

HAUNTED SITES

A Ravenloft Netbook

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Welcome to the second of our compilation netbooks, this time presenting all the entries in the Haunted Sites contest, announced in DRAGON® Magazine #252 (October 1998). The premise was simple enough: Create a haunted abode or location for the Ravenloft campaign setting, in a thousand words or less. As with the Terror From Above contest, the results were wildly creative. While some entries are specifically tied to either Ravenloft or Gothic Earth, nearly all can be easily adapted to any setting.

Many thanks to all those who entered the contest, the fans who asked for this book, and specific thanks to Cindi Rice (TSR RAVENLOFT® editor) and David Gross (DRAGON® Magazine editor), without whose cooperation this netbook could not have been possible. Lastly, a final congratulations to the contest winners!

Contest Winners

Joseph Dunn
Columbus, Ohio
for
“The Phantom Oracle”

Margaret L. Carter
Annapolis, Maryland
for
“Children in the Attic”

Jaleigh Johnson
Arthur, Illinois
for
“Rose Garden”

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HAUNTED SITES: INTRODUCTION

Young Bartleby stood before the aged, drooping house on the secluded country lane, clutching the letter in a trembling hand.

The reclusive Grimsdyke was one of society's greatest authors, a celebrated master of the ghost story. However, even as Grimsdyke's fame had spread, the man himself had retreated from the world. Countless young writers had sought to study under his tutelage, but their letters had all been returned unopened. All their letters, save one.

Bartleby stopped at the front step to reread the invitation he had received, and to gather his courage. Out of all the young writers vying for Grimsdyke's attention, for some unknowable reason the famed author had chosen to reply to Bartleby, and to Bartleby only, inviting the young man to his home.

Holding his breath in anticipation, Bartleby raised the door's heavy brass knocker and rapped once, twice, thrice.

There was no answer from within. After several more knocks upon the door, and several minutes of waiting, Bartleby's anxiety returned. Now, however, he pondered the fate of the aged hermit Grimsdyke, fearing the worst. Cautiously, he tried the handle on the heavy front door, and found it unlocked.

Slowly, the door swung open, and Bartleby took a tentative step inside the home. Thick tomes were stacked on every surface and all along the walls of the room that greeted him, and the air was thick with dust.

"Excuse me," called out the young man. "Mister Grimsdyke?" Bartleby slowly moved deeper into the darkened house. "Are you here, Mister Grimsdyke? Are you well?" Bartleby's calls were muffled in the musty air, and they brought no reply.

As Bartleby stepped into the next room, he finally found some sign of life. A wide staircase, illuminated by a golden beam of summer sun streaming in through a high window, ascended into the shadows of the second floor. Though the posts of the heavy banister, Bartleby spied a young and joyous boy, silently playing on the steps, shining in the sunbeam.

"Pardon me," offered Bartleby, approaching the stairs to better greet the child, "but could you tell me if a mister—" Bartleby's introduction died in his throat, for as he rounded the banister, the "child" faded from view. A trick of the light; the boy had been nothing more than motes of dust, dancing in the light of the sun.

Bartleby stood rooted to the spot for several minutes, his mind swimming and quite unable to grasp how his eyes could have been so thoroughly fooled.

When Bartleby heard the voice, it startled him so terribly he gasped, and only then did he realize how dry his throat had become.

"Well?" the whiskeyed voice called out again. "Who goes there?"

Bartleby collected his wits and finally replied.

"I'm Bartleby, sir! I... I'm sorry to intrude, but there was no answer at the door... I-I have an invitation..." Bartleby paused a moment to think. "Excuse me, sir, but are you Mister Grimsdyke?"

The shadows at the top of the stairs were silent for a moment before responding.

"I am. And I've been waiting for you. Come upstairs."

To finally hear the voice of the idol he had come to meet did much to steady Bartleby's nerves, so that by the time he reached the second floor, the illusory child had been all but forgotten. At the top of the stairs, Bartleby found the landing marked the middle of a long hallway, each side lined with several doors. Unsure where to go, he peered first one way, then the other. As he peered off to his left, a woman stepped into view at the end of the hall. She was about Bartleby's age, her features beautiful even in the shadows. She took in Bartleby with kind eyes and the hint of a smile upon her lips, but as she stepped forward to greet him, the young man's attention was stolen by the return of the rasping voice.

"In here, Bartleby." Grimsdyke's voice came from the door just to Bartleby's right, so close that it startled him. Bartleby stepped towards the door. His mind then jumping back to the lady, he turned back towards her to make a proper introduction.

She was gone. She had never been there. Where she had stood, where Bartleby had seen a lovely young woman, there was now nothing more than a dark shadow, distorted by imperfections in the plastered wall. Bartleby felt a chill run through his veins as he began to understand the nature of his surroundings.

His thoughts churning, Bartleby followed Grimsdyke's voice into a study, choked with even more books than the rooms before. It was there that Bartleby finally found himself facing the great author.

Grimsdyke sat at a heavy desk, cluttered by papers and folios, even more tomes piled up on the floor around him. His legs wrapped in a blanket, Grimsdyke seemed not so much to be sitting as his desk as cocooned within it. His sixty years weighed heavily upon every feature of his face, and he peered up at Bartleby with passionless eyes.

"Have a seat," offered Grimsdyke, gesturing to one of the less cluttered chairs. After clearing the seat of its books, Bartleby accepted the invitation.

"So," continued Grimsdyke at last, "I understand you wish to know the secret of my inspiration."

"I did, and do," replied Bartleby, the excitement in his voice battling with his need for decorum. "But after

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what I've seen in this house, I suspect I've learned half your secret already."

Grimsdyke frowned. "In what sense?"

Bartleby could not help a nervous grin. "The child on the stairs, and the woman in the hall."—Bartleby noticed a hint of pain slip behind Grimsdyke's gaze—"They are spirits, are they not?"

"One might say." Grimsdyke's voice sounded tired.

"This home is haunted, is it not?"

"One might say."

Bartleby stopped to consider his next question.

"I fear that I go too far, but I must ask—do you know who these ghosts were in life?"

A slow and pained smile crept across Grimsdyke's face, and he too seemed to consider his words before replying.

"They were my family," Grimsdyke said, the smile draining from him. "One might say."

Bartleby's gaze slipped to the dusty floor. "I'm very sorry. I can only imagine what it must be like for you, first to lose your loved ones, and then to be haunted by..."

Bartleby's rambling trailed off as waves of confusion washed his face. His mouth still lightly ajar, he looked at Grimsdyke again, his eyes searching. Grimsdyke grimaced.

"Ask it," said the aged author.

"Well," Bartleby stammered. "It's just that... Well, I've studied everything you've ever written, and everything ever written about you. But..."

"Do go on," urged Grimsdyke, grim amusement in his voice.

"Well, sir, in all my studies I never found any mention that you had married, or had a child, much less lost them."

Grimsdyke smiled once again, but his eyes squeezed shut in pain. "Your studies were not incorrect. I never married. The woman you saw in the hall was a damsel I loved from afar in my youth. I rose from my bed each morning merely for the hope of seeing her pass me by in the street. She could have been the passion of my life, but I never had the courage to so much as speak to her."

Bartleby's eyes betrayed his deepening confusion.

"The woman you saw is the beautiful wife I never wed, and the boy you saw is the beloved child we never had."

"Never had?" The words trickled from Bartleby's lips, almost before the thought had been formed. "But if you never had a son, then what did I encounter on the steps?"

"Or in the hall, for that matter," continued Grimsdyke. "The woman I adored is very much so still alive, as is her husband, as are their children and their grandchildren."

Grimsdyke released an anguished chuckle. "In my stories, I write about ghosts of the dead, so perhaps that's what you expected here. But it is not so. At night, these halls echo with the laughter of the love I never knew. I am haunted by the choices I have made, by those things I left undone. I am an old man, haunted not by death, but by the life I never led."

"Ghosts of the living?" replied Bartleby, still trying to understand.

"No, not of the living. I am surrounded by the ghosts of life." Grimsdyke leaned forward, speaking to Bartleby in a conspiratorial tone. "I have not lived my life, young man, I merely haunted it. Now it haunts me in turn. In that light, the ghosts of death hold no fear for me, for the choices I have made in life marked me as one of them despite my beating heart."

Grimsdyke leaned back in his chair again. "That is the secret of my inspiration, young man."

Bartleby frowned, comprehending at last. "But if you regret your life so very much, is it not too late to change it? You have many admirers, sir! Why do you remain in this old house, surrounded by these phantoms?"

Grimsdyke touched a finger to the corner of his eye, then gazed out into the hall as he replied.

"One cannot build a house upon a foundation of cobwebs, my boy. When I turn away from my phantoms,"—Grimsdyke continued as his gaze turned back to Bartleby—"I see nothing else to keep me warm at night. My ghosts and my regrets are all that I have. All, other than this..."

Reaching into the stacks of papers on his desk, Grimsdyke produced a thick folio, stuffed full of manuscripts, and tossed it to the wide-eyed Bartleby.

"Here. All my unpublished notes and manuscripts. Enough ghost stories to fill an author's career. They're yours, to do with as you wish."

"But why give them to me? Why not publish these tales yourself?"

"Because I tire of the life I made for myself. I made this house so empty that the void had to fill itself with the whispers of life. I read your letter, and saw that you were following my path. Take these stories. Use these ghosts to fill your pages, but keep your life for yourself. Now go. It is time for me to join my phantoms. In this house, *you* are the unwanted spirit."

Bartleby stood and walked to the door in awed silence. At the door he paused, thinking better of his manners, and turned to thank his idol.

In Grimsdyke's chair sat only a stack of yellowed books, with a moth-eaten blanket to cover them.



THE ABBEY OF KYLDISS

by Jay Paladino
Rolla, Missouri

Tucked away frighteningly near where mortal man dwells, the odd sandstone abbey of Kyldiss lies in a shallow grassy bowl, surrounded on three sides by towering peaks of wet, basalt rock, the dark heights wine-dark with the heavy moisture that drifts inland from the distant sea. A narrow, rutted dirt path winds down from the upper plains to the ancient wrought iron gates that pierce the long black fence that surrounds the abbey grounds. And, on this day, I found myself wandering down the path, drawn by the curiosity of the strange, compelled by the self-destructive search for knowledge that has damned more than one unquiet mind.

The Guardians of the Gate, a Vistani man and women, watched me pass with dark, shadowed eyes, and drawn faces. Every year, on the day after the winter solstice, a new pair of gypsies would arrive to guard the gates for a year. No one knew why the transient gypsies would consent to standing sentinel over the gates for a year, but it was rumored that it was one of the final trials to becoming an Elder amongst the clannish Vistani; a trial that left the couple with the strange otherworldly compassion, and knowledge of eldritch horrors that leant their wandering packs the necessary edge for survival in the dark realms.

I drifted down the well-worn dirt path to the towering orange-yellow walls of the dark-stained abbey. Passing through the giant-size double doors of swollen, dark wood, I entered a vast and shadowed chamber. The slate flagstones of the abbey floor were of irregular shape, and the maze of spidery, dark lines suggestively tugged at the back of my mind, almost as if the wandering lines were a sinister pattern hidden beneath my feet, spelling out some elder words in a forgotten tongue. I quickly paced to the center of the chamber, where beneath the lofted crystal dome a large well rested in the shaft of sunlight.

The well was walled with the quarried basalt blocks from the nearby mountains, and gazing over the waist-height barrier, I beheld the oddest sight: a viscous black fluid that absorbed the falling shafts of sunlight without glimmer, or reflection. I stepped back to ponder this tantalizing puzzle of jumbled oddities, when I beheld the

Guardians coming down the path to begin shepherding the pilgrims out of the abbey grounds. Every evening, the guardians would expel everyone from the abbey, by force if necessary, and return to their posts as the sun vanished behind the wall of dark basalt.

In an instant, I made my horrible decision. I raced back to the gate, and turned sharply and ran down the length of the black, iron fence. I hid in a low cluster of scraggly bushes, pulling my dark cloak tight about my body, so that I became one with the growing shadows. I watched as the Vistani harried the last visitors beyond the barrier, as the sky purpled and blackened.

I watched in rising fear, as a wall of grey mist began to flow down the mountains and settle over the deep hollow of the abbey. The creeping mists ended at the iron fence, and swirled in agitation at being balked by such a paltry, tangible obstruction. The full moon began its rapid ascent into the sky, shedding silvery luminescence over the surging shadows of the heavy mist.

Distantly, from the now-hidden abbey, I began to hear, almost feel, a faint trilling of a flute. With faltering steps, I arose from my concealment and began to shuffle down to the abbey, drawn by the unseen call of the strange, ethereal music. Abruptly, yawning from the mists like the maw of a giant beast, the dark portal of the abbey appeared. Without a glance backwards, I quietly eased inside the ancient walls.

The gibbous moon, high over the crystal dome, was blurred into obscurity by the gently surging mists. The silvery light muted and diffuse, the fog began to glow with the pearlescent light. Echoing oddly in the vaulted chamber, the haunting notes of the ghostly flute made my heart beat in a wild, halting rhythm. A new sound crept slowly into my awareness, and I turned slightly to view the doorway, and was struck dumb with horror!

A wave of surging bodies crashed soundlessly through the abbey. The mindless undead stalked with a terrible purpose toward the center of the abbey, and the dark well. I watched in mounting fear, as the decaying remains of men and women shuffled past me, the stench of decay causing my guts to heave and rumble in rejection of that which should not be. In the midst of the shuffling undead, a few wavering, incorporeal forms drifted through the ranks, and a chill settled about my heart, slowing the beat, all the while the mad piping began swelling to a horrible crescendo of madness and ecstasy.

Watching with numb fascination, I observed the creatures approach the well, and lean over to gaze into the depths of the dark liquid. After gazing for a few moments, the undead would turn and vanish into the mists beyond the abbey door. A dread fascination crept over me, displacing my caution and wits, I joined the

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shuffling lines of undead, my mind screaming at brushing shoulders with ghouls, and breathing the foul fumes of wraiths. As I approached the well, I beheld a sight that mortal man could never have imagined. The undead wept.

Tears of putrescent decay coursed their way down faces ravaged by time. Wavering droplets of midnight essence fell from incorporeal eyes. The dark fluid of the well swallowed each offering silently.

Trembling, I approached the well, so different in the shimmering luminosity of the unseen moon than in the calm light of the rational day. Drawing a shuddering breath, I stared into the regrets of the undead. I saw that which would make the undead weep, and my mind shattered into fragments of madness, my world was plunged into darkness.

The Guardians of the Gate found me, or rather, I was told that a silent zombie laid me at their feet. I have remained with the Guardians now for three score years, and soon I too will join the shuffling masses that visit the dread abbey of Kyldiss.

I beheld in that one fleeting glimpse, that which would make the undead weep, and would drive a mortal man to madness. I am now forever caught between the two worlds, unable to live in one, and unwilling to journey to the other. For in the moment, I saw my life, my death, and the eternity beyond. For a man, to be confronted by the brevity of his life in comparison to the eternity of death, to come face to face with the knowledge of his own insignificance, his own finitude, this is madness. Life is an exercise in futility.

For the undead, they see that which is lost, the one brief moment when they too held life, the candle flame against the dark ocean of eternity. And so they weep, in the abbey of Kyldiss, the dread conscience of the Undead, and they join their sorrows with those who have come before, and add to the pool of the tears, the regrets of the undead.



ALMADRASK'S LIGHTHOUSE

by Joseph P. Laycock
Amherst, Massachusetts

This dreary, decaying lighthouse can keep grim countenance over the rocky, storm-blasted coast of almost any campaign world. It stands atop a crumbling hill and is over a hundred feet tall. The tower has six sides and was built by strong dwarven hands of fine granite designed to last for centuries. Now, with no one to look after it, its walls have become dingy and covered with gray-white lichen, especially on the sides facing the sea. At the top, where the wind is fiercest, whole chunks of granite have fallen as the elements decay the mortar. The ground around the tower is littered with such fragments that could kill passersby had the lighthouse not long since been abandoned.

The only entrance to the tower is a rat-gnawed door of heavy oak that can no longer keep out the icy winter blasts. The delicately-carved sea nymphs that once graced its wooden face have become gnarled and twisted with age. The door leads to a rickety iron spiral staircase that has rusted badly in the salty air. At the top is a chamber where Almadrask once lived. The room smells of damp and vermin. The furnishings have long since rotted away, except for a cob-webbed rocking chair sitting in the corner that creaks away the centuries even in the doldrums when the wind is completely still. There was once a fireplace, and the wind that blows in through the crumbling chimney makes an eerie wail. The holes in the wooden floor stand as a reminder of the grizzly fall that awaits anyone standing on them when they finally rot through.

On top of the tower with its dilapidated merlins and eroded gargoyles is the great beacon that has lured countless ships to its doom. From here, one can see the white waves furiously clash with the black rocks as they will for aeons to come. This was the last sight Almadrask saw before he leapt to his death.

For the story of the lighthouse is the story of Almadrask. Almadrask was the bravest, most daring sea captain there ever was in the port of Faeyalot. This was even more amazing because he was a dwarf. Almadrask had always loved the sea. But his love had always brought nothing but shame to his family who were of one of the great, noble families of dwarven craftsman. They

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told Almadrask that the sea had always been the home of men, and that dwarves belonged in the mountains where it was civilized.

But Almadrask was stubborn like the rest of his family and, after a hundred years, his stubbornness began to pay off. He eventually became one of the wealthiest merchants in Faeyalot. When the pirate lord Garim the Dread fell to Almadrask's axe, not even the most bitter dwarf could deny feeling pride for him.

But all good things must come to an end, and one night while sailing through a November gale, Almadrask fell from the mast and broke his back.

The clerics said their magics could do little good for the poor dwarf. Almadrask lived, but often wished he had not, for Almadrask could never sail again. His back was now humped like a whale and he walked with a crippled gait.

Almadrask was more than wealthy enough for retirement, but in his bitterness he resigned to the lonely life of a lighthouse keeper. His family pleaded with him to come back to the mountains but he would hear nothing of it, and so it was decided that if a dwarf must live in a lighthouse, it would be the grandest lighthouse there ever was. The tower is the only lighthouse ever designed by dwarven craftsman and was the pride of Faeyalot.

In time, Almadrask's bitterness faded as all things eventually do, and he took a wife. How Seelia, the tall and lovely tavern wench, could love a crippled dwarf is still a mystery. Most folk said she was only interested in the old dwarf's fortune, but one thing is certain and that is that Almadrask loved Seelia. She was the only thing that brought joy and comfort to him in the beautiful lighthouse he had made his prison.

But when the old dwarf slept, Seelia would slink down the steps of the lighthouse into Faeyalot where everyone said some handsome rake waited for her. Rumor can strike faster than a gale at sea and even dwarven ears in lofty towers are not impervious to its spread. Almadrask told Seelia that if ever she failed to be true to him she would never see a single copper of his fortune.

Outraged, Seelia stormed out of the lighthouse to her handsome rake. She came back long enough to tell Almadrask that they would set sail that very night at sunset. Almadrask begged her not to leave. From his tower he watched the white sails of the ship grow smaller in the distance. He never saw Seelia again.

With bleary eyes, Almadrask took one last look at the unquiet sea from the top of his tower. Then he leapt, cursing every ship there ever was in the port of Faeyalot. Over the next year, ships began to crash on the rocks where the lighthouse had once stood watch. Survivors swore the beacon had been on in the old tower and then suddenly faded when they came close to the rocks. It

wasn't much longer before barmaids began to swear having seen the hideous image of a crippled dwarf out of the corner of their eyes. The townsfolk never go near the tower for fear of his curse, hoping in time the tower will crumble away, but the dwarven stonework has stood gale after gale as the years roll by. And while the town of Faeyalot has grown, the shadow of the lighthouse still looms over it as it always will. Dwarves still tell the tale of Almadrask to any dwarf who has fancies about going off to sea.



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ANSRICK'S PRISON

by Jeremy Whitt
Stanton, Kentucky

From the outside it appears as a common farmhouse that is deserted and run down. To look into the house from a doorway or window it looks to have three ground floors and an attic. When someone enters the house the door closes behind them, but when the door is opened it leads to a grand hall instead of outside. The hall, like all other rooms, has two doors, the entrance door and another door on the opposite side of the room. No door leads to the same room twice. Each room entered is dark, dreary, and quiet, but is easily seen that each room was once beautiful, colorful, and bustling with life. Rooms range from great dining halls, hallways, bedchambers, King's chambers, libraries, studies, and even kitchens.

Each room can be searched, but a time limit is given to each room and always changes. If a character remains in a room for too long (no more than a matter of minutes) then ghouls and other undead begin forming from the shadows. These creatures will never leave the room from which they came, nor can every shadow in each room be extinguished.

Ansrick, a man who must wander this place for eternity, will eventually help or destroy any poor soul trapped inside. Ansrick, because of his torment, which consists of being constantly murdered by the creatures of his prison, and returning each night, has become insane. When he does show himself as a friend, he will help any character, but it is a false hope. The only way for any character to escape is to kill Ansrick. This of course isn't a problem if he appears as an enemy. Once he is dead the rooms will return to normal and any character will find himself/herself in the main room of the shack.

The next night Ansrick will reawaken and the process will start all over. Of course, there is a way for Ansrick to escape the prison, but he would have to take his own life. This would lead to a more severe punishment.



THE STORY OF BATEMAN HOUSE

by Robert Chaney
Pleasant Grove, Utah

The old place up on the hill, you say? Well now, there's a tale attached to that particular animal, as me grandfather used to say. Aye, I know the "educated" folk of Dementlieu say that every hamlet in Mordent has its "place on the hill," and that ye can't kick a rock without it hittin' some backwater fool willin' to tell the tale. But if they're so all-fired smart then why do so many of 'em end their days in those asylums they got? It's 'cause Mordent folk know the truth of things and have the sense not to go pokin' around where decent people don't belong.

To be sure that house is a place of tragedy, made all the worse by it happenin' to one of our own. Jonathon Bateman was reliable Mordent stock, even if he did make his fortune dealin' with queer foreigners in distant places. 'Course some folks say what happened is what comes to a man who takes an Invidian bride. You just ignore such talk, Myriam Bateman was one of the sweetest women to ever live, never you mind those odd fits of hers, and not once did I hear tell of her showin' "the Invidian temper" to a soul, not even her own children. And the gods know that her children gave her reason enough to at times, but that's true of all children. The oldest, Mary, was every inch the beauty that her mother was. She even turned my head when I was a lad, but I guess I was overfond of me possessions to court her. Valuable things tended to disappear when Mary was around, you see. No one ever did figure out what she did with 'em. Now her brother Jeffrey was as solid and as practical as his father, assumin', of course, you overlooked his unhealthy fascination with the grave. But what can ye expect from a lad who came upon the ghost of his grandmother in the woods wailin' about the death of the entire family? After that he spent most of his time contemplatin' the graves of his young twin brothers, Albert and Andrew, who died of crib death not long after their birth.

No one knows what pushed Jonathon to murder that night. He'd been in a foul temper ever since an important shipment to Lamordia went down in the Sea of Sorrows, and he took his frustration out on his family. Nothin' physical, mind you, but bad enough that Myriam

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took abed with one of her fits. Accordin' to the servants, the whole household simmered like that for about a week until Jonathon caught Mary sneakin' out of the house at night with the silver tea set. The whole lot of them took to screamin', even Myriam from her bed, and it got so bad that the hired people fled and found other places to stay that night. The neighbors listened to the screamin' into the wee hours until the last busybody drifted off to sleep, but no one thought anythin' was truly wrong until mornin', when the sound of someone hoarsely screamin' could still be heard.

