebastian's family left the room to begin disposing of the other bodies in the house. Sebastian crumpled to the floor, his eyes pressed shut. He murmured to himself. His voice grew stronger, and he cried out in anguish. As Sebastian tried to stand, his body began to change.

Grandfather Blutkalte was alone in the room with the body of Philip's father. He did not see the form of Jutta appear in the doorway. He only turned in time to see her hands latch around his throat. Tobias struggled to yell, but his already narrow windpipe was clenched shut by Jutta's iron grip. Jutta did not release her hold until well after Tobias stopped resisting.

Max and Jutta were in the bedroom of Philip's mother when a shadow blocked the light from the door. Max and Jutta turned to see what appeared to be their father, standing in the doorway with a blade in his hand.

Jutta was unprepared for the quickness with which Tobias crossed the room and slashed his poisoned knife across her face. She stumbled backward and fell to the floor.

Max screamed at Tobias. He grabbed his spade and swung it at his father with all his pent-up fury. Tobias recoiled from the blow and feebly tried to fight back the relentless assault that followed.

"How dare you attack your father?" were the last words Tobias uttered before he hit the ground. As he collapsed, his body began to shrink and his clothes began to change. Max saw the bloody body of his son Sebastian lying on the floor where Tobias used to be.

A misty form began to coalesce over the body of Sebastian. The ghostly form of Sebastian called out against his father with an echoing voice like





that of a man standing at the bottom of a well. Sebastian raged and lashed out for the soul of Maximilian Blutkalte. Max swung his spade futilely through the apparition repeatedly, until Sebastian had drained him completely away.

Before dawn the next morning, Max stumbled from the Fassbinder home after setting it afire. As the fire drew villagers from their beds, Max told them he had to burn the house to rid it of the "cursed plague" that had infested it. He made no mention of his family within, and he left the town before noon that day.

The Doppelghost

When Sebastian Blutkalte killed his friend Philip, something snapped in his mind. He became someone who could control the situation, and his latent doppelganger powers emerged. He became a doppelganger with a multiple personality disorder. When Max killed Sebastian in the form of Tobias, Sebastian's psyche did not die. Sebastian had more personalities that could live on, and he became a ghost. The Dark Powers granted him the ability to use his shapechanging ability whenever he possesses a mortal.

Sebastian now roams from town to town in kidnapped bodies, killing innocents in the styles used by his former family members. In each town, he travels in public as a non-threatening personality until he has picked out his victims. The killing begins, with each relative taking their turn when needed. When Sebastian is satisfied or the townsfolk close in, he moves on to a new location.

In the standard storyline, Sebastian is a rank four ghost (see the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook** and **Denizens of Dread**). He has the powers of Manifestation, Malevolence, Malevolent Shapechanging, Grave Summoning, Dream Walking and Draining Touch.

Sebastian's multiple personality disorder controls his Malevolent Shapechanging ability. He prefers to spend his time in possession of a body rather than in ghost form. When possible, he seeks out strong physical specimens to inhabit. When he possesses a body, a personality appropriate to the situation takes over, transforming his host body to match the personality. He will stay in this form until his psyche (his plot or the circumstances) tells him that another form would be more useful. He maintains enough of a sense of self-preservation to avoid changing in the presence of others unless forced to do so.

When Sebastian's personality shifts, his skills and abilities change to match. It is important to note that the personality is Sebastian's creation; he creates what he believes that person to be. None of his family members were serial killers, but Sebastian's versions of them are. His skills have been created through years of thought-reading experience, innate ability, practice and supernatural manifestation.

Unlike normal doppelgangers, Sebastian does not have the freedom to take whatever form he chooses. He did not have the opportunity to master his shapechanging skills before he was killed. Sebastian may only change into forms that match one of his personalities. He does not even have the ability to keep the form of the host body or to mimic its personality; he must always become one of his existing personalities.

Sebastian may develop new personalities over time. If a person somehow leaves a significant impression on Sebastian, he may adopt his or her personality. Generally, only Sebastian's murdered victims are candidates for adoption.

As with all ghosts, Sebastian will reform if killed. However, Sebastian does not need to make a level check to reform; his powerful psyche keeps him around until his torments are resolved. Sebastian is also not restricted to any particular location. He is free to roam about the Dread Realm spreading terror wherever the conditions are fitting.

Sebastian's Personalities

As part of his multiple personality disorder, Sebastian has a limited number of alter-egos (see the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**). He does not have any fragments of personalities. Sebastian's subconscious psyche controls when he shifts personalities.

"The Grandfather"

In appearance and mannerisms, Sebastian's "Grandfather" personality matches the original head of the Blutkalte family. However, Sebastian's version is more sinister. While Tobias Blutkalte was motivated primarily by a desire for power, a lust for sadistic, tortuous killing through poisoning motivates the Grandfather. In essence, the Grandfather amplifies the cruelty displayed by Tobias.

The Grandfather chooses the infirm, particularly young boys, as his victims. If he cannot find a sick person, he creates one through poisoning or



contamination. When a person falls ill, the Grandfather finds a way to gain access to the victim. If the Blutkalte legend is unknown in his current location, he might offer assistance to the family directly. The Blutkalte personalities are aware that they are hunted to some degree, so they use aliases as needed. Jutta's maiden name, Nadel, is a frequent choice for a surname. If the Blutkaltes are too well known, the Grandfather tries more subversive approaches to reach his prey.

One tactic Sebastian uses to gain access is to distract the family with one of his non-Blutkalte personalities. Perhaps a meeting is arranged so that the infirm is left alone, or the family is convinced to take the infirm through the wilderness to a nearby healer. Sebastian might also use his own form to sneak into the house, changing shape into the Grandfather once he reached the bedside of the sick. If the victim was under constant supervision, Sebastian could leave his current host and possess the victim's guard.

The Grandfather prefers to make his victims suffer as much as possible, so he uses slow-acting agents whenever he can. If access to the victim is limited or difficult, the Grandfather might be forced to use something with a more immediate effect.

When the victim is no longer capable of displaying pain, the Grandfather finishes him off, or puts them in the capable hands of his son and daughter-in-law.

"The father"

"The Father" is Sebastian's representation of Max Blutkalte. Like Sebastian's other personalities, the Father is even more menacing than the original. The Father is quiet until provoked, something that comes easily to him. An imagined plot against the family could cause The Father to mark a person as his next victim. Whatever the cause, The Father eventually attempts to murder the offender.

The Father has a number of tools at his disposal to carry out his foul deeds. His weapon of choice is a long-handled spade. He uses the spade to strike victims unconscious or to kill them outright. The Father also carries a hammer and chisel, ostensibly for carving headstones. The Father uses them for carving into heads. If he can study his opponent before making his strike, or if he can render his victim helpless, he will attempt to drive his chisel into the unfortunate's skull.





The Father has one more tactic he can use: Grave Summoning (see the DM's Appendix). When the Father has a particular target in mind, he can use a ritual to summon that person. First, the Father must dig a grave and place an open wooden coffin inside. When that is done, he must carve a headstone for the victim. When he finishes carving the victim's name into the headstone, the victim feels magically compelled to travel quietly to the gravesite in a trance. The victim may be able to resist the pull with a DC 20 Will save, but he may still seek its source out of curiosity. When a compelled victim reaches the site, the individual climbs into the grave and lies in the coffin. The Father then seals the coffin and covers it with dirt. As soon as the coffin is sealed, the compulsion is broken and the victim may attempt to break free before the Father finishes filling in the grave. A DC 15 Strength check is necessary to do this.

The Father embodies the personification of Sebastian's temper and strength. When Sebastian feels rage, or when he feels threatened, he uses the Father personality to address the problem.

"The Mother"

Sebastian uses "The Mother" when mental strength or "just" punishment is required. If someone is being too nosy about family affairs, spreading rumors or otherwise misbehaving, the Mother may take notice. She is cold and dispassionate when meting out her justice.

The Mother has a telltale technique for killing her prey. Generally, she requires her victim to be alone and asleep or unconscious. If the conditions are right, she quietly sews the victim up tight in his or her own bed linens, like a spider wrapping its prey, leaving only the head exposed. The victim usually wakes when the Mother shoves a small linen bag filled with thistles into his mouth and covers it with her hand. This procedure prevents the victim from yelling or biting effectively. She next cinches the victim's mouth shut with a leather strap wrapped under the jaw and around the head. The victim is generally at her mercy now, though struggling continues.

The nature of the offender's transgression determines the severity of the punishment. In all cases the victim will end up dead, it is simply a question of how long The Mother takes to perform the act. As a mortician, she typically begins the process by sewing the mouth and eyelids shut. The Mother then murders the victim through either

vivisection by scalpel or through piercing by one hundred critically placed needles.

"The Son"

When Sebastian appears as himself, he is a bit more innocent than he was in real life. He imagines himself before the troubles at the Fassbinder house, before he became a killer. He appears as a young boy of twelve years, but one who has clearly experienced a great deal. The lines of worry are etched permanently on his face, and one eye is always bruised. In the daytime, Sebastian dresses in work clothes, covered in dirt. His black hair is unkempt and dirt-filled. At night, he dresses in slightly better clothes than his social standing would indicate. His hair is combed as if a mother had prepared him for school. His bruised face and sunken shoulders belie his otherwise polished appearance.

The Son is evasive when questioned. He may put up a tough front. He does not reveal many details about his life but instead acts as a guide. Sebastian uses the Son to point player characters in the right direction to help free him from his torment. So he may give them a clue to prod them into the right course of action.

"The Minstrel"

Sebastian uses The Minstrel to spread his story. In fact, the legend of the Blutkalte family travels mostly through Sebastian himself. Through the Minstrel, Sebastian hopes to find someone to release him from his cursed existence.

The Minstrel is named Wolfgang Saenger, and he is described in the "The Legend"—at the beginning of this chapter. If asked about the source of his story, Wolfgang simply says that stories form like rivers — from many sources.

Other Potential Personalities

Sebastian can have any number of personalities, depending on the needs of the story. He might appear as one of his previous victims, such as a merchant or random villager. He might appear as a member of the Fassbinder family, such as his friend Philip. An additional family member could be added as well, such as an innocent younger sister.

When creating additional personalities, several factors should be considered. First, why did this person leave a strong impression on Sebastian? Second, why does Sebastian need this personality? What does Sebastian use this personality to accom-



plish? (Perhaps the personality represents one of Sebastian's particular moods.) Lastly, consider the likelihood that this personality will "give away" the plot or cause the player characters to discover Sebastian too early. Any personality that arouses suspicion or invites investigation should be avoided unless it is designed for an adversarial encounter.

Using the Story



This section shows how to develop the Brood of Blutkalte into a full-fledged adventure. Feel free to adapt the details to suit your own campaign. In addition to describing several ways to enhance the structure of your adventure, an outline for building a story featuring this monstrous villain is presented for DMs to use.

Tricks and Techniques

The *Ravenloft Dungeon Master's Guide* provides some useful techniques to help DMs incorporate horror into their scenarios and add atmosphere to the game. However, some additional methods are required when running a serial killer adventure to ensure the plot plays out to a satisfying conclusion.

Running a Matrix Adventure

The information listed in the previous section describes prototypical encounters in a serial killer adventure. However, the adventure itself does not need to be serial. In any adventure, two timelines exist — the timeline of the player characters and the timeline of the villain. The characters control their own timeline, and the DM controls that of the killer. The adventure works best when the characters have the ability to interrupt or affect the murderer's timeline.

Splitting the Party.

Most seasoned players know that the one thing you should never do is split up the party. It does not mean that they will not do it; just that they know they should not. In a serial killer adventure, the DM must force the characters to split up. As mentioned previously, the DM has only one villain to work with. If you want to give the characters a chance to encounter the villain before the climactic finale, you need to split up the party so that the villain survives to the final encounter. The characters should not be divided for the final encounter,

because it would deny some players the opportunity to participate.

The DM can use several different techniques to split up a party. The most certain way is to put the characters in a location where a physical barrier can be used to divide them. Typically, this device takes the form of a pit trap, a sliding wall or a teleportation device. This technique is most effective in the villain's lair. Most serial killers are paranoid and will protect their lair from intruders. The characters should already be on edge, and facing a superior foe at half strength can only heighten their anxiety.

Outside the villain's lair, it is much harder to split up a party. It is best to attempt this at night when most of the party is sleeping, since part of the work is already done. A well-placed *silence* spell can help ensure that some of the party is asleep for the entire encounter.

In an uncontrolled environment, a DM can split up a party using one of two ways. The first is to disable part of the party, which can be accomplished through spells such as *arcane lock*, *color spray*, *entangle*, *fear*, *mass hold person*, *sleep*, *stinking cloud*, *symbol of sleep*, *wall of force*, *wall of ice*, *wall of iron* and *wall of stone*. Some magic items can also be effective, such as *dust of sneezing and choking*. All these effects are likely to disable or isolate multiple party members. Generally, these should be cast as part of an ambush, to ensure they have an opportunity to take effect. The DM should consider which characters are likely to resist a particular type of attack when choosing the method. The killer may have a particular PC he wants to isolate and will plan accordingly. If the attack does not isolate part of the party, the killer may abandon the attack.

The second method for splitting up the party outside the villain's lair is to let the party do it themselves. This method is harder to accomplish, but in some ways more rewarding. The plot feels less contrived and more opportunistic. This method begins with a lure. The DM needs to find something that would lead a PC or PCs away from the rest of the group. The typical lure is an urgent cry for help while the other PCs are otherwise occupied or distracted. Note that the lure could be used to lure the PCs toward or away from the villain. For example, the characters might find an injured child in the woods. While helping the child, they hear a cry for help in the distance. All the characters rush to the cry, except for one who stays behind with the injured child. That character is now





isolated, and the villain can make an appearance. The other characters arrive at the sound of the cry, a villager who has discovered a body planted by the killer.

In a town, numerous options exist for leading party members astray. If multiple shopping opportunities are present, characters naturally gravitate to the particular shop that interests them. The killer could focus on characters at a particular shop. During a meal at an inn, the villain could have a note delivered to a particular character, asking him to come outside alone to receive an important clue.

The villain may also be able to use spells as lures, such as *charm person*, *dominate person*, *magic jar* and various illusion spells.

Allowing the Villain to Escape

If the characters are to encounter the villain before the finale, the villain must escape in earlier encounters. Either the villain can perform a hit-and-run attack, or he can attempt to split up the party.

In a hit-and-run attack, the villain attacks while the characters are unprepared, such as when they are sleeping. Note that serial killers attack to kill, not to injure. Therefore, a serial killer with a death attack, such as the assassin prestige class, can initiate a far more frightening hit-and-run attack than one who lacks such an attack. The death attack might be even more effective if used against an associate or ward of the characters rather than the characters themselves. The attack leaves the characters feeling guilty and vulnerable, rather than victimized by the whim of a DM. A hit-and-run attack should be quick, terrifying and disorienting.

After the attack, the killer must escape through a foolproof method that does not appear to be foolproof. The exact method of escape depends on the capabilities of the killer and of the characters. If the characters are not particularly speedy, a fast moving killer might simply be able to outrun them. The villain might be particularly skilled at hiding or have a hidden lair nearby. If some of the characters are sleeping during the attack, the ones who are awake may be reluctant to chase the villain off into the darkness, potentially separating themselves from the rest of the party. Magical methods of escape include *blink*, *dimension door*, *expeditious retreat*, *haste*, *invisibility*, *pass without trace*, *teleport* and the use of items such as *dust of disappearance*.

If the villain decides to split up the characters or lure one individual away, it is much easier for the villain to escape. In fact, in this scenario, it may be more difficult for the characters to escape! Once some of the characters have been lured away, the killer attempts to kidnap or kill them. The characters' friends might show up to scare off the killer before he completes the task. If the villain is kidnapping the character, he attempts to subdue or disable the victim. Once subdued, the character can be taken back to a lair to be killed in the ritualistic fashion that defines the serial killer. The character should ideally be rescued before the killer gets that far, though. A kidnapping could allow the character to gain valuable insight into the mind of the serial killer. In fact, understanding the killer's pathology could be the one thing that saves the unfortunate character.

Building an Adventure with the Brood of Blutkalte

The information provided so far describes the background of the story and the characters, but not the plot that drives the adventurers. Clearly, the ultimate resolution of this story is to put the ghost of Sebastian Blutkalte to rest permanently. The structure of the adventure, however, details the investigation of a serial killer. The following is an outline of such an adventure using the Blutkalte family.

Introduction

This adventure begins in the city of Lebek in Falkovnia, in the poorer section of town. When the characters arrive in town, a town guard confronts them. The guard informs them that a local priest must examine all new arrivals to town for signs of a sickness that is plaguing the town. The guard directs the party to a shabby inn, the Last Resting Place, where other newcomers are staying. They are to wait there for the arrival of the priest, a cleric of Ezra named Eckert Pfaff.

While in the inn, the party can ask the other travelers and inn staff about the sickness and other local events. The following information can be gathered:

- The sickness first appeared several weeks ago. Three prisoners in the local jail contracted the disease and died. The jailer eventually died as well.
- The sickness has killed eight people so far. Nobody knows how many others are infected.





Chapter Three

- A traveling healer was tending to the sick, but a priest of Ezra named Eckert Pfaff ran him off. Eckert says that only anchorites are allowed to heal people.

- Eckert has not actually healed anyone; he just quarantines people. He will not heal anyone who does not follow Ezra. He probably cannot cure the sickness anyway.

- The sickness affects people differently. The symptoms are never the same. Some victims get sores, and some go blind. Some cough up blood. Most are bedridden and slowly lose their mind. One man's skin turned black and fell off like ashes from a fireplace log.

- A mason named Konrad is the latest to contract the disease. He is a friend of the innkeeper. Konrad has lost all his strength, and his eyes have begun to dissolve. Eckert quarantined Konrad and his wife in their home a week ago.

Sebastian Blutkalte is actually in the common room of The Last Resting Place, in a possessed body with the personality and appearance of "The Minstrel." At this time, he reveals no information about the legend of the Blutkaltes. He simply listens and observes. If asked a question, he says that he is newly arrived in town and has no additional information.

Eckert Pfaff shows up at the inn in a few hours. He is a young man and much more arrogant than his minimal experience justifies (he is a very low-level cleric). He does not particularly care for the fate of the unconverted sick; he is more concerned with keeping the disease away from his faithful. After he examines the characters for any unusual symptoms, he answers any questions they may have for him. Note that "unusual symptoms" might include curses; affected characters may have to succeed in a DC 15 Diplomacy check to convince Eckert that they are not infected.

Eckert can provide the following information:

- Currently only one person is sick in town, so he believes the quarantine is working. Konrad, the ill man, is not a follower of Ezra, so Eckert cares nothing for his fate.

- Three families remain under quarantine, though their infected relatives have already died.

- The victims do not appear to have contracted the disease in a common location.

- A traveling charlatan claiming to be a healer was caring for the sick. This behavior is illegal (at least according to Eckert). He chased the man out

of town a few days ago, since the jail is still under quarantine.

- The charlatan was a large man with white robes. He was not a cleric; he may have been an herbalist of some sort. He said his name was Tobias.

- Eckert does not know the type of disease or its cause. He has not examined the affected people very closely for fear of contracting the disease himself. He does not have the power to remove diseases.

- Other members of his church will not assist in this matter. They tasked him with solving the problem.

- The characters should not visit any of the quarantined locations. If they do so, they will be quarantined at that location as well. The quarantine lasts for one week after the death of the last infected person.

The adventure can proceed in one of several ways. The characters should feel compelled to investigate due to the cleric's indifference to the suffering. They may be able to convince him to allow them to help with DC 20 Diplomacy check, or they may decide to investigate in secret. If they do not feel an obligation to assist, someone in the inn may approach the characters after Eckert leaves and tell them that she heard sounds coming from inside the jail just this morning, even though it was boarded up. The DM can use other techniques to bring the characters into the adventure if necessary, such as infecting a character with poisoned food. Sebastian (as the Son) might even enlist their help to rescue his "uncle" from the jail.

The Jail

If the characters choose to investigate the jail, they find a boarded up stone building with a "Keep Out" sign nailed to the door. A successful DC 16 Listen check allows a character to hear a moaning sound inside the building. The interior of the building reeks from the stench of decomposing bodies. Eckert boarded it up with the bodies inside, as well as one forgotten living prisoner, Arno Baecker. Arno is in an underground cell beneath a trap door. He is a baker who was jailed for baking underweight bread. Arno is not sick, since the Grandfather never visited him, but he is dying of malnutrition. He has been drinking the water that floods the floor of his underground cell.

Arno knows only that a healer came to see the prisoners shortly after they first got sick. He gave them horrible medicines and applied burning oint-



ments. He seemed very interested in seeing how they responded to each treatment. Arno heard that the healer was always smiling, even when the prisoners wailed in pain. His cures did not work; the prisoners all got worse and died. Arno has not seen the healer or anyone else in a week. Arno is, of course, very thankful for being rescued.

If the characters search the jailer's quarters, they find a receipt for repair work done by Konrad Maurer.

The true story is that Sebastian possessed the jailer every night for a week and visited the inmates in the personality of the Grandfather. As captives, they were particularly susceptible to his sadistic treatments. Finally, he poisoned the jailer by eating his own tainted food.

Konrad Maurer's House

A member of the town guard watches over Konrad's house. The characters have to use diplomacy, stealth or trickery to get inside. Within the house are Konrad, his wife, Astrid, and his daughter, Britta. Konrad is nearly mad with fits of screaming that constantly interrupt conversation in the house. Astrid and Britta are healthy. Astrid can provide the following information:

- Konrad first showed symptoms about a week ago.
- A traveling healer named Tobias came to visit the next day. No healers ever visit people in this neighborhood, so Konrad appreciated the visit. The healer came every day for a few days, but Eckert told him to stop coming.
- The healer was not a pleasant man, and his cures were as bad as the disease. Tobias claimed harsh medicine was needed, but it would eventually cure Konrad. He used bleedings, burnings and piercings to drive out the illness.
- The healer said he suspected it was a poison, and he asked Konrad if he had wronged anyone or if anyone had wronged him. Konrad did not give the healer any names. However, Konrad did have a disagreement with the jailer over some repair work he had done a few weeks ago. Konrad also had a long-standing feud with his brother, David, but David was certainly not behind this suffering.
- If the characters seem very trustworthy, Astrid relates that Tobias has returned to the house several times after Eckert told him to stay away. The family appreciates the help, even if Konrad can barely withstand it. Tobias told Astrid he slips past the guard when he fell asleep.

The true story is that Sebastian possessed the guard, retrieved his medicines, and walked into the Maurer house. If questioned about it, the guard denies ever falling asleep on duty.

David Maurer's House

If the characters investigate Konrad's brother's house, they find that he has become ill as well. David, who lives alone, is now blind and shakes with chill. He has not seen his brother in years. They both loved Astrid, but she chose Konrad over David. Konrad became sick several days ago. A healer came to visit David to tell him of his brother's illness. The healer has been back to tend to him every night, including last night.

Return to the Last Resting Place

The characters may return to the Last Resting Place to spend the night, or they may stay with the Maurers. In either case, the night passes uneventfully. The morning brings dark skies and heavy rain. Wherever the characters spend the night, someone asks them in the morning if they have seen Eckert Pfaff. Eckert always checks in at the inn or quarantined houses first thing in the morning, but he has not appeared yet today. If the characters do not investigate, someone else informs them several hours later of the murder of Pfaff in his home. The innkeeper and city guards all know where Pfaff lives.

The Home of Eckert Pfaff

The characters may or may not be the first people to reach Pfaff's home, depending on when they arrive. If they arrive first, they notice that the door is ajar, with no signs of forced entry. Inside, they find the body of Eckert Pfaff.

Pfaff has been sewn into his bed like a cocoon. His blankets are still damp with sweat. His eyes, nose and lips have been sewn shut. Bloody tears streak his face. If his mouth is opened, a large pinecone is found inside. One hand protrudes from a slit cut in his blanket. A slash across the wrist still drips blood into a pool on the floor.

If the PCs provided any sort of aid to either of the infected Maurer brothers, a piece of vellum is sewn onto the victim's scalp. The vellum has a message written upon it: "Punishment is swift for the wicked pretending to do good. Be wary <insert character name>!" Use the name of any character with a strong mind, preferably a cleric or paladin. This note is a trick by Sebastian to make a particu-



lar character feel targeted, when he actually intends to select a weaker-minded character.

The driving rain makes tracking difficult. The characters must make a DC 14 Search or Wilderness Lore check to find a single set of human tracks directly in front of the house, leading in the general direction from which the characters came. The tracks cannot be followed into town. No other clues can be found.

Eventually, city guards, other clerics of Ezra and curious onlookers arrive at the house. The guards order everyone back to their homes and the characters back to the inn to await further questioning.

The Mob

When the characters return to the inn, the patrons are buzzing about the killing. Sebastian, in the guise of the Minstrel, reveals the story of the Blutkaltes, as described in the Introduction of this chapter. The story achieves immediate credibility with the patrons, who begin to speculate on where the Blutkaltes might be found. Eventually the locals convince themselves and others that a family living just down the street most closely matches the description of the Blutkaltes. The crowd works themselves into a frenzy and marches out the door to confront the alleged Blutkaltes. The characters have to act quickly to prevent a tragedy from occurring. Diplomacy, intimidation or nonlethal of the mob leaders are all acceptable solutions to the problem. While the party is dealing with the mob, the Minstrel quietly slips away.

The Grandfather

After the mob has dispersed, a young woman approaches the characters. She informs them that a young boy, perhaps 12 years old, approached her as the mob was forming and told her that the people were looking in the wrong place. The boy said that they ought to be looking in the old tower down by the river. He then ran off in that direction. (The boy, of course, was Sebastian as the Son.)

The tower by the river is an old dilapidated stone watchtower, some 80 feet high. The door handle at the base of the tower is coated in terinav root contact poison (DC 13, 1d6 Dex /2d6 Dex); the door is on the side of the tower away from the rain so the poison has not been washed off. It is very dark and musty inside. An old wood staircase winds up to the top floor 60 feet above the ground; the other floors have collapsed. If the characters are

not quiet or lose their balance among the rubble, Sebastian hears them. Note that Sebastian always uses the form of The Son to climb the steps.

At the top of the stairs is a small room lit by sunlight streaming through an open door in the outer wall. The Grandfather is waiting at the top of the stairs with a poisoned dagger drawn and ready. The Grandfather's goal is to step between the open doorway and the stairs, slashing at any characters who attempt to reach the top floor. When more than one character reaches the top or he feels his life is in danger, he moves out the doorway on to the old walkway around the tower.

The walkway is very precarious. It is 12" wide, and the railing is long gone. The rain continues to pour. Anyone (including the Grandfather) who walks on it must succeed at a DC 12 Balance check to move. Failure by 4 or more means the person falls into the river, 70 feet below. See the *PHB* for more information on fighting while balancing. Damage from the fall is 3d6 real plus 2d3 nonlethal. The person is then in dark, fast-moving water and subject to drowning (see the *DMG*). A fight at this point mirrors the fast-paced action of a horror adventure and is a standard "cliché" of dark fantasy.

The Grandfather fights to the death on this ledge. As he dies, any characters on the ledge see his body transforming as falls. If he is killed on the ledge, the body falls into the water below. If he falls off before being killed, the Grandfather drowns in the river, at least as far as Sebastian is concerned. In reality, the ghost of Sebastian abandons the possessed body and seeks another person to possess, this time as "the Father." Sebastian will not be able to use "the Grandfather" personality again, and the characters are one step closer to putting Sebastian to rest. The next day, the body of an unknown person is discovered down river.

The characters can find various poisons and disease agents in bottles in the Grandfather's lair. The Father's and the Mother's equipment are hidden elsewhere.

Next Steps

After the Grandfather is killed, the adventure becomes more dynamic. The characters' actions determine Sebastian's next moves, since he is now hunting them. The characters must kill both the Father and the Mother to free Sebastian. The DM must also slowly reveal the plot to the characters, giving them more clues about Sebastian's identity.





The final encounter might involve the Father and the Mother personalities working together, or they might have to be faced individually. The party should face the Mother first, followed by a dramatic fight with the Father in the body of one of the characters.

Wrapping Things Up

The next night, the Blutkalte family attempts to attack the characters. Sebastian can use the Minstrel or the Son and his thought-reading powers to spy on the characters. In the Blutkalte's ideal scenario, only a single character is on watch at a time. This condition allows the Father to lure the watching character away with his grave summoning ability, and then slip in to attack the sleeping characters in the persona of the Mother. If more than one person is watching, the Mother attempts to sneak into the room where the other characters are sleeping. As a last resort, she could possess a character to sneak up on her sleeping prey. The goal of this encounter is to split up the party and introduce a real element of fear. Ideally, the party will be able to regroup just in time to save themselves.

If Sebastian possesses a character, he abandons the villager's body in the woods. The villager should be someone the characters have met before, perhaps at the inn. The confused villager might come across the characters or even the grave-summoned character.

If the Mother sneaks up on sleeping characters undetected, she attempts to sew one into his bedroll. To do so without waking the characters, she must succeed at 10 opposed Move Silently checks (DC equals the characters' Listen checks). Sleeping characters receive a -10 penalty on their Listen checks. Any character who succeeds, wakes up. Escape from the cocoon requires an Escape Artist check opposed by the Mother's Craft (sewing) check and takes 1 minute. During this time, the victim is considered bound and helpless. If the victim wakes before the Mother finishes sewing, escape is unopposed.

Once the Mother has an opponent wrapped up, she turns her attention to other characters in the room. Using her scalpel, she attempts a coup-de-grace attack against the throat of a sleeping character, preferably a warrior. Whether the character lives or dies, the attack wakes up any sleeping characters.



It is important to remember that Sebastian is a powerful entity, and he might be able to kill all the characters under the right circumstances. However, that would not be much fun for the players. The DM should make the players think that they are all going to die. Remember that the Blutkaltes enjoy torturing their victims, and they cannot do that if the victims are dead. If necessary, the Son can fight for control of the possessed body to save a character that is about to be killed by the Mother or the Father. This circumstance would provide an opportunity for Sebastian to tell the characters that they have to stop his family, or he will follow their example.

The Mother makes sure she wounds any wrapped-up characters at the beginning of the fight, causing a bleeding wound. She fights to the death, possibly attempting a coup-de-grace against the bound character if things go badly. It is not necessary to kill her body to free Sebastian; nonlethal damage that knocks her out drives Sebastian away. As she dies or collapses, her body transforms into the body of her host. By this point, the characters should realize that they have either killed or subdued an innocent person. The manifested ghost of Sebastian rises up from the body and flees, seeking a new body to use for the Father. If the characters have separated, Sebastian finds a villager and then pursues the separated characters. If not, he attempts to possess one of the characters and fight.

The Summoning

The Father has dug a grave in the woods several hundred yards from where the characters are sleeping. He also has prepared a coffin and a headstone. The Father does his best to determine when a weak-willed person is on watch. He makes his way to the grave and carves the name of that character on the headstone, invoking his grave summoning ability. Max then moves back through the woods to where the characters are sleeping to see if it takes effect. Depending on the reactions of the characters, Max may attack one of the characters with his spade and paralyzing death attack, or he may wait until a better target takes his turn at sentry duty.

If the Father's grave summoning was successful, he follows the character to the gravesite. The DM must keep track of rounds elapsed and distances traveled, because the party's ability to rescue their summoned comrade depends on it. The Father attempts to distract any pursuers to make sure the summoned character arrives safely. At the gravesite, the summoned character quietly lies in the small coffin at the bottom of the grave

until the Father arrives. The Father hammers the lid shut on the coffin and climbs out of the pit. The Father has prepared the coffin lid ahead of time by filling it with hundreds of nails, making it painful for anyone to attempt to escape. As soon as the first shovel full of dirt lands on top of the coffin, the character is able to act normally.

While in the coffin, the character is considered grappled. Attempting to break out of the coffin requires a Strength check as if breaking a good wooden door (Break DC 18, Hardness 5, Hit Points 15). The Strength check is at a -2 penalty due to the confined space. Each escape attempt also causes 1d4 points of damage from the nails protruding through the coffin lid. The DM can make the Strength check more challenging using ropes, chains or stronger wood. The character can attempt to break free without additional penalties a number of times equal to their Constitution score before becoming fatigued. He may try again as many times as his Constitution score, but afterward he becomes exhausted. For every minute Max spends shoveling, the DC to break out increases by 1. It takes Max 20 minutes to fill in the hole. The coffin has only 10 minutes of air in it. After 10 minutes has expired, the character drops to -1 hit points and is dying. When his hit points reach -10, the character dies.

Conclusion

Once the characters have "killed" the Grandfather, the Father and the Mother, the ghost of Sebastian Blutkalte can rest. Remember that Sebastian has the Rejuvenation special ability, so killing the ghost itself is unlikely to be effective.

When Sebastian is released, he manifests and appears before the characters as the "human" boy Sebastian. He thanks the characters for releasing him. He then transforms into each of his other remaining personalities and says goodbye. His final form is that of a juvenile doppelganger as his ghost dissolves into the ether.

Plot Breakers

The Brood of Blutkalte is a complex story that relies on a number of different mechanisms in order to succeed. The villain is a doppelganger, a ghost, a serial killer and a madman. The DM must be prepared to adapt the plot on the fly as players do the unexpected. Here are some potential "plot breakers" for which the DM should be prepared.

The easiest way to foil a good serial killer adventure is for the killer to be found too early. The





adventure should be structured such that the characters do not even have the opportunity to meet the killer until midway through the adventure. This guideline can be ignored somewhat in the case of the Sebastian, as long as the DM is aware of the ways that the characters have available to detect Sebastian's true nature. Of course, even if a character detects the presence of a ghost, she may not want to reveal it immediately, since it may cause a panic among those present. If Sebastian subconsciously senses that he has been detected (Sense Motive), he tries to use his *detect thoughts* ability to plan the proper response. Sebastian's personality will not be consciously aware that he is doing any detection, however.

The feats Ethereal Empathy, Ghostsight and Haunted from the **Ravenloft Players Handbook** can reveal a ghost, even one that has possessed a body. Ethereal Empathy allows the character to see resonance, but not the ghost itself. Therefore, the character would essentially be aware that a powerful emotional resonance was in the immediate area but would be unable to pinpoint it. Ghostsight allows the character to see the ghost inside the possessed body. Similarly, the guardian spirit from the Haunted feat

might be able to see the ghost. If Sebastian is in the form of one of the nonviolent personalities, an interesting encounter could actually develop when he is discovered. The personality might have to come to the realization that a member of the Blutkalte family has killed him. It is unlikely that the characters suspect that the ghost is also the killer. The characters should believe that the ghost follows the Blutkalte family around, trying to gain release.

Several spells can also detect a ghost. Remember, however, that undead always get a Will save vs. any spell effect that would reveal their nature. In addition, ghosts are generally immune to *detect thoughts*. *Detect undead* can be effective. See *ethereal resonance* (**Van Richten's Arsenal**) does not work, since it does not allow the subject to sense ethereal creatures.

Van Richten's Arsenal and the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook** list some spells that are useful against ghosts, such as *eternal slumber* (VRA) and *soul anchor* (RPH). *Spiritual purgative* (VRA) can drive a ghost from its host.

The DM should be familiar with the sections on ghosts from the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**, **Van Richten's Arsenal** and **Denizens of Dread**.



Variations on a Theme



his section describes ways that the story can be changed to build entirely new adventures. The techniques detailed here can provide DMs with many scenarios, all stemming from one story.

