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DUNGEON BACKDROP:
THE HOUSE OF YSPHER



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DUNGEON BACKDROP: THE HOUSE OF YSPHER

The lonely house on the hill is no place to spend the night. Many a weary traveller on the road to Dunstone has sought shelter there from the dangers of the night, only to find even darker terrors lurking inside the house's crumbling walls. Those who find death beyond the shadowed threshold are considered fortunate, for the few who escape the house's harrowing halls are cursed to endure a life of madness; their bodies and souls scarred beyond mortal comprehension. Few know the truth. The dreaded manor once belonged to Yspher, a reclusive wizard with an evil reputation who mysteriously vanished many years ago. Whispers of sinister experiments involving black magic and forbidden lore surrounded Yspher's disappearance, which would prove only the first of many tragedies ...

Unearth the disturbing past of Yspher's dismal demesne and unveil the mystery surrounding Ashlar's most haunted manor. The House of Yspher awaits!

CREDITS

Design: Bart Wynants

Development: Creighton Broadhurst

Art: William McAusland, Matt Morrow and Dean Spencer. Some artwork copyright William McAusland, used with permission.

Cartography: Dyson Logos and Bart Wynants

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BONUS MATERIAL

House of Yspher: Bonus Material presents three handouts for use with this Dungeon Backdrop. This bonus content comprises:

- **Yspher's Letter:** When the players find Yspher's letter in the laboratory (area 10) give them this handout.
- **Testament of Ruin:** Handouts 2 and 3 comprise the first page of the *Testament of Ruin* found in area 8 (Secret Study). When the characters find the book present them with handout 2. Replace handout 2 with handout 3 when they solve the encrypted poem.

USING A DUNGEON BACKDROP

Tweak and modify this dungeon to make it your own. The parts of this supplement describing the actual dungeon itself feature extensive space for you to make notes—adding treasure, opponents and so on.

- **Location Descriptions:** The various location descriptions provided herein only describe the basic appearance of the dungeon's rooms, chambers and corridors. They do not include descriptions of any monsters lurking therein. Remember when describing the dungeon to your players the snarling orcs (or whatever) are probably more noticeable than the room's features. Also remember, creatures in the dungeon will modify their home to better suit their needs. For example, the aforementioned orcs may have set up a rough camp—mention these changes when describing the area.
- **Treasure:** The text only presents the details of minor treasures the PCs could discover in the course of their adventure. Most is of little value, but serves to underline the flavour of the dungeon. Remember to add level-appropriate treasure when designing the dungeon.

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DUNGEON BACKGROUND

Nine generations ago, in the autumn years of Duke Arndul Nenonen II's reign, a reclusive wizard settled into the old rectory near Dunstone. A tall, lank-haired man with piercing blue eyes, Yspher's appearance soon earned him the distrust of the

ADDITIONAL GM RESOURCES

Depending on your design for the House of Yspher, the following resources might prove useful:

- *20 Things #35: Ghost-Haunted House*
- *20 Things #37: Fane of Evil*
- *20 Things #38: Torture Chambers*
- *20 Things #41: Ruined Wizard's Tower*
- *20 Things #42: Archives & Libraries*
- *Town Backdrop: Dunstone* (or a different backdrop if you choose to set the adventure elsewhere).

townsfolk. It was thus considered no small wonder when, four years later, Yspher returned from one of his lonely expeditions alongside a beautiful, raven-haired bride. Elvytta was kind and outgoing, and would often visit Dunstone to chat with the local folk, though she would never speak of her husband's alchemical pursuits. When several girls from Dunstone mysteriously disappeared, Elvytta went to great lengths to convince the local lord of Yspher's innocence. One day, however, she stopped coming to town, and the people of Dunstone became convinced the wizard's dark desires were the cause of these disappearances. They stormed the manor only to find it abandoned. Yspher had escaped justice.

The truth, however, is far more sinister. The thing Yspher took for his bride was no mortal woman. In the guise of the raven-haired beauty Elvytta, she had put a charm upon the wizard, forcing him to conduct terrible, secret experiments. As Yspher slaved away, Elvytta bathed in the blood of lifeless maidens taken from Dunstone. In the face of such cruelty, the fetters laid upon Yspher's heart and mind were broken. Realising the full extent of the horror he had brought to Dunstone, Yspher resolved to set things right. Feigning enthrallment for several more days, he concocted a powerful arcane poison and administered it to Elvytta. Though it failed to kill her, she was paralysed long enough for Yspher to carry her frozen body to the basement, where he immured his bride inside her own horrid torture chamber. The ordeal had taken a terrible toll upon the wizard's mind, however, and Yspher soon took his own life. Elvytta remains imprisoned

IN YOUR CAMPAIGN

Dungeon Backdrop: House of Yspher is not like a normal commercially available adventure. While we have done the bulk of the work for you describing the house in detail, setting out its history, designing plot hooks to get your characters to the dungeon and so on, there is still (a little) work left: you must stock the manor with appropriate monsters and treasures and make any other changes or additions you see fit. In short, you must make the House of Yspher your own!