It was Jeffrey, curled up in a comer of the master bedroom, cryin' over and over about his grandmother outside the window. Nearby, Mary's battered corpse lay beneath her father's gently swayin' form as it hung from the noose affixed to the ceilin', Mary's blood drippin' from his hands. Myriam lay in the bed with her eyes fixed on the ceilin', her body unmarked but no less dead than her husband's. The magistrate boarded up the house in the hopes that Jeffrey might come to his senses and tend to it someday, but Jeffrey screamed himself to death up in that fancy asylum in Dementlieu about a year later. Over the years, the house itself was claimed as inheritance by a series of cousins and such, but each and every one of them fled before spendin' so much as a single night beneath its cursed roof. These days folk just leave the house be, not even heedin' when some damn fool treasure hunter starts pokin' 'round for the money that's supposed to be lost in there. This isn't some parlor in Port-a-Lucine where the dark is far away and easily mocked. Evil dwells in that house, and I for one ain't goin' to be visitin' it.

The Truth

Before Bluetspur was sheared from the Core, a lone Illithid wandered from within its wastes. Its name, like its motivations, is meaningless to humanoid minds, though it considers itself a researcher. It used its talents to observe the surface lands with detached interest until it was drawn to Myriam Bateman. Recognizing in her the crudest form of its own formidable skills, for the first time the monster was intrigued. Prior to this, the Bateman household was a normal one with its worst scandal being Mary's infatuation with emulating a dashing rogue she met while on holiday in Port-a-Lucine.

The creature enhanced Myriam's skills beyond her control or tolerance. Her dreaming mind wrecked havoc abroad, including the sinking of the Lamordian shipment. When awake she poured her overflowing mental energy into those around her, enhancing mild or latent traits into psychoses. Jonathon's temper exploded; Mary's infatuation became obsession and kleptomania; and Jeffrey, having a touch of his mother's sensitivity, was

driven insane by the influx of his mother's dying surge of energy.

Myriam's mind, along with the minds of her family, remains trapped by madness within the house. Memories drift down the halls like drafts of cold air, making reality ever subjective. Myriam slumbers often, but fitfully, causing disasters as she dreams, but when awakened by intruders her attention cripples them by magnifying exponentially their latent traits and foibles. In addition, the Illithid still scrys its "grand experiment" from a cavern beneath the house, and will intervene if it believes the latest set of "variables" (i.e., people) threaten to bring its research to a premature conclusion.



HAUNTED SITES

BLACKSHADOW'S

STUDY

by Montsho Shelby
Chicago, Illinois

You gaze upon a magnificent building maybe three stories in height. The building is gray and devoid of color; the only thing that gives the building life at all are the long windows and beautifully sculpted statues. There are ominous, winged gargoyles at the top of the building, and gracing the entrance are gigantic, grey steel double doors. There are a few steps to get to the entrance of this structure and to each side of the steps lay two statues of men on their side. The two statues are pointing out as if to lure a wary traveler in for a comfortable night.

As you near the place you take a further inspection of the two statues, only to notice faces on the inside of the stomachs of each of the two statues. As you turn to the door, you swiftly turn back to the statue and you could have sworn by your god that the faces on the stomach of that statue shifted positions, or maybe it was just paranoia. The group's wizard and thief notice cryptic runes on the steel door, though your two companions aren't sure exactly what the door says. The wizard believes that the runes say, "Your knowledge will be increased after one night spent in this place." The thief of your party believes the runes say, "Your wealth will be increased after one night spent in this place."

The warrior doesn't care one way or the other because the party needs a place to sleep. The warrior slowly creaks the door open, only to be greeted by the moldy smell of books. The inside is pitch-black until the wizard casts his *light* spell. The light reveals an eerie but marvelous sight, no doubt, the remnants of a great library. You notice a torch to the side of you and quickly use your flint and steel to spark a fire to life. This library has three floors; the second and third floors are filled with books on the side and open in the middle.

Suddenly, you hear the metal doors creaking as if they would shut behind you; you jump just a little. The warrior slaps you on the back with one hand and points to the door. "It's just a storm brewing, my friend," is what he tells you, as the wind and light drizzle begin to blow into the library. Maybe it's your paranoia, but the sky was perfectly fine before you came into this place. The warrior slams the door shut with a boom. As the

door slams shut a loud click chimes in a disturbing sound. Though nothing has happened, you definitely feel uneasy about being in this place. Even the light shining from the wall seems as if it's watching you.

The party checked the whole library from the first floor to third, and you took note of everything we found of significance. On the first floor we found magical runes on the entire first floor; the wizard says if the right chants were spoken it could have been used for summoning demons. Besides the aisles of books, upon which the wizard frequently perused, we found a trapdoor leading into a mess hall and sleeping quarters; from your knowledge of religious practices, you'd think monks lived in this place. Other than the infernal ticking of a clock you haven't found, this floor was fine.

The second floor housed aisles of books just like the first but, inside of the books were long boxes that seemed to look like coffins. Since this floor seemed to be fine we let the thief try his luck at picking the locks on the supposed coffins.

As you venture to the third floor one man less, the wizard begins to get paranoid; you believe those books he had been reading have been giving him evil messages. As the warrior tried to take away the wizard's books, the wizard snapped at him; the wizard never had done this. You ventured on to find a wizard's laboratory; the wizard wished to stay in this place to find out more about the former owners. You and the warrior now gaze down to the first floor, only to find out that the moonlight shining on the first floor seemed to be moving. The warrior decided to go back down to the first floor, and check things out while you go and find the thief and the wizard.

Now all alone you go to find the wizard, but it seems as if the book aisles are in a different place. Had this place given us the impression that everything was fine just to split us up? You push your doubts aside to find the wizard, until suddenly a noise distracts you. You see a demented man in wizard's robes push a man in priestly robes off the side of the third floor banister. You brandish your holy symbol, maybe these are ghosts, but nothing happens. The mysterious wizard runs off, dropping a book behind him. As you look over the side to see if there is a dead priest you see nothing, but do see the party's warrior on the first floor.

You open the book, but instead of seeing words, you see an image of the group's wizard and thief talking in the library. The thief suggests that the wizard and he should kill the fighter and you and collect the reward at the end of the night.

Suddenly, a hand taps on your shoulder; it's the thief. You immediately question him about what you saw, but the thief stutters out his words. The thief said it was a chill, but your wisdom tells you better. The thief says that, "there were dead bodies in the coffins we saw

earlier.” He even says that he thought you were calling his name. To your relief the warrior returns; you need an ally. In a split second the warrior falls to the ground with a knife in his back. The wizard stands over him. “I am the great magician Blackshadow,” he yells. You can look in the wizard’s eyes and tell he is not all there.

You deduce that the excessive reading of the books must turn wizards into this demented man. Now you use your exceptional deductive abilities to create a hypothesis. This place must have been designed by evil priests and one evil wizard. Somewhere along the line the priests had a falling out, so the wizard murdered all the priests. Sometimes the library replays the murders like the way you saw earlier, but you guess that it is not enough. If this place gets a good wizard to read the books it turns that wizard into an evil wizard. Then the library turns everyone against each other whether they read the books or not.

You and the thief subdue the wizard, and you manage to heal the warrior, saving his life. The thief and you try to unlock the door the whole night but it won’t budge. Though you see visions and ghosts the whole night, at daybreak you hear the ticking of a clock stop. The big metal double doors swing open, and it seems as if the rain has just stopped. As you and the thief drag the unconscious warrior and wizard out of the library, the thief notices a gold coin positioned on the first step of the library. “I received wealth and the wizard received knowledge I guess,” the thief says with a sigh.

There was nothing that physically attacked us in that place, so, you guess the worst demons are in our own heads.

(P.S. Every suspicion and hunch is correct information.)



THE HORROR OF CASTLE VANIA

by Alexander “Warlock” Bennet
New York, New York

This haunted site is loosely based on the legendary Glamis Castle in Scotland, childhood home of the Queen Mother and the most haunted place in Britain. Written for the *Ravenloft* setting, the castle would work well in Mordent or Dementlieu. Also, a few modern features such as the lift mean that it could easily be reworked for the *Masque of the Red Death* setting.

Castle Vania, crouched on the hills above Strathmore village, was once the home of a long line of Earls, all bearing the name of Strathmore. The First Earl lived as King of a people called the Dorns in a now unknown Prime Material world. These people were nomads, looking for a likely site to call home. Eventually, they settled down and founded the village of Strathmore.

The First Earl had a son, the Second Earl, who built Castle Vania. He designed it himself, for he was an enthusiastic, if slightly mad, architect. Many of the traps and dangers in the castle were designed by his hand. However, the castle’s fate was written by the Third Earl, Patrick.

Stories say that Patrick was an evil child. His mother died in childbirth and his father doted on him. He had everything he wanted: fine food, splendid toys and exotic pets. Because of his wealth, Patrick grew up obsessed with gambling. He would wager much money on cards, dice... and dares.

At age sixteen his friends bet him that he could not poison his father’s meal. Patrick won a lot of money that night, and a week later became King. He was a harsh ruler, demanding large taxes which he quickly gambled away.

One night, Patrick stayed awake until midnight, playing cards with the Earl of Craweford. A servant approached to remind him that it was nearly the holy day, upon which no gambling was allowed to take place.

Patrick replied that he cared not for holiness, and that the Devil himself could take a hand of cards if he wished.

The servant fled the room, terrified of what she knew would happen.

HAUNTED SITES

It is said that at midnight, with a crackle of thunder, the Deville appeared and told the two that they had lost their souls and were cursed. The Earl of Crawford died of fright right then, but Patrick stood his ground. He cursed the Deville back, and the village of Strathmore was claimed by the Mists of Ravenloft.

Castle Vania and its village settled somewhere in Mordent in the Barovian year 599. It is not known why the dark powers took them for Patrick was not made a darklord.

When the Earl awoke the next morning, he found that there was nothing different. He believed that he had avoided the curse of the Deville.

Two years later, Patrick's wife had a son. When it was delivered, the midwife fainted and dropped the child, while onlookers ran from the room and the mother sobbed. The 'Horror' was so hideously deformed that doctors thought it impossible to save, but it lived on in secret rooms which Patrick built for it.

Patrick had other sons as well, but these were seemingly normal. The eldest became the Fourth Earl of Strathmore, and so the bloodline, and curse, continued.

By the Fourth Earl's private decree, no woman of the royal household could ever be told of the curse. Every male Strathmore was told the secret on the night of his twenty-first birthday.

For almost a century and a half, the Strathmores lived in fear that the curse would resurface. Every birth in the family was a time of fear. The Sixth Earl once said to a friend:

"If you could know the nature of the curse, you would go down on your knees and thank the gods it were not yours."

Twenty years ago, a second Horror was born.

Castle Vania lies prematurely ruined, for the entire Strathmore family has fled. Its dark spires are now home to many creatures of the night and restless spirits of this sad history. Only the hopelessly insane Seventh Earl, Robert, stays on in the castle, tending to the Horror's every need, just as Patrick did centuries ago.

The Castle is four stories high, not including its towers, a fact that annoyed the Fifth Earl. Being a lazy and obese man, he decided to use the considerable Strathmore fortune in building a 'lift.' This large wood and iron box, capable of holding several people, was powered by magic and could be 'lifted' to any floor of the castle with the push of a button. One night, as the Fifth Earl was holding a banquet, he watched ten of his guests push and shove their way into the lift, wanting to be the first to try the incredible invention. The Earl was about to follow, when he saw to his terror that the face of the lift attendant was that of his brother, who had died a week earlier. The Earl fled, screaming, from the room.

On its way to the fourth floor, the lift cable snapped and all inside the cage plummeted to their deaths.

Now the ghost of the lift still makes its way up and down the inside of the castle, opening to any who come near. Those foolish enough to step inside are taken on a one-way trip past the ground floor and into hell.

Then there are the other ghosts of the castle.

Jack the runner is the ghost of a messenger boy, beaten to death by the Seventh Earl because he stumbled upon the secret rooms of the Horror. He now strides through the castle, bizarrely elongated legs propelling him through the halls.

The Grey Lady is none other than the ghost of the mother of the First Horror. She hanged herself soon after its birth and now haunts the room where she died.

Then there is the Horror itself. No one knows what it looks like or where its secret chambers lie. It cannot leave its hidden rooms, for it has spent its life within them and is too afraid to leave. It can project its mind beyond them though. Because of this, it knows the instant anyone enters Castle Vania. Even now it is building up strength to escape from its chambers, and perhaps even the castle itself. Any adventurers who would try to stop it: Good luck. You'll need it...



THE CATHEDRAL OF THE DAMNED

by François Mathieu
St. Victor, Quebec

To the K argat, Secret Document:

The following text is taken from the journal of Thoris Tregart, a young and positive paladin who followed his father's lead in the hope of being as good as him and to avenge his death. But now, it's Thoris' death that must be avenged. Thoris roams now as a "Radiant Spirit" (*Ravenloft MC Appendix III*), filled with the desperate obsession of finding someone able to give his corpse a decent burial, and to kill the person responsible for his father's death. His corpse lies in a secret chamber (in the wardrobe of another chamber; pushing the dirty clothes reveals a door leading to this one). In fact, Thoris hung himself in this room, trapped between madness and despair. The Lord of this place animates the corpse as a zombie but leaves it hung, just to torture his spirit. At first view, the dead body seem to be just what it is: dead; but if someone comes too close to it...

Thoris' equipment is at one corner of the room. The journal is in one of his pockets (on the corpse, of course). Have a good read.

The Paladin's Journal

March 16th, 733.

—The oracle of this town told me that I will find answers to my questions on the top of the mountain to the East. He said that I will even find more than that. I wonder what he wanted to say. Later, I went to see a fortune-teller. When she looked in her crystal ball, she screamed and dropped it. Then, she put twice the money I gave her on the table and told me to leave immediately. What the hell is happening?

March 17th, 733.

—I slept outside the town and, when I woke up, the entire town had disappeared! Like planned, I went to the East. After a mile, I began to see it: a high plateau of which the summit was lost in the clouds. After two

hours of constant climbing, I had entered a foggy stretch that persisted all the way to the top.

Near to the top, there is a secret entrance on a little ledge. It leads into the plateau, to the crypts beneath the cathedral and they are connected together. You must be very lucky (or unlucky) to find it.

On the top, mist covered all the ground so I couldn't see my feet. Then, I saw it in all its morbid splendor, a huge, sinister cathedral with a tall belfry, towers, tinted windows, gargoyles... They were carvings that seemed to represent fallen angels. This place gave me the chills. The cathedral was infinitely immense, three or four floors without the belfry and the towers. It was larger and longer than I could imagine. But, before reaching the imposing structure, there was a little obstacle: the thorny garden. It's a labyrinth with interlaced branches full of thorns that serve as tall, long and thick walls.

I was driven from my thoughts when I heard wolves howling. Worgs and wolves were around me, ready to stalk me at any cost. I feint a heart attack but I ran faster than my thoughts.

When I regained my memory, I found myself in that gigantic maze, lost in the middle of nowhere. Encounters like the above, dogs' relatives in particular lore, were common. It took me all the night to finally find the exit to this cursed place. I found interesting elements about this place. The complex maze was all around the cathedral. The branches and thorns seemed to secrete something preventing fire from igniting.

If someone is able to extract it, all items or people induced by it are immune to fire of any sort for a maximum of an hour or after the first fire attack on this "special oil".

Cutting it was impossible, it grew again instantaneously. I was perforated once by a thorn. I don't seem to suffer lately but when it happened, I felt like it was draining my blood. I was afraid about the idea of an unarmed person impaled by thorns and seeing himself slowly become a bloodless heap of skin.

Climbing the thorny walls is, of course, impossible. Using magical ways is a possibility, but magic is as unpredictable as anything on and in this plateau (the plateau is a wild magic zone).

I was completely exhausted, but the nightmare was not yet started.

HAUNTED SITES

March 18th, 733.

—The sun had just risen when I left that dreadful place. I saw, some distance before me, two magnificent but extremely fearful statues standing face to face on each side of the exit. They were like two tall, winged vampires, of an incredible artistry that shook me inwardly.

These monsters have nothing to do with gargoyles. They are called “Geodemonias” and they are only active by night. These two have been ordered to catch anyone avoiding the labyrinth (such as with a fly spell), clutching their victims by the shoulders and leaving them anywhere else in the maze.

A pack of death dogs found me but they stopped their run brusquely when I passed between the statues. I looked back at them when I heard their snivels. They were running back to that awful maze when I noticed the red eyes of the statues. Weren't they closed a moment before? The courtyard had an old, crumbling fountain. In an adjacent spot, there was the biggest and the most horrible tree that I've seen in my life. It was if people were trapped under the bark, frozen in agony and trying to escape it. Then, among these “sculptures”, I saw the man I had imagined impaled by the thorns.

Suddenly troubled by that view, I fled to the cathedral, climbing the enormous stairway leading to the gates. I took a break to write these lines, but now is the time to enter that place; mixing of beauty and terrors, anger and death—and... sacrilege.

The remains of the journal are scrawls of notes concerning the cathedral. The last part is completely illegible.

The cathedral is the lair of arts in all its forms. Splendid but scary frescos and bas-reliefs are common. This site has an innumerable variety of rooms and has had many owners through time. None had discovered all the rooms so some hold secrets of another time. All the ghosts and spirits here speak in an inverse order. So, a ghost saying “help me” will rather say “em pleh”. It gives players another mystery to solve and some spirits can give them good clues (not clearly or directly, of course).

Among the cathedral's owners, the first were the order who built it (over six generations), a very affluent church of a distant realm with the greatest project of time. But, for unknown reasons, they became or were evil priests who have done all the atrocities imaginable.

100 years later, a vampire claimed this place as his own. He was driven mad and now he reacts just like a beast. He can't think, just acts by morbid impulses and instinct. One of his experiments, an intelligent and powerful zombie created from a wererat trapped in its hybrid form, became then the new master. Now he (or it) is chained up to the big mosaic rosary of the nave. Sometimes, we heard a loud noise of footsteps. Is it the true lord of this place?



CELL NUMBER 4

by Pierre van Rooden
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The Martira Bay jail house can hardly be called a luxury place to spend your days. Cell number 4, in that respect, does not seem much worse (or better) than any other cell.

It is only three feet wide by five feet long, with one small barred window that looks out on a small alley place at the back of the jail house. It contains a bunk to steep on, and a bucket for other ‘necessities’. In the ceiling used to be a hook on which you could hang a lantern, but the one in this cell has been forcibly removed.

All in all, this does not differ much from other cells the building. Cell number 4, however, has been the site of a haunting ever since the death of a young man named Marnix Drecht.

Marnix was the son of a poor Lamordian craftsman. He was also, secretly, the lover of a young woman, Elserelda, who was the daughter of a wealthy local merchant. Obviously, the girl’s father was not pleased with the love of his daughter. He confronted her, trying to convince her that the young man was no good, going so far as to spread false rumors that he was unfaithful, and tried everything in his might to turn the two lovers away. Finally, after all his attempts had failed, he flew into a rage, and struck his daughter so hard that she dropped down to the floor and hit her head on the mantle piece in the study room. She was killed instantly.

The merchant panicked. He was at a loss of what to do, not willing to turn himself in, to be accused of causing the death of his own blood.

At that moment, the young Marnix arrived at the gate to speak to his beloved. The merchant saw his chance—he granted the young man entrance, giving him free way to wander about the house to find his daughter. When the young man thus happened upon the body of his beloved, his heart broke. He was kneeling by the dead body, stroking her hair in shock, when the merchant entered with a quickly-fetched servant witness.

The officials were quick to bring a charge of murder against the young man and he was thrown in jail, in the now infamous cell number 4. Marnix was devastated. His girlfriend was dead, and he was accused of the vile crime. Moreover, he felt it had all been his fault—was it not his love that had brought her death? It was more than he could take, and the next morning, when the guards came to get the boy for his trial, they found he had hung

himself using his own belt. The constable declared the boy hung himself out of guilt, and the case was closed.

Two weeks later, another man was interred in cell 4. This time, the accused was a thief named Micel, who had stolen a merchant’s purse. In the night, the young thief was woken by a soft voice, that whispered to him of guilt and despair. He called out to his guards, but when they had arrived, the voice was quiet. They laughed at his fear, saying he was nervous before his trial, and left. The following morning, however, they were shocked to find the thief had hung himself, in exactly the same way as Marnix had done before.

In another three weeks, two other people, an alley rat and a drunk, had hung themselves in cell number 4. The constable at that time, Alanik Ray, had no time to investigate the matter at that moment, and instead had the cell sealed.

Several years later Ray was replaced by Aron Tyllich, a commander who was known for his pragmatism and disdain for all things mythical. He ordered the cell to be opened again, despite protests of some veteran guards. He had the hook in the ceiling removed to “ease the locals” and, in fact, was so confident that he accepted the challenge to spend the first night in the cell all by himself.

Unconfident, the pods posted someone outside the cell to be sure to take watch. In the middle of the night, the guard fell asleep, only to be woken again by a soft droning voice of a young man that seemed to emanate from the cell. He hurriedly entered the cell only to find commander Tyllich dangling from a makeshift noose he had tied to the bars of the cell’s window. The next and current commander, Emily Tohald, quickly installed after this event, made her orders very clear: Cell number 4 was to be closed and never to be opened again.

It remains closed to this day, though prisoners in neighboring cells sometimes claim to hear a young man’s voice speaking to them from the cell. No one has been willing to open the cell in years, however. And it seems it will take until the next commander before anyone ever will.



HAUNTED SITES

CHATEAU DE MARIUS-EIBENAL

by Matthew L. Martin
Chatfield, Minnesota

Description

This once-glorious Richemulot mansion, nestled between two hills on the west banks of the Musarde River just south of Ste. Ronges, retains some of its former glory. Three stories tall, it's built in a Gothic style, with vaulting ceilings and many tall, narrow windows. The ceilings are wrapped in cobwebs and shadows, and most of the windows are broken or fragmented, letting in drafts that chill the rooms regardless of the outside temperature. The house was built in a 'hollow square' pattern, with numerous halls and suites surrounding courtyards and gardens. At the center, connected to the main body of the house by a dark and narrow hallway, is a building devoted to a great dining hall on the first floor and a ballroom that takes up the second and third. Unlike the rest of the house, which is ramshackle and dusty, the ballroom's floors still shine, the stained glass windows that depict legends of the Core remain clear and intact, and the lanterns and chandelier bum with pale and unearthly flames that shed no heat and cannot be quenched.

History

The feud between the Marius and Eibenal families of Richemulot date back to farther than any resident of Richemulot remembers; some whisper that it was old when the domain appeared in the Core. The origins of the hostilities are likewise lost in time. Some say that the two families both possess strong Invidian blood, which might be enough of an explanation. Others say that in years past, the two families dabbled in sorcery and unleashed an unearthly creature that set them against each other.