Anatomy of a Serial Killer Adventure

Many different formats can serve as an outline for an adventure featuring a serial killer. The following, however, presents the structure of the adventure in a way that allows for flexibility as well as organization.

The Hook: Introducing the Problem

The characters need to have something to do and a good reason for doing it. In a serial killer adventure, player characters can be brought in at several points:

Before the killings begin — This option presents “the legend” of the killer, told to the characters in a generally nonthreatening situation, followed by an indication that the killer might be real and in this town. The usual indicator is the discovery of a body matching the details described in the legend.

Immediately following the first killing — The characters find out, along with the rest of the town, that someone has been murdered. This option delays the discovery of the legend to the investigation phase.

After one or more killings. — The characters arrive in a town that has already seen a murder. The townspeople are scared, and the constables are investigating. The legend may be one of the theories behind the killings.

After a victim has been discovered, the characters should want to investigate, particularly if they knew the victim.

Investigating the Crime Scene

The crime scene might be nearby, or it might be on the other side of town. In the early stages, the adventure proceeds more easily for the DM if the characters discover the victim some time after the murder takes place. The characters should not have the impression that the murderer is still nearby, even if that is the case. This encounter should establish the relationship between the characters and local investigators. The locals might ask the characters to assist them, to share information or to stay out of the way.

Arriving after one or more murders — If the characters arrived in town after one or more murders have already taken place, few clues may remain. The body has probably been buried or burned, and some of the evidence might no longer exist (washed clothes, cleaned rooms, etc.). To investigate, the characters need to convince local officials, clerics and family members to allow them to exhume the body or search through personal effects. Otherwise, the characters must gain any information second or third hand. Such an encounter involves the questioning of NPCs.

Encountering the body in the presence of locals — If the characters encounter the body at the same time as the townsfolk, more first-hand information is available. The cause of death becomes easier to determine. Depending on the murderer, some tools may have been left behind. The characters might be able to use *speak with dead* or *immerse mind* (**Van Richten's Arsenal**) to gather some information from the corpse. If a character has the Ethereal Resonance feat or *see ethereal resonance* (**Van Richten's Arsenal**), a phantom of the dying victim might be visible.

Following the Leads

The characters should have some leads to follow from their investigation of the murder scene. The plot unfolds through the course of these encounters. The characters meet potential suspects, potential victims and other personalities related to the case. The DM can introduce as many plots and subplots as desired. The characters should be left with the impression that something larger is occurring behind the scenes. The story should include cover-ups, false leads and plot twists. Investigation of the clues can occur over several days, with additional murders occurring every day.

Witnessing a Murder

Eventually, the characters have enough clues to put them in the right place at the right time to witness a murder. This should give them their first glimpse of the murderer. The characters might even be able to confront the murderer to some degree, but the killer should escape. This scene must be carefully devised and executed. The DM has to walk a fine line to give the characters the impression that the outcome of the encounter is not prescribed while still ensuring that the adventure continues to a proper conclusion. In a serial killer adventure, there is only one bad guy. When the villain's reign of terror ends, so does the adventure.





Hunters Become the Hunted

Once the killer is aware that the characters are in pursuit, the characters themselves become vulnerable. The killer must still serve the demons that haunt him, though, so he determines the victim and the setting accordingly. The villain either picks a character as victim or someone very close to the characters who matches the profile of his other victims, and he lures his target into an appropriate environment.

While the killer hunts his target, the characters need to be split up. The entire party cannot encounter the killer until the conclusion of the adventure, or they might kill the villain prematurely.

Remember that the characters' lives are in the hands of the DM. A DM can kill the characters at any time in an adventure of this sort, but that doesn't mean she should. Even when the villain has targeted a character for killing, the "best" outcome is for the targeted character to survive the ordeal. Therefore, survival of the character should be possible and even likely if the other party members act quickly and creatively. The encounter should be designed with a questionable result. The victim needs to feel real fear for his own life while recognizing that his fate lies in the hands of his friends, not the DM.

For purposes of the plot, the rescue of the character or ally can be either the last encounter or the next-to-last encounter of the adventure. If it is the last encounter, then the encounter should take place in the villain's lair. If this encounter is the next-to-last encounter, then it should take place at some other location and the killer should escape to his lair, while leaving a trail the characters follow.

Entering the Lair

At some point during the adventure, the characters must enter the killer's lair, an event that could occur at several points in the plot. The first possibility occurs if the characters have tracked the villain to his lair after witnessing a killing. The villain will not be there, but the characters may find clues revealing more of the villain's plans as well as his personality. Another possibility involves the rescue of a character or an ally from the lair, as described above. Finally, the characters might not have to venture into the villain's lair until the very conclusion of the adventure when they are ready to bring the killer to justice.

Concept Variations

The Brood of Blutkalte builds on a simple concept: the raising of a dread doppelganger in a human

family. If the doppelganger's family environment was particularly horrible, perhaps it might develop multiple personalities. When the doppelganger reaches puberty, its shapechanging abilities appear, possibly leading to additional psychological and sociological problems. Finally, what might happen if this creature is killed and becomes a ghost?

Many different variations are possible using these ideas. If Sebastian is not killed, he can still make an effective villain as a dread doppelganger with a multiple-personality disorder. It would be harder for him to move about and remain undetected, but additional personalities could compensate for the lack of ghost abilities.

In another variation, Sebastian would not develop multiple personalities. He would simply be a doppelganger ghost with a great desire to kill. In the standard plot, Sebastian's abilities are limited by his mental disorder. He cannot, for example, change into anyone he desires. Without this disorder, Sebastian would become even more powerful. He could use his ghost powers to their full ability, and he could use his own cunning to masquerade as anyone.

Other possible permutations of this storyline exist. For example, Sebastian could be a human rather than a dread doppelganger. He would still have a multiple personality disorder and become a ghost. He would not, however, have the ability to change his appearance at will. Sebastian would simply possess bodies that matched the personality he wanted to use.

The Blutkaltes could even be real people, working together as a family. The grandfather is a true serial killer, while the father and the mother are simply evil people who murder those who cross them. Sebastian, in this case, might be a protagonist, trying to escape his family's plans for him.

A potentially interesting variation on the theme is to put Sebastian into a cursed object. For example, if the personality of Sebastian were infused into a *hat of disguise*, any character or NPC could become a doppelgangerlike serial killer with multiple personalities. The hat would use the wearer as a tool to satisfy its lust for killing. The hat could even force the current owner to give it away when it needed to change wearers to avoid capture. Even if the wearer were killed, the hat would likely be claimed as a prize, thereby ensuring the killing would continue.

Plot and Goal Variations

The sample plot begins with the characters investigating murders committed by the Grandfather.





However, the adventure could follow a completely different path if a different family member initiated the first murders. For example, Max might decide that he needs to kill everyone who was in a tavern one night when they laughed at his mud-covered clothes. He might pursue individuals on their way home from the tavern late at night. When the patrons make it difficult for Max to fulfill his goal, the Grandfather might assist by poisoning the vats in the tavern's cellar. Of course, he would have to visit the tavern to watch the effects of his poisons. Finally, the Mother might strangle the barmaids on their way home from work.

A plot beginning with the Mother might involve political intrigue over an extended period. The Mother is more methodical in her planning. She might not feel the need to kill as often as the Father or the Grandfather. Perhaps in an ongoing campaign, NPCs periodically turn up dead, sewn into their sheets. The characters might not discover the relationship among the victims for months.

In the standard Brood of Blutkalte story, Sebastian's ghost must be set free through the killing of his murderous personalities. However, there may be other ways to put Sebastian to rest permanently. If Sebastian himself is considered a true killer (or was he coerced by his wicked family into killing Philip?), then the Son personality might have to be killed as well. Perhaps that is the only personality that needs to be killed.

Sebastian might follow a specific ritual every time he enters a new town. His family, from eldest to youngest, must each kill a victim. The personalities must be killed before Sebastian takes a life, thereby continuing the legacy. In this scenario, the "death" of one of Sebastian's ancestors would not be permanent unless Sebastian was put to rest also. He would move on to a new town and restart the cycle.

Another possible way to free Sebastian is to destroy his ghost and then right the wrong that created him. In this case, that might involve the proper burial of the Fassbinder family or destruction of the dagger that Sebastian used to kill Philip.

The standard story introduces some minor subplots among Sebastian's victims. These subplots are used more as a diversion to keep the players guessing about why these people are being killed. However, Sebastian might choose victims that were part of a larger plot. Sebastian would be seen as bringing justice to the people who were involved. For example, the characters might eventually discover that all the victims are members of a secret guild that prevented newcomers from establishing businesses

in the town. The more involved the DM makes the subplots, the more people are available as potential suspects and victims.

Setting

Serial killer adventures can take place in any locale with a sufficient number of victims and suspects. The environment is one of the killer's choosing, even if the characters try to influence it.

The story described here takes place in a large town or small city near a river. However, the story can be easily adapted to other locations. For example, the dilapidated watchtower could be placed on a bluff rather than by a river. The quarantine dictates a location without easy access to *remove disease* or *neutralize poison* spells. However, this location could be any area without many clerics. A small village or an atheistic domain such as Lamordia would work as well.

While a sprawling urban setting is the traditional hunting ground for serial killers (probably due to the number of available victims), a more restrictive location can be even more terrifying. Imagine a confined location full of people, such as an asylum, a prison, a remote inn or a ship. Sebastian is extremely mobile while in ghost form, so the killers can strike in nearly any location, regardless of the precautions taken.

The story can be set in many different locations across the core of Ravenloft. In addition to Lekar, the story could be set in Aerie or Stangengrad in Falkovnia with little modification. In Barovia, Zeidenburg or Teufeldorf are good locations. In Invidia, the thieves' quarter in Karina is suitable.

In Darkon, the town of Mykle might be an appropriate setting. The large asylum in Mykle could be used to good effect. Characters might suspect that a killer had escaped the asylum. With some modifications to the adventure concept, they might be correct.

In Borca, the slums in Levkarest on the Luna River would fit the story, but an interesting variation might be to make the Blutkalte family of higher social standing. Perhaps the Grandfather is charming and devious. So much so, that Ivana Boritsi made him into one of the emordenung. Of course, Sebastian would not have the powers of the emordenung, but he might have developed a way to simulate them through contact poison. The Father might be a high-ranking soldier. The Mother could be an aristocrat who sews as a hobby.



Chapter Four:
Noises in the
Night



The Legend



ike all good stories, this begins...

“Once upon a time there lived a Lamordian folklorist by the name of Hans Gleam. He and his brother, Jakob, were passionate young men, so much alike they were often mistaken for twins. They shared similar interests and were friendly but competitive rivals in every field they entered—swordplay, hunting, romance and, most importantly, the academic world. Both brothers were fascinated by the myths and legends of the Lands of the Mists. They began as students in the Universitat Ludendorf, finishing first and second in each year of study, first Hans, then Jakob, then Hans again. Both moved to the University of Il Aluk in the days before the Hour of Ascension claimed that great institute of learning. I take it you all know that tale? In any case, it is a story that should be told at another time.

“At the University of Il Aluk, Hans and Jakob studied the variations in the myths surrounding the Hour of Ascension. Unlike many of their fellow countrymen, the brothers didn’t scoff at these tales as baseless rumors. Instead, they believed each story was a pearl, built around a grain of truth, a speck of dirt coated in the accreted layers of generations of embellishments and forgotten details. Though this was not an original idea, they pursued it with unique interest. They turned their fiercely analytical minds to uncovering those seeds. Their eternal competition would ensure they pushed each other harder and harder, always trying to peer more deeply into the past, gather more legends from townsfolk and so on. Everything they discovered, though, they published together. They were brothers, after all, and their rivalry was fierce but friendly. The first of their exploits was tracing the folk tale of the Darkwraiths of Abalon to a real cult in Darkon’s Age of Secrets. You haven’t heard of that story? Well, that is definitely a saga to be told at another time. During daylight, I believe, not now in the dark of the midnight hour.

“After several years of their partnership, the brothers were recognized by the academic powers that be. Jakob was offered the newly formed Chair of Historiography at the University of Dementlieu, a joint position offered by both the Departments of History and of Divinities. Hans, however, was not given a tenure. He felt slighted; why should he, who had done half the work, receive nothing when his brother received an annual allowance generous enough to satisfy a Borcan lord? His brother had no explanation. Jakob offered Hans a third of his grant and a

lecturer’s position under him, but Hans would have none of it. He was a proud, hotheaded man, and the sting of being passed over made him even more stubborn. Through gritted teeth, he angrily dictated a letter to his brother, accusing him of deliberately stealing recognition for the work they had done together, claiming that he and his fiancée would starve before he would choke on scraps from a traitor’s table, and a thousand other harsh words, swearing that he would never speak to Jakob again.

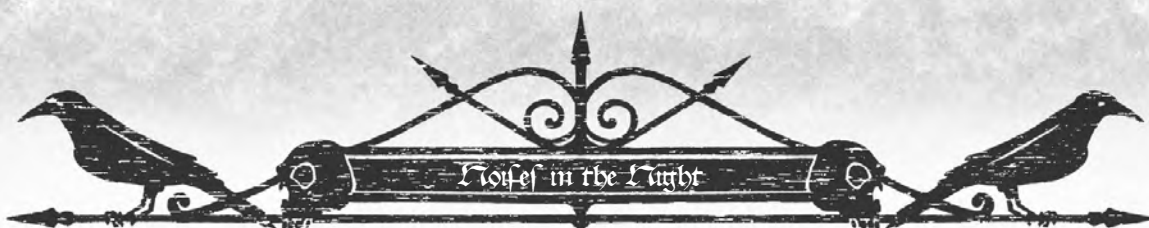
Why he blamed Jakob so, and not the academics who offered the position, I do not know. Until he received Hans’ letter, Jakob was considering turning down the Chair. After, he hardened his heart and wrote an equally vituperative letter in reply. The brothers disowned each other. Jakob took the Chair, and Hans and Giselle, his wife, stormed south to the Balinoks. Both brothers continued their analyses of folklore, but without the other, neither achieved the greatness that was theirs as partners.

“Hans and Giselle lived as little more than paupers in Teufeldorf for many years. Giselle bore two children: a son named Oscar, after Giselle’s father, and a daughter, Liesel, after Hans’ mother. Oscar was a playful scamp, as wild as his father and uncle had been as children, while Liesel was timid, sweet and affectionate. Hans doted on his children. He worked endlessly, trying to sell his papers to academic journals to raise enough money to support his family. If only he had known that his work would lead to tragedy and devastate the beautiful family he had worked so hard to provide for. If only he hadn’t fallen out with his brother and moved to Gundarak in anger.

“As I have said, Hans and Jakob Gleam were famous for uncovering the grains of truth that lurked behind legends both dark and merry. However, they were men of Lamordia, with a Lamordian’s view of the world as a great, ticking machine, where everything was explicable in terms of reason and science. When faced with tales of the voishlacka, Hans looked for a bloody-thirsty noble or cruel highwayman, not an undead monster. Lycanthropes were distorted legends of the mentally ill or degenerates. Elves were creatures descended from a different branch of the Tree of Life to humans, but possessed none of the fey powers they were said to have. In many ways, Hans Gleam was as innocent as dear, sweet little Liesel.

“In his studies, Hans came across the Gundarakan legend of Olló-öregból. This grim tale bore startling similarities to the Scissorman, a myth from Hans’ own youth in Lamordia. This excited him greatly. Always in the past when Hans had found that two places had shared the same, or similar, legends, it was because





clear links were to be found between the regions. Either both tales were descended from the same historical root, or wanderers or immigrants to a new location had carried one. In the Scissorman's case, neither link could be found. There was no trace of immigration from Gundarak to Lamordia or vice versa that could have transplanted the legend from its home soil, and both Gundarak and Lamordia had completely separate histories. Their cultures, legends and languages were otherwise completely distinct. Where could a legend that was ancient in both societies have come from?

"Hans began to correspond with his sources in other realms, trying to map out the Scissorman's path through the realms. He found it scattered higgledy-piggledy all over the Land, in parts of Barovia, Mordent, eastern Darkon, G'Henna, Nidala, Paridon and Graben. There was no explanation for the story's appearance in only one or two villages in each realm, or for its presence in such disparate lands. In all cases, it was similar enough to be unmistakable, but possessed a hundred minor changes that showed the legends were unrelated.

"The Scissorman is a monstrous tailor, dressed in finery but splattered with blood. He carries a mighty pair of shiny shears, with which he carries out terrible

punishments on naughty children. As I first heard the story, Peter is instructed by his mother not to suck his thumb, for it will uneven his teeth and damage his rosy smile, for which he is famous throughout his village. The naughty Peter ignores her. She warns him again, 'Peter do not suck your thumb.' Again, he ignores her. Finally, Peter's mother says, 'Peter, beware: the great tall tailor always comes to naughty boys who suck their thumbs.' With this final warning, she leaves for market. No sooner has she left than Peter starts to suck his thumb once more. A coldness seeps into the room, so the foolish boy moves closer to the hearth. Unseen behind him, the shutters begins to close, one by one, all around him. Peter doesn't hear the quiet scrape of wood on wood, or the tiny clicks of the locks trapping him inside. Still sucking his thumb and enchanted by the hearth's dancing flames, the boy is unaware that he is being closed off from the world, from help.

"Finally, once all the shutters are closed, some terrible instinct warns Peter, who looks up in sudden, spasmodic fright. At that moment, the door slams open, and the Scissorman leaps into the room with a single flex of his mighty legs. Grinning a terrible grin, he shuts and locks the door, and draws out his shears. Peter screams, but no one outside can hear him. The





Scissorman walks toward him, snipping his scissors and smiling.

“Hans probed deeper and deeper in the mysterious tale. He could find no rational, historic root for the legend. Intrigued, he began to go back over his past failures: Monsieur and Madame Croquemitaine, Fanton Griswold, the Bad Thing, Alligator Lenny, the Voice in the Storm, the Gentlemen, Der Kinderstod, the Loçolico. All these stories showed the same random patterns, the same baselessness in fact. Hans began to suspect that some dark secret lurked behind all these grim tales. All were children’s tales. All involved terrible monsters who punished or pursued the weak and innocent. What could the truth have been? As I said, Hans was naïve. He didn’t appreciate, as you or I might, that scholars need look no further than the surface to find the truth in some stories. Or that the creatures they speak of may not appreciate being dragged into the light.

“Finally, Hans began a monograph on the strange stories. This was the final mistake, which brought tragedy upon his entire family.

“Oscar and Liesel went each day to play with the other children, under Giselle’s benevolent maternal eye. On this day, a fat woman was in the park. To say she was fat is to say Count Strahd is a bad man. She was corpulent and disgusting. Rolls of fat flowed from her everywhere. Food stains covered her clothes. Her skin was greasy and peppered with warts.

“Despite her foul appearance, the woman was jolly and entertained the children with dozens of dirty jokes and tall tales. None of the mothers seemed to notice her. When she saw Oscar and Liesel, her black eyes twinkled with evil delight. She tempted them closer with her banter, and then offered the pair a sweet from her bag. Oscar, always a brave and forward lad, was going to take one, but Liesel—poor child—took his arm. In a voice as pure and musical as a flute’s, she begged her brother not to take the sweet. Didn’t he remember Papa’s work? Hadn’t he listened to the story of Madame Croquemitaine, who offered children poisoned sweets to kidnap and eat them? She begged her brother to come away, to play on the swings instead. Because he could deny his sister nothing, Oscar ignored the taunts of the other boys and went with Liesel.

“Later that night, Oscar’s young ears heard his parents talking. A boy had vanished from the park that day, just after Giselle had taken her children home. There was no sign of the criminal who had taken him; he was never heard from again.

“Oscar and Liesel were terrified by the news. They were sure Liesel was right; the woman had been Madame Croquemitaine, and the boy had been eaten.

They tried, time and again, to explain to their parents, but the adults refused to listen. Giselle thought the boy’s disappearance and Hans’ work had disturbed them and forbade Hans from discussing his stories in the house anymore.

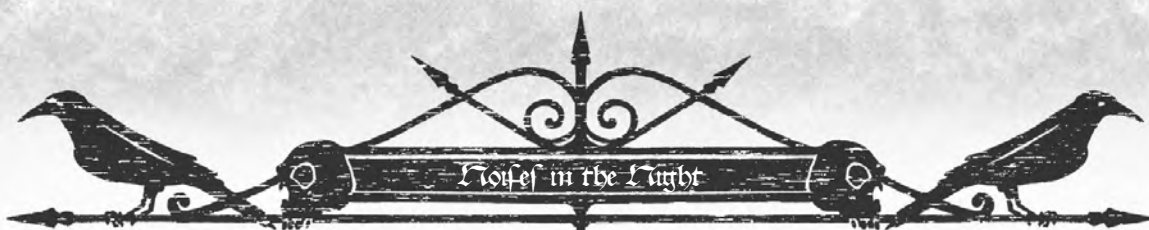
“A few more days passed, and Oscar and Liesel began to forget their fear. Once more, they returned to the park to play, and, with no sign of the fat woman to menace them, resumed their games as though nothing had happened. Once again, though, a visitor interrupted them, an average-looking man with a jolly smile. He explained that he was a traveler, but had lost his way to the burgomeister’s house. Would any of the children know how to get there?

“This time, Oscar needed no prompting from his sister to be wary of the man. The other children, too, remembered their missing playmate, and as one refused to lead the traveler to the burgomeister. That was fine, said the man. Some strangers were dangerous to children (here his foxy grin widened), and the children’s parents would be pleased they were so careful. They didn’t have to show him where the burgomeister lived, just tell him, and the one who told him would get a present from his bag.

“All but the most suspicious children—Oscar and Liesel—began clamoring for a present. One girl was chosen, and the traveler gave her a tiny clockwork mouse as a toy before going on his way.

“The next day, Oscar heard Giselle whispering with another of the mothers. The girl who helped the traveler had gone. When her mother went to tuck her into bed the night before, she had pulled back the blankets to find, instead of her daughter, a squealing, twisting horde of rats. Some said the panicked woman had beaten at the swarm with an iron from the grate, and each time she killed a rat, it turned back into a part of her daughter: a hand, a shoe and so on. Giselle shushed the other woman and told her not to say such nonsense, but Oscar could see she was frightened. No children went to the park anymore.

“A few weeks later, Liesel woke the house screaming that there was a monster outside her window. She could hear it scratching at the windows, and had seen its pale, wormy fingers wriggling underneath the shutters. From that moment on, she and Oscar slept with a lantern lit between their beds. Then, they began to go to the well in pairs, armed with bushels of lavender to fend off Beteg-gyilkos. If Giselle noticed the strange smell that had begun to emanate from their well, she made no comment about it. She was too busy worrying about her children. Despite the best efforts of the town militia, three more children had vanished without explanation, and Oscar and Liesel had begun to jump



at every shadow and strange noise. Their eyes were black and hollow with fear, and they jumped at the smallest noises. She had begun to fear that even if her children escaped the demon plaguing Teufeldorf, they would be forever changed by their experiences.

"Finally, on a dark and wild night in winter, Oscar and Liesel, pale shadows of their previous selves, bade their parents goodnight—which is to say, forced their father to search the room for monsters before allowing themselves to be tucked into bed. Giselle and Hans stayed up, she knitting, he writing his paper, both discussing the events of the past few weeks. Some of the villagers believed the children were being taken by a madman inspired by the very legends Hans was researching. Others believed it was one of Gundar's soldiers. Both agreed that nothing like this had happened when they had lived in the north. For their own sake, and for that of their children, and perhaps because some of the villagers were beginning to believe Hans, with his collection of folklore, was the madman, the pair decided to take their family back to the safer, more civilized lands of the north. Perhaps Hans would even reconcile himself with his brother?

"In the next room, Oscar and Liesel slept uneasily. The tiny lantern flame flickered between them. The wind howled outside, shaking the shutters and screeching in the chimney. A branch fell and slid across the tiled roof, sounding like heavy footsteps and scabbling claws. Exhausted, the children slept on. As the town clock began to strike twelve, the wind finally gained a small victory against the house: the flame of the lantern flickered, faltered and died. The children were left in darkness.

"Oscar and Liesel awoke to find the room dark and cold. Their breaths condensed in the chill air, although they could not see it. The pair lay shaking in their beds, too afraid to move, too afraid to call out for their parents. Both could sense some dark malignity in the room with them.

"Finally, Oscar could bear it no longer. 'Liesel?' he called. 'Are you there?' His only answer was a muffled squeak. 'Liesel?' he called again.

"'Liesel?' a voice echoed him from the darkness in high-pitched mockery of his own voice. 'Liesel? Liesel, liesellieselliesel!' it called, before collapsing into horrific laughter. Another voice shushed it.

"'Do you look for your sister, boy?' the second voice called. 'A light would help, perhaps?' A sulfurous glow lit the room as the intruder re-ignited the lantern between the children. It revealed the grinning face of a man in a pinstriped suit splattered with blood. His cold black eyes flickered with reflected lantern light, and his grin widened even further as he saw the

fear in his victims' eyes, cracking the dry skin around his mouth. He drew out a pair of silver scissors and slowly opened and shut them once, twice: snip, snip.

"Oscar and Liesel began to scream hysterically, but, like Peter in the story, no noise escaped the darkened room. Hans and Giselle sat quietly talking in the next room, completely unaware of the great, tall tailor working in the next room.

"The next day, Hans was preparing breakfast while Giselle fetched the children, when he heard a terrible scream, a scream that no human voice should ever have cause to make, a scream that went on and on and on. He dropped the pan into the fire and rushed to his wife, who stood, still screaming, staring with locked gaze into the children's room. I cannot put words to describe what shocked Hans into immobility when he grabbed his screaming wife. The room was scarlet. Oscar crouched, wide-eyed and silent, covered in scratches and bite marks, staring at his sister's bed. A still form lay beneath those sodden blankets, completely covered except for one pale hand that had fallen from beneath the covers, and the scarlet trail that flowed down it to bead at the tip of her finger. When, with shaking hands Hans pulled down the blankets, his beautiful, innocent daughter was unrecognizable.

"As they had discussed, Giselle and Hans moved back to Ludendorf. The broken man wrote to his brother, who flew to his side to care for them. Hans gave up his study of folklore. All his notes he gave to his brother. He never published his monograph on tales of bogeymen and spent his days a broken man. Giselle proved inconsolable, and, with her still-unspeaking son, was given to the care of the Chateaufaux asylum. She never emerged. Jakob spent all his fortune on their asylum fees and eventually had to sell some of the brothers' notebooks to cover the expense. The monograph found its way into the hands of a mage, who enchanted the already tragedy-stained pages for the pleasure of a degenerate noble. But that is another story and shall be told at another time."

The aesthete storyteller's dry, rasping voice tailed off into silence. He licked his lips and glanced around his spellbound audience as though seeing them for the first time. They, in turn, drew back from the storyteller. Some shivered. During the story, the fire had died down, and the room had grown chilly. Shadows had gathered in the corners. The storyteller stared at them suspiciously and stirred the fire back into life.

"I think," he said once the fire blazed with heat and light once more, "I shall retire for the night. Thank you for your hospitality." He rose to his feet and shuffled off, pausing only to light a taper on his way. His audience exchanged wide-eyed glances. The fer-



vor with which the haggard young man had told his tale was enough to convince many that his story was more than a myth. Some wondered what had brought him to them, or what his name was.

They never found out. During the night, a night many of the storyteller's audience found was disturbed by strange noises, the storyteller's taper blew out. His journals, when the man's locked door was broken down the next morning, were scattered all over the room. The few sections that were still legible revealed the work of both a folklorist and a vengeful monster hunter. Amidst all the blood and ruined flesh, no one noticed the few scattered tailors' pins, each topped with a blood-red bead of glass.

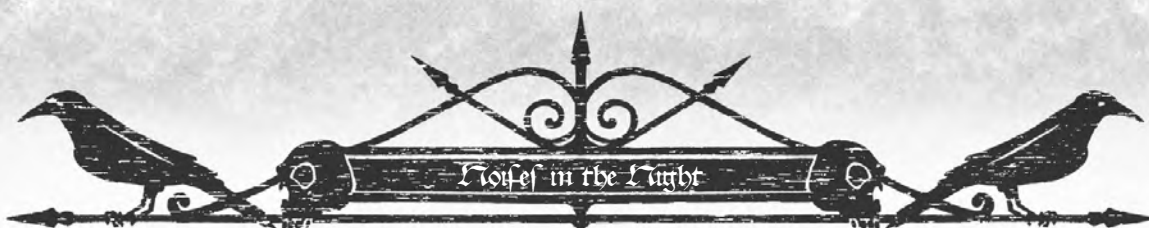
Uncovering the Truth

Ironically considering his devotion to uncovering the truth behind legends, almost as many rumors surround Hans Gleam's shattered life as he analyzed in his work. In reality, both he and his brother were famous folklorists who studied stories in the hope of unearthing the thoughts, fears and assumptions of people long dead and of discovering

the real origins of those stories. That search for truth led to tragedy: a daughter dead, a wife reduced to a catatonic Lost One and a son who refused to speak for nearly ten years and then spent the rest of his short life hunting the supernatural horrors that destroyed his family.

As Hans Gleam began to suspect, the erratically distributed bogeymen stories such as that of the Scissorman did have a common link, although not the historical links he originally suspected. Bogeymen, in Ravenloft, are real. They are creatures quite literally composed of fear, bloodshed and insanity, and they exist only to spread those emotions by stalking the vulnerable, defenseless and innocent.

In many cultures, the natural world is seen as a single, living consciousness, composed of all the creatures that live on or in it, whose thoughts move with the speed of the seasons. While druids, who gain their spells from it, serve this great mind it also creates a wide variety of more unusual servants. The fey are personifications of tiny aspects of this great life force, who exist to protect the things they are formed from—defending objects such as a par-



ticular forest or river, or ensuring natural cycles of life and death run smoothly.

The Demiplane of Dread is an imperfect and unnatural copy of these worlds. As in other planes, the sun and moon turn in regular cycles, autumn follows summer and is followed by winter. It is filled with natural beauty, from the soaring peaks of the Balinoks, to the humid swamps of Souragne, to the harsh but stunning deserts of the Amber Wastes. Like in any world, fey are born from these beautiful regions, and for the most part, are benevolent, or at least, without ill will.

However, Ravenloft is unique in that strong emotion can mark the very fabric of the world. Great acts of hatred, fear or malice create sinkholes of evil, which taint the energies that create and nurture fey creatures. The fey that arise from sinkholes of evil are the distillations of all the negative emotions tied into that area, strengthened and embodied into a single twisted creature. Like all fey, these creatures then set about protecting their homeland—meaning they try to maintain the evil in the soil and spread that taint further.

Bogeymen are fey of this kind. Although they are given life by sinkholes of evil, they are given shape by children's stories. For some reason, bogeymen don't bubble forth from every sinkhole of evil. They need specific circumstances to arise, and thus, are thankfully very rare.

To create a bogeyman, an act of great evil must be performed upon an Innocent, purely from the desire to inflict suffering. The victim's loss of innocence burns their pain and fear into the ground, creating a powerful sinkhole of evil. (See the **Ravenloft Dungeon Master's Guide** for details on sinkholes of evil). The bogeyman is then called into being from this reservoir of agony when a children's story, where the villain's actions are reminiscent of the original deed, is told within a mile of the sinkhole. The story acts as a catalyst, dragging the natural energies from the earth and clothing the fey in the form of the storybook villain. The newly created bogeyman then makes those who listened to the story, its unwitting creators, its first victims.

For example, in Darkon very early in the reign of King Azalin, a thug lived in the sewers of Martira Bay. Some childhood trauma had made him hate all adults, but he loved the company of children and would kidnap them from the surface to take into his noxious home. He would keep the terrified children prisoner until he tired of them and then

drown them and dump their bodies. He was eventually caught and executed, but his actions had made his lair a place of powerful negative energy. When, a few years later, the children of Martira Bay began making up stories based on the half-remembered criminal, this contained energy burst out like pus from a wound, coalescing into Alligator Lenny, a sewer-dwelling kidnapper and murderer. Over the years, these stories have spread and changed, to act as warnings to children to avoid deep wells or playing in sewers. Unfortunately, the stories have dragged Alligator Lenny with them, so his territory now ranges from Martira Bay to the canals of Richemulot and the sewers of Nosos.

Once created, bogeymen are free to leave their birthplaces. However, a bogeyman is only able to enter villages where stories about it are common and can only harm those who know the story. Their frequency of victims varies with each individual; most kill no more than once or twice a year, but some hunt more often or embark on a murderous spree before vanishing for years. Where they go when inactive depends again on the legends told about them. Mister Fox, for example, is said to live at the House at the End of the White Road; when he is not hunting, that is where he dwells, and potential victims who try to find him can discover routes to his home in many dark forests. If the legends don't specify a home, the bogeyman just vanishes when inactive.

Being creatures of the Mists, they are able to move as swiftly as the Vistani, making any journey, no matter how long, in a single night. In many cases, the hour at which a bogeyman makes its journey is also hinted at in myth. The Bad Thing, for example, only travels at midnight; one heartbeat before twelve strikes, this foul creature may be in one village. As midnight strikes, the Bad Thing begins to fade into darkness, vanishing into the shadows until only its glimmering eyes can be seen. When the clock finishes striking, the eyes vanish, and the Bad Thing emerges from another pool of shadows half a world away. The Voice in the Storm can only come to torment innocents during terrible thunderstorms. The White Road, which leads to Mister Fox's bloody lair, slowly vanishes as the moon sets and reappears elsewhere as the moon rises. Once the road is fully formed, Mister Fox is free to travel into whichever villages are near. Of all the bogeymen, only the Croquemitaines are able to travel whenever they want. Their wagon



simply vanishes from one village and reappears in another, at any time of day or night.

Bogeymen are generally solitary creatures. Except those very rare bogeymen who travel in groups, such as the Gentlemen or the Loçolico, it is exceptionally rare to find more than one in the same vicinity at the same time, although two bogeymen may visit the one unlucky village at different times. Even if two bogeymen happen to visit the same region at once, they generally don't interact; one or the other simply moves on as soon as it is able. Quite simply, fairy tales only have one villain in them, and too many murders in one area endangers both bogeymen. Ironically, Hans Gleam's manuscript was such a threat to these secretive beings that the folklorist's attempts to uncover the truth about them provoked an unparalleled cooperation among the fey as they tried to silence him.

The strange link between their legends and the bogeymen themselves also expresses itself through their very life force. A bogeyman's strength and abilities are determined primarily by what their stories require of them. Alligator Lenny represents unbridled brutality, and so he is exceptionally strong and tough. The Bad Thing is much smaller, because, according to legend, it is weak and pathetic. It is skilled in mental, not physical, abuse. However, bogeymen feed on folklore as much as they do from their victim's pain and suffering. The more widespread their legends or the more power the folk tales hold over their audiences, the more powerful the bogeymen become. The Scissorman is the most powerful bogeyman because folk tales about him are told all over Ravenloft, and children hold him in particular dread.

Bogeymen's most unusual power is their ability to hide from all those with the power to stop them. These fiends are safe from discovery by the fact that most adults are able to recognize them for what they are only if the fey desires. Only the imaginative and pure at heart—the prey of the bogeymen—are always able to recognize the evil of bogeymen. This includes children, of course, but also includes adults who have never been called upon to make a Powers Check, who are suffering from hallucinations or fever, or who are just naturally given to flights of fancy. Of course, these are also the people who are most likely not to be believed when they claim to have seen a monster. Those in positions of power are more likely to

believe a lone psychopath commits the crimes, not a supernatural horror.