This Dungeon Backdrop is designed for use with the Duchy of Ashlar and the Gloamhold megadungeon or the Lonely Coast. However, the manor is relatively self-contained and so with minimal effort it can be easily modified to fit almost any campaign world.

The major salient components of the adventure comprise:

- **Haunted Manor:** Mind-bending terrors fill the manor.
- **Ghastly Revelation:** The truth behind Yspher's legend is far darker than the characters initially suspect.
- **Forbidden Lore:** The manor hides a dangerous tome, thought long destroyed.
- **Ancient Evils:** Elvytta belongs to an ancient bloodline of predatory monsters, walking unseen among mortals. Her true nature is up to you to decide and fit into your campaign.

beneath the house to this day, driven mad by decades of darkness and isolation.

ADVENTURE SETUP OPTIONS

Before designing the challenges and encounters lurking in the House of Yspher, you must determine Elvytta's fate.

OPTION 1: DEATH BECOMES HER

Through command of the black arts, Elvytta reached across the boundary beyond, summoning and binding the souls of the dead to her will. Incorporeal undead and strange supernatural effects haunt the harrowed halls. In addition, corporeal undead have been created from the bodies of the dead at Elvytta's whim.

OPTION 2: MASTER OF PUPPETS

Elvytta's alien mind is a powerful psychic beacon, attracting a host of madmen and evil creatures to the house. This option offers the broadest choice of encounters. For optimal results, consider using doppelgängers, mimics and similar creatures with shapeshifting or

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

The first half of the Dungeon Background (up to "The truth...") is common local knowledge. The House of Yspher is well-known throughout the area, and locals are eager to recount the legend.

A character may know something about the House of Yspher, its history and surrounds. Determine how knowledgeable the characters are and then impart some (or all) of the information below.

1. Yspher left no living descendants and ownership of the manor passed to the Oksanen family, rulers of Dunstone.
2. From time to time, the manor attracts adventurers, vagrants and near-do-wells; all either ignorant of its legend or foolish enough to ignore it. Few return, and those who do are driven irrevocably insane.
3. After murdering his bride, Yspher fled to the Mottled Spire, where he set up his lair in Gloamhold's doom-wreathed halls. (False rumour)
4. Yspher's predations claimed a total of nine local girls. Their names are engraved on a modest memorial stone in Dunstone's farmer's market (location 10 on the Dunstone town map). The girls' bodies were never recovered.
5. Stories say Elvytta was wise beyond her years and schooled in all manner of arts and sciences. Some claim she hailed from the Lonely Coast, or the lands beyond the Forest of Gray Spires.
6. When the good folk of Dunstone came to arrest Yspher and found the house abandoned, they tried setting it ablaze. The fire would not take, and a dark spirit chased them from the manor.

mind-affecting abilities, suitable for replicating the tropes of a haunted house.

OPTION 3: THE MIND IS A TERRIBLE THING

The haunting comprises illusions created by Elvytta's unfathomably powerful psyche. Consider this option if you wish to torment the characters with visions of past failures, details from their tragic backstories, or the foreshadowing of some greater doom yet to come. Alternatively, combine this choice with either of the above, mixing regular encounters with terrifying vistas of personal horror to keep the characters on their toes.

ELVYTТА

Elvytta lurks in her prison beneath the manor. Her true nature and origins are left for the GM to decide. She could be a succubus, vampire, hag, or any other long-lived creature you choose, disguised by illusion magic.

Since Elvytta's goal is to escape her prison and not necessarily kill the characters, you can afford to make her a challenge normally beyond their level. Should Elvytta escape, she makes an excellent recurring villain!

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The mere existence of a haunted manor is often enough to attract intrepid adventurers to investigate. Alternatively, use one of the following hooks to lure the characters to the House of Yspher.

- **Any Port in a Storm:** While travelling along the road to Dunstone, a sudden savage storm catches the characters out in the open. The party are forced to seek shelter in the old manor on the hill until the storm passes.
- **Lost Lore:** Vieno Rekola (N old male human wizard 4), patriarch of the once-famed Rekola family (location 7 on the Dunstone town map), is desperate to restore their reputation as renowned wizards. Having long suspected Yspher possessed rare books containing arcane knowledge, he seeks to hire adventurers to search the house. Vieno downplays the manor's reputation, fearing it might scare off the characters. If they confront him after learning its history, Vieno grudgingly doubles his reward.
- **The Keys are Under the Mat:** The characters somehow gain possession of the deed to the House of Yspher. It could turn up amid the treasure of an earlier adventure or be granted as a reward by a wealthy patron for services rendered. Perhaps a recently-deceased relative of one of the characters has left it to them in their will. The characters must travel to Dunstone to have the deed authenticated by Lord Benjam Oksanen, who warns them of the manor's ill reputation.



THE SURROUNDS

The House of Yspher sits perched upon a lonely hilltop south of Dunstone. It can be reached only by climbing a narrow, bramble-choked path snaking its way up along the hill's rugged flanks. Stubborn thickets of holly and hawthorn surround the old manor, and vines of pale ivy crawl across its crumbling face like veins and exposed muscles. Only the sullen, eye-like windows are spared, behind which lurks an utter blackness, even on the brightest day.

