

THE HOUSE OF YSPHER: BONUS MATERIAL

This package contains three handouts to use when running *Dungeon Backdrop: The House of Yspher*. Whereas *Yspher's Letter* (Handout 1) is a simple prop document, the *Testament of Ruin* (Handouts 2 and 3) comprise two sequential puzzles for the players to crack, immersing them in the occult secrets of the *Nine Books*. The solutions to the puzzles are cryptic enough for the GM to fit them into almost any campaign while retaining a fair amount of depth with which to flesh out future adventures revolving around the infamous *Nine Books of Hodhek*.

HANDOUT 1: YSPHER'S LETTER

When the characters find Yspher's letter in the Laboratory (area 10), give them this handout instead of paraphrasing its contents.

HANDOUT 2: TESTAMENT OF RUIN I

This handout represents the first page of the *Testament of Ruin*. It contains an encrypted poem of nine verses. The order of letters in each verse has been reversed and each letter has been substituted by an arcane rune. Decrypted, it reads:

*To walk the silent shadows
Along the winding path
To brave misfortune's arrows
And fear not fire's wrath
To face the dark alone
To bend knee before the stone
Is to walk the road of hate
And to sunder the black gate
Which leads men before my throne*

INTERPRETATION

Depending on your preferences, the text might describe:

- A series of vague directions to follow, leading to a specific geographical location.
- Metaphorical descriptions of an obscure ritual or spell.
- Cryptic warnings to bypass a series of deadly traps in some ancient dungeon.

Consider also whether the poem represents a complete set of instructions (identical across all nine books), or just part of the solution (with each volume containing a different text as part of a larger puzzle).

DEVELOPMENT

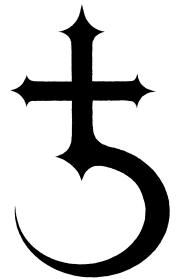
In addition, reciting the poem out loud casts a simple spell which causes the central enneagram to peel away, revealing an entrancing pattern of shifting red and black. Replace Handout 2 with Handout 3 to represent the altered page.

HANDOUT 3: TESTAMENT OF RUIN II

The new image at the centre is a *stereogram*; a two-dimensional image which, when viewed in the proper way, creates a fully three-dimensional optical illusion revealing a hidden image. The trick to seeing this illusion is to focus one's eyes at a point *beyond* the image, and not the image itself. A common method is to hold the image right up against your nose, then slowly moving it back while staring ahead. Another is to focus on a distant object and slowly moving the page into view while attempting to retain focus.

It takes practice to view stereograms, and people who lack depth perception will not be able to see the illusion at all. When frustration looms, or if your players are simply unable to see the hidden image, suggest using a *detect magic* spell (or similar effect) to reveal the glyph instead.

Tell the players how their characters' gazes are mystically drawn to the strange image. If they are unfamiliar with the concept of stereograms, you will need to explain how they work. When someone succeeds at viewing the hidden glyph, ask them to draw it on a piece of paper as proof. It should resemble the picture nearby.



INTERPRETATION

Depending on your preferences, the revealed glyph might reveal:

- An arcane sigil to be used in a certain spell or ritual.
- A letter or number from an unknown language and alphabet.
- An occult symbol with an obscure meaning.

Consider also how the glyph relates to the first part of the puzzle. Ask yourself whether the other eight books contain an identical image, or a different one. In the latter case, how are they related?

WHAT ELSE IS IN THE BOOK?

The *Testament of Ruin* is several hundred pages long and, at your discretion, could contain a plethora of evil spells, dark rituals and maddening lore, accessible to the reader only after deciphering its encrypted text. Even after the cipher is cracked, it takes the average reader several hours to decipher and make sense of only a handful of pages at a time.

HANDOUT 1: YSPHER'S LETTER

I cannot, for the life of me, recollect how, when, or even where I first met the lady Elvytta.

My memory is feeble and worn from suffering. Yet, I vaguely recall I first laid eyes on her in some ancient, decaying city along the great river on one of my fateful voyages. It must have been there, then, where I was first smitten with her singular beauty, her sharp intellect, and the thrilling and enthralling eloquence with which she so stealthily stole into my heart.

Perhaps, had I not been so starved of companionship, I would have seen the strands of her web before they ensnared me. But the common folk loathe and fear me. They hate what they do not understand. I have learned not to blame them, however, having lived in this hideous misshapen body so long I have come to detest my very reflection as well. The loneliness of my self-imposed exile had made me weak, grinding away my capacity for reason. And so, when the raven-haired maiden approached me, I willingly stepped into her snare.

Know the creature of which I speak, Elvytta, is a thing which should not be. I have briefly spoken of her sharp intellect. Her knowledge was immense. In matters of ancient history, linguistics, and the arcane, I have never found her at fault. The grace of her subtle, aquiline features was nothing short of regal, and a mere glance from her would have sufficed to raise a flag of truce in burning heaven. Her true nature remains a mystery to me. I recall her once mentioning she came from an old family, though she would not reveal more.

Before long I found myself caught in her spell, a dark and diabolical charm from which I would not be able to extricate myself for many years. They were bleak and dismal days, spent as if under the ghastly radiance of a perpetual black lotus-induced haze. I would remain locked inside my laboratory, slaving away in secret at the blasphemous experiments she would charge me with. From time to time, she would return from her visits to town with a young girl in her company. Elvytta would force me to watch as she proceeded to torture and bleed the poor child, often over the course of several days. On certain nights, she would bathe in their blood as part of some ancient ritual, which I assume allowed her to retain her immortal beauty.

In time, however, Elvytta's acts of cruelty became so horrific and depraved the magical fetters she had laid upon my heart and mind were broken. When first I came to realize the full extent of the horror I had brought to this place, and my complicity in its crimes, I wept for many hours. Then, it dawned upon me I must remain strong, for I had a responsibility to see her evil undone. Aided by the intake of soporific potions of my own making, I feigned enthrallment for several more days. Locked inside my laboratory, I used what little I had managed to learn of Elvytta's alien physiology to create an admixture potent enough to kill her. Weaving arcane spells into poisonous philtres and tinctures of mercury, I at long last succeeded in distilling a singular liquor and - with much trepidation - administered it to her via one of her sanguinary meals.

To my horror, I found the poison had failed to kill her. Though her body went limp, I could tell from the cold, accusing stare in her emerald eyes her mind yet lived. Her silent stare glanced daggers at me, promising a slow and torturous death. Fearing any less than lethal physical trauma might hasten her recovery, I resolved instead to immure her in her own nightmare chambers.

As I write these words, I can hear her muffled screams. Honeyed words mixed with the foulest of curses echo throughout the basement. I feel the effects of the sedatives leaving me, and with them, my will to live. The terrible acts I have witnessed can never be forgotten. And my complicity in them cannot be forgiven. My last thoughts are with the girls; may they find peace in the next world.

Yspher