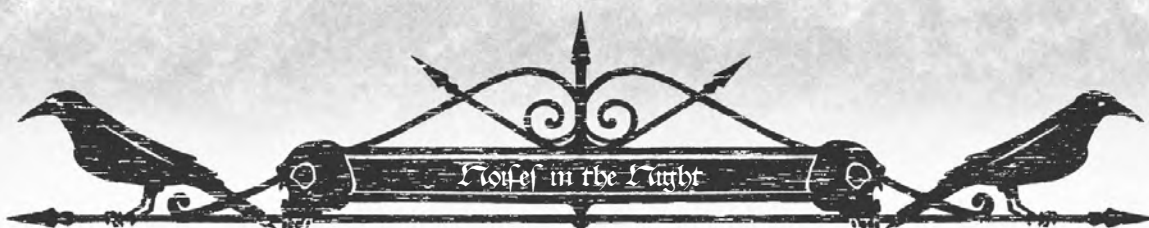
Even when adults become convinced that the occult is involved, bogeymen are very hard to destroy. Despite their near-immortality, or perhaps because of it, all bogeymen are terrified of death. They are used to hunting those too weak to defend themselves; more powerful opponents send them fleeing for their lives. They never forget this slight, though. Day or even years later, bogeymen return to silence witnesses to their first attacks and punish those who scared them away. A boy who sees Madame Croquemitaine kidnap his sister may suffer a midnight visit from her husband; a hero who defeats Der Kinderstod could find her enemy returns when she is lost and alone, or that her children are punished in her place.

Even if a bogeyman is slain in combat, that is not the end. Its body dissolves into putrescent fluids and sickeningly colored light, both of which are quickly absorbed into the ground, returning to its original sinkhole of evil. The "dead" bogeyman lurks in this dispersed state for an entire generation before it can reform. If during the week after the bogeyman reforms, its name is not invoked in a story or warning by someone within a mile of its sinkhole, the fey is permanently destroyed, its essence dispersed back into the foul soil that birthed it. If its name is used, the bogeyman reforms at full health and makes the unfortunates who spoke its name its first victims. Alternatively, if the taint is removed from the ethereal resonance of the bogeyman's sinkhole before it can reform, the bogeyman is destroyed. Of course, finding that sinkhole can be almost impossible.

Despite their near-immortality, bogeymen are strictly bound by the conventions of folk tales and the traditional childish defenses against their kind. Even those active during the day do not attack those who sleep with a lantern lit beside their bed, and children who play dead, put their heads under the covers or refuse to look at the bogeymen are generally safe as well. Bogeymen seem to prefer tasting a victim's fear before attacking and won't harm those who pretend they aren't there.

Using the Story

As written, Oscar's story already contains several adventure hooks: what are these creatures that prey on children? What happened to Giselle, Hans and Jakob? What happened to Jakob's manuscript after it was enchanted (assuming that part of the



story is true)? DMs should be able to reap several adventures out of the tale, and the monster descriptions in the appendix contain several more ideas. The events can also be altered to impede the PCs' progress: what if Hans and Jakob were never reconciled, or if there was another reason, apart from simple pride, that the brothers quarreled?

The easiest way to adapt the story to an adventure is to run it exactly as it appears. The PCs arrive in an isolated village and take a room in the inn. At some point during the evening, another traveler arrives. He is a relatively young man, but has been aged by some personal sorrow. He looks sick, and when he speaks, his voice is scratchy and dry. He has obviously been traveling for some time, but under the dirt and patches, he wears clothes of a Lamordian cut.

The other traveler has barely paid for his room when he launches into his story. Unlike other bards, the strange man doesn't seek any compensation for telling the story; he tells it purely because it is important to him. At the end of his story, he asks his audience if they've heard any similar legends and then goes to his room. By coincidence, this is right next to the PCs' rooms.

The next morning, the PCs are alerted that something is wrong when they leave their rooms to find a thin trickle of blood seeping from under the traveler's door. If they fetch the innkeeper or break down the door, they find the traveler has been horrifically massacred: thousands of cuts lace his body, his extremities have been cut off, the skin flayed from his face, and so on. The torture seems to have lasted several hours, and much of the blood is still slightly sticky, indicating it could only have finished a short time ago. However, the PCs next door heard nothing, there are no footprints in the blood and the door and windows are both locked with no signs of being disturbed. Only if the PCs search the room intimately do they find a few tailor's pins trodden into the cracks in the floorboards.

Much more obvious are the traveler's journals, which were originally filled with hundreds of legends from all over Ravenloft. Most concern the Scissorman, but other tales of bogeymen and famous legends are also covered. The notebooks may even contain a few stories based on the PCs' own exploits, although the DM should use these to unnerve the PCs rather than congratulate them. The myths that reflect their actions may seem like disturbingly accurate prophecies, not simple leg-

ends. Play up the strangeness of the discovery—folk tales are such a part of bogeymen that every opportunity to use a story should be seized and every ounce of eeriness wrung from it. In any case, the journals have been cut up. All the wounds on the traveler's body and the journals were made using the same, exceptionally sharp blades. A spilled glass of water and an extinguished candle sit on the bedside table, and a sheathed sword lies beside the bed.

Quite obviously, mundane efforts to find the traveler's murderer lead nowhere. No one saw or heard anything from the man after he retired for the evening, and no one was seen lurking around his room or window. Attempts to contact his spirit result in horrific illusions so violent they inspire Madness saves.

Attentive PCs may remember Oscar and Giselle Gleam are still supposedly held at the asylum at Chateaufaux. If they go there to investigate, they find Giselle is a heavily sedated Lost One. If they try to revive her, she begins screaming unstopably until drugged again. Oscar, however, was released nearly ten years ago, after being held for ten. The nurses recall that, even when he was judged fit enough to be released, the young man refused to sleep without a candle lit beside him.

If the PCs seek out Hans and Jakob, they find Hans dead and Jakob a sad old man who blames himself for the feud that destroyed his brother's family. Depending on how easy the DM wants to make the investigation, Jakob could have a copy of Hans' manuscript (although he would probably see it as cursed and be unwilling to let the PCs see it), or he could tell them who he sold it to, which could lead into even more complex adventures. Once they have it, the PCs discover Hans made much more progress than Oscar's story led them to believe: most of the information from the "Uncovering the Truth" section above is to be found there. (Again, the DM can decide how much information Hans uncovered and how much is correct based on how merciful he or she feels. Feel free to include several red herrings and be sure not to give away bogeymen vulnerabilities or their invisibility to adults too easily).

Once they have read the manuscript or found some other way of uncovering the truth about bogeymen, the PCs must find some way of luring the Scissorman into battle with them and then destroy him. This may be more difficult than it seems, because the bogeymen quickly become aware of the adventurers' investigations



and take steps to protect themselves. Once again, the DM should refer to Oscar's story: the bogeymen try to warn off the PCs in exactly the same way they did to Jakob Gleam twenty years before. First, a child vanishes from the park, leaving no trace, although a few hysterical witnesses say a nasty fat woman dragged him away. A few days later, Mister Fox's clockwork mouse transforms a girl into a swarm of rats, which her mother kills. The more time the PCs waste, the closer to them the victims become. The Scissorman could sew their lips shut as a warning to keep silent; Alligator Lenny could infect or murder a close friend, or spook a PC's horse into throwing and possibly injuring its rider. If they leave a town, the bogeymen follow them. (If the PCs refused to investigate Oscar's death, the same thing happens to the village they were staying in, except this time, the killing abates if the PCs swear to leave the bogeymen alone).

Remember that bogeymen go unnoticed by all but the imaginative, the mad and the innocent, which can make hunting them down very difficult. The PCs must first realize that the bogeymen are present though invisible and then find some way of detecting them. Next, they must deal with the threat. When they have finally killed one, the adventure is over—for the moment. As cruel fate would have it, a few days later, Jakob Gleam sends them a few pages missing from Hans' manuscript, or the PCs find a few more pages from Oscar's notebook. These pages reveal that the bogeyman has been dispersed but not killed: if the PCs can't find the sinkhole of evil that spawned it, or stop the folk tales being told, the bogeyman will return in twenty years time to seek revenge and begin the suffering anew...

Variations on a Theme

The unique links between bogeymen and folk tales lead to particularly unusual adventures exploiting these connections. Most importantly, bogeymen adventures should be different in tone from those featuring other monsters. Bogeymen are inspired by (and come from) the dark tales of childhood where the "baddies" are much more powerful than the protagonist, have goals and abilities that don't make any sense and are defeated by bravery and quick thinking instead of swords and magic. Don't be afraid to rely on conventions from those stories, such as saying things are "unspeakable" or refusing to explain what the PCs' opponent is in your adventures. Their presentation, behavior and motivation should all be modeled on the eeriest elements from fairy tales.

For that reason, bogeymen are all unique and should rarely if ever be seen working together. If you say there is a race of Bad Things, you enter fantasy, not folk tale. The horror of bogeymen comes from the unknowable "monster" that wants to hurt you for no reason and has impossible abilities that enable it to do so. If you treat bogeymen the way you treat any other monster, their mystique evaporates. Of course, balancing that with the demands of running a game can be tricky.

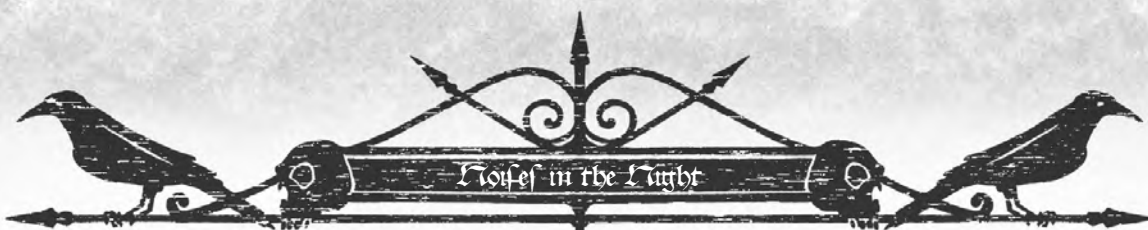
One method, particularly useful for lower-level adventures, is to ensure the bogeyman never actually appears. Instead, the adventure begins when the PCs are told that the anniversary of a bogeyman's death happened one generation ago next month. (Perhaps Hans Gleam tells them he and Jakob killed one just after Oscar was hospitalized). If they don't want the bogeyman to reform, they must find the sinkhole of evil that spawned it and somehow remove the taint from its ethereal resonance, or kill the story itself, to stop it from calling the bogeyman back. Both of these options would rely heavily on roleplaying, planning and bardic abilities.

To remove a sinkhole of evil, a character must spend a fortnight performing in a community with breaks only for eating, resting and sleeping. The character then makes a Perform check (DC 30 + the sinkhole's rank – the bard's class level – 1 per additional fortnight spent performing). If successful, the sinkhole's rank is reduced by one and the bogeyman is destroyed or emerges far weaker, depending on how powerful the bogeyman is and the DM's intentions for the adventure. Similar guidelines can be used to try to prevent the people in a community from telling the folk tales, by inspiring them to tell tales about something else. Other potential ways of stopping the stories being told, such as magical charms, explaining the truth about bogeymen or physical intimidation, are limited only by the players' imaginations.

More action-oriented parties must find the ideal time to invoke the story themselves so the bogeyman is drawn to them where it can be killed again. This is not as easy as it might seem, because bogeymen only reform if the PCs use their names in the presence of one of their potential prey, which could be cause for powers checks for deliberately using an innocent as bait.

Finally, a compromise between the two options could be found: The PCs must use their wits to stop people telling folk tales about a particular bogeyman to weaken it enough for the heroes to defeat it in





combat, or to stop it from entering a single village the PCs are charged to defend. They may even change the story, or create new stories about their opponent, to alter its abilities or induce new weaknesses. In these cases, the hero must make a Perform check (DC = 20 + bogeyman's Challenge Rating), with a circumstance penalty of up to -5 depending on how long the tales about that bogeyman have been told and how widespread the stories are. If the Perform check succeeds, the bogeyman's abilities change to reflect the new story. Once again, the DM should interpret the new legend as deviously as possible while still being true to the story to ensure a few surprises remain for the players.

In all cases where the PCs try to attack bogeymen through storytelling, the players should be encouraged to actually tell the stories themselves. If they do a particularly good job, feel free to alter the Perform check's DC. Try not to penalize the players for poor storytelling, however; the DC is already high enough to challenge most bards. If the tales don't flow properly, are inconsistent or don't recognize the power of dramatic imperative, they have no hope of weakening the bogeyman. In the world of bogeymen, stories are as alive as the

bogeymen themselves; weak or internally inconsistent myths aren't powerful enough to challenge the masters of the folklore world.

Changing the Scenery

The adventure detailed above can already be set in any settled area in Ravenloft, although visiting the Chateaufaux asylum and Hans Gloom in Lamordia make it more suited to the northern Core. However, bogeymen are quite at home in wild areas. (In fact, many folk tales are set in deep, dark woods, not villages.) Instead of using the Scissorman as written, you could draw on Washington Irving's original short story, "The Headless Horseman." The PCs are traveling through some dark wood, perhaps having just heard Oscar's story before they left. As they walk along, one of them begins to hear a "snip-snip" noise, but investigation reveals nothing. After they start moving again, the PC again hears the noise, slightly louder, and, after a long delay, again. Then, another PC notices a buckle on the first's backpack is loose—that must be causing the noise they can hear. But it isn't.

After a while, the PC hears the noise again, but this time, he or she sees a man standing in the





gloom under the trees, grinning at the PC and snipping a pair of scissors. If the PCs split up to find the man, they find themselves embroiled in a game of cat and mouse as the Scissorman tries to lure them apart and pick them off one by one, until only the rising of the sun saves them. It may turn out that the Scissorman really was nothing more than a fear-induced hallucination — when dawn comes, the PCs find their way back together, having spent the night chasing their own tails. Those who “died” simply lost their way or fell down a ravine and couldn’t get out. For further variation, many horror movies set in the U.S. use cornfields instead of dark forests; in fact, almost any type of terrain can be adapted, from deserts to arctic wastes.

Another simple way of unnerving the PCs is to include strange phenomena whenever the bogeyman is active. These occurrences needn’t be used every time, and one bogeyman needn’t cause the same phenomena each time. Examples include a strange whispering noise made every time the bogeyman approaches, birds that start echoing the breathing of whoever is nearby, tree buds that open to reveal fleshy, tongue-like protrusions, or two dogs savagely fighting in the street that flee for their lives when disturbed.

Changing the Cast

Many creatures in Ravenloft are inspired by similar creatures in folklore and can easily be used in a bogeyman-style adventure without being bogeymen *per se*. The Headless Horseman, Jack Bequick, the Nightmare Court and the Three Hags are all darklords that demand or can easily be adapted to a style of adventure closer to the uncanny monsters from childhood stories than those from standard adventure or gothic horror tales. The first three are particularly appropriate because, as lords of pocket domains, they can appear anywhere at any time.

More generally, shadow fey, backward men, midnight cats, the furies, mist ferrymen, skin thieves and dread trolls are easily appropriate, and with a little work, bakna rakna, bastelli, carrionettes and hearth fiends (from **Denizens of Dread**) and aranea, chokers, crawling claws, cloaklers, skum, evil treants and many monstrous humanoids or extraplanar creatures (from the *Monster Manual*) can also be used. In most cases, their Intelligence should be adjusted to at least average, they should be able to speak, and you may want to give them some unusual abilities to make them even more eerie. Whatever their stan-

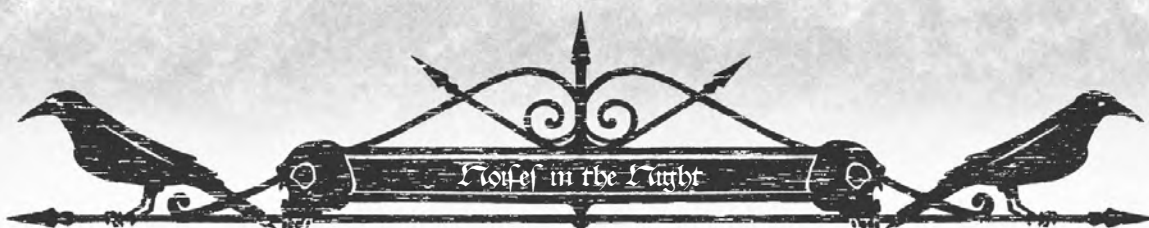
dard habits, the altered monsters should lurk in the background, preying on the weak.

Adapting creatures in this way does restrict their use as more generic monsters; one can easily make a goblin into its more frightening fairytale counterpart, but not if the PCs have encountered goblins before. Likewise, meeting normal goblins after fighting a bogey-goblin could tarnish the memory of the more exotic previous encounter. However, some cosmetic changes (even minor ones, like giving the goblin glowing cat’s eyes, a characteristic item of clothing and an interesting background or *modus operandi*) can go some way to overcoming this.

Another interesting variation would be to play precisely on these similarities; bogeymen are, after all, created by stories, and, as Jakob Gleam believed, the stories may be based on real creatures. If the PCs are associated with the city guard or other government department, a criminal could seek them out (or they are sent to him) for help. Once a criminal of the basest kind, preying on the weak and innocent, this man was finally captured and imprisoned. Over time, he claims to have come to regret his actions and was eventually freed to live quietly just outside the PCs’ home village or town. A few years after his release though, more crimes start occurring with the same *modus operandi* as this man used. He was rearrested and sentenced to death. He claims innocence. Someone else — the bogeyman spawned from the stories about his crimes — is (knowingly or not) framing him. Perhaps, to add another complication, the criminal is imaginative enough to attract the attention of the bogeyman, which appears and tells him that he will be its next victim.

As another example, the PCs could go to a village built a few miles from a deep crevasse that, unknown to the villagers, is home to a tribe of grimlocks. The grimlocks have recently moved into the area and quickly come to resent the humans’ presence in what they see as their land. They begin hunting down intruders: the trappers and hunters the village needs to gather enough food to survive. In desperation, the villagers beg the PCs to find out what is killing their foresters, and, after a dangerous dungeon crawl, the adventurers kill all the grimlocks. They return to the village and explain the nature of the menace to the townsfolk and that it has been dealt with.

The relieved villagers begin using the grimlocks to frighten and entertain their children, emphasizing the creatures’ home in the crevasse, and their



preference for darkness. Misunderstanding what their parents mean by saying that the grimlocks are blind, the children give their story villains staring, blank eyes. When the heroes return to the village in a year's time, they find almost the same situation as they did upon their last village. This time, however, the children, not the adults, are vanishing. The crevasse is still abandoned. This time, the culprit is a bogeyman spawned from the villagers' tales, subtly different from the original grimlocks and far more dangerous. Perhaps the PCs suspect that some creature other than the grimlocks is behind the troubles when they overhear one of the stories being told, or a witness describes the murderer as having staring white eyes, rather than blank skin where the eyes should be.

Alternatively, the villains in your adventure could be simple humans relying on the fear fairy tales provoke for their own evil ends. To return to the story at the beginning of the chapter, perhaps Jakob Gleam earned the enmity of a powerful wizard who used Jakob's well-known love of stories to punish him. By magically reproducing the bogeymen's methods, he first cast suspicion on Jakob and then led him to ruination. After learning of Oscar's recovery and his self-appointed vendetta, the wizard decided to kill him as well. Using *silence*, *hold person* and *passwall* spells, the wizard entered Oscar's room and murdered him while he slept. The PCs must avoid the red herrings in Jakob's monograph, which would lead them to look for a supernatural, not mortal, villain. As another option, the noble who bought and enchanted Jakob's monograph could give it to an enemy and use magic to try to frighten him to death or convince him that the manuscript has drawn real bogeymen to its new owner.

For DMs who want to make their own bogeymen, popular culture and genuine folk tales abound with other monsters that can be easily adapted as well: Raw-Head-and-Bloody-Bones, Spadefoot, the Monster Under the Bed, Baba Yaga, the wolf from "Little Red Riding Hood," Stephen King's "It," "Coraline" by Neil Gaiman, the wheelers from "Return to Oz" and many episodes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, to name a few, offer examples of characters to use as bogeymen.

Adventures dealing with Mister Fox's gifts of grief can also draw on a wide range of monsters. A kitten, for example, could turn into a midnight cat or plains cat after dark. A doll could become a boowray or a carrionette. Mister Fox may give a cloak to one

child, who then vanishes, leaving only the cloak behind. When the cloak is passed on, the new victim disappears as well. To adult eyes, the cloak is perfectly normal, but when left alone, the cloak becomes a cloaker that devours the innocent. The problem with this technique is that many players are familiar with many monster descriptions, and many also know common folk tales. If the players guess what monster is behind the disappearances too early, the atmosphere you have carefully created disappears. Like bogeymen, you must rely on secrecy and conceal the true nature of the villain as long as possible. Of course, if players begin using storytelling conventions to their advantage — walking backward, for example, to draw out the bogeyman — you should occasionally reward them. Indulging in clichés can be fun, and, because they are so well known, everyone can identify with them.

Bringing it Home

A simple way to involve bogeymen in a campaign is to build them into a player's background, either overtly or covertly. It may be as simple as a sibling disappearing during a storm, with a faint reek of an unidentifiable odor as the only clue, or accidentally witnessing the Croquemitaines at work without realizing who they were. It may be as obvious as saying the PC was a victim of the Bad Thing or actually saw a friend or relative changed by Mister Fox. This provides the PC with the long-term goal of destroying those responsible.

Another option is to strike while they are recovering from a previous adventure. A PC, grievously injured and infected with filth fever, or afflicted with some form of insanity after failing a Madness save, is hospitalized. In a fit of delirium, she sees a large, cloaked man in a broad hat standing over a child in another bed. The child later dies. The PC is too sick to get out of bed, but hears that several other people have died in the same way over the last few weeks. If the DM deals with the situation properly, the other PCs should be convinced the specter is nothing more than an hallucination, especially if the sick PC is the only one who witnesses it and then only when delirious. On one hand, the building may really be haunted by a bogeyman. Another possibility is that the PC may have seen a mundane madman who is murdering the patients, but has cloaked the murderer with the hallucinatory visage of some fairytale monster from her childhood.

Dread Possibility: The Tome of Terror

According to Oscar Gleam, the *Tome of Terror* is his father's manuscript, bought by a decadent noble when Hans' notes were sold. Exactly who the noble was or where he came from varies with each telling; like any good storyteller, Oscar knew to adapt local preconceptions into his work. The noble, however, employed a powerful wizard to enchant the manuscript, allowing him to journey into the stories contained within the book and experience them firsthand. So degenerate was this noble that he found the often-gruesome tales entertaining — until he himself became a victim of one of the monsters in the book. Some say the skull on the tome's cover belonged to the original darklord of Timor, and that some residue of that queen's evil escaped its magical controls and subverted the few protections the noble had built into the book. Since the noble's death, the book has increased in evil and power until no one, not even the most decadent, can enjoy the stories. Of course, this may all be a fabrication created by Oscar Gleam; the tome's true history may be much darker. The book did, however, appear a few years after Hans Gleam sold most of his brother's works, and its subject matter is what one would expect Jakob to have collected.

The tome is a lavishly illustrated book detailing fairy tales from all over Ravenloft. Made of fine vellum, it contains delicate calligraphy and painstakingly drawn illustrations. Its cover is bound in leather. From beneath this layer, a screaming human face pushes out of the front cover, making the book particularly disturbing when closed. Many people make the mistake of opening the book simply to avoid looking at this macabre face.

The first time each day the *Tome of Terror* is read after sunset, all those within ten feet of the book are drawn into the tale being read. The unlucky readers randomly assume the identities of characters from the story, with no respect for their actual age, class or race and with only the equipment and abilities possessed by their alter egos. Although they have some degree of freedom, their experiences are determined by the way the story is written (so, if a character were drawn into "Little Red Riding Hood," she would find herself on a road leading to Grandma's house regardless of which way she walked. She would find herself surrounded by an endless forest on all sides while a demonically clever talking wolf stalked her every step). The characters are trapped until the story reaches some kind of logical end. As the words written in the tome change to reflect the characters' actions, very few of the stories play out the way they were originally written. As the book's original owner preferred dark and morbid tales, most endings are bleak.

If the readers manage to reach the end of the story without being killed, they are freed. Any equipment gathered during the course of the story remains with them, making the book a dangerous but effective way to get rare magical items. The readers also retain any damage taken or the effects of failed Horror or Madness saves. The spirits of any characters who die remain trapped in the tome forever.

Most readers who escape the *Tome of Terror* find it haunts them forever after. The stories invade their dreams, becoming more and more real until the dreamer finds he can no longer wake up: he has returned to the tome and must find his way to freedom again. A few storytellers say that the only way to escape the book's grasp is to find the spirit of its original owner, still lost somewhere within its pages and force him to reveal the words of power that control the book. Most, however, say that there is no way to escape the book.

Despite its magical powers, the *Tome of Terror* is as vulnerable to flame as any normal book.





Chapter Five:
To Honor and
Obey



"...understand why we should have to wait!" the young man argued angrily, pacing before the low-slung table. "I love her, she loves me! To blazes with what our parents want, tell me why you can't marry us now! This very month!"

The old priest leaned forward, elbows on the grainy wood, a faint smile cracking the weatherworn leatherlike skin of his face. The hum of conversation throughout the common room grew muted, as other patrons strained to overhear a conversation grown suddenly interesting. "They say you should be careful what promises you make, Michael."

"I know what promises I'm making to her, and she to me. We're no foolish children, ignorant of what we enter into."

"You need not be a child to be foolish, my son. Let me tell you of another marriage, years ago in a distant, bog-covered land..."

The Legend



In the eastern end of the isle, the weight of summer pressed down upon the land like a fist. Here to the west, on the very edges of the great swamp called Maison d'Sablet, the heat was far worse, stifling, squeezing the breath out of any foolish enough to spend long out of doors. The cobblestones of the main road were streaked with moisture, the dirt roads that intersected it churned to mud. It had not rained in days, but the moisture hung so thick in the air that even breathing was a chore. Those poor souls unfortunate enough to live here, in the town of Thibaut, would have given anything to be elsewhere. They could hardly comprehend the notion that someone would come here deliberately from outside.

Nor would the newcomer to Thibaut have come now, except that this was the home of the man she needed to see.

A carriage, its top worn and its silver medallions tarnished, trundled up the main avenue, its shadow hurled far behind it by the setting sun. At an imperious tap from within, the driver reined the exhausted horses to a stop in front of a rickety wooden storefront. Only the dancing of a single candle's tiny flame between the boards over the broken windows suggested the structure was not utterly abandoned.

Her dark, wilted from the heat curls plastered to the back of her neck and a bright-hued blouse clinging to her shoulders and chest, Hillaire Durand stepped from the carriage. She offered a single,

disgusted glare to those locals who peered from the closing shops to see who had arrived in their town in such a contraption, and pushed aside the curtain that served as the storefront's only door.

It was cooler in here, thanks be to all the *loa*, but that didn't make it pleasant. Hillaire wrinkled her nose at the dry, musty scent of the place. As her eyes adjusted, aided only by that single candle and what little sunlight crept in between the boards, she picked her way through a haphazard collection of tables and shelves. Here, a leather sack labeled "Powdered bone of monkey." There, a jar in which floated a paw, of what species the woman could not begin to guess. Behind the long table that served as a counter in the back of the shop, sat the proprietor, looking no less preserved than any of his wares. His skin, rough as parchment, was baked a dark tan by the sun. His head was bare, though his cheeks and chin wore a scraggly growth of beard. Dull tunic and pants clearly marked him as a commoner; but his bright, wild eyes and the string of beads and teeth wrapped tightly about his left wrist marked him as something more.

"I see you decide to come after all, *ma chère*."

Hillaire's scowl grew darker still. "You will take a more respectful tone with me, Monsieur Mensonge, or our business ends now. You are supposed to be the best, but you are hardly the only man of your...talents. I would cherish a reason to leave this beastly town and find what I need elsewhere."

"Of course, Mademoiselle. My apologies." The old Voodan smiled darkly. "But then, I think you would not come all the way to Thibaut to find old Mensonge if you did not need him, *non*? I think, after all our correspondence, you will not walk out on me so quickly. You place too much value on your family."

The young woman shivered slightly, her skin crawling as though she had bathed in something unclean. The old warlock was right. Her family was too important to her, was in far too much danger, to let anything sway her course now. Damn Vardain for driving her to this, anyway!

"Very well, Mensonge. Let us have done with it then." Hillaire stepped nearer the table. As she approached, her gaze fell on a small glass decanter at the edge of the makeshift counter. Cut almost square, with a stopper shaped like a serpent's head, it was perhaps three-quarters full with a peculiar green substance. It seemed almost to shine with a light of its own, as though she looked through it





into a fire. "Is this it, then?" she asked, unable to tear her eyes away. The glow was enticing, hypnotic. She found herself reaching...

"Non!" Hillaire snapped out of her near-trance as the Voodan lunged over the table and actually slapped her hand. Her face hardening, hands clenched into fists, she spun to face the proprietor.

"My apologies again, Mademoiselle. But this," and he waved in the direction of the vessel for which she'd been reaching, "is dangerous, *oui*? It is not what you are here for."

"What is it?" Hillaire demanded, teeth clenched, choking down her rage that this peasant, no matter what abilities he might have, should dare touch her.

"Poison for the soul, Mademoiselle Durand. The drinker, his spirit dies. He is like the *zombi* of the Lord of Death, but he does not rot. He serves, slave to his master, never dying, never sleeping. It is a bad fate, Mademoiselle, and not a thing to be trifled with."

Hillaire's eyes went wide, in horror, yes, but also in fascination. "Why did you not tell me of this, Mensonge? This would solve my problem more effectively than—"

"You could not afford it, *machère*," the Voodan told her, his expression laughing. "The Durand, you are noble, *oui*, but I think you are not so wealthy any longer. Is this not one of the reasons Vardain is marrying—"

"Vardain is not marrying!"

"Of course. This is why you are here." Mensonge's smile grew wide. "But for now, Mademoiselle, your family has few funds, and your brother, he wields most of what is left. Had you access to all the remaining Durand riches, you might afford this aperitif." The old man reached back to a shelf behind him, hauling forth a clay jug, far larger than the decanter and sealed with a simple wooden cork. "This is what you seek, Mademoiselle."

Hands quivering, Hillaire took the vessel from him. "You are certain this will work?"

"As promised. Be sure, however, that you both drink together. If you do not, the elixir will have no source from which to draw."

"She'll drink," the youngest Durand sibling vowed, "if I have to force it down her throat."

Then they'd see just how anxious Vardain was to pollute the line with his doxy!

* * *

The servants had all been dispatched on various errands, or sent to labor on the far edges of the fields. With less than a week before the Master's wedding, it wasn't hard finding sufficient excuses to empty the main house. When the chime sounded in the hall, announcing the presence of a visitor at the door, Hillaire herself moved to answer it.

When the heavy door creaked open, the ill-mannered little *chiene* didn't even make eye contact with her hostess. She was too busy staring around her at the plantation, the towering pillars that supported the roof over the porch, the endless fields of cotton, the ominous family crypts that held a place of honor just beside the main house. Never mind that ivy had crept over those crypts like the webs of an enormous spider, that the fields produced barely a fraction of the yield they once had, that the house was poorly patched and mended like an old pair of trousers. The girl was still unaccustomed to such finery, for all that her family's mercantile endeavors had made them far more wealthy than the Durands had been in many a generation.

Hillaire, choking on the waspish comment she so desperately wanted to spit in the face of her in-law-to-be, instead forced her shoulders to relax and her red lips to part in a friendly smile. "My dear Renee, please, come in."

The young woman at the door, blonde of hair and rather more slender than her buxom hostess, smiled shyly in return. Clad in blouse and skirts of expensive cloth, worn in combinations that suggested she had little education in the dictates of style, she cut an attractive, if entirely commonplace, figure. If she was startled that Hillaire herself was playing doorman, she gave no sign. It was entirely possible, Hillaire realized in revulsion, that the girl was so uneducated in the ways of nobility that she didn't know there should have been a butler.

"I was honored to receive your invitation, Hillaire," Renee offered hesitantly as they strode through the foyer, the threadbare carpet far too thin to prevent their shoes from echoing on the stone floor beneath. "I have to admit, I was a little surprised."

"And I," Hillaire replied, pretending not to notice when her guest, eyes suddenly drawn to the antique brass chandelier overhead, stumbled at the threshold to the dining room, "was delighted that you were able to find the time to come. I know you must be overwhelmingly busy, with the wedding so

Chapter Five

near." A lifetime of training in manners and propriety still couldn't keep the scorn out of her voice at the word "wedding," but again, Renee either failed to notice or was at least courteous enough not to comment.

The table in the dining room was draped in a silk cloth, its embroidered fringes slightly moth-eaten. The chairs were upholstered in velvet, worn smooth through years of use, and tubs of polish and hours of work had still not scraped all the traces of tarnish from the silver. Hillaire, seething at the signs of her family's decline, offered her guest the nearest chair and the nearest goblet of chilled wine, taking for herself the second of each.

"I should be doing two or three dozen things at the moment," Renee admitted, once the two women were both seated. "But I could hardly refuse your gracious invitation, could I? We're to be family soon, and... Well, I pray pardon my bluntness, Hillaire, but I've never felt you were entirely fond of me."

Hillaire raised her goblet. "Let us take this opportunity, then, in this moment of calm before your big day, for us to clear the air."

Renee smiled and drank. For an instant, her face reddened and she coughed, even as Hillaire

struggled not to do the same. Whatever else Mensonge's concoction might do, it certainly added a kick to the wine!

"My dear," Hillaire began then, sliding her chair over so she could place her hand atop the younger woman's own, "it simply isn't true to say that I'm not fond of you." Abruptly, her grip tightened; manicured nails cut into Renee's skin, and the young woman cried out. She tried to yank her hand back, but Hillaire's grip was far too strong. "It would be more accurate," she continued, voice suddenly cold, "to say that I despise you with every fiber of my being, every shred of my soul. You're a parasite, *ma petite putain*, a common wench from a common family who acquired riches to which others of better birth were entitled. And you used them to attract a man far above your station, one who should never have sullied his eyes by looking upon you, let alone his family's blood!"

Eyes wide and beginning to fill with tears of fear and pain, Renee shook her head and struggled still to free her hand. "Vardain loves me! You think I used my money to attract him? I've already told him he'll not have control over it, Hillaire! I retain my family's interests, or I cannot agree to wed! He's agreed!"





“Do you think I care what my idiot brother has agreed, you stupid little cow?! He would use you to pollute the noble Durand blood, and I will not allow it! If he will not come to his senses and choose someone worthy, I shall simply have to do it for—”

In unison, both women gasped in sudden pain, the agony strangling any further comment either might have made. Muscles tightened and guts clenched as the Voodan’s potion went to work. Hillaire lost her grip on Renee’s hand; the younger woman didn’t even notice. Glasses fell to the floor and shattered, struck by spasming arms, and it was luck that neither woman shredded her tongue between gritted teeth.

As suddenly as it began, it was over. For a long moment, two sets of pained, heavy breathing were the only sounds to break the silence.

And then Hillaire finally recognized the simple fact that the hair hanging in her eyes, as she slumped over the table, was blonde.

The damn thing really worked!

Hillaire raised her head, to stare into the shocked face of...Hillaire. She couldn’t help but smile. She had been expecting the transformation, and still she found it almost impossible to conceive. Renee herself must be absolutely stunned.

