

Horrors of Penance

by Brannon Hollingsworth & Ken Marable

Table of Contents

Horrors of Penance	1	Tying Up Loose Ends	32
Introduction	2	The Plot Thickens	32
Adventure Preparation	2	Anelie's Tomes	33
Scenario 1: Craving Darkness	3	The Fires of Damnation	34
Background	3	Facing the Devil	36
The Initial Trap	5	Conclusion 1: Playing into the Devil's Hands	36
Main Floor (Level 2)	7	Conclusion 2: Refusing to Play the Game	37
Second Floor (Level 3)	9	Final Battle	39
Observatory (Level 3)	13	Conclusion	41
Basement	14	Totembound Soul	42
Conclusion	18	Statistics for NPCs	43
Statistics for NPCs	18	Further Adventures - A Coven of Ideas	46
The Lectors	18	The Flesh Gatherers	46
Allies	19	The Empty City	47
Monsters	20	Plague of the Penitent	47
Scenario 2 - Totem	23	Bloodlord Thrall	47
Background	23	Brotherhood of the Bane	48
Synopsis	23	Curse of the Decaying Flesh	48
The Ritual	23	March of the Beasts	48
Character Hooks	24	Rain of Blood	48
The Death of Samuel Viss	25	Restless Spirits	49
Clue Checklist	26	The Thirteen	49
Visiting Aunt Anelie	27	The Brood	49
The Deadpit	28	The Mist	49
A Slew of Swarms	30		

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Dedications

Dedicated to all the late-night odd noises and moving shadows that I swear are just the cats. -klm
To all those nights spookin' with the gang. -blh

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Introduction

The Forge is a place of extremes. Newcomers to the Forge soon learn that every perception, every emotion and every sensation that they experience here is hammered into its most acute and intense manifestation by the unique properties of the plane. Fear, while often overlooked, is one such emotion, and there is no other place in the known universe where fear can be as concentrated or palpable as on the Forge. This product focuses on that single aspect and offers adventures and adventure ideas that delve into the fear-invoking and truly horrifying side of the great City of Penance, the largest settlement on the Forge.

Horrors of Penance includes two complete adventures specially designed to spawn feelings of fear, disgust, and horror in the characters and to send shivers down the players' spines. The Forge is home to the mightiest of heroes; it takes a great deal to instill fear into such stalwart and heroic hearts.

Horrors of Penance begins with **Craving Darkness**, an adventure for characters of 10th level. While traveling through the Undercity, the characters find themselves in a centuries old mansion that has been cursed and plunged into utter darkness. Even the most powerful mortal spells can only barely pierce the seething darkness. The characters are forced to traverse the maze-like rooms and corridors blindly as they seek their way out again. This task alone would prove difficult enough, were it not for the pair of undead lectors (*Oathbound*, p. 335) that continually stalk them and the many insidious these villains have placed.

Second, *Horrors of Penance* offers up **Totem**, an adventure for characters of 17th level. The simple totems of a kindly old lady seem to ease the pain of grieving families. Unbeknownst to them, these totems also act as a doorway for a powerful devil. Now that the door is open, a rash of horrific and puzzling murders breaks out and the characters soon find themselves facing angry mobs, plagues of insects, and finally a pit fiend in his own lair. All of these obstacles must be overcome if they are to save both Penance and the souls of their departed loved ones.

Lastly, *Horrors of Penance* provides a **Coven of Ideas**, a selection of thirteen horror-themed adventure seeds meant to be planted in the most twisted corners of your imagination. These seeds can serve as the inspiration for any number of other possible adventures that will immerse the characters even deeper into the dark places of Penance.

Adventure Preparation

As these adventures are intended to be used in the Oathbound campaign setting, it is highly recommended that the GM possess the book *Oathbound: Domains of the Forge*. With a little work, though, a GM should be able to adapt the encounters to another setting. In such a case, all that is required to use these adventures are the three core d20 rulebooks. All non-player character (NPC), monster and item statistics have been provided at the end of each adventure in an abbreviated form or in the adventure where appropriate. When necessary, the proper resource is clearly referenced. In addition, *Minions*, *e-Minions* (or *Minions: Rebirth*), *Arms and Armor*, and *Spells and Magic*, all from Bastion Press might also prove useful. These tomes contain the expanded versions of many of the creatures, items, and spells mentioned within.

It is highly recommended that the GM read over each adventure fully and have a keen and clear understanding of the events that are about to unfold before running it. Both are fairly non-linear, and what happens in one moment or location will dramatically affect what occurs in other times and places.

Note that text that appears in shaded boxes is considered player information, which you can read aloud or paraphrase as appropriate.

Lastly, it is the goal of the adventures herein to inspire a healthy dose of fear and trepidation in your players. Establishing and maintaining an atmosphere of creepiness and uncertainty is essential to achieve that goal. GMs might consider any number of "real world" alterations to the typical gaming ambiance to keep their players on edge, a factor which will naturally bleed over into their characters' moods and actions. Some tips and tricks are listed here as an initial source of inspiration:

Take advantage of a stormy night for your gaming session and use the storm as emphasis in your game. Draw audio and visual examples from the impressive and awe-inspiring show that is going on around you.

Turn off all of the lights and play by only the light of a few candles. Use the reduced light to show the players how their characters see their surroundings.

Select a new and unfamiliar location for your gaming session. The experience of being in a strange locale will help considerably in setting your players (and their characters) on a fear-stirred edge. We're thinking more along the lines of someone's basement or an isolated cabin than of a gaming store, which is pretty far from "eerie".

Play moody and eerie background music. Music, especially when played at very low volume, becomes

an almost subliminal force that will heighten the levels of suspense and tension around the gaming table.

Scenario 1

Craving Darkness

An adventure for 10th level characters, wherein a house cursed in darkness holds captives, deadly traps, and two ravenous undead.

Background

The legendary magic sword Red Shard traveled through the seven domains of Penance until it was picked up on the fields of Arena by Purepath, a haze warrior. It served him well for decades as he wandered the Forge on a variety of adventures. Time eventually caught up with Purepath, and he traveled to the great city of Penance to retire. With the riches gained from a lifetime of adventures, he purchased a fine estate where he lived until his death at a ripe old age. The mighty sword Red Shard, a friend as much as a weapon, was displayed in honor upon a wall. No one could find Red Shard among Purepath's belongings when he died, nor had he communicated a desire to bestow it upon any heir. After ferocious searching, all interested parties, both foul and fair, gave up. The house was abandoned and the city grew up over it.

Red Shard remained hidden in the house, though, and waited for someone to come and claim it.

After discovering a mention of the sword and the haze's home in ancient annals, a group of delvers decided to make the trek into the Undercity for the weapon and any other treasures that might be found within the old warrior's estate. It turned out to be a difficult expedition, and the group almost turned back several times. Thanks only to the urging of two strong-willed party members (Bolthor, a male orc, and Sissel, a female human) did the group press onward.

Whether it was the maddening depths of the Undercity, or a problem deep within their minds that had been lingering for quite some time, the deeper they traveled, the more obsessed the two became. Obstacles of the journey and the rest of the group's trepidation only pushed them further. Finally they found the home and began exploring it...and discovered they were too late. Perhaps lost to another group of delvers, or magic, or the Queen herself – the sword appeared to be gone and with it went Bolthor's and Sissel's sanity. They believed the rest of the group had somehow duped them and

retrieved the sword without their knowledge. They would not listen to reason as they exploded into a furious rage and began slaying their companions. The party's ceptu cleric was the last to fall, and with her dying breath she called upon her god to curse the two betrayers and murderers.

Though her deity had no power in the Forge, something that many consider a myth answered the call: the palethian (*Oathbound*, p. 144).

Bolthor and Sissel were killed in a flash of intense evil and the house filled with a dark curse that blinded any who enter. Because they so coveted an item of magical power, Bolthor and Sissel's punishers thought it just that they be animated as the undead creatures known as lectors. Such beings usually roam the Undercity, attuned to and attracted by items that are cursed or imbued with negative energy. These two were inflicted with an additional ironic and darkly humorous punishment: forever hungering for items of negative energy, they were bound to the scene of their crime and, unbeknownst to them, to the location of a powerful weapon of positive energy. The proximity of Red Shard would cause them an eternal pain that they would never understand. So they remained and sought solace for their pain by preying upon unwary explorers for several centuries, satiating their hunger for cursed items with whatever these unlucky souls brought with them.

Of course, anything so unusual as a darkness-flooded mansion was bound to draw attention, especially one with a link to the fabled Red Shard. Rafter after rafter, delver after delver traveled to the cursed home, seeking the truth and the wealth behind the house and its rumored treasures. The vast majority of them met nightmarish ends at the hands of the covetous, vicious lector couple.

Finally, Einian Quickfinger, a dwarven rafter and part-time trap maker that stumbled onto the house, managed to elude the lectors for a time through the creation of impromptu traps made from the belongings of past victims. His delaying tactics caught their attention, so when they inevitably caught him, they spared his life. They kept him as both a toy and a servant, forcing him to set traps in several of the rooms to ensnare other visitors.