Regardless of the origins, the bloody feud between the two houses continued until ten years ago, when the heads of the two families decided to end it in the wake of the Grand Conjunction. Louis Eibenal and Emile Marius, heirs to the family lands, would marry. The Chateau de Marius-Eibenal was built to celebrate the union of the two houses; the mansion was a marvel in its day. Unfortunately, Emile's brother Jean had been slain

in a duel with one of the Eibenals, and the anger she felt at that had snapped her mind and left her fixated on vengeance. On the night the two were to wed, both families gathered at the Chateau. Emile, meanwhile, had managed to steal Louis' dagger, and attempted to cut herself with it, hoping to frame her fiancée for an assault. In her madness and rage, though, the blade slipped as Emile sliced at her arm. A serving girl found her dead an hour later, blood flowing from her wrist and Louis' dagger by her side. Louis was quickly hanged by the men of the Marius family in one of the gardens, in plain view of the rest of the Eibenals. The resulting anger swept up the rest of the household. Duels were fought, both nobles and servants were hanged, and it all came to a climax in a furious, vicious conflict in the ballroom. By the time the sun rose, no living soul walked the halls of the Chateau de Marius-Eibenal.

The final tragedy came in the fact that two younger scions of the families, Elaine Eibenal and Pieter Marius, had met and fallen in love that day. The two of them tried to escape as the violence swept through the house, but fell, shot down by two of their own kinsmen who each thought that one of them was trying to capture the other.

Hauntings

When entered in daylight, the Chateau appears to be an ordinary ruined mansion. The only remarkable thing is the cold, which persists regardless of the season or weather. Rats and spiders fill the halls, but they are only the most mundane feature. As the day goes on, heroes may hear whispers in the background, speaking of peace and happiness. Swords, daggers, and pistols appear beneath the rubble, looking as though they were newly polished. Some weapons are ornamented with blue and gray colors, the colors of the Marius family, while others show the red and green of the Eibenals. If walking through the gardens, the shadow of a noose can be glimpsed out of the corner of the eye.

As the moon rises, the Chateau begins to change. The cobwebs start to disappear, and heroes who look closely can see the spectral windows glistening dimly in the moonlight. The whispers some heroes might have heard grow a bit louder, and also more hostile, talking now of vengeance and offended honor. Heroes who picked up weapons find themselves sympathizing with one of the two families, going so far as to draw those weapons against those carrying blades or guns of the opposite family, or lashing out at unseen targets. Anyone fleeing to the gardens finds the hung bodies confronting them at every turn; standing beneath a tree for any length of time brings a rope down around one's own neck. The phenomena grow stronger as the night goes on, with

ghosts, haunts, geists, and other incorporeal undead appearing the mansions halls. The haunting will usually herd the heroes towards the ballroom, where most of the ghosts gather in the last hour before dawn. The spirits attack anything, even turning on their own kin; while immaterial, the blades and bullets they strike with harm living flesh just as well as ectoplasm.

The ghosts of Louis and Emile walk the halls; each will gladly tell their side of the story if asked. If those facts can be presented, the wrath of the offended ghosts will focus on Emile, as they realize her attempt to restart the feuding. The haunting thus ends as the situation resolves itself, albeit horribly for Emile. Those who help the spirits of Elaine and Pieter escape, by guiding them on a different path or protecting them from attack, do not break the curse, but manage to escape with their lives and free these two souls, a worthy act itself.



THE CHURCH IN THE MISTS

by Chris Montgomery
Del Mar, California

An old, gray church rises out of a quiet yard, with tall gothic spires and a timeworn bell tower. Fog shrouds the area inside the tall, ivy-covered outer wall, restricting vision to about twenty feet. One large, rusted gate stands at the front of the grounds, slightly ajar. Ivy from the walls clutches the sides of the gate, slowly pulling it closed behind you as you enter. The bell tower seems shadowed and unreal in the fog, with dark windows and no visible bell. Gray, half-glimpsed faces drift in the fog, seen only through the corner of your eye. A sense of watching quiet pervades the area. The cathedral itself stands near the back of the grounds, and a sprawling garden ringed with dense hedges covers the front area, near the gate.

Stone statues of robed figures stand among the heavy leaves of the garden, and vines clutch their feet. In the center of the garden stands a dry fountain filled with dead leaves, which rustle constantly as if something were passing just underneath their surface. Narrow passageways between tall hedges form a fog-filled maze around the fountain. Perfectly white, silent cats roam the grounds, moving slowly and deliberately. They seem to follow you, staying just out of reach in the fog and gazing silently down at you from the tops of hedges and walls. The leaves of the garden seem to reach out at you, clutching softly at your arms and face. The leaves seem unnaturally dry in the mist, and quiver slightly in an unfelt wind.

As you get close to the church, a barely audible whispering noise drifts from the damp walls, seeming to get louder and louder as you approach—but when you shake your head, you realize that it hasn't changed. The old stone doors of the church stand wide open, and dead leaves litter the wide steps in front of it. As you step inside, the air seems colder, and the fog thins. The church consists of one large room, with rotting wooden pews standing to your left and right, forming an aisle to the altar. Heavy shadows cloak the upper reaches of the walls and the arched ceiling, giving the room a sepulchral feeling. A great stained-glass window frames the altar, covering most of the wall behind it. The stained-glass window depicts a hag in black rags with a

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hooded face, surrounded by less detailed images of weeping angels. Three steps of cold black stone form a podium for the altar. Tall, narrow windows are spaced regularly along the inside of the church, looking out on the fog-covered grounds. As you look outside through the glass, you see misty gray figures slowly come out of the fog and walk towards you. They look like pale children in black clothes, all walking towards the window that you are looking from. The fog doesn't stir as they move through it, and when you blink they seem to have all disappeared.

A heavy trapdoor behind the altar creaks sullenly open when you pull on it, and cold air rushes out of the dark space below. As you descend on a nearly vertical stone staircase, your lights flicker and dim, causing shadows to lurch and sway at you in the cold. A dank, one-room basement stretches out in front of you, almost as large as the church itself. Water stains run down the regularly spaced pillars that support the ceiling, and you begin to hear soft, pleading cries emanating from the dark places in the room. The air smells faintly of mildew and decay, and a thin covering of clouded liquid on the floor makes it hard to be completely sure of your footing. In the center of the room, surrounded by the shifting shadows, lies a small rag doll. It lies face-down in the liquid on the floor, and seems quite heavy when you pick it up. It hangs limply in your hand, as the trapdoor to the basement shuts with a slow, sodden creak. Suddenly it is very dark.

According to local legends, the Church hasn't always been this way. It was once open to everyone who happened by, and a kindly old woman would welcome those who came. It was a light, airy place then, and all spoke highly of the Church and its caretaker. Then things began to change. The old woman seemed to grow even more friendly, especially towards the children who once played in the garden. They would ask their parents if they could stay at the church for days at a time, and the parents would agree—it was holy ground, wasn't it?

And so the old woman took care of the children, teaching them about the plants in the garden and the animals that lived there. The parents let the children go to the Church often, glad that they were learning. But then, one day, the children didn't come back. After a while, the parents grew worried, and went to the Church. They found it as it is now.

Some whisper that the old woman embraced dark arts, while others say that she was abducted and replaced by something more hideous. A few believe that the old woman kept the children in the Church's basement, and left them to starve—or worse. But people only know what they have seen: that the fog around the Church never lifts, even on the sunniest days, and no animals will

go near it. None tread lightly near the Church in the Mists.



THE CITY OF LOST HOPE

by Andy Schiller
Adrian, Michigan

Amid the desolation, the darkness, the chill that is Ravenloft, there once was a citadel against the night. It was built on a plateau, surrounded on all sides by sheer cliffs. The humans who built the city sealed its entrances with wards and glyphs, keeping out undead, spirits, and unwelcome guests.

Several generations flourished within its walls. Azalin's zombie armies could not penetrate the heights, nor could any transgressor defeat its magic.

The city elected a council of elders, and for decades the city of Jepsen flourished. But what rises must fall, and the Citadel of Hope fell to a horrid, ghastly ending.

A clan of vampire/sorcerers, plotting to steal the lifeblood from every soul in the city, devised a magic so potent, that the circle that was the city's magical defense was snuffed out like a candle. The undead poured in like a flood, rising to engulf the city. They thirsted for the life-energy that they would steal to add to their own power.

Losing all hope, the city Elders issued their last orders. Rather than allow their inviolable city to be desecrated, and its inhabitants violated, they chose to destroy themselves, putting an end to the vampires' evil plan. Every man in the city perished by his own hand, just shortly after his family, save one man.

That one man was Saravick. Saravick was a coward, a liar, and a cheat. Too afraid to end his own life, he hid.

Howls of anguish filled the air when the Kindred learned of their misfortune. Weak and exhausted from their compound magics, the undead took refuge in the now Dead City. They soon found Saravick, though, and vented their frustration on him. Although they did not kill him, the vampires used his blood for their dark rituals, gathering strength to go out again.

The ghosts of the dead citizens taunted Saravick to the point of lunacy. On the night that was to be Saravick's last, he was drained nearly to the point of death, and he began hallucinating. His vile visions made him insane, but gave him courage as well. Staggering, he took the only bold action of his life, and attacked the vampires at their weakest moment during their blood

ritual. A lantern was thrown, and its oil spilled across the floor, then ignited, setting the kindred ablaze. As the undead screamed and died, Saravick fled into the only portion of the room that was not ablaze—the circle drawn in the center of the room by the Kindred. Here, Saravick received the power begotten by the blood ritual, and the knowledge of how to extract this power from living beings.

Saravick took refuge in the Dead City, but he was haunted by the ghosts of the city's predecessors. Driven mad, he found himself trapped within the walls, held by the ghosts who wished to torture him for an eternity.

Saravick is not undead, but he is ancient. He is warped and twisted, a husk of a man. (Note: his Comeliness is -18, and his alignment is CE.)

Now centuries have passed. The Dead City sits atop the plateau like a carcass. Scavenger animals and birds are seen near the site regularly. A few bard's ballads and the occasional historic text make mention of the glory that once was Jepsen, but none alive now remember it. Rumors of vile magic and all sorts of "old wives' tales" concerning the place abound. Some have even reported seeing strange, ghastly creatures entering and leaving the City of Lost Hope. There have even been reports of ghosts near the plateau, but all witnesses have either disappeared or gone mad.

Any PC casting *legend lore* to find out more information about the Dead City must make a Constitution check. This is due to the immediate onset of visions of murder and mayhem. A PC peering through a crystal ball will experience the same thing.

Attempting to enter the city is difficult, due to its location, and to Saravick's minions who patrol the area. They keep an eye out for anything alive to bring to their master. The old Defiler needs the life-blood of a living being every day just to maintain his own life. He still, however, is unable to leave the city, trapped and tormented by the ghosts of the city's citizens.

Where's the Adventure?

An NPC, the elven maiden Alhana Starbreeze, seeks a magical item to prolong the life of an elderly half-elven king. Her mentor has provided her with the information that there is such an item, known as the Phylactery of Ages, and it is located in the Lost City of Jepsen. This is all she knows.

The party somehow comes to aid her (perhaps they have heard of the city, and overhear her mention it?). What no one knows is that the item was made by Saravick, and he wears it around his neck. Alhana has no idea that the item steals life from other beings, and does not know what awaits in Jepsen.

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Is That All?

After defeating the city's guardians, the party enters the city. They are immediately flooded with images of people stabbing each other, and sounds of screaming, which may seem completely real to the PCs. However, when approached, these 'victims' simply fade away, as though they were illusions. Really, they are ghosts, and due to the power of this place, they cannot be dispelled, turned, or destroyed. The ghosts are relentless, reenacting their vile ends day and night.

When witnessing one of these horrible atrocities, all players must make a Wisdom check. Failure means that the feeling of a dreadful darkness fills the character's bones. All checks made from that point onward are at a -1 penalty. This effect is cumulative.

Any player missing seven Wisdom checks has lost all hope, immediately finds the nearest sharp object, and takes his own life.

Of course, if the party has lost any members in this manner, they are bound to see that PC's ghost at a later time. The ghost will die in a very macabre fashion. This is enough to merit its own -2 penalty (on top of any other penalties) to the Wisdom check.

OK, The Place is Scary. Is That All?

The PCs must find and defeat Saravick. Once this is done, they will find the Phylactery. Alhana will then groan in despair when she realizes that the item is useless to her. She decides that the item must be destroyed. This can only be done by throwing it into the fires that sparked its creation. This means a journey down into the mountain. Here awaits the lava pool that will destroy the item.

Are We Done Yet?

No. On their way out, the PCs face Saravick as a ghost. The spirits that kept him prisoner in the city have now been laid to rest, so he is now free to travel outside the city, should he decide to try to get away. He has the full powers of a 25 HD ghost.



THE CLOCK

by anonymous
Youngstown, Ohio

Long ago in a city of obscure origin and name there was a clockmaker. This clockmaker was the best craftsman in his field. He had an odd hobby for a man of such mechanical means, that of magic. His fascination with this craft was a result of the fear of his mortality. So through his studies he searched for an escape from death.

In his seventieth year he finally realized his time was drawing to a close when on the same day two miracles happened to him. Each aided the other. As he searched through the basement of a recently committed man he found an old spellbook. He quickly realized this book was written in an order from the easiest spells of its contents to the most difficult. He promptly flipped to the final page and found what he had longed for for so long. A spell for immortality.

So amazed he was with his find he thoroughly read the entire description of the spell. That was when he found what caused the spell to be so difficult. Unlike most spells which are mainly influenced by a combination of words, materials, and motions, this spell revolved around a central item. A giant clock with precision to rival the very stars.

This was definitely not the undertaking of a normal mage. Only one with extensive experience in the field of clockwork would be capable of constructing such a monument to the ultimate of cheats.

Upon his return to his store a messenger rapped upon his door. The man was a messenger from the council. A hall was to be constructed in the center of town to be the new housing of the council. His expertise was required for the centerpiece of the tower. An enormous clock of unrivaled proportions would be constructed by a hundred men under the command of the old clockmaker.

He was overjoyed with this wonderful turn of events. This was precisely what he needed. He excitedly accepted the offer and quickly ushered the messenger out. The sooner to study the spell and design the clock of his freedom from death.

Five years later the tower half of the hall was almost completed. One thing had still not been completed. The clock. With only four months until the scheduled commemoration of the clock the clockmaker hadn't even begun construction. He had threats from the council that if at commemoration time he still was not finished they

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would have a hanging instead, with his neck in the rope. This was the old man's last chance, so foolishly he took shortcuts. Desperation can cause the mind to make mistakes and cause one's thoughts to deteriorate, as the clockmaker found out.

Finally the day of commemoration had arrived. All the townsfolk were there. When the sun had reached its highest peak in the heavens a great hush came over the land and then the tolling of the bell began. At first the bells started off with an unusually quiet note that slowly increased in intensity climaxing with a great roaring torrent of ringing and gonging that was suddenly silenced. The townsfolk suddenly burst into cheers and whoops of pride at what one of them had created. Slowly though, one by one each person realized that person whom they cheered for so was not there. Then the true tolling began.

The clock tower struck out with such a ringing that no human thought possible from a timepiece of any size. Frightfully haunting yet mystifyingly entrancing the clock rang out and was once again suddenly silenced. But only momentarily. For once the chimes had ceased a cause for a new title for that day swooped from the sky. Clouds of innumerable crows rolled over and upon the town. The citizens panicked. Parents grabbed their children from the streets and ran for cover. Only the luckiest could save their young. Young and old alike, a hundred people died that day. Once the crows had pecked clean the bones of those they had killed they turned on the homes. By sundown the crows disappeared just as suddenly as they had come.

Sure that the old clockmaker was to blame for this massacre the townsfolk managed to assemble a party to confront him. As they were about to enter the tower the doors easily swung open. One of the party kicked the tower as he passed through the doorway and instantly turned into a decayed pile of remains. The others were thoroughly horrified but proceeded anyway.

As they searched each of a hundred rooms they grew tired easily and found themselves resting before the fourth level. As they huddled together they had a horrifying realization. They were rapidly aging. Rather than waiting for their energy to return they hurried for the exit. The longer they stayed the older they became. As it seemed they might almost make it out with a few years left, they heard a horrifying youthful cackle from the uppermost region of the tower and then heard the faint rustle of flapping wings. As soon as they reached the first floor the onslaught of crows befell them. None returned to their families.

It has since been concluded that any who assaults the tower will have all youth and life sucked from their body and any who shall venture into the tower of the insane clockmaster will have their life slowly drained from

them. The lives of these unfortunate souls are then transferred to that of the clockmaster. He will do anything to keep his captives within his home. He has since found many devious ways to detain visitors. He is truly insane in all but self preservation as a result of his careless shortcuts. He may also never leave his tower or instantly decay to nothingness.

Kargatane Note: The author's name was missing from this entry. If you're the author of this entry, please contact us at kargatane@kargatane.com so we can properly attribute you.



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THE CRESCENT MOON

by James Wyatt
Berkeley, California

That wreck? She's the *Crescent Moon*. Listen up, you steer clear of that ship, you hear? Why? Because she was lost at sea eight years ago, that's why!

"The story? First go hang the lanterns; this fog is thick tonight. Then come back here and I'll tell you the story."

The *Crescent Moon* is a haunted cog that appears from time to time in the Nocturnal Sea. When she drops anchor near a port, sailors sleep lightly in their bunks, if they can sleep at all, for they say her arrival is an ill omen of the worst sort. Nightmares plague any sailor who sleeps on the sea that night, and some of those sailors simply never wake up.

"You got the lanterns hung? Good. I don't like the looks of the fog out there.

"Well, I promised you a tale, lad, and that you shall have. The *Crescent Moon* plied these waters just like we did, hoping to make a fortune with trade to the east. Her captain, Landry his name, was one of the first to set sail from Egertus when she became a port city, though he lost several ships before the *Crescent Moon* dragged him down with her. Folks laughed at him for setting sail into this thick fog—it was even worse in those days—and no one rated his chances very high. Called him a foolish dreamer. But he was right—he was one of the first to drop anchor at Meerdorf.

"They say that's about when his nightmares started—recurring dreams of failure, where he suffered total humiliation. If that's true, then his nightmares only drove him to greater and greater efforts—he kept exploring the eastward sea until he found the storms of ice past Kirchenheim.

"Four times he sailed the *Crescent Moon* into those storms, only to be driven back in defeat. He never returned from the fifth voyage. At least not alive.

"The *Crescent Moon*, though, she returned. Rime-encrusted, her sails in tatters, and no sign of any crew, just like you saw her tonight. She comes into port with the setting sun, drops anchor but never docks.

Overnight, she just sits there, dead in the water—not a light on her decks, and no breeze can stir those rags of sails any more. But with morning light she sails out again. She takes nothing out, and leaves nothing behind.

"Nothing, that is, but some bad dreams."

The *Crescent Moon* went down while sailing toward Todstein, the island home of the necromancer Meredoth. No ship has ever made a safe landing on that fell island, and many seamen have lost their lives in the attempt. Captain Landry, however, had the unfortunate distinction of being a victim of the Nightmare Court when he lost his life. Tormented by dreams of failure and inadequacy, Landry saw his worst nightmares come true as the *Crescent Moon* sank beneath the waves. The emotional devastation he suffered was so powerful that it brought his spirit into undeath. Restless in death, Landry still pilots the *Crescent Moon* through the icy waters of the Nocturnal Sea, feeding on the nightmares of sailors like himself.

Captain Samuel Landry (Third-Magnitude Ghost): AC -2; MV FI 6 (C); HD 7; hp 38; THAC0 13; #AT 1; Dmg special; Int exceptional (15); AL CE.

Special Attacks: *Wisdom drain:* Drains 1 point of Wisdom with successful attack, recovered at 1 point/week. *Cause despair:* Everyone within 100' of the ghost must make a saving throw vs. spell or suffer a -2 penalty to all attack, saving throw, and proficiency check rolls. *Cause nightmares:* Affects sleeping victim within 20' (usually sailors in their boats). Victim suffers an extremely terrifying nightmare (see page 16 of *The Rules of Dreams and Nightmares* in *The Nightmare Lands* boxed set). Depending on the outcome of the nightmare, the victim may fall into a coma, go insane, or even die.

Special Defenses: +2 or better weapon to hit. Immune to biological spells. Invisible and incorporeal. -1 penalty to turn attempts.

Weaknesses: Holy water causes 1d6 hp damage. Becomes more solid (AC 4, +1 weapons will hit) within earshot of a foghorn. Repelled by mirrors—can't approach within 5'.

The ghost of Captain Landry appears as a billowing cloud of ice-cold vapors or mist. He cannot leave the Nocturnal Sea, though he can freely drift above its surface or enter ships afloat on it.

"Yes, there's some who've tried to solve the mystery of the *Crescent Moon*. They row out through the fog, and some of them even come back to tell of their failure. Some drift back in to shore, sound asleep in their skiffs. Others climb aboard, only to be knocked overboard by a

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swinging mast or rolling barrel. Most of them have nightmares for days and days afterward, long after the *Crescent Moon* has sailed on.

“Like I said, lad, steer clear of that ship.”

Captain Landry maintains a mystical link with his ship, which gives him extraordinary powers aboard the vessel. He cannot be turned when he is on his ship. He can move any object aboard at will—including possessions brought onboard by foolhardy explorers, or even the explorers themselves. All characters setting foot on the *Crescent Moon* are automatically affected by a *neverending nightmare* spell that takes affect when they next sleep. Captain Landry can cast *sleep*, at will, on anyone within range of the ship.

“Quite a fog we’ve got tonight. You’d better get to sleep, though, lad. We’ve a long day ahead of us. Me? No, I don’t sleep when the *Crescent Moon* is around. You go ahead, though. Pleasant dreams.”



DARKBLOOD

TOWER

by Chad M. Paxton

Fredericktown, Pennsylvania

As you step through the mists, the hills and valleys that lie before you are barren of trees. The only landmark is a tower in a short distance, with what seems to be a light coming from a window near the top of the tower. You begin to approach the tower, wondering on the lack of foliage, but happy for it nonetheless. For if there are no trees, there are no trees for something... *unfriendly* to hide behind. Reassuring yourself of your relative safety, you walk toward this tower, a soft glow from the moon lighting your way.

Trekking toward what hopes to prove a friendly abode, you begin to notice the chill in the air, the quietness, the lack of even the most gentle of breezes. Still, the light from the tower beckons you, “seek sanctuary here”.

You approach the tower cautiously, hoping its occupants to be friendly, or at least to be living. You begin to notice something odd about this tower which becomes more and more noticeable the closer you come to it. The light doesn’t come from a window, per se, but from a glass dome that sits atop the tower. Yes, a large glass dome, an observation post, perhaps a place to watch the heavens and the earth.

The tower itself is nothing out of the ordinary, a large stone structure; vines near the base, creeping upwards; a few windows here and there. Again your mind is fascinated by the dome. How did it get there? Placed upon a tall tower like that, the glass seems to be one large piece. You look up again to marvel at this structural miracle, and you notice there is an enshadowed figure looking back at you.

The door then opens, and a whisper is heard all around you:

“Enter. You are welcome here.”

You turn to look at your traveling companions, and enter into the foyer. The surroundings tell of a home of a practitioner of magic, as books lie against one wall. Tomes of knowledge and myth, folklore and philosophic passages.

Stuffed chairs and a fireplace line another wall, as a holy symbol hangs above the mantle, illuminated softly from the fire.

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“Within this room, I can see and hear you.” The voice seems to come from everywhere and nowhere. “I entertain few visitors, and even fewer of those are friends. I must ask each of you, touch the holy symbol above the hearth. For my peace of mind.”