Which worked out just fine. Hillaire reached into the pocket sewn into her belt — her clothes had not transformed when she did — and removed one of her brother’s old shaving razors. For the barest second, she hesitated, staring into her own face, wishing briefly that the magic had not required that Renee take on her appearance as she took on Renee’s.

And then, with a mental shrug, she calmly slit the younger woman’s throat. In Hillaire’s voice, Renee managed to emit a single despairing sob before the portion of her blood that had not already spilled over the table filled her lungs. From behind a perfect copy of Renee’s face, Hillaire watched, dispassionately, as “her” body landed facedown on the table with a hollow thud.

She still had some time before the servants returned, and she was going to need it all. The hounds would take care of the body well enough — and if not, it was not a far ride to the nearest bayou, where the alligators would certainly do the job. The bloodstained tablecloth would have to go, but Vardain was hardly likely to notice something like that. Renee’s clothes, too, were stained with blood and would have to burn with the tablecloth. None of Hillaire’s clothes would fit her any longer, as her

new body was rather less curvy than her old, but they would do long enough for her to return to Renee’s home and acquire some more appropriate attire.

A few missing personal items and a note from Hillaire, expressing her disgust over the coming ceremony, would explain the absence of the groom’s sister. Then, “Renee” had a wedding to prepare for. She would stand with her brother on his wedding day; and on his wedding night, she would ensure that the Durand blood remained pure.

* * *

Hillaire shuddered. The cold stone façade of the bedchamber was chill This

would be the future of the Durand family. No mongrel children, whenever they might be born, but undiluted nobility, pure of blood.

It had not been easy, passing herself off as the lowbred, ill-mannered commoner for nearly a week. Every evening, she thought she’d suffered through the worst of it, and each following day proved her wrong. The ceremony itself had been the worst, faced as she’d been with all of Renee’s family at once, forced to keep that insipid smile plastered on her face, that coarse and unrefined laugh in her throat.

But tonight, when they’d returned to the bedroom of the Durand estate, it had proven it all worthwhile.

They finally made it to the bed, collapsing next to one another in exhaustion. For a time they simply rested, and then, a large grin on his face, Vardain reached across her to the bedside table, where two goblets of wine sat, poured earlier in the evening Hillaire noted, with no small sense of irony, that they came from the same set as those she’d used to serve Mensonge’s potion to the girl whose form she now wore.

The wedding night would prove thirsty work, and the vessels were swiftly empty of wine. Hillaire was just considering allowing herself to drift into slumber, when Vardain ordered, “Go get some more wine.”

Irrked by his tone but too tired to argue, the new bride shuffled to her feet and wandered into the next room. She flushed briefly as she realized she’d neglected to put anything on, but the servants were almost certainly all downstairs. Nobody was going to see her.

In the next room was a small table, on which sat a carafe of wine. Her mind still foggy with



exhaustion, Hillaire picked it up, turning to go back to the bedroom... And her breath caught in her throat when she saw what lay on the table behind the carafe. The light of the room's lantern gleamed dully off a small glass decanter, almost square, with a stopper shaped like a serpent's head; a decanter with barely enough luminescent green liquid remaining within to coat the bottom of the vessel.

The carafe of wine fell from Hillaire's suddenly limp hand, to shatter across the floor and around her feet. In the back of her throat rose a horrified shriek, but it never reached her mouth. Her entire body, in fact, seemed suddenly disconnected from her mind, unwilling to move at her commands.

"Clean that mess up!" Vardain shouted angrily from the other room, apparently alerted by the sound of breaking glass. "Use your bare hands, you clumsy bitch! That should teach you to be more careful.

"And when you're through, come back in here. We need to have a little chat about your family's funds..."

Trapped in an undying, unsleeping prison of flesh and bone, hands already bleeding from the tiny glass shards she could not help but pick up, the tiny remaining spark of Hillaire's soul began to silently scream.

Uncovering the Truth



he events described in the above tale are certainly horrific, but appear relatively straightforward. Unlike other stories in this volume, "To Honor and Obey" contains no mysterious entities who are more (or less) than human, no haunted locales that warp the laws of reality itself. The villains of the piece may be twisted, vile individuals, no less evil than the most foul of vampires or most corrupt of demons, but they are still human. Still, for those who wish to use the twisted Durand family or the mysterious Mensonge in their own tales, a brief examination of the preceding events and the people involved, is in order.

The insanity that clearly runs through the Durand line is not unique to the current generation. While past members of the family have been less obsessive about the purity of their blood than Hillaire, the doomed sister and wife of Vardain was far from the first to take the matter seriously. While Hillaire and Vardain are likely the first mated

siblings of the line (at least in many centuries), intermarriage between cousins—both distant and not so distant—is common. The Durand blood may be pure, but it has also grown thick, and few modern scions of the line are entirely "right." To date, the vast majority of defects have been mental, rather than physical.

This same inherited insanity has resulted in the family's fall from power. The Durand line has not held wealth or influence appropriate to its station in many generations. A series of poor decisions—investing in failed ventures, providing patronage to artists and alchemists whose dreams outpace their skills and, of course, splurging on various luxuries and debauched entertainments—all conspired to strip the family of its riches in a surprisingly brief span of time. Regaining their "rightful" position has been an obsession of the line for quite some time, and Vardain is far from the first member to attempt an unorthodox solution. Vardain is the current patriarch of the Durand family, but dozens of other members dwell in various communities throughout Souragne and several of the core domains. Immediately following the events of "To Honor and Obey," messengers have traveled to most of the family's members, instructing them to hunt for the missing Hillaire and bring her home. Now a mindless slave of her brother and husband, Hillaire herself is incapable of ever revealing her identity to Vardain, who has no reason to suspect she is anything other than what—who—she appears.

Vardain himself, clearly, did not marry Renee for love. He wanted a slave and, more importantly, a slave who could provide access to her family's monies. To date, Renee's family has had no reason to suspect that a stranger wears their daughter's face, which means Vardain now has access to their wealth, precisely as he'd planned. The funds he now has at his command are far from sufficient to restore the line to its former greatness, but they are enough to begin expanding Durand interests. Further, Vardain has begun to wonder if he cannot repeat the same trick twice. His only regret is that he has not yet found his beloved sister, with whom he yearns to share his success and good fortune.

Of course, not all involved in this twisted web are of the Durand line. Mensonge is a powerful Voodan, clearly, but he is more than that. Although he pays respect to all *loa*, his true patron is Ohuwaghnn, the Serpent King, whom Mensonge serves as most high Voodan. He really could not



care less to what use Hillaire, Vardain or any of his other customers put his concoctions and *gris-gris*; his only concern is the slow erosion of what civilized society exists in Souragne. Mensonge and his fellow worshipers of the Serpent King will be happy only when Maison D'Sablet dominates the entirety of the isle, and the people are reduced to dwelling in simple, primitive villages at the mercy of the great swamp's more bestial denizens. (See the *DM's Appendix* for more on both Ohuwaghnn and the Voodan.)

And what of poor, innocent Renee, the only true victim in this nest of vipers? Well, Renee is dead. As far as the specific events of "To Honor and Obey" are concerned, that's the end of it. But death is rarely simple—and often not even final—in the Land of Mists....

Using the Story



he PCs are unlikely to be directly involved in the events described in "To Honor and Obey." (Although they certainly can be if you want them to, and don't mind the possibility that they may find some way to stop Hillaire or Vardain from accomplishing their goals.) Rather, the tale is best used as a means of introducing the concepts involved, so that the PCs may later encounter them, or something like them. As one possible example, you might make use of the tale as follows.

- The PCs overhear the sad tale of Renee, Hillaire and Vardain in a tavern or other public place. The PCs may seek more detail and may learn that the Durand family is a noble line, found in many different lands. They will not, however, be able to learn any more of Vardain and Hillaire and, in fact, most of those who know the tale believe those two dead many generations gone. Nobody can say how, if the tale is true, the knowledge got out; after all, at the end of the story, not even Vardain knows the truth regarding his new wife.

- Over the following days, emotions in the town become strained as a number of people, mostly young women, begin acting erratically or improperly. One or two even disappear.

- The PCs may choose to investigate on their own, or they may be forced into proving their innocence to the townsfolk, who are likely to treat all strangers and newcomers with great suspicion. They might eventually learn that a small group of the village's young men have gotten hold of an elixir that seems to bear no small resemblance to

one of those appearing in the story. This group is forcing several of the village girls to become involuntary lovers and to steal from their families to enrich their "masters." The PCs learn this either from a young man who refused to go through with the conspiracy, or a young woman who escaped their clutches. In either case, the informant disappears unless the PCs take great steps to protect him/her.

- The PCs will eventually confront these young men. Even though the conspirators likely pose little direct danger to the PCs, they are still a substantial challenge. Can the PCs reach them without having to slay innocent villagers who are either enslaved by their powers, or who simply believe they are protecting their neighbors from hostile strangers? Perhaps one or two of the criminals aren't pushovers either. After all, one of them must know something of magic to have hunted down the elixir in the first place.

- Even should the PCs uncover the guilty, their travails are far from over, and many questions remain unanswered. Who provided them with the elixir in the first place? Was it a single fanatic such as Mensonge, determined to sow chaos? Was it the Durand family, perhaps engaged in some convoluted scheme to advance their own agendas? And if this is happening here, where else might it be occurring? Who else could be enslaved to people such as the Durands?

Variations on a Theme



As written, "To Honor and Obey" is clearly set in the domain of Souragne. The imagery of the buildings and the ornate aboveground tombs, the oppressive heat and humidity, and of course the dark yet spiritual magic practically scream the New Orleans gothic sensibility. It is a tale of the past, a tale told as a warning to others, and it is a small story, personal rather than far-reaching. It introduces elements with which the PCs may have to deal, but it, in and of itself, is not precisely the stuff of adventures.

With a little effort, everything can be altered or expanded to encompass almost any type of adventure in any sort of setting.

Location

The setting of a tale like this one is almost its own character. The class struggles, the presence of

the voodan and other details set the tone and feel of the piece without ever taking any direct part of the story. They are background, unobtrusive, yet vital.

By making full use of the location, or altering the setting, the DM can greatly enhance, expand or even completely alter any of her campaign invents inspired by the tale.

Using the Tale in Souragne

Souragne is a perfect setting for a story such as “To Honor and Obey”; that’s why it was set here. Even more so than many of Ravenloft’s domains, Souragne is a land of mystery. Even those who worship the *loa* do not pretend to fully understand what those spirits are, what they stand for, how they may behave. The most benevolent of the *loa* may be moved to anger under the right circumstances, and the most evil and vicious of them may prove merciful, even helpful, if properly propitiated. Souragne is a land of alien powers and strange magic, and anything can happen here.

In Souragne, overhearing this tale might lead the PCs to discover entire plantations worked by soulless slaves, their wills crushed by elixirs such the one sold by Mensonge. The heroes might find

themselves working against the efforts of Mensonge or those like him. Alternatively, they might find themselves forced to seek out his aid! The voodan are the dominant mystical power in Souragne, and while some worship kind *loa*, many more adore spirits of a more primal, more malevolent aspect. Few in Souragne worship gods, leaving the voodan the only divine casters whose services can be regularly acquired. How might the players react, sessions after hearing this tale, when they enter the shop of the only man who can heal their injured companions, only to see a serpent-headed decanter of gleaming green fluid on the counter?

To make full use of Souragne as a setting, consider this. The *loa* are spirits, with no true physical form of their own. In many celebrations, worshipers leave themselves spiritually open, allowing the *loa* to temporarily possess them, serving as “mounts” while the spirits enjoy the sensations of the flesh. What might happen, then, should the darker, more evil *loa* learn that several mortals have been exposed to Mensonge’s elixir, are now living vessels with no soul and no will? Might these dark *loa* not attempt to acquire one of these bodies, and what might the results be of a *loa* no longer bound to return to spiritual form?





Using the Tale Elsewhere

Of course, a tale of obsession and love betrayed need not be set in any given locale. Many of Ravenloft's domains serve as an appropriate stage; indeed, the story need not take place in the Demiplane of Dread at all. (For that matter, the events of the story might well be sufficient to draw the participants into the Mists, if they do not yet have the pleasure of a Ravenloft address.)

Nearly all cultures have their own workers of magic, which might serve as well as the voodan in this tale. The part of Mensonge might be filled by an evil witch dwelling in the deep woods near a knight's castle; a sadistic wizard high in his tower; a cruel djinn; or a demon summoned by the groom-to-be's jealous sister. The Vistani would likely not engage in such practices as a whole, but some rogue elements among their number might well do so. It is even possible to remove any overt magic from the soul-poisoning elixir and instead making it the creation of some ancient alchemist or mad scientist. (This is less easy to do with the first potion, the one that Hillaire uses to trade faces with Renee, but the two elixirs do not have to appear in the same tale.)

In regions where a mystical potion is not appropriate, the magic might take another form as easily as the individual peddling them. Hillaire might lose her soul to an enchanted wedding band, carved by vicious gnomes. Her slow loss of personality and descent into mindless slavery might not be the result of deliberate malice on the part of Vardain, but instead of a curse pronounced on her by the dying Renee. In a setting where magic is less common—perhaps in conjunction with the notion that the elixir is an alchemical creation—Hillaire may have no mystical means of stealing Renee's face. She may have to do it literally, slicing the flesh and skin from the corpse of her brother's fiancé and having herself altered through primitive surgery at the hands of an insane doctor.

Timeframe

Of all the decisions a DM can make when introducing the events of this tale into her campaign, the choice of timeframe is one of the most vital. Determining when the events of the story happened—or will happen—shapes the options for using the elements involved.

The Tale is Ancient

In this variant—the one assumed by the story's introduction as written—the events as described

are assumed to have taken place quite some time ago. Decades, even generations, have passed since Hillaire murdered Renee and was condemned to suffer her own eternal imprisonment for it.

The advantage to using the tale this way is that the DM can introduce the players to the important elements, without making it clear how they will then come up. Is the important point of the story the elixir, which is now in the hands of those who will use it to commit more evil? Is it Mensonge, who serves a *loa* the PCs will themselves have to contend with? Is it the Durand family, who seeks vengeance against the heroes for interfering with their interests? Or is the villain someone totally unrelated, who was inspired by the tale and seeks to recreate it?

The Tale is Recent

Portrayed this way, the marriage of Vardain and "Renee" occurred only a few years ago. The Durand line has annexed Renee's family fortune, and Vardain is thoroughly engaged in various schemes and plots intended to return the family to their place of prominence in society. The tale is certainly not told in so public a forum as a tavern, but is instead whispered through the underground, or told to the PCs by a seer, a ghost (of Renee perhaps; see below), or a stranger whose knowledge of the events is at least as mysterious as the events themselves. DMs who select this opportunity should be prepared for the heroes to involve themselves in the affairs of the Durand family, perhaps even to interact with Vardain. Whether they are able to prove the truth of the Durand's actions, or to untangle Renee's family from their clutches, can make for many fascinating stories without the use of any overt monsters at all.

The Tale is Current

Perhaps the trickiest variant to run is one in which the PCs never hear the story at all—because it's happening even as they watch. In this variant, the DM utilizes the events of "To Honor and Obey" as a timeline for an ongoing game, one that will turn out badly for Renee and Hillaire both, if the heroes do not somehow change the outcome. They may be able to save Renee, or to prevent Vardain's enslavement of Hillaire. (Not that she is undeserving of punishment, of course, but Renee's family deserves to know the truth and to escape from under Vardain's thumb.) At the very least, perhaps they can stop Mensonge from trading his evil wares and harming anyone else.





This can be the most difficult way for a DM to utilize this tale, though it can also be the most rewarding. The DM has to find some way to involve the party—who may well be outsiders to the region—in secretive and hidden events that involve only a select group of people. Doing so is easiest, and most believable, if the DM works the relevant details into the campaign in advance. Perhaps Renee is the distant cousin of a PC, and the party is in the region for the wedding. Maybe they've dealt with Mensonge or his brethren before and become involved in affairs that way. Whatever the case, a story written to involve only four individuals suddenly involves another outside group whose presence could change any or all the events to come. On the other hand, the difficulty may well be worth it when the PCs manage to save the life of an innocent girl whose only crime was to fall for the wrong nobleman—or at least to ensure that her family does not suffer for her misjudgment.

The Villain of the Piece

"To Honor and Obey" introduces a variety of individuals and factions who can function as primary villains for a long-term story or even an entire campaign. Assuming the tale is presented as is, the DM has a variety of choices regarding which elements to use.

The Durands

Even if Vardain is long dead (this being Ravenloft, and Vardain clearly having a taste for dark magic, there's no reason he has to be), he was not the only corrupt member of this maddened family. Nearly all the Durands are obsessed with their family's status. While they are much poorer and less influential than once they were, they still hold positions of some authority in various cities of Souragne and others across the core domains. They can pose substantial political dangers, turning allies against the PCs, spreading rumors about them to the common folk, penalizing merchants who work with them, even raising mercenary companies against them. Further, the Durand family is not averse to even the blackest of magic. Perhaps Vardain's technique has spread throughout the family, now commonly used by every member of the line who unites a Durand with another powerful or wealthy family. The Durand family could have dozens of soulless slaves in the form of its newest wives and husbands. Some of them—including Vardain himself, if he still lives—might have veritable harems of slaves, some of whom are

little more than concubines, while others hold valuable political alliances together. Vardain might well have several different wives, each legally wed to him under the laws of a different realm.

It's also worth noting that those under the effects of the *heart and soul* spell, which is the basis for Mensonge's elixir, do not actually lose any of their abilities. They are simply incapable of initiating any action of their own. If ordered to do so, enslaved individuals who happen to be skilled warriors or spellcasters can make life very difficult for the PCs—especially since the heroes cannot simply kill them at whim, because many of these poor souls are innocents who were mystically entrapped into serving the Durands.

Mensonge and the Serpent King

Ohuwaghnn, called the Serpent King, is not as greatly feared as the Lord of the Dead, nor as utterly reviled as Ulwaddithri. He is, however, one of the greatest threats to Souragnian civilized society, for he actively seeks to overthrow the reign of humanity and return dominion to the beasts of the swamp. While many Souragnians pray to Ohuwaghnn to turn aside his displeasure, only a mad few worship him. Among those is Mensonge and others like him, men who make every effort to destroy the people and society around them in exchange for the power granted them by the Serpent King. Mensonge makes a hefty profit selling his wares, but profit is not his primary concern. The destruction and defilement of all around him, except those who share his insane beliefs, is Mensonge's primary interest. He keeps his own faith a secret, passing himself off as a simple voodan and magician for hire, but his wares have a knack for causing far more suffering than they alleviate. Some would say that most of those who would involve themselves with a man such as Mensonge deserve what they get, but given that most who can afford his services are also important members of society, anything that happens to them tends to have a ripple effect on those around them.

Mensonge and those like him are powerful enough, however, that they need not remain subtle; when angered, they can be devastating opponents. Most of Ohuwaghnn's followers are powerful voodan, and heroes who believe they have their enemy on the ropes just because they've prevented Mensonge's elixirs from working their horrors are likely to discover the very beasts of nature rising up against them. Mensonge makes an excellent recur-



ring villain, always popping up in the service of others against whom the PCs are struggling. It can be particularly effective for the players to discover one of Mensonge's creations in the possession of an enemy, without (for the time being) encountering the voodan himself.

The Ghost of Renee

Should you feel that making the Durand family or Mensonge your villains might be too obvious, consider a more devious option: Renee. The victim of a brutal murder, which indirectly led to her family's fortunes being partly swallowed up by the Durand family, this poor girl's got enough tragedy and emotion surrounding her death to empower any three vengeful spirits. Even the most innocent of victims turns malign swiftly enough when forced to haunt the shadows of the Land of Mists. For that matter, there's no reason Renee really has to be entirely innocent. Perhaps, just as Vardain schemed to take advantage of her wealth, she schemed to take advantage of his position. Did she have her own plans for her new husband? Was he to die in an "accident," leaving Renee the matron of this branch of the Durand line? The tale portrays the girl as an innocent, and it may be more tragic for such a one

to become a ghost, but there's no reason the DM can't decide to make her far more than that.

Which Ghost is Which?

As a particularly intriguing possibility, consider that Renee and Hillaire have both manifested as ghosts. (Perhaps Hillaire died at some point since the events of the tale took place, or maybe the portion of her soul that was poisoned by the elixir has itself manifested as a spirit of some sort.) The heroes might have two ghosts attempting to acquire their aid, or two vengeful spirits wreaking havoc. Consider, as well, that the general appearance of a ghost tends to be based, at least in part, on an individual's self-image. It's possible, depending on how much of Hillaire remained in the duplicate of Renee's body and for how long, that both ghosts might look like Renee. Making the players decide which "Renee" to believe opens the door for all manner of story possibilities—especially if both are dishonest, but for their own reasons.

Alternative Events

Central as the concept may be to the tale as written, "To Honor and Obey" need not even involve a wedding. By changing the fundamental





nature of the event around which the story revolves, the DM can completely alter the scope and feel of any subsequent adventure.

The Tale Involves a Business Endeavor

The parts of Vardain and Renee might be filled with two partners-to-be in some manner of business. This might be as small as a local shopkeeper arranging with the teamsters who deliver goods to everyone in town, or as major as a pair of merchant guilds from two major cities forming an enormous consortium. One partner assuming control over the whole thing, using Mensonge's elixir or similar magic, could lead to all manner of troubles for the community. Villagers might starve, as vital foodstuffs are suddenly only available from one vendor and at exorbitant prices. A merchant might suddenly grow so wealthy, as the only provider of a particular luxury in a large city, as to become a viable political force. No matter whether the villain and his ambitions are large or small, he has a great deal to lose if anyone exposes his secrets, or finds a way to undo his enslavement of his business partner.

The Tale Involves a Criminal Trial

Few of Ravenloft's domains (or fantasy settings in general) have a court system of the sort that most players are accustomed to. That doesn't mean, however, that trials do not take place. Whether the accused is brought before a magistrate, a tribunal of nobles, a church inquisitor or an assembly of a town's landowners, he still faces the threat of punishment for his (alleged) crimes. Such an accused criminal, or his allies, might take the place of Vardain in the story, making use of mind-controlling magic to sway the verdict, or to silence witnesses. A criminal might use the face-trading potion to frame an innocent, perhaps even a PC, for his crimes. This might even have become standard fair for an organized thieves guild; the people around them live in terror, knowing that anyone who speaks out against them will be persecuted by the mind-controlled officers of the law, or turned into a mindless thrall themselves.

The Tale Involves a Rise to Political Power

The option with perhaps the most far-reaching implications is one in which the individual enslaving the will of others is using his artificial

influence to climb the political or feudal ladder. This might be one landowner among several, competing for a position such as *burgomaster*, regional governor, tax collector or the like. On a larger scale, the heir to a throne—be it a barony, a dukedom or a full-fledged kingdom—might be enthralled by any one of a number of people interested in usurping his power. Is it a younger sibling, who intends the true heir to step aside in his favor? Someone associated with the court who wishes to rule from behind the scenes, such as a seneschal, a lesser noble, a church leader or even a well-connected guild master or merchant? For that matter, the DM might keep the wedding theme and make the tale one of political machination by making the wedding a royal one, and the villain a bride seeking to advance her position by pulling the strings of her husband's reign.

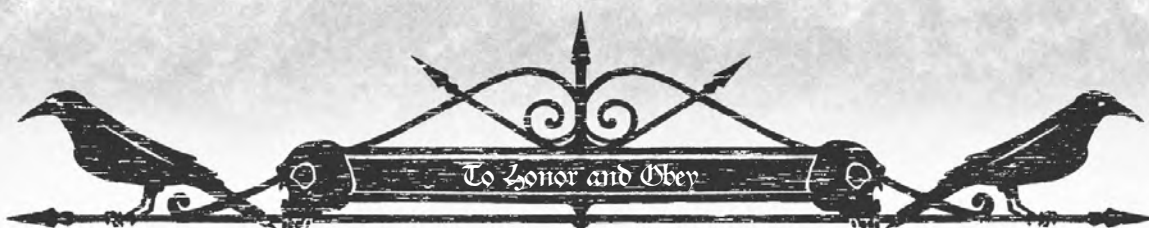
Other Options

Finally, the events of this tale can be altered in ways that do not quite fit into any of the above categories. Each of these changes, in rather substantial ways, the theme and feel of the events described herein, but each can also lead to all manner of further adventures.

Mensonge is Not Human

It seems an obvious enough option, but it's worth exploring. Mensonge, or whoever takes his place in the tale, need not be a human being at all. The notion that he might instead be a demon, summoned by Hillaire to grant her the power to take Renee's place, was suggested previously. This is a particularly strong option if the DM has chosen to set the adventure in a realm more reminiscent of the European Middle Ages than gothic New Orleans. Similarly, he might be a mischievous creature of the fey, one who delights in tormenting the foolish mortals surrounding him. In a Middle Eastern setting, he could just as easily be a djinn of some sort. Arabian tales are rife with wishes gone awry, and this one would certainly qualify.

Mensonge might be a ghost or revenant, someone harmed in life by Hillaire or the local townsfolk and who's out for revenge. Certainly, his actions here are rather more subtle than those normally employed by the vengeful dead, but that doesn't make them any less effective. He might be a voodan lich, one who has served Ohuwaghnn not for years, but for decades, even centuries. He might be a vampire, seeking to create—either through direct



use of the elixir, or by enticing others to use it—a population of individuals who, lacking any will of their own, would be incapable of revealing that he has been feeding on them. (What would one of these soulless individuals be like if raised as a vampire?)

He might even be an agent of some other Darklord, one with a stake in disrupting life in Souragne. Anton Misroi isn't known to have any enemies quite that powerful outside his borders, but how often does one know one's enemies in Ravenloft?

Mensonge Serves Anton Misroi

And speaking of Darklords, suppose that Mensonge does not worship the Serpent King, but instead serves Souragne's own lord, Anton Misroi? This does not mean he worships the Lord of the Dead in his incarnation as one of Souragne's *loa*, but the actual Darklord. In this case, Mensonge knows that Misroi is the lord of the domain and acts entirely under his orders. So what, then, does Misroi—for whom the activities of the living rarely hold much interest—hope to accomplish? Is Mensonge's elixir intended as the first step in a process to create more human-looking zombies, rather than the shambling corpses that are Misroi's standard servants? If so, what possible use could he have for them?

Alternatively, Misroi's efforts may have nothing to do with zombies. Perhaps he simply wishes to exercise some measure of control over the Durand family and is allowing Vardain to spread the elixir's effects through the line before Vardain himself is made into a puppet. The Durand line is not particularly powerful in any given area, but it exists throughout many domains, so Misroi could only have some purpose for them that extends beyond his own borders. He has never shown any interest in annexing other regions as part of his domain, so what might he be looking for beyond the Mists and the Murky Sea?

Finally, Mensonge may serve Misroi, but might be selling his mystical concoctions on his own, without his lord's permission. Misroi might not care, in which case he becomes involved only if/when the PCs harm one of his powerful servants. Alternatively, he may be enraged that Mensonge has exposed the elixir before Misroi himself wishes to make use of it and sets out to destroy both his disobedient servant and those who know of his concoctions. In this instance, the heroes might end

up working with Mensonge—though he cannot be trusted and would betray them in an instant if he felt it was to his advantage—in their efforts to survive Misroi's anger long enough to escape Souragne.

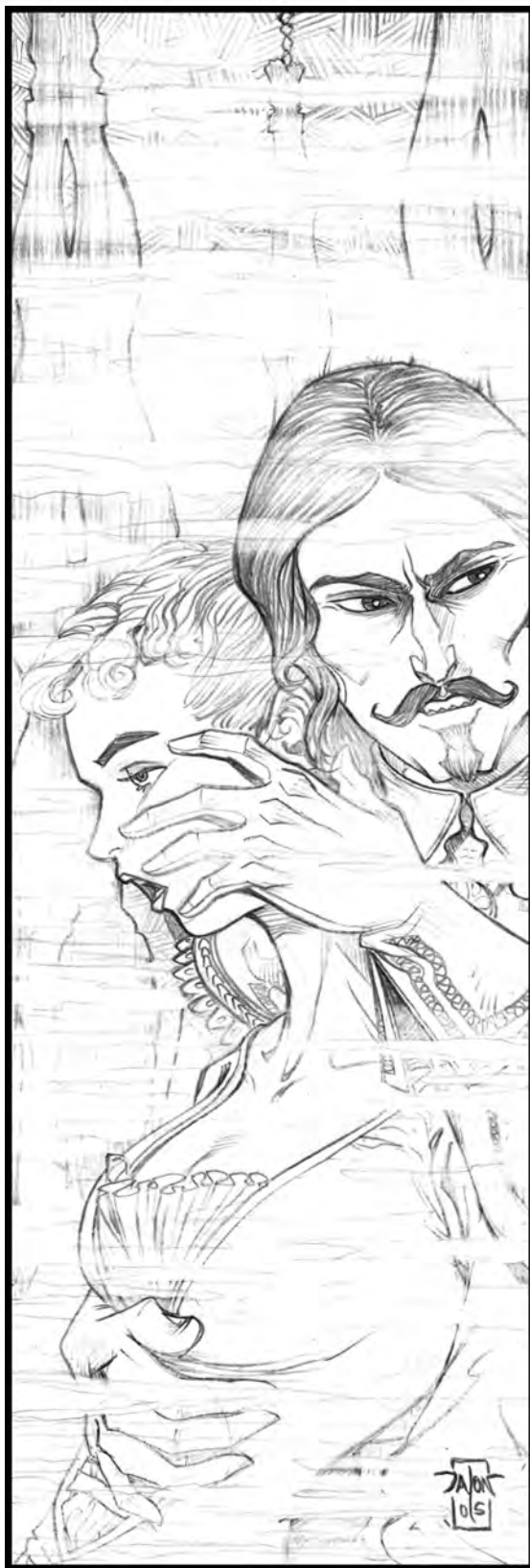
The Brides Are Not Human

For a more horrific scenario, concoct a story in which the mind-controlled slaves are inhuman creatures in their own right. Perhaps Hillaire, in addition to being an obsessed sister, was also a werewolf, or perhaps Renee was a red widow and Hillaire failed to take her place. Or, if Vardain or other Durands have made continued use of the elixir beyond the events in the tale, future wives might be monsters even if both Hillaire and Renee were entirely human. The PCs might be involved in a multi-session story in which they must track down a red widow who has been slaying important men in a community, only to learn, when they finally discover her, that she has been working on someone else's orders. A monster hunt has abruptly become a political mystery, in which the heroes face an unknown villain who has many more slaves, human and otherwise, to raise against them.

The Elixir Attracts Attention

Mind-controlling magic as powerful as the *heart and soul* spell, or the technique that allows such a powerful spell to be made into a potion, is going to strike many individuals as a powerful tool. Surely, if the PCs have heard the tale of Hillaire, Renee, Mensonge and Vardain, then others have as well. For a faster-paced story, the heroes may be involved in a race against all manner of dark forces, attempting to acquire or destroy the elixir (and the one who knows how to make it) before someone far more evil even than Vardain gets his hands on it.

Previous suggestions have addressed the notion that Misroi might be angered at Mensonge's use of the elixir. As the same possibilities apply should he discover it after the fact and want it for himself, we won't focus on Misroi here. But what if one of the other darklords should, through means mystical or mundane, learn of the *heart and soul* elixir? Any number of these foul creatures might desire the potion for their own use. Azalin, of course, cannot learn new magic on his own, but he can certainly make use of items. Harmon Lukas might well be fascinated at the notion of a new bardic spell, one unheard of in his own experiences. Ivan Boris would love such elixirs, for the



possibilities to destroy the lives and loves of others through their use are practically endless.

This will most certainly not lead to any sort of open warfare between domains. Leaving aside the fact that such an event is inefficient (and not particularly conducive to personal horror, though an enterprising DM could certainly use the opportunity to play with the horrific aspects of warfare), it's practically a physical impossibility. Souragne is an Isle of Terror, separated from all other domains by the Mists. It's difficult enough for a lone traveler to find his way to Souragne should that be his destination. Attempting to march an army to the Nocturnal Sea, then sail them through the Wake of the Loa—the only semi-reliable Mist way to access Souragne—is an undertaking of unimaginable complexity. To go through all that, only to face an enemy who can raise your own dead against you in a limitless army, is foolishness of the highest order.

It is far more likely that any Darklord who wishes to obtain Mensonge's elixir will send a single operative, or a small band. These could wind up as adversaries of the PCs, engaged in a three-way struggle along with Mensonge for acquisition of the elixir. Alternatively, the heroes might serve as these agents, wittingly or unwittingly, discovering Mensonge and his magic only when they are dispatched by someone to travel to Souragne and retrieve them.

Of course, the interested parties need not be Darklords or their agents. Religious sects, criminal organizations, powerful villains, even good-aligned but misdirected good churches and monster hunters—plenty of these, and more, inhabit the Land of Mists. Any or all of them might prove interested in the sorts of magic Mensonge has made available, and all of them could prove exceptionally dangerous to the heroes.

Lord Vardain

Perhaps the most ambitious direction a DM might take the events of "To Honor and Obey" is to use them as a foundation for a new domain. Mensonge is devoted to a higher power, and Hillaire winds up a mindless slave, though the most obvious choice for the new Darklord around which to build a domain is Vardain himself. This is a man who has no compunctions about using dark magic to enslave innocent women, destroy their wills and possibly even their souls and to make use of them to steal their family's wealth and resources. By even



the most charitable of definitions, that makes him a rapist, a slave-owner and a thief. If the elixir truly destroys the soul, as Mensonge claims, he is also a murderer and worse. Easily enough, one would think, to draw the attention of the Dark Powers.

Any such domain would likely be small, an Island of Terror with Mistways to both the core and Souragne. Within, Lord Vardain keeps his harem of enslaved wives, his household of mindless servants and his unbreakably loyal guards. Yet, he has nobody with whom to share his triumph. His sister, the only truly close member of his family, is gone, fled (or so Vardain believes) to avoid witnessing his marriage to a commoner. He rules here, making his family as important as he wished it to be, but it is a hollow victory. So what if they rule here, in this tiny domain that is his prison? They still labor in growing poverty elsewhere, and no other nobles exist in his tiny domain to acknowledge his supe-

riority. Vardain, though he maintains his will, grows slowly as soulless as his slaves, as he realizes that his rule is empty, meaningless and impossible to expand.

Vardain himself would not be a particularly powerful Darklord on a personal level. He is likely only a mid-level aristocrat, with no special powers and abilities except those granted by his new Darklord status. Consider the possibility, however, that his lust for domination has infected the land around him. He no longer needs Mensonge's elixir; he can control minds with a touch. Worse, perhaps the Mists that rise when he wishes to close his borders have effects like the elixir itself. Anyone who attempts to leave when he does not wish it must make Will saves every time they enter the Mist, or find themselves among the ranks of Vardain's soulless slaves.



DNV's Appendix

*Imageries of dreams reveal a gracious age:
Black armour, falling lace, and altar lights at
morn.*

—Lionel Johnson, "The Age of a Dream"



This appendix contains information on items, monsters and people from the preceding five chapters, arranged according to the story to which they belong. If you are a player, you may wish to read this information only after you have taken part in the stories already presented.

Chapter One: To Inherit Eternity



his section contains the treasures essential to the tale of Lord Theone and his search for immortality as well as descriptions of the major players in the tale and details of three new monsters that figure in the story.

