

# THE COUNTESS'S BALL



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# THE COUNTESS'S BALL



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# CREDITS

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*Disclaimer: The author is not liable for any mysteries surrounding cats, costumed beasts, old houses, incessant heartbeats, masquerade balls, oversized luggage, or wine cellars.*

## **ON THE COVER**

Artist Mel Williams presents an undead cat, which can be found and befriended in the following pages.

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# THE COUNTESS'S BALL

“The Countess's Ball” is a Halloween-themed adventure for 13th-level Player Characters (henceforth PCs). It is designed to be played over the course of one long session or two short sessions.

## A. GOOD EVENING...

To begin the adventure, read or paraphrase the following text:

The Countess herself has sent an invitation to you—to *you*, the humble subjects! Not only were you invited to the Countess's annual masquerade; she specifically asked that you pay her a more personal visit.

Now you stand in her mansion's grand foyer—a red marble chamber with a fifty-foot ceiling—shaking loose the few autumn leaves, which still cling to your cloak.

To your left—west—there yawns a wide hallway, in fact a series of rooms.

Straight ahead, the foyer rushes to meet a set of double-doors.

The PCs begin the adventure in area A, the foyer. To the west lies areas B1-B7, as described below. The double-doors are unlocked, and lead to area C.

## B1 - B7. THE SUITES

PCs, who explore these rooms *before* meeting Countess Edna Alene Poe in area C, will find nothing but chattering guests. If they explore them *after* the Countess requests that they mingle, then the PCs trigger the event “The Stranger Arrives” as soon as they enter area B7.

Either way, when the PCs first examine or approach the suites, read or paraphrase the following text:

The suites stand end-to-end, each connected by a single open archway; yet their collective length curves and twists, nearly obscuring one room's view of the next.

Each room glows with a single color, contrasting with the hues of its neighbors. Several guests chatter in each one.

The PCs begin the adventure in area A, the foyer. To the west lies Areas B1-B7, as described below. The double-doors are unlocked, and lead to area C.

## INSIDE THE SUITES

Each suite emphasizes a unique color, with curtains and carpet matching the hue of a single stained-glass window. Together the windows represent the cycle of mortality using the Countess herself as a model, with the first window depicting her as an infant and the last one showing her as an undead vampire.

Each suite is a cubical, roughly thirty feet per side. They are listed below in the order, in which a PC would first encounter them as they move from east to west.

Area	Color and Window Theme
B1	The room's sky-blue window shows a sleeping infant.
B2	The room's purple window shows a little girl playing with a doll.
B3	The room's green window shows a young woman with flowers in her hair.
B4	The room's orange window shows an older woman with a cat.
B5	The room's pearl-white window shows an elderly woman reading.
B6	The room's indigo window shows a woman's eyeless, withered corpse.
B7	The room's jet-black curtains and carpet are the only ones, which fail to match their accompanying window; the blood-red window depicts a vampire with extended fangs.

While striking, the rooms hold nothing of interest to the PCs besides guests (below), until the Countess asks them to mingle.

Once the Countess has asked the PCs to mingle, *and* the PCs have reached area B7, run the event, "The Stranger Arrives."

## PARTY GUESTS

In each of the suites, the PCs find 1d4 + 1 party guests. The guests greet the PCs jovially, brag about their costumes, and maintain a pleasant but superficial tone. Use the following table to decide which sorts of guests the PCs find.

D6 Roll	The Guest at the Masquerade
1	The guest's fancy dress or suit contrasts with their skull-shaped mask and skeletal gloves. If any PC makes a pun involving bones or skeletons, the guest gives them a candied apple, which works as a <i>potion of greater healing</i> . This can only be earned once.
2	The black-robed guest wears a toothy, green-skinned mask and pointed hat with a broad brim. If any PC makes a pun involving witches, brews, curses, or cauldrons, they get a cinnamon lollypop, which is a <i>potion of fire-breathing</i> . It can only be earned once.
3	The guest wears a black cat costume. If any PC makes a pun involving cats, the guest delivers a playful kiss, which functions as the spell <i>aid</i> . This reward can only be earned once.
4	Smiling beneath two red horns and playfully brandishing a toy pitchfork, the guest enjoys a glass of wine. If any PC makes a pun about devils, demons, or hell, they get a bar of chocolate that functions as a <i>potion of haste</i> . This can only be earned once.
5	A cantrip causes this costume's Jack-O'-Lantern-shaped helmet to glow orange. If any PC makes a pun about pumpkins, gourds, or squash, the guest gives them a rope of black licorice; it confers the <i>poisoned</i> condition for an hour if anyone eats it. This reward can be earned multiple times.
6	This guest's scaly green costume features tentacles, which hang from where the mask's mouth would be. If any PC makes a pun about sea monsters, the guest hands over a book, whose title is "scary stories." The book is actually a scroll of <i>darkness</i> , which is cast as soon as anyone begins to read the book. This reward can only be earned once.