Each in turn, you touch the symbol of faith, proving your status as one of the living. Then, a door opens. A man enters.

Slowly he looks at each of you.

(“There’s something wrong with him,” you think.)

He wears black silk, trimmed in dark purple.

(“What is it?”)

His long, flowing white hair.

(“He’s just not... *right*.”)

“I am Darkblood,” he says.

He has no eyes.



DEAD END

by Jennifer Murray
Lafayette, Indiana

You find yourself in a dark, damp dungeon. Cries of pain and agony, fill the air. You look around yourself, and see next to nothing. The moonlight streaming through a tiny crack in the wall is your only illumination.

You plunge forward in the darkness with your hands outstretched in front of you. Your fingers brush the wall, and you follow it to a narrow passageway. You continue along until you can see light up ahead. You turn a corner and find that the passageways here are lit by torches spaced every ten feet. You continue onward.

You find yourself in a cavernous room that seems more like a cave than a man-made area. It is darker here, but not so much that you can’t see. Stone soldiers line the upper section of the room, all in a perfectly straight line. Their eyes are all glowing a ghastly purple.

“Who goes there?”

The voice echoes through the cavern, but you are unable to pinpoint it.

The soldiers slowly stir to life. You know you have no chance against that many fighters, so you run for all you are worth toward the far end of the cavern, narrowly escaping the clutching fingers of the soldiers. A bright white light seems to be coming from underneath some sort of a small door nearly hidden on the far wall of the cavern.

You throw yourself at that door, and manage to get it open and go beyond. You turn quickly and slam the door closed. It immediately glows with a red aura that seems to be giving off intense amounts of heat, so you back away toward the far side of the room. It seems to be some sort of a lab. You look around and find that there is only one other exit, so you attempt to open that door.

A large explosion rocks you backwards and slams you against a wall.

As you come to, you look up to see some whisper of a man, nearly invisible as he is so insubstantial, peeking down at you.

As you return his gaze, your mind is filled with the words, “You should not have come, you will be punished.”

With no more than a nod of his head, your body is filled with the most intense pain you could ever have imagined. The wraith turns almost green as his power envelopes him.

“Now you will die.”

You feel your skin start smoking, so you look toward your hands, only to find that the skin has nearly melted cleanly away. Mercifully, you pass out, and finally die.



THE DEVIL'S PIT

by Pierre van Rooden

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Everyone knows the stories of how the breaking of a vow can spell disaster and bad luck. At Madig's Ville, a small village of mostly farmers, this can get more literal than one might wish. The well in the center of the village has been named the Devil's Pit by the locals. It is customary in these parts to make ones wedding vows or seal closing deals in trade by casting a coin in the dark pools of the village well. Such a thing, however, is not a wise act to do in the Devil's Pit at Madig's Ville.

According to local lore, this was once the place where the woodsman Anton and the lovely Lumiere made their vow to eternally love each other and never part sides, by each casting a coin in the water of the well.

True love, however, is not always that easy to obtain. To Lumiere, so the tale goes, the relationship with Anton did not evolve into the happiness that she had desired. Indeed, the two often fell into quarrels, as Anton was jealous and quick to anger, and it did not take Lumiere long to figure out that Anton was not, after all, the one she wanted to spend her life with.

Unfortunately, Anton was obsessed with Lumiere. To him, the vow was sacred, and when Lumiere, after many fights, broke off their engagement he was furious. When she thereafter also proved susceptible to the charms of his teenage rival, his sanity shattered.

It is said that, in an especially dark night, Anton went to Lumiere's house once more to demand her everdying love, as she had vowed. He found her and her newfound lover in arms, and, in his rage, killed them both with one fell stroke of his axe.

Anton's dead body was found that morning in the well. Some say he drowned himself, others that he had stumbled and fallen on his way home, thus punished for his hideous crime. Some others say his death was even less natural, a punishment of the gods. No one can tell.

Soon after that fateful day, the well became known as a cursed place, and hence was named the Devil's Pit, for to make a vow at the well was to forge a pact with the fiends themselves. Anyone who now makes a vow at the still waters better be sure about it. For if the vow is broken, it is said, Anton's spirit will rise from the pool, and his axe will strike once more... at the vow breaker. Some have said they saw the tormented spirit rise at night, screaming in anguish. The following day, people

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more often than not would find the body of a boastful man, who arrogantly made his vow over the well, most often a vow he could not possibly keep. And despite the risks, vows are being made and broken again and again, for tradition is strong, and the human nature fickle.

So be ware to cast a coin at the well of Madig's Ville, for one risks the chance of losing more than merely one's honor...



FEAR

by Andrew Polewarczyk
Princeton, Massachusetts

The wind-empowered rain stings his pale face, and the hell-wrought gales pull at dark cloak, which he strains to keep wrapped about his frame. Much like a faithful hound following only a few steps behind treads yet another who braves the agitated weather this night. The wind rips at his tortured figure as well, almost lifting him from the rain-soaked, muddy ground beneath his feet. The men stand like solitary shadows against this vengeful night. Reaching the summit of a small hill they spy, at long last, refuge from the harsh weather of this desolate land. "Come Callert, there is where we'll find shelter from this tempest!" the taller man shouts, more to hear his own voice than to inform his struggling assistant.

"Yes, Master," Callert replies, his words broken by labored breaths. The master continues on, not waiting for Callert to regain his wind. The master's eyes are locked on what is ahead; a grand abbey stands before them. Two towering spires reach toward the clouded heavens, each tower harboring a large bell to awaken the hearts of the faithful from the dark sleep of sin. To the left of this massive structure lies a cemetery encompassed by a wall of piled stones. The wind has removed many pieces of the wall and has thrown them to the ground, revealing many gravestones. The markers are cracked and crooked, the names of the deceased forever erased by the years of fierce weather. Gargoyles perch upon the slate roofs, grinning wickedly from the abbey's stonework. Yellow lightning reflects off ancient stained glass marking the abbey's chapel.

Rain is still pouring down from the night sky when Callert and his master reach the abbey door. The master grasps the plain brass knocker and slams it down three times. Each knock echoes like a thunderbolt splitting the damp air. No answer comes to the grand wooden portal. Again he grabs the knocker and announces his presence with three more knocks. "I guess there be no caretaker awake to greet us; we shall enter and pay dues in the morn," the master concludes.

"But master!" Callert's voice is shrill. "This place frightens me, let's find rest elsewhere!"

"You forget you are traveling with me, Callert! Dr. Jean Abat-jour fears nothing!" He pulls open the great door and enters. A bolt of lightning flashes across the sky and Callert scampers in, finding his master standing in the middle of a giant chapel. Stone benches wait in rows on either side, a plain altar inhabits the room's far

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end, and narrow windows draw up the high chapel walls. “Here!” the master proclaims, “is where we shall spend this night!”

They light a fire and eat a meal of salted meats and dried fruit. Then they sit in silence. The doctor leans back against a stone bench. Callert’s eyes dart from corner to corner and at the shadows which seem to be creeping toward them. Suddenly, “Did ... did you hear that, Master?” Callert stammers.

“For once let your imagination be leashed,” the master speaks. A small rock skips out into the firelight. “Master! Master!” Callert begins, but he is silenced by the wave of a gloved hand. Abat-jour reaches for the heavily jeweled dirk strapped at his side.

“Who goes there?” he thunders. A dark robed figure emerges from one of the thicker shadows.

“Stay your weapon, good traveler, I am called Mechant and I am the caretaker of these halls. This place is called Maudit Abbey. I apologize for not having attended you earlier, but I was sleeping and did not hear you enter. Please sit.”

Jean replaces his dirk. “I am Dr. Jean Abat-jour, and this is my assistant Callert.” They turn to Callert who sits pale and shaking, his knees pulled to his chin. “You must excuse Callert,” the doctor growls, “he frightens easily. Pray remove your hood and draw closer to the fire.”

Mechant sits before the fire, opposite Jean. “Thank you. I do become so cold at times.” He turns to Callert. “I know it is little consolation, but your fears are well founded.”

“They are?” Callert chokes.

“I will tell you of the evil which haunts this place,” he speaks. Callert looks to his master, panic written across his face. Jean nods and turns back to Mechant.

“An untold age ago,” Mechant begins, “there stood here a temple to an ancient and forgotten god, Odemi, Lord of Fear. At one time Odemi had a large and faithful following until conquerors from the west swept across this land. They saw Odemi as a primitive and powerless god. They slew all faithful to him. The high priest, Tnahcem, seeing his brothers and sisters slaughtered, cried out to Odemi for vengeance, but the conquerors defiled Odemi’s temple and with its fallen stones they constructed this abbey, on the very spot, to house the priesthood to *their* god. Then, one by one, these monks were massacred, cut down by Death’s scythe while praying to their god. Through their deaths Odemi granted the high priest’s final wish and eternally bound Tnahcem’s spirit to these halls. Rumors speak of how Tnahcem knows the deepest fears of anyone entering this accursed place. He uses the knowledge of these fears and his unnatural powers to torture them. He offers their

fear to Odemi in the hope that this act will release him to his long awaited rest.”

“What fools do you take us for?” laughs Jean.

Mechant then removes his hood. A deep gash, oozing crimson, is drawn across his throat. Demonic designs are traced in blood on his face. His eyes, red as hell’s inferno, flame out at Jean, who gasps. Callert faints.

“Look, behold my revenge!” Mechant cries. Joan turns. Half-decaying corpses of the abbey priests rise to their feet. The shadows thicken and return to a wretched half-life, fulfilling Mechant’s twisted wishes.

Praises to Odemi, Lord of Fear, are revealed, written in his offerings’ life blood upon the chapel walls.

Mechant rises, “Enlighten me; dear, sweet doctor, what does a great man like you fear? Will you tell me? Or must I show you myself?”



HAUNTED SITES

THE GATES OF DUSK

by Geoff Gabriel Sinclair
Scarborough, Ontario

In a Barovian tavern, upon the 'Bold Ones Wanted' board, this particular listing has caught your eye. Roll for Intelligence to see if you are able to read the messy writing.

The wind howled especially audibly there, throughout the estate of the little-known necromancer Villik Scorscindusk, its hills dreamily inviting, brushed by strong breezes as I, the wary traveler, made a long, hard trek to the broken house atop.

I was young then, a ranger, searching mischievously for uncharted places. I walked proudly, strutting with my trusty walking cane clutched in hand.

I remember halting briefly (during the only rest period of my venture, mind you) to get a drink of water from my flask. I drank and drank, thirst diminishing when suddenly, I was startled by a bolt of the most vivid, godly lightning as it slithered out of the clouds and struck swiftly the roof of the old mansion. Near the house, I suppose due to stray sparks, a tree was lit into flames, providing light which allowed me to see the mansion, the horror of it all—five levels, all of them with careless, ajar windows, their red velvet draperies fluttering noisily in the wind, reaching for me like hordes of aggressive, ghoulish hands. The front doors, gigantic in their devilish splendor, remained closed and somehow seemed to boast the mansion's enormous level of ghostly intimidation. I felt the way one might feel if kneeling at the foot of a regal, kingly black serpent, its structure teeming with life, possessed by an underworld god. Nevertheless, I continued on, limping with my cane, swinging the bum leg with flawless rhythm.

By the time I reached the top, the foggy, grey sky had permitted rain, smothering the tree's fire to bring darkness once again. From my pack, I brought forth a mid-sized torch and lit its oiled peak.

The doors were more enormous than I had anticipated, an arch of jagged wood and metal with a yawning black dragon headpiece for its knocker. I timidly reached up, grasped the hideous, serpentine ring, and rapped three times. *One, two, three...* and three

echoes followed, ricocheting between the walls in the mansion.

There was no answer, as I expected, so I pushed the door, pressing all my weight into it, and the hinges began to squeal, low-pitched then high, higher and higher until the door suddenly gave way to my efforts and eased inward.

I stood at the threshold in shock, cold fear invading my body as my gaze locked on the overwhelming silver chandelier hovering near the ceiling high above. There were humming white spirits, maybe four of diem, encircling the chandelier continuously, emitting a low, droning moan. Their presence lit the area generously, prompting shadows to dance along the red velvet walls—shadows of figurines on wall-mounted shelves, depicting a diversity of children playing, crying, running, jumping; it was all so very impressive and when I looked more carefully, I saw that every statue, even the life-sized ones, were of children and incredibly detailed as well as preserved.

I snapped my attention to the spirits again and drew my sword. *Thank the gods for all things elven*, I whispered, weapon brandished, lighter than a dove's feather in my hand. The spirits came to a sudden halt of movement and one of them, the largest one, stretched for me, its neck lengthening so that the head could address me face to face. I quickly pointed my sword toward it, arm outstretched to keep a reasonable measure of distance between us. The spirit had the facial appearance of a young man and the voice of an elderly, dying one.

"Enter the gates of dusk, if you will," it sang. "...to explore, find adventure on this hill."

Another of the spirits made descent toward me, slower than the first, smiled, and joined in voice with the other.

"Find the bride of Master Villik and be assured," they continued, "that your spirit, your essence, your soul will be granted a treasure, a gift to *conquer the night*."

My spirits were lifted. *A treasure? How brilliant to have stumbled upon this!* But I was no fool. My sword's tender blade began to shimmer with gold light, humming with active energy.

"And what precisely is this gift?" I asked.

"To conquer the night is to master the powers of your soul," they chimed, and withdrew, pulling themselves up to the chandelier once again. "Will you descend to the house?"

"Descend? Are we not in the mansion at this moment?"

They were gone. I suppose my stubbornness aggravated them. Appearing to take their place, a wooden floor panel slid open, shedding forth luminous light. A staircase wound to the bottom of this trench,

some miles below. Jutting from the sides of the staircase every two steps, there was a metal platform, complete with railing. I figured them to be different levels of the apparent dungeon one could walk into.

Stubborn, ever so independent, I simply walked past the opening in the floor and explored the entire house *above* ground. I found nothing but two extra torches, a red velvet cloak with hood (Villik quite obviously cherished velvet), and an envelope. Standing near the opening in the floor once again, I opened this envelope and read the letter within. It was a poem and this is how it read:

*I have naught to find my flower,
I have naught to find my love,
Such greater forbidden power,
Has taken my wedding dove,
Fight I will the beasts,
The ancient rulers of the pain,
To be united with my dear,
To keep myself so sane*

I folded the poem, returned it to the envelope and sighed. I am within the house below at this moment, aiding in the search of Villik Scorscindusk's bride. I have reason to believe that he searches with me, most likely on a lower level than I. Feel free to join us. The reward, I can safely assure you, will be more than handsome.



THE GLASS HOUSE

by Marco Torres
Sacramento, California

In the domain of Richemulot, outside of the city of Mortigny near the Borcan border, there lie the remains of a greenhouse. Forever in the dark shade of the trees around it, the marvelous structure stands two stories high and measures nearly 200 feet in length. Unfortunately, the structure is incomplete. It is only a skeleton of what the original builder must have had planned, for it contains only a few glass windows, and only a single plant grows within. A passing observer need not wonder why it was never completed, however. The people of Mortigny know the story of the Glass House quite well.

Nearly fifty years ago, there lived a wealthy and intelligent merchant who resided in Mortigny. Most of his business was with the neighboring domain of Borca, so he traveled there often. On one of his visits, he met the daughter of one of his associates. She wasn't incredibly beautiful, but years of living a lonely life as a bachelor, the yearning for an heir, and the fact that her father was wealthy stirred the merchant's heart. After arranging things with her father, the merchant took his new bride back to his home. After spending time with her, he grew to truly love her. She, however, grew to resent him, for he had taken her away from the only home she had ever known, and thrust her into a new land. She never learned to love him, choosing instead to love someone else.

Shortly after moving into her new home, the lady took a liking to a handsome servant. She carried on an affair with him for many years, her husband never noticing because he was always away on business. At first, she only met with the servant when her husband was away on long trips, but after a few years, she began to take more risks. She met with the gentleman far more frequently, and during times when her husband was away for only one or two days. She was testing her luck and loving it. She would have gotten away with her affair had fate not stepped in.

On their tenth anniversary, the merchant decided he would give his wife a special gift. He would build a magnificent greenhouse for her: a place to contain nature's beauty for his Beauty. He hired the finest

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architects and engineers to design and build it right before he left for an important meeting with a Borcan associate. Before he left, however, he placed what he hoped would be the first of many plants within the greenhouse. It was an extremely rare plant, one that was said to grow only on the soil of some lost domain. According to the man he had purchased it from, the fruit of the plant was a key ingredient in curing certain deadly diseases. It was also quite tasty, and a delicacy in that forgotten land. While he was away, his wife discovered the greenhouse he was building for her, as well as the plant, and developed a taste for its fruit. Realizing she could have two good things at once, she chose the greenhouse as the location for her meetings with her lover. The merchant returned during one of these encounters, but rather than heading straight for his house as he normally did, he decided to check the progress the builders had made on the greenhouse. It was late, and the workers had gone home, but upon nearing the building, he heard voices. He approached cautiously, drawing the sword he always carried at his side when he traveled. Upon entering the incomplete building, the merchant's whole world was shattered.

There he found his wife and her lover, both as startled as the merchant was. His wife rushed to him, pleading for forgiveness and spouting excuses, but the merchant paid her no attention. With his sword already drawn, he threw his wife aside, and pierced the heart of her lover. Then his attention turned to her.

"I will not let you go so easily," he told her. "We made a vow, to stay together until death did us part. But you obviously didn't take that vow seriously." The merchant wiped away the tears that trickled down his cheek. "We will stay here together, forever reliving this cruel torture that you have caused, until enough people have shared our fate to fill the windows of this symbol of my love. And this time, you will take this vow seriously." Then, he took his wife into his arms in a final embrace, and thrust his sword through her back, straight into his gut. It is said that at that very moment, the first windows of the Glass House took form.

According to the tale, the Glass House was cursed by the merchant's final words. Now, anyone who enters the house becomes marked by it, and they are doomed to suffer from a death caused by the betrayal of someone they care about. In addition, the curse traps the souls of those it marks by creating a new window to contain them. This window appears at the exact moment in which the victim dies, and contains a small, nearly invisible bloodstain. Anyone who gazes into it sees a barely visible re-enactment of the victim's death. Some of these reenactments are gruesome, and can drive the strongest of men quite mad. There are quite a number of bloodstained windows already, as many courageous

people have braved the curse of the house to obtain the miraculous fruit of the plant within. Unfortunately, the curse usually takes effect by making the very person saved by the fruit be the one to betray the fool who braved the evil of the Glass House.

The souls of everyone trapped within the windows will be released once enough victims have been claimed to complete the construction of the building. Then, and only then, will the curse finally be broken, and the souls inside be allowed to rest.



THE GROTTO

by Robert VandeVeegaete
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Deep in the forests of Richemulot lies the Grotto. The ground suddenly rises up to form a cliff which is split by a steep cleft with a small rill flowing out. Beside the rill is a well tended path. The rill and path split the four foot width of the cleft as it winds back into the cliff. About twenty feet above the cleft ends, and the sky or an occasional overhanging tree can be seen. At each turn, grasses and wild flowers line the walls. After going about fifty yards the cleft opens up into a hollow. On the far side of the hollow water pours from the rock wall about eight feet up and falls down through a series of small pools to a pond below. Soft moss lines the edges of the pool and water lilies float in full bloom. The rill flows from the pond through a sward and out the cleft.

The sward is a fifty by eighty foot oval with bushes and trees lining the side and the steep rock wall behind. Many oak trees overhang the edges at the top of the rock walls with a circle of bright, blue sky in the middle. Beside the pool is a cave opening, and on the other side of the cave is a large oak covered in ivy. A swing hangs from one of the branches of the oak, and the ivy has grown down the ropes making it look like a natural part of the tree. The cave is about eight feet high and has a floor of sand. No tracks can be seen here. Back about fifteen feet it opens up into a room that seems to be someone's well-tended home. There is a fire-pit in the back with a crevice in the ceiling above for the smoke to filter out, and a cooking rack and pots to the side. At one side of the room is a table and two chairs. A bed is on the other side on the floor with a fine chest at its foot. In the chest are a few dresses and other clothing, most made for practical use rather than style. A passage leads off to two more rooms. The first is a storage room with shelves lined with herbs, sacks of grain and clay jars of preserved fruits. The other room holds a small underground lake and has water-filled passages that lead back into the darkness. Light from the torches reflects off the lake onto the wet ceiling in a beautiful, almost hypnotic pattern.

As time passes, things start to change. The sky darkens as if a storm is rolling over. The water from the spring becomes dark. The pond becomes brackish and expands, turning the sward into a marsh. The rock walls are covered with algae where water slides down, and the

rocks crumble making climbing impossible. The top of the cleft closes in, leaving a low cave with roots and moss hanging down from the ceiling and the brackish rill covering the floor. Where the swing once hung, a pair of nooses now dangle. Lizards and snakes can be seen creeping around the edges of the hollow while bugs swarm above your heads. The plants slowly wither and die, leaving a carpet of dead leaves around the edge of the hollow. In the larger cave, the ceiling is also covered with dangling roots and mosses where spiders weave their webs. The dead leaves blow into the cave and a jumble of old tracks become apparent. In the cave, the smoke hole clogs up while the furniture becomes worn and finally falls apart. The food in the storage room rots on the shelves. The underground lake becomes brackish and creatures can occasionally be seen surfacing for a few seconds in the dark water. Soft crying can be heard throughout the hollow and caves. This process takes place gradually over a period of about four hours.

Unfortunately the decayed state is reality and the other state is only a memory of what it used to be like. Long ago, a druidess was drawn into Ravenloft. She found this place and used her druidic abilities to make it into her home. She lived here in peace, caring for the surrounding forests when Grishnith, a werewolf from Arkandale, came upon her and captured her. He fouled her home, enjoying the torment that came from watching the place that she loved be destroyed, then murdered her. Her broken spirit remained, but could do no more than make the illusion of what her home once looked like. Grishnith used this place as his lair for a few years before he left for a new hunting ground. When he was finally wounded beyond the hope of recovery, he made his way back here and died in the underground lake.

Short of a wish, the only way to set the spirit of the druidess free is the restoration of her home. Grishnith's remains must be removed and burnt to ashes and the remains of his victims must be removed and buried outside the entrance to the cleft. All of the decayed matter and strange creatures must be removed and the water (both the pond outside and the underground lake which it is fed from) must be purified. New plants must be brought in and cared for until they are established. The remains of the druidess must be buried in the hollow and an oak tree planted over her grave. When all of this is done, her spirit will be able to leave, and she will leave her blessing on this place. Those buried outside the entrance will rise up to become guardians against any evil that tries to enter.



HAUNTED SITES

THE HANGING TREE

by Jason Taylor
San Jose, California

The Towne of Despayre

The frontier mining town of Despayre has always had a reputation as a rough town. Although most of the local population consists of peaceful miners, those of less than reputable morals frequent the town because of its relative isolation from big cities and their lawmen. The town itself sits at the base of a mountain rich with copper deposits. The mines are only an hour walk from the edge of town, along an old and much worn dirt road that leads up the mountain.

The Sheriff

Far back in the town's past, when the first tavern's walls still smelled of the lumberyard, the local rabble had grown to be too much trouble for the miners and businessmen to tolerate. They sent word into the city to notify the magistrate there that the problem had grown out of the control of their sheriff, who could barely handle the town drunks. Annoyed by their demands, the magistrate sent a sheriff into town to deal with the problems. His name was Bartholomew Ivanushka. He had a fierce reputation as having no mercy with trouble-making riff-raff. His appearance was a welcome relief to the townsfolk, who looked at him as a savior. He quickly replaced the local sheriff and deputized some of the locals to form a town militia and posse. It was made known to all through a public proclamation that the lawlessness would cease or be dealt with harshly. Unfortunately for them some of the more dense hooligans took no heed of his warning.