Einian has been recreating and setting traps for almost a year now. He has hopes that some group will arrive and help him to escape and to destroy the lectors, if possible. His hopes were almost made reality when a week ago a powerful group of rafters entered the house. Encountering the deadly traps, they tried to avoid them by digging out through the basement. Unfortunately a monstrous jaggon had made a lair near the cursed darkness and it was into this very lair that the delvers dug, releasing the creature into the basement, where it immediately

attacked the group. Einian does not know for certain, but he suspects that one of the party might still be alive down there. What the dwarven trap-maker does know for sure is that the jaggon is still down there – and is growing hungry.

Synopsis

As the characters are traveling through the Undercity, they come across the “entrance” to the cursed mansion, which is a pit that drops the characters into the midst of the house. Chances are that not all of the characters will fall prey to the trap. However, the lectors encourage Einian to yell for help and lure would-be rescuers to their doom.

After entering the darkness, the characters must make their way out by passing through several trapped rooms and survive multiple hit and run attacks from the lectors. There are three possible allies they can find in this home in their attempts to destroy the lectors and survive to see light again. There is Einian who is more than willing to destroy the lectors (and in fact will not leave the house knowing they are still around). Also, a valco paladin named Sorib lak Haran is trapped in the basement with the jaggon. Lastly, an ort named Mafuane is inside the house terrified at what it has stumbled onto. It will gladly help anyone who can guide it out of the darkness.

Character Hooks

The hook for this adventure is quite easy to integrate into any campaign – simply get the party into the Undercity. Their reason for entering the Undercity can be literally anything: they can be there in search of an item, to map a certain region, on a task for a bloodlord (or other important individual), or merely passing through on their way to another, ultimate destination (if used in this last manner, it would be very simple to insert **Craving Darkness** as an extended “Side Trek” adventure). Whatever their mission is, it should not be so urgent that they are unwilling to take an impromptu trek to assist someone in need.

Alternatively, their purpose there could be tied more directly to the background of this adventure. Perhaps they could have come to this area in search of Red Shard or they may be searching for someone who entered the house recently, such as Sorib lak Haran’s party or possibly Einian himself.

Another variation is that the characters are hired to investigate the death of the original adventuring party (the one composed of Bolthor and Sissel before their cursed deaths). Perhaps one of the party member’s relatives is continually haunted by dreams of her death, or perhaps one

of the current characters is a descendant of one of the original party members and themselves are plagued by these dreams. If this hook is used, it could make the final confrontation with Bolthor and Sissel all the more dramatic and fear inspiring, especially if one of the characters is a direct descendant of what is now an evil undead abomination! With this as the adventure’s background, the adventure could be simply started with the handing down of a family heirloom that leads to an investigation via city records or a divination into who these past adventurers were and what they were looking for.

In the end, all that is truly necessary to begin this adventure is that the party be traveling through the Undercity. GMs are welcome to use as much or as little of this information as they wish.

The Darkness

The curse placed upon the house goes beyond a mere magical darkness. It was crafted by the palethian as a bitter and ironic metaphor for the blindness that Bothor and Sissel exhibited in the insane slaughter



of their party. It generally blinds any creature in the house. This is not to say that creatures with alternative forms of vision are unaffected; the curse simply smothers and makes useless a creature's main sensory apparatus. Indeed, creatures that do not normally rely on vision may never have experienced blindness before and may be even more severely panicked by finding themselves thus affected. Normal vision, lowlight vision, and darkvision are useless. A haze's mindsight is similarly "blinded", as is a grimlock's blindsight. A creature with vision and the scent ability, for example, would lose vision but retain their secondary ability to pinpoint other creatures by smell; on the other hand, a creature that has no eyes and relies almost entirely on scent would have that sense "blinded". As explained in the DMG, blindness has the following effects:

- 50% miss chance in combat
- loss of positive Dex bonus to AC
- movement at half speed
- -4 on Search and most Str and Dex based skills (GM's discretion)
- Spot checks or other visual based activities are impossible
- Opponents receive a +2 on their attacks against the blinded character

Trying to pierce or dispel the darkness is nearly impossible. Mundane light sources do not work. A *light* spell only illuminates a 1' radius, and *daylight* only creates a 5' radius. *Remove blindness/deafness* and *remove curse* allow any creature to "see" again with its main sense, but only to a distance of 5' and only for a duration of 10 minutes/level (identical to a *daylight* spell). *True Seeing* will allow any creature to "see" within the house normally.

Other spells that enhance a creature's main sensory system, like a spell specifically for hazes that improves their mindsight, may work at the GM's discretion; ideally, however, no spell effect other than *true seeing* should allow a creature any greater visibility than *daylight* does for vision-based creatures.

In order to try and dispel any of the darkness, a *dispel magic* check (DC 26) must be made. If the dispel attempt succeeds, for every point above 26, a 10' by 10' section can temporarily be "seen" normally (there are no natural light sources here, so creatures relying on vision would have to illuminate it by some other means). However, the darkness returns at rate of 5' by 5' every 10 minutes. Light within the mansion simply seems to grow dimmer every moment.

A *limited wish*, *wish*, *miracle*, or other similarly extremely powerful spell will allow an entire floor to be illuminated, but darkness will encroach at same rate as above. Only once the Forge has been rid of the foul pair of lectors can anyone permanently remove the darkness from the house.

A Note on Room Descriptions

The ***bold italicize*** text descriptions of the rooms assume that the characters cannot "see" and try to convey the sensations experienced by secondary senses. One of the primary means of exploring blindly is with the tactile sense. Therefore, do not read certain sections of the descriptive text aloud until the characters feel their way over to the object described.

Obviously, if the characters are able to muster some reasonable means of illumination, then the objects can be described without the characters having to physically come in contact with them. Feel free to embellish the descriptions with details of how all of the furniture and other décor are mildly lavish, but very old. Occasional damage can be detected from the various fights that have occurred within this house, but unless otherwise mentioned, no bodies are present.

Also, the entire house is thick with the musty aroma of a house several centuries old mixed with the metallic scent of blood from the lectors' many victims. Most of the walls and floors are stained with the lifebloods of countless races, a sign of the inhabitants' violent reception of guests. All floors other than the basement, the floorboards will creak as people walk across them (causing a -5 circumstance penalty on all Move Silently checks).

Lastly, all windows throughout the house are broken with some shards of glass remaining along the edges. The lectors can navigate through them easily without injury. Others who try to feel their way through the window opening take 1d4 points of slashing damage from the broken glass.

The Initial Trap

At some point while traveling through the Undercity, read the following:

As you emerge from a small winding cavern, your shadows stretch out before you onto what was once a main city street. There seem to be several openings and archways leading further into the maze, but every one you investigate reveals only a dim, shadowy pocket that is sealed with rubble and stone after only a few feet. Only the countless tiny tunnels marring the walls and ceiling of your subterranean road seem to progress very deeply, and they are no wider than a picker's slender fingers. This once proud thoroughfare is the only reasonable path along which to progress, but it is far from pleasant. The statues lining the road leer at you with an ancient haughtiness. The dust puffing up from your footsteps seeps beneath your clothes and armor to scabble at your flesh. Based on the lack

of supports, the area around you should have collapsed along with everything else; it seems almost as if some foul presence keeps the passage open out of spite. Your footsteps echo as if you were in a tomb, and the passage continues forward in a straight line for as far as your light can reach.

Hopefully the characters are on edge, expecting a possible attack from the shadows and not focusing on searching the ground before them. The lectors have created a 10' x 10' pit trap here to catch passersby. It stretches across most of the width of the tunnel, and the tight confines of the passage tend to ensure that at least one member of any passing group will fall in.

Pit Trap (60 ft. deep): CR 6; no attack roll necessary (damage special, see below); Reflex save (DC 20) avoids; Search (DC 30); Disable Device (DC 20). The trap automatically resets itself after being triggered. The pit is roughly 60' deep and funnels into the top of the former elevator shaft of the house. Characters that cannot stop their descent drop into Area 1 on the main floor, where they are automatically engulfed by the gelatinous cube at the bottom of the shaft (MM, p. 145). This is a mixed blessing; characters take less damage by the cushioned landing, as if falling into water (1d6 subdual and 2d6 normal damage from this height). On the other hand, they are now engulfed by a hungry ooze. Because the cube's entire body is a mindless and primitive sensory organ, it is uninhibited by the cursed darkness.

Development: Whether one of the characters actually falls into the pit or not, a series of ropes and bells alert those within that the trap has been triggered. Einian begins yelling for help from where he is chained in the house. For characters that fall, skip to the main floor (Level 2) below. For those that did not fall, use the Open Elevator Shaft section that follows.

As the floor panel begins to swing back into place, you hear the distant cry of a male voice, possibly dwarven. "Help me!! Please somebody!! If anyone is there, please help!! I'm trapped down here! Help!!!" As the panel closes, the muffled pleas continue, more desperate, from deep within the pit.

Trying to communicate with the dwarf is difficult. If anyone yells down to him, he will honestly yell back that he can barely hear them and can't make out what they're saying. This is because of the acoustics of the shaft, which the lectors altered to hamper attempts at two-way communication. Sense Motive checks (DC 14) reveal that Einian does

seem trustworthy, if exceedingly desperate, and is not enchanted in any way. Even though the lectors demand that he cries for help whenever the trap is sprung, he does desperately want help.