## THE STRANGER ARRIVES

A **mummy lord** dressed as a pirate arrives, entering area A through the front door. It immediately advances on the PCs.

Read or paraphrase the following text to begin the event:

Suddenly, the front doors swing open with a thunderous slam. Straining and peering through the curved hallway, you catch a glimpse of a cadaverous figure advancing on you!

A desiccated skull groans beneath a three-cornered hat, nodding to the corpse of a parrot that still clings to the creature's shoulder. His arms swing in an asymmetrical arc: one of them ends in a hook instead of a hand.

As he crosses the first room, all those standing in its blue light collapse to the floor, then begin to writhe...

As the mummy lord crosses each room, the guests in that room collapse, then immediately rise as hostile **mummies** with just 1 hit point.

When the PCs defeat the mummy lord, they have mingled with the guests to the Countess's satisfaction.

**Treasure.** The mummy lord carries a scimitar, whose attunement allows the owner to cast *thunderwave* once per day by laughing.

## C. THE LOUNGE

Countess Edna Alene Poe awaits the PCs in this chamber. When the PCs enter, read or paraphrase the following text:

A half-circle of couches rise before you, covered in discarded cloaks. A set of stairs lead downward, while a second set of double-doors block your view to a chamber beyond.

A well-dressed woman sprawls leisurely atop one sofa, heedless of the cloaks beneath her. Regarding you with the slightest nod, she calls out a greeting.

"Ah, good evening; how lovely of you to answer my invitation!" She pauses for a moment. "Don't be so nervous," she frowns. "It's my party, and I want you to have *fun* above all else. Speaking of which, I have three favors to ask." Smiling, she adds, "Do them, and perhaps you will earn *my* favor."

The stairway leads to areas D and E; the other double-doors lead to area F (though they remain magically locked to all, except those who carry the Countess's key).

The Countess wants the PCs to do three things: (1) "demonstrate that you are the life of the party," which means running the event "The Stranger Arrives," (2) "help Albrecht in the wine cellar," which means running the event "The Heart in the Walls," and (3) "find my pet kitty," which means running the event "The Cat and the Box."

Once the PCs have completed (1) - (3), run the event "Her Reward," described below. Until the PCs complete *all* of (1) - (3), she shows no further interest in them.

## HER REWARD

When the PCs have completed the Countess's tasks and returned to her, read or paraphrase the following text:

“Well done, well done indeed!” The countess cackles as she sits upright, stands, and then floats into the air.

“Truly you are the life of the party,” she grins. A pair of sharp fangs protrude from her mouth. “Now die right here, and join me forever in undeath!”

As she hovers, the discarded cloaks take flight with her!

A life’s worth of books threaten to explode from the shelves, in which they have been too tightly crammed. Only one section of wall is spared the burden. In one corner, you spy a collection of luggage: a bag with buckles, a duffel, and a large, oblong suitcase. From some unseen place there drones a faint but shrill whine. The staircase continues downward to a musty chamber.

The Countess is a hostile **vampire** with a fly (hover) speed of 20 feet, who has the following mythic trait:

***Blood is the Life (Mythic Trait, Recharges after a Short or Long Rest):*** If Countess Edna Alene Poe is reduced to 0 hit points, she does not die or fall unconscious. Instead, she gains 80 hit points. In place of her previous form, the Countess now appears as a misty apparition with a fiendish shape. In this form the Countess gains immunity to the Charmed, Exhausted, Frightened, Grappled, Paralyzed, Petrified, Poisoned, Prone, and Restrained conditions.

The cloaks that fly up into the air are actually 1d4 + 2 **cloakers**, which obey the Countess's mental commands.

Once the Countess's mythic form has been defeated, she becomes a cloud of mist, which seeps under the doorway to area F to her coffin.

## D. THE LIBRARY

From area C a descending staircase leads to a library, then continues to the wine cellar (area E). Read or paraphrase the following text if the PCs approach:

The books are thoroughly uninteresting: dry old volumes of profits and loss, family records without noteworthy details, and practical manuals about housekeeping abound.

The luggage contains nothing of note, except for the oblong suitcase, which is locked. A DC 13 proficiency check with a tool kit is sufficient to unlock it. Inside is a withered husk of a human corpse.

PCs who succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check can identify the whine as some kind of vocalization. PCs who succeed on a DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check can recognize it as a cat. PCs, who succeed on a subsequent DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check, discover that the sound is coming from behind the bare section of wall.

A variety of checks could be used to destroy the section of wall, which muffles the sound of a yowling, one-eyed, undead cat. Whatever the check, be it Strength (Athletics) or a proficiency check with a tool kit (such as Thieves’ Tools or Artisan’s Tools), the DC is 13.

