

# The Black Stairs

Instant Adventure for 4–6 characters levels 4–6



When you arrived in the village of Blackbrook, you couldn't help but notice the anxiety and gloom in the faces of the locals. When you bought the bar a round and asked the villagers about their troubles, they explained that the dead have not been resting easy.

"Oh, we've often had problem with the restless," said a wizened old woman in the corner. "Vampires, zombies, even wild ghouls from time to time. But they mostly stay in the mountains, where the hunting is easy. But that might be changing now.

"Five nights ago, Dekellus, the lord's son, went missing. We found him a day later on the edge of town, dead. There was a vampire bite on his throat, and not a drop of blood in him. Looks like the restless dead are on the hunt again. You'd best be careful if you're traveling at night."

Now, two days out of Blackbrook and half a day into the mountains, the old woman's words come back to haunt you. The sun has just sunk beneath the horizon, and you hear clanging steel, shouts, and other sounds of battle from over the rise before you. You could try to walk away from this trouble, but it may just follow you. After all, the night is still young.

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# LEGENDS & LAIRS

INSTANT ADVENTURE



# The Black Stairs

by Darrell Hardy

Requires the use of the Dungeons & Dragons® Player's Handbook, Third Edition, published by Wizards of the Coast®



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## How to Use This Product

This adventure takes place in the world of Mennara, the setting of Fantasy Flight's bestselling *Diskwars* fantasy battle game. This provides a convenient frame of reference, but the adventure is specifically designed to be easily incorporated into any existing D&D campaign. Feel free to alter the names of places and characters and customize the details of the adventure to fit your own world.

You should be able to run this adventure in a single game session. You should read it through at least once and study those sections you will need to know well. In particular, you should familiarize yourself with the features and capabilities of new monsters and magic items introduced in the adventure. You may also wish to photocopy the map on pages 8 and 9, both for your own reference and to show to the players, if appropriate.

## Dungeons & Dragons®

This adventure requires the use of the *Dungeons & Dragons®* Player's Handbook, Third Edition, published by Wizards of the Coast.® You won't be able to run the adventure without it.



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# THE BLACK STAIRS

By Darrell Hardy

## DM BACKGROUND

Princess Lysara is fed up with her family, and has decided to run away. But Lysara is no ordinary princess, and hers is no ordinary family. She is a vampire, and the newest member of a fiendish undead clan that rules the miserable realm of Xaarx. Politics amongst these monsters is incessant and brutal: Bloody battles and vicious treachery abound as the vampires jockey for power amongst themselves.

Lysara was one of many mortals brought "into the fold" by Irsa, the vampire queen. Lysara and her "sisters" were to not only help Irsa maintain control of the mortal population, but to help defend her against the attacks of her vampiric rivals. Though at first she hated her new unlife, the "vampire princess" soon learned to revel in it. Seductive, remorseless, and utterly lethal, Lysara made a place for herself in the vampire courts of Xaarx—but it was not enough.

After nearly a decade of service to her queen, Lysara knew she would never rise above her current position in the undead hierarchy. She was too important to Irsa as a diplomat, assassin, and servant. Seeing no other choice, Lysara decided to abandon not only the vicious politics, but all of Xaarx as well, and to find a new place where she could rule without constant competition. To this end, she put together a caravan of trusted mortal minions and fled, under cover of daylight, to the Deathpeaks, a mountain range to the north of Xaarx.

But Lysara knew that Irsa would not let her leave without a fight. Therefore, she took with her the Lantern of Malnoc, a powerful magic item that had been "in the family" for nearly 2,000 years. The Lantern masks the true nature of all those near it. (In game terms, it creates an antimagic field that negates all divination spells and spell-like effects.) It would not only hide Lysara's vampiric nature from those around her, but prevent Irsa and her minions from using their magic to locate her as well.

Once she realized what Lysara had done, Irsa dispatched her minions in every direction with orders to locate and retrieve the renegade princess.

Now, Lysara's small caravan is 10 days north of Xaarx, about to enter the treacherous mountain pass known as the Black Stairs. Just as the sun is setting, they are set upon by some of Irsa's servants: a pack of ghouls and their vampire master.