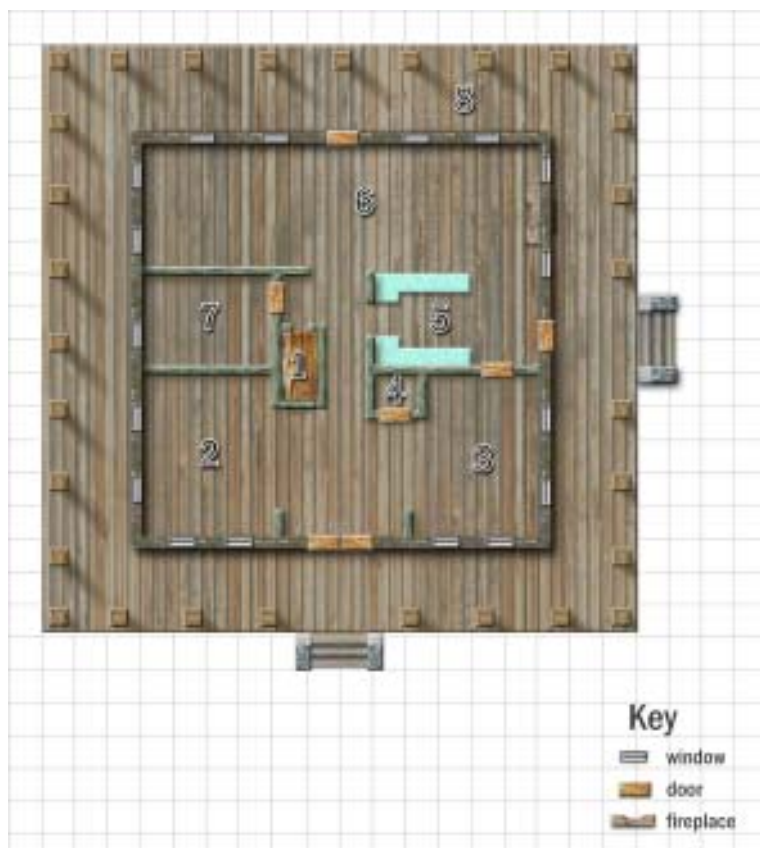
Open Elevator Shaft

Characters that avoid falling into the pit trap will have to negotiate a 30' descent before entering the house itself. The walls of the pit for those first 30' are smooth stone with no handholds, and will either require a rope (Climb check DC 15) or some sort of magic to get down. After 30 feet characters will enter the cursed darkness as the pit opens into the house elevator shaft. If they are climbing, read the boxed text below. If they are flying or levitating down and not feeling the sides of the shaft, they be completely unaware of the spiders. They will be level with the observatory (Level 4) after 40 feet but won't be able to find an opening until they reach the second floor (Level 3) at 50 feet. See map 1 for a cross-section of the pit/elevator shaft.

As you touch the wall, you feel the squish of some sort of insect or other extremely small creature under your hand, and then all around you the walls erupt in scurrying and shifting. A chill runs down your spine as you feel dozens upon dozens of tiny legs crawling over your hand – over and under your clothing and armor – like a writhing blanket sliding over your arm and onto your body.

The walls of the elevator shaft are covered with hundreds of spiders of the normal, non-monstrous variety. Characters reaching into or climbing through the shaft will be immersed in them. Treat the spiders as a permanent, stationary *summon swarm* from a 9th level caster. There is an additional effect, however: the feeling of being covered in spiders is so horrifying that a character must make a Will save to do anything, including climbing, other than fighting them off.

Once within the shaft, characters will find knotted ropes hanging from the walls. They originally served the purpose of moving the elevator, but can now serve to aid the characters in climbing up or down the shaft (DC 5). However, tiny shards of broken glass and metal have been strewn through the ropes, so characters suffer the equivalent of caltrop attacks while climbing the ropes (melee attack at +0, shield, armor, and deflection bonuses to AC do not count, though gauntlets provide a +2 bonus to AC). If damaged, the character's movement is not impaired (as per actual caltrop damage), but all attacks



are at -2. Further, some skills that rely heavily on the character's hands may be adversely affected at the GM's discretion.

Main Floor (Level 2)

1. Former Elevator Shaft

If a character falls into this area or descends under their own power, read the following:

As you drop, you note a change in the surrounding darkness. The inkiness of the shaft becomes all-consuming, growing so black that you almost feel it pressing in against you. You are only able to consider this for a moment before you fall feet-first into a strange substance, far thicker than water but not altogether solid. Almost immediately after being encased in the stuff you feel a sharp burning sensation as your flesh is eaten away.

Creatures: The lectors were quite happy when a gelatinous cube happened upon their pit trap. It fell to the bottom of the shaft and landed atop the old elevator (which now rests in the basement). The ooze is trapped by the shaft's metal framework on the main floor of the house; while it would eventually

shrink and escape through the 5-foot opening, the lectors make sure to give it enough food that it maintains its healthy 10-foot size. Creatures of medium-size or smaller who fall down the shaft are entirely absorbed by the cube. Larger creatures are only partially absorbed.

Absorbed characters who resist paralysis may make a grapple check to move through the cube. If they win the opposed grapple check, the amount they win by is the distance in feet they can travel - up to half of their normal movement rate. It is also important to remember that characters whose heads are still within the cube cannot breathe or speak and drowning rules (see DMG, p. 85) soon come in to play.

Gelatinous Cube: hp 69; see MM p. 145.

Development: Any sounds of movement, especially combat, alert the lectors that they have guests to attend to. Sissel will quietly drop onto the main floor via the hole in the northeast corner of the covered porch. Bolthor will wait and listen to determine where the

characters go. If they move onto the second floor first, he will stay on the covered porch and perform hit and run attacks on the party. If they go to the first floor, Sissel will make hit and run attacks from the covered porch, and Bolthor will go up to third floor to knock Einian unconscious before moving back down to assist Sissel in the attacks.

See the Northeast Bedroom (Level 3, Area 5) on the second floor for more information on the lectors' tactics.

If the characters manage to destroy the gelatinous cube, they discover that it was resting on the top of the elevator car, which long ago fell to the basement level. There is a hatch in the top of the elevator car leading down into the elevator itself, and through that into the basement. Small sized creatures can fit through the hatch with a simple Climb check (DC 10), failure meaning they fall to the floor of the car taking 1d6 points of subdual damage. Medium sized creatures must make an Escape Artist check (DC 15) in addition to the Climb check in order to fit through. The opening is simply too small for large-sized creatures.

2. Southwest Sitting Room

The velvety texture of the couches in this room is occasionally marred by cuts in the fabric where the stuffing now puffs through. The wood is nicked and scarred as if someone whiled away many hours poking at it with a knife.

Along one wall is a small, rickety, wooden desk with a single drawer on the front. The desk's surface is covered with a combination of fine dust and rough, granular sawdust.

There are three couches in this room arranged in a rough circle. Along the north wall sits a desk. Opening the drawer will release a club trap that may target any 4 people in the room (see below). The rough sawdust on the desk is from the continual resetting of the trap and may alert the characters that something is amiss.

Hanging Club Trap: CR 4; +10/+10/+10/+10 melee (1d10+2 per hit); Search (DC 20); Disable Device (DC 25).

3. Southeast Sitting Room

The velvety texture of the couches in this room is occasionally marred by cuts in the fabric where the stuffing now puffs through. The wood is nicked and scarred as if someone whiled away many hours poking at it with a knife.

Along one wall is a small, rickety, wooden desk with a single drawer on the front. The desk's surface is covered with a layer of fine dust. On the other side of the room are two doors, one very solid and laden with several locks.

This room is nearly identical to area 2, however it is not trapped. The windows are more open here to give the lectors easier access. The cloak closet (Area 4) is thoroughly locked by several deadbolts and key locks placed by Einian, but not to protect anything valuable; the lectors commanded him to do so merely as a ruse to delay adventurers. The lectors have the keys embedded in their hideous skeletons. Picking the locks requires three separate Open Lock checks (DC 25, 30, and 30).

Development: If characters stay here and take the time to pick the locks to the cloak closet (Area 4), one or both of the lectors will attack according to their standard tactics.

4. Cloak Closet

As the door finally opens, the musty odor of rotted clothing crawls over you like a brood of carrion crawlers. This is an old closet, nothing

more. The hooks for cloaks and coats hang empty, the moldy piles of fabric beneath them the only evidence of their original purpose.

5. Kitchen

In this area, it seems that everywhere you go, you note numerous drawers hanging open. Above them rests a smooth, cold, stone counter.

The kitchen includes a number of small traps. Within each drawer and every few feet along the wall are small spring-loaded blades. Anyone reaching into the drawer or along the wall risk having a finger or even hand severely damaged, if not severed.

Traps: CR 2; + 4 melee (1d4); Search (DC 10), Disable Device (DC 20); on a critical there is a 50% of losing a finger and 10% chance of losing an entire hand.