New Magic Items

The following items are particularly suited to *To Inherit Eternity*, though DMs may find that they provide inspiration for more stories.

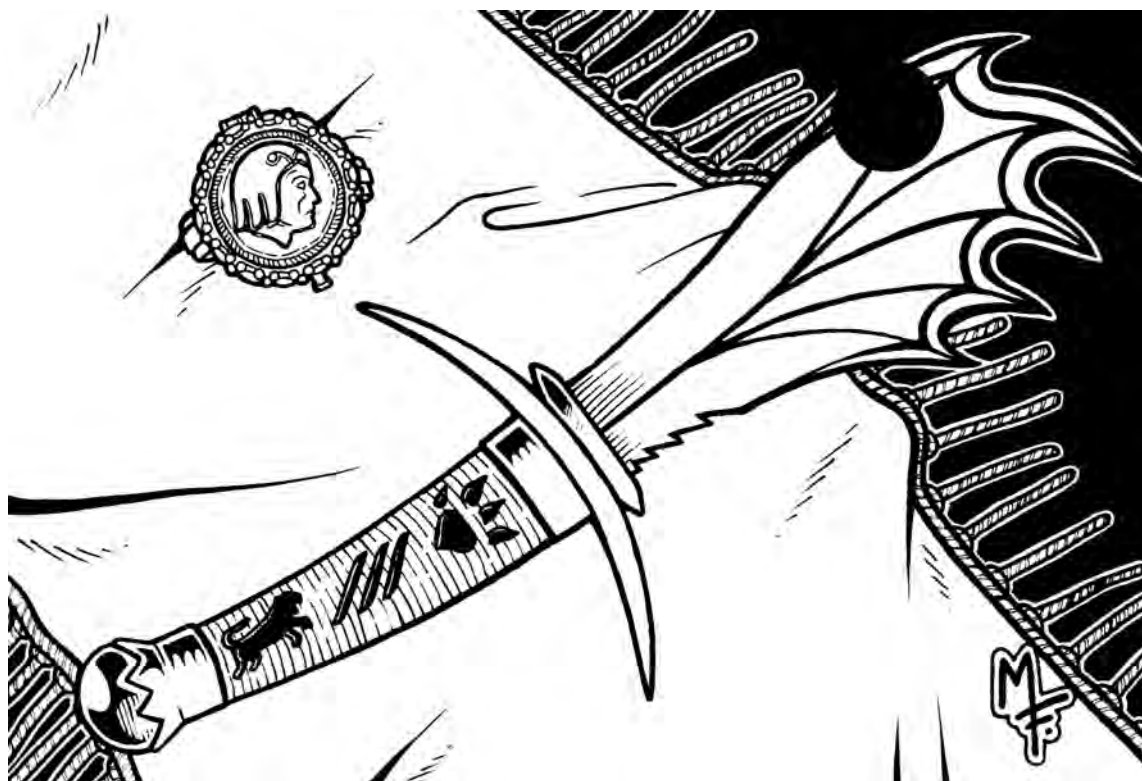
The Heirloom (Memory's Recall)

Though the heirloom has changed form over the centuries, at its heart there is always a cameo depicting a woman's face with an owl-visaged helm

tipped back to rest on her forehead. Over the years, the heirloom has been a ring, an amulet, a locket, a pendant, a watch fob and a stickpin, and it may assume other forms in the future, all with the cameo mounted in its center. It has the following powers.

Memory Renewal (Su): Though Eternity's heirloom appears to be an item of little value, he created this item to renew his fading memories. The heirloom may be invoked up to 6 times a day to recall and use knowledge, skills, feats or experience from his past, manifesting in different ways. To recall a nugget of knowledge requires an Intelligence or Knowledge check (DC = 16 + 1 for every 100 years in the past or degree of obscurity). Eternity may identify a magic item or recall an activation method due to prior experience with an additional +5 to the difficulty level. Knowledge slowly faded after a month.

Knowledge Enhancement (Su): By this same method, a feat or skill may be learned or enhanced by 3 ranks, but the knowledge fades in a day. With a successful DC 25 Will save, the user may temporarily add two levels of experience to any class for one day. In the hands of its original owner these memories and skills, feats and experience level adjustments remain as long as he possesses the





heirloom. Should he lose the item, his memories fade in a year.

Rejuvenation (Su): Interacting with Eternity's internal light, this item reverses the aging process at the rate of one month per year to the appearance of a twenty-year-old human. Loss of the artifact causes the body to start aging normally again. As a final defense, Eternity can channel his power through the ring to invoke a *word of recall* permitting him to teleport away to his homeland and safety.

Rubbing the ring and concentrating on a specific need while repeating the activation phrase activates the heirloom.

When the owner's life is in peril or when struck by light magic, a single memory, skill, feat, vital nugget of knowledge or one of its powers may activate automatically. If the user makes a DC 18 Intelligence check, he remembers how to activate that power. Otherwise, the user must use trial and error to evoke the discovered power again.

Faint transmutation; CL 18th; Craft Wondrous Item, *contingency*, *limited wish*, *wish*, *word of recall*; Price 27,000 gp. Weight varies.

Story Hook: Since the heirloom was made to help The One (or Lord Theone) recall his past, anyone using the item repeatedly may begin to confuse those memories with her own and perhaps misinterpret them as memories of a previous incarnation. Over time, the power of the heirloom may transform the appearance of the new owner to resemble The One's youthful image and grant access to up to 50% of his knowledge. This may result in the unwanted attention of others who mistake the new owner for Eternity or it may result in the new owner being driven mad with the belief that he is the real "One" while the true Eternity seeks to reclaim his property.

The Lucine Claw (Tempus Bane)

This small *dagger +1/+3 vs. creatures of air or light* resembles a curved ebony claw from some great cat. Its hilt is polished mahogany carved with the images of sinuous feral felines. The pommel holds an amber cats-eye crystal. Forged from the essence of the *darque* by the founder of the Cult of Light centuries past to battle the Evil One, this magical dagger is the bane of creatures of air or light, but later generations abandoned the weapon as a tool of darkness! Against its foes, this is a magical *dagger +3* and possesses additional powers if one knows how to activate them during an encounter. If the

blade is licked, there is a 25% chance the powers are activated. If the lick draws blood activation is automatic. Once activated the blade automatically casts *protection from good* on its wielder and a *bane* spell on its foes. It can cast *blur* and *darkness* up to twice a day. It can counter the effects of *light* magic as if casting a *continual dark* by making a DC 20 attack roll (DC 20).

Moderate evocation; CL 9th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor; Price 9,000 gp; Weight 3 lb.

Story Hook: Using this weapon draws the attention of not only the Cult of Light, but also the interest of the One. The Cult does not trust any who would sully themselves by using this tool of darkness, watching to determine their goals and nature and then either attempt to steal the artifact or punish the wielder. Eternity keeps track of the owner and frames them for some minor crime to keep them from pursuing him and using this weapon against him.

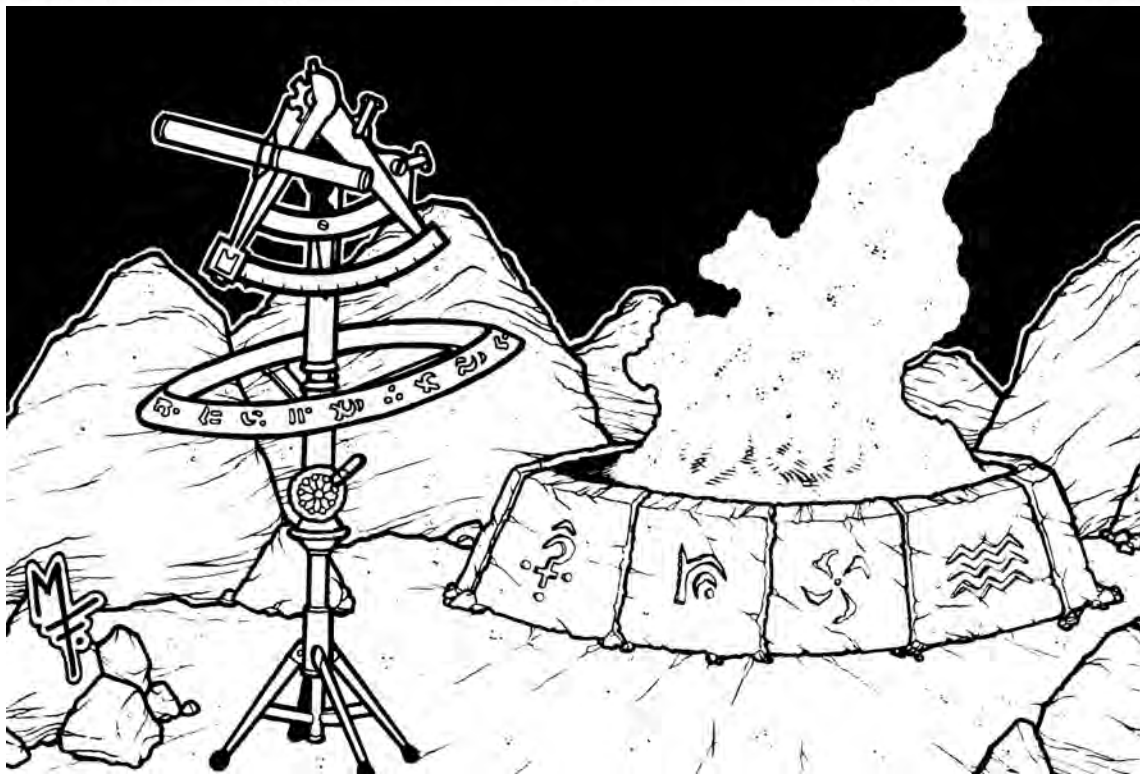
The Wanderer's Guide (Compass and Key)

This item appears to be a strange collapsible brass sextant with an outer ring forming two handles on either side, a pivoting 360 degree compass ring and a rising azimuth viewing tube with a protruding bezel on its nether side. Odd, indecipherable script is inscribed on the outer ring, and small crystal chips are set at the cardinal points of the compass.

This item locates the shortest path to some general object or place. It cannot locate a specific item. When the guide is set on the ground on its bezel and the activation phrase intoned it will begin to spin like a top with the crystals sparking. Upon speaking the words to identify what is sought, the sextant stops, balancing on its bezel and points in the direction of the nearest path to the desired element. Afterward the device grows warmer and vibrates when pointed in the right direction. The crystal chips glow to indicate left or right, forward or back, with all four pulsing three times and then extinguishing themselves when the identified site is reached. If the owner is lost and facing dire circumstances or the item is doused with water this device will grow warm and begin to vibrate when pointed in the direction of safety or rescue.

This device can also open doors, locks and passages as well as remove bars. It also possesses two secret attributes. When laid upon Eternity's complete map of the Realms and the azimuth tube





raised to the correct position, a light shined down the tube will point to the location of the Fount of Time. When the tube and compass are set to spinning and held aloft, the item is the key to penetrate the barrier of the Verge.

Faint divination; CL 10th; Craft Wondrous Item, *knock, locate object, locate creature, permanency*; Price 1,000 gp apparent value (actual value priceless); Weight 3 lb.

Story Hook: This device may be used to set out on a treasure hunt for a lost hoard or it may be coveted by another candidate for immortality who seeks to claim it as his own.

Waters of Eternity

An oddly pleasant, yet pungent scent, like roasting spiced almonds, infuses the air about this well. The water is greasy and has an iridescent sheen on its surface. Inhaling the vapors causes dizziness.

The waters detect as weak magic. The hot waters are astringent and halt bleeding and close some wounds (healing 1d6+1 points of damage once per day), but they lose this quality once the water cools. The black fluid is toxic if ingested, requiring a DC 24 Fortitude save. The victim of a successful save suffers delusions, believing she feels

the magic of the black liquor. The victim will be in great spirits and may actually experience healing (but this is really due to victim's subconscious use of any magical healing available to her). The victim of a failed save suffers 3d8 points of damage and must make a DC 20 Fortitude save or die. The oily film and vapors may ignite if exposed to an open flame. Roll as an unmodified skill check against the film (DC 18) or against the vapors (DC 15). Anyone touched by the flame suffers an attack (Atk +4, Dmg 1d6 film, 3d6 vapors). The flame lasts for 1d4 +1 rounds.

Cast of Characters

Each successful story features a cast of memorable individuals who add their own personal tale to the telling. This legend introduces an assemblage of non-player characters (NPCs) each possessing a secret story and personal goals. By understanding each character's motives, the DM will be better prepared to respond and adapt to each character's actions and to keep the story on track. Following is the cast of NPCs and their motives as an aid to portray each character during an adventure.

Note: These characters are provided with thumbnail descriptions only, since the DM has the



option of varying the roles each character plays in the story and, hence, their classes, levels and game traits. DMs are encouraged to assign these characters levels and Abilities in keeping with their campaign using the guidelines in Chapter 4 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Senor Hector Elissar Ramirez

The host for the evening, Señor Ramirez is chief barrister and solicitor to Lord Theone, steward of Eldron Manor and caretaker of the lord's estates. He is a gracious host, pleasant and polite to guests, but firm in his decisions. Devoted to his master, he has performed faithfully for decades, carrying out any task he was asked to perform without question.



Senor Ramirez

For years, he knew of his master's obsession with immortality and believes that Lord Theone actually found one who knew its secret. This has become very important to Hector for he has discovered he is dying of an incurable malady and, like any mortal, wants a chance to live. Through researching his master's papers, he concludes that this person is one of Lord Theone's rivals or acquaintances. With the decades old absence of his master and in accordance with his Lord's written instructions, Senor Ramirez has invited those who

seemed likely suspects, hoping to discover the One's identity or, failing that, at least to find a clue or recruit allies in his quest for the One.

While the curator admits his employer's fascination with the legendary quest for immortality, he neither confirms nor denies the existence of an immortal, but will act charmed by the idea and encourages others to keep an open mind. Throughout this story, Señor Ramirez meets with each guest privately and tries to get the individual to admit he is the immortal. He seeks to save himself by learning the identity of the One or the secret of immortality to recover his health. In the end, he realizes that survival is not for him and sacrifices himself to save another, only then realizing how close he was to the truth.

Mr. Alistair Charoan

Señor Ramirez's loyal and trustworthy clerk has a head for numbers, but does not deal well with people. He is quiet and reserved, seeking to avoid attention. If faced with a challenge, he trusts his own meager skills rather than those of others. While he does not have the heart of a hero, he defends his employer without hesitation. He is observant and analytical, dwelling on minute details and thus often understanding something before others do. He quietly suggests a course of action or



Mr. Alistair Charoan



solution to those who are willing to listen to him. Mr. Charoan is uncommonly fond of Miss Wellbue, but is uncertain how she feels and is clumsy and tongue-tied in her presence. Alistair knows that his master is sick and suspects there is at least one imposter among the guests. He wants to protect Señor Ramirez.

Hugo

Hugo is a servant who helps clean and is often used to fetch or carry things. Brain-damaged at birth, he possesses a childlike mind and is slow to understand, though he desires to please others and is loyal to Señor Ramirez and Lord Theone. He likes to hug and tends to speak in a loud stutter, shouting *non sequitur* remarks or agreeing to another's comment. Hugo often stands with arms folded, head down and a scowl on his face, but breaks out into a broad, broken-toothed smile when given attention. He seems uncommonly brave and unembarrassed, but that's just because he does not understand danger. If he is shouted at or faces loud noises or fire, he cowers or runs away. Hugo recognizes his former master's ring and subsequently his master, who takes pains to silence him.



Father Daniel Marcus Franklin

Father Daniel is a priest of the Order of Eleazar, a sect devoted to collecting and preserving knowledge and the works of master artists and crafters. He speaks with a deep, jolly voice and obviously appreciates the finer things in life, including excellent food and wines, clothing, jewelry and the arts. While an educated man, he has a very narrow, naïve view of life. To him there is only good and evil, no middle ground. A person's character is defined by his deeds; an evil being would not do good deeds, nor would a good man perform hurtful acts.

He relies on the teachings of his faith to explain anything and to help him decide the best course of action, for he finds it difficult to have any opinion of his own. Father Daniel is less a priest and more a patron of the arts. He can only cast spells from the Animal, Good, Knowledge, Protection and Travel domains. While he seems a confident man, he is really both greedy and a coward. He knows the tale of Lord Theone's fabled quest is true and lusts after the lost treasure hoard said to be left behind.



Captain ferril Conklin Harrow

Captain Harrow is a veteran of many wars and bears the scars to prove it. In his youth, he loved adventure. Most of all, he liked playing the hero, rescuing the needy and oppressed and arriving in time to save the day. His adventures, however, claimed a terrible price. The right side of his face is horribly burned, and he is blind in his right eye. He hides these scars with a wide-brimmed hat, long hair and a beard. He also wears gauntlets to conceal his missing right hand. He met Lord Theone and fought beside him at the Battle of Ravening Plains. There he learned of the quest for immortality.

He believes Eowyn somehow claimed at least a part of the prize, for he saw Lord Theone recover from wounds that would kill any other man. That day his life was both saved and lost, for in that battle he lost his hand and his nerve. Now he lives only through memories of the exploits of his youth. He sorely misses the excitement and would pay almost any price to regain his vitality for one last adventure. He believes tonight is his chance.

Master Currin Klein de l'Ombre

De l'Ombre is a wealthy merchant of some renown and a fellow collector of arcane artifacts. Often in competition with the late Lord Theone,

The Guardian or The Last

This being was once a mortal man called Kiethos aux Brugemont, but that was long before he met The One and took up the quest for immortality. Unknown to The One, Kiethos is the only other man who succeeded in claiming that prize, but at a great price, for in becoming immortal he lost his humanity. He became a cankerous mass of undying flesh, his body growing, regenerating and spreading like a great cancer. Even when severed from his body, the flesh remains a living thing controlled by his mind. As a result, Keithos took on the role of the Guardian or the Last, the undying foe of The One to prevent others from suffering his fate. He guards the Well of Life and creates many of the challenges to thwart those who would seek the prize. Further, he reaches out beyond his realm using agents to help dissuade any who take on the quest. He recruits agents using reason, bargains and the power of his living flesh. When a piece of his flesh is attached to a creature, it forms a mental link with it. Then, depending on the creature's intelligence or willingness, he can exert a spell-like influence over the host as if he were an 18th level Wizard. The Guardian can *dominate* a creature with an intelligence less than 8, use *suggestion* to manipulate a being with average intelligence of 8 to 13 and *charm* another with an intelligence greater than 13.

Keithos was once a sage — a skeptic, cynic and doubter. He works to convince others that immortality is a myth and anything that prolongs life is more of a curse than a blessing. In the original story the Guardian has made a pact with Captain Harrow to help him have one final adventure and then end his suffering. The Last has replaced the captain's hand and eye with a piece of himself; the replacements, while functional are clawed and scarred. The Guardian and his agents seek to convince others to turn aside from the quest for immortality or to deny them clues vital to finding the well. Failing that, they use any means to prevent the creation of another eternal.



these two never met, but each respected the other's abilities and grew to covet their rival's collection. Master Currin is impatient, competitive, wary and hot-tempered, but can pretend to be friendly and caring when it serves his purpose. He likes to act as if he knows more than others do, sharing his knowledge only when it benefits his goals. He affects an air of mystery, suggesting that many events are rooted in the supernatural. He acts interested in talk about immortality and tends to ask many questions, always placing himself at the center of events, encouraging debate and distrust. His purpose at this auction is to acquire the most valuable artifacts for himself by discrediting their authenticity. His primary goal is to purchase the portrait of Lord Theone because he believes it conceals a map to the secret treasure hoard at the Well of Life.

Mr. Gar and Mr. Kantall

These individuals claim to be the merchant's business partners, but they are rogues hired by the master thief to assist him in stealing Lord Theone's greatest treasure. They have no idea what this treasure is, but the considerable sum Master Currin is paying has made them ready, if not altogether

loyal accomplices. Not possessing a lot of brains, these two are thugs who like to intimidate marks and rough up those who resist. They rely on their brawn and cunning respectively. Mr. Gar seems an uninteresting simpleton, but he is a brute using his strength to bully others. He follows the thief's orders, though his solutions to problems tend to be simple and brutal, either strangling his victims or bludgeoning them to death. Mr. Kantall has a mysterious air reminiscent of exotic cultures. He speaks little, if at all. An assassin who relies on cruelty and torture to get what he wants, he uses poisons and can turn anything into a thrown projectile. Both are willing to follow the thief's direction for now. But once the secret treasure they have been promised is found, they will prove there is no honor among thieves.

Sir Edwin Kent

Sir Edwin is a gentle nobleman and purportedly grandnephew to Lord Theone. He is a bit of a cipher for on the one hand he appears to be an overindulgent fop pursuing all the pleasures of life, and on the other, he seems pleasant, interested in others' opinions and willing to freely offer his counsel. He preens a bit too much and has the

Behind the Scenes: Basil, the Master Thief

The master thief known only as “Basil” is the one who made the failed attempt to break into Eldron Manor, killing one of the guards to avoid capture. Basil thinks well of himself and has greater plans for his future. He has a nimble mind and thinks quickly on his feet, readily adapting his plans to overcome obstacles. He is a rather charming, though bossy con man and uses his glib tongue to bluff or negotiate his way through dilemmas. Basil’s exploits are the stuff of legends, but few know the reason for his success — fabled Sands of Time, an amulet holding an enchanted hourglass, taken from a slain mage. This amulet grants him power to control his own time, but at the cost of stolen years. Basil has already aged four score years though his half-elven blood conceals this fact. The master thief seeks to steal Lord Theone’s legendary treasure because he believes that among the items in the aristocrat’s collection lies a secret that can reclaim his lost years, a potion or artifact to restore youth. Basil is not only a master thief, but also a master of disguise, assuming the guise of one of the invited guests in an effort to get a second chance to steal the legendary secret of Lord Theone. The DM may use Basil as an additional complication for the player characters, replacing de l’Ombre or an NPC of the DM’s creation.

casual attitude toward money so prevalent among the aristocracy. Edwin is kind and courteous, open-minded and amused by the evening’s proceedings. Though originally disowned by his great uncle, he has been given a second chance. As the last of Lord Theone’s lineage — the only surviving male, he becomes heir to his uncle’s legacy if he can find his uncle’s seal and claim it for his own. He believes he will find the vital clue in his uncle’s portrait, so he bides his time and seeks to remain unobtrusive till then. He will, however, protect the estate’s treasures.

Miss Natalie “Nicky” Warren Wellbue

Miss Wellbue is a fledgling author who is more comfortable with the written word than with people. She is shy and feels very out of place at this



Sir Edwin Kent

gathering. She only came at the behest of her friend Señor Ramirez whom she cares for dearly. The caretaker commissioned her to prepare the catalog



Miss “Nicky” Warren



Eternity or The One

This being is the first true immortal in the realm. The sole survivor of an ill-fated adventure, he somehow won the blessing and curse of eternal life at the cost of his friends' lives. He has lived many lives since then and long ago abandoned his given name referring to himself as Eternity or The One. He uses different aliases, plays on words such as his most recent identity as Eowyn Tierny Tytian or "E. Tierny T." and Lord Theone or "The One." A consummate actor, The One can assume so many roles and personalities that it is difficult to know his true nature. He is a pragmatist and will do whatever it takes to hide his nature, willingly playing the fool. He can be both easily amused and easily insulted, quietly thoughtful and loudly demanding, a sympathetic soul and a cold uncaring heart, but every so often his mask slips. Then one sees his true self, a bit too serious, dead to joy, impatient with folly, annoyed with the constraints of society.

In truth, The One is jaded and miserable with eternal life. After burying countless loved ones and making and losing power and fortunes, he tried his hand as a villain, taking whatever he wanted and committing any crime necessary to claim a prize. It was while on this dark path that his selfish desires led the Mists of Ravenloft to claim him. Now he wanders the Dread Realm forever, not a dark lord but a lost soul. In exile, he found the only constant is that nothing is forever, except that he will forever be denied happiness. Several generations ago he decided that what he needed were companions, some one who understood his misery, some one who would not die. Thus, he invented the Game. He seeks worthy individuals, people he likes to become candidates for immortality and tests them for a time. When he feels they are ready, he tempts them with tales of the great quest for the secret of eternity. He encourages them to discover the mysterious path for themselves and marks each candidate with a brand of a dark sun somewhere on their body, so that other candidates will know them. He cannot show them the way to the Well of Life, because he can no longer find it. He has played the game for two hundred years, but as far as he knows no one has ever won.

Eternity has several abilities he may use learned during his infinite years of life. He possesses an incredible amount of knowledge and skills that he may call upon as if rank +7 for any skill. There is a chance that he may remember a historical fact, legend or a command word as if he possessed the *legend lore* ability of a 20th level bard. He is also a master of weapons and martial arts possessing all the skills and special abilities of a 13th level monk. However, many of his abilities rely on fading memories. To aid his memory he had a magical stone created. This ring recovers both lost memories and memories of his identity. The stone may also be used to raise an ability score temporarily providing heightened speed (*haste*), strength, dexterity, defenses and other scores, such as attack and ability bonuses, or mental strength, Will saves and spells possessed in past incarnations. Lastly, the ring can also invoke a *recall* spell to help him escape.

The secret of Eternity's longevity comes from the power of an inner light he won at the Well of Life. This power gave him a heightened Constitution of 25 with a Fortitude save of +7. He can manipulate the power of the light within himself to resist damage up to 15 points and regenerate any type of damage to reconstitute his body at a rate of 5. He can be slain and suffers the agonies of death, but he does not stay dead, regenerating his form or transferring his intelligence to one of his candidate's bodies, inheriting their life and expelling the candidate's spirit. Then, through the power of the *recall stone* he can transform the new body into the image of his original form. He can also share a bit of the power of life re-kindling an artificial life where it has recently fled. Unfortunately, revived bodies do not heal and eventually the flesh mortifies and rots while the brain suffers a permanent loss of half its intelligence and wisdom. Only total destruction of the body can end this mockery of life.

It is possible to learn clues to the current identity of The One from others who encountered him in the past. Clues to his identity may include mannerisms, natural marks, common verbal expressions and character preferences. For instance, he might like fine foods or be a risk taker or possess skills higher than his apparent rank. He has prepared for future exiles by hiding several caches of moneys, treasures and deeds, as well as tools and weapons to reclaim if needed.

and history of items for sale and to create a biography of his former master's life. She hopes to gain some insights into Lord Theone by observing those who interested him. She takes notes about each of the guests for character studies for her writing. Though very quiet and unobtrusive, Nicky is intelligent and deduces things that few others see. She is socially very awkward and tends to stammer and look at the floor when talking to others, only studying someone when she thinks no one is watching her. She does not like physical contact or crowds. She will not drink and covers her nose with a handkerchief when in the company of smokers. She has grown fond of Senor Ramirez's clerk, but is uncertain how he feels toward her. Nicky is looking for an ending to her biography, little expecting that she is just writing another chapter in the never-ending existence of Lord Theone.

scientific terminology and ignoring the blank stares and protests. He lectures when he speaks about history or science, becoming very excited and animated when dealing with his favorite topics. He may seem a bit absent-minded, impatient and rude, but this is because he is distracted with his thoughts racing ahead to other hypotheses. His research has convinced him of the existence of an eternal, immortal being. He believes that such an Eternal could prove to be the greatest treasure of the realm because of what he must have learned and experienced. The doctor knows an incredible amount of history and lore, and some may mistake him for the Eternal One because he knows so much trivia. He has a passionate vision of engaging this Eternal in exciting dialogues about history and science. The doctor seeks to prove to the world that an immortal does exist.



Doctor Cameron

Doctor Melrose Elliott Cameron

Dr. Cameron is the epitome of the driven scholar: intelligent, infatuated with science, inwardly focused and lacking in social graces. The doctor believes that the pursuit of knowledge is the highest calling and does not give a lot of attention to courtesy or polite behavior nor does he consider consequences when a new discovery is possible. He tends to talk over the heads of most people, using

Darren Churrow

Thurrow is Doctor Cameron's young assistant. He is eager to please and wants to not only learn from this great man, but to follow in his footsteps and one day become a great scholar. Darren provides the common sense, social grace and humanity that the doctor ignores in pursuit of knowledge. He is rather nimble and agile, both in body and in mind, but he is not much of a fighter. He is quick



Darren Churrow



to echo his teacher's opinions adding sensitivity and diplomacy, but he lacks the narrow perspective, fervor and stubborn conviction of his mentor. Darren is eager to prove his worth when shown approval by his mentor and seeks the scholar's insight and instruction. Otherwise, despite the energy and inquisitiveness of youth, he is humble and self-deprecating and is a bit in awe of the company the doctor keeps. His goal is to keep his master alive and act as his eyes, ears and strong arms in pursuit of Doctor Cameron's quest.

Charles and Ilsa Tempiere

These two associates are not really brother and sister, hence the lack of family resemblance. While they profess to be followers of a religious order, they are in truth committed members of the Cult of Light, a secret qabal devoted to the capture and destruction of a creature they call the Evil One. These two do have a bond, but it is scarcely familial or romantic, more the devotion and loyalty between comrades-in-arms. Together, these two seem grim and humorless, at times snobbish and standoffish, and both seem overly logical and pragmatic. Ilsa is emotional and temperamental, driven by her fear and sense of impending doom. Charles is calm and calculating one, always observing and analyzing weaknesses to exploit. Neither is very diplomatic or polite. They possess a very narrow view and do not care much for



Ilsa Tempiere



Charles Tempiere

The Cult of Light

This qabal is devoted to the eradication of the Evil One, an immortal whose very existence is an abomination. Members believe this creature is responsible for numerous crimes and atrocities throughout the ages, and that he corrupts decent men and women with the false promise of immortality. An immortal is contrary to nature, for any who possess such a power will surely forsake their humanity and view mankind as their playthings. While members of this cult vary, they are all rather grim and humorless, though one must admire their dedication to the quest and their steadfast loyalty to fellow cult members. Indeed, if cult members have a weakness, it is their selfless bond to each other.

Cult members champion the innocent and injured. If they suspect that an individual has been tainted by contact with the Evil One, they may seek to redeem the lost soul by slaying him. Knowing that the Evil One has eyes and ears everywhere, agents of the cult operate incognito and recognize other members by the symbol of an eclipsed sun on a ring, piece of jewelry, tattoo or bit of embroidery secreted on their person. The cult accepts all character classes into their ranks, but is lead by a hierarchy of clergy that not only command their limited forces, but can call on the special talents of clerical inquisitors and crusaders, enlightened diviners and scholars and blooded cleansers.



others who are too blind to recognize the evil in the world. These two are no nonsense and reject the idea that an immortal being could be good. Their mission this night is to win the portrait of Lord Theone for their order, so that at last they may put a face on the Evil One. They will let nothing and no one stand in their way, believing the ends justify even extreme means.

New Monsters

This section presents new creatures designed for use in *To Inherit Eternity*, though the DM may find them suitable for other scenarios as well.

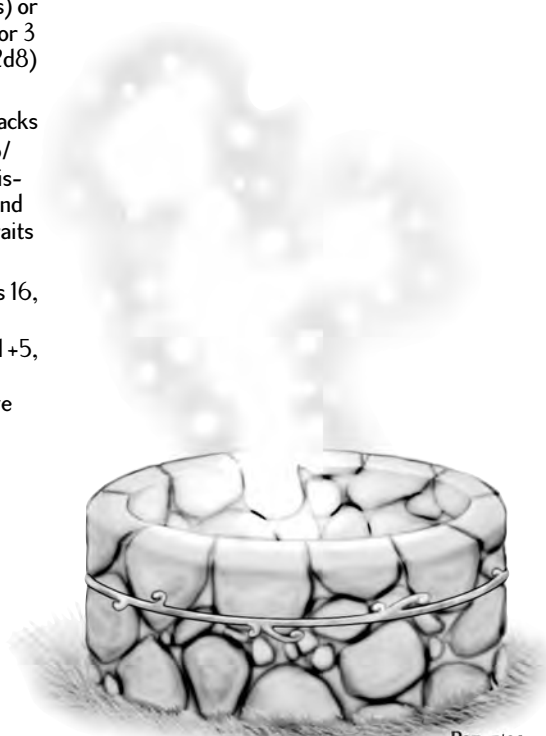
The Ambient

	Medium Undead (Incorporeal)
Hit Dice:	9d12 (59 hp)
Initiative:	+10
Speed:	flow 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 60 ft.
Armour Class:	24 (+6 Dex, +8 deflection), touch 24, flat-footed 18
Base Attack/Grapple:	+4/+5
Attack:	Engulf +16 melee (1d6 Con + stun 1d4 rounds) or phase through +16 melee (1db Con + stun 1d4 rounds) or ray of light +11 ranged (2d8) or shaped force field +8 ranged (2d8)
Full Attack:	3 engulfs +16 melee (1d6 Con + stun 1d4 rounds) or 3 phase throughs +16 melee (1db Con + stun 1d4 rounds) or 3 rays of light +11 ranged (2d8) or 3 shaped force fields +8 ranged (2d8)
Space/Reach:	5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Alternate forms, blind, reflect attacks
Special Qualities:	Blindsight, damage reduction 15/darkness, incorporeal traits, invisibility, energy resistance (light and electricity) 20, spells, undead traits
Saves:	Fort +10, Ref +8, Will +14
Abilities:	Str —, Dex 23, Con —, Int 17, Wis 16, Cha 10
Skills:	Concentration +3, Handle Animal +5, Heal +8, Knowledge (lore) +13, Knowledge (the Mists) +13, Move Silently +16, Sense Motive +8, Spellcraft +18
Feats:	Blind-fight, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Silent Spell
Environment:	The Mists
Organization:	Solitary
Challenge Rating:	10
Treasure:	drained magical treasures
Alignment:	Always neutral
Advancement:	Unique
Level Adjustment:	—

This creature, seemingly made of living light, is neither living nor dead.

The ambient is a unique creation of the Mists, a being of energy and force. An amorphous floating mass of quivering light changes shape and solidity at will, the ambient is often mistaken for a natural phenomenon rather than a living entity. It lives and draws sustenance from the black waters of the Well of Life and the mystic energies of magic and life. It does not tolerate intruders long, using its brilliance to drive back creatures of the Darque while testing other intruders.

Possessing an alien intelligence, the only sounds the ambient produces are musical tones similar to wind chimes. It is difficult to communicate with the entity. The ambient manifests colors that might be interpreted as emotions though they are not completely analogous and have no real human equivalents. It turns red when content or amused indicating that it does not feel threatened. Its hue shifts to purple when it is trying to understand, empathize with or manipulate others. A green tint signals either annoyance or perceived threat. When its surface turns a pulsing silvery-blue, it is intrigued or interested. Lastly, when its light darkens and takes on a black and gold hue, the creature seems curious and playful.



PozA'05



Normally the ambient rests in a dormant stage looking like a pool of water or a floating mist. Once disturbed by heat or energy, the ambient bursts into animation, flowing together and coalescing into a more coherent form to observe and interact with interlopers. The ambient has the power to control the very essence of its domain, the Mists and the Darque, to create, reshape and animate a variety of challenges from its substance, including mazes and obstacles, dangerous terrains, weatherlike manifestations and even supernatural effects that emulate up through 3rd level sorcerer spells. Its actions are a wondrous and confusing sight.

If the ambient is sufficiently amused and satiated, it may grant a trespasser his innermost desire, though this is rarely what the recipient thinks of as his greatest wish. The ambient can alter anything within its domain, transforming it through a variety of methods. It may create a mirror that passes through a creature, changing the creature as it does so. It can create a clone of its very being and then infuse the mortal with this light. It may absorb its prize into the womb of its domain then give birth to a new being. The ambient's actions seem capricious and random, and however it chooses to act, it is rarely as expected. Its gifts always bear an unexpected burden that plagues their recipients for the rest of their lives.