But there is more trouble brewing for Lysara beyond the immediate danger. What she doesn't know is that her latest victim, a pretty young man named Dekellus, from the village of Blackbrook, was actually the son of Sir Darius, an affluent local

noble. When Darius realized what had happened to his son, he hired the Red Company, a small mercenary band specializing in undead hunting. He gave them a third of their payment, and promised the rest when they brought him the vampire's head.

In the three days since they were hired, the Red Company has learned of Lysara's caravan, and that it is traveling north into the mountains. They have not caught up with the vampire's entourage yet, but hope to do so in the Black Stairs.

The characters are also traveling north into the mountains when they come across Lysara's caravan. It is under attack by Irsa's minions.

## BLOOD ON THE ROAD

The road before you dips into a small valley, then rises again into the higher foothills of the Deathpeaks. Looking down, you see three horse-drawn carriages on the road. The front carriage is on its side, its horse dead and twisted in its harness. The second horse is barely held in check by a man in light armor with one hand on its reigns and the other wrapped around his sword. The third carriage is on fire, and its horse is rearing in panic. Between the sun's dying red light and the flickering carriage, you can make out at least five humanoid figures circling the caravan. They seem to be held back, just barely, by a handful of people with swords.

One of the defenders spots you and yells, "Please, help us! Or the princess will surely perish!"

The defenders are Lysara's minions. They are servants, not soldiers, and they are slowly falling to the pack of ghouls that has surrounded the vampire's caravan. Still, they are loyal to their princess, and will fight to the last to protect her from harm. Leading the defenders is the only true fighter of the group, a grizzled old human named Phineas.

There are 12 ghouls in the attacking band. Three of them are carrying torches, and are trying to set the other two carriages alight. The others are doing their best to get into the undamaged carriage, which holds the princess.

Standing in the shadows at the edge of the fray is Karlor, one of Irsa's trusted lieutenants. With his sparkling dark eyes, cruel smile, and long white hair, the vampire spawn is a coldly handsome figure. If the characters see him watching the attack, he simply nods to them, smiling a thin, knowing smile.

Karlor is in charge of the ghouls' attack, but will not participate unless half of them are defeated. If more than two thirds are defeated, Karlor decides it would be better to report Lysara's location than to endanger himself trying to capture her; he disappears into the darkness (perhaps in his gaseous form), leaving the battle behind.

As for Lysara, she knows the ghouls are merely trying to flush her out. If she makes her presence known, she'll just be making

herself a target for Irsa's more powerful minions (which are surely lurking nearby.) If the characters allow the ghouls to fight their way into the carriage, Lysara will use her gaseous form to escape, reforming when it is convenient to do so without raising the characters' suspicions. ("I slipped out and hid behind the rocks.")

**Ghouls (12):** CR 1; Medium-size Undead; HD 2d12; hp 13 each; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (+2 Dex, +2 natural); Atk +3 melee (1d6+1 and paralysis, bite), +0/+0 melee (1d3 and paralysis, claws); AL CE, SV Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +5; Str 13, Dex 15, Con —, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 16.

*Skills:* Climb +6, Escape Artist +7, Hide +7, Intuit Direction +3, Jump +6, Listen +7, Move Silently +7, Search +6, Spot +7.

*Feats:* Multiattack, Weapon Finesse (bite).

**Karlor, Male Vampire Spawn:** CR 4; Medium-size Undead; HD: 4d12; hp 26; Init: +6 (Dex, Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 15 (+2 Dex, +3 natural); Atk +5 melee (1d6+4 plus energy drain, slam); SA charm, energy drain, blood drain; SQ undead, +2 turn resistance, damage reduction 10/silver, cold and electricity resistance 10, gaseous form, spider climb, fast healing 2; AL: CE; SV: Fort +1, Ref +5, Will +5; Str 16, Dex 14, Con —, Int 13, Wis 13, Cha 14.

*Skills:* Bluff +8, Climb +8, Hide +10, Jump +10, Listen +11, Move Silently +11, Profession (guide) +10, Search +8, Sense Motive +11, Spot +11.

*Feats:* Alertness, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Skill Focus (guide).

**Phineas, Male Human Ftr4:** CR 4; Medium-size Humanoid; HD 4d10+8; hp 34; Init +5 (Dex, Improved Initiative); Spd 20 ft.; AC 19 (+1 Dex, +8 full plate); Atk +9 melee (1d10+5, bastard sword); AL CN; SV Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +2; Str 16, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 8.