6. Banquet Hall

The unmistakable stench of a rotting corpse overpowers all other scents. It is not difficult to find the source: a sticky, cold, humanoid shape. As your hands tentatively trace its length, you find, to your horror, that one of its sides seems far too pliable and riddled with gaps and holes.

There is a fireplace on the eastern wall of this room. Small creatures may use it to travel between floors with a Climb check (DC 15). Medium-sized creatures must make an Escape Artist check (DC 15) in addition to the Climb check, and large creatures simply cannot fit. In order to enter at all, however, one must first remove the metal fire grate with a Disable Device check (DC 23 to remove it silently, DC 13 will remove it with a loud grating noise).

There are three corpses in this room – all of them grimlocks that followed the trail of Sorib lak Haran's party into the house a day behind them. They had heard that the party planned to explore a magically darkened mansion in the undercity, and decided that with their blindsight they'd either be able to beat them to the best loot or perhaps even murder and loot the party themselves. To their surprise, they became as blind as any human when they feather fell down the shaft. They only survived a few minutes. Two were killed by Sissel directly while the third ran blindly across the room into a sword trap in the western half of the floor.

Traps: Dozens of swords, polearms, and other bladed weapons have been stuck in the western half of the floor with the points up. Creatures are often driven across this room into them, or they fall from

area 6 of the second floor onto them. Characters feeling their way through the room must make a Reflex save (DC 15) to avoid taking 1d6 points of damage. Otherwise, whether moving at higher speed or falling, use these statistics:

Bladed Floor Trap: CR 4; +10 melee (1d6 blades for 1d8+4 points of damage per successful hit); Search (DC 5); Disable Device (DC 10). At the GM's discretion, melee attacks against running characters may receive a +2 circumstance bonus per 5 feet of movement moved.

7. Lounge

Thousands of sharp splinters of wood are all that remain of what you can only assume was once the furniture in this room. They cover the floor, making crunching noises as you step and rolling under your feet like severed fingers. In one corner of the room, you find a pile of larger pieces of splintered wood. Beneath it, you detect something smooth, cool, and large - perhaps a chest.

Treat this room as being covered in half-strength caltrops: +0 melee per five feet traveled (no damage, reduces movement by ¼, characters receive +2 AC for soft-soled boots, +6 AC for steel-shod boots).

The metal chest is in the southwest corner of the room where one of the lectors can easily reach through the window to grab anyone in front of it. Bolthor and Sissel use the chest to store assorted less valuable knick-knacks and trinkets they find on their victims. All of the true valuables they collect are stored in their room (Level 3, Area 5). The chest is trapped with a poison needle trap containing carrion crawler brain juice.

Trap: CR 5; +8 melee (1 plus carrion crawler brain juice: contact, DC 13, paralysis for 1 hour/0); Search (DC 30); Disable Device (DC 30).

8. Covered Porch

The air here seems slightly different here, less claustrophobic and musty. While the floor still feels stable, it creaks more loudly and feels somewhat . . . hollow? The near wall is comprised of rough, slightly warped wood that smells of moldy water. As you feel out for the opposite wall, you feel nothing but sharp barbs and blades.

This 15 foot wide porch encircles the entire house and is also drenched in the cursed darkness; the effects of the curse end just outside of the porch. However, looking out from the porch towards the "non-cursed" area will not reveal any light from beyond. One must be outside the area of the curse in order to

see more than a few feet. Light sources and magical effects near the edge will illuminate their full range outside, but are still limited inside (creating an oblong area of illumination).

There are numerous 1' x 1' pillars lining the porch and supporting the roof above. Strung between these pillars from floor to ceiling are lines of barbed wire strung throughout with small, sharp objects: shards of glass, knives, broken bones, stakes, and metal and wood splinters. It is impassable without removing or cutting through several feet of the barbed wire (hardness 5, 12 hp/foot).

Casual touching the wall of sharp objects without adequate protection causes 1d4 points of damage. Walking into it or being knocked into it causes 2d4 points of damage, and the character must make a Reflex save (DC 15) to avoid becoming entangled. To remove oneself takes either a Strength check (DC 15) or an Escape Artist check (DC 20). Merely attempting a Strength check to remove oneself causes an additional 3d4 points of damage. An unsuccessful Escape Artist check causes 2d4 points of damage, where as a successful Escape Artist check only causes 1d4 points.

Though unlikely, anyone specifically inspecting the ceiling in the northeast section will find the 10' x 10' opening up to the next floor. Give characters passing directly underneath a Listen check (DC 25) to notice a change in the acoustics.

Development: The lectors can typically be found on the porch either at this level or the one above. They move silently around to the rooms observing the characters and striking and retreating quickly. Often they will climb along the barbed wall instead of walking along the creaky floor. They particularly like to grab the last member of a passing group, whom they then carry into the house to be killed and looted as quickly as possible.

Second Floor (Level 3)

1. Former Elevator Shaft

The elevator shaft opens upward, providing access to the pit shaft. Reference the Open Elevator Shaft section for information on the spiders and ropes located here. The shaft used to open onto the observatory, as well, but the lectors sealed that floor off to prevent their pet trapmaker, Einian, from being easily found and rescued. The only entrance to the observatory now is through their lair (Area 5, Level 3). The shaft would provide access downward to the main floor (Level 2) were it not for the gelatinous cube filling the area and forming the semblance of a floor. Please note, however, that the gelatinous cube supports no weight and trying to step on it will drop

the character to the main floor (see Area 1, Level 2). Bear in mind as well that characters standing near the second floor section of the elevator shaft may face attacks from the gelatinous cube's pseudopods.

Gelatinous Cube: hp 69; see MM p. 145.

2. Southwest Bedroom

A Search check (DC 10) reveals some bits of wire across the doorway attached to three levers. While these wires and levers do not actually do anything, they should keep the characters investigating long enough for a lector to attack. If the characters believe that the wires and levers have a purpose, a Disable Device check (DC 20) will prevent the levers from being "tripped". If the initial Search check succeeds by 15 or more, the characters realize the wires and levers are pointless.

If they proceed further into the room, read the following:

You locate two pairs of furniture, probably some sort of wooden dressers, one tall and slender and the other short and squatty. You also encounter the remains of a bed. It seems to have all but turned to dust, the bits of decaying mattress clinging to your hand like damp pieces of dead flesh.

Creatures: An ort Undercity druid named Mafuane is hiding in this room. It fell into the house a couple weeks ago and fortunately, due to its unique physical structure, it landed on but was not automatically engulfed by the gelatinous cube. Despite its hard-won experience battling Undercity menaces, it was quickly overwhelmed with terror by the sudden trap, the acidic cube, and the stalking lectors.

Terrified and blind, the ort quickly crawled out and managed to pass through the trip wires in the doorway of this room. Bolthor searched for the creature that had triggered the initial (entryway) trap, but did not recognize the "pile of garbage" within this room as a living thing. Thinking it was another false alarm (for there are some, especially animals and small humanoids large enough to set off the trap but too small for the cube to leave anything behind).

Mafuane has remained in this room since then, listening to the lectors hunt down and kill several more hapless victims. Needless to say, the ort has

grown extremely paranoid, and is terrified of anything it hears approach.

Creature: Mafuane, Ort Clr7, hp 54.

Development: Mafuane will remain motionless, though a Listen check (DC 15) will alert the characters that there is something moving in the room. It is Mafuane quivering in fear. If a character succeeds at the Listen check by 5 or more, he can determine that the sound is coming from beneath the bed. If the characters investigate, read the following:

Underneath the bed, you hear a rustling noise, akin to a faint shuffling of paper. You can smell the distinct, sickly sweet aroma of rotting garbage coming that direction.

If anyone touches the ort, it will immediately explode into attacks with its tendrils while screaming in total horror to be left alone, as well as for whatever is attacking it to show mercy. Mafuane will not press any attacks, but will stay in place and attack anything that comes near it. It is possible to talk the ort down from the attacks with a Diplomacy check (DC 18) or through magical means. If the characters promise to help the cleric get out of the house, it will gladly accompany them. At first it will be hesitant to enter into combat with either lector, but will help the characters if they press their attack. After all, it



would prefer they not be killed, leaving it all alone with the lectors (who would then be aware of its presence).

3. Southeast Bedroom

You have to step up slightly in order to enter this room. Feeling around, you notice that the walls and floor are bare and relatively smooth to the touch.

The slight step up is due to floor being a false one. A thin layer of loosely connected boards gives way when 400 pounds of weight is placed on it, dropping the characters a few feet onto a lowered floor below. Within this shallow pit is every single tanglefoot bag that has entered this mansion. While not inherently dangerous, the trap can be dangerously debilitating while the lectors press their assault.

Trap: CR 5; no attack roll necessary; Search (DC 27); Disable Device (30); Reflex save (DC 20) avoids; characters who fall in are automatically hit by, and fail their reflex saves against, 1d4 tanglefoot bags.

4. Hallways

There are numerous sharp and rusty nails sticking up through the floorboards within the hallways of this floor of the mansion. GMs should treat the entire area as if covered with caltrops. Also, the floor is slicked with blood from recent victims. Treat as a non-magical version of *grease* spell (Reflex save: DC 15). If characters fall prone, they suffer 1d10 points of damage from nails and may be infected by a disease (Filth Fever – Injury; Fort save DC 12; incubation period 1d3 days; effects 1d3 Dex and 1d3 Con).