A rusted iron fence rings the remains of a garden where a thin, gossamer mist clings to the ground, lazily swirling around gnarled roots, weeds and poison blooms. Herbalists might recognise deadly nightshade, hemlock, foxglove and wolfsbane growing in and around the garden. Most striking, however, are the scarlet orchids growing in an otherwise barren plot at the back of the garden, marking the missing girls' graves. A character who spends one hour digging finds a girl's withered remains buried in the cold clay, matted blonde hairs still attached to the scalp.

GENERIC HOUSE FEATURES

Near two centuries of decrepitude with a pervasive evil entombed beneath it have reduced the once-stately manor to a twisted shadow of its former glory. All areas share several generic features.

Unnatural Aura: A pall of dread hangs over the house. Animals refuse to approach the manor unless their master makes a DC 25 Handle Animal or wild empathy check. Corvids and vermin are unaffected.

Illumination: The evil permeating the manor dims all natural light. Windowless rooms are always shrouded in deep darkness, and windowed areas remain gloomy even on the brightest days.

Sound: The incessant cawing of the rooks nesting in area 6 echoes through the house, imposing a -10% penalty to all hearing-based hear noise rolls.

Walls: The walls of the house are typical masonry, covered in cracked stucco and warped wainscotting.

Floors: Sturdy oaken boards, covered with mouldy carpeting or stained parquet, make up the manor's floors. The aged planks groan and creak ominously underfoot, imposing a -10% penalty to all move silently rolls.

Doors: Unless stated otherwise, doors are of good wooden quality. When closed, however, they have a 50% chance of becoming stuck.

Secret Doors: All secret doors in the manor are easier to find than normal (the deterioration in the manor's interior making them easier to find than when they were constructed). A character has an additional 1 in 6 chance of finding or spotting a secret door.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS AT A GLANCE

The old manor has many rooms, spread more or less evenly between the ground and first floor. Basement access is concealed behind a secret door. Elvytta's prison lies hidden beyond.

DUNGEON DRESSING

Use the entries below, to breathe life and detail into the manor.

1. A blood-curdling scream rends the silence, sounding from another room of the GM's choice, where a fresh, bloody handprint is found staining the door.
2. All candles, torches and lanterns in the room suddenly flare with bright blue witch-fire. Characters within 5 feet must make a saving throw against breath weapons or be blinded for 1d10 rounds.
3. A sudden blast of chill wind tears through the room, extinguishing unprotected flames and slamming shut all doors. A malicious cackle echoes in the dark.
4. A clamour of rooks smashes through the windows, showering the characters with broken glass. After three combat rounds, however, the birds disappear and the windows are suddenly intact as if nothing had happened.
5. With a soft whimper, a young spectral girl dressed in a bloodied, tattered nightgown crawls across the floor, dragging broken legs behind her. The apparition does not interact with the characters and continues crawling until her invisible pursuer catches up with her. With a heartbreaking cry, she dissolves into a cloud of ash.
6. Deep, claw-like gouges appear in the wall thirty feet ahead. They approach with alarming speed, tearing across the splintering wood with an ear-splitting screech before coming to a sudden stop in front of the leading character who alone can hear heavy breathing in their ears.

THINGS TO FIND

Use this list, to determine what minor objects or features of interest the party discover if they take the time to search. Modify the value of items below to suit your campaign.

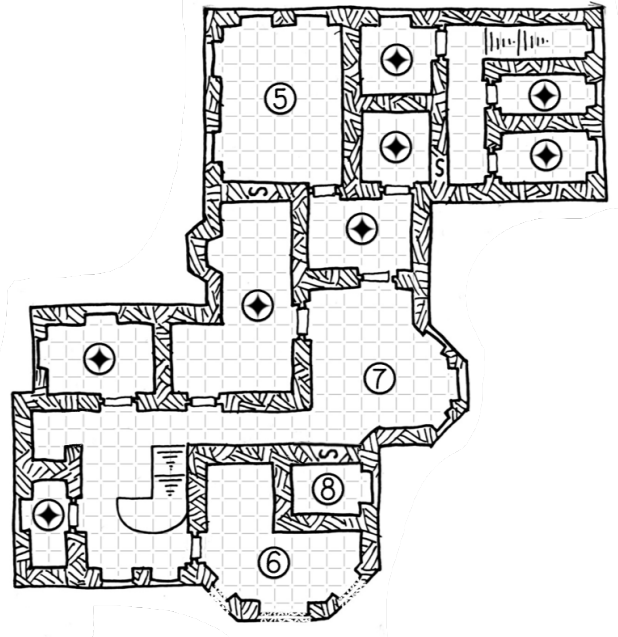
1. This lock of soft golden hair, bound with a bright red ribbon, feels freshly cut and smells faintly of lavender.
2. Spidery black writing covers this torn parchment. The complex alchemical formula is sadly incomplete.
3. Exquisite carvings inlaid with ivory adorn this silver hairbrush. Closer inspection reveals the ivory to be human teeth. Long, glossy black hairs are entangled in the brush.
4. The golden chain of this finely-wrought banded agate cameo depicting a young girl has snapped. The carved gem always feels wet to the touch and closer inspection reveals the image is constantly weeping.
5. This pair of supple leather gloves still has fingernails attached to the tips. If worn and subsequently removed, the wearer's hands are slick with blood.
6. A subtle lavender scent emanates from rosy-tinted candles. Crafted from corpse tallow and with wicks of human hair, they produce an acrid stench when lit.