*Skills:* Hide +4, Listen +5, Search +8, Spot +5.

*Feats:* Exotic Weapon (bastard sword), Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Weapon Specialization (bastard sword), Weapon Focus (bastard sword).

*Possessions:* Bastard sword, full plate, backpack, lantern, rations, waterskin, belt pouch with 50 gp.

## AN UNREFUSABLE OFFER

After the battle, Lysara introduces herself and greets the characters.

"I cannot thank you enough for your help here tonight," says the princess. "Without it, we might surely have fallen to these horrible... unliving things. They warned us in Blackbrook that these mountains were dangerous, but I had hoped to avoid such trouble. Alas, it was not to be.

"But now I have a request of you. As you can see, many of my guards have fallen. More than ever we will need the help



and protection of brave warriors such as you if we are to make it through the Black Stairs unharmed. Please, join our caravan. For there is safety in numbers, and when we arrive at my uncle's manor, I shall reward your efforts with gold."

If the characters ask for payment up front, Lysara seems mildly taken aback, but then offers them 300 gp apiece. "This is merely a down payment," she says. "My uncle will more than double it when I arrive safely."

Lysara's offer and safety concerns are genuine: She seriously wants the characters to accompany her, and feels that their presence will help protect her from Irsa's minions. Of course, there is no uncle at the end of this journey—Lysara doesn't even know where she's going yet—but she will worry about rewarding (or more likely killing) the characters when they start grumbling, and not before.

**Lysara, Female Vampire Ari3:** CR 5; Medium-size Undead; HD 3d12; hp 20; Init +5 (Dex, Improved Initiative); Spd 20 ft.; AC 17 (+1 Dex, +6 natural); Atk +2/+2 melee (1d4 +2, claws); SA slam (1d6), domination 30 ft., energy drain, blood drain (1d4 Con), children of the night, create spawn, SQ undead, damage reduction (15/+1), turn resistance (+4), resistance (20 vs. cold and electricity), gaseous form, spider climb, alternate form (bat, dire bat, wolf, or dire wolf), fast healing (5 hp/rnd); AL CE; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +2; Str 14, Dex 14, Con —, Int 13, Wis 12, Cha 16.

*Skills:* Bluff +11, Hide +10, Listen +9, Move Silently +10, Search +9, Sense Motive +9, Spot +9.

*Feats:* Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes.

## WHO'S WHO AND WHAT'S WHAT

Once they join the caravan, the characters have a chance to meet their fellow travelers and inspect the carriages.

**The Servants:** When Lysara left home, she brought 10 of her most loyal servants. Now most of them are dead, leaving only three: Anna, a middle-aged woman who is thrilled and terrified to be on such a grand adventure; Thomas, a burly young man who thinks himself a fighter, though his skills lie in blacksmithing; and Lenore, a tiny, shy woman who serves as Lysara's handmaiden. All three have been dominated so long and so often, their loyalty to and affection for their princess is obvious and genuine. They have had their cover story (see below) indoctrinated so well, they almost believe it themselves, and recite it verbatim when asked.

**The Fighter:** The only minion Lysara has not dominated is Phineas. She doesn't have to. He's an old mercenary warrior, the veteran of more battles than he cares to remember, but still has one fear: death. He has agreed to accompany the princess to her new home on the condition that when she establishes her new family, he is the first vampire she makes. Phineas doesn't like the idea of Lysara taking on more muscle (he doesn't want the competition) but grudgingly accepts the characters as necessary to ensure the



vampire's safety. He is loyal to Lysara, but only so far as it benefits him.

**The Princess:** Lysara herself is a pretty young woman, with pale, hard-edged features and long black hair. Dressed in fine traveling clothes, she very much looks the part of the princess. She prefers to remain in her carriage most of the time, either alone or in the company of Lenore. She never leaves the carriage during the day, and rarely speaks before nightfall. If she needs to communicate during the day, Lenore speaks for her. Lysara is very conscientious in disguising anything that may reveal her true vampire nature. While the Lantern of Malnoc makes this easier (see below), she is careful to avoid any slip-ups.