Combat

The ambient disguises its intelligence until it has taken the measure of its foes, creating challenges and observing reactions for a time. A creature acting violently or drinking from the Well of Life elicits a personal response from the entity. It initially ignores or reflects attacks back onto its attackers, until it suffers a significant degree of discomfort. When it does attack, the ambient fires beams of burning light at its foes or reshapes itself into a living weapon of razor sharp force. It may also engulf a victim with its substance or phase through an attacker, temporarily stunning and draining Constitution from its opponents. Lost Constitution may be recovered at a rate of 1 point per half hour of rest. If Constitution falls to 0, the victim is permitted a DC 15 Fortitude save to fall unconscious, otherwise he dies and the ambient absorbs his form. The ambient may attack up to three targets a round, but takes only one attack per target. It may also use any of its special abilities in lieu of a normal attack.

The ambient cannot die, for it draws its existence from the Mists, but it may be dispersed for 1d8 hours by reducing its hit points to 0. Unfortunately, since the ambient holds the creatures of the Darque at bay, vanquishing the ambient releases the Darque to attack at will.

Alternate Forms (Ex): This creature of living liquid light can alter its shape and form at will. The ambient can assume many forms, including a glimmering cloud, a scintillating rain or iridescent droplets of dew. It can be transparent, ephemeral, reflective or hard; the more solid its nature, the thinner its form. Its most common form is that of a blob of light. It cannot attack during the round in which it changes forms.

Blind (Ex): Instead of attacking during a round, the ambient can generate a flash of dazzling light to blind its opponents. Victims must make a DC 20 Reflex save. Failure results in blindness for 25 rounds minus 1 round per point of Constitution. A successful save blinds the target for 1 round and stuns her for 1d4 additional rounds.

Reflect attacks (Ex): The ambient can reflect the effects of an attack back on the attacker or onto another target. The creature must succeed on a normal attack roll (the target is considered flat-footed). A successful hit means that the damage of one attack affects the new target.

Invisibility (Ex): The ambient can dim its light, becoming invisible, as the spell. This is a full-round action. While invisible, the ambient cannot use any of its special abilities or attacks.

Spells: As a 9th level sorcerer.

The Darque

	Large Aberration
Hit Dice:	6d8 (30 hp)
Initiative:	+ 4
Speed:	40 ft. (8 squares), shadow step 120 ft., spider climb 40 ft.
Armor Class:	19 (+4 Dex, -1 size, +6 natural), touch 13, flat footed 15
Base Attack/Grapple:	+5/+7
Attack:	Dark limb +8 melee (2d6 +2) or shadow darts +4 ranged (1d6)
Full Attack:	Dark limb +8 melee (2d6 +2) or shadow darts +4 ranged (1d6)
Space/Reach:	5 ft. /10 ft.
Special Attacks:	Engulf, frightful presence, grow a limb, incapacitate, phased trample (damage 3d4, stuns)
Special Qualities:	Incorporeal, shadow blend, shadow step, <i>silent image</i>



Saves: Fort +8, Ref +7, Will +11
Abilities: Str 15, Dex 18, Con 21, Int 11, Wis 16, Cha 5
Skills: Listen +9, Sense Motive +9
Feats: Alertness, Blind-fight, Combat Reflexes, Mobility
Environment: The Mists
Organization: Pack or hive
Challenge Rating: 5
Treasure: None
Alignment: Usually chaotic neutral
Advancement: 7-8 HD (Large); 9 HD (Huge)

Out of the gloom they bound, congealed shadows whose baying freezes hearts with fear.

Darque creatures have the malleability of living shadows. Some assume the shape of great, slinking cats or hulking ursine monsters. Others are nimble apes or snorting boars. All that is sure is that they are not of any of the realms, but dwell in the dark and swirling Mists, waiting to bound forth when summoned or in pursuit of fleeing prey. Once they have caught a scent or tasted blood, they are indefatigable hunters.

The darque are fiercely territorial and treat all trespassers as prey. They devour flesh and fire as well as suck warmth from the marrow of the living. Swift and sure of foot, they cling to any surface, possessing the ability to spring from shadow to shadow so that they can leap to ambush their victims.

Combat

The darque prefer to hunt in dimly lit and shadow-filled or dark environs that gives them the ambush advantage. Bright or magical lights banish the shadows, encouraging the darque to retreat till a more opportune time. Sometimes, they attempt to extinguish any flames or lights.

Engulf (Ex): The creature may envelope its foe in its shadowy substance as a *swallow whole* attack (see *Monster Manual*). The creature must succeed in two successive grapples to do so. Engulfed victims must make a Fortitude check (DC equals 15 + 1 for each round after the first) or lose 1d6 Constitution. When Constitution drops below 0, the victim suffocates.

Grow a Limb (Ex): In lieu of one of its attacks, the creature may form another limb, head or weapon to gain an additional attack per round. A creature may gain a number of attacks equal to its number of hit dice. For every 5 points of damage it suffers, it loses one attack.

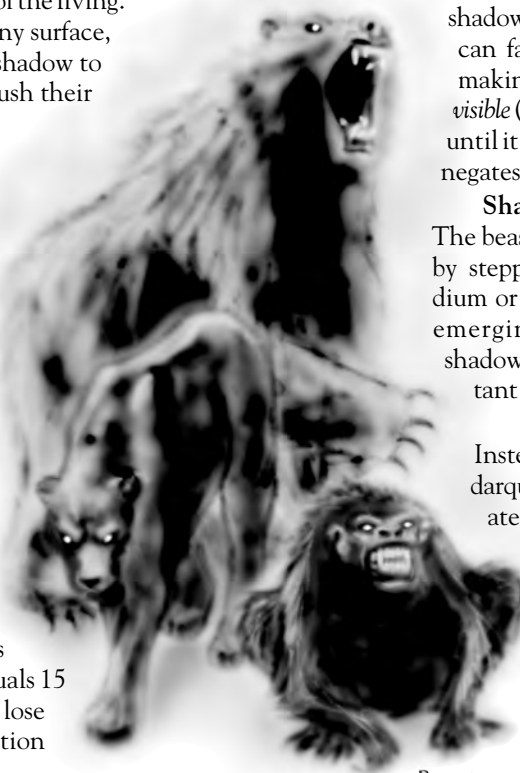
Incapacitate (Su): The beast may attack to incapacitate, inflicting only nonlethal damage to its foe. A successful incapacitation attack requires the victim to make a Fortitude save (DC 13 +1 per point of damage inflicted by attack). A successful save deals nonlethal damage only, but a failed save results in some minor handicap or incapacitation — blinding, choking or partial paralysis in a limb for 1d4 rounds. Partial paralysis results in a penalty of -1 per successful attack to any Strength or Dexterity action and any Fortitude and Reflex saves for the effect's duration.

Phased Trample (Su): A creature of the darque may make a trample attack against an opponent by running through it. This action is the same as the *trample* attack (see *Monster Manual*). If the attack is successful, the beast may make a *trip* attack (see *Player's Handbook*), and victims must make a DC 18 Fortitude save or be stunned for 1d4 rounds.

Shadow Blend (Su): In environments rife with shadows, a darque creature can fade into the shade making it essentially *invisible* (total concealment) until it moves. Bright light negates.

Shadow Step (Su): The beast can travel swiftly by stepping into any Medium or larger shadow and emerging from another shadow up to 120 feet distant as a normal move.

Silent Image (Sp): Instead of attacking, a darque creature may create at will a phantom image from the substance of shadow as if casting *silent image* at a level equal to the creature's hit dice.



PozAN'05



The Lost (Echoes or Shells)

	Medium Aberration (Shapechanger)
Hit Dice:	3d8+7 (23 hp)
Initiative:	+3
Speed:	40 ft. (8 squares), warp 300 ft.
Armor Class:	15 (+1 Dex, +4 natural), touch 11, flat-footed 14
Base Attack/Grapple:	+2/+3
Attack:	Weapon +3 melee (1d6+1); Missile weapon +3 ranged (1d6)
Full Attack:	Weapon +3 melee (1d6+1); Missile weapon +3 ranged (1d6)
Space/Reach:	5 ft. /5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Shadow magic, shadow creations
Special Qualities:	Imitate skill, know language, <i>major creation</i> , memory read, mimic voice, regenerate +2/cold, magic and mental, blindsight, shape change
Saves:	Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +3
Abilities:	Str 13, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 11, Wis 11, Cha 16
Skills:	Bluff +5, Hide +3, Move Silently +3
Feats:	Blind-fight, Endurance
Environment:	The Mists
Organization:	Colony (1-20 or 5-100)
Challenge Rating:	2
Treasure:	False shadow creations
Alignment:	Usually lawful neutral
Advancement:	4-5 HD (Medium); 6 HD (Large)

There is more sight and sound than substance to these creatures approaching from the shadows.

The lost draw their substance and sustenance from the Mists. As living fields of force, they can bend and reshape light to take on any appearance they choose. Also called *echoes* or *shells*, these entities interact on both a physical and mental level with other creatures, appearing to speak their language while actually communicating mind to mind. A shell may imitate any sound or animal cry. In their natural form, the lost are shimmering fields of force that reform into other shapes as needed. They may alter the texture of their surface to simulate any substance and can wrap themselves with envelopes of light to take on the appearance of flesh and fur.

Using their power to command the substance of the Mists, they can create clothing, tools, weapons and almost any other substance as if using *major creation*. In addition, these entities can reshape the ethereal matter of the Mists to recreate any environment within 100 feet of the creature. When encountered away from the depths of the Mists, the

lost may still alter their appearance, but their ability to create substance is limited to their personal space and to the emulation of attack forms such as magic and missiles.

Though the motives of the lost are uncertain, they often act in concert, reacting to intruders by adopting appearances and emulating events drawn from their target's memories. A shell may recreate images of friends, foes and events to fight or frighten aggressive creatures. Rarely does a shell change shape within sight of another creature. Most meetings with the lost result in the character reliving some event from his past with a chance to alter his actions to determine what might have been.

Shells do not appear to sleep or eat, though they may simulate these activities. They draw sustenance from the Mists and may feed on alternative sources of energy by draining magic or absorbing lightning and flame attacks, from which they suffer only minimal damage. They take nonlethal damage only from most attacks except for cold, magic or mental attacks. These inflict normal damage.

Shells move by willpower as if hovering just above the landscape, or they may instantaneously warp (*personal teleport*) up to 300 feet away, though this is reserved for ambush or retreat.



POZAN'05



Combat

A shell can emulate any form of physical combat, using claws and bites in bestial form or weapons and missiles as a humanoid. Any weapons, however, evaporate within an hour of being separated from the shell. Shells attack in a manner consistent with the memory they recreate, though they act more intuitively because they do not need to see and are surprised only by impulsive and irrational actions.

Imitate Skill (Ex): In conjunction with its memory-read ability, the lost may imitate the use of any Skill at the level of the creature they are imitating, but suffer a -2 penalty when using that skill.

Know Language (Su): In conjunction with its memory-read ability, this creature can speak telepathically in any language its subject understands, though the subject imagines he hears a voice.

Major Creation (Sp): The lost can reshape the Mists within a 100 foot radius as a 10th level sorcerer to duplicate any setting or environment. Several lost can work together to extend this range by 100 feet per additional lost.

Memory Read (Su): The lost possess the natural ability to read the memories, but not the thoughts of those within 120 feet. They use this knowledge to imitate a character or creature previously encountered. Those whose memory is being read may once every ten minutes attempt a DC 18 Will save to notice something different or incongruent with his or her memories.

Shadow Creations/Magic (Sp): The lost may manipulate the substance of the Mists to create tools, weapons and armor or to simulate the use of 1st through 4th level sorcerer spells that the creature they are imitating might reasonably possess. These items and spell-like effects dissolve or dispel when moved beyond a 100 foot range of its creator.

Chapter Two: The Curse of Ashington Manor



his section contains a description of the magic item central to *The Curse of Ashington Manor* along with a new monster and descriptions of major NPCs.

New Magic Item

The following item is particularly suited to *The Curse of Ashington Manor*, though DMs may

find it useful in their own campaigns with some adjustment.

Rozaleen's Tarokka Deck

This minor artifact is a slightly worn tarokka deck created by a brilliant artist who had an eye for extreme grotesquery. It remained a prized heirloom for a particular family of Zarovan Vistani for generations, until its final member, Rozaleen, was murdered just as she was blossoming into womanhood. The passage of time has obscured the identity of the deck's maker. Some believe only Madame Eva, the Zarovan's powerful matriarch, Madame Eva, could create a tarokka deck of such great power. Others hold that the deck must have been a product of the dark beings that drove the Vistani into an eternally nomadic existence, citing as proof the deck's inherent power, macabre imagery and the fact that it brought the family that possessed it suffering and doom. With the death of Rozaleen, the full power of the deck (as well as the curses it carries) is likely to become as forgotten as its creator.

The back of the cards in Rozaleen's Tarokka Deck displays a Vistani symbol of death. The front of the cards all contain images incorporating the traditional iconography of the tarokka but which focus on Vistani suffering in every way imaginable.





The only exception to the litany of horror seems, at first glance, to be the cards of the Fortuna Magna, or the high deck. The traditional images associated with these cards either incorporate a beautiful Vistani woman directly, or are seen in the background while Vistani women in the foreground perform everyday chores, dance, or read the cards. A closer look reveals that the images show the same Vistani woman. If placed in a particular order (The Mists, The Innocent, The Raven, The Hero, The Artifact, The Temptress, The Marionette, The Spirit, The Beast, The Hangman, The Prison, The Broken One, The Horseman and The Dark Master), they show her decaying from a vibrant young girl to a withered crone and ultimately to a lichlike figure. Characters succeeding in a DC 15 Spot check (if examining the entire deck) or a DC 10 Spot check (if looking only at the Fortuna Magna) may recognize the pattern.

Any character who is at least one-quarter Vistani who handles Rozaleen's Tarokka Deck must make a DC 13 Fortitude save. If she succeeds, she feels a strange sensation creep across them... a sense that the deck is alive with magical energy and that every Vistani who has used it has somehow left a bit of her essence with the deck. However, the character also feels a sense of loss and incompleteness. If the character fails the saving throw, she is overwhelmed by the sensations, falls unconscious for 1d6 rounds and must make a DC 19 Horror save. If the horror save is failed, the character suffers a minor horror effect (see the **Ravenloft Player's Handbook**). While unconscious, the character experiences the sights, sounds and extreme suffering of Rozaleen's final moments as if it were happening to the character. (See Chapter two for details of Rozaleen's fate.)

A check of the deck by someone with at least passing familiarity with the tarokka shows that two of the cards are missing — the Five of Swords from the lesser Deck of Fate and the Innocent card from the Fortuna Magna. Any character with the slightest touch of Vistani blood in her veins, however, has an instinctive feeling that this deck still has the power to tell the future, even with the missing cards. In fact, this deck has a capacity and flexibility that goes well beyond normal tarokka decks. (See the **Ravenloft Dungeon Master's Guide** Chapter Four for information on the effectiveness of tarokka decks.)

The deck is unusual in that it retains prophetic powers even in the hands of those not of the creator's

bloodline. Any person, male or female, regardless of whether or not they possess Vistani blood, can use Rozaleen's Tarokka Deck to read the future with some degree of accuracy. Additionally, the deck functions with cards missing, even if those cards have been destroyed. (Naturally, the readings are not as reliable as those made with a full tarokka deck.)

Characters with even a trace of Vistani blood can use the deck to do augury with a reading once per day, as well as divination as if cast by a 10th level cleric (with an 80% chance of success), once per day.

One-quarter and half-Vistani can use the deck as if it was created by a full-Vistani blood-relative with the effectiveness outlined in Chapter Four of the **Ravenloft Dungeon Master's Guide**.

In the hands of a full-blooded Vistani, the deck is even more powerful. When a full-blooded Vistani uses Rozaleen's Tarokka Deck, the cards do not so much foretell the future as determine it. Whenever the deck is used to see the future or fate for a particular individual, the information revealed by the cards will occur. When used by a full-blooded Vistani, the deck flawlessly picks the focus card that describes the subject of the reading, and the past card is also always accurate. Of course, the tarokka deck is always open to a certain degree of interpretation by the Vistani using the deck, so to some extent, the deck allows the Vistani to dictate the subject's fate. If the Vistani attempts to put a positive spin on the reading, there is no particular risk to her. However, if she acts with malice and attempts to doom the subject to a dire fate, she must make a base 2% powers check. If the Vistani is aware of the powers of the deck, the check is at a base of 4%.

The deck also places a curse on whoever uses it. After performing a reading with the deck, the character suffers a -2 penalty to all saving throws and skill checks, and all undead she comes into contact will focus their attacks on her first. (The undead may change their target if a greater threat to their existence is nearby, but the cursed character will always be the first target of choice.)

This curse lasts until the next full moon, or until the character is the subject of *remove curse*. (The DM should not inform the player of this curse, but instead allow the player to figure it out.) This curse takes effect only with the first reading the character performs during each lunar cycle. Repeated readings don't increase the penalty, nor does the curse return if other readings are performed during the same lunar cycle.



New Monster

This section introduces a new monster integral to *The Curse of Ashington Manor*. DMs may wish to incorporate the following creature into their own campaigns as well.

Vehrteig

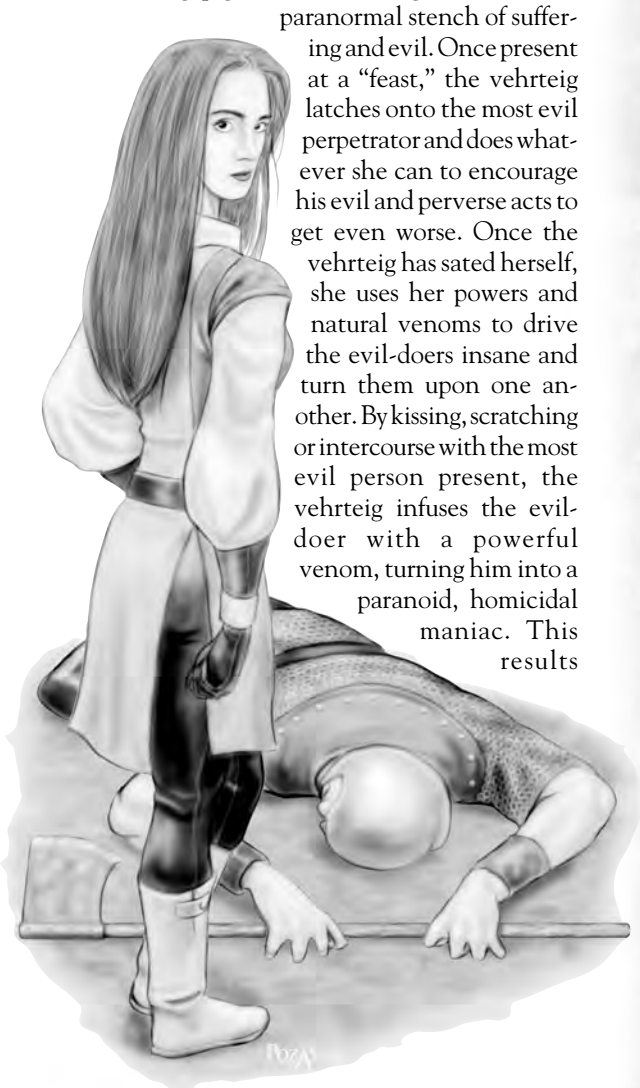
	Medium Humanoid
Hit Dice:	1d6 +2 (6 hp)
Initiative:	+2
Speed:	30 ft. (6 squares)
Armor Class:	14 (+2 Dex, +2 leather armor), touch 12, flat-footed 12
Base Attack/Grapple:	+0/+1
Attack:	Dagger +0 melee (1d4) or unarmed (1d2, plus venom) or dagger +2 ranged (1d4)
Full Attack:	Dagger +0 melee (1d4) or unarmed (1d2, plus venom) or dagger +2 ranged (1d4)
Space/Reach:	5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	<i>Charm person</i> , death gaze, fascinate, venom, spells
Special Qualities:	Bardic Knowledge, bardic music, mutual recognition, sense evil, countersong, immunity to aging and divination, exceptional recuperative powers, inspire courage +1, immunity to sinkholes of evil
Saves:	Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +2
Abilities:	Str 11, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 12, Wis 11, Cha 15
Skills:	Bluff +8, Concentration +3, Decipher Script +3, Diplomacy +6, Escape Artist +4, Gather Information +4, Sense Motive +6, Spot +2, Perform +3 (sing), Perform +2 (lute).
Feats:	Negotiator
Environment:	Any Ravenloft or Gothic Earth
Organization:	Solitary
Challenge Rating:	6
Treasure:	Standard
Alignment:	Usually neutral evil
Advancement:	By class
Level Adjustment:	+4

The dark-haired beauty continued to sing, her angelic voice horrifically at odds with the orgy of violence unfolding in the grand hall, as men who hours earlier had been comrades-in-arms hacked each other to pieces. A warrior charges at her, blood-encrusted axe upraised, only to fall dead at her feet as his eyes met her calm, dark-eyed gaze. She never stopped singing.

The Vistani fear few supernatural horrors, but first among those they dread are the vehrteig.

Vehrteig are a race of humanoids whose presence in the domains goes unnoticed and undetected by most. When detected, they are often assumed to be succubae, because they are present at the center of extreme cases of perversion, corruption and violence. Unlike their demonic counterparts, however, vehrteig don't necessarily encourage perversion and corruption — they merely feed on it.

In a manner that is not understood, vehrteig sustain themselves by absorbing the negative energies released when mortals inflict pain and terror upon one another or engage in other perverted acts. Like a hungry man drawn to the smell of a



roasting pig, so is a vehrteig drawn to the paranormal stench of suffering and evil. Once present at a "feast," the vehrteig latches onto the most evil perpetrator and does whatever she can to encourage his evil and perverse acts to get even worse. Once the vehrteig has sated herself, she uses her powers and natural venoms to drive the evil-doers insane and turn them upon one another. By kissing, scratching or intercourse with the most evil person present, the vehrteig infuses the evil-doer with a powerful venom, turning him into a paranoid, homicidal maniac. This results



in one final orgy of violence, as the evil ones attack and destroy one another. Ironically, any surviving victims of the abusers often view the vehrteig as their savior, believing her presence caused their tormentors to turn on each other.

As mentioned, the existence of the vehrteig is not widely known. The Vistani are all familiar with them, however, and the two races share both a supernatural and historical bond.

The Vistani fear the vehrteig because they are immune to the most potent Vistani weapons — the evil eye, curses and prophetic powers. Fortunately, Vistani can recognize a vehrteig since the creature exudes a supernatural aura that causes the hairs on the back of a Vistana's neck to stand up. When possible, Vistani will flee rather than confront a vehrteig.

Only the Vistani elders, who pass the knowledge along only to certain acknowledged successors, know the nature of the historical bond between the vehrteig and the Vistani. Speculations abound, some rumors holding that the vehrteig are servants of the great evil that drove the Vistani into the Realm of Dread, and that they are here to seek out a way for their master to visit retribution upon its hated enemies.

Vehrteig are always females. They share many of the Vistani's physical characteristics and are most often assumed to be half-Vistani by *giorgios*. How they reproduce is unknown even to the Vistani, but some speculate that they arise spontaneously from sinkholes of evil. Others believe they are the dark powers made flesh. Some believe the vehrteig are sent from the worlds beyond the Mists, as mentioned above.

Vehrteig are fluent in Patterna, and most know several other domain languages. Aside from Patterna, vehrteig do not appear to have a native language, another source of speculation among the Vistani.

Combat

Vehrteig avoid physical combat whenever possible, relying instead on their special abilities and charming personalities to either defuse a confrontation before violence is directed toward them, or to encourage someone to fight on their behalf. When cornered, they rely on spells and dirty tricks to defend themselves. More often than not, they attack unarmed, attempting to scratch or bite their target and infect them with their insanity-causing venom. (The poison won't help the vehrteig im-

mediately, but may give it some revenge from the grave should the vehrteig fall to her attacker.)

Aging Immunity (Su): Vehrteig are immune to all natural and unnatural aging. Only violent death can end their lives.

Charm Person (Sp): Twice per day, vehrteig can use *charm person* as a spell-like ability. The ability functions as a 2nd level arcane spellcaster. The vehrteig must make eye contact with the person she wishes to charm.

Death Gaze (Sp): Once per month, the vehrteig can kill a victim with a single look. After locking eyes with the target, the vehrteig need only exert the smallest amount of will to cause his death (a free action). The target receives a Fortitude save with a -2 penalty if he has previously been charmed by the vehrteig, and an additional -4 penalty if he has her venom coursing through his veins. If the save fails, the target dies instantly. If the saving throw is successful, the target suffers 10d6 points of damage. The target might die from the damage even if the saving throw is successful.

Divination Immunity (Ex): Vehrteig are immune to all spells and spell-like effects that draw upon the school of divination. It's as though they are divorced from reality, or so intertwined with it that magic cannot trace their presence or predict their path.

Exceptional Recuperative Powers (Ex): A wounded vehrteig heals 50% of its total hit points for each day of total rest, 25% of its total hit points if active. These regenerative powers work on all hit point damage so long as the vehrteig is not reduced below -10 hp; she appears to be dead once she drops below 0 hit points, but she will revive three hours after her "death," returned to 0 hit points. Any attribute point drain or loss is recovered at the rate of two attribute points per day.

Evil Eye Immunity (Ex): Vehrteig have complete immunity to all of the powers of the Vistani evil eye.

Sense Evil (Su): Vehrteig can detect evil (and thus potential sources or nourishment). By making a DC 11 Spot check, a vehrteig can sense whether a given location is a sinkhole of evil. They receive a +1 bonus to the check for each rank of the sinkhole.

Sinkhole of Evil Immunity (Su): Vehrteig are immune to the spiritual weight of their prime feeding grounds.



Venom (Ex): Injury, Fortitude DC 19, initial and secondary damage progressive paranoia peaking at homicidal rage. The save DC is Constitution-based. A successful save postpones the effect for 1d8 days; a failure brings on the paranoia in 2d4 hours. Spells and potions that neutralize poison negate the vehrteig venom.

A kiss or scratch from a vehrteig infuses a slow-acting venom into the target. If given two rounds to prepare for combat, the vehrteig can lick the blade of a dagger and deliver its venom with a stab. The venom is only good for one attack. If fighting unarmed, the vehrteig need only inflict 1 point of unarmed damage.

Spells: A vehrteig casts arcane spells as a 1st level bard.

Typical Bard spells Known (2 0-level; save DC 13 + spell level): 0 — *daze, lullaby, mage hand, message.*

Mutual Recognition (Su): Vehrteig and Vistani share a mysterious bond that allows them to sense and recognize the presence of one another. Whenever a vehrteig and a Vistani comes within 15 feet of one another, the DM should roll a secret DC 12 Fortitude save for each character. If the save is successful, a chill runs down the character's spine and her eyes are drawn straight to the vehrteig (in the case of a Vistani) or the Vistani (in case of a vehrteig). Even if the sensed character is hiding or behind a barrier such as a wall, the person sensing the vehrteig or Vistani still looks where the sensed person is.

Vistani learn the legends of vehrteig from childhood, so each knows that if they ever experience a strange feeling and have their eyes drawn to an attractive human female, they know they have encountered an ancestral foe from the Worlds Beyond. When possible, the Vistani will attempt to escape the presence of the vehrteig, while the vehrteig will do her best to make the Vistani's immediate future as difficult and painful as possible, usually through the victims currently under her sway.

Vehrteig Characters

The vehrteig's favored class is bard. Most vehrteig are 1st level bards. Their disarming nature allows them to ingratiate themselves with victims or put potential foes off guard. Exceptional vehrteig are accomplished bards, or have levels in the rogue or sorcerer classes.

Nonplayer Characters

The following individuals are major characters in *The Curse of Ashington Manor* and may be useful as NPCs for a DM running a game based on this story.

Lord Herod Ashington (Vile Nobleman)

Male Human Ari 2/Exp 2/Rog 4: Cr8; Medium-size humanoid (human) (5 ft. 11 in. tall); HD 2d8+2d6+4d6; HP 41; Init +5; Spd 30; AC13, touch 13, flatfooted 12; Atk +6 melee (1d4+4 dagger or 1d6+4 rapier) +1 ranged (does not typically carry ranged weapons); SA sneak attack +2d6, trap sense +1; SD evasion; AL NE; SV Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +7; Str 16, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 15.

Skills and Feats: Appraise +3, Bluff +6, Climb +5, Diplomacy +45 Handle Animal +5, Intimidate +12, Knowledge (arcana) +6, Knowledge (local history) +5, Knowledge (royalty and nobility) +5, Spellcraft +5, Search +5, Sense Motive +5, Spot +4, Use Rope +5; Coldhearted†, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Persuasive.

Languages: Mordentish*, Balok.

Signature Possessions: Matched set of a +2 dagger and +2 rapier featuring the Ashington family crest on the hilt, *ring of protection +2*, *amulet of protection from the evil eye +4* (grants a +4 protection to saving throws to resist the evil eye ability of Vistani).

†This feat is described in **Legacies of Blood: The Great Families of Ravenloft**. All powers checks are reduced by –2%, with 0 or negative results being treated as “this act does not warrant a powers check.”

Herod Ashington is a dark-haired man in his early thirties. He has sharp features and dark hair, which he wears in a pony tail. His eyes are pale blue and seem to cut straight through to the very soul of those he looks at. His bearing and diction mark him as a member of society's upper-crust, and he does everything with the confidence of someone who is the master of all around him. During his years as an adventurer, he developed a taste for the austere fashions of Lamordia, and he favors such garb to this very day. Regardless of how he is dressed, however, he wears the finest of clothes and carries the highest quality of weapons.

Background

Ashington was once a proud and noble house, but it completed its slide into evil and decadence with the ascension to adulthood of Herod Ashington. He spent his childhood cruelly abusing servants, his young adulthood roaming the land as part of a band of “adventurers” more feared than respected by the locals in the areas they operated,



and returned home following the death of his parents to assume the title of Lord Ashington.

Ashington's father and grandfather had both been dabblers in magic and the occult. Although Ashington himself is not a spellcaster, he has enough theoretical knowledge to speak intelligently about the arcane arts. Further, during his time wandering the realms, he worked with a pair of darklings. These hate-filled Vistani outcasts taught him much about how their kind conduct themselves and how much of their supposedly supernatural abilities is nothing but showmanship. They even gave him an *amulet of protection from the evil eye*, which he wears always. The information given to him by the darklings and the theoretical knowledge he has of magic has caused him to dismiss virtually everything the Vistani do as trickery; he puts no stock whatsoever in their supposed "second sight" and their ability to foretell the future.

Since becoming lord of Ashington Manor, he has gathered around him a group of friends who take pleasure in debauchery. Several times a month, he gathers with them to have parties of drunken perversion. Several unfortunate "guests" who happened to be traveling the roads near Ashington

Manor on the nights of these parties have met their end as "party favors."

Ashington's final night among the living was spent tormenting and then murdering Rozaleen. Following that, he sated his lust with a beautiful female bard, in actuality a rare creature known as a *vehrteig*. The *vehrteig's* poison drove Ashington mad, causing him to kill his friends. The *vehrteig* then killed Ashington herself.

Current Sketch

Ashington dies the same night he murders Rozaleen, and his spiritual essence is trapped in Ashington Manor. His ghost doesn't manifest itself until the final night of the curse and the very reality of the house starts to come undone.

Combat

Ashington is an expert swordsman, delighting in cutting down his foes. If faced with a superior enemy, he is not above resorting to trickery or calling upon friends and hirelings to join in the fight. Even if he is in a duel, he will summon supporters if threatened with defeat; he has no honor, and neither do any of those who are with him.

Maekon (Deadly Singer)

Female Vehrteig Brd6/Rog4: CR 16; Medium humanoid (*vehrteig*); (5 ft. 6 in. tall); HD 6d6 + 4d6; HP 40; Init +8; Sp 30; AC16, touch 14, flat-footed 12; Atk +8 melee (1d3+1/20 unarmed or 1d4+2/20 dagger) or +11 (by weapon); SA *charm person*, death gaze, fascinate, venom, sneak attack +2d6, *suggestion*, spells; SQ immunity to aging and divination, countersong, evasion, exceptional recuperative powers, inspire courage +1, immunity to sinkholes of evil, trap sense +1, uncanny dodge, bardic traits, mutual recognition, sense evil, trapfinding; AL NE; SV Fort +4, Ref +13, Will +6; Str 12, Dex 19, Con 13, Int 14, Wis 11, Cha 16

Skills and Feats: Bluff +12, Concentration +7, Decipher Script +8, Diplomacy +15, Gather Information +9, Intimidate +8, Knowledge (arcana) +7, Knowledge (local history) +7, Knowledge (monster lore) +7, Knowledge (planes) +6, Knowledge (Vistani) +8, Languages (Vaasi), Listen +7, Move Silently +9, Perform (lute) +8, Perform (singing) +8, Ride +7, Search +7, Sense Motive +10, Sleight of Hand +10, Spellcraft +9, Spot +7, Tumble +8, Use Magic Device +9 (+11 when using scrolls); Combat Reflexes, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Negotiator.

Languages: Patterna*, Balok, Mordentish, Vaasi.

Typical Bard Spells Known: (3/4/3; save DC 13+ spell level)
0— daze, detect magic, lullaby, magehand, open/close, read magic; 1st— cause fear, charm person, comprehend languages, hypnotism; 2nd— detect thoughts, hold person, suggestion.



Signature Possessions: Ring of protection +2, ornate lute, macabre tarokka deck with the Innocent and Myrmidon cards missing (*Rozaleen's Tarokka Deck*; Maekon loses this item when she appears in *The Curse of Ashington Manor*, but she often plays with it up until that time. (She is immune to the ill effects of the deck.)

Maekon appears to be a human woman in her mid to late twenties. She has pale, flawless skin and long delicate limbs. Her night-black hair and dark eyes make her appear even paler. Her facial features are the very image of classical nobility, and she carries herself with refined grace whether she is striking up a tune in a bar or preparing to deliver the killing blow to an evil being she has had her fill of.

She travels far and wide across the dread realms and is well-known in bardic circles — even if she is believed to be her own granddaughter. To the dismay of fellow bards, Maekon prefers “masculine” fashions whether traveling or performing. She is always dressed in boots, trousers and shirts, and more often than not in riding leathers or hunting outfits. However, when worn by Maekon, such outfits become more sexy and alluring than the most revealing garbs of Vaasi streetwalkers or Akiri dancing girls. A reason for the way she dresses is the fact that she travels light — she never carries more than a couple of saddlebags and a rucksack.

Background

Maekon's early history and origins are shrouded in mystery. She has wandered the domains for at least three centuries, although leaders among the Vistani claim she is older than that. Maekon incurred the wrath of Strahd von Zarovich when she spurred citizens of Vallaki to lynch a family of Vistani some 280 years ago, so she tends to avoid Barovia. She is rumored to have been the mistress of one of Vlad Drakov's earliest and most brutal lieutenants — a human monster whose hunger for violence eventually claimed himself and his entire family — and a portrait that bears a striking resemblance to her hangs in the governmental palace in Lekar; she is believed to have been present in Nova Vaasa when a cat-worshiping cult that sacrificed humans was at its most powerful and to have been at the court of Lord Bakholis when he met his end by the hand of Gabrielle Aderre. The Vistani also blame her for more than a dozen of the more heinous examples of *giorgios* attacking wandering Vistani.