The manor comprises the following notable locations:

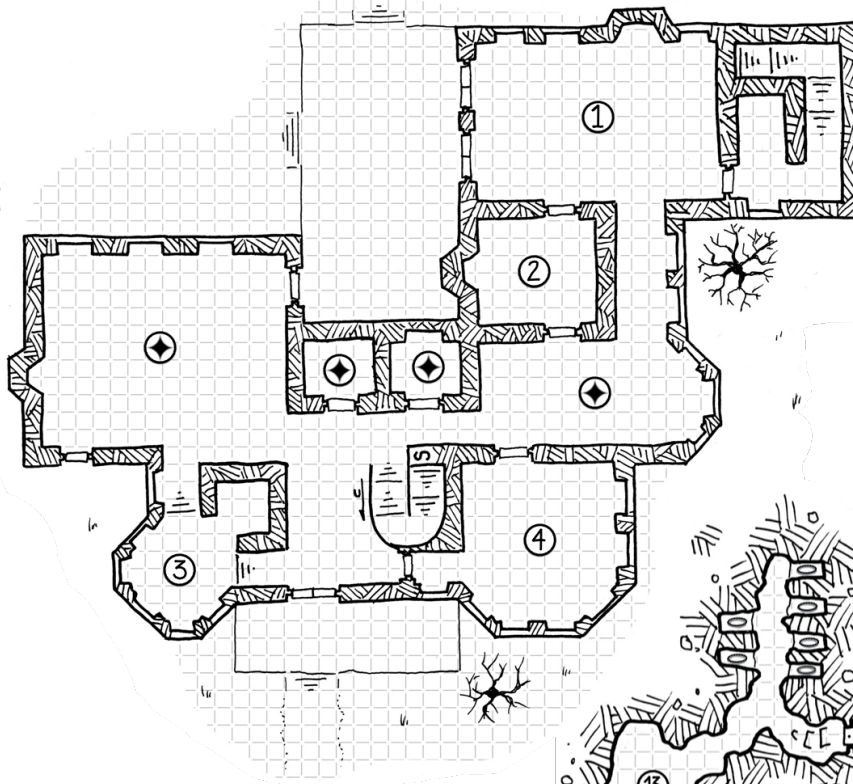
- ◆ **Dynamic Room:** This kind of chambers contain variable contents and dynamic events.
- 1. **Dining Room:** Angry townsfolk thoroughly ransacked this room long ago.
- 2. **Kitchen:** The manor's kitchen lies in disarray.
- 3. **Chapel:** This chapel is dedicated to Morden, god of knowledge.
- 4. **Library:** The library houses a collection of alchemical and historical treatises.
- 5. **Master Bedroom:** This is where Elvytta slept, if she slept at all.
- 6. **Rookery:** Hundreds of cawing corvids nest in this dilapidated room.
- 7. **Gallery:** Ancient portraits of Elvytta's baneful bloodline deck these sombre walls.
- 8. **Secret Study:** This concealed study holds a blasphemous book.
- 9. **Basement:** Gaining access to Elvytta's prison (areas 12 and 13) requires demolishing part of the western wall.
- 10. **Laboratory:** This underground laboratory contains Yspher's remains lying, amid volatile compounds.
- 11. **Poison Cabinet:** This secret room was Yspher's arcane poison store. Only one vial remains.

- 12. **Black Ossuary:** Grisly trophies of her experimentations and rituals decorate Elvytta's unholy sanctum.
- 13. **Exsanguination Chambers:** Here in her own torture chambers Yspher imprisoned his demon bride.

First Floor

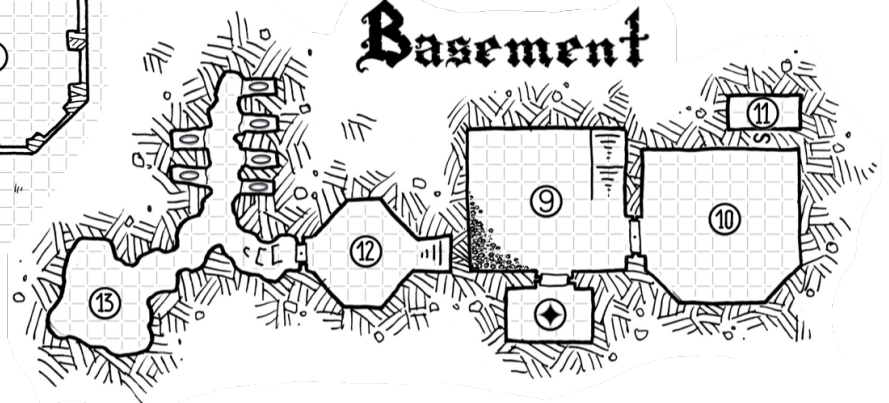


Ground Floor



1 square = 5 feet

Basement



GM NOTES

Note where a dynamic room feature is first encountered, so you can easily remember its location when it's referenced by a follow-up event.