Lysara has concocted a cover story for herself and her minions to use when meeting with others on the road. She is careful to avoid any connection with Xaarx and its vampire rulers, for it is important that no one suspect her true nature. With little prompting, she or the others will relate the following to the characters:

Princess Lysara is the daughter of King Thordar, ruler of a small, rich island kingdom just off the southern coast. Lysara came to this land to expand her knowledge and education, so that she can rule more wisely when her time comes. For the past two weeks, she has been traveling north to visit her uncle, Lord Grandell. Grandell's manor lies in the Goodlands, just northeast of the Deathpeaks.

**The Carriages:** Assuming the ghouls failed to set the other carriages on fire, there are still two serviceable carriages, and probably two horses to draw them.

The burnt carriage is unusable except as firewood, and all that remains of its cargo are two trunks full of clothes.

The carriage that was on its side works fine once it is righted again. It, too, is carrying trunks of clothing, along with enough food and drink to keep Lysara's minions fit for a two-week journey. Perceptive characters may note, however, that there is none of the fancy, rich food one would associate with so regal a person as the princess. (Her highness does think to ask for food, though no one sees her eating more than a morsel at a time.)

Lysara's carriage is off-limits to everyone but Lenore. In fact, it is only if someone tries to get into the carriage that Lysara will reveal her power—as subtly as possible, of course. There is but one door on the carriage, with a sturdy lock (DC 35) and no windows. The walls are made of thick wood (DC 30 to break) and reinforced with steel bands.

The inside of the carriage is plush and ornate enough for any princess, and littered with books and trinkets with which she amuses herself while traveling. Instead of the usual bench seats, the interior features what is essentially a large bed covered in cushions. Close inspection reveals that if the cushions are pushed aside, the top of the "bed" swings open, providing access to a large storage area below. There is a small, locked (DC 30) metal chest on one side of the storage area containing 2,000 gp in assorted coins and gems. To the other side is a wooden coffin.

The only other item worth mentioning in Lysara's carriage is the Lantern of Malnoc. Referred to by the princess and her minions simply as "the lantern," it is a heavy hollow sphere of black iron with 13 wide, ornate holes carved through its metal shell. A pale bluish-white light emanates through these holes when the lantern is activated. The light can range from a mere candle flicker to a near-daylight blaze 50 feet across, depending on the user's wishes. Atop the sphere is a black iron ring from which to hang the lantern.

As soon as the caravan begins moving again, Lysara has Phineas hang the lantern from the top of her carriage, so that it may light the travelers' path. (For a complete description of the lantern's powers, see the New Magic Item section.)

## FIGHTING ON THE STAIRS

The caravan pushes on into the night, stopping a few hours later to rest just off the road. Shortly after dawn, the servants produce a simple breakfast of dried fruit and bread, and then get the caravan moving once more. Perceptive characters may note that their fellow travelers do not take down the lantern when the sun rises, but leave it glimmering dimly on Lysara's carriage.

Eventually, the caravan reaches the infamous Black Stairs. The road is steep and blanketed in black gravel that occasionally slides beneath wheels and feet. It narrows here to 15 feet across, with a hundred foot drop on one side and a steep slope covered with trees and rocks on the other. For several hours, the road winds its way along the edge of the mountain.

The Red Company has tracked Lysara's caravan to the Black Stairs, and is traveling parallel to the road on a ridge above the thin trees. After spying on the carriages for an hour or so (during which time the characters may have the feeling someone is watching them), they decide to make their move. Six of the mercenaries ride

ahead of the caravan, leave their horses on the ridge with another five fighters, and sneak down through the trees to lie in ambush. A few of them push a small fallen tree from out of the woods onto the road. It's not much of a roadblock, but it's enough to force the caravan to stop, which is all they want.

Shortly before noon, the characters come upon the tree across the road. Moving it is not a difficult task, requiring only a Strength check (DC 20), but while the travelers are occupied, the mercenaries attack. (Perceptive or paranoid characters watching the woods may see the vampire hunters shortly before they strike by making a successful Spot check, DC 25.)

Three of the mercenaries concentrate their efforts on breaking into the princess' carriage, while the others try to hold back her defenders. Perceptive characters making a Spot check (DC 30) may note that the mercenaries are carrying wooden stakes in their belts and that they smell faintly of garlic. Those less perceptive (DC 20) will notice that the attackers are wearing red skull patches on their right shoulders.