Once the PCs destroy the wall, revealing the source of the noise, run the event “The Cat and Box,” described below.

## THE CAT AND THE BOX

A pair of **wraiths** and four **crawling claws** escape from the cavity behind the wall, as a third **wraith** arises from the oblong suitcase. In addition, the PCs can spy an undead cat, which avoids the ensuing combat. Read or paraphrase the following text:

As you push away the last chunk of the wall, a blast of freezing, putrid air assaults your face! Then out of the darkened cavity, there float a pair of grim, shadowy figures. One looks like an axe-wielding man; the other a woman bearing axe-wounds. Behind them there sits a ragged, half-skeletal house-cat with a single glowing eye.

As you brace yourself, a third ghostly figure arises from the oblong suitcase!

The wraiths fight until they reach 0 hit points and perish.

When the PCs have defeated the wraiths, they have found the Countess's cat to her satisfaction.

**Treasure.** The undead cat becomes friendly toward the PCs, happily serving as a familiar or pet. It has the same statistics as a common **cat**, except that its creature type is undead and it has a zombie's Undead Fortitude trait.

## E. THE WINE CELLAR

From area D the staircase terminates in a wine cellar. Read or paraphrase the following text if the PCs enter:

A man's gruff voice scrapes like pebbles against a boat's bottom. “The worms crawl in, the worms crawl out, the worms play knucklebones in your snout,” he sings. Descending the staircase, you find a full wine cellar. At one end a gaunt figure in a vest is working on a wall. Bricks and mortar lie nearby. At your approach, he spins around and waves a trowel. “Hello there, would you give me a hand?”

The “man” is a **ghast** named Albrecht and a favorite servant of the Countess. As revenge for insulting him, Albrecht has chained seven **vampire spawn** to the walls of an alcove, which he is now covering with brick.

Sealed in the alcove with the vampire spawn, however, is an undead human heart, which beats ever louder as the PCs stay in the wine cellar.

Albrecht is friendly and will not attack the PCs unless provoked. Instead, he asks the PCs to help him brick up the wall he is finishing.

A PC who succeeds on a DC 13 check with Artisan's Tools successfully helps Albrecht. As thanks, he gives them a scroll of *polymorph*. If a PC attempts and fails, Albrecht barks that they're doing it wrong and waves them away.

Albrecht finishes the wall in a few moments, with or without the PCs' help. At that point, run “The Heart in the Walls.”

## THE HEART IN THE WALLS

Soon after their initial interaction, Albrecht becomes anxious, asking if the PCs hear something. A few moments later, he grows



agitated, then begins to scream of an intolerably loud heartbeat. PCs who succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check hear the heartbeat; too. Once at least one PC has heard the heartbeat, the seven vampire spawn explode from the newly-built wall and attack.

Once the PCs have defeated the vampire spawn, they have helped Albrecht to the Countess's satisfaction.

**Treasure.** The undead heart has the powers and statistics of an *ioun stone of protection*.

## F. HER CRYPT

This room's door cannot be opened, except by using a key the Countess carries—a blood-red key, whose head is shaped like a droplet. When the Countess is defeated in battle, the key can be recovered. Read the following as the PCs open the door.

From the floor of a wide, blood-red marble chamber, there rises a tiered dais. In its center lies a pearl-colored coffin. As the doors open, you spy the last wisp of a fog-cloud slip inside. Only a crystal chandelier above lights the room.

The coffin is indeed the Countess's resting place, and if defeated, her corpse can be destroyed here by beheading it or with a stake through the heart.

Lurking by, however, is Springtoad, a **death slaad** in a jester's costume and a personal servant to the Countess. He has used a scroll to cast *invisibility* on himself, and he waits on the room's other side.

When the PCs cross the chamber, Springtoad cuts the rope holding the chandelier, prompting the PCs to make a DC 13 Dexterity save or else take 2d4 bludgeoning and 2d4 fire damage. Springtoad then whistles, summoning 1d4 **apes** in jester costumes, who join in the attack.

## EPILOGUE

Read or paraphrase the following as the PCs finally destroy the Countess:

All around you, the walls and floor begin to tremble. The wide stone cracks. Fissures lengthen and linger, like shadows in the dying of the day. The whole mansion threatens to bury you in its collapsing depths!

PCs, who cannot leave the mansion by magical means, must successfully make *three* DC 13 ability checks of their player's choosing. Any skill is allowed, so long as the player explains how it assists in their escape. *No skill can be attempted more than once.* The Dungeon Master is the final arbiter for whether a skill can be used.

Any PC who fails three of these checks before making three of them is unable to escape the collapse; they take 20d6 bludgeoning damage, or half with a successful DC 18 Dexterity saving throw.

Surviving PCs advance to level 14.