◆ : DYNAMIC ROOM

Use the table below to generate content and dynamic events for any rooms marked with a diamond.

Effects preceded by "A" only occur when a result is rolled a second or subsequent time. For optimal effect, use these dynamic events to foreshadow encounters you have prepared.

ROOM CONTENT/EVENT

1. A dusty harpsichord sits at the chamber's centre; its many strings broken and frayed from age.
 - A. The rushed notes of a haunting toccata reverberate throughout the manor, coming from the harpsichord's room.
2. Yellowed bedsheets cover a stacked jumble of old furniture. A broken grandfather clock stands in the corner.
 - A. Ghostly peals sound from the old clock's room, striking thirteen times.
3. 3d3+3 faceless wooden mannequins with split and splintered limbs stand at silent attention.
 - A. The stumble of footfalls is heard elsewhere in the manor. Investigating the noise leads to the mannequin chamber, where the dolls are found in complete disarray. 1d6 are missing.
4. Amid the clutter filling this room, the pale, ethereal form of a young girl in a torn white dress sits shivering in a corner. She doesn't interact with the characters but silently follows them around the manor.
 - A. The ghostly girl silently strides into the room ahead, disappearing into a padlocked closet. Wicked iron bars line the walls inside, with scraps of white cloth snagged on a handful.
5. The thick, shaggy carpet covering the floor writhes as if alive. If disturbed, it scatters into a swarm of rats who scurry off into the walls, leaving behind a gnawed-upon skeleton.
 - A. Frantic scratching behind the walls heralds the reappearance of the rats, who gnaw through the wooden paneling in 1d10 rounds.
6. Clawed wrought-iron feet support an enamelled bathtub crouching low on a ragged woollen carpet. It looks clean, save for a moist wad of long, dark hair at the bottom.
 - A. The trickle of running water is heard, originating from the bathtub which is now overflowing with tepid blood. Crimson footprints beside it lead to an unexplored room.

1: DINING ROOM

Angry townsfolk thoroughly ransacked this room, long ago.

Scorched and broken furniture piled in a heap in one corner hints at a failed arson attempt. Through the cracked windows, faint shapes move.

Windows: Looking through the windows conjures ghostly images on the other side; while unsettling, these images are harmless.

- **Inside Looking Out:** A character looking outside through the windows can see the faint outline of nine girls in tattered, bloody dresses staring at them from the garden.
- **Outside Looking In:** Characters standing outside looking into this area through the glass see a towering demonic shadow with menacing red eyes skulking in a corner of the dining room. If the viewer looks away and back again, the shadow is gone.

2: KITCHEN

The old manor's kitchen lies in disarray.

Dented copper pans hang from rusty hooks along the walls. The wailing wind howls in the chimney above the fireplace, casting motes of dust across the cluttered floor.

Clutter: The contents of the shelves and cupboards are spread across the floor and constitute uneven terrain. All move silently rolls made here suffer a -10% penalty.

Fireplace: A random character hears their name whispered from this spot. Anyone looking up the chimney is attacked by a shadowy creature with lambent red eyes hiding in the flue. It dissolves into a pile of soot when struck with a weapon.

3: CHAPEL

This chapel is dedicated to Morden, neutral greater god of magic and knowledge.

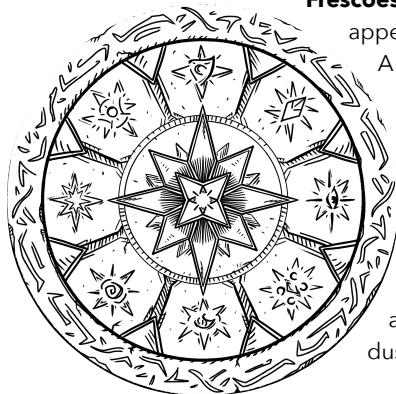
Blackened blood streaks the octagonal marble altar of Morden in this shadowy chapel. Frescoes of demons with leering faces deck the vaulted ceiling, twisting and writhing in the gloom.

The chapel has been perverted by the depth of malignant evil lurking in the manor house, and this has affected the initial appearance of this room.

Frescoes: At first look the frescoes appear to be cavorting demons.

A closer inspection reveals the frescoes depict the god Morden surrounded by his eight sorcerers disciples. They seem still and perfectly normal.

Altar: Closer inspection reveals the altar is clean, apart from a thick layer of dust.



GM NOTES

The shadowy creature dwelling lurking in the kitchen's chimney could be nothing more than a harmless apparition or it could be some other form of threat.

GM NOTES

The animate bedsheets in area 5 could be nothing more than an annoyance incapable of hurting anyone, an animated object or the result of a poltergeist's or ghost's malevolent actions.

Feel free to have the rooks in area 6 attack instead of fleeing.

4: LIBRARY

Yspher's library holds his collection of alchemical and historical treatises.