The battle is made all the more dangerous by the narrow battlefield. If the characters aren't careful, they could very easily fall or be pushed over the edge of the road and into the ravine below. Once they fall, they start sliding down the sheer rock face, 10 ft. the first round, then 20 ft. each subsequent round until they can catch themselves. A character must make a Dexterity check (DC 20) to stop his slide; otherwise, the character will tumble 100 ft. to the bottom of the ravine and take 8d6 points of damage.

The hunters were expecting to face only Lysara's servants, and are surprised when faced with the characters' skills. After three of them fall, two flee back into the woods, running up to the ridge and to their mounts. The remaining mercenary throws a vial of alchemist's fire onto Lysara's carriage, setting it ablaze in an effort to slow any pursuers. He then turns and follows his companions.

**Red Company Mercenaries, Male Human, Ftr4 (6):** CR4; Medium-size Humanoid; HD 4d10+8; hp 26; Init +5 (Dex, Improved Initiative); Spd 20 ft.; AC 17 (Dex +1, chainmail +5, shield +1); Atk +8 melee (1d8+6, longsword), or +6 ranged (1d8+1, longbow and 20 +1 arrows); AL CG; SV Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +4, Str 16, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 8.

*Skills:* Climb +2, Jump +2.

*Feats:* Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Iron Will, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot.

*Possessions:* Chainmail, shield, +1 longsword, longbow, 20 +1 arrows, 20 normal arrows.