The Beginning

Later that same night, a young miner by the name of Sergei had too much too drink. He took it upon himself to beat a harlot who refused to submit herself to him. When word reached the sheriff hours later, he personally went to the man's house and dragged him out of bed by the hair. In the center of town with the scared drunk cringing at his heels, the sheriff shouted out to all in the town that this man was guilty of beating a woman. He

was to be executed in the morning and everyone in town was required to attend the execution, just after dawn. By the time the sun rose, quite a sizable crowd had already gathered at the jail. When the sheriff emerged, he had Sergei by the scruff of the neck in one hand, and a length of rope in the other. He led the hung-over Sergei and the crowd out of town down the road that leads back into the city. There, at the crossroads just outside of town, stood the largest oak tree that any one of them could remember seeing. With Sergei's neck at one end of the rope, the other was thrown over a branch. The sheriff declared to all present that this was to be the one and only punishment for any crime in town. There, stretched by his neck, Sergei met his fate. And its name was Black Bart.

Black Bart

Although the first executions were met with welcome approval from the townspeople, the sheriff's strict methods were soon to be dreaded by the populace. They whispered names behind his back, "Black Bart" being one that was particularly fond after he had an entire gang of thieves executed at the same time, eight in all. In no time at all, most of the criminal element in town had been killed or scared off. But Black Bart was not satisfied. Seemingly overcome by madness, he soon started executing innocent citizens under the guise of phony accusations. In some instances, the crimes were real, but his lust for justice blinded him to the innocence or guilt of the accused, and he had them executed anyway. It was not long before some members of the town met at secret locations to discuss what was to be done with the new sheriff. Even some of the town's shadier citizens were there, for everyone hated Black Bart with all their hearts. It was decided by all that the sheriff was no longer to be tolerated. Late one night, a mob gathered outside the sheriff's home, carrying torches and crude weapons. The sheriff's own deputies were in the front of the mob, and indeed were of instrumental importance in organizing the mob. Bart was dragged out of bed, much like poor Sergei those many months ago, and hauled bodily down to the crossroads. There, he was pronounced guilty of his crimes against the town, in the same fashion in which he had judged them, and was hung by his neck until he stopped kicking. When some curious youths went out in the morning to see the body, it was not there. There was only a rope with a noose at the end, still hanging from the tree.

The Crossroads

Although many years have passed since Bart's fateful execution at the hanging tree, the area has not changed

much. It is located just outside of town, about twenty minutes' walk. A gnarled old oak tree, older than any in town can remember, stands at the location. Not a single leaf hangs from its twisted branches. To all appearances, the tree is dead, yet it still grows a little every year. Several old and frayed lengths of rope hang from some of the lower branches. Eerily enough, one still has a noose at the end, and it is whispered at night that this was the rope from which Bart was hung. On all sides of the dirt crossroads are the shallow graves where the executed were buried face down in the dirt once their bodies were cut down. All except for Bart, that is. It is said that his spirit still haunts the area, looking for vengeance on his murderers. Forever prowling the night, his soul is in eternal torment. To this day, locals make a warding sign as they pass the tree and crossroads, which they do so only in the utmost of need.



THE IPSWICH BREWERY

by W. Jason Peck
Freemont, California

Whether the arras actually moved I cannot say. I think it did, very slightly. But what I can swear to is that behind it I heard a low, distinct scurrying as of rats or mice.

—H. P. Lovecraft
The Rats in the Walls

Along the craggy coast of northeastern Massachusetts the cold Atlantic washes against a series of towering sea cliffs. This region, just west of the small town of Rockport, is crowded with the gnarled and ancient trees of a dark pine forest. Through the rustling woods and beyond an overgrown, wagon-rutted road a worn complex of timber buildings broods upon the precipice, overlooking the gray, churning waves of Ipswich Bay.

The region surrounding the decrepit brewery is numbingly silent, with only the ever-present crashing waves far below and the occasional wailing wind through the trees to stave off deafness. Even before the Puritans whispered of the black devils frolicking through the trees here, the native Indians spoke of the evil earth spirits who lurked atop the misty cliffs. No one had ever lived here and no manner of humanity's civilization had ever encroached upon this sullen land. No one, that is, until William Byron Thomas decided that this unclaimed patch of land would serve admirably as the site of his New World brewery.

History

Construction on the brewery began in the spring of 1753 and seemed bedeviled from the start. The rainy season dragged on late that year, unceasing until mid-June. The heavy rainfall drenched the coastline, creating huge expanses of clinging mud and soaking the woods to near axe-resistant proportions. Even before the end of June the workers, who mostly hailed from nearby Rockport,

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whispered that it was obvious that the Devil frowned upon this intrusion into his territory.

But Master Thomas refused to be cowed. A self-made Boston merchant, Thomas firmly believed that there was nothing that an intelligent, obstinate man could not do. He therefore doubled his work force and returned to his task. He drove the workers hard, quashing all rumors of the supernatural with harsh words concerning such drivel, and forcing everyone to stay focused. Still, a series of accidents and unlucky mishaps plagued the operation and several men were maimed, killed or went entirely missing. The men claimed that spirits haunted the site and many refused to remain. Despite this, Thomas' iron will won out, and those who did remain completed the brewery complex in late October, having once again slogged through the miserable rains that had come early that year.

Once the work was complete, Master Thomas settled into his modest two-story home. In addition to his home, the complex consisted of a large barn, three long, interconnected brewing buildings and a small collection of lesser shacks. The entire place was constructed of stout pine logs from the surrounding woods. Thomas spent the winter purchasing supplies and hiring a brewing labor force for the spring. This task proved more easy than the initial construction and by early 1754 the brewery was up and running.

After the initial year, the brewery proved successful. Ipswich Ale became all the rage in Boston over the next decade and Master Thomas was much respected for his pioneering spirit and unrelenting drive. Indeed, in Boston, Thomas became a sort of folk legend—the man who had tamed the Devil's land and turned a profit too. In Rockport and its surrounding lesser communities, however, Thomas and his brewery garnered a more sinister reputation. It was commonly believed by the local folk that only by trafficking with the evil spirits of that dark woodland could anyone benefit from the misfortunes of those men who had built the brewery.

By 1771, though sales of Ipswich Ale were still brisk, the brewery was declining. Laborers were hard to come by, for most locals refused to work in this tabooed place and outsiders were expensive to recruit and/or import. In addition, Ipswich Brewery had developed a well-deserved reputation for being infested with rats over the last decade and no measures taken to rid the place of them had any discernible affect. There were also many rumors concerning ghostly sightings, ominous scurrying and tragic accidents. Amid whispers that Thomas had last been seen walking along the cliff-side gibbering about 'the voices in the wall,' the brewery was abandoned in 1775.

Forbidden Lore

The ruins of Ipswich Brewery have remained empty for over one hundred years, disturbed only by the occasional stranger seeking Thomas' rumored stash of gold. The evil stories continue to circulate even now in 1881, only they have been expanded upon by legends of Thomas' mad ghost and the evils infesting the old brewery. Evil deeds, haunting spirits, and tales of those foolish explorers who ventured into the ruins and never returned abound in the local countryside and parts of Boston.

The truth is that this rocky stretch of coastline has been the home to a clan of elusive jermaine for centuries. Their vast warrens honeycomb every nook and cranny of the sea cliffs, including many entrances into the ruined brewery. The tiny jinxkin and their rat companions have tormented intruders into their lands since before the Europeans had come, and it is their pranks and snares that have given the region its haunted reputation. They always operate from the shadows of their hidden tunnels, taking care never to reveal themselves. It is in this way that the clan finally succeeded in driving William Thomas mad after having failed to scare the iron-willed man off in the first place. Now, a hundred years later, the clan infests the ruined brewery as well as the cliffs upon which it stands. The land is much the same as it was in the past—dark, wild and forlorn. Only today, the decrepit ruins of failed civilization sometimes lure the adventurous, and the jermaine enjoy the chance to frighten and abuse them.



THE LEGEND OF WILLIAM TOR

by Dan Olson
Chicago, Illinois

William Tor, in his youth, had spent much of the time with his friends, an adventuring party known as The Hunters. A sun-priest, William made healing his specialty. In fact, his curative abilities were spoken of far and wide. Many big cities offered luxuries and flat-out bribes for William to retire within their confines.

When the day did come for his retirement, William chose not one of these cities, but the small lumber town of Bachelor's Grove. And with his life-savings, William built the Cathedral of Radiance.

It was a grand structure, truly magnificent in its worship of the sun. For years, people would come, not only from Bachelor's Grove, but from the cities themselves. And these were cities that had cathedrals of their own.

The people of Bachelor's Grove began to see William as their own personal saint, more than the man he really was. William would, without fail, make it a point to gently correct this misconception. Of course, that only made him seem more saintly, and his popularity grew. Thus it came as a devastating shock when the infant died.

The child had been brought to him late one night. The boy seemed to be suffering from a bad cold, nothing more. But the malady grew steadily worse, and as dawn broke, the child died. It was as though the infant had been waiting for the sun. William's popularity had peaked and now began to wane.

A few months later, a hunting party arrived at The Cathedral. One of their group had been mauled by "something" in the surrounding woods. The man was dead before they even carried him inside, but that was not how the story remained. Word quickly got out that William Tor had lost another soul.

Enemies of the Hunters (the ones that had managed to survive) saw this as an opportunity, and made the most of it. Bodies began turning up in Bachelor's Grove, each one marked with symbol of William's order. Graves were dug up, and muddy footprints led to the rear doors of the cathedral. William, of course, was responsible for none of this. The townspeople, however, saw it

differently, deluded as they were by the recent events and the speeches about William's dark past given by the "wandering minstrel." Incited to a mob mentality, they stormed the cathedral en masse. Kegs of oil were broken open throughout the interior, while others were left to explode at key structural points. William, emerging from his chambers, was met with a hailstorm of thrown debris. He fell back, unconscious.

He did not awaken until his oil-soaked robes burst into flames. His shrieks could be heard even above the roar of the inferno by the townsfolk outside. Over the course of the night, the Cathedral of Radiance was leveled. Exploding kegs started the job; sledgehammers and teams of oxen finished it. The pile of rubble smoldered all through the following day.

But as the sun set, the people of Bachelor's Grove began to scream. As others ran into the streets, they saw it, too. Not a pile of smoking rubble, but The Cathedral itself, standing defiantly, now seeming to loom over the small town. By the following night, no one remained in Bachelor's Grove. The mass exodus had been fast and panicked, many people fleeing down the road without returning for their belongings.

The Cathedral of Radiance appears again, from time to time, but it is by no means anchored to Bachelor's Grove. The spirit of William Tor, enraged by the mistrust and betrayal of those he served so faithfully, is now consumed by a quest for revenge. The Cathedral reappears on the outskirts of towns now inhabited by the people from Bachelor's Grove directly responsible for the betrayal. It remains a day, and then vanishes, only to reappear near another of the angry mob. Very few of those targeted ever entered the structure, but William's hatred knows no bounds, and the curse has become hereditary. The descendants of the original mob very often do not know about The Cathedral, ashamed as their parents and grandparents were of the incident. It is through this ignorance that William seeks to fulfill his quest.

The Cathedral is completely harmless during the day as William, its driving force, lies dormant. As the sun sets, The Cathedral loses any claim to "radiance". The white stones turn charcoal grey and the colored windows bleed to red. When the sun disappears, the doors slam shut and cannot be opened until sunrise.

The many paintings throughout the Cathedral, formerly of holy figures and sunscapes, take on a sinister new look. William, and those trapped within, are constantly reminded of the past. In one painting, two parents stand over a tiny coffin, glaring accordingly at the viewer. Other paintings depict William's former compatriots, now seen as ghouls and rotting zombies. Many other pictures become personalized for the person

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looking at them, showing gravestones with their names on them, for example.

William appears at the altar during the night and begins his sermon. He starts out innocently enough, speaking of the merits of friendship and loyalty. But the sermon soon turns to the topics of betrayal and murder. Should one of the captives be a descendant of the Bachelor's Grove townsfolk, William makes it a point to explain to the doomed individual that he or she is dying this night to set right an old wrong. But unless the opportunity presents itself to do so in a fitting manner, he does not kill the person outright. He is patient, and more than willing to play "cat and mouse" until morning.

Just before sunrise, the oils from the paintings begin to liquefy and pool on the floor. The blood from the windows mixes with it as well. As dawn breaks, the sunlight ignites the oil, and the past is relived. Those trapped within will never be seen again.

Except for William For, of course... he has much more to do.



THE LITTLE FELLOW

by Jon Stacey
Bradley, South Dakota

This article takes place on Gothic Earth and is based off an actual place and legend.

From the journal of Thomas O'Brien, railroad engineer:

August 7th, 1898

A tragic tale was revealed to me this day. A tale of a child's ghost, lost and alone, trapped in this world by its own childish aspirations...

For more than a year, I ran a locomotive though the Great Plains. A rather boring route because of the emptiness of the land. There was one highlight of the trip though: a young boy who would stand upon a hill and wave as I rolled past. The lad couldn't have been more than nine and his face would absolutely beam with dreams and aspirations. The boy would only be there to greet me the few hours before sunrise or the few hours after sunset.

Seeing the young boy filled with awe as the locomotive rolled by always lifted my spirits... until this evening...

The summer heat warped the rails in a town near where I would see the little boy. My engine derailed—not bad, but I needed help to set the wheels back on the track. Men from the town volunteered to help and we had the engine sitting back on the rails by evening. I thanked the men for their time by buying them all several rounds of drinks at the tavern. It was a celebration! Until my curiosity got the better of me...

I asked the barkeep about the young lad who waved at the locomotives. As soon as the words passed my lips, the room grew silent. Everyone stared at me, surprise and fear on their faces.

I'll never forget what the barkeep said to me then: "There is no such lad... Not for many years." He continued, his voice breaking the silence. "The lad always stood on a hill beside the rails to wave at the engineer as the train rolled past. Even during the coldest part of winter he would be there to greet the locomotives."

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The barkeep looked at me in sorrow as he saw the truth dawning on me. “The lad died ten years ago. His family buried him on the same hill so he could watch the engines forever. A simple wooden cross as his marker. Then they left, returning to the East, unable to stay in the land that took their son. No one even remembers their surname.

“Ever since the lad was buried, we still hear stories of him waving at passing trains. I guess the boy’s spirit remains, still greeting the great locomotives he so loved when alive. I am sorry to be the one to tell you this.”

The people in the tavern resumed their chatter, only more quiet than before. I left the tavern soon after, leaving a generous tip for the barkeep. As I write this, I sit here in my room at the inn, unable to sleep, as my mind races over what the barkeep told me. The boy who greeted me every sunrise and sunset for the past year was in truth a spirit tied to the earth, unable or unwilling to move on, trapped by his own love of trains and childhood aspirations. I wonder if the spirit even realizes he is dead. I cannot help but weep for that poor lost soul.



LOCHART LAKE

by Jason Schultz
Quimby, Virginia

Background

Among the rolling hills of the north lies the sleepy town of shepherds known as Downing. These people, safe in their warm beds or next to their glowing fires, speak in hushed tones of the lake to the south known as Lochart. Surrounded by a misty forest the cold, dark waters of the loch have beckoned many a group to their deaths. A few fishermen ply these waters and speak of a beast who roams them by night.

Plesiosaurus: AC 7; MV sw 15; HD 20; hp 100; THAC0 5; #AT 1; Dmg 5d4 (bite); SA flippers; SZ H (40’ body, 20’ neck); ML avg (10); Int non-(0); AL N; XP 12,000.

Notes: When attacking aquatic foes, can attack twice with its flippers for 2d6 damage each.

But it is not the waters that call to adventurers, but the mist-shrouded island at its heart whose shores cannot be seen from land. The six-by-five mile island was once a grove to a druid. One day a noble and his men landed on the island and found the grove. They chose to begin their construction using the stones of the grove. When the druid returned he was distraught and was easily captured. He was taken to the shore and on the pain of death told not to return. The prince then used the local townsfolk to build his manor.

Less than a year later the noble captured the fancy of an elven maid and she soon came to reside with him in his new home. A year later the manor was finished and there was a celebration, for the maiden was found to be with child. But the celebration was short-lived, for now the townsfolk were again drafted to make additions and changes to the manor. But now they were at a deadline, for it must be finished before the birth. They were pushed and worked, some to death, and many accidents occurred but they finished a week before the gala.

Now during this time the druid had walked the land and had heard all of what the noble had been doing. But when he heard about the maid, he began to understand. He had known her thirty years before and had refused her love, and this was all directed against him to make him suffer. And so his plot of revenge was formed; along with many of the villagers they planned to poison all the wine going to the ball.

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At the final toast of the evening it was made sure that all had plenty of wine, and after the toast the druid confronted the assembled guests, told his story, and announced their fate. Then, as he laughed at their doom, he transformed into a raven and took flight. With her final breath the elven maiden cursed him, and as he flew over the water his form was transformed and he crashed into the icy waters below. He swam back to the island and found he had been transformed into a leucrotta (greater or normal). As he lay on the beach he heard the maiden's final scream as she was transformed into a banshee and her guests into zombies and skeletons as the fog began to come upon the water, drawing them into the Demiplane of Dread.

Description

The waters of the lake are dark and murky. The fog clings to you, seeping coldness through to your bones. The only sounds you hear are your labored breathing and the sound of the oars slapping against the water as your smelly fishing boat creaks through the mists. All sound seems muffled in the dead calm of the loch.

Ahead of you the fog begins to take on form and you can make out a rocky shore. As your boat beaches on the rounded stones of the shore the silence is broken by the beating wings of visitors. Your admirers, huge coal-black ravens, stare at you with piercing blue-black eyes from the limbs of ancient oaks a few dozen yards away. They start to call to you, bringing uncomfortable attention, disturbing the deathly silence of the shore as if in protest to your intrusion upon their isle. Just as suddenly as they came they take flight as if to go and warn the rest of the island of your intrusion. It is only then that you notice the forms of turrets of an ancient castle that lies ahead of you, somewhere within the gloomy mist-filled woods before you.



MIRRORS TO THE SOUL

by Lazarus Smith
Jonesboro, Arkansas

Sometimes it seems that the most frightening things are those that are not evil, but are instead tragic. This is the nature of the Soul Mirrors. In years gone by, the Garden of the Soul Mirrors was a place of peace, guarded by a small sect of priestesses. The acolyte would enter the Mirrors, which were actually a set of four small pools, each one absolutely clear and serene, and would look in each one in turn. They would show her the past, present, and future. Each acolyte was always warned not to look into the fourth, lest they see that which no one should ever see, though none ever knew what that was, for none had ever dared to look.

Then the day came that a young acolyte named Iona was to take her turn at the mirrors. Iona knew that the Mirrors would help her decide what to do with her life. Many other young women had come away from the Mirrors with a new purpose, having seen that their Goddess had different plans for them. That was the purpose of the Mirrors after all, showing you not what you wanted to see, but rather, the truth.

Iona's doubts about her life as a priestess sprouted from a young man named Daen. The two lovers had been together just once, but it made Iona feel that she might not belong in the sect, but rather had a family life ahead of her. Daen had told her how much he loved her, but that he would respect any decision she made. He would wait for her to visit the Mirrors, and when the next day came (visiting the Mirrors was usually an all night affair), he would meet her outside the garden where they would either be married or go their separate ways.

That evening Iona went to the Mirrors. She looked in the first pool and saw herself as a child. She dreamt what it would be like to have a child of her own. Moving to the second pool, she saw an image of herself. It could almost be a reflection, except that in the pool, she was pregnant. Iona tried to touch the full belly of the reflection, but the image vanished in the ripples. Hurrying to the third pool, she gazed in, and saw nothing but swirling mists.

Iona realized that she must have looked into the pools out of order, and hurried to the fourth pool. Gazing into its cool depths, Iona saw Daen, and knew in her

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heart that this was a sign from her Goddess, that she should spend her life with him. She watched as his body rolled with hers, and he cried out that he loved her, that he would always be hers, and hers alone. She remembered all the things he said to her, and hearing him saying them again made her resolute that this was the path that her life was to take. Then she noticed the hair of the woman in the image. Instead of her blonde curls, she saw the raven locks of another acolyte. Daen was with her, and Iona realized what the fourth pool showed her as her heart broke. The pain in Iona's heart grew as she drew out the slim knife that she used for a hundred different chores every day.

The next day, When a priestesses went out to the garden to see how Iona had fared, Iona was not there, and neither was the garden. All that remained was a slim, bloodstained knife.

The Mirrors

In Ravenloft, The Mirrors can seem to be a safe haven, because undead will not enter the garden unless commanded by someone on the power level of a Lord. The players (and their characters) will never believe that they are safe from the horrors of Ravenloft because the place they are in is too horrible even for those on the other side of death's threshold.

If the characters choose to ignore the pools of water entirely, then there is no problem. However, if during the night someone chooses to drink, wash, or even look into the pools, two saves vs. spell must be made; the first is to suffer the effects of the pool, the second is to see if

the character goes on to the next. If this second save is successful, the character has no compulsion to continue, but knowing most players, they will.

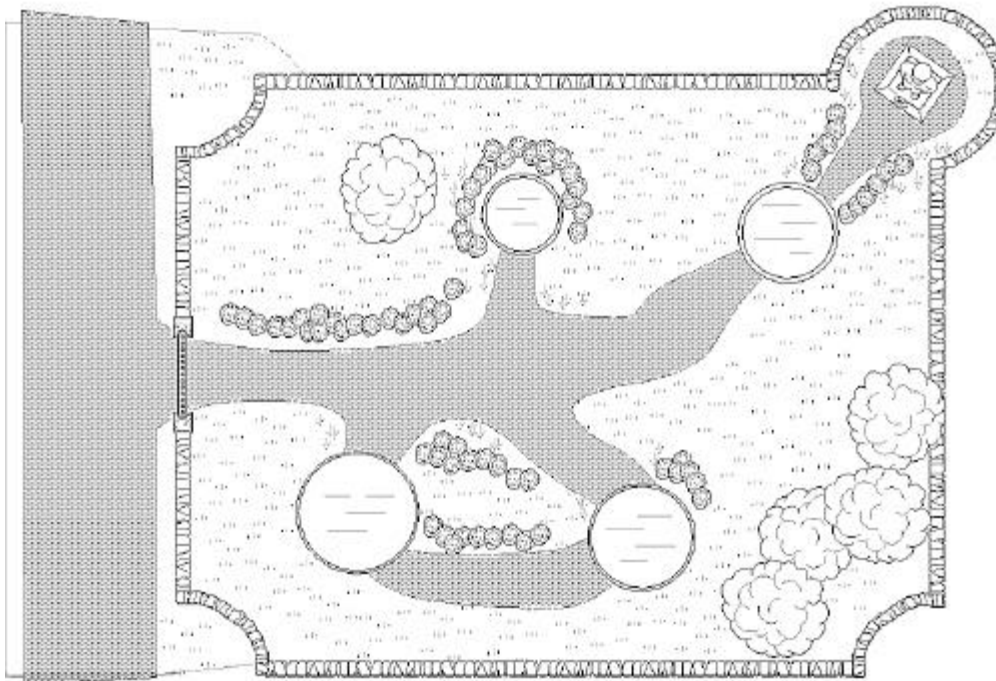
The first pool will show the character his childhood. The character will be forced to relive his worst childhood memory, and must save, or be forced to relive it forever, every time he closes his eyes, allowing for no sleep.