Scores of sagging shelves groan underneath the weight of dusty, worm-riddled books. A sullen-faced bronze head sits on a marble pedestal at the room's centre.

Books: The shelves hold a few hundred books; the vast majority half-devoured by age and mould. The few volumes remaining intact are harmless treatises on alchemy, herbalism and history.

Brazen Head: When approached, the bust opens its eyes, revealing life-like, human orbs. The head speaks:

Master, what wisdom do you seek?

If a character convinces the confused head they are Yspher through good roleplaying it truthfully answers 1d4 questions regarding the manor. If the deception fails, or if the head is attacked, it retaliates by firing *magic missiles* as a 5th-level wizard. It has AC 8 and 17 hp. If the characters destroy the head, a preserved human brain slides from the smashed brass casing.

5: MASTER BEDROOM

This is where Elvytta slept, if she slept at all.

A magnificently carved canopy bed draped in dark velvet dominates this spacious chamber. A gilded vanity stands beside it.

Bed: Anyone approaching the bed is attacked by the suddenly animating sheets. A character successfully searching the room finds a concealed drawer in the headboard containing a single blood-red topaz (worth 100 gp) and a worn iron key (which unlocks the door to area 10).

Vanity: A character looking in the mirror sees their own features distort into those of a beautiful, dark-haired woman bearing a menacing scowl. The reflection screams and the mirror explodes, dealing 2d4 slashing damage to the viewer (a successful breath weapon saving throw halves).

6: ROOKERY

Hundreds of cawing corvids nest in this dilapidated room.

A thousand beady black eyes fix their gaze upon you as their madly cawing cacophony falls silent. Nests of straw, twigs and dead leaves cover every inch of the room.

Structural Damage: All the windows here are broken; half of the roof has collapsed, leaving the room exposed to the elements.

Rooks: The birds disperse when attacked, escaping through the broken roof and windows. They return after 2d12 minutes.

Nests: With 20 minutes of searching, a character finds 2d6x10 gp worth of shiny trinkets amid the bird's muck.

Floorboards: The floorboards are weakened by rot. Whenever two or more characters share a 10x10 foot floor section, they must each make a saving throw against breath weapon or fall to area 4, ten feet below.

7: GALLERY

Ancient portraits of Elvytta's baneful bloodline deck the walls of this sombre gallery.

Scores of sinister paintings with cracked paint line the walls. Most striking is the oval portrait of a beautiful, raven-haired woman; her dark, disquieting gaze forever staring over distant seas.

Paintings: These depict nameless nobles sharing similar aquiline features. An ancient castle perched atop a desolate crag is in every picture's background. A DC 18 Perception check reveals the artist's hidden signature as "Hamu Malari".

Oval Portrait: Though undeniably ancient, this portrait of Elvytta has resisted the ravages of time. A character within 10 feet meeting its withering gaze feels their skin crack and peel like old paint and suffers 1d6 damage every round until they tear their gaze away with a saving throw against paralysis, poison or death magic. Afterward, the portrait looks as new; its paint still tacky. The secret door to area 8 lies behind this portrait.

8: SECRET STUDY

This concealed study hides a blasphemous book.

Resting on an ebony lectern lies a weighty tome, bound in cracked leather and closed with a bronze clasp.

Tome: A character wise in arcane or religious lore identifies the book as the *Testament of Ruin*: one of a series of nine nefarious volumes called the *Nine Books of Hodhek*.

THE NINE BOOKS OF HODHEK

Legend holds these nine blasphemous tomes were written in a single night by Hodhek the Soulless; a monk possessed by Braal, the god of hatred and malice. While the books' pages contain a chaotic jumble of esoteric drawings, obscure symbols and plain gibberish, they are said to harbour a terrifying secret. If one were to decipher the secret code hidden among the nine volumes, it would reveal the location of a mystical portal leading to Braal's black throne. Cultists, madmen and careless scholars alike are desperate to obtain all nine tomes. Their titles are:

- I. *Earth Shall be Riven*
- II. *Revan Chants*
- III. *The Woeful City*
- IV. *Dwellers in Shadow*
- V. *Ethics of Danakil*
- VI. *Testament of Ruin*
- VII. *Dirge of Reason*
- VIII. *Black Solstice*
- IX. *Throne of Wrath*

Supposedly, all existing copies were destroyed by Darlen's Order of the Watch Eternal. The characters' discovery of the *Testament of Ruin*, however, suggests their purge was not as thorough as expected.

GM NOTES

Consider triggering a dynamic room event when someone lifts the book from the lectern in area 8.

GM NOTES

Using force to break down the walls or doors in area 9 alerts all other creatures in the manor.

At your option, the laboratory might contain a powerful magical freezing agent to deal with the brown mould in area 9.

9: BASEMENT

Gaining access to Elvytta's prison requires demolishing part of the western wall.

A numbing cold emanates from the basement, conjuring forth ghosts born of ragged breath. The rich, earthy smell of mould and graveyard soil is so strong, it leaves an ashen taste in your mouth.

Brown Mould: The southwest corner of this room is infested with brown mould. A bricked-up doorway set into the west wall is hidden behind it.