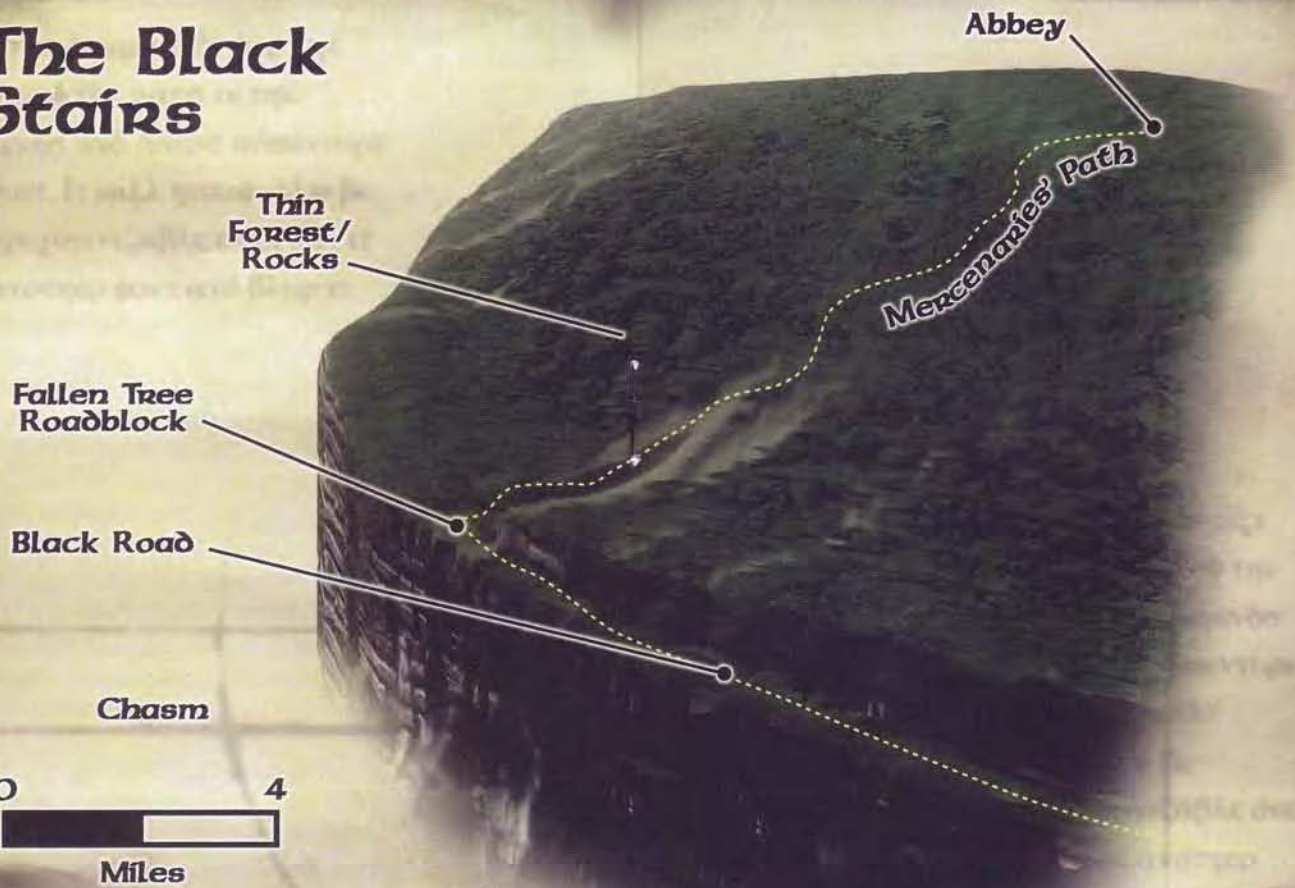
## LOST AND FOUND

Immediately after the battle, Phineas insists that the caravan move on to put some distance between them and their attackers. The truth is, he recognized the insignia of the Red Company. He knows who they are and fears for Lysara's existence.

If the characters ask about the mercenaries, Phineas tries to dismiss them as simple highwaymen. ("Probably been waiting there by the tree for days, looking to hit the first wagon to come along.") If the characters point out the red patches or vampire-hunting equipment, Phineas suggests the mercenaries might be desert-



# The Black Stairs



# Abbey Ruins

Scale: One Square Equals 10 Feet

## Key

-  Tree with Tripwire
-  Mercenary
-  Campfire
-  Shiva
-  Marko





ers from the local military, and that stakes and garlic are reasonable precautions here where the undead are known to prowl the night.

Two hours before sunset, one of the servants notices that the Lantern of Malnoc is missing. Suddenly Lysara, who has been grave-silent all day, cries out from inside her carriage:

"The lantern is missing? Please, my friends, you must recover it. For not only is it an ancient family heirloom, but its magical properties are many and great. You have already seen it shed light without fuel, but know that its light heals and protects as well. Indeed, it is even said that those who bathe in the lantern's light will never age.

"Please, dear friends, I implore you to find the lantern and return it to me."

If the characters require further convincing, Lysara offers them another 300 gp each to recover her stolen lantern.

Tracking the mercenaries' trail into the trees requires the Track feat and a Wilderness Lore check (DC 15), and climbing the steep mountainside is slow going—even slower if the characters are trying to ride or lead horses up the trail. But eventually the characters will reach the upper ridge, where the vampire hunters met their horses. The trail is easier to follow here (DC 12), and leads across a gentle mountain slope dotted with stunted trees.

## CAMP OF THE RED COMPANY

The Red Company has set up camp in the crumbling ruins of an old abbey. There are 10 mercenaries in the camp, including Marko, the cleric, and Shiva, the company captain. Shiva knows from experience that when hunting vampires, it pays to have a good defense. Therefore, she has set guards and a string of traps around the camp.

**The Traps:** There are trip lines set in the high grass, connected to small bells that ring when the line is tripped, alerting the guards to the intruder's presence.

**Alarm Trap:** CR 1/2; no attack roll necessary (no damage, but alarm sounds); Search (DC 20); Disable Device (DC 15).

**The Guards:** There are five mercenaries hiding in the trees around the camp, keeping an eye on the surrounding area. If they see someone coming, their first priority is to shout and alert the rest of the camp; their second is to stop the intruder. If the characters approach the camp in a friendly, straightforward manner, the guards stop them, demanding to know their business, and try to take them prisoner. If the characters are seen charging or sneaking into the camp, the guards attack first and ask questions later. The guards, like all the mercenaries, are wearing garlic and assume the characters are Lysara's dominated minions.

Once a modest stone building, the abbey has fallen into ruin over the past two centuries. Now the roof is gone and all but two of the walls have crumbled to less than waist height, but it's shelter

enough for Shiva's hardy band. The mercenaries have hung garlic wherever they can and stretched a canvas over the two remaining walls, creating a makeshift roof to keep the rain out. Shiva and Marko are beneath the canvas, studying the lantern, when the characters arrive. The other mercenaries are inside the ruins cooking dinner over a small fire.

Shiva is a tall, dangerous-looking woman with a pair of vivid red scars across her throat. (They are souvenirs from the vampire that almost killed her.) As cold and merciless as the monster she hunts, the captain of the Red Company is no one to trifle with.