Although viewed by the Vistani as one of the more notorious of her kind, they also say that she is clearer in the purpose she serves in the Land of



Mists than many other *vehrteig*. Most *vehrteig* seize upon any petty evil and amplify it until their appetites are sated. Maekon usually zeroes in on men and women who are already monstrosously evil and causes them to self-destruct in one final orgy of deadly debauchery. As such, the Vistani view this terrible creature as a strange sort of friend to innocents in the domains since she culls the worst of those who might hurt them.

Maekon has a particular dislike for the Zarovan. She has often gone out of her way to make their lives difficult. In the case of Rozaleen, Maekon was inclined to let her at least escape with her life, but Lord Ashington had already succumbed to homicidal insanity from Maekon's venom. Rozaleen's death was fated once she had been captured.

Current Sketch

The terrible deaths at Ashington Manor had no more influence on Maekon than the thousands of others she had witnessed or caused over her many centuries of existence. When she took Rozaleen's tarokka deck, however, she became linked to the curse in a subtle and undeniable way. Every 17 years, she must return to Ashington Manor where she takes part in a funhouse-mirror reflection of the events that led to her coming to own the rare tarokka deck. This has limited the range of her





wanderings in recent decades, causing an increased number of mass killings in the domains around Ashington Manor.

Maekon also knows the true origins of Rozaleen's Tarokka Deck. She knows that it is an artifact that originates beyond the misty borders of Ravenloft, yet for the last several decades she has treated it as a toy — often augmenting bardic performances with mock fortune tellings. She is confident that nothing that stems from the deck can result in harm to her, so although she has become convinced that the deck is somehow tied to her urges to return to Ashington Manor, she doesn't believe it can cause her to come to harm. Her attitude changes when the deck magically removes itself from her pack to reincorporate itself in the events of Ashington Manor. Not knowing why this occurs, she grows nervous and fearful.

Combat

Maekon attempts to avoid physical confrontations whenever possible. She uses both her powerful personality and magical abilities to either turn the would-be combatant into a soon-to-be-doomed lover or to convince others to fight for her. Failing that, she either attacks with what few offensive spells she knows, or attempt to catch foes unaware, stabbing them with her dagger and scratching them with the nails of her offhand, hoping to infect them with her venom. She naturally hopes to end the fight while she is still standing, but if she should go down, at least she knows her foe will eventually die as well. (She always assumes that anyone who defeats her will be unaware of her extraordinary healing powers and that she will revive in time to enjoy — and feed from — her enemy's demise in a blaze of insane violence.)

Lair

Maekon is an eternal wanderer. She seldom spends more than three or four days in any location and rarely visits the same place more than twice within a fifty year period. The exception to this is the Meistersinger competition in Kartakass. She attends at least one of these each decade — and sometimes she even takes part in the competitions without causing death or mayhem.

Rozaleen, Doomed Vistani Girl

Female Zarovan Vistana ExpI/SorI: Cr2; Medium-size humanoid (human) (5 ft. 1 in. tall); HD 1d6 + 1d4; HP 8; Init +1; Spd 30 (6 squares); AC11, touch 11, flatfooted 10; Atk +1 melee (typically 1d4+1 dagger, but presently unarmed); SA

Evil Eye; AL N; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +5; Str 10, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 12.

Skills and Feats: Appraise +2, Bluff +6, Craft (Painting) +3, Diplomacy +4, Heal +3, Hypnosis +3, Knowledge (the planes) +2, Perform (Singing) +6, Scry +4, Sense Motive +3, Survival +5; Negotiator, Self-Sufficient.

Languages: Patterna*, Balok, Mordentish.

Typical Sorcerer Spells Known (5/3; save DC 11 + spell level)
0 — detect magic, detect poison, dancing lights, resistance;
1st — animate rope, detect undead.

Signature Possessions: Rozaleen's Tarokka Deck

Rozaleen is a 17-year-old Vistana whose natural beauty is coming into its full bloom. She wears a multilayered, brightly-colored skirt and a loose-fitting white blouse with billowing sleeves. She ties her raven-black hair back with a strip of bright red cloth and wears golden bracelets on her wrists and left ankle.

Background

Rozaleen was born into a small caravan of Zarovan Vistani, the only daughter of a seer so powerful that other Vistani sought her out for insight into the future. Sadly, her mother died while giving birth to her. At an early age, Rozaleen showed that she had inherited her mother's great powers, particularly when using the mysterious tarokka deck that had been passed down to her over countless generations. (See Rozaleen's Tarokka Deck above details.)

As Rozaleen grew older, she became increasingly eager to take on formally the mantle of her mother — that of a seer among the Zarovan. Her father, however, feared for her safety and sanity. He didn't want her exposed to the burdens of fortune telling too early in life and insisted she wait. He tried to explain to her the unique and dangerous nature of the tarokka deck she had inherited from her mother, but Rozaleen felt that he was treating her like a baby. After one particularly vicious argument that ended with her father threatening to scatter the tarokka deck in the Mists, Rozaleen gathered up her belongings (including the tarokka deck that was her birthright) and left her family behind.

Shortly after leaving, Rozaleen decided to use the tarokka deck to help guide her movements, despite the fact she had been taught her entire life never to lay her own fortune. The cards told her of a dark fate that loomed in the near future, not at all the exciting life she had pictured. She decided to retrace her steps and return to her family, but ran into a pair of corrupt noblemen named Hanford



and Rostoff before she could reach her caravan and safety. They thought the little gypsy girl would be the perfect accent to a night of debauchery with their good friends.

Current Sketch

After being brought to the isolated Ashington Manor, Rozaleen suffered many hours of abuse and humiliation that culminated in her murder at the hands of Lord Ashington. The cards had foretold this. What had not been evident in the cards was that she would leave a fortune uncompleted and that she would bring a curse down upon the heads of her tormentors and herself.

Rozaleen, Ashington and the others involved in her death are trapped in an unusual haunting and repetition of history. Until the final tarokka pattern Rozaleen was laying when Ashington murdered her is completed and until her curse has been broken, Rozaleen's ghost continues to haunt Ashington Manor. Approximately every 17 years, around the anniversary of her death, distorted reflections of her abuse and slaying replay themselves out in the building. (The curse comes to a head every seventeen years, because that was Rozaleen's age when she was killed.)

Combat

When she was alive, Rozaleen was not much of a combatant. All the spells she knew were divinatory in nature, and the only weapons she carried was a small knife...and she wasn't terribly adept at using it. She relied upon her brothers and father for protection. She didn't even realize how dangerous the world could be until she fell into the hands of Ashington and his lackeys.

As an undead, Rozaleen doesn't attack, nor can she be attacked. Turning and other attempts to dispel or destroy her automatically fail. She is essentially doing nothing but replaying her final moments, except for when she appears by her grave in area 14 (see Chapter Two).

Cair

Rozaleen wandered the domains with her family in a pair of Vistani *vardos*, never staying in one place for more than two or three days. As a ghost, Rozaleen now haunts Ashington Manor, the place of her death.

Chapter Three: The Brood of Blutkalte



This section contains information for DMs intending on running an adventure around the events of *The Brood of Blutkalte*.

New Monster

The creature whose story makes up the heard of *The Brood of Blutkalte* is detailed below. Chapter Three gives information on how to alter this character to suit individual campaigns.

Sebastian Blutkalte

Ghost, Dread Doppelganger, 2nd-Level Rogue, 1st-Level Assassin
Medium Undead (Augmented Monstrous Humanoid)
(Shapechanger) (Incorporeal)

Hit Dice: 7d12 (46 hp)
Initiative: +5
Speed: 20 ft. (4 squares), fly 30 ft. (perfect)
Armor Class: 17 (+1 Dex, +6 deflection), touch 17, flat-footed 16, or 17 (+1 Dex, +6 natural), touch 11, flat-footed 16
Base Attack/Grapple: +5/+7





Attack:	Incorporeal touch +6 (1d4 ability damage) or +7 against ethereal foes or slam +7 melee (1d6+2)
Full Attack:	Incorporeal touch +6 (1d4 ability damage) or +7 against ethereal foes or 2 slams +7 melee (1d6+2)
Space/Reach:	5 ft./ 5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Detect thoughts, draining touch, dream walk, grave summoning, malevolence, malevolent shapechanging, manifestation
Special Qualities:	Change shape, darkvision 60 ft., glamor, incorporeal traits, multiple personality disorder, rejuvenation, turn resistance, undead traits
Saves:	Fort +4, Ref +10, Will +6
Abilities:	Str 14, Dex 13, Con—, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 22
Skills:	Bluff +11*, Craft (alchemy) +5, Craft (sewing) +6, Craft (sculpting) +1, Disguise +16*, Hide +16*, Listen +19*, Move Silently +8, Search +10*, Sense Motive +10, Spot +16*
Feats:	Alertness, Dodge, Improved Initiative
Environment:	Any
Organization:	Solitary
Challenge Rating:	10
Treasure:	See below
Alignment:	always chaotic evil
Advancement:	By character class
Level Adjustment:	+7

sinister plot possible. Sebastian does not contemplate his state as a ghost or as a sufferer of a disorder. For example, his personalities do not consider where they have been or why they occasionally carry each other's belongings. Sebastian's subconscious makes sure that he does what he needs to do to continue his ruse, and his personalities are not consciously aware of what drives them.

Sebastian has acquired some equipment over the years. He has an assortment of poisons that he either bought or created, as well as some bottled diseases. Typically, he carries blue whinnis and large scorpion venom for use on weapons, such as the multiple daggers he keeps for use by The Grandfather. He uses bottled blinding sickness, oil of taggit, striped toadstools and arsenic for poisoning food and drinks. He especially likes to experiment with new concoctions. As an assassin, he can use most poisons with relative impunity. As



The old man shuffles as he approaches, a strange, unfocused look in his eyes.

Sebastian Blutkalte is the ghost of a dread doppelganger with a multiple personality disorder. He can be extremely powerful, but his mental disorder keeps his powers in check. First, his multiple personality disorder prevents him from acting in his own best interests in every situation. Second, he cannot use all of his abilities at one time.

Sebastian's disorder is not as severe as that of some sufferers, however. He has a limited number of alter-egos and no personality fragments. He did not suffer significant ability damage when he became mad. Unlike other multiple personality disorder sufferers, Sebastian does not need to make Will saves to keep from changing personalities at inopportune times. Perhaps this is due to the limited number of personalities he possesses, or perhaps it is a favor granted by the dark powers to keep Sebastian from being discovered.

Sebastian's subconscious thoughts drive his actions and personality changes to follow the most



a ghost, he can simply abandon any body that becomes accidentally diseased.

Sebastian carries a +1 *straight razor of wounding* for use by The Mother. He also carries spools of very strong thread and sewing needles. His pockets are filled with miscellaneous items for use with his doppelganger *glamer* ability. Sebastian does not need a real weapon for The Father. He uses his Malevolent Shapechanging ability to create a spade (treat as a greatclub) whenever it is needed.

Sebastian has grown very skilled at moving his equipment around. He hides his items somewhere using one body, and then he walks away. He then possesses another body. His personality remembers exactly where he left his equipment, and he uses the new body to go retrieve it.

Combat

Sebastian has limited attack powers while in ghost form — his only incorporeal attack is his draining touch. As a result, he uses his malevolence ability whenever possible. Sebastian prefers to possess physically powerful people such as town guards or laborers. These people generally have weaker minds, as well.

While Sebastian is in possession of a body, he must use his malevolent shapechanging ability to resemble one of his alter egos. His damaged mind will not let him possess a body without changing it. Note that Sebastian can only possess a body for 10 hours at a time, so a host may periodically escape from Sebastian's grasp. In addition, unlike the *magic jar* spell, ghosts cannot be trapped inside the corpse if their host dies. Finally, if the host is rendered unconscious, the ghost is forced from the body.

While using his malevolent shapechanging ability, Sebastian fights according to the dominant personality. As The Grandfather, he uses a poisoned dagger. As The Father, he uses a spade. As The Mother, he uses his +1 *straight razor of wounding*. In every case, he prefers to set up a situation where he is in control against a limited number of foes. He avoids a fair fight if at all possible. His favorite combat tactic is to use his assassin's death attack, though he often uses the paralyzing variation. A paralyzed foe gives him more options.

Sebastian may use his dream walk ability to send dreams to player characters to torment them or to enlist their aid in releasing him.

As with all ghosts, Sebastian will reform if killed. However, Sebastian does not need to make a level check to reform; his powerful psyche will keep him around until his torments are resolved. Sebastian is also not restricted to any particular location. He is free to roam about the realm spreading terror wherever the conditions are fitting.

Rogue Abilities, Assassin Abilities: Sebastian can use all of his rogue and assassin abilities.

Dread Doppelganger Abilities (Su): Sebastian has the *change shape*, *detect thoughts* and *glamer* abilities of a dread doppelganger. *Change shape* only works while Sebastian is in ghost form (but see malevolent shapechanging, below). Sebastian cannot consciously control the shape he takes.

Malevolent Shapechanging (Su): When the ghost template is applied to a creature with the shapechanger subtype, malevolent shapechanging may be selected as one of a ghost's special attacks. The malevolence special attack is a prerequisite for malevolent shapechanging. When a ghost uses its malevolence special attack to possess a host, it may use its *change shape* ability as if the host had that ability.

Grave Summoning (Su): Grave summoning is a ghost special attack that allows a ghost to use its powerful emotional resonance to draw a victim to their doom. Once per day, the ghost may conduct a ritual that culminates in the inscription of the name of a victim on a gravestone. The ghost writing ability can be used for the inscription, or the ghost could perform the ritual while possessing a body. Once the victim's name is inscribed, a compulsion similar to *dominate person* takes effect if the victim is within range. The range is 400 feet plus 80 feet per rank of the ghost. The victim gets a Will save to resist the effect. The DC is 10 + the ghost's Hit Dice + ghost's Charisma modifier. If the victim fails, they will proceed as if dominated to the location of the headstone. Once there, the victim will "lie in his grave". The victim remains dominated until buried or attacked or until 24 hours have passed. A ghost cannot ever summon the same person to their grave more than once.

Spells: As a 1st-level assassin, Sebastian knows two spells — *sleep* and *true strike*. However, based on his intelligence modifier, he may only cast one spell per day.

Chapter Four: Noises in the Night



his section contains information for DMs intending to run stories based on *Noises in the Night*.

New Monsters

Following is a description of a new creature with multiple forms. Though a central part of *Noises in the Night*, this monster may spark many ideas for other games featuring one or more of its many variants.

Bogeymen

Bogeymen are terrifying distillations of evil, given form as the traditional terrors of childhood: death, disease, mutilation, disempowerment, losing the love of a parent and so on. They feed off the suffering and pain of innocents, combing darkened streets, hospitals, playgrounds and asylums for victims, secure in the knowledge that they will never be discovered by those powerful enough to stop them but strangely curtailed by the laws of the stories from which they come.

Bogeyman subtype: Bogeymen are a subtype of fey found only in Ravenloft. As well as the abilities discussed in Chapter Five, all bogeymen have the following traits, unless otherwise noted:

Bogeymen Vulnerabilities (Ex): As well as any individual vulnerabilities a

bogeyman may possess, no bogeymen are able to harm those protected by *bleed* spells or the relevant *protection* or *magic circle* spells. They all take 2d4 damage from holy water and can be turned by clerics of good deities as undead (although not by clerics of neutral deities who can turn undead).

Eyes of Innocence (Su): The true evil of bogeymen is clear only to the imaginative and innocent; all others see them as normal people, or don't notice them at all.



Pozan '05



Linguist (Ex): Bogeymen can speak any language spoken in any community where stories about them are told.

See in Darkness (Ex): Bogeymen can see in darkness as clearly as a human can see in broad daylight.

Taint of Evil (Su): Bogeymen are so evil that they leave their taint on everything they touch. Attempting to contact the bogeyman or its missing victims mentally places the mentalist in direct contact with that evil, provoking a Madness save. Psychics who touch the corpses of victims must also make a Madness save as the victim's last moments are experienced first-hand.

The Bad Thing

The diminutive creature resembles a broken ape with the face of a malevolent, vicious child.

At three feet tall, the Bad Thing is no bigger than the children it torments, but its form is nightmarish and broken. Its apelike body is covered in bristling black fur. Its arms are long and thin, the gnarled fingers resembling nothing so much as tree branches. Jutting from behind it is a bulbous spider's abdomen. The front pair of its four legs are short and bandy; the back pair are the long and delicate legs of a giant spider. Most horrifying of all is its face: that of a macabrely distorted child. Features that may once have been soft and innocent are now leathery and creased with malice; instead of care-

Table H-1: Sample Bogeymen, Part One

	The Bad Thing Small Fey (Bogeyman)	Mister Fox Medium Fey (Bogeyman)	Monsieur Croquemitaine Medium Fey (Bogeyman)
Hit Dice:	3d6+3 (16 hp)	4d6 (17 hp)	6d6+12 (38 hp)
Initiative:	+3	+1	+6
Speed:	40 ft.	30 ft.	30 ft.
Armor Class:	17 (+1 size, +1 Dodge, +3 Dexterity, +2 deflection), touch 16, flatfooted 13	13 (+1 Dexterity, +2 deflection), touch 13, flatfooted 12	14 (+2 Dexterity, +2 deflection), touch 14, flatfooted 12
Base Attack/Grapple:	+1/+2	+2/+4	+3/+6
Attack:	Claw +2 melee (1d3+1)	Dagger +5 melee (1d4+2)	Slam +7 melee (1d4+3)
Full Attack:	Claw +2 melee (1d3+1)	Dagger +5 melee (1d4+2)	Slam +7 melee (1d4+3)
Space/Reach:	5 ft./5 ft.	5 ft./5 ft.	5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Spell-like abilities	Charm, gifts of grief, murder	Improved grab, strangle
Special Qualities:	Eyes of innocence, vulnerabilities	Alternate form, eyes of innocence, scent, vulnerabilities	Eyes of innocence, spider climb, weapon resistance, vulnerabilities
Saves:	Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +6	Fort +1, Ref +5, Will +6	Fort +4, Ref +7, Will +6
Abilities:	Str 12, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 17, Cha 14	Str 15, Dex 13, Con 11, Int 15, Wis 14, Cha 16	Str 16, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 8
Skills:	Bluff +8, Climb +7, Hide +11, Intimidate +8, Sense Motive +9, Spot +9	Bluff +10, Diplomacy +10, Jump +9, Knowledge (local) +9, Listen +9, Sense Motive +9, Spot +9, Swim +9	Balance +11, Escape Artist +11, Hide +11, Listen +10, Move Silently +11, Open Locks +10, Spot +10
Feats:	Dodge, Lightning Reflexes	Power Attack, Weapon focus (dagger)	Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (slam)
Environment:	Any	Any	Any
Organization:	Solitary	Solitary	Solitary
Challenge Rating:	3	4	5
Treasure:	None	50% items (90% cursed)	None
Alignment:	Lawful evil	Neutral evil	Chaotic evil
Advancement:	4-5 HD (Small)	5-7 HD (Medium)	7-8 HD (Medium)
Level Adjustment:	—	—	—



free pleasure, its tiny black eyes glow with vicious joy and more than a hint of fear.

The Bad Thing is a wicked creature that wields terror and intimidation like an artist, painting the rural villages it haunts with misery and evil. Although all bogeymen are cowards, the Bad Thing is almost crippled by fear and inadequacy. It never appears when adults are present and only targets the young and infirm. Even then, it rarely emerges from the shadows. Simply put, the Bad Thing is a petty bully. It attacks innocents from the shadows, trying to bend them to its will, in the vain attempt to give itself a feeling of power. Out of all the bogeymen in Ravenloft, the Bad Thing is possibly both the most repulsive and the most pathetic.

The Bad Thing enjoys spreading fear and evil. It does not often kill its victims. Instead, it steals their innocence and leaves them emotionally disturbed. Sometimes, it does no more than scratch on their windowpanes with its twiglike fingers, or make loud noises just outside their bedchambers, feeding off the fear this inspires. Sometimes, it speaks to its victims in its grating voice, threatening them with any number of unsavory acts if they do not obey it. Refusal pricks the Bad Thing's already tender pride, and in its vengeful rage it will mutilate pets, break precious objects, soil food and even dart out of its protective shadows to pull its victim's hair or viciously claw its innocent target. It maintains this relentless victimization until it is driven away or the child gives in. Eventually, victims are either driven insane from the constant harassment, or begin to perform evil acts willingly, anticipating the Bad Thing's next demand. Once this is achieved or the victim refuses to be intimidated, the Bad Thing moves on.

Combat

The Bad Thing does not fight with weapons, but uses its fear-invoking powers to frighten and corrupt its victims.

Eyes of Innocence (Su): The Bad Thing is such a coward that it never emerges from its hiding places when adults are present. How it might avoid their attention, if it has any supernatural way of doing so, is unknown.

Spell-like Abilities: 2/day—*cause fear, charm person, deeper darkness, ghost sound, ventriloquism*; 1/day—*scare*. These abilities are as the spells cast by a 3rd-level sorcerer. The save DC, where applicable, is 12 + spell level.

Vulnerabilities (Ex): The Bad Thing is crippled by feelings of inadequacy. So tender is its pride, laughing at it strikes a terrible blow into the Bad Thing's shriveled heart. It is forced to recognize its own pettiness and dissolves into the ground, swearing revenge against those who ridiculed it.

Mister Fox

The dapper gentleman wears old-fashioned clothing and carries a large leather bag as he approaches, smiling.

Mister Fox is a charming, friendly gentleman, with sharp features, reddish-brown hair and green eyes that always have a smile twinkling in them. He is dressed in the slightly old-fashioned clothes of a well-to-do (but not too rich) traveling scholar or merchant, an image enhanced by the large leather bag he always carries. This bag is by far the most notable feature about him: the handles and clasp are made of bleached bone, and the leather is midnight black. Occasionally, the leather bulges or twitches, as though something is alive inside, and when opened, the distant sound of screaming can be heard. The other sign of Mister Fox's true evil is the bushy fox's tail that sometimes can be seen poking from under his coattails.

Unlike other bogeymen, Mister Fox is charming and vivacious, full of good humor. He always gives small toys and presents to children he takes a shine to, and his good looks and kind nature have won the hearts of many a young girl. Of course, beneath this pleasant exterior, Mister Fox is a black-hearted murderer. The children who take his gifts undergo horrifying transformations, while any young woman who agrees to be his wife is taken back to his lair, the House at the End of the White Road, and slowly and sadistically butchered. Even those who resist his advances are not safe from him; Mister Fox can charm the parents or guardians of those he truly desires into willingly handing over the bewildered innocent to his malevolent attentions.

In some stories, Mister Fox agrees to meet his innocent new wife at the House at the End of the White Road. In these tales, the girl enters a dark, dark forest, following a road that glitters like a ribbon of moonlight. To prevent her getting lost, Mister Fox marks the trail by slitting a sow's throat and dragging it behind him. The woman must follow the gory trail until she reaches the House, where her own, equally terrible fate waits.



Combat

Mister Fox prefers to use guile and subtlety instead of physical combat. His repertoire of abilities gives him a wide choice of ways to elude or win over those who might oppose him. When forced to fight, he uses a dagger in human form (see below) or his natural weaponry in fox form.

Alternate Form (Su): As a standard action, Mister Fox can transform into a cunning and vicious fox. This transformation restores hit points as though Mister Fox had rested for a day. The bogeyman's statistics are unchanged, except he gains a +4 racial bonus to Dexterity, his Speed increases by 10 ft and he becomes Small. Instead of wielding a dagger, Mister Fox bites for 1d4+2 damage when in fox form. Mister Fox can stay in fox form for a maximum of one hour per day, but can change back and forth as he desires up to that limit.

Charm (Sp): Mister Fox can cast *charm person* three times per day (DC 15). Innocents gain a +4 sacred bonus to this save. Once *charmed* by Mister Fox, a person will do anything he requests, up to and including exchanging their children for some worthless trinket from his bag, or agreeing to be his wife.

Eyes of Innocence (Su): To adults, Mister Fox seems to be a perfectly normal traveler. They can't see his tail, notice nothing unusual about his bag and don't notice that his smile doesn't genuinely reach his eyes. The innocent, of course, can, but these clues are often too little, too late to save them.

Gifts of Grief (Su): Stories about Mister Fox almost always revolve around the trinkets he gives to children from his demonic bag. All are, at first, desirable and normal toys: a spinning top, a small painting, a bag of marbles, and so on. However, the gifts soon reveal their true nature, forcing horrific transformations on their victims. The girl who accepts Mister Fox's picture vanishes, only to appear in the artwork. The skin of the boy who takes his marbles begins to stiffen and whiten, until he solidifies into a marble statue. The new owner of Mister Fox's top vanishes, but their screaming voice can be heard whenever the top is spun. Others simply vanish, leaving no trace. When a focus for the spell remains, *break enchantment* can return these trapped children to normal, but doing so earns Mister Fox's ire.

Murder (Ex): If Mister Fox successfully hits an opponent with his broad-bladed dagger while

flanking them, they must make a DC 17 Fort save. If they fail, Mister Fox can choose to kill them instantly or, more frequently, to paralyze them for 1d6+4 minutes. Mister Fox usually uses this time to carefully butcher his victim, keeping them alive as long as possible to fully appreciate his skills with his knife. This ability can affect elves and anyone of 7th level or less with the Improved Uncanny Dodge ability.

Vulnerabilities (Ex): Mister Fox is repelled by foxglove flowers. He is unable to enter any house with foxgloves growing in the garden, and won't approach anyone carrying them. If the flowers are strongly presented to him (like garlic to a vampire), he flees. Unlike most bogeymen, Mister Fox's vulnerability doesn't destroy him, it only repels him.

Monsieur Croquemitaine

A cadaverously thin man with hollow cheeks stands before you looming like a spectre.

Although Monsieur Croquemitaine is of average height, he appears much taller due to his painful slimmness. He is cadaverously thin; his cheeks are hollow and his eyes narrow and black, the dirty and sun-burnt skin falling around them in folds due to the lack of muscle beneath. The laborer's clothes he wears hang on his emaciated frame like rags on a scarecrow. These clothes were once as fine as any working man could afford, but long, hard wear has made them filthy and ragged. The only parts of his body that appear well nourished are his wiry arms, inhumanly long fingers and his teeth, which are huge yellow and gray tombstones like horses' teeth.

Monsieur Croquemitaine is usually only encountered at night. He is a bogeyman that haunts dark alleys, windowsills and bedchambers, waiting to kidnap his prey. Despite his emaciation, Monsieur Croquemitaine possesses incredible wiry strength. He can effortlessly climb walls to reach his prey and is perfectly capable of wringing someone's neck or dragging them bodily away. He is able to unlock even the tightest window, his long, white fingers wriggling between the cracks of the shutters to reach the latch. Occasionally, he hangs just below the windowsill, and drops things into the street beneath. When someone opens the window to investigate, he grabs them by the throat and drags them outside. Some of his victims are strangled in their sleep and left for their families to discover, while others simply vanish — bundled into a sack and dragged back to his wagon. This rickety old farm cart is drawn by a ragged, un-



healthy looking ox. When it moves, its wheels leave tracks of fresh blood for a few meters, when it suddenly vanishes. No one has ever discovered what happen to those he kidnaps in this gory cart.

Combat

Monsieur Croquemitaine fights with his slam attack as well as his other physical powers. He prefers to attack from surprise, with his victims at a distinct disadvantage.

Eyes of Innocence (Su): To adults, Monsieur Croquemitaine seems to be a simple farmer or laborer. A strange fog seems to descend over their minds; even if a farm hand would seem out of place in a given situation (such as sitting outside Chateau Delanuit on the night of a ball), adults won't consider his presence unusual. Only in extreme circumstances, when he is engaged in something that cannot be ignored, will they act against him. Children and other innocents, however, are always able to see the fiendish potential for evil contained in his emaciated frame.

Improved Grab (Ex): If Monsieur Croquemitaine manages to hit with his slam attack, he deals normal damage and may attempt to start a grapple as a free action, without provoking an attack of opportunity. This ability may be used against Medium-size or smaller creatures.

Strangle (Ex): While grappling with an opponent, Monsieur Croquemitaine can strangle them for an additional 1d4+3 damage. If the attack that allowed the bogeyman to gain a hold was also a critical hit, the victim immediately begins suffocating.

Spider Climb (Sp): Once per day, Monsieur Croquemitaine may *spider climb* as a sixth level sorcerer.

Weapon Resistance (Ex): Monsieur Croquemitaine's emaciated body is almost entirely free of bone, supported instead by a network of cartilage. This gives him his unnatural ability to slither through narrow windows and unlock shutters from the inside and also means he takes only half damage from bludgeoning weapons.

Vulnerability (Ex): Monsieur Croquemitaine is a creature of the night. While he is able to move about during the day, he is unable, or perhaps unwilling, to hunt. Likewise, if confronted with bright light while attempting to kidnap a child, he must make a DC 17 Will save or flee. If he is somehow trapped in a beam of sunlight for one full minute after night has fallen, the murderous fey is

destroyed—forced back into his dispersed state for another generation.

Madame Croquemitaine

This jolly woman is immense in size and always seems to be eating something.

Madame Croquemitaine is the opposite of her husband in almost every way. Where he is taciturn, she is jolly and talkative. While he drives their wagon during the day and hunts at night, she kidnaps her victims during the day. He lurks in dark streets and bedrooms, she in playgrounds, parks and other 'safe' areas where children play. Monsieur Croquemitaine is thin; his wife is grotesquely fat. Curtains of flab hang from her body. Her head is separated from her mounded shoulders by rolls of chins rather than a neck. She is always eating, and food stains her fine but well-worn clothing. Her mole-ridden skin glistens with oil and sweat.

Madame Croquemitaine is never seen without a bag of sweets, which she uses to capture her victims. She sits in parks throughout the western Core, munching on a roast chicken or sandwich, and eagerly engaging anyone who passes in conversation. Children and other innocents are offered a sweet from her bag. In some cases, this makes her victim vulnerable to the murderess' suggestions, and they are lured into a nearby alley where Monsieur Croquemitaine waits with their wagon. In others, the child is instantly struck dead or paralyzed, bundled up in Madame Croquemitaine's voluminous skirts and dragged away. Her husband whips the tired ox, the wagon creaks slowly away, and the only clue for the distraught parents and other authorities is a seldom-noticed trail of drying blood. She and her husband are said to devour their victim — she eating the fat, he the lean — in their home in a dark wood somewhere, although the exact place varies from legend to legend.

Combat

Madame Croquemitaine eschews combat whenever possible, preferring to lure her victims through her special power (see below).

Eyes of Innocence (Su): To an adult, Madame Croquemitaine appears to be a normal, slightly overweight, woman. Most people do not seem to notice her, and even those she engages in conversation are unable to remember her clearly enough to describe her once the conversation is over. She is perfectly capable of kidnapping an innocent in full view of a group of oblivious adults. Only the

Table H-2: Sample Bogeymen, Part Two

	Madame Croquemitaine Medium Fey (Bogeyman)	Alligator Lenny Medium Fey (Bogeyman)	The Scissorman Medium Fey (Bogeyman)
Hit Dice:	6d6+27 (53 hp)	8d6+32 (66 hp)	10d6+10 (53 hp)
Initiative:	+3	+2	+4
Speed:	30 ft.	30 ft.	30 ft.
Armor Class:	13 (-1 Dexterity, +2 natural, +2 deflection), touch 11, flatfooted 11	17 (+2 Dexterity, +1 Dodge, +2 natural, +2 deflection), touch 14, flatfooted 14	16 (+4 Dexterity, +2 deflection), touch 16, flatfooted 12
Base Attack/Grapple:	+3/+5	+4/+9	+5/+7
Attack:	Slam +5 melee (1d4+2)	Slam +10 melee (1d4+5 plus disease)	Scissors +12 melee (1d4+6/17-20)
Full Attack:	Slam +5 melee (1d4+2)	Slam +10 melee (1d4+5 plus disease)	Scissors +12 melee (1d4+6/17-20)
Space/Reach:	5 ft./5 ft.	5 ft./5 ft.	5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks:	Sweets	Cause disease, putrescent aura	—
Special Qualities:	Eyes of innocence, weapon	Eyes of innocence, vulnerabilities resistance, vulnerabilities	Eyes of innocence, frightful presence, healing, isolation, passwall, vulnerabilities
Saves:	Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +6	Fort +10, Ref +7, Will +8	Fort +4, Ref +11, Will +8
Abilities:	Str 14, Dex 8, Con 18, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 14	Str 20, Dex 13, Con 18, Int 11, Wis 14, Cha 8	Str 15, Dex 19, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 13
Skills:	Bluff +11, Diplomacy +11, Gather Information +11, Hide +10, Knowledge (local) +10, Listen +10, Spot +10	Balance +12, Climb +13, Hide +13, Jump +13, Listen +10, Move Silently +12, Spot +10, Swim +13	Balance +13, Bluff +13, Hide +14, Intimidate +14, Jump +13, Listen +13, Move Silently +15, Spot +14
Feats:	Improved Initiative, Run, Toughness	Dodge, Power Attack, Weapon focus (slam)	Power Attack, Weapon focus (scissors), Weapon finesse (scissors), Weapon specialization (scissors)
Environment:	Any	Any	Any
Organization:	Solitary	Solitary	Solitary
Challenge Rating:	5	7	8
Treasure:	None	Coins, goods (gems and jewelry only)	Scissors (as <i>keen dagger</i> +2)
Alignment:	Chaotic evil	Chaotic evil	Lawful evil
Advancement:	7-8 HD (Medium)	9-12 HD (Large)	11-12 HD (Medium), 13 HD (Large)
Level Adjustment:	—	—	—

imaginative and innocent — her prey — are able to see her in her evil corpulence.

Sweets (Sp): Madame Croquemitaine hunts with her sweets. These delicious treats are capable of unleashing a number of different horrors on those foolish enough to eat them. One per day, Madame Croquemitaine can choose to cast one of *charm person*, *hold person* or, much more rarely, *death* (DC 15 + spell level) on the last person to

have eaten one of her sweets. Madame Croquemitaine creates this effect herself, acting through the sweets. By themselves, they are not magical.

Weapon Resistance (Ex): Because of the huge amounts of fat surrounding her body, weapons that rely on pure force to injure opponents are less effective against Madame Croquemitaine. As such, she takes half damage from all bludgeoning attacks.



Vulnerability (Ex): Despite her ravenous appetite, Madame Croquemaite is unable to stomach even one of the sweets she offers to her victims. If one of her sweets should ever pass her lips, she is instantly struck down in incredible pain and forced to disperse.

Alligator Lenny

The tall, massively built person who approaches appears to be a human or perhaps an ogre until he grows near enough to reveal his glowing red eyes and blunt, forward-thrusting snout.

Alligator Lenny is a massive creature. In the eternal gloom of his watery home, he could easily be mistaken for a particularly muscular laborer, possibly even an ogre. He is more than six feet tall, with powerful shoulders nearly two thirds as wide. His hands are callused spades. Tendons and rippling muscles stand out all over his brawny frame. On closer inspection, however, it is clear Alligator Lenny is no natural creature. His nose and mouth jut forward into a short, blunt snout, and the irises of his eyes glow red in the darkness. A terrible stench of decay seems to emanate from every pore in his cracked and broken skin. Most of his teeth are covered in rot, and the whites of his eyes are yellow with jaundice. The only things kept in good order are the necklaces of coins and other pieces of jewelry he always carries with him.