5. Northeast Bedroom

Both doors into this room are well locked (Open Lock DC 40) and solid (hardness 5, 20 hp, Break DC 25).

As you begin to enter this room, your foot slips on some small, loose, smooth objects on the ground. A momentary clinking noise seems to indicate that you have just stepped on a large amount of coins. The welcome sound of spilling riches is suddenly torn asunder by a pair of ear-piercing shrieks. Tearing through your mind, the high-pitched, droning scream echoes through the house; there is little doubt than everyone and everything within a mile knows exactly where you are at this moment.

Unlike most lectors, these two are cursed to remain in one place and have therefore made this room into a lair for themselves. When they are not stalking prey in the house or overseeing Einian's resetting of the traps, they lounge here among the

former belongings of their victims. Nearly everything here is imbued with the fear and terror of their owners' last moments, which the lectors can taste and revel in. Anything more valuable to the lectors, like items that have histories of evil acts, have been incorporated into the villains' skeletal bodies.

Characters' movement is halved (in addition to the movement penalty imposed by the darkness) if they wish to maintain stable footing. Moving any faster requires a Balance check (DC 15).

One shrieker fungus and two violet fungi guard each entrance in to this room (one group by the door to the hallway, another group by the door to the covered porch).

Shrieker Fungus (2): hp: 16, 15 (see MM, p. 93).

Violet Fungus (4): hp: 19, 19, 18, 17 (see MM, p. 93).

There is also a crate in the southeast corner of the room that contains twenty monstrous centipedes. Bolthor and Sissel like to use these to help poison the crossbows on the third floor. The vermin will attack anyone who opens the unlocked chest that they are kept in, and then attempt to flee in any direction possible.

Tiny Monstrous Centipedes (20): hp: 1 (see MM, p. 207)

Finally, this room contains a trap door in the southwest corner that leads up Einian's room in the observatory. Once the Shrieker Fungus is destroyed, characters may make a Listen check (DC 10) to hear the dwarf calling for help from above. Two-way communication is fairly easy here, and the dwarf will be able to guide them to the trap door. If Einian has been knocked unconscious by the lectors, the trap door is not terribly difficult to find with a Search check (DC 10) due to the rope dangling from its handle. If the trap door is opened, a rickety set of folding stairs opens along with it.

Tactics (for Bolthor and Sissel, the lectors): Both lectors prefer hit and run attacks. They will start off on separate floors so that they can readily get at the party wherever they are. However, if it looks as if the characters are intent on remaining on a single floor, the lectors will converge on them, typically from different directions and angles in order to keep them off balance.

For their initial attack, the lectors will move in, strike one or two characters and then quickly retreat in order to gauge the party's threat potential. Keep in mind that they may use the Move Silently skill as soon as they step back into the darkness by moving at half speed. After withdrawing, they will move as quietly as possible on the covered porch and observe the characters. If one passes close to a window or is delayed somewhat apart from the group (such as by one of the traps), one of the lectors will strike and try to drag the character out onto the porch. It will

then try to carry the character at least a quarter of the way around the house where it will meet the other lector to finish off the character and take his or her belongings. Sissel prefers to use her net to snag the character, whereas Bolthor is more brutal in striking the character as hard as possible with his *ring of the ram* before grappling and dragging her away.

If the lectors hear the shriekers, they will both go to windows outside their room and attack anyone inside. They are willing to fight to the death to protect their treasure, but would prefer to force characters to flee. Furthermore, they still try to drag characters out onto the porch in order to further separate and confuse the party. If the characters leave this particular room, the lectors will not pursue immediately; first they will make sure the room is relocked and no characters are hiding inside.

Treasure: There are heaps of mundane items, clothing, and gear here; characters enterprising and greedy enough to haul it all out might fetch anywhere from 500 gp to 2,000 gp for the lot of it. None of the treasure here is cursed as is normal with a lector's belongings, but does seem somehow . . . unpleasant. The following monetary and magical treasure is spread out over the floor of this room: 25 pp, 3800 gp, 12,500 sp, 11 gems (500 gp, 200 gp, 2 x 100gp, 6 x 50 gp, 10 gp), *potion of reduce*, *potion of invisibility*, *potion of spider climb*, *wand of cure light wounds* (27 charges remaining), *wand of daylight* (3 charges remaining), and a *Horn of Fog*. The command words for the wands are inscribed on their surfaces, the cure light in common and the daylight in valco. Clever PCs might discover these words by feeling them with their fingertips. The *Horn of Fog*, while its effects are not very noticeable to the blinded PCs, might be a useful tool for evening the odds against the lectors.

Development: Because of the shaft-like construction of the fireplace, it is possible for small creatures to use it to travel between floors. Medium-sized creatures must make an Escape Artist check (DC 15) to climb through, and large creatures simply cannot fit. In order to enter at all, however, one must first remove the metal fire grate with a Disable Device check (DC 23 to remove it silently, DC 13 will remove it with a loud grating noise). Once the grate is removed, accessing the main floor or the basement can be accomplished by climbing down (Climb DC 20) through the fireplace shaft. Climbing up the chimney is considerably more difficult, as this space is used by the lectors to dispose of the corpses not used to feed Einian or the gelatinous cube. The bodies, once stripped of all of their goods and valuables, are shoved up into the chimney. It is currently full of diseased, rotting corpses (and even a few skeletons which have been forced out the top

and now litter the roof). Anyone entering or searching the chimney risks becoming infected with the disease known as the shakes (Fort DC 13, 1 day incubation, 1d8 Dex). Upon the initial discovery of the fireplace, read the following:

Tentatively sliding your hands along the wall, you eventually discover a section of stones roughly cemented together. After about a foot of stone, there is an abrupt opening in the wall.

If they search or otherwise reach into the fireplace, read the following:

A few feet beyond the yawning void in the stone wall you soon discover a similar one, which seems to form a backing of sorts. The echoing sounds of your breath and a fairly steady draft of cooler air inform you that the opening seems to form a shaft reaching into the floor. Reaching up, however, your blood freezes as you grasp the familiar but deathly cold shape of a humanoid hand.

The hand is a part of the lowest body in the chimney, and is attached to a silver that has been here for over a month. Removing the body requires a Strength check (DC 15). All of the silver's gear has been added to the lectors' loot or the traps. Removing other bodies is possible, but the DC steadily increases by two for every 5' traveled up the shaft. If all of the bodies are removed (20' to reach the top of the house), a character may attempt to climb out (DC 20). Contracting the shakes remains a danger, and the Fort save DC listed above increases by 2 for every 5' traveled.

6. Northwest Bedroom

The creaks and groans of the floor beneath your feet echo through this room. The wall around the doorway feels rough, as if someone or something has repeatedly clawed the wood from about chest high all the way to the floor.

The entire floor of this room has been removed except for a 5' x 5' section directly in front of the door. That section has been hinged so that it feels like the rest of the floor until someone puts his or her weight onto it. At that point it will drop that person onto the blade trap in the Banquet Hall below.

Trap: CR 4; no attack roll necessary (1d6), +10 melee (1d6 blades for 1d8+4 points of damage per successful hit); Search (DC 20), Disable Device (DC 20); Reflex DC 20 avoids.



7. Covered Porch

This area is identical to the covered porch on the main floor save for the 10' x 10' opening in the northwest. Characters failing to notice it with a Search check (DC 10) must make a Reflex save (DC 15) or fall to the main level and take 1d6 damage.

Observatory (Level 3)

The stench of filth, waste, and rotting meat pours over you. Moving into this room, you also hear the familiar sound of breathing. Given its slow and steady nature, you wonder if the individual breathing is even conscious.

If the characters move around the room, they can find the following (either read it all at once, or in separate groups as the characters move around the room):

Portions of the room are full of loose bits of clothing, waste, and various ropes, chisels, scraps of wood, small hammers, and other tools. You find the gruesome remains of a half-eaten corpse

that may have once been an elf. Also, you find first one, then several crossbows. Each crossbow is aimed towards the center of the ceiling and has a light chain leading directly up.

This is where the lectors keep Einian. He is suspended from the ceiling 10 feet off the ground by chains attached to each of his limbs. Unfortunately for Einian, the chains are also attached to twelve crossbow traps – all pointed directly at him.

Einian Quickfinger: Dwarf Rog10, hp 21 (82 max).

There are twelve nearly identical traps here – crossbows all aimed at Einian. Nine of them are light crossbows (one of them a +2 light crossbow) and three of them are heavy. Additionally, Unbeknownst to Einian, the lectors like to dribble monstrous centipede poison on the bolts (Fort DC 11, 1d2 Str, 1d2 Str); pick 1d6 crossbows at random to have been poisoned. Any strong movement of any of the chains, whether by Einian or a PC, causes all of the crossbows to be triggered.

Trap: CR 10; ranged attack +10 (3 heavy crossbows, 1d10 each), +10 (8 light crossbows, 1d8 each), +12 (+2 light crossbow, 1d8+2); Search (DC 10), Disable Device (DC 25). Each crossbow requires a separate Disable Device check.