Marko is stout man in heavy armor. Though he is a cleric of Utaavo, a local good-aligned deity, the only evidence of this is the holy symbol he wears.

There are two likely ways the characters' encounter with the mercenaries will play out: combat and parley.

**Combat:** It is most likely the characters will simply attack the mercenaries. After all, the Red Company did attack the caravan, trying to kill the princess and stealing her precious lantern. Furthermore, due to the lantern's magical influence (see the New Magic Item section for details), no one on either side of the conflict can use magical or other supernatural means to discern the other's alignment or intent.

**Parley:** If the characters have grown suspicious of Lysara, they may take this opportunity to speak with the mercenaries, trying to find out who they are and why they are attacking the caravan. Shiva is highly suspicious of the characters, but grudgingly explains that the Red Company has been hired to kill the vampire Lysara. As for the lantern, she says that her men didn't know what it was—none of them do—but recognized it as a likely magic item of some sort, so they took it. If the characters are able to convince Shiva that they were duped into serving the vampire, she will ask their help in destroying the undead monster.

**Shiva, Female Human Ftr5:** CR5; HD 5d10+10; hp 38; Init +7 (Dex, Improved Initiative); Spd 20 ft.; AC 18 (+3 Dex, +4 chain shirt, shield); Atk +7 melee (1d8+6, longsword), or +9 ranged (1d8+1, masterwork light crossbow, 20 +1 bolts; AL CG; SV Fort +7, Ref +3, Will +5, Str 15, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 11, Wis 13, Cha 12.

*Skills:* Climb +2, Jump +3, Listen +1, Ride +3, Search +1, Spot +1, Swim +2.

*Feats:* Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Iron Will, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Quickdraw.

*Possessions:* Chainmail, shield, masterwork light crossbow, 20 +1 bolts, +1 longsword, belt pouch with 40 gp.

**Marko, Male Human Clr5:** CR 5; HD 5d8+10; hp 36; Init +0; Spd 20 ft.; AC 16 (+5 chainmail, +1 small metal shield); Atk +5 melee (1d8+1, heavy mace), or +2 ranged (1d8, light crossbow); AL NG; SV Fort +7, Ref +1, Will +9; Str 13, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 11, Wis 16, Cha 12.

*Skills:* Concentration +8, Gather Information +5, Heal +6, Knowledge (arcana) +7, Knowledge (religion) +7, Listen +3, Move Silently +3, Search +4, Spellcraft +6.

*Feats:* Alertness, Dodge, Scribe Scroll.

*Spells (5/5/4/3):* 0—cure minor wounds, detect magic, light,

*read magic, resistance; 1st—bless, cure light wounds, detect evil, divine favor, magic weapon; 2nd—aid, bull's strength, cure moderate wounds, spiritual weapon, 3rd—cure serious wounds, daylight, magic vestment.*

*Domain Spells (1/1/1): 1st—protection from evil; 2nd—aid; 3rd—magic vestment.*

*Possessions:* Backpack, wineskin, 5 day's trail rations, bedroll, bullseye lantern, 5 metal stakes, hammer, iron holy symbol; 6 armed cross, scrolls: 1 command; 1 invisibility to undead; 5 cure light wounds; 3 cure moderate wounds.

## FAMILY REUNION

One way or another, the characters return to where they left the caravan, probably with the Lantern of Malnoc in their possession. When they do, they find a surprise waiting for them.

The caravan is silent as you approach, and soon you see why: Phineas and the princess' servants are dead, their bodies neatly stacked beside the road. The horses are nowhere to be seen. And there are ghouls sniffing around the outside of Lysara's carriage. But that's not the worst of it.

A bloated corpse is staggering down the road towards you, blood on its lips. Extra arms and legs protrude from its swollen flesh seemingly at random. The creature slowly swings its head around and stares in your direction with yellow, inhuman eyes.

The shambling creature is a corpse-thing (see New Monster section), an undead abomination. It, and the ghouls, are here in the company of Karlor, who has returned from reporting to Irsa. After meeting with the vampire queen, Karlor has new orders: bring back the Lantern of Malnoc and kill all those who know of its existence—especially the traitorous Lysara.