In Darkon, a terrifying brute stalks the sewers, drains and waterways. Stories of his glowing red eyes, peering malevolently from sewer gratings or benighted lakes, are common in Richemulot. In Nosos, his scaled hand brings illness to those who play in the street with the poor and death to those who travel abroad in the rain. He is driven by an almost insatiable lust for blood and for coins and other valuables. He is Alligator Lenny, the bogeyman created by children who drowned in wells or died, lost and alone, beneath the city.

Despite his brutish appearance, Alligator Lenny is a canny creature, able to plan his subtle attacks and move with surprising speed to carry them out. He enjoys stalking his victims slowly, glaring out at them from darkened openings, creeping up on them until his stench is almost overpowering, before falling back again, deliberately giving away his presence with a scuffed footstep or a splash of water. Not until his victim flees, sobbing in terror from the thing behind them, does he pounce — leaping out in front of them and letting them run into his arms. Of course, he has also been known to surge out of a river or well, or

stretch a massive arm through a storm water drain to drag a poor child into the drain. He is strong enough to tear them apart if they are not physically capable of fitting through the gap, but this quick death is perhaps preferable to what lies in wait for his smaller victims. Those who are dragged into his dark underworld are slowly and sadistically murdered (often held under the water until they pass out, then revived and held down again, until they finally die), stripped of their valuables and abandoned to the vermin.

Combat

Alligator Lenny prefers to attack from a position of stealth, using surprise and his immense strength to his advantage.

Cause Disease (Ex): Alligator Lenny's cracked and jaundiced hide is not simply a horrifying cosmetic effect. He is literally crawling with disease. Simply entering the bogeyman's putrescent aura is enough to infect someone with filth fever (Fortitude save DC 10). People who drink from water that has been in contact with him for some time (such as a well or lake where he has lurked) must save as well, at the same DC. Those who are unlucky enough to touch or be touched by him can be afflicted with one of any number of diseases. The DM should choose a disease based on the strength of the victim; particularly appropriate diseases include filth fever, slimy doom or devil chills.

Eyes of Innocence (Su): Adults are unable to see Alligator Lenny, detecting only a faint, lingering smell. He seems to fade into the background. The sound of his footsteps becomes the scurrying of rats or the yowling of a stray cat. His victims seem to have been mauled by some kind of animal, or to have perished from natural causes, such as drowning. There always seems to be another, more rational explanation for his deeds. Of course, children and other innocents are always able to see and hear him.

Putrescent Aura (Ex): A terrible, nauseating stench emanates from every pore on Alligator Lenny's corrupt body, fouling the air around him and polluting any area that he lingers in. This hideous aura extends for 10 feet around him, although it can be detected at far greater distances and is enough to turn the stomach of even the most jaded necromancer. No natural animal or beast will willingly enter Alligator Lenny's aura, and any living being that does so must make a DC 15 Fortitude save or become nauseated. The DC rises to 20 for creatures with the Scent quality.



Vulnerability (Ex): As a creature of corruption and decay, Alligator Lenny is affected by symbols of purity and health, such as posies, rose petals or lavender. He is unable to directly harm anyone carrying these or similar items and pressing one of these flowers against his snout is enough to kill him. He is also immune to turning, unless one of these medicinal items is used in addition to the cleric's holy symbol, or if the cleric has access to the Healing domain.

The Scissorman

At first glance, the man standing before you looks and dresses like a tailor; only when he gets close are his insectoid features revealed in their grotesqueness.

In many ways, the Scissorman looks like a cross between a well-to-do tailor from Mordent or Paridon and a gigantic praying mantis. He is easily seven feet tall, with big eyes and exceptionally long legs. His hard, dry skin, which is strangely like the carapace of a beetle, enhances his insectoid appearance. Flakes of dusty skin fall away from him with every movement. He is thin but muscular and always dresses in a fine crimson and black pinstriped suit, complete with gaiters, cane and top hat. He occasionally appears with his mouth sewn shut, but this is unusual—those few who have met him and survived describe him as a pleasant conversationalist, often engaging in witty banter.

The Scissorman is a polite, urbane gentleman in every respect — except one. He uses a huge pair of shiny silver shears to attack and mutilate his victims. Children who disobey their parents, suck their thumbs or are otherwise “naughty” sometimes attract a midnight visit from this fiend. He appears silently in one corner of the room, seemingly materializing out of the shadows. Occasionally, this macabre visitation is heralded by the “snip-snip” of scissors. The Scissorman toys with his victim, indulging in games of cat-and-mouse, before finally moving in for the kill. Once he has finished, his victims are often beyond recognition, but not always dead. Some are left alive, driven insane by pain and terror, with their tongues cut from their heads. Somehow, these wounds often seem to be self-inflicted — leaving the insectoid tailor free to pursue his endless search for materials to make his clothes.

Combat

Scissorman uses his scissors as a weapon when necessary, but he prefers to avoid combat altogether, saving his scissors for other uses.

Eyes of Innocence (Su): Adults are completely unable to see the Scissorman, unless he wishes them to. Unlike other bogeymen, children also become unable to see him in the presence of adults. To them, the terrifying shape looming out of the closet simply becomes a trick of the shadows or a pile of clothes when an adult is summoned and a candle is lit. Once they are gone, of course, the Scissorman returns.

Frightful Presence (Su): By slowly snipping his scissors and grinning, the Scissorman can strike fear into the hearts of his victims. Witnesses must make a DC 18 Fear save. This is a mind affecting fear effect, and those who make their saves are immune to it for one day.

Healing (Su): Once per day, the Scissorman can use his tailoring abilities to heal his wounds by sewing them shut. This requires a full-round action, after which he is restored to full hit points. Unlike a ghost, he needn't rest afterward and can return immediately to his games. However, while sewing, the Scissorman loses his Dexterity bonus to his Armor Class, and if he is hit, the healing attempt is ruined for that day.

Isolation (Sp): The helpless victims of this terrifying madman often spend their last few minutes screaming vainly in fear and agony, while those outside the room are unable to hear a thing. Once per day, the Scissorman is able to isolate his victim's bedchamber (or similar room) from its surroundings. In effect, any sounds are *silenced*, and all the door and windows are affected by *hold portal* spells. Both these abilities take effect as though cast by a 9th-level sorcerer.

Passwall (Su): At will, the Scissorman is able to move through solid walls. This is how he gains access to his victims, and how he escapes again after he has finished.

Scissors (Ex): The shining silver blades that give this bogeyman his name are unnaturally sharp. They have the combat abilities of a *keen dagger* +2.

Vulnerabilities (Ex): Despite his many powerful abilities, the Scissorman is easily dealt with. Water eats into his dry and dusty skin like acid, rusting his shears and dissolving his features. A single cup of water thrown into his face is enough to send him fleeing into the night in agony, while a liter of water can immediately destroy him. Note, however, that other fluids — like blood — don't affect him in this fashion.





Chapter Five: To Honor and Obey



o Honor and Obey doesn't contain a lot in the way of overt gaming tools. Its magic is subtle, elixirs rather than gargantuan contraptions or ancient items of arcane might. Its monsters are all too human. Closer examination, however, reveals quite a few tools for an enterprising DM to use to torment her players. We've presented a few of those below.

New Class: The Voodan

Not all faiths honor the gods directly. In many cultures, spirits of the natural world and messengers of the gods are far more heavily involved in mortal affairs than are the gods themselves. Why pray to a deity who does not hear, when you can direct your petition to the entity that god placed as lord over luck, or death, or rain or wealth? If you seek succor in the depths of a swamp, should not the swamp itself be the recipient of your pleas?

This, then, is the source of the voodan. A divine caster who worships neither gods nor nature itself, but rather spiritual entities who fall somewhere in between, the voodan is possessed of only limited spellcasting ability, but has other mystic capabilities granted him by the *loa*, spirits of the natural world. The voodan does not deny the existence of greater powers such as deities; he simply chooses to focus his veneration on beings nearer to him.

Adventures: Most voodan tend to remain relatively close to home, sometimes because they serve as community leaders, often because the power of the *loa*—less than that of a god—is limited to a certain geographical area. Adventure often comes to them, however, as the voodan is frequently responsible for protecting his people from spiritual and supernatural threats.

Those who do go out into the world seeking adventure may be acting in the interests of one or more of their patron *loa*, but may simply be seeking their own fortune. The *loa* rarely restrict the behavior of their followers, so long as they are granted proper respect and the voodan does not act in ways completely contrary to his patrons' interests.

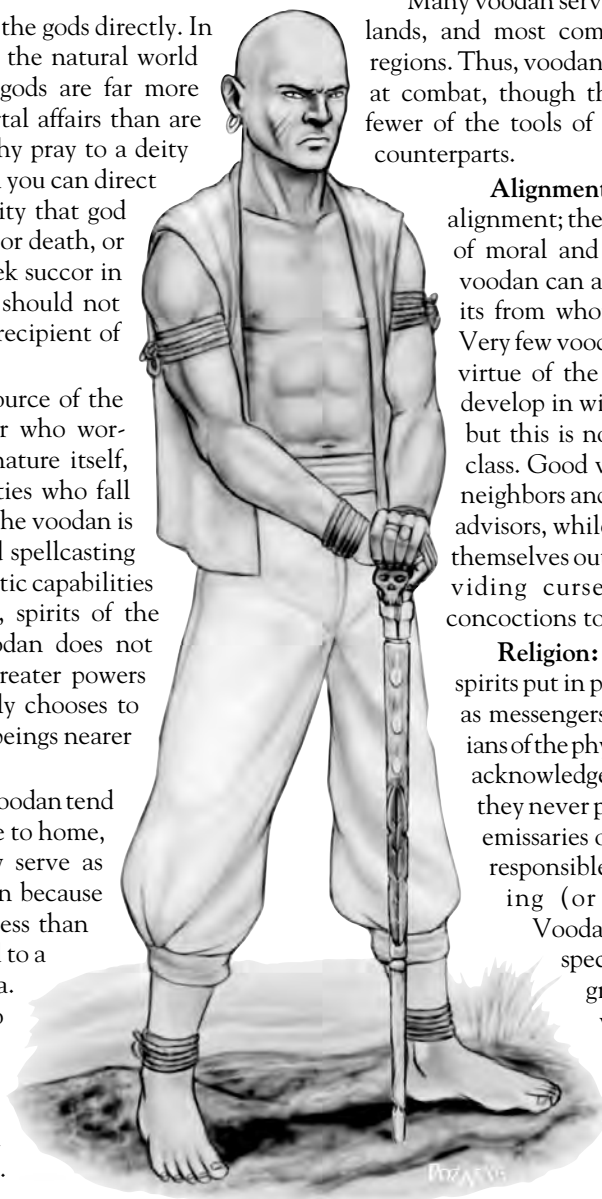
Characteristics: Voodan are incredibly powerful spellcasters, though they cannot cast as swiftly or as flexibly as the other casting classes. Given sufficient time to prepare, however, their mastery of both the spiritual and natural worlds makes them exceedingly potent.

Many voodan serve to protect their homelands, and most come from relatively wild regions. Thus, voodan are all reasonably adept at combat, though they are proficient with fewer of the tools of war than their clerical counterparts.

Alignment: Voodan can be of any alignment; the *loa* run the entire gamut of moral and ethical behavior, so a voodan can always find kindred spirits from whom he can draw power. Very few voodan are lawful, simply by virtue of the fact that they tend to develop in wilder, less urban regions, but this is not a requirement of the class. Good voodan usually aid their neighbors and serve as protectors and advisors, while evil voodan often hire themselves out as "witchdoctors," providing curses and foul mystical concoctions to anyone who can pay.

Religion: Voodan worship the *loa*, spirits put in place by the gods to serve as messengers, caretakers and guardians of the physical world. The voodan acknowledge the gods' existence, but they never pray directly to them. As emissaries of the divine, the *loa* are responsible for heeding and granting (or refusing) petitions.

Voodan do not choose a single, specific *loa* to whom they grant the entirety of their veneration. Rather, voodan tend to call upon whichever *loa* is appropriate to their current circumstances. (A voodan lost





in a bog might call on the Maiden of the Swamp, even if he normally devotes most of his veneration to Kurkva, the Wailing One.) Voodan do, however, choose a particular *loa* to whom they feel closest and devote more of their efforts and ceremonies to that *loa* in particular. It is this “patron” *loa* that grants the voodan most of his spells.

Voodan, Not Vodoun

Just as the standard cleric of d20 fantasy does not represent a true priest of any real-world religion, so too is it vital to remember that the so-called “voodan” of Souragne — while clearly *inspired* by the beliefs of Vodoun as it is practiced in the Caribbean and the American south — are not meant to accurately recreate or represent it. The *loa* of Souragne are not the *loa* of Vodoun; the Lord of the Dead is not Baron Samedi, for instance, nor does the Maiden of the Swamp correspond to any true *loa*. As are the deities presented in the core D20 rules, the *loa* presented here are fictional.

You can, of course, choose to portray a voodan more in keeping with a real world *houngan*, and have him worship the Baron, or Legba, or any one of the hundreds of *loa* honored in vodoun. You could also choose to play a cleric who worships Jesus, or a paladin who follows Vishnu. Remember that unlike its fictional counterpart in the **Ravenloft** setting, Vodoun is a living and thriving religion, with sects and variants that encompass millions of worshippers. Treat it with the respect it is due.

Background: As worship of *loa* tends to be a cultural phenomenon, most voodan-to-be realize at a relatively young age that they feel a particular pull toward the faith and petition one of the local voodan to accept them as a student. Some do come to the calling at an older age, but this relatively rare.

Most voodan come from relatively rural or wild environments. Worship of the *loa* is far more common in small villages on the edge of civilization than it is elsewhere; only a handful of sizable cities claim the faith as their dominant religion.

Voodan do not congregate in great church hierarchies. Most temples to the *loa* are maintained by a single voodan, or perhaps a voodan and his students. While all voodan respect one another as servants of the *loa*, they feel no intrinsic sense of loyalty, and two powerful voodan might be bitter rivals as easily as they might be allies.

Races: In the **Ravenloft** setting, in which Souragne is the only domain from which voodan hail, humans make up the entirety of the class. (If any nonhuman voodan do exist, they are so rare as to make up a statistically negligible proportion.) In other settings, elves, half-orcs and halflings from wilder regions sometimes gravitate toward worship of the *loa*. Gnomes and dwarves rarely find the faith appealing, but some of the monstrous humanoid tribes adopt it.

Other Classes: Voodan get along reasonably well with arcane spellcasters, as they believe that arcane magic simply represents a different means of borrowing the *loas'* power. They are less sanguine around clerics or druids, believing such individuals to be either disrespectful of the *loa*, or deluded regarding the source of their power. All others, they tend to judge on a case-by-case basis, though they often have much to discuss with rangers, who frequent the same sorts of areas and do not rely as heavily as druids on divine magic not granted by the *loa*.

Role: The voodan's role in a party varies considerably depending on which spells he can access at a given time. Some may serve as healers, others as combat casters, still others as scouts. Because they see themselves as closest to the entities that dictate the course of the natural world, voodan often see themselves as natural leaders, or at least as guides and advisors to those who command.

Game Rule Information

Voodan have the following game statistics.

Abilities: Wisdom determines how powerful a voodan's spells are and how many he can cast in a day. Charisma is at least as important, as nearly all the voodan's other class features are based on that ability. Constitution is useful for surviving the harsh environments in which many voodan dwell, and Intelligence enables them to acquire the skill points needed to thrive there.

Alignment: Any, but a voodan's alignment must be within one step of his chosen patron *loa's*.

Hit Dice: d8.





Class Skills

The voodan's class skills (and the key ability modifier for each skill) are Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Knowledge (nature) (Int), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Listen (Wis), Profession (Wis), Spellcraft (Int), Spot (Wis), Survival (Wis), and Swim (Str).

Skill Points at 1st Level: (4 + Int modifier) x4.

Skill Points at Each Additional Level: 4 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All the following are class features of the voodan.

Weapons and Armor Proficiency: Voodan are proficient with all simple weapons and with light armor.

Spells: Voodan cast divine spells, which are drawn — under certain restrictions, as described below — from several different spell lists. Although these spells function as those cast by other spellcasters in most respects, they do possess a few fundamental differences. As with a cleric, the voodan's alignment may prevent him from casting certain spells opposed to his moral or ethical beliefs.

When preparing their daily allotment of spells, wizards pre-cast the greater portion of the spell, and clerics pray for the ability to cast the spell at a later time. Voodan, however, spend their hour of preparation time creating a number of small charms, called *gris-gris* (pronounced GREE-gree). These charms can take any number of forms, from small carved tokens to primitive dolls to elixirs. Each *gris-gris* is, essentially, the physical form of one of the spells the voodan has prepared for the day. This is *not* item creation in the traditional sense; each *gris-gris* is a spell stored in physical form, for all practical purposes, and its presence means the voodan may cast that spell once, just like wizards or clerics may only cast a spell once after they've prepared it. Any material components or foci required for the spell must be present during preparation time, rather than during casting. When it comes time to actually cast the spell, the voodan need only have the *gris-gris* on his person, though it still requires the standard amount of time to cast the spell.

All of this is, for the most part, purely cosmetic. When it comes to actual mechanics, a voodan casts spells very much like any other caster

who pre-prepares his spells. It simply takes a different form. The one advantage to the voodan's method, however, is that he is capable of giving his *gris-gris* to someone else. This means the voodan cannot cast the spell, but the other individual can; see below for more.

To prepare a *gris-gris* or cast the associated spell, a voodan must have a Wisdom score equal to at least 10 + the spell level. The Difficulty Class for a saving throw against a voodan's spell is 10 + the spell level + the voodan's Wisdom modifier.

Like other spellcasters, a voodan can cast only a certain number of spells (prepare a certain number of *gris-gris*) of each spell level per day. His base daily spell allotment is given on Table A-4: The Voodan. In addition, he receives bonus spells per day if he has a high Wisdom score.

Voodans pray for their spells while creating their *gris-gris*. Each voodan must choose a time at which he must spend 1 hour each day in quiet contemplation and craftsmanship to regain his daily allotment of spells. Time spent resting has no effect on whether a voodan can prepare spells. A voodan may prepare and cast spells as described here, provided that he can cast spells of that level, but he must choose which spells to prepare during his daily meditation. He does not require any special materials for creating *gris-gris*. Voodan tend to prefer more aesthetic charms where possible, but simple twigs and grasses tied into rough figures and rocks painted in religious symbols, will do in a pinch. If unused, *gris-gris* lose their power within 24 hours, requiring the voodan to prepare new spells the following day.

Primary Schools and Preparing Gris-Gris: Every *loa* has a selection of three schools associated with it. A voodan must select two of the three schools offered by his patron *loa* to be his primary schools. When preparing his spells/*gris-gris* for the day, he may draw from the bard, cleric, druid and ranger spell lists. (The bard spells are cast as divine spells in this instance, not arcane.) If a spell appears on more than one of these lists, the voodan may select it at the lowest level slot available. However, only spells from the voodan's two primary schools function as those in the book. Spells cast from outside those two schools take up a spell slot one level higher than normally required.

For instance, Mensonge is a voodan of Ohuwaghnn, the Serpent King, granting him a choice of Divination, Necromancy and Transmutation. He elects Necromancy and Transmutation



as his primary schools. When preparing *gris-gris* for his 3rd-level spells on any given day, he can select both *animate dead* and *plant growth*, as those are both 3rd-level spells from his allowed spell lists and primary schools. However, if he wishes to prepare *create food and water*, he must prepare it as a 4th-level spell, because it is a 3rd-level spell from outside his select schools.

Bestow *Gris-Gris*: The single largest difference between voodan *gris-gris* and a cleric's spells is that, because *gris-gris* are physical manifestations of the spells, the voodan can give them to allies for their own use. This functions, in many respects, like an innate *imbue with spell ability*. The voodan selects one or more of his prepared spells and gives the *gris-gris* to someone else. That person then has the option of using the *gris-gris* and casting the spell herself. The voodan can *not* cast the spell; furthermore, the spell slot remains unusable to the voodan until either the bestowed *gris-gris* is used, or until it expires after its 24-hour lifespan, whichever comes first.

A *gris-gris* bestowed on someone else, however, does not function as well as if the voodan had cast it himself. This, combined with the fact that the voodan cannot cast the prepared spell himself once he has given the *gris-gris* to another, inspires most voodan to limit the number of *gris-gris* they give away in a given day.

Apply one of the following modifiers to any spell / *gris-gris* used by someone other than the voodan who created it. The negative modifier applies to both effective caster level and any relevant save DCs, all of which begin at the base values of the voodan who crafted the *gris-gris*.

Table H-4: *Gris-gris* Modifiers

User of the <i>gris-gris</i>	Modifier
A voodan, but not the one who created the <i>gris-gris</i>	-1
A worshipper of the <i>loa</i> , but not a voodan	-2
Anyone else	-3

The *gris-gris* must be granted deliberately by the voodan. Stealing a *gris-gris* from an unwilling voodan prevents him from casting that spell until he can create a new *gris-gris* at his prayer time the next day, but it does not allow the thief to cast the spell.

Domain Spells and Spontaneous Casting: Each *loa*, in addition to three schools, also has three domains associated with it. The voodan chooses *one* of those three domains. He does *not* gain the associated domain ability, as a cleric would, nor does he gain extra slots per day to prepare domain spells. At any time, however, the voodan can "lose" any prepared spell in order to cast the spell of that same level from his chosen domain.

Turn/Rebuke Chosen Spirit (Su): At 1st level, the voodan chooses one category of "spirit" that he may turn or rebuke, exactly as a cleric of his level. He may choose a second variety at 6th level. Good voodan need not turn, and evil voodan need not rebuke; unlike clerics, they can choose which option they prefer at character creation, regardless of alignment. Other than the choice of which sort of creature to turn/rebuke, this ability functions exactly as does that of the cleric and can be used a number of times per day equal to 3 + the voodan's Charisma modifier. Options for the choice of spirit include:

- Animals
- Elementals
- Fey
- Outsiders
- Undead

Remember to account for the added difficulty of turning undead when using voodan in the **Ravenloft** setting.

Voice of the Spirit Realm (Sp): Beginning at 2nd level, the voodan may either *speak with animals*, *speak with dead*, or *speak with plants* as a spell-like ability. He may use this ability number of times per day equal to the voodan's Charisma modifier.

Mount of the Loa (Su): Once per day, beginning at 4th level, the voodan may allow his patron *loa* to "ride" him for brief periods. During this time, the voodan gains any one of the following abilities:

- +2 to any single ability score.
- +2 to any single saving throw.
- +1 to attack and armor class.
- +4 points to skills, divided among one to four skills as the voodan chooses.

The bonus lasts for a number of rounds equal to 2 + the voodan's Charisma modifier, if positive (and not counting any enhancement to Charisma he may have gained by using this selfsame ability). The voodan cannot use this ability when engaged in an activity of which his patron *loa* would not approve.

At 10th and 16th levels, the voodan gains an additional daily use of this ability.



Table H-4: The Voodan

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	----- Spells per Day -----												
						0	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th			
1st	+0	+2	+0	+2	Turn/rebuke 1st chosen spirit, bestow <i>gris-gris</i>	3	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2nd	+1	+3	+0	+3	Voice of the spirit realm	4	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3rd	+2	+3	+1	+3	—	4	2	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4th	+3	+4	+1	+4	Mount of the <i>loa</i> , 1/day	5	3	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5th	+3	+4	+1	+4	—	5	3	2	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6th	+4	+5	+2	+5	Turn/rebuke 2nd chosen spirit	5	3	3	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
7th	+5	+5	+2	+5	—	6	4	3	2	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
8th	+6/+1	+6	+2	+6	—	6	4	3	3	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
9th	+6/+1	+6	+3	+6	—	6	4	4	3	2	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
10th	+7/+2	+7	+3	+7	Mount of the <i>loa</i> , 2/day	6	4	4	3	3	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
11th	+8/+3	+7	+3	+7	—	6	5	4	4	3	2	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
12th	+9/+4	+8	+4	+8	—	6	5	4	4	3	3	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
13th	+9/+4	+8	+4	+8	—	6	5	5	4	4	3	2	1	—	—	—	—	—
14th	+10/+5	+9	+4	+9	—	6	5	5	4	4	3	3	2	—	—	—	—	—
15th	+11/+6/+1	+9	+5	+9	—	6	5	5	5	4	4	3	2	1	—	—	—	—
16th	+12/+7/+2	+10	+5	+10	Mount of the <i>loa</i> , 3/day	6	5	5	5	4	4	3	3	2	—	—	—	—
17th	+12/+7/+2	+10	+5	+10	—	6	5	5	5	5	4	4	3	2	1	—	—	—
18th	+13/+8/+3	+11	+6	+11	—	6	5	5	5	5	4	4	3	3	2	—	—	—
19th	+14/+9/+4	+11	+6	+11	—	6	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	3	3	—	—	—
20th	+15/+10/+5	+12	+6	+12	—	6	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	—	—	—

The *Loa* of Souragne

As mentioned above, the religion of the domain of Souragne does not make use of any *loa* worshipped in true Vodoun, but a pantheon unique to the **Ravenloft** setting. The *loa* of Souragne number in the thousands, representing all manner of natural forces, locations and concepts. Many communities worship their deceased ancestors as *loa*. As such, it would be impossible to present anything resembling a comprehensive list here. For voodan and other characters from Souragne, however, we present here a selection of the greatest *loas* of the Souragnian faith, equally useful in a **Ravenloft** campaign or any fantasy game with a Vodoun-bent. Your DM may, of course, create others as she chooses.

The Maiden of the Swamp

Seen as somewhat flighty and unpredictable yet ultimately benign, the Maiden of the Swamp is one of the two most widely worshipped *loa* in all Souragne. She holds dominion over healing, those lost in the wild and growing things. Some view her as a servant of the Lord of the Dead, one who handles those tasks to which he is ill-suited; others consider her the only being of Souragne who can thwart his will. The Maiden is portrayed as a beautiful yet hauntingly sad woman of fey mien, clad in the simple attire of the lowest-born peasant.

Alignment: Chaotic good.

Schools: Abjuration, Conjunction, Enchantment

Domains: Animal, Healing, Plant



The Lord of the Dead

The other of Souragne's greatest *loa*, the lord of the dead is the single most dominant power of the entire faith. All those who die in Souragne are left unburied for four days, so that the Lord of the Dead may claim them as his own, should he choose. Many ceremonies serve no purpose other than to appease him. The Lord of the Dead is portrayed as a walking corpse in old-fashioned but well-kept finery.

Alignment: Lawful evil.

Schools: Divination, Enchantment, Necromancy

Domains: Death, Knowledge, Repose

Brahmbei, the Oracle

The shaper of fate and the seer of all things to come, Brahmbei was once the most powerful of the *loa*. He has grown old, however, and his powers have waned before those of the Lord of the Dead and the Maiden of the Swamp. Brahmbei is still a potent figure, however, and the people of Souragne pray to him for luck and knowledge. Due to his age, Brahmbei does not see as clearly as he once did and is prone to occasional fits of absent-mindedness. Further, he has been known to deceive those seeking knowledge, if he doing so serves to direct them toward their eventual destiny. He is portrayed as a kindly old man, occasionally doddering but still possessed of a powerful presence and piercing gaze.

Alignment: Lawful neutral.

Schools: Abjuration, Divination, Illusion

Domains: Knowledge, Law, Luck

Kurkva, the Wailing One

Kurkva is the rain, the clouds and the open sky. Once wed to the earth itself, or so legend has it, he lost his beloved when she splintered into

many smaller *loa* (including the Maiden of the Swamp and numerous lesser *loa* of specific places and animals). Thus does Kurkva always grieve; the winds are his cries, the rains his tears, the thunder his shouts of anguish. Despite his grief, however, Kurkva continues to do his duty to the world, directing his rains and winds where the natural order requires they fall. Followers pray to him for all

matters relating to rain and weather. He is portrayed as a middle-aged man clad all in white.

Alignment: Neutral.

Schools: Conjunction, Evocation, Transmutation

Domains: Air, Travel, Water

Lethede, the Lady of Roads

The wanderer and patron of travelers, Lethede is not an especially powerful *loa*, but she is very widely revered. Those far from home, those lost, and those whose loved ones are absent pray to Lethede. She is also patron of those who must undertake a spiritual journey, or face an upcoming life change. Lethede is portrayed as a dark-skinned young woman, her garb somewhat beaten and worn from travel, but her features tireless and determined.

Alignment: Lawful neutral.

Schools: Abjuration, Conjunction, Transmutation

Domains: Protection, Strength, Travel

Madrís Orundi, the Dancer

Easily one of the most popular of *loa*, if not the most popular, the Dancer is the patron of artists and lovers. She is muse, inspiration and matchmaker. Her most frequent prayers come from young people requesting that she ensure that the object of their affections return those feelings, but she listens equally to old married couples and artists



POZAS'OS



seeking a creative spark. She is portrayed as a woman in early middle-age, still possessed of the beauty of her younger years, but with the grace, poise and wisdom of one who has had some time to live in the world.

Alignment: Neutral good.

Schools: Divination, Enchantment, Illusion

Domains: Good, Luck, Protection

Ohuwaghnn, the Serpent King

Reviled as few other *loa* are, Ohuwaghnn represents the dangerous beasts of the swamp and, by extension, the hazards of the wild in general. While he has a few devout followers, most who pray to him seek to propitiate him, to turn his wrath aside, rather than to ask any true boons of him. Ohuwaghnn despises most of humanity and seeks a return to primal days when people dwelt only in scattered communities (if they lived at all), and the beasts of the wild dominated the land. He is normally portrayed as a great serpent, though he also appears in a few images as a gaunt man with reptilian eyes.

Alignment: Chaotic evil.

Schools: Divination, Necromancy, Transmutation

Domains: Animal, Destruction, Trickery

Ovun Borundir, the Warrior

Evoked by those who are going into battle, professional soldiers and brawlers alike, Ovun Borundir is the patron of all who live and die — and kill — by violence. He is not evil per se, but neither does he favor those who fight for righteous causes. In his eyes, it is not the reason for battle, but the battle itself, that is worthy. He is portrayed as a large man clad in armor, carrying a great mace and pierced by various swords and spears that seem to bother him not at all.

Alignment: Chaotic neutral.

Schools: Abjuration, Evocation, Transmutation

Domains: Protection, Strength, War

Sehkelo, the Queen in Gold

Mother of the rebellious and violent Tonthomba, Sehkelo is revered as the sun, the disperser of darkness, the queen of the sky. (She is also mother of the *loa* of the moon, but he is not

considered a primary *loa* and is not included here.) Although she brings the oppressive heat of the long Souragnian summer, this is considered a necessary evil to her presence and her efforts to banish the darkness. She is the patron of those who seek to thwart evil and who seek knowledge for the betterment of all. She is portrayed as a blonde warrior woman clad in golden raiment, carrying a spear.

Alignment: Lawful good.

Schools: Abjuration, Divination, Evocation

Domains: Fire, Sun, War

Tonthomba, the Burning Man

One of the wildest of the *loa*, Tonthomba is as capricious as the flame he represents. He is vital to civilization, providing light in the dark and heat in winter, but he is also one of the world's greatest destroyers, easily angered, difficult to control. He is revered by all who use fire, which means nearly all civilized men and women pray to him at some point. He is particularly worshipped by pyromaniacs and devotees of chaos and destruction. He is usually portrayed simply as a great being of flame; when he appears as human, it is as a muscular young man with deep red hair and flaming eyes.

Alignment: Chaotic evil.

Schools: Conjunction, Evocation, Enchantment

Domains: Chaos, Destruction, Fire

Ulwaddithri, the Consuming One

The Lord of Death may be the most feared of the dark *loa* of Souragne, but Ulwaddithri is the most reviled. The Consuming One represents the poisonous air of the deep swamp, the wasting touch of sickness, the hollow suffering of famine. She is plague and want and all things unwholesome. Many Souragnians pray to her, not to invoke her, but in hopes of assuaging her and directing her attentions elsewhere. Very few who are not hopelessly mad worship her as their primary *loa*. Ulwaddithri is portrayed as a beautiful, seductive woman, save for her left arm and leg, which are wasting away to disease and rot.

Alignment: Neutral evil.

Schools: Conjunction, Necromancy, Transmutation

Domains: Death, Evil, Trickery





New Spells and Feats



he voodan of Souragne have developed spells and techniques unknown elsewhere. Several of those appear in "To Honor and Obey," and are presented here in their entirety for use in your games. Although neither of these spells are technically evil in terms of subtype, casting them on an unwilling target calls for a powers check as though they were indeed evil. These spells and techniques are unique to the voodan, and they intend to keep them that way. It should be all but impossible for any non-vooodan — player character or NPC — to acquire them.

New Spells

Touch of the Doppelganger

Transmutation

Level: Brd 4, Sor/Wiz 4

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 round

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Target: One creature plus caster

Duration: Permanent

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

The caster changes physical appearance with the spell's target. Every physical feature, from general shape to hair color to the tiniest birthmark or scar, is perfectly duplicated. No amount of physical examination will reveal the change, though behavior that rings false may tip off those who know the individuals well that something is off. So long as both of those involved in the spell live, *true seeing* and similar magic reveals the truth. Once one is dead, however, even that option disappears, and nothing short of a *wish* or divine intervention reveals that the survivor's form is unnatural.

The creature targeted must be within one size category of the caster and must have the same number of limbs (though the limbs need not be of the same type). Both involved individuals retain their personalities and mental abilities, but they trade all physical abilities. They do not trade any extraordinary, spell-like, or supernatural abilities.

Heart and Soul

Enchantment (Compulsion) [Mind-Affecting]

Level: Clr 8, Sor/Wiz 8

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

Target: One humanoid

Duration: Permanent

Saving Throw: Will negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

The target of the spell becomes a complete slave of the caster. She initiates no behavior on her own, takes no actions, will not even eat or defend herself unless ordered to do so. She will, however, follow any orders given to the best of her ability; this includes anything overtly suicidal or against her (former) alignment. Essentially, the body lives and retains its memories, but the soul of the individual has either gone to the afterlife, or been trapped so far in the subconscious that it is no longer in control. The orders may take a great deal of time to carry out, and the individual might seem completely normal while so doing—until and unless events occur to disrupt his activities. At that point, it becomes clear that the individual possesses no decision-making abilities whatsoever.

Unlike the *dominate* spells, this spell does not create a telepathic bond. The caster must deliver all commands verbally and in a language the subject can understand.

Spells such as *dispel magic* or even *break enchantment* will not restore a victim of *heart and soul*. *Miracle* or *wish*, however, can do so. Further, *raise dead* or *resurrection* — if cast within the standard period of time from the moment the target suffered *heart and soul* — will restore the soul to the body and break the effects of the spell.

New Feats

Brew Greater Potion [Item Creation]

You can create potions of greater potency and higher spell-level than normal.

Prerequisite: Brew Potion, Caster level 9th

Benefit: You can create a potion of spells up to 9th level. Your choices in what sorts of spells to imbue into the potion are limited, however. The spell must be one that targets a specific number of creatures, not an area or an inanimate object. Further, once you have determined the cost to create the potion as per the standard potion brewing rules, you must then increase that cost by 50%. Otherwise, this feat works as Brew Potion.

Normal: With the standard potion brewing rules and feats, you can only create potions of spells up to 3rd level.



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