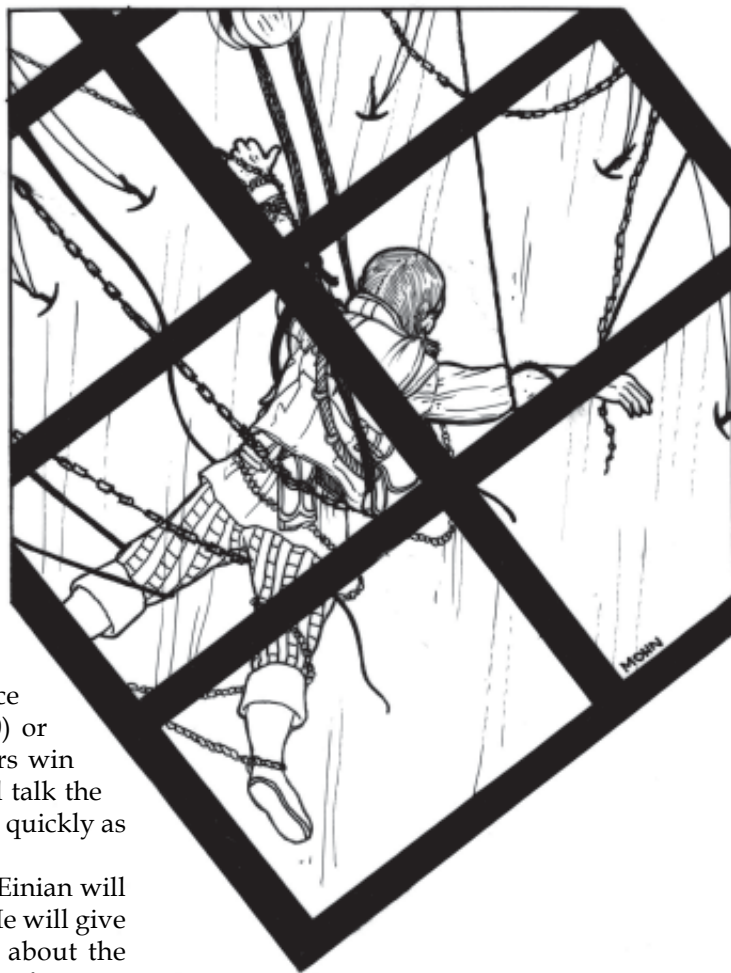
Development: When the characters arrive, Einian is lost in a deep, semi-conscious slumber. If woken up (gently so as not to trigger the trapped crossbows), he can help talk any characters through disabling the traps. However, they will need to convince Einian that they are skilled enough to attempt disabling these traps. Have Einian and one character that is attempting to convince him of her skill make opposed Disable Device checks (which represents the two of them arguing over the intricacies and subtleties of traps). Other characters may provide a +2 circumstance bonus by succeeding at a Bluff (DC 20) or Diplomacy (DC 20) roll. If the characters win the check or fail by 5 or less, Einian will talk the characters through disabling the traps as quickly as possible.

If the characters fail by more than 5, Einian will tell them not to try to disable the traps. He will give them as much information as possible about the lectors, the traps in the house, and means of escape, and will plead with them to get away and bring back help. If the characters insist on trying to disable the traps anyway, Einian will begin shouting for the lectors. After all, the dwarf would much rather the lectors dealt with any incompetent rescuers than having them botch the disable attempt and end his life. While Einian despises his existence here, he is at his core a survivor (in truth, to have gone through all that he has and still live, he would have to be) and is not about to give up his one hope of seeing the light of day and the death of his captors.

If Einian assists a character by trying to talk him or her through disabling the trap, the character gains a +5 competence bonus to each check.

Basement

The good news is that the lectors have no way of getting into the basement; the many blades and trinkets jutting from their skeletal bodies make it impossible for them to fit down the chimney or the trap door in the top of the elevator. This should therefore be a safe place for the characters to lick their wounds, memorize spells for those that don't need spellbooks



or have some way of illuminating them, and plan their escape or assault. The bad news is that the basement is already occupied by a being arguably as dangerous as the undead harriers above.

1. Elevator

If the characters descend to the basement through the trap door in the top of the elevator (which assumes they must have destroyed the gelatinous cube), they will enter into this room.

Fragile, musty cloth that may have once been quite expensive lines this small chamber. On one side is a pair of folding doors that are currently closed. To the right of these doors is a small, cold metal cone jutting out of the wall. As you trace the length of the cone with your hands, you find that it connects to a small, pliable tube that disappears into the wall at a downward angle.

The elevator came to rest here in the basement, and now supports the bulk of the gelatinous cube. If not for the metal skeleton of the chamber and its metal roof, the gelatinous cube would have long ago dissolved it entirely. There is an exit panel in the

ceiling of the elevator, but characters must either pass through or move the gelatinous cube for it to be of any assistance to them.

What remains of the elevator's ropes, the bulk of which were long ago dissolved by the gelatinous cube, dangle just above the horrid cube; if they were somehow reattached to the elevator's pulley system or replaced with new ropes or chains, such as via a Knowledge (engineering) skill check (DC 19), the elevator could again work normally.

The metal cone and tube assembly is a device which was used by individuals using the elevator to communicate with the servants in the basement Pull Room (Area 2), who would then move the elevator to the appropriate floor.

2. Pull Room

Thick, braided strands of coarse rope snake their way across the well worn floor. You soon find that you must walk carefully to avoid tripping over their entangled masses.

The ropes that lie on the floor within this room wend their way through a series of pulleys, and were once used by servants to pull the elevator to different floors. If the ropes above the elevator are somehow repaired or replaced (see Area 1 for details), characters may move the elevator up with a Strength check (DC 30). Multiple characters may pull on the ropes at once, stacking their bonuses. If the elevator happens to be located on a floor other than the basement, or is raised by the characters, lowering it again requires a lower Strength check (DC 20) in order to ease it down without damaging the mechanism. If it is damaged, another successful Knowledge (engineering) check (DC 15) will fix it again. A series of locking mechanisms throughout the system keep the elevator from slipping, which at least makes sure falling damage is not an issue.

3. Vault Entry

The interior of this small, cool room is made of a smooth stone rather than the wood found throughout the rest of the house. On the far wall stands an impressive metal door inlaid with strange etchings and what seems to be an entire series of bas relief embellishments.

The etchings and embellishments are decorative only and detail a few of Purepath's adventures throughout Penance.



The metal door (hardness 10, 60 hp, Break DC 30) is locked (DC 30) and protected by a *magic missile* trap that will fire at anyone attempting to open it. **Trap:** CR 5; no attack roll necessary (5d4+5); Search (DC 26); Disable Device (DC 26). Unlike the mechanical traps throughout the house, this trap resets itself immediately.

4. Vault

Similar to the small chamber before it, this entire room is made of smooth stone. Well-carved and sanded wooden shelves line three of the four walls, all of them empty. In the rear of the vault, a lone pair of ornamental hooks, crafted from the fluted horns of some massive creature, is mounted; it seems from their placement that they were used for supporting an object in an obvious place of honor.

All the loot from the vault was removed and stored in the lectors' room shortly after they took up residence here. However, unknown to them, there is a secret compartment within the vault in the floor of the northeastern corner. It requires a Search check (DC 30) to detect, and is again trapped (an additional Search check is required to detect the trap once the compartment has been found). The secret compartment is lined with lead and contains a permanent miniature *antimagic field*, both of which prevent finding it by magical means.

Chain of Lightning Trap: CR 12; individual opening compartment (12d6) and others in room (6d6); Reflex save (DC 19) for half; Search (DC 31); Disable Device (DC 31). Anyone of neutral good alignment can open the compartment without triggering the trap. This trap resets once the compartment is closed.

Treasure: In the truest twist of irony, Red Shard never left the house. Shortly before Purepath died, he conversed with the mystical blade and they determined that no worthy heir had been found. They did not want one of Purepath's servants or associates to take the cherished weapon as bounty. Therefore, Purepath placed the sword within this secret compartment in the hope that the proper individual would someday come, retrieve it, and wield it in the name of good. The sword, being virtually immortal, could wait (for more information, please see the "Statistics for NPCs" section for details on Red Shard).

It was hidden in this compartment with magical wards to prevent the detection of its presence via magic. Bolthor and Sissel were so embroiled into their own manic fears and steeped in paranoia that when they found the sword missing, they instantly assumed that their companions had betrayed them. In reality, that which they so desired was just a few inches below their feet.

Lastly, the fluted horn hooks are hand carved from the horns of a massive gnarl, and worth approximately 600 gp to a collector or other interested party.

5. Guards' Barracks

If the PCs have been in Room 9, describe this as a very similar room. If they have not, read the following:

In direct contrast to everything else you have encountered in this abysmal place, almost nothing seems disturbed within this room. A thick layer of throat-coating dust lines what can only be various pieces of furniture, many of which are on the verge of falling to pieces.

Seven beds and small wooden lockers fill this room. Searching this area (DC 22) will reveal a few weapons and other seemingly personal items still hidden within beds or under floorboards.

Treasure: 50 gp, longsword, (rusty but functional), shortsword x 3 (each slightly rusty but functional), shortbow, 10 arrows, and a *light mace* +1.