If it is after sunset when the characters arrive (which is most likely, considering the distances involved), Lysara lies lifeless and still at the edge of the road, with a wooden stake driven through her chest. Karlor stands nearby with a slight smile on his face, waiting patiently for the sun to rise and finish her off.

"Ahhh... We meet again," says Karlor with a smile. "When Lysara stole the lantern from us, I was afraid we might never see it again. And when it was stolen from her... well, that was most inconvenient. But now, here you are.

"I could ask you to hand the lantern over, but I'd much rather have my friend here take it from you."

With that, the corpse-thing attacks the characters. A round

later, the ghouls join the fray. As before, Karlor will only join in when it appears his minions are losing the battle.

If the characters arrive before sunset, Lysara's minions are still dead (killed by the corpse-thing), and Lysara still staked, but she and Karlor are inside the locked carriage. If they arrive after sunrise, Lysara has been burned to ash by the sun. In either case, Karlor dispenses the above theatrics and simply commands the corpse thing to kill the characters and bring him the lantern.

## NEW MONSTER

### CORPSE-THING



#### Large Construct

**Hit Dice:** 9d10 (49 hp)

**Initiative:** -1 (Dex)

**Speed:** 30 ft. (can't run)

**AC:** 18 (-1 size, -1 Dex, +10 natural)

**Attacks:** 5 slams +10 melee

**Damage:** Slam 2d8+5

**Face/Reach:** 5 ft. by 5 ft./10 ft.

**Special Attacks:** Berserk

**Special Qualities:** Construct, magic immunity, add limb

**Saves:** Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +3

**Abilities:** Str 21, Dex 9, Con —, Int —, Wis 11, Cha 1

**Climate/Terrain:** Any land and underground

**Challenge Rating:** 7

**Treasure:** None

**Alignment:** Always neutral

**Advancement:** 10–18 HD (Large); 19–27 HD (Huge)

Corpse-things are monsters made of reanimated body parts magically joined together. Most have at least four arms, and many have at least three legs. Some even have multiple heads. The necro-



mancers of Xaarx created corpse-things to serve as guards, soldiers, and other “disposable” combatants.

## COMBAT

Corpse-things are slow, and have only limited intelligence, but they are tough, tenacious fighters that won't stop until destroyed.

**Berserk (Ex):** A corpse-thing has a cumulative 1% chance to go berserk each round. A berserking corpse-thing will attack the closest living creature each round, or destroy an inanimate object if no living creatures are within reach. With a successful Charisma check (DC 19), the corpse-thing's creator can regain control if within 60 feet. After one minute of rest, the corpse-thing's berserk chance returns to 0%.

**Magic Immunity (Ex):** Corpse-things are completely immune to most magical or supernatural effects.

**Add Limb (Su):** The necromancers gave the corpse-things the ability to add still more parts to their bodies. If a corpse-thing spends a round to remove a body part from a fresh corpse, then another round holding that body part to its torso, the corpse-thing will be able to use that body part in combat. They have a number of attacks equal to their current number of arms.

**Construct:** The corpse-thing is immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, disease, and similar effects. It is not affected by critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

## NEW MAGIC ITEM

### LANTERN OF MALNOC

The Lantern of Malnoc is a heavy hollow sphere of black iron with 13 wide, ornate holes carved through its iron shell. A pale bluish-white light emanates through these holes when the lantern is activated. The light can range from a mere candle flicker to a near-daylight blaze 50 feet across, depending on the user's wishes. Atop the sphere is black iron ring from which to hang the lantern.

According to vampire legend, Malnoc was a powerful wizard who got sick of sanctimonious paladins, clerics, and other self-styled “warriors against evil” attacking him and his company just because of their alignment. He therefore crafted a magical lantern that would mask the alignment of anyone within two miles. As an added bonus, it also protects those within two miles from any other sort of divination or scrying as well. It's rumored that the lantern has many other fantastic magical abilities that have been lost over time.

The lantern generates an antimagic field with a two-mile radius that negates all divination spells and spell-like effects. It can also be activated to give off a pale, bluish-white magical light.

Recently, the Lantern of Malnoc has been used by the vampires of Xaarx to hide their presence from outsiders. *Caster Level:* 10th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *antimagic field*, *daylight*; *Market Price:* 60,000 gp; *Weight:* 4 lbs.

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