Bricked-Up Doorway: The brickwork in this walled-up doorway is obviously of newer construct than the rest of the manor.

East Door: This sturdy iron door is locked. The lock can be opened with the key found in area 5.

10: LABORATORY

The underground laboratory contains Yspher's remains, amid volatile compounds.

A tall skeleton clad in purple robes slouches over a dusty desk amid the clutter of this ancient laboratory. The acrid smell of spoiled alchemical mixtures hangs in the air.

Alchemy Laboratory: For every 10 minutes spent searching the laboratory, a character can find any material spell component or alchemical item with a cost of 50 gp or less. Searching characters must make a roll under their Dexterity score on 4d6 to avoid disturbing the volatile materials still here. A failed check starts a fire which cannot be quenched by water.

Skeleton: The skeleton's teeth and finger bones are stained a deep blue; the same colour as the powdery residue left in a nearby goblet. A stained letter lies underneath the skull.

Letter: Written in a spidery hand, the writing tells of unspeakable horrors enacted under the thrall of Elvytta, who is called, "*a thing which should not be*". It relates how the writer eventually broke her evil spell and formulated a poison to incapacitate Elvytta, after which he immured her in the basement. The final part reveals how the terrible toll inflicted upon the writer's sanity drove him to suicide. The letter is signed "Yspher".

DEVELOPMENT

If the characters don't discover areas 12 and 13 they'll likely not encounter Elvytta. If the party lacks the resources to get passed the brown mould in area 9 all is not lost. Part of the Black Ossuary (location 12) lies directly below the manor's chapel (area 3). Canny characters could lever up the floorboards therein to gain access to Elvytta's final resting place.

Alternatively, if the party are not under any time constraint in their explorations, they can travel to Dunstone to acquire the knowledge and resources required to defeat the brown mould.

I 1: POISON CABINET

This secret room contains Yspher's arcane poison.

Shards of broken glass crunch underfoot; the remains of perhaps a hundred flasks, shattered when the aged shelves lining the walls collapsed. An iron strongbox lies amid the debris.

Strongbox: The strongbox is locked. Using force to open the box has a 40% chance of ruining the contents. Inside is a small vial wrapped in parchment.

- **Vial:** The vial is unlabelled and contains a single dose of Yspher's poison: a silvery liquid, both odourless and tasteless. It affects only creatures of Elvytta's type (even if those creatures are normally immune to poison).
- **Parchment:** This contains the formula for Yspher's arcane poison, allowing a skilled craftsman to recreate it (if they have access to the various esoteric ingredients).

I 2: BLACK OSSUARY

Grisly trophies decorate Elvytta's unholy sanctum.

Ghastly remains lashed together with hair and sinew form a grotesque totem in the chamber's centre. The walls are lined with skulls and bones, mortared in place using a compound of lime and brain matter.

Charnel Totem: The totem exudes an evil influence, mimicking the effects of a *protection from evil 10' radius* spell.

Door: This sturdy iron-bound door is hammered shut with nine steel spikes, each one dipped in molten silver.

I 3: EXSANGUINATION CHAMBERS

These are the dreaded torture chambers where Yspher imprisoned his demon bride.

A soft, melodic voice echoes from the primordial darkness ahead, its gentle melody hauntingly familiar. As the melody continues, twin blue flames spring to life in the shadows, fixing their unblinking gaze upon yours.

Haunting Lullaby: Characters who remember their mother and hear Elvytta's song must make a saving throw against spell or become shaken for 2d10 minutes.

West Chamber: An assortment of cruel torture devices, kept in pristine condition despite their age, fills this chamber. These include a rack, a cast iron cauldron and an oversized cartwheel festooned with straps hanging from the chimney.

North Chamber: Each of the six cells branching from this chamber holds an iron tub caked with long-dried blood. An array of rusted chains, needles and copper tubing hangs above each. Depending on the manor's set up, each iron tub could also contain a skeletal abomination.

GM NOTES

Elvytta first tries to sway the characters to her side. Failing that, her foremost concern is to escape her prison.