The second pool shows the character's present, but magnifies his worst flaw. The character must save, or will be filled with self doubt for the rest of his life, causing him to always lose initiative.

The next pool is simple, as it shows the character laying dead next to the pool, and he must either save or die from the shock.

The fourth pool shows the character the worst betrayal of his life. If the save is failed, the character flies into a rage and attacks the betrayer (if present) with a +4 to hit and +4 to damage (spells are allowed). If the betrayer is not present then the character will make every attempt at suicide, unless restrained. A *remove curse* will stop any effects but this last one, which requires a properly worded *wish* to break it.

The final danger of the garden is Iona herself, who is like unto a Lord in this Mini-Realm. She resides in the statue of the forgotten goddess, which she will animate and cause to attack anyone who has ever betrayed a lover. The statistics of this statue are those of a 16 HD Earth Elemental (*Monstrous Compendium*), except that it can only be harmed by the betrayer, and is impervious to any other source of attack.



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THE MOORLAN' STONES

by Michael Abell
Wilmington, Massachusetts

Before you lay the moor-lands; nestled within a bowl formed by the surrounding hills. Pale, dead trees dot the landscape, their roots long drowned by the persistent water. Within the center of the moors lie a circle of monoliths. Even at this distance you feel a strong pull from the stones...

The ground beneath the moss is soft, with each step it undulates, sending ripples as though announcing your presence. Ice cold water wells up through the moss with each step, numbing your legs from the calves down. With leaden limbs you pick your way forward as the lure of the stones pull you onward...

The stones are mottled with a scabrous growth of lichen and jut out of ground like rotten teeth. You can feel the weight of eons bearing down as you enter the circle and approach the pool. The familiar sounds of the surrounding woods have stopped as if unable to penetrate the stone circle. Even the light breeze has been stilled, causing the air to lie heavy...

The grove is pock-marked by clumps of sickly vegetation; the clumps growing closest to the water are covered in a pallid fungus. The same fungus grows thick on fallen trees as if a bloated corpse has risen from the depths. A sluggish stream oozes from the pool, the only discernible movement in the fetid waters is the occasional swirl...

You now realize that you've been standing near the edge of the pool, your weight causing the floating ground to pitch toward the black maw of the pool... With a cry, you stumble back from the edge, falling as your wooden limbs betray you. The icy water shocks you awake and as you regain your footing you realize that the sun is low in the sky...



THE MANOR AT NEW CORINTH

by Tricia Newbre
Peoria, Illinois

The Manor at New Corinth rises nearly 180 feet above the rocky inlet of the Atlantic coastline. The courtyard and gardens surrounding the marble fountain are well-designed and perfectly executed; not a blade of grass is out of place. The white stone walls of the house have taken on the dancing glow of torches which line the circular drive, and the candles that shine in every window. Cheerful bunting flutters around the great arched doorway. Before the house stand a dozen or more carriages, ready to convey their owners home at the close of the evening. So the Manor has stood for three centuries and more; not a stone has fallen from its walls, not a single leaded glass window has been broken, and the white lace curtains still adorn its windows.

The Manor has not changed in its slightest detail since well before this piece of real estate was deemed "The United States of America," when "Pennsylvania" sounded odd and too new. The Manor stood at New Corinth long before polite people dared to make the voyage across the Atlantic, then a feat reserved for criminals and refugees. Yet, even then a certain few of the old world sensed the potential this mysterious new continent held. Lord Henri of Corinth was one of them. Seemingly overnight he amassed an unheard of fortune, the entirety of which he devoted to building his estate in the new world.

Upon its completion he gathered what passed for high society in that place for a celebration which rivaled those held in the courts of Europe. At the height of the festivities, a servant summoned the master of the house to settle a dispute among his men. He emerged from the house to the courtyard, furious that his celebration had been disrupted. He turned his best hunting dogs loose on the angry men, ordering them off the property and refusing payment for their services. Instead of leaving and allowing him to return to his glorious housewarming, the men swarmed, pelting him with whatever debris they had. Henri of Corinth was stoned to death there in the courtyard by his own men. They left his body where it fell, bloody and unburied.

His guests that evening simply vanished. Some surmised that they witnessed the murder and fled, or

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were murdered themselves, but in any case not a single person in the house the night of Henri's death, guest or servant, ever returned. Soon after, the gates were found locked and the yard empty except for the broken body of Henri Abbot. The body has since disappeared, but the same lock hangs upon the gate today, unruined and unbroken.



OLD OGDEN ABBNEY

by James Wyatt
Berkeley, California

A bleak promontory overlooks barren fields that have grown no crop in decades. Atop the desolate mound, charred mounds of rubble huddle around a ruined chapel, the only structure that remains of Old Ogden Abbey

Background

Ogden Abbey was founded centuries ago, in a happier time. It was never large or wealthy, but served its god as a center of learning, a place of worship—and a renowned bakery. The nearby village benefited greatly from the presence of the brothers on the hill, and sustained their labors by providing a market for the abbey bread.

Twenty-five years ago, everything changed. Somehow, a chasm opened in the earth that seemed to connect to the deepest pits of the Abyss, and from that chasm foul tanar'ri came streaming forth, polluting the land with their presence. Ogden Abbey was gutted by fire, the brothers were tortured and killed, and the scorched stones of the chapel were abandoned on the hilltop.

Or perhaps they were not quite abandoned. Over the years, many travelers have found themselves among the ruins of the abbey—some hoping to rebuild it and reconsecrate the chapel, others simply looking for shelter. All of them have faced a terrible enemy: a succubus, the most beguiling and treacherous of tanar'ri, who led their plans and their hearts astray.

The Chapel

Except for the bell tower, the chapel is but a single large room, a rectangle about 40' by 60'. Arching stained-glass windows once graced all four walls. Above the doors to the chapel, a gaping hole is all that remains of the glass which once invited all within and without the sanctuary to join in praise. On each of the side walls, four small windows depicting prominent saints of the church are in various states of wholeness, some completely intact, others with only fragments remaining. On the far wall, above the altar, an elaborate circular window depicts Saint Marcella, the warrior-monk who

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lay down the Rule by which the monks of this abbey lived. She is dressed in plate mail and has long golden hair spilling over her shoulders. The top half of the window is broken out, but the remaining portion shows the saint kneeling before a beautiful black unicorn (a divine avatar), as angelic figures deliver the pages of the Rule into her hand.

Nine statues ring the altar in a semicircle, representing the same nine saints depicted on the chapel walls, with Marcella in the center. These are worn and sometimes broken, like the windows. The altar itself is a large stone table, decorated with scenes of unicorns and knights, monks and townspeople. The precious furnishings that once graced the altar are gone, and the surface of the table bears dark stains from the defiling sacrifices of fiends.

The rest of the sanctuary is large open space. There never were pews in the chapel, since the monks stood during worship. The bell tower, located in the southwest corner of the chapel, impinges on the rectangular space of the sanctuary. An open doorway adjacent to the main chapel doors gives access to a square staircase leading upward. The bell ropes hang all the way down to the chapel floor. At the top of the stairs, a trap door leads through a thin wooden floor to the belfry itself. Two bells hang from the top of the tower, their ropes passing down through holes in the floor. One bell remains firmly affixed to its bearings, but the other is loose, and the slightest extra weight on the rope will send it crashing down to the ground below.

The Fiend

The sole inhabitant of Old Ogden Abbey is a succubus named Shi'ara. She delights in twisting the spiritual longings of her prey, using the faith of her victims to corrupt and eventually destroy them. Her favorite targets, naturally, are paladins and priests, but she eagerly sets her sights on the simple faith of the nearby villagers as well. By seducing the good with visions of power tainted with corruption, with dreams of glory and wealth achieved through force and trickery, Shi'ara pollutes the highest ideals of good, spiritual folk with baser motives and desires. In a demiplane where the forces of good have so little power, she finds many easy victims by offering them the chance to exert power in the name of goodness—even though that name be defiled on their lips.

This is why Shi'ara has taken up residence in Old Ogden Abbey. Posing as the elderly leader of the monastery, Abbot Michael, struggling alone to rebuild and reconsecrate the place, she lures those who also dream of rebuilding the abbey. She favors the guise of Abbot Michael, a wizened old man who seems

completely harmless, but to suit her purposes she often appears in other forms as well. She sometimes appears as a young woman who reluctantly confesses to being the abbot's daughter, conceived in a shameful liaison. She is especially fond of appearing as Saint Marcella, the patron of the monastery.

Shi'ara (succubus): AC 0; MV 12, FI 18 (C); HD 6; hp 34; THAC0 15; #AT 2; Dmg 1-3/1-3; SA Energy drain, see below; SD Silver or +2 magic weapon to hit, immune to fire, electricity, and poison, half damage from cold and gas, never surprised; MR 30%; ML 14; AL CE; XP 14,000; Planescape Monstrous Compendium/ 109 (Tanar'ri, Lesser).

S 12, D 15, C 13, I 19, W 16, Ch 17

Notes: The innate spell-like abilities of a succubus include: *etherealness, charm person, clairaudience, ESP, plane shift, shapechange, suggestion, darkness 15' radius, infravision, teleport without error.*



PLIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

by Conor Trouw
Berkeley, California

The stench of a thousand souls slowly trickles its way along the worn masonry as it weaves its path along the grey banks, finally dropping into a darkness, which, although absurd, seems capable of sentient thought, almost as if the darkness itself were alive, and hungry. The maze of refuse and excrement has almost become tolerable now. However, despite experience, one never truly becomes accustomed to the filth.

Slowly, the roar of the turbulent waters becomes louder, and with every step further along the narrow path, the terror slowly begins to build. For ahead is the darkness, the final battle, and the final test. Has the constant sound of running water gnawed at your mind for too long? Were the long hours of planning worth all the days in this filth? Will the vain cries of help from your drowning guild haunt you for the rest of time? Soon however all these questions are dismissed, and only one remains. What alternatives are there? The flashes of the many hours you've spent in this labyrinth appear before your eyes, and all hesitation is wiped from your mind. No one should ever have to experience a place such as this, and no one but the devil himself should be forced to brave it twice.

The tunnels of the sewer had opened up recently, and for a moment the relief of going in the correct direction seemed almost as good as a warm meal. The map, which you were told would lead you directly to your goal, was quickly found to be a fake, when a pool you were instructed to wade through was found to be anything but a pool, and far from uninhabited. The knowledge that most subterranean creatures are greatly effected by bright light again became quite invaluable.

Places like this has always haunted you. They're like a nightmare, the kind where the monster chases you and you run, but no matter how fast you go, no matter how far you push yourself, you just can't escape it. These tunnels do the same. They stay with you, and you can't escape them. They leer in creaking tones. Their

tears of laughter trickle down your back. For they know you can't escape them. Just like the monster in the dream, you're doomed no matter what you do. Down here in the tunnels however, once the monster finally gets to you, there's no guarantee you'll be waking up.

Suddenly, the tumbling of stonework brings you back to the present. A mix of a thousand emotions rush across your mind and it is the very walls you have learned to despise which save you from a grisly death. The darkness has finally given up its bounty to you, and as you stand on the edge of oblivion, you begin to realize the true magnitude this secret, a secret hidden for over a thousand years and more, truly poses. For it is now that you stand witness to what many a storyteller has dubbed, The Eater of Souls.

The drop before you is greater than any you have ever witnessed, and the thought that you have uncovered the Abyss itself comes to mind. Even more astounding however, is the realization that there are almost a hundred more outlets, almost identical to your passage, sprouting from every inch of the inner wall. Looking toward the surface you suddenly realize that your passage is far below the city streets, and that there are many more openings marring the smooth grey wall of this immense shaft, each spewing their horrid contents into the great depths below.

Suddenly, a chill begins to fill the air and you suddenly feel a dampness around your ankles. The water has begun to flow swifter since you first arrived here, and it is only now that you realize the other outlets have also quickened their pace. Sorrow fills your heart as you frantically search for another exit; however, it is now that you finally notice another, far more sinister change. As the repugnant liquid tumbles away from your sight you notice that a cloud has begun to form. This mist comes not from the liquid's vapor, nor does it seem to be rising from the floor. No, this mist seems to be forming from the very air itself, and it is now that you begin to wish you had reconsidered turning back. Despite the fear of approaching death however, you are amazed to find yourself almost hypnotized by the spectacle. Every swirling tendril of mist seems to beckon you, calling out for you to leap toward the mist's swirling center, and yet you are frozen in place, almost as if you have become one with this domain of defecation.

With a roar not even the greatest of beasts could muster the city begins to lose control, with many of the openings being destroyed in the very process. Gallons of vile liquid begin to plummet into the unknown and it is only a matter of time before the structure gives way. Therefore, as the entrance to your passage begins to shudder and the sound of over a thousand years of waste is forced towards you, you gain the strength to vault. To fling yourself into the darkness. To descend into the very

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unknown which you had before seen only as evil. For it is now that you realize that it is not what you can't see which is evil, it is what you could see all along which poses the greatest threat. So it is as the mists engulf you, and the remaining entrances explode with an earth shattering tremor, that you finally escape the wretched labyrinth of blackened filth, and hope that wherever this strange mist takes you it has a hot bath.



THE RED CARPET HALL

by Pierre van Rooden
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Author's Note: This site is meant for the *Masque of the Red Death* setting. It can be adapted to other places, though the concept of large hotels is probably not one popular in most places in Ravenloft. Within *Masque of the Red Death*, it can be placed anywhere, though I chose the Amstel Hotel in Amsterdam (for obvious reasons).

The Amstel Hotel is a large hotel at the edge of the bustling Amsterdam city center, facing the Amstel River that flows south from the city.

It has been the chosen place to rest for kings and queens, rich merchants and noblemen. It is famous for its cuisine, the service and the luxurious rooms.

One thing you won't find in the hotel's advertisement leaflet, however, is the Red Carpet Hall.

This hall, situated on the second floor, is named after the large red woolen carpet that covers it from wall to wall. Careful observers will note that the carpet has several stains, seemingly caused by soot or burning of the fibers. No matter how often the carpet is cleaned, the marks reappear every time.

The stains are one of two reminders of a large fire that took out most of the third floor a few decades ago. The second reminder is the ghost which is now known as 'Isabella', a young girl that—so rumors state—died in the fire. She was trampled by the horde of people trying to escape, and probably suffocated due to the smoke.

Now, the girl wanders the halls of the hotel, though her presence can best be felt in the Red Carpet Hall. Few have actually seen her. Those who have say she looks like any other girl, but with soot on her face, and burns on her hands. Some have seen her being on fire, but those witness accounts are discarded as being too fantastic.

Most people detect her presence through other, more subtle signs. Guests have claimed to hear footsteps and moaning in the corridor, or the voice of a girl that cries for help. Those who open their door find nothing in the hall but a sharp scent of burning fibers.

Some have felt hands grasping their coats or dress, and a few men have had the sensation of 'tripping' over someone lying on the floor, though there was no one to be seen.

The most mysterious accounts are those of a steward who once actually sighted the girl, crying out to him before disappearing into thin air. For some reason, the steward immediately felt compelled to take a look in the boiler house, where he narrowly avoided the hot water kettle from igniting a fire would have lain the hotel into ashes.

Another time, a guest who heard moaning from a room found a small fire had started from a fallen candle. The fire could be put out, but no person could be found in the room, and again, this save was attributed to the girl ghost.

So far, the hotel management has kept the existence of the ghost out of the public eye. After all, a ghost might frighten the guests, or draw unwanted ones. And as long as the ghost's spooks are minor and even seem to be beneficial, no steps are undertaken to lay the little girl to her rest.

And so, the haunting continues to this day.



THE RIVERSIDE

WALL

by Nick Pabon

West New York, New Jersey

I don't know why I keep coming back here, but it was a very nice night to do so. The autumn sky was clear but the air was chill. I could see my breath as I made for the cliff that everyone was talking of. I made sure to be prepared for this journey as there are rumors going around of an apparition haunting the site. With my enchanted blade in hand, I headed down the hill to the edge of the cliff.

I often wonder why people talked of this place as being haunted. There were always people coming here, as the site was very popular with lovers. There was a short wall built of black stone separating the cliff edge from the street leading back to town. Leaning over the wall, one could see the cliff face and then the river beyond. Across from the river, was another town like any other. At night, the dinner fires lit up and their reflections danced on the river's surface.

But tonight was different. Fewer fires were burning across the river. As I leaned over the wall, I felt the stone unusually cold to the touch. It was like ice. My vision blurred for a bit under the pale moonlight, as if everything suddenly turned to shades of gray. Gripping my sword tightly, I strained to see clearly. I noticed the trees, in their blue and gray hues in the moonlight, reaching up towards the sky. As if winter had suddenly come, they looked lifeless. They looked like hands clawing upward reaching for light, for breath.

Darkness surrounded the tree trunks and there were no signs of life. No animals scurrying for food or crickets chirping their night songs. Then ice hit me from behind, or at least, it felt like ice. It was as if a wind struck me but there was no other evidence of it. No leaves rustling or clothes whipping in the rush of it. It was only affecting me and it was cold. It felt like ice against my shoulders, yet there was no numbing feeling and no moisture for it to actually be ice. This was very unnatural as well because it was gone the instant it had arrived.

I turned to see what caused the chill and was amazed to see a very striking young woman smiling at me. Her eyes were dark and her skin like porcelain. She wore a rather revealing gown, almost transparent. I saw the

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shape of her body. She had full breasts and a seductive swell to her hips. But the gown revealed nothing more. She smiled at me and turned to lean against the stone wall. Her movements were slow but there was grace in them. I was instantly attracted to her.

“Hello stranger,” she said as she slowly looked at me. “What brings you out this eve?”

“A ghost,” I replied.

“Oh? How frightening. She was mocking me.

“You’re not scared?”

“Not at all. I live near by, lived here most of my life. I always come here to think and clear my mind.”

It was very late at night to be taking walks, and around here, late night strolls could be a very dangerous thing. But I found myself listening to her every word. She was beautiful but I had to get back to my task of finding out if there is something unnatural happening along the cliff.

“You should go back home, your man must be worried and this is no hour to be out alone.” I could barely take my eyes from her as I said the words. I longed to stay but I was feeling so nervous and my legs were weak. My heart raced a little as she drew in a breath to respond.

“Well, I don’t live far away, and I have no man. I live with my father. Your are right thought, I should go.”

I turned to walk away and she put a hand on my shoulder.

“Will you be here tomorrow night? I’d love to talk to you some more, maybe hear some stories about what you’ve been through? I’d love to get to know you better.”

My heart was pounding and I couldn’t help but show it. I smiled warmly at her and agreed to the meeting. I didn’t even notice the odd feeling I had on my shoulder, as if cold water were being poured on it, but I wasn’t feeling wet.”

“Very well then,” she said smiling. “Tomorrow night when the sun sets.”

She walked away but I didn’t have the chance to see which direction she walked. I was feeling nauseous. I fell to one knee and then against the cold stone wall.

I awoke at my shack in the woods, my comrades around my cot.

“Overall, we found you passed out along the cliff edge and we brought you here. How do you feel?” I tried to sit up on my bed and noticed my hand was covered with wrinkles and liver spots. I took a deep breath and looked at my other hand. They were the same. I closed my eyes and asked one of my friends to fetch me a mirror.

“Brace yourself,” he said as he held it before me.

To my horror, I saw myself forty years older. My skin was like dried leather, browned and wrinkled with

age. My eyes were pale and my hair was ash. I then realized that the woman I was talking to on the cliff edge must have been the apparition. I lay back down on my bed and closed my eyes tightly. Again, my world turned black.



THE SHADOWED CHURCH

by Kathleen Ervin
Peoria, Illinois

It was a church of light.
It is no longer.

Dust coats the stained glass windows, disfiguring the images and mutating the light into dim, eerie hues that shift and crawl through the still, silent air.

The arched ceiling is masked in darkness; only the dim shapes of the lowest rafters are visible. Below, poles that once held brightly colored banners now stab unadorned into the space above abandoned pews.

At the far end rests the altar, vested in patchwork shadows that stretch like fingers down the empty aisle, and flanked by candelabras whose candles have long since gutted out.

The slightest sound echoes, marking the intruder and awakening the Guardians...



THE STATUE

by Aaron Swanson
Red Oak, Iowa

The small town covered in darkness, a darkness that seemed to swallow all light. In the center of this darkness, and some say the cause of it, rests an immense statue. The statue is of a great warrior upon a great mount, his sword held high as if in victory. The warrior depicted is said to have once, many, many years ago, defended the town from a swarm of undead, and brought life back to the decaying town.

The statue was once gold, but now is the same dark black that chokes the town. The darkness fell upon the city abruptly, and seemingly without cause. As the darkness consumed the town, so too did it consume the statue. The only bit of color is the fiery eyes of the horse and its rider. The statue rests upon a large square of metal, in which a door stands open. The door once led to the city treasury that was kept in the halls beneath the city. Many of the towns people have entered the treasury, but none of these citizens ever returned. Then began the wailing, as of a thousand widows mourning.

The town began recruiting adventuring parties to investigate, praying to gods that they no longer believed in, to find the cause of all the disturbances. Many parties entered through the cold steel doorway, but only one ever had the misfortune of living to return to the surface.

A young fighter named Ankin once staggered from the doorway, trembling and clutching his chest. The local clerics set to work and healed his broken ribs, broken nose, and torn flesh, but his mental wounds threatened to overwhelm his senses. He told of how new tunnels had branched from the original treasury complex and that the walls had turned midnight black. These walls seemed to suck up the light, he told, and at times he had even run into them, unable to distinguish them from the darkness.

Lanterns and torches would not light. He said the only light they could use was magical. Screams and moans emanated from the very air around them, and creatures seemed to scuttle around just out of their sight. The group tried to tie a rope to the entrance of the tunnel, so they could find their way back, but as they started out the rope fell slack. Investigation revealed that it had been cut by something. It seemed as if something wanted them there.

Ankin said that the party was ambushed, but he didn't see what or who these attackers were. His nerves uncoiled and he ran to save himself. He wandered for

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hours, becoming lost in the darkness of the tunnels. Whether by fate or coincidence Ankin managed to stumble upon the stairway leading to the town above. As he started his ascent, he heard claws clacking upon the stone floor behind him. He started running, but the stairway seemed to grow. He ran to the verge of collapse before reaching the doorway, easily covering more than four times the length of the original staircase. When he turned to look back though, he saw that the stairs were the same length as they had always been. There were also no signs of his pursuers.

After learning of Ankin's experiences, the mayor ordered the door sealed. The whole town turned out to watch as the mayor's men tried to shut the door, but they couldn't budge it. A priest was called in and began blessing the area. Before the blessing had been completed, a ball of fire rolled from the stairwell. The fire enveloped the priest, and many of the townsfolk. Panic exploded throughout the assembly, and many of the townspeople ran to flee the town. Others had nowhere to go, and so remained where they were. From then on no adventurers would dare enter through the gaping doorway, and so life continued.