6, 7, 8. Storage

Rough wooden crates bound shut with rope and moldy, rancid sacks occupy this space. The sheer volume of dust in here burns your nose and stings your eyes.

Creatures: In Room 7 a small pack of dire rats is hiding from the jaggon; they attack anything that moves.

Dire Rats (8): hp 5 (see MM, p. 56).

9. Servants' Quarters

If the PCs have been in Room 5, describe this as a very similar room. If they have not, read the following:

In direct contrast to everything else you have encountered in this abysmal place, almost nothing seems disturbed within this room. A thick layer of throat-coating dust lines what can only be various pieces of furniture, many of which are on the verge of falling to pieces.

Fourteen beds and wooden lockers fill this room. Searching it (DC 25) will reveal various trinkets, personal belongings, and even a spellbook hidden throughout.

Treasure: 5gp, 20 sp, 40 cp, a fine silk wedding gown carefully stored within a cedar-lined trunk (worth 120 gp), *scarab of golembane (flesh)*, arcane spellbook containing: *arcane eye*, *black tentacles*, *comprehend languages*, *detect thoughts*, *fly*, *gaseous form*, *ghost sound*, *magic mouth*, *magic weapon*, *prestidigitation*, and *sepia snake sigil*, as well as 5 pages of gibberish where the last owner (who was apparently not a spellcaster but inherited the book from her father) tried to learn how to write the magical runes.

10. Rubble

The walls and floor in this area have been torn asunder violently. Boards, stonework, and even metal rafters from below the house form a twisted mound here. Raspy breathing seeps up from the mound.

Creatures: A valco paladin named Sorib lak Haran is trapped beneath this confusing mishmash of rubble. He was part of a group that recently became trapped within the mansion and attempted to dig their way out. Their digging soon unearthed the lair of a jaggon that had been attracted by the cursed darkness. The wizard of that doomed party managed to partially seal off the tunnel in a cataclysmic spell, but the jaggon had already made its way into the basement. The paladin was trapped in the rubble,

both of his legs broken, and forced to listen to the dying screams of his comrades as the Jaggon tore them apart.

Sorib quickly discovered that as long as he remained motionless and buried out of reach, the foul creature could not detect his presence. Since that terrible day, the paladin has only been able to keep himself alive through magic and by his valco ability to gain nutrition from nearly anything, even passing insects and moldy rations. Despite his best efforts, he cannot get himself out. Sorib has been able to keep tabs on the movements of the monster from the sounds it makes, and has thus been able to pick and chose the most opportune times for making the slight movements required for casting his spells.

The paladin is hesitant to attempt to fully heal himself for several reasons, the greatest of which is that even at full health, he could not remove the boulders atop him or face the beast single handedly. Also, he fears that casting a healing spell while still under the boulders would either cause his leg bones to set improperly, or worse, simply cause them to be broken again (a painful experience that he is not eager to repeat). However, Sorib is quickly growing desperate.

If he hears anyone entering or approaching the area, he will try to warn them of the creature and of his presence, though he will try to do so without alerting the jaggon if the awful beast has not already sense the newcomers.

Sorib lak Haran: Valco Pal9, hp 74 (max hp 92).

Development: It will take approximately ten minutes to extract Sorib from the rubble without additional injury. Magical means or careful engineering can speed this up at the GM's discretion. If the jaggon from the Work Area (Area 11), has not been dealt with, it will definitely come to investigate any movement within the rubble, and will hungrily attack any creature it can locate.

Sorib is able to cast spells from where he is, but is also blind like most creatures within the cursed mansion. He will do everything he can to assist the party if they are attacked by the jaggon. Sorib believes the best thing he can do is cast spells to boost the party in their fight, but he is willing to risk offensive spells against the jaggon if the fight is going badly and the characters need the assistance.

A Search check (DC 17) in the rubble reveals an opening to the area below the house. Without any attempts at widening it, only small creatures can currently get through, but a successful Craft (stonemasonry) check (DC 14) or Knowledge (engineering) check (DC 14) and 1d10+5 rounds can safely widen it for to allow for the passage of medium to large sized creatures. Failing either check by more than 5 will simply collapse the rubble even further, causing 2d6 bludgeoning damage to anyone

working on the rubble or trapped beneath. This also has the unfortunate side effect of destabilizing the rubble and raising the DC for safe digging by 2.

Beneath the rubble, the darkness curse continues ten feet into the ground itself and outwards to the mansion's perimeter. The area that can be accessed beyond the darkness seems to be a former apartment building that was once three stories high; several passages exit from it into the mazelike paths of the Undercity.

11. Work Area

If the PCs have descended via the fireplace, they will emerge in the center of the work area. Adjust the boxed text appropriately.

The strange echoing sounds of your breath and your footfalls inform you that this room is substantially larger than most others you have explored thus far. What seem to be the broken remnants of various tools and splintered work benches are scattered throughout the room.

Creatures: The jaggon that Sorib lak Haran's group accidentally released into the house remains here while it waits for prey to enter the basement. While its blindsight is affected by the curse, its secondary means of locating prey, tremorsense, is working just fine. Anyone managing to fly or levitate is effectively invisible to the creature, but anyone touching a wall or floor is immediately pinpointed. If it hears any noise or detects any movement, it will quickly move to investigate and attack. Of course, its horrific appearance will not affect blinded PCs; those that have managed to push the darkness back with magic may prefer blindness to the sight of the hideous beast that lunges at them from the shadows.

Jaggon: hp 129 (see *Oathbound*, p. 533).

Tactics: The jaggon is both at an advantage and disadvantage within the cursed mansion. On one hand, it can fully "see" in this cursed darkness but on the other, it cannot detect anything more than 60 feet away. Therefore, as long as characters are quiet in what they do, the jaggon will not know of their existence unless they come within 60 feet of it.

Currently, the jaggon lies in wait in the southeastern corner, hoping to hear Sorib so it can pinpoint his location. In this position it will not be able to detect characters coming in through either the elevator or the fireplace chimney. As long as characters stay in the western and northern halves of the basement and remain fairly quiet, it will most likely not know they are there (although the characters are very likely to hear the jaggon moving around).

GMs can elect to have the jaggon move around the room, as it is constantly hungry and could be patrolling for vermin to eat; if it comes within range

of the characters or if they make any sort of movement that it might detect (such as a cascade of falling rubble), it will immediately dive in and attack with a ferocity born of unending hunger. After its first kill, the jaggon will try to drag the body off to consume it, but if the party presses the attacks, the creature will stay and fight to the death.

Conclusion

Even with the lectors destroyed, the memory of that dark day is permanently stained upon the mansion. The curse of darkness will remain in perpetuity a *miracle, wish*, or other powerful magic manages to dispel it, or perhaps if some truly heroic, sacrificial or good deed is performed in that area. Until that time, the vacant and blood-stained mansion may attract other nefarious occupants who will undoubtedly put the vile curse to use for their own devious means.

Statistics for NPCs

The Lectors

Note: The Lectors listed here are variations on the normal undead creature listed on p. 335 of *Oathbound: Domains of the Forge*. Slight changes have been made to individualize the villains and reflect the fact that they retain unique characteristics from their previous existences. If either one is defeated, GMs should feel free to describe a variety of mundane and magical objects implanted on and entwined within their bodies. Anything magical should be a cursed item, either from the DMG or the GM's imagination, and even mundane items should have a feeling of unease or bit of bad luck about them. Indeed, an object found in the lectors' skeletal forms could be the hook to another adventure.

Bolthor: Male Lector; CR 12; Medium-size undead; HD 10d12; hp 110; Init +5 (Dex); Spd 30 ft, climb 20 ft.; AC 31 (+6 Natural, +5 profane, +4 Dex, +5 armor, +1 enhancement); Atk +15 melee (1d8+10, 2 claws), +13 melee (1d6+8, bite); SA curse; SQ greater darksight (60'), profane aura, sense bad juju, undead; AL NE; SV Fort +8, Ref +13, Will +12; Str 20, Dex 20, Con -, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 15.

Skills and Feats: Hide +6, Intimidate +5, Knowledge (arcana) +2, Listen +10, Move Silently +16, Open Lock +5, Search +2, Spellcraft +2, Spot +8; Dodge, Mobility, Multiattack, Power Attack, Spring Attack.

SA - Curse (Su): Anyone bit must make a Will save (DC 17) or be cursed (as *bestow curse*) - the lector

chooses which of the three standard curses at the time of biting. Bolthor prefers the -4 penalty on all attack rolls, saving throws, ability checks, and skill checks because of the overall weakening effect it has on his opponents.

SQ - Greater Darksight: Lectors can see through magical darkness to a range of 60 ft. Normally this would be limited by the darkness curse, but Bolthor and Sissel can see to the full range of their darksight - perhaps so that they will always see the cage they are trapped within.

SQ - Profane Aura (Su): A profane aura appearing like flames around the lector's head provides a +5 bonus to attack rolls, damage rolls, saving throws, and Armor Class (included above).

SQ - Sense Bad Juju (Su): Lectors can sense items that have an evil taint (GM's discretion) within 100 ft., and feels a tug in the direction of the item.