CONCLUSION

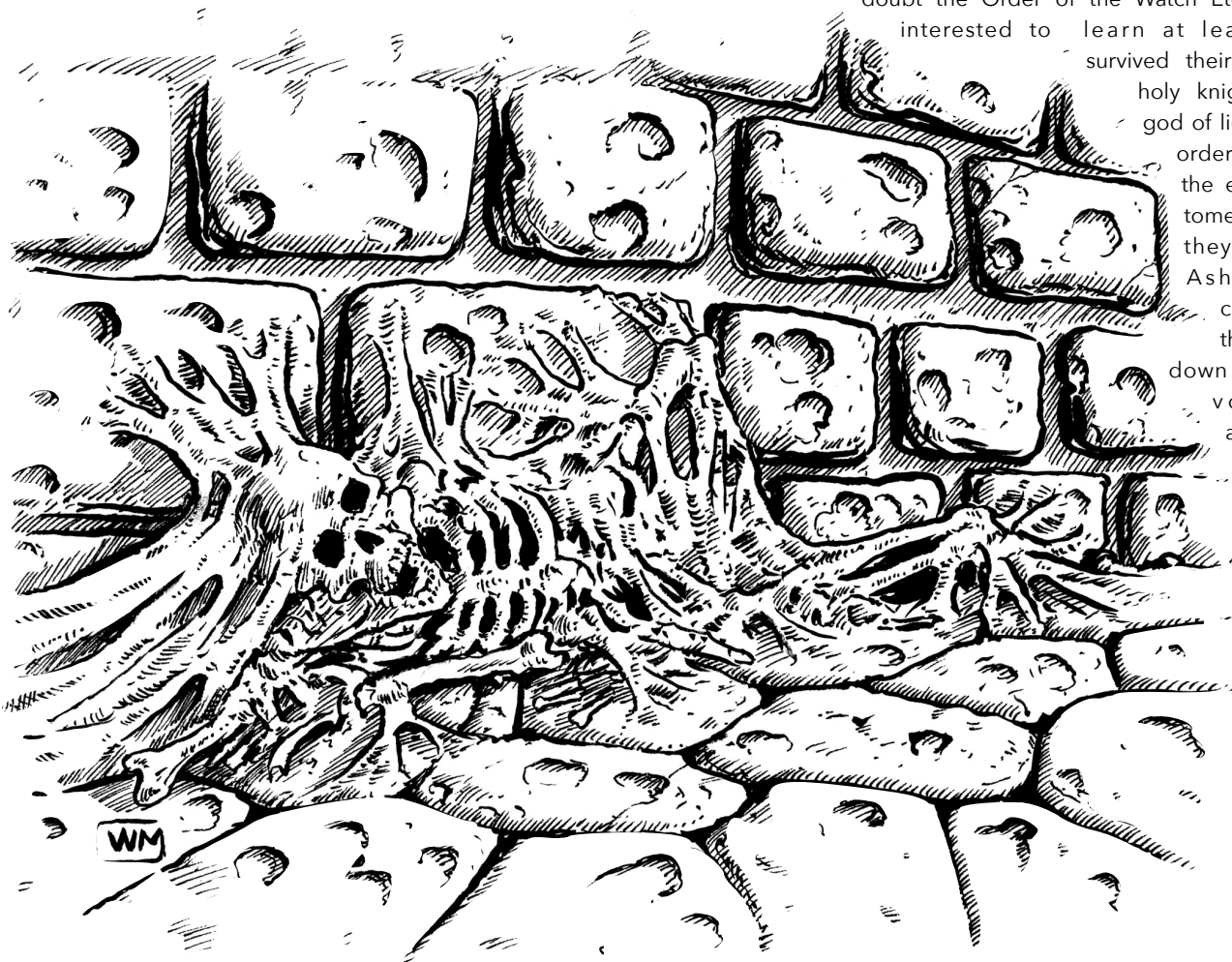
Even with the ghastly truth laid bare, many questions remain unanswered. Below are several suggestions on how to continue the story of the house. Feel free to combine several to keep the characters occupied for many months to follow.

- **Home, Sweet Home:** With the horrors of the House of Yspher defeated, the characters can make the old manor their new base of operations or seek a buyer for the property. Now the manor is safe, however, Aavo Oksanen, grandson of the Lord of Dunstone contests the legitimacy of their claim to the house. Prospective buyers may have sinister motives for acquiring the manor.
- **Charmed, I'm Sure:** If Elvytta escaped, she returns later as the betrothed of some powerful noble of Ashlar. Under this new cover, she recommences her murderous activities and uses her position to make life difficult for the characters.
- **Ashes to Ashes:** If the characters burn down the manor (intentionally or otherwise), Benjam Oksanen, Lord of Dunstone, demands compensation for the destruction of the old manor which he considers his property. In addition, alchemical fires in the basement burn hotly enough to melt

the silver seals on Elvytta's prison. Like a dark phoenix, she rises from the ashes and escapes.

- **A Baneful Bloodline:** The portraits found in the gallery suggest Elvytta was not the only creature of her kind. Hunting down any surviving members of her bloodline could become the focus of many new adventures. The name of Hamu Malari, who painted the sinister portraits, and the sombre castle featured in the background provide two valuable clues.
- **A Pernicious Poison:** Whether faced with the threat of Elvytta's return, or the decision to hunt down her "family", Yspher's poison could prove indispensable to the characters. If the formula was recovered from area 11, creating more doses is a matter of obtaining the correct ingredients (which are left to the GM to decide), as well as finding a skilled craftsman to brew the deadly concoction. Even without Yspher's formula, someone with a comparable mastery of alchemy might be able to create a similar compound. Such people are rare, however.
- **A Calamitous Collection:** If the characters recovered the *Testament of Ruin*, any scholar worth his salt can confirm its authenticity. Vieno Rekola (see "Adventure Hooks") is keen to obtain the book, as are many less savoury characters. No

doubt the Order of the Watch Eternal would be interested to learn at least one copy survived their pyres. As the holy knights of Darlen, god of light and law, the order cannot abide the existence of the tomes and the threat they represent to Ashlar. Can the characters aid them in tracking down any surviving volumes and avert disaster?



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