A week later a storm crept in, and the town was rocked by lightning, rain, and hail. Shortly after the storm began, Ankin bolted from his bed screaming. His terror could be heard over the storm itself. His screams would follow many to their graves. The remaining townsfolk challenged the storm and raced to Ankin's side, trying to calm him. Ankin clawed at the corner of his room, oblivious to the presence of the others. Then his clawing stopped, and he turned. He crouched on the floor and appeared to be watching something on the wall. Tremors wracked his body, and his face bleached white.

"They're coming! Gods help us, they're coming!" He howled before slumping to the floor, dead.

In the morning, after the storm had passed, the townsfolk went to the town square and all wished that they had fled the town with the others. In the middle of the wrecked town and the wrecked crops surrounding the town, a most unholy event had taken place. The statue's color had once again undergone a transformation, turning from black to blood red. The ground within the town's square had been scorched black, and all of the trees reduced to smoldering piles of ash. A trail of red stone lead from the edge of the town square directly into the blackness of the treasury doorway. The red tile still remains, beckoning, inviting people to follow it into the depths of the city.



THE SWAMP

by Tim Roberts
Huntington, Indiana

The swamp seemed alive. I had entered with a bold and noble purpose; to clear this forbidding bog of the evil that hangs so heavy it can be felt for miles in each direction. It was bright daylight a scant hundred feet behind me, but it seemed even the sun feared to enter through the decaying, moss-encrusted branches overhead. As I withdrew my lantern from my pack and fumbled with my flint to create a spark, I marveled at the tremors shaking my hands... did the temperature drop that much? Or is my imagination taking too much hold on me?

At last, the oil sputters into flames that seem to dance and sway despite the lack of any wind in the stagnant air. Any hopes I had of a brighter mood are destroyed as the light shed from the lantern only shows ghostly shadows where none should be, and branches that seem to reach and grab for me as I slowly trod through muck that threatens to pull me under with every step.

But the worst is what cannot be seen.

My lantern's light has become the center of a very small world. Thirty feet out, and in many places far less distant, all is blackness, save for an occasional pair of savage, emotionless eyes reflecting back at me. I know not what foul creatures are watching me from that infernal darkness, all I know is that they are there! I begin to wonder what they are... a mistake it seems, as my imagination fills my head with creatures only distantly remembered from childhood nightmares. The creatures out there couldn't possibly be that bad... I pray.

There! From the left, or was it the right? It seems that even sound itself has turned against me. All I have now is the blessed light from a single lantern to see me through. I have long since unsheathed my blade and it sings from side to side every few steps as a new threat seems to materialize from nothing.

I strike! Again and again I lash out furiously, slicing at my latest attacker! My blade snaps and still I strike at my unknown enemy. Only when my hand gives up and releases the useless hilt do I pause to see what attacked me. A tree, but surely a tree from the Abyss itself! The rotten trunk grins wickedly as the branches no wind has stirred in decades reach for me... I must run!

Back the way I entered (I hope) I flee, all thoughts of riches, fame, and adventure banished by forces no man

was meant to conquer. It seems I've run for far longer than I have been in this swamp, but I am starting to question everything my mind is telling me. So much so that when a root or rock or something grabs my foot and sends me sprawling into the black water, it is like a shock, bringing me back from the sweet release of madness!

How long I sat in the cold water I know not. My weapon is gone. My lantern lost in the silt and muck beneath my feet. My sanity? I begin to wonder... then I begin to shake. I can feel them now; slimy forms swimming around my legs and feet. Occasionally, I feel a nip, a strike, but I can't react! Any movement now would tell me that all this is real. All I can do is sit here in the dark and the cold and hope I wake up before I bleed to death.

Is it my imagination again, or has it grown lighter? It has! I can begin to make out the sickly pale of dying trees and even some tracks in the mud I know I didn't make. I can see the mists... the light is from the mists, reflected and held and out of place in this world of darkness. It is like the last dying breath of day as it loses its battle with the night, soon to be gone forever. Then I see them.

Shuffling forms slowly moving through the fog. One is grabbed and pulled under by the merciless bog and they do not stop. I scream, I threaten, I pray, and still they do not stop. Dozens of dark forms and they are coming for me... coming to punish this fool who dared to invade their realm.

I try to flee, but I have been here too long. My legs are firmly mired in the mud, or perhaps some underwater behemoth is holding me in offering in appeasement of the wandering horde's mercy. I don't know... all I know is terror! And that they do not stop!

Closer they come. Closer and closer. Always closer. They move with a calm deliberation that makes them all the more terrifying. There is no panic. There is no hurry. They know their prey will not escape them. Well before they arrive I can smell the scent of death and decay hanging from diem. I vomit. As my stomach and head clear I look up to see that they have gotten ever nearer. I close my eyes and pray for madness to take me.

And they do not stop.



THE HAUNTED OF VALCON FOREST

by Robert Baker
Asheville, North Carolina

Valcon Forest is a thickly wooded forest resting some twenty miles away from the Village of Barovia. This magnificent green forest was once the home to a group of people known as the Givilis. Some say these were the very first inhabitants of Barovia, and that they possessed knowledge of the lands history long forgotten by modern peoples. Legend say they had some secret ties to the Gypsies. Others maintain they were simply a loosely-knit group of wanderers, brought together in a simple community away from outsiders.

All that remains of the Givilis today is what lies in Valcon Forest, their home. The Givilis made there home deep within the woods, living off the rich wildlife and the abundant wild berries growing throughout the woods. Their main focus of life revolved around a small ruined keep located directly in the center of the woods. Although the Givilis often explored other lands seeking adventure, a large number could always be found within or outside the ruined keep. The Givilis were peaceful, bearing no ill will towards others unless provoked.

Until the vampire lord Strahd came to their country.

When Strahd first began flexing his newly discovered powers, the Givilis retreated to the keep, hoping to avoid the attention of the dark ruler. Unfortunately, their actions had the opposite reaction. It was not long before the Givilis and their forest came under the vampire's severe scrutiny. He requested a meeting with Velsar, an experienced warrior who led the Givilis. Strahd invited him to come to his castle on a certain date.

When Velsar refused, the vampire grew angry at the Givilis leader's defiance and immediately dispatched an entire legion of his undead zombies and skeletons to Valcon Forest to destroy the Givilis.

But Strahd had severely underestimated the Givilis fighting knowledge, for Velsar had always trained his people in the ways of combat. The battle of Valcon Forest was great, and for a time, the Givilis actually nearly defeated Strahd's undead, but when the vampire sent more, their sheer numbers became too much for even the brave Givilis. The undead's lack of weariness and teeming masses eventually wore the Givilis down.

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Many of the people were hacked down to pieces by the undead's relentless swords. Those who survived were quickly hunted down as they tried to flee the forest by undead patrols scouting along the outskirts of Valcon Forest.

Those who remained alive were imprisoned within Valcon Keep until the next sunset.

Strahd himself came to the keep the night following the battle. He brought the surviving Givilis before him, allowing them to view their dead, all piled up by the zombies by the keep.

He gave Velsar one more opportunity to swear loyalty to him, in much the same way the gypsies had done. Velsar spat at him in response.

Calmly, Strahd ordered the last Givilis to be taken and crucified throughout the forest, as an example to others who might think of disobeying his rule. The vampire forced Velsar to watch as men, women, and children were nailed screaming and bleeding to the trees of Valcon Forest.

Velar tried to fight, but Strahd had brought some of his vampire servants along with him, two royal women from other lands. They held Velsar, turning his head so he could not turn away from the extermination of his people.

When the last Givilis hung crying from a tree, Strahd took Velsar to the top battlement of Valcon Keep, making him listen to the tortured screams of agony of the Givilis echoing through the forest all night long.

An hour before the coming of dawn, Strahd gave the signal for Velsar himself to die. The warrior was forced to his knees by the two female vampires. While the women taunted him, a skeleton bearing a huge battle ax lumbered forward, coming to stand over him.

Filled with sadness, anger and desire for vengeance, Velsar cursed Strahd. "From this night on, you shall never be able to set foot within this forest. All who serve you who come here will perish. What treasure lies within this keep shall never be yours Strahd. If my people could not live in peace in our forest, neither shall those seeking to dwell or travel through these woods."

At that moment, Velsar's separated head sailed over the battlement edge, falling to the ground below.

Strahd at once found himself under attack from the recently departed angry dead spirits of the Givilis. The force of their attack was so great, the vampire almost lost his mind in a whirlwind of insanity. He tried to call on his undead servant, but was shocked to find they no longer obeyed his commands. Zombies and skeletons climbed the walls of the keep in all directions, attempting to attack Strahd with their weapons.

Strahd's female vampires, being far less powerful, met gruesome ends. Their bodies were ripped apart under the assault of the dead. Using all his strength,

Strahd fought them off, flying away from the keep, not stopping until he cleared the edge of Valcon Forest.

There he found his undead patrols waiting for him, awaiting his orders. Those outside Valcon Forest were still his. Strahd angrily cursed the Givilis leader's last words. The land had evidently listened. For several days Strahd was forced to lie in the ground outside Valcon Forest recovering from his wounds.

Over the past several decades, Strahd has tried to re-enter Valcon Forest to search the keep but to no avail. Every undead he sends to the forest he loses control over. And the few parties he slyly has sent have never been heard from again.

All that is known of Valcon Forest is the superstitions which have grown up around the haunted forest.

Whenever travelers get close to the outer edges, a feeling of great sadness and dread falls over them while the sun still burns overhead, affecting the morale of all those near. If the group or individual is not driven away from the forest by these awful feelings in the daylight, as dusk falls they begin to hear the far away, frantic, terror-filled cries. As the night comes, the screams become more numerous and louder. Men, women, and children's voices mix together in wails and shrieks, and the air becomes icy cold no matter the time of year.

A few tales say some individuals have bravely ventured a small way into the woods and have reported seeing strange lights weaving and bobbing among the trees, accompanying the tormented sounds of the Givilis spirits. Wherever a skeleton hangs from a tree, it is believed the spirit savagely attacks any living beings nearby, creating illusions and bringing up any profound fears a person carries in their mind.

The undead Strahd sent to the forest still walk there, aimlessly stalking through the woods, viciously attacking any creature which crosses their path.

At the keep itself, the spirit of Velsar himself is said to stand on the battlement, headless, holding in his hands the very battle ax which removed his head. He is said to be guarding his home until the end of time from any intruders.

Other fearsome beasts from the demiplane are now believed to also make Valcon Forest their home, although none know exactly what kind. But there are reports of cattle and in some cases people carried off by things in the night, and a bloody trail can be found leading into the woods.

What treasure is located inside Valcon Keep is a complete mystery. No group of adventurers have ever been known to make it to the keep, and little of the keep's design is remembered other than it stood at least four levels high, and contained many rooms, some of which were secret, and known only to certain Givilis.

Great wealth could perhaps be found inside the keep if it could be explored, although a successful search will probably bring about the attention of the vindictive Strahd. But so far, the combined might of the angry Givilis spirits and mindless, violent undead and whatever now lives in the woods have sent most parties fleeing for their lives, leaving the keep and Valcon Forest itself largely unexplored.



THE SPECTER OF VILLSMITH

by Rogan R. Hamby
Columbia, South Carolina

Villsmith handles its problems much like any other hamlet that is far from church and law—it buries them. The Specter of Villsmith came to be one hundred years ago. The boy's name was Helmus and he was poor but witty. He thought Ingrid Janseng, the daughter of the mayor, loved him. Every soul in the area knew that Herr Janseng wanted Helmus' head on a pike and none were surprised he was framed.

With no family to look out for Helmus it was expected that Ingrid would pay the jailer off with silver to have him look the other way while Helmus ran, and he would not show his face in Villsmith again. It would not be the first, or even fifth, time in memory. Helmus waited patiently for Ingrid, but she never came. He grew mad and a violent red set into his veins. He knew that the mayor was keeping Ingrid from seeing him.

Eventually, news filtered to Helmus that Ingrid had been seen with a new suitor. Although this wounded him, he remained convinced that there was something else to this and that she would still come for him. In the end she didn't even bring the coppers to the hangman to tie the knot that would end Helmus' hanging quickly. It took him over twenty minutes to die at the crossroads with most of the town watching. Helmus was buried in a pauper's grave with other criminals behind the apple trees they were hanged from at the crossroads.

There is no doubt among the people of Villsmith that the specter is Helmus. The first sighting occurred two weeks after the hanging as a group of farmers returning from market passed through the rarely-used crossroads. It was a deranged farmer named Thomas who led the townsfolk to the corpses, his own skin stretched so thin at the neck as to become transparent. Thomas described in detail an image that periodically would return to the townsfolk over the next hundred years. Sometimes the results would scare the townsfolk and sometimes would terrify.

The farmers were passing through, their pockets jingling with the pay from their livestock and a little drunk, looking forward to their beds and hearths, when a chill tore through the area. The feeling was slight, like a prickling of the skin, but then they heard the smashing

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sound of horse hooves striking frosted ground. They realized that their breath was fogging in front of them and their limbs felt numb. Getting off his horse, one of the men tried to warm up and absently reached up to pick a young apple. After a minute of effort he forced it into halves with a knife only to find it frozen through. He put the apple to his tongue to first feel the rough texture of jagged ice and as it melted against the warmth of his mouth, replaced with the taste of acidic flesh.

Then the men became disoriented and the horses bolted when the sound and sensation of a gale force wind struck the area instantly though no actual movement of air could be felt on the skin. Suddenly a force gripped Thomas' neck and he reached out to resist, but could only find a stringy mass that he could feel but not actually touch with force or see, and it felt like cords or rope. The farmers couldn't hear each other screaming until a single noise broke the deafening noise, the sound of a coin striking the ground as Thomas' coin pouch slipped from his belt and the coins fell across the ground. Suddenly the force let up and Thomas saw a face for a split second and he stumbled away. Thomas could hear the screams of the other men though they sounded high-pitched, as if through a film of water.

Years later a gypsy band visited the town and Thomas ran away screaming. He admitted on his death bed that the gypsy's monkeys reminded him of the face, a face that was human but distorted and attached to arms that were too massive for any human. The face he recognized, impossibly, as belonging to Helmus. As the decades passed the specter would attack at any time of day but always those who carried large amounts of money. Some have come to believe that throwing silver into the trees will placate him, while others have been attacked for carrying a few copper bits.

Mayors have attempted to close the roads but the growth of port cities to the north has increased the need for the crossroads and increased the number of victims. The dead are found with their necks stretched thin and heads rolling away from the body where several inches separate the bones in the neck. One merchant was found curled into a fetal position trying to spit out coins. Although he lived he had strange ailments and breathing problems until he committed suicide a year later. Some have managed to bypass the curse by carrying no cash but the difficulty of doing that makes the value of travel between ports limited. Thirty years ago the townspeople brought a witch in from the west, hiring her to cast out the spirit. The witch returned sweating, refusing money and became a hermit in the woods and obsessive that no apple trees be allowed to grow near her. Three young lads got drunk ten years ago and tried to dig up the "treasure of the apple grove." They were found dead, with gold clasped in their hands where they fell,

stumbling away from the trees. The townspeople cut the corpses' hands off so as not to touch the gold and swept it back under the trees, carting the bodies off for burial.

And still the specter haunts the crossroads, less common now than he was a hundred years ago and perhaps closer to peace, but every now and then a new victim testifies to his vigilant rage.



THE HAUNTING OF WATERLOOK MANOR

by Jason & Belinda Asbell
West Melbourne, Florida

Waterlook Manor sits upon a steep hill overlooking a lush river delta. The manor is far enough from the seaport town of Waterport to be considered a “country estate”, but close enough to go to town if need be. The main channel of the river bends around the base of the hill before fanning out into the bayous and ultimately emptying into the sea. This creates a beautiful view from almost any window, especially to the east where the sun rises over the wetlands. But all this beauty hides a sinister past.

Many years ago, an abbey of nuns sat atop the hill, offering refuge from the horrors of the world for a life of quiet prayer. The abbey also housed an orphanage. Each child received an education and learned discipline working in the fields which kept the abbey self-sufficient.

Twenty years ago, a wealthy merchant named Ilyich Varonov saw the site upon the hill and desired it for his own, to tear down the abbey and build himself a country home. He offered a fair price, but the nuns refused even his best offer. Accustomed to getting his way, Varonov hired an arsonist, one Drego Pyotrov, to bum the place, planning to renew his offer afterward. He also assumed Pyotrov would commit the deed in such a way that no one was hurt. He could not have been more wrong.

Pyotrov was a poor choice to commit the deed. He had been orphaned and spent his childhood in the gutters of Waterport. He was a cruel, bitter man and his cold heart drove him to ensure that nothing remained unburned. Out of over a hundred children and twenty nuns, no one emerged from the blaze alive. Neither did Pyotrov survive; his drive to bum everything caused him to be trapped in the fire as well.

It was apparent that the fire was a crime, but as the criminal also died in the deed, no investigation was made. Varonov quietly claimed the land a few weeks later and work began on his house—to be called Waterlook Manor. When it was finished, he looked forward to settling down with his wealth. But it was not to be. Too many lives had been snuffed out prematurely,

and not all rested peacefully. Already tom by conscience, he slowly went mad. Varonov hung himself from an upstairs window, and his unquiet spirit joined those of his victims. Successive owners of the place found it to be a home of strange events and rarely stayed long.

There are many manifestations of the unquiet dead in Waterlook Manor:

- ❖ **Strange Sensations:** Muffled screams and the crackling of flames can be heard regularly, sometimes accompanied by sensations of warmth and even unexplained smoke. “Hot spots” may appear in various areas within the manor where the air feels inexplicably warm. The most dramatic manifestation of this type is of a closed door exhibiting all the signs of a fire beyond (warm door, searing hot doorknob, flames visible through keyhole and under the door) for several seconds only to return to normalcy.
- ❖ **Ilyich Varonov:** An apparition of his spirit (similar to a geist) may occasionally be seen in the room where he ended his life. It appears beside the window with a rope about its neck. It looks around fearfully as though it were surrounded by enemies. It thrusts its hands out in supplication and cries, “I never meant any harm!” before leaping out the window. The only physical evidence of this manifestation is that the window will swing open just before the apparition appears, and remains open afterward.
- ❖ **Drego Pyotrov:** This tortured soul manifests as a flame, similar to a will-o-wisp in appearance, flitting about the perimeter of the old abbey—this does not match the perimeter of the manor, so there are times where this apparition will pass through walls. The supernatural flame is the same size as the flame from a torch and feels warm in proximity but not hot enough to burn. Anyone viewing this who is capable of seeing invisible or into the border ethereal will be able to discern the faint outline of a featureless humanoid.
- ❖ **The Bonny Child:** One of the orphans was a joyful child, always smiling and helpful. Her spirit can manifest physically but is usually noncorporeal (treat as a spectre but will never attack and will disappear if any attempt to attack is made). It appears as a horribly burned child whose unburned face bears an almost angelic expression. Seeing this is a cause for a horror check, but anyone who succeeds at this check feels a strange sense of calm which will remove any outstanding effects of previous failed fear or horror checks. The spirit will occasionally manifest physically to perform small helpful tasks.

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- ❖ **The Stained Glass Image:** The abbey had a large stained glass window which faced west and projected a beautiful image through its altar area with the light of the setting sun. The main hall of the manor occupies a part of this space, and occasionally the image of the stained glass window may be seen upon the floor of the hall. The window was of colored geometric patterns only, and had no special symbolism, but its image is no less eerie when it appears upon the floor of the hall.
- ❖ **The Praying Nun:** The rarest apparition is the praying nun (treat as a geist). She appears at midnight on the anniversary of the fire, kneeling in prayer on the spot where the Stained Glass Image appears. The image surrounds her, but this time lit with the flickering light of fire rather than the clear light of sunset. She makes no sound but is obviously praying. Over the course of several minutes, the apparition appears to burn, continuing to pray despite obvious agony. It collapses from pain, then disappears, along with the Stained Glass Image. This sight may be cause for multiple horror checks in succession.



THE WELLSPRING

by Derek Ash
Ellsworth, Maine

The Garden

There exists a tiny, roving island of terror that drifts like a spirit among the Mists of Ravenloft. As if driven by its own will, it often draws travelers in need, seekers of secrets and of truths to it.

The tiny island is known by the few that have been there as 'Kargel'. No one knows why that is the name, but the few that have come in contact with the island leave it with that knowledge.

Kargel is encountered among the Mists, or upon the sea, or anywhere among the Core lands, even within the borders of another domain itself. It manifests as a small garden on a hill, with an old well at its center. Anyone entering the area immediately notices that the sun has been swept behind a sudden head of clouds, dressing the beauty of the garden in shadow. A visitor's eyes long to see the sun, even if their visit to Kargel is a short one. There are a few old stone posts set in the ground, with heavy iron rings, old and rusted, set in them. Vines and flowers creep their way up the stones, thriving in spite of the shadows. There is a silence so deep that one's breathing is the only sound to be heard.

The well at its center appears old, with some stones loose and missing from its lip. It does not seem rickety or weak to the touch however, in fact, the stones feel harder, and colder, almost leeching the body heat from those it touches. The water is black as oblivion, and there are no ripples in its surface, nor reflections of those looking in. An unspeakable feeling wafts up from that circular black pool; one of being scrutinized very carefully by some huge beast with its eye to a tiny peep-hole.

The water can be touched and ingested with little worry. Though the water would most surely have stagnated long ago, this water is fresh and alive.

Those who enter this domain will soon discover one thing. They cannot leave. Try as they might to enter the Mists and be on their way, they cannot. If they walk into the surrounding forest or push their boat off into the waters of the ocean, they always seem to be lost, and rerouted to this tiny garden with its ancient well. Only upon ingesting the water and spending one night in the garden (and dreaming a very special sort of dream) may the weary traveler be on their way.

The Promise

Once travelers have taken a sip of the well-spring's waters, the traveler becomes sleepy within an hour's time. Rest must be taken. Several patches of harmless and very comfortable moss grow within the garden's areas, for just this purpose. Regardless of where the traveler sleeps, the traveler always dreams.

The dreams are always prophetic, and disturbing. There is a chain of images, different for every dreamer, that floats through its mind. Then an image of the dreamer dropping an undefined item into the well's water, and then a miraculous light bubbling up from the water. The most immediate need of the dreamer is met in the dream. Knowledge, money, strength, power, answers to mysteries, the love of a woman, or escape from one's past evils.

The sequence of images repeats itself once more, and the image of the dreamer dropping a mysterious item into the water. Then a message: "*Bring it to me.*"

The traveler wakes, and is rested. They are then free to go. But they leave with knowledge. The island's name, and how to visit it a second time: Whisper 'Kargel' within the Mists, or near water, and the well will soon be found.

The Price

The dream images are a message, telling the visitor what he or she must look for to drop in the well. The images are purposefully obscure. More often than not, misinterpretations abound.

The images might be: a blue bird, a human skull, and a tree. This could be many things. A feather from the base of a tree in a graveyard? A bird's nest with a dead chick? A branch from an undead treant that preys primarily on birds? Or a tapestry with all three images embroidered on it?

The point is, the dream should be hard to navigate. The traveler that sets out the next morning, suddenly finds all kinds of situations where the dream might apply. Only one item is the right item however. And indeed, the well delivers, if the right item is dropped into its waters. The items disappear into the water as if they were only ghosts sliding into the ground, and the visitor's wish (minor wishes only) is granted. Everyone is happy.