SQ - Undead: Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and disease. Not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

Possessions: +1 chain shirt of silent moves, ring of the ram (22 charges remaining).

Notes: Bolthor's orcish heritage follows him even into undeath. He is dense, brutish, and violent. He is also very covetous of his *ring of the ram*, assuming that everyone, even Sissel, means to steal it. He knows that its power is limited but is too stupid to have counted the number of charges expended, and therefore uses its power only when faced with extremely powerful opponents. He prefers to use spring attack on opponents in any case, especially those that have some form of illumination, as it allows him to watch their terror as his hideous skeletal form leaps into the light, claws at them, and then disappears . . . possibly with one of their fellow party members in his clutches.

Sissel: Lector; CR 12; Medium-size undead; HD 10d12; hp 110; Init +5 (Dex); Spd 30ft, climb 20 ft.; AC 27 (+6 Natural, +5 profane, +5 Dex, +1 Dodge); Atk +16 ranged touch (net); or +14 melee (1d8+9, 2 claws), or +12 melee (1d6+7, bite); SA curse; SQ greater darksight (60'), profane aura, sense bad juju, undead; AL NE; SV Fort +8, Ref +13, Will +13; Str 18, Dex 20, Con -, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 17.

Skills and Feats: Hide +10, Intimidate +6, Knowledge (arcana) +13, Listen +13, Move Silently +20, Open Lock +10, Search +14, Spellcraft +13, Spot +13; Alertness, Dodge, Expertise, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (net), Multiattack.

SA - Curse (Su): Anyone bit must make a Will save (DC 17) or be cursed (as *bestow curse*) - the lector chooses which of the three standard curses at the time of biting. Sissel prefers the -6 penalty to an ability score, namely Dexterity. This decreases their

AC significantly, making it easier for her to catch them within her net, as well as making it more difficult to escape it.

SQ – Greater Darksight: Lectors can see through magical darkness to a range of 60 ft. Normally this would be limited by the darkness curse, but Bolthor and Sissel can see to the full range of their darksight – perhaps so that they will always see the cage they are trapped within.

SQ – Profane Aura (Su): A profane aura appearing like flames around the lector's head provides a +5 bonus to attack rolls, damage rolls, saving throws, and Armor Class (included above).

SQ – Sense Bad Juju (Su): Lectors can sense items that have an evil taint (GM's discretion) within 100 ft., and feels a tug in the direction of the item.

SQ – Undead: Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and disease. Not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

Possessions: +1 net, *boots of elvenkind*.

Notes: Sissel lets Bolthor do most of the hand-to-hand fighting and distraction, while she attempts to quietly net someone that is further away from the party and drag them through a nearby door or window. She prefers to attack from the same level, as she isn't strong enough to haul trapped creatures up from above. She is also fairly intelligent, and uses her lector-granted Spellcraft and Knowledge (arcana) to guess what magic items, tactics, and spells a party will most likely use after watching them in action for a few rounds.

Allies

Einian Quickfinger: Male Dwarf Rog10; Medium Humanoid ; CR 10; HD 10d6+30; hp 21 (82 max); Init +2; Spd 20; AC 12; Atk +8 base melee, +9 base ranged; SQ: Darkvision (Ex), Dwarven traits (Ex); AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref +9, Will +2; Str 12, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 17, Wis 9, Cha 9.

Skills and Feats: Appraise +11, Balance +12, Climb +11, Craft (Carpentry) +5, Craft (Metalworking) +5, Craft (Stonecarving) +3, Craft (Stonemasonry) +3, Craft (Trapmaking) +16, Craft (Weaponsmithing) +3, Decipher Script +7, Disable Device +14, Hide +9, Intuit Direction +3, Listen +3, Move Silently +8, Open Lock +10, Profession (Armorsmith) +1, Profession (Blacksmith) +1, Profession (Metalworker) +1, Profession (Miner) +1, Profession (Stonemason) +1, Profession (Weaponsmith) +1, Search +16, Spot +9, Use Magic Device +12, Use Rope +15; Blind-Fight, Dodge, Endurance, Skill Focus: Craft (Trapmaking).

Notes: Einian is a survivor above all. Escaping from the mansion intact is more important to him than getting back at the lectors and, indeed, more important to him than the lives of his rescuers. He holds bitter hatred for his captors, but recognizes that escaping and coming back with the appropriate help, prepared with the proper spells and equipment, is the best way to accomplish his vengeance. If he cannot talk the party into leaving by the quickest route possible, he may attempt to escape on his own. He might not be above betraying the party if he can broker a deal with the lectors, and if he can be convinced that they'll stick to the bargain.

Mafuane: Male Ort Clr7; Medium Aberration; CR 5; HD 7d8+7; hp 54; Init +2; Spd 30, Burrow 5; AC 14 (+3 natural, +1 Dex); Atk tentacle slam +5/+5/+5/+5 (5 ft. reach), or +5/+5 (10 ft. reach) or +5 (15 ft. reach); dmg 1d3 plus 1d4 acid; SA – Corrosion, spells; SQ – Malleable; AL CG; SV Fort +6, Ref +3, Will +8; Str 11, Dex 12, Con 12, Int 9, Wis 17, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +6, Heal +5, Hide +7, Move Silently +1, Sense Motive +3, Spellcraft +2; Blind-Fight, Combat Casting, Craft Wondrous Item.

SA – Corrosion (Ex): Can choose to secrete acid (1d4), can apply to object struck (especially armor)

SQ – Malleable (Ex): can flex body into unusual proportions (10 ft. by 10 ft. sheet few inches thick, 3 ft. sphere, 20 ft. long cylinder few inches thick), spring new appendages: 4 x 5 ft. long, 2 x 10 ft. long, or 1 x 15 ft. long tentacles.

Domains: Protection, Travel

Spells Prepared (Clr 6/5/4/2/0): 0 – create water, detect magic, detect poison, light, purify food and drink, resistance; 1st – bless x2, obscuring mist, protection from evil, shield of faith; 2nd – find traps, lesser restoration, silence, sound burst; 3rd – daylight, summon monster III.

Notes: Mafuane is an ort, a shapeshifting race of subterranean creatures that live beneath Penance (see *Oathbound*, p. 336). He is a courageous wanderer of the Undercity, protecting those in need and ferreting out dangerous creatures. That is, he was . . . until yesterday. After falling down the pit, being partially corroded by acid, and stalked by vicious lectors, he is now a nervous wreck with little more courage than the pile of garbage he resembles. He will be of little use to the party until someone goes unconscious or is snatched away by the lectors, at which point his protective instincts will kick in. From that point on, he will be a courageous asset to the party. His bravery will become so strong, and his shame at his previous behavior will be so deep, that he will go so far as to give his life holding off the lectors so that the characters may escape.

If asked about his religion, Mafuane will neither be able to confirm nor deny any connection between

it and Israfel, Queen of Penance. He simply refers to a connection his people have with the “keening”, some sort of beautiful sound that only they can hear. It is to this “sound of the maker” that they pray, he says, and from this that they receive their spells.

Keep in mind that the spells listed above represent Mafuane’s repertoire after having spent some on healing and some trying to pierce the darkness. He will be able to regain spells several hours after the characters find him, having been too flustered previously to pray for more.

Red Shard: +2 *intelligent keen falchion*; Speech – common and draconic; PA – *Spider climb* for 20 minutes on wielder 1/day, wielder gains uncanny dodge (as a 5th-level barbarian); AL NG; Int 12, Wis 9, Cha 15.

Appearance: Red Shard is named for its blade, which is comprised of a strange obsidian-like crimson stone. Its pommel is polished ivory with a carving of a humanoid with tentacles sprouting from its face at the bottom.

Sorib lak Haran: Male Valco Pal9; Medium Humanoid; CR 9; HD 9d10+18; hp 92; Init -2; Spd 20; AC 17; Atk +13 base melee, +7 base ranged; +15 (1d8+6, Adamantine Battleaxe); AL LG; SV Fort +12, Ref +3, Will +8; Str 18, Dex 6, Con 15, Int 10, Wis 16, Cha 15.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +8, Diplomacy +6, Heal +15, Knowledge (religion) +2, Listen +5, Spot +5; Alertness, Great Fortitude, Leadership, Power Attack.

Spells Prepared (Pal – /2/1): 1st – Create Water, Cure Light Wounds; 2nd – Delay Poison.

Possessions: Adamantine Battleaxe; Light crossbow; Dagger; Silvered dagger; Short sword; Masterwork banded mail; Large mithral shield; *Bag of holding* (Bag 1); *Ring of Minor Elemental Resistance*.

Notes: Sorib is an honorable Valco who did everything he could to help his previous party, but now realizes that pragmatism is the only thing that will get him out of this situation. He will do everything he can to help a party that rescues him. That does not mean, however, that he does not have a strong need to avenge his previous party and a moral obligation to destroy the lectors, if he can. If he believes he can do this with the party’s help, he will attempt to convince the party that the lectors must be destroyed before they depart. He realizes that some of them may die before the battle is through, but feels that it is worth it. If the party refuses, he will be disappointed but will accompany them in their escape. He will not, ironically, be as courageous a defender as Mufuane; if the party will not focