

Shadows over
VATHAK

ROTTING ON THE VINE

By ISMAEL ALVAREZ

5TH EDITION HORROR

In wine, there's truth and mourning in
Shadows over Vathak Horror Roleplaying Game

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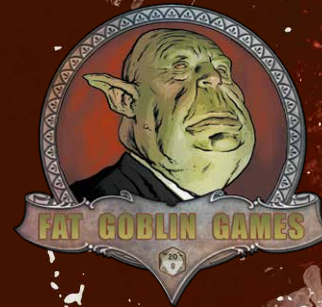
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Based in South Carolina, USA, Fat Goblin Games was founded in 2011 to create Pathfinder Roleplaying Game compatible products. With a focus on high-quality production values and providing a creative environment for our team of freelancers (The Fat Goblin Hoarde), Fat Goblin Games has quickly become a recognized force in the world of Third Party Publishers of not just the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game and 5th Edition Fantasy, but also supporting the vs. M Engine, our own Difference Engine, and TinyD6 games originally produced by Gallant Knight Games. With hundreds of support books, visual aids, campaign settings, and quality stock art, Fat Goblin Games continues to provide exciting content and fantastic worlds in which gamers can immerse themselves.

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Rotting on the Vine is intended for four players with an average party level of 3 to 4.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Rotting on the Vine is an adventure intended for a party of 3rd to 4th-level characters. The scenario can take place in any modestly sized town or city, and highlights any local culinary scene, whether that scene happens in a mid-sized hamlet or a small to large metropolitan city.

A cooking community is rocked when a number of prominent chefs are murdered in cold blood. Some suspect a jealous rival or a failed apprentice. After a chef and cook are murdered, the remaining culinary experts band together to hire investigators willing to find the killer and bring them to justice before another of their ranks is found dead.

The party is likely approached when they arrive at a tavern, as a clerk for the chef collective notices their weapons. The clerk begs them desperately for help, saying that he will be whipped if he fails to find someone willing to help. Upon agreeing, the clerk tells the party the basic details of the murders, as well as the terms. The party can ask to meet the collective, but the chefs are far more interested in the investigation starting swiftly and in earnest.

ADVENTURE LOCATION

This scenario can be placed in any small town to large metropolis, as long as it could feasibly have a culinary scene, even if it is not a fancy one. As always, feel free to adapt the material presented here as you see fit to make it work within your campaign.

This adventure fits in best with the grim setting of Shadows over Vathak, and could be placed in a number of its various towns or cities.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

As the Gamemaster, you must decide how best to involve the players in this adventure. The easiest method is for them to simply be travelling through when they get swept into the events of the adventure.

- A character who has a background in cooking may be compelled to help, especially if they happened to know one of the victims. It is also possible that a character who is an accomplished chef may receive a threatening letter saying that they are next.
- The church of the One True God could be involved and ask the group to complete the job on their behalf. It is likely that a powerful local authority favors one or more of the chefs and wishes to keep them safe, trading favors for favors to get the church to use their influence.
- One of the chefs may have an ingredient or item that the group needs, and offers a barter. In this case, the matter of the murders will not rear its ugly head until the party goes to ask for the item, at which time the chef in question will ask for the party to assist in catching the murderer.
- As a ploy, the group may find a wanted poster advertising a reward for the capture of the alleged killer. The poster has no sketch of the perpetrator as none have seen the killer. However, it does provide the information about the killings, as well as a contact for more details.

SHADOWS OVER VATHAK

Welcome to the world of Shadows over Vathak, a realm of dwindling hope and despair. As players, your characters fight to survive in a land threatened with destruction by the rise of the ancient and evil Old Ones and their spawn. Your characters may represent points of light in the darkness or give in to wicked temptations. Most will fall somewhere in between — survivors struggling to eke out another day. Though the followers of the One True God speak of divine providence while battling the Old Ones, the sins of the Church often rival those of their enemies. In the world of Vathak, your character's perceptions of heroes and villains is a thin line drawn by their own personal morality and, of course, determined by the victor.

This adventure is set in the dark fantasy world of Vathak. As such there are references to the history, characters, and locations of that world. However, with a little bit of alteration, these adventures can be suited for any horror themed 5th edition game.

If you are new to Shadows over Vathak, make sure you join our [Patreon](#) and receive a free copy of the *Explorer's Guide to Vathak*.

RUNNING THIS ADVENTURE

To run this adventure, it is recommended that you have copies of the 5th Edition core rulebooks.

In this adventure you might come across spells, abilities, creatures, magic items, and other references to content from these corebooks. When this happens that item will appear in bold/red text, like this:

“The **goblins** are waiting to attack the caravan as it comes around the steep bend.”

If the content is new (such as monsters or equipment) and not included in one of the corebooks, we will make note of the source or include the item in an appendix to the adventure.

ABBREVIATIONS

The following are a collection of common abbreviations that might be used in this adventure.

AC	Armor Class	GP	Gold pieces
CE	Chaotic Evil	HP	Hit Points
CG	Chaotic Good	LE	Lawful Evil
CN	Chaotic Neutral	LG	Lawful Good
cp	Copper pieces	LN	Lawful Neutral
CR	Challenge Rating	N or TN	Neutral, or True Neutral
d%	Two d10s die one as the 10s the other as the 1s	NE	Neutral Evil
d10	A die of 10 sides	NG	Neutral Good
d12	A die of 12 sides	NPC	Non-Player Character
d20	A die of 20 sides	PC	Player Character
d4	A die of 4 sides	pp	Platinum pieces
d6	A die of 6 sides	sp	Silver Pieces
d8	A die of 8 sides	Stats	The statistical representation of a character
DC	Difficulty Class	XP	Experience Points
EL	Encounter Level		
EP	Electrum Pieces		
GM	Game Master		



BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

As you stroll into the evening air in twilight, the local eateries are still venting warmth and pleasant aromas of food. As restaurant patrons slowly meander the streets heading in and out of these eateries, you see your contact...

The party goes to meet with Gottfrid, the owner of the Whiskey Wraith tavern. Gottfrid has long acted as an intermediary in the collective's disputes, and is a trusted ally. Thus, the collective decided to turn to him to officiate the hiring of the group to hunt down and stop the killer.

Gottfrid leads the party to the tavern, and takes the time and private space to inform the party of the recent events, telling them about the murders. The two murder victims were rival chefs, Gustav and Lars. They came into conflict over who would teach an apprentice, Anika. Somehow in their bickering, they caused Anika's death, and they both blamed each other.

Gustav was drowned by wine a week ago, though the authorities are not sure how it happened as his body was completely dry. Lars was killed in an identical way a few days ago, just as the local authorities

were about to question him about Gustav's murder. Furtive rumors have placed the blame on the spirit of Anika, but local spirit speakers have failed to connect to her soul.

The only clue to the identity of the next victim is the cork of a wine bottle that was left at the site of each murder.

Gottfrid promises 250 gp from the collective for each party member who assists in apprehending the murderer, dead or alive. The collective is even willing to offer one of their restaurants to the party if they can succeed before another murder takes place. Though Gottfrid does not share this information, the restaurant in question is a failing business that they were going to sell off anyway.

If the party asks for details, Gottfrid can provide the corks left at the scene of the crime, as well as a little bit of extra information. The wine used to drown Gustav is a rare vintage only found in colder climates. Gustav had exactly one bottle that went missing during the murder. Also, Gottfrid knows that Lars and Anika were briefly involved romantically, according to a letter that Lars was writing at the time of his murder.

INVESTIGATION

The investigation of the murder scenes should be brief, and it is unlikely that the party will need to go to both scenes. During the investigation, the party may uncover a few clues as to the nature of the rivalry between Lars and Gustav, but it only amounts to saucy accounts of their dirty designs, and Anika's suffering due to their petty bickering.

A few minutes into the investigation, the party hears a crash in the basement of the home they are investigating. The first person to investigate the noise finds a broken wine bottle, and is attacked!

The spilled wine congeals to form a strange red ooze!

ENCOUNTER: RED OOZE

Modified **gray ooze** (1)

For Stronger Parties. Consider attacking with up to 3 modified gray ooze for a strong party.

The ooze has the statistics of a **gray ooze**, but it is missing the Corrode Metal ability and the ability to corrode armor.

Once defeated, the ooze appears to leave behind a single cork. Investigating the broken wine bottle discovers that it was a brand made in a northern region, similar to if not identical to the wine bottle that went missing. There is only one distributor in town that can get their hands on this wine. After a quick consultation with Gottfrid, the party can head to this distributor.

TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING

The party is directed to speak with Milos, a romni businessman of renown. When the party arrives, his subordinates are visibly nervous, and say that Milos is not available. If pressed, they confess that Milos has gone missing, and they are not sure where he went. If his subordinates realize the group is investigating the murders, they ask them to help in the search. A quick search of Milos's office finds that it has been ransacked, and that a trail of red wine leads out the window, which seems to have been opened and closed carefully by a hand dripping with more red wine.

Following the trail of red wine leads to the restaurant that the collective is looking to sell. An astute character may notice that this is the restaurant promised to the party, if such a promise was made. The front door has had its lock broken, and the trail of wine leads to the basement. A cry for help is cut short by a painful gurgle, and the sounds of struggle as the party arrives in time to see a horrid sight.

Milos is dead on the floor of the basement as the party descends the stairs. His face is frozen in fear, and his hands are held to his neck. He appears to have clawed away some of the skin on his neck in a vain attempt to remove something. A DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check reveals that Milos was asphyxiated.

BITTERSWEET

Within a minute of investigating Milos, three figures emerge from the shadows. They are none other than Anika, Gustav, and Lars. Within moments of showing themselves, the figures shift into an amorphous form resembling the red wine oozes that the party fought earlier, but with a humanoid shape. The three creatures then shift into different forms, showing themselves to be impeccable shapechangers.

ENCOUNTER: RED PRETENDERS

Modified **doppelganger** (3)

For Stronger Parties. If the party is especially strong, consider having Milos rise as a red pretender and join the fight.

Treat these creatures as **doppelgangers** that also have the following traits:

Amorphous. The pretender can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

Drown. The pretender can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. The first time it enters a creature's space in a turn, that creature takes 3 (1d6) necrotic damage. A creature that starts its turn in the same space as the pretender takes 3 (1d6) necrotic damage. A creature reduced to 0 hp in this way instantly dies, and has a 50% chance of coming back as a red pretender within a minute of death.

CONCLUSION

Once defeated, the red pretenders turn back into wine. In the wreckage of the fight, the group spots two letters. Each is from Anika, with one addressed to Gustav, and one to Lars. Her letters were meant as goodbyes to each of them, saying that she was going with Milos, and that her heart belonged to him. It is unclear whether the letters made their way to their intended recipients, but her words provide a clue as to what happened.

If the party investigates the specific brands of wine that come from the north, they find that all such locally owned wine bottles have gone missing, and that they had recently been shipped to several dozen locations throughout Vathak. You can end the session by saying that mysterious trails of wine have been found throughout the city, and that strange oozing figures have been sighted peering into windows and slinking through alleys. The killers have been apprehended, and the party is given their reward, and are even given the now creepy restaurant where that seemed to draw the attention of the ooze creature.

The mystery of the wine ooze creatures will persist, troubling the folk of this town in their dreams and twilight hours.



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