If the wrong item is dropped within the water's reach, the water turns a dark red, and something terrible happens. The effect is different for each person. Perhaps rotting, sea-zombie arms raise up out of the water to grab a hold of the foolish seeker. Perhaps a whispering voice slowly echoes from the water source until a thousand mad voices all whisper and wail, gibber and laugh in the traveler's ears, driving him quite mad while his companions watch in silent horror. Or wraithlike

maidens drift up like steam from the smooth pool's surface to steal away the victim's soul.

The effect is different every time. Be inventive. They are potentially harmful, and always very dangerous, and usually fatal if not dealt with, but they can be resisted, and fought, like monsters or spell affects. Only, the character's companions are never aware of the outcome because they can neither see nor hear the effects. In effect, they cannot help him.

Trying to communicate with the well, or a being within it by magical or psionic means is to invite madness. The area around the well should be treated as a sinkhole of evil, and the undead that come from its depths can be turned, but with all the inherent difficulties. Exploring the depths of the well is to be swallowed by the well, never to be seen again. That is all there is to tell.

No one who has been in contact with Kargel ever tells its secrets, or the outcome of their visit. They only shiver at its mention, and may only tell their story under extreme conditions.

The best course is to not heed the call of the well, after it has made its pitch. Ignore the promise, and avoid the price.



HAUNTED SITES

WHERE ARE WE?

by Martin Morris
South Bay, Florida

“Where are we?” was the general question asked for what seemed like the thousandth time. The elven wizard’s ears received the same reply as his brown hair was gently blowing in the stagnant wind, “We be west of the nine places of Hell as far as I can tell.” Well, what did he expect from a dwarf, thought Lichbane. His gray eyes looked about at the endless blood red sky streaked with poisonous veins of a midnight black that lacked hope of any welcome. This was hell if ever there was one, and the constant swirling of the glowing yellow-green mist constantly took on humanoid shapes. There was the constant moan that could be heard.

Now looking around at the others, he figured that they probably felt the same soul wretchedness that he felt. There was only five in the party, only five against the whole of hell. The dwarf’s name was SlabNugget Pitchwright. He was a stout dwarf of the mountains. His hands were in a death grip upon his giant war hammer as if it were part of him. The two females that were currently sitting upon the dead tree, went by the names of Christina De’NocAngel (who was the silver-headed one) and her sister Sara (with a mane of pure spun gold). Their beauty was as fierce as their swords were deadly. The large fellow who was currently crouching and cleaning his armor was none other than Arkust Dawn Bringer. A paladin of the Order of the Flaming Bolts, who zestfully served the goddess of magic. His hair was as red as the flaming crest he wore upon his talbert. His eyes were the palest green and full of kindness.

By this time the food and water were getting really low. Arkust had stated that his powers grew weaker and weaker as they stayed there. He couldn’t feel the connection to his Goddess. They all needed that power if they were to survive another hour in this den of nightmares.

Arkust was the first to react to the sound, it was a sound of a child who was innocent and pure; it cried out to them, tugging at their hearts. The wind had begun to pick up and the mist started to stir. The sky took more of the black brightness than before. The party took a defensive posture and surrounded Lichbane who had begun to chant. The rune blades of Christina and Sara glowed the pale rose colors that made them so famous. As Arkust lifted his great two-handed sword it caught fire and he started to sing the song of valor.

SlabNugget’s hammer was swinging around and around. Then all of a sudden—nothing happened! The air grew quiet and the mist settled down. A peace was in the air. The party looked around and then at each other. An uneasy stillness was in the air. Nerves were straining from the effects from the stress of the moment. The party was beginning to put their weapons and into a peace-defense stance. Ten minutes went by and still nothing else had happened. The party started to reset the camp. When the attack came—

Out of the shadows a grinning doll’s head came up. Its eyes were dripping blood, the head set upon the bones of what looked to be past victims and not all looked to be human. The doll thing stood up and was the size of a small giant. It towered over the party. Then it screeched—Aahhaahahahh!

Fear assaulted the friends. Arkust looked to have aged forty years and with not a whisper died. Christina groaned and blood dripped out of her mouth, then she turned to stone. Sara was the first to recover from the ambush then with vengeance ran and struck the bone demon’s front left leg. The blow fell true, with the crackling of bone the leg came off. The creature slashed out with its long white tail and struck her in the head. The only sound was the crunch of broken bones. She fell like a flower petal in the wind. A hammer went flying and with the Kaboom of thunder, ozone filled the air. The demon cried out *Mmmiiiggghhttttyyy*, as it was enveloped in sparks of electrical whips. Before it could recover Lichbane struck out with his anger and released the fury of the arcane arts into the most lethal spell he knew—the *brimstone bolt* spell. It would drain him of his very life essence but he knew his friends needed him. The gates of hell began to open up and power flew from his finger tips. The cold plasma of justice struck the Spawn of Bones in its breast, as the smell of sulfur and burnt flesh hit the air, it roared and began to burn.

Lichbane stumbled and almost fell. He tried not to black out. The fires were still burning when the effect of his power began to be felt—time itself was being ripped apart. The spell was reacting to the very air itself. The land moaned and time had begun to break apart. Lichbane looked at his friend with tears in his eyes, at friends he would never see again. SlabNugget might have guessed at what he had to do and tried to stop him if given enough time—but he wasn’t...

With arms outstretched he pulled into the nexus of the power, sweat beaded his brow and he shook. When he felt he could take no more, still the power flew into him by his will alone. He was transcended as time was restored...

...“Where are we?” was the general question asked for what seemed like the thousandth time. The elven wizard’s ears received the same reply as his brown hair

was gently blowing in the stagnant wind, “We be west of the nine places of Hell as far as I can tell.”...



HAUNTED SITES

THE WRECK OF THE TENEBRAE

by William J. Walton
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It sits, perched among the dunes of the parched desert as if in its rightful place; a massive black sailing vessel with tattered sails.

The nomads and caravans avoid it, as has rumor has it that simply gazing upon it is very bad luck. Legends tell that it is a ship from the netherworld, abandoned here by its monstrous crew during a cursed expedition.

At first, one would think it was a mirage, a common occurrence to a pair of dry, sand-encrusted eyes. But as a traveler draws near, the ship's reality becomes more evident. It is a very real, very solid, black ship of massive proportions, leaning at a slight angle in the sand on its starboard side. The sails, flags and rigging are tattered and rotten away, and jagged holes can be seen in the exposed portions of the hull. The desert winds blow through and around these holes, creating eerie whistles and moans that have become a part of its reputation among desert travelers.

The entire ship is constructed of a black, thick-grained wood that has been nearly petrified by magic, yet remains buoyant enough to have kept the afloat in its heyday. Close inspection of the wood reveals what appear to be twisted faces hidden in the grain. At night, in the moonlight, the faces seem to swirl and dance over the surface of the wood.

The masthead features a stone statue of a woman with long, writhing snakes in place of hair. She appears to be screaming in horror. Novice adventurers will know that it is a representation of a Medusa, while the experienced will wonder if it isn't in fact an actual specimen who has fallen victim to her own petrifying gaze.

The ship itself is massive, nearly four times the size of the common pirate ship, and can easily hold a crew of 200 or more men. Entering the ship is easily done through one of the gaping holes found in the hull, at which point the bold soul will find himself in the lowest cargo holds of the ship.

Inside, the contents of the ship remain almost perfectly undisturbed; despite years of abandonment, nothing has been taken from the vessel. Moving about

HAUNTED SITES

inside the ship is slightly hindered by the angle at which it rests.

Skeletons of the ship's crew lie scattered about, clutching sabers and cutlasses, as if they had all died in battle. Judging from their dress, and the positions in which several of them lay, it appears as if they had no enemy; the crew were fighting among themselves.

Hunched over a desk in the captain's quarters rests a well-preserved corpse, his dress and accouterments suggesting that he was a mage in life. A cutlass juts from his back. On the desk before him lies a treasure map of some sort, written in a strange language.

History of the Tenebrae

The *Tenebrae* was the creation of Alij Bak'nhar (al-LEEZH bak-NAHR), an evil wizard bent on locating an artifact of great power, the *Prism of Unseen Stars*. His reasons for possessing the artifact were unknown, but given his reputation, it was certain that it was for his own vile advances. For years he researched the location of the *Prism*, until he found evidence that it had been left on a deserted island as part of a treasure cache by a gang of unknowing pirates.

Alij commissioned the ship, killed the workers after its completion, and enslaved a crew of drunks, orphans, and homeless to join him in his quest. He was a cruel and heartless man, and was no less of that as a captain, and many of his men perished while on the journey.

As the *Tenebrae* drew close to her destination, The Mists drew around her and brought her to Ravenloft. But rather than deposit her into the sea, the Mists slammed the ship into the middle of the desert, as some kind of cruel joke. The hull cracked like a black, rotten egg and men were thrown about as the ship ground to a fatal halt.

Driven mad by lack of food, terrible morale, and their situation, the crew revolted, and began fighting among themselves. None survived the chaos, including Alij, who was stabbed in the back before he could even recover from the impact.

Exploring the Ship

Anyone entering the ship and staying past nightfall will gradually feel the ship begin to rock in the familiar rhythm of the ocean. A quick look around will reveal that the ship has transformed into its former sinister glory. Crew members, still in their skeletal form, race about the ship, adjusting the rigging, and performing their duties as did in life. The sails and flags billow with wind, and below can be seen an oily black sea.

If caught by the crew, the intruders are quickly overrun by skeletal forces, who subdue rather than wound the characters. Once captured, the intruders are

brought to the captain's quarters, where they meet the undead Alij Bak'nhar.

Alij is now a revenant, and is devoted to finding the *Prism* even in his state of undeath. His dedication to his task has created his own Nightmare Realm, where his ship still sails upon a black sea, and his crew is silent and ever willing to serve. He knows that if he ever finds the *Prism*, a terrible power will be his.

He gives the intruders the choice of serving him in his quest, or walking the plank (as is the usual punishment for stowaways). No matter their choice, Alij sentences them to servitude. He believes that living hands will aid him much better than dead ones.

Whether he finds the *Prism*, or is thwarted by his newly-gained crew members, is up to the adventurers...



CHILDREN IN THE ATTIC

by Margaret L. Carter
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This location occupies a phantom space attached to a hundred-year-old house. This two-story structure is in good repair and appears to be an ordinary, comfortable home for anyone who decides to buy or rent it. In a small upstairs bedroom, however, a massive, heavy chest blocks a long-disused door. Upon moving the chest, anyone who investigates finds that the door is warped but not impossible to open. Opening the door reveals a walk-in closet empty of all but dust and cobwebs.

Anyone who steps inside the closet sees the back wall dissolve into mist, then change into another door, secured by a wooden bar. Yet this room lies against an outside wall; there is nowhere for the door to lead.

If this portal is unbarred and opened, the musty smell of the closet changes to the fumes of smoke. Before the investigator's eyes, a steep, narrow stairway leads up. The house, however, has no floor above this one.

The stairs bend around a corner, continue upward, and finally end at a narrow door, small enough to force a tall person to stoop to enter.

Beyond this door, the odor of smoke becomes dense and unmistakable. The intruder hears the cries of babies and the screams of children.

Eighty years ago, the attic of the house was occupied by a young woman who practiced "baby farming," providing shelter and food for orphaned and abandoned children under the slipshod oversight of the local town council. She accepted more children than she could adequately care for, greedy for the stipend paid by the council. She pocketed most of the money allotted for the feeding of the orphans, nourishing the infants on watered milk and the older children on cheap, meager fare. In the overcrowded, poorly supervised attic nursery, one of the toddlers stumbled into the open hearth. The fire quickly spread from his clothes to the rest of the room, blocking the exit. The "nurse" and all her charges burned to death in the destruction of the attic.

Anyone who enters the ghostly re-creation of the attic finds that the main room features a large fireplace,

from which flames and smoke billow out. The rest of the attic is divided by flimsy wooden walls into several cramped rooms. The only furnishings consist of an overstuffed chair beside the hearth and straw-filled mattresses covering the floors from wall to wall. Smoke and the stench of burning flesh, hair, and cloth fill the air.

Upon stepping over the threshold, the intruder instantly becomes disoriented. He or she stumbles through the tiny rooms, with their low, slanted ceilings, unable to find the way out.

Dozens of screaming children crawl on the floor or roll on their pallets, vainly struggling to escape the flames that engulf them. All the children capable of crawling cluster around the intruder, clutching at arms, legs, and clothes. Upon being rebuffed, they clamp their teeth onto any exposed flesh they can reach. They force the intruder to drag them along in his or her escape attempt.

No attempt at extinguishing the flames has any effect. If a visitor attacks the babies, one blow from a weapon causes the infant to fall "dead" and change into a heap of bones. Within minutes, however, it reconstitutes its lifelike form and clutches onto the visitor again.

A wailing woman, with her hair and gown aflame, rushes out of the thickest cloud of smoke with an infant in her arms. She tries to give the baby to any living person she can reach. If the intruder accepts the baby, the other children stop mobbing him. He then finds himself in front of the open door to the attic stairs. As long as he carries the baby, he can successfully descend the stairs and exit through the door into the closet.

As soon as the phantom door is barred, it vanishes. The baby transforms into a charred skeleton wrapped in the disintegrating ash of swaddling rags.

If an intruder refuses to let the woman give him or her an infant to "save," the visitor will never find the way out. The children's clawing and biting become more painful, as if they are growing more solid. Eventually they rip the intruder to shreds. His or her mutilated body will be found in the closet, should anyone else open it in the future.

A successful exorcism by a powerful priest will reduce the woman and children to calcined bones and make the flames vanish. To make the entire haunted attic (with the stairs) disappear completely, however, a more elaborate ceremony performed by several holy persons together is required.



HAUNTED SITES: CONTEST WINNERS

THE PHANTOM

ORACLE

by Joseph Dunn
Columbus, Ohio

Description

In a valley lies an arc of travertines which stand before the opening to a circle of squarish, squat stones. The formations are fairly short, the tallest being barely seven feet tall and the circle seeming to lack any natural cause.

Background

These are the remains of a band of Vistani who offended a darklord named Koreth, long since vanquished by the portent foreseen for him. The site survives its creator by the dark events that befall those who enter it.

When the Vistani were altered, their spirits remained trapped and tormented with little chance for release. By her gift, the old prophetess of the group discovered the means to overcome the bane but could not pursue it. Only the living could bring the release of her fellow wanderers forever rooted to this cursed valley. Many times, the souls strained to contact a living being to help them. Rarely would a mind be touched and then only to drive it to madness. Even in their madness, the poor possessed creatures could not even chip the smothering stone. Agony infused these moments. Reaching for hope which quickly crumbled. Encased in grim stalactites which would not. It eventually was realized that prognostication must be their salvation. To this end, they focused their will on the talismans of prophecy which had remained unharmed within the boulder which had been the vardo of the seer. But the dark powers of Ravenloft twisted their efforts.

Effect

Any sentient may enter the “cave” of the phantom oracle to seek their fortune, but few are favored by the future shown. The “fate” of the seeker is determined by the Tarokka. When the fated sits before the stone at the center of the vardo cave, a stack of cards appears before them. When touched, it proceeds to display itself in a simple cross.

The significance of each card is defined by three levels. The central card remains the focus and directs the effect. The four cards to complete the simple cross or inner circle determine the effect. The four cards that finish the extended cross or outer circle modify the effect.

Focus	
If the focus is:	Then the penalty applies to...
Lesser Deck	
Swords	THAC0
Coins	Poison & Dexterity-modified saving throws.
Glyphs	Turning undead, Wisdom-modified saving throws.
Stars	Spell saving throws.
High Deck	
Artifact	2-4 random effects
Beast	Reaction modifier, Ranger ability to calm animals, Spells to control.
Broken One	Madness checks.
Darklord	Special: Koreth appears before the party and speaks of a weakness in the darklord who deposed him, but he must accompany the party. Koreth is a bussengeist. It was this flaw upon which he depended in his final battle. Select an appropriate darklord. Koreth stays until the party defeats the darklord or for ten days. The party will not be rid of him until then.
Donjon	Special: A version of the petrification virus afflicts a random party member. Patches of stone slowly form about the victim's body until they are encased in stone. If fully affected, the PC can only be released by the means to save the Vistani. Alternatively, the effect may prevent the use of a number of favored weapons, spells, or abilities equal to the penalty number. This lasts ten days.
ESPer	Psionic-related checks, Saves vs. chaos, confusion, etc.

HAUNTED SITES: CONTEST WINNERS

Ghost	<p>Special: The spirits visit with varied effect. Roll 1d10 a number of times equal to the penalty number and consult the chart.</p> <p>1-5: Haunt. If possessed, madness checks ensue until the haunt is removed due to tormented memories.</p> <p>6-8: A phantom of the final moments of the camp.</p> <p>9-10: An angry poltergeist tries to chase the intruders away.</p>
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If a card from the high deck appears in the inner circle, then it signifies an entity from that card's influence will be encountered within the scope of the minor curse granted by the prophecy (for example, Artifact: animator, Beast: lycanthrope). If no creature is readily apparent, consider a creature able to affect the party according to their new vulnerability. Keep it imaginative. The archetypes have no effect on the outcome at this level.

Hangman	Thief stealth skills (-1/-5%), Positive modifier to thief detection.
Horseman	Saving throws, armor class.
Innocent	Surprise checks, Proficiency checks, Fumble (as per spell except 1% per point of penalty).
Marionette	Saves vs. mind-affecting effects.
Mists	Special: As the focus, thus card changes the layout to an extended cross.
Raven	Informational skills/ spells beneficial for non-magical items (stakes, silver weapons, etc.).
Tempress	Special: One of the characters acquires an "advisor." The spectral remains of the imp that served Koreth subtly encourages evil acts. The voice remains for a number of months equal to the penalty. Alternatively, any attempt to sway a character against their alignment requires a save vs. spell to resist the suggestion.

The Outer Circle

For simplicity's sake, the outer circle is limited to modifying the other factors of the read. If the cards are all from the lesser deck, there is no modification. If an Archetype, the penalty is doubled but is applied once only. If from the high deck, further special factors may be added.

Resolution

Release from the curse is revealed in a singular configuration. The focus must be the Mists. The inner circle is composed of Ghost, Donjon, Artifact, and Raven. The outer circle is formed by the Archetypes. In this form alone is the vision of the means to release the Vistani revealed. There is no penalty involved aside from achieving that release. Once aware of the plight of the spirits and the way to free them, the players should feel some obligation to act. Ignoring these unfortunates is sufficient cause for a Ravenloft powers check. Feel free to improvise other intriguing results in relation to specific high deck combinations.



The penalties apply for the next three months and are cumulative.

The Inner Circle

If the cards are all from the lesser deck (2-9), then the results are determined by subtracting the combined total of the mortal suits (swords and coins) from the combined total of mystery suits (glyphs and stars). The remaining number is compared to the chart with the appropriate result applied.

Suit Tally	Penalty
30+	-5
20-29	-4
10-19	-3
0-9	-2

HAUNTED SITES: CONTEST WINNERS

ROSE GARDEN

by Jaleigh Johnson
Arthur, Illinois

Over the high stone walls of the garden, the child gazed at the unbreachable gray dome of the afternoon sky—the only color visible beyond the lush pink roses that dominated the grounds. She shuddered and tore her eyes away from the lifeless sky, much preferring the wild scent of the roses amid the pink landscape. It was the color she remembered best—the scent that was forever etched upon her senses.

Distantly she heard the sound of hoofbeats on the road approaching the manor house; someone was coming. She glanced over her shoulder to the far corner of the garden, where a dark, shadowy blemish marred the beauty surrounding her.

As the sounds came nearer, the shadows stirred as if from a long sleep and stretched out questing tendrils of black mist towards her. She turned in a swirl of skirts and brown curls and started to run towards the garden gate, knowing what was to follow; it was the same game she had played and lost for centuries. It never mattered; they came for the Beast, and now the beast was coming for them.



The rider had dismounted and was exploring the grounds of the ruined manor house. Silence hung heavily in the air, broken only by the creaking of the iron garden gate swinging back and forth on its hinges.

He was not a young man, but his stride was strong and confident. Confident he was, for he had come to this place with a purpose. He would slay the Beast that dwelled here and banish the evil hanging over the manor, succeeding where others had failed.

He caught the latch of the gate and opened it. The bravado held so carefully cultivated began to slip at the sight that met his eyes in the garden beyond. A child was running toward him, her step impossibly fast and graceful over the crumbling cobblestone path that led to the gate. She was gaunt, disheveled ... and nearly transparent—the man could see through her frail, ethereal frame to the twisted, dead tangles of rose bushes behind her.

The man backed away, out of reach of the child-spirit. She stopped near the gate and regarded him with a wounded expression. Upon closer inspection, the man realized that she must have been quite a beautiful child

once, with a round face and expressive, china doll eyes that seemed to look through him. He shuddered in revulsion at her clothes, hanging in ripped tatters about her body. Her hair was a rat's nest of matted tangles and wild curls swirling around bare shoulders that could no longer feel the cold.

She regarded him pleadingly and held a crumbling dead rose out to him with a shy smile. It was covered with ugly, biting thorns that dug deeply into her small palm, though she obviously could not feel their sting.

The man steeled himself against the chilling image of the child-spirit's awful smile and deliberately stepped around her onto the path into the garden. The child was no doubt a distraction, meant to delay him reaching his goal. He could feel the spirit's eyes watching him as he started cautiously in the direction she had come from.

The path was long worn down with age and being trod upon by centuries of feet. Here and there stones were broken and strewn carelessly in the dirt and shriveled grass as the roses and weeds had grown wild and thrust themselves—violently it seemed—up through the cracks in the stone. Even these now lay dead and coiled crazily across the ground, giving the scene a chaotic, unsettled appearance. Nothing could grow in the garden now, the man realized, but even so, he could feel the presence of something still existing here; something unnatural held the garden, preventing anything living from taking root.

Following a bend in the path, the man passed beneath an archway of stone and had the startling impression that he was passing from afternoon to night. The light of the gray sky dimmed suddenly, and the remains of the once lush vegetation cast sinister shadows before him. The man turned around in alarm, thinking he had stepped through some sort of portal that his magic had failed to detect. The archway was still there, but with an impenetrable darkness drawn across it like a thick curtain. There was nowhere to go but forward, so the man ventured deeper into the darkness, realizing he was being drawn towards something. Rounding another corner, he met with a dead end wall of stone.

Shadowy darkness clung to the wall like creeping ivy, and with it came the stench of rot and decay. The presence he had felt—the unnatural and malignant eyes he had barely sensed before—fell upon him fully.

The man had no time to think, to act, before the rotting stench mingled with a sickeningly sweet scent of fresh roses filled the air, choking him. Roses appeared around him suddenly, pink and black, scratching and clawing at him, dragging him down to the ground with their decaying arms. The man opened his mouth and screamed, long and loud, as their thorns dug deep gashes into his flesh. The shadows separated themselves from the stone wall and edged sinuously closer to the

HAUNTED SITES: CONTEST WINNERS

struggling figure. As he screamed, the man realized vaguely that the garden seemed to scream with him.



The child-spirit watched the familiar scene in detached silence, letting the bright pink rose fall from her hand into the dirt. It was her fault for failing to warn him properly. He had ignored her, afraid, just as the others had been. Now the beast would punish her again, would use the intruder's life and corrupt another of her precious rose plants. So few still bloomed as the years passed, and the scent ... the child sighed and turned away from the shadows, where the scent of her pink roses had gradually become the scent of rot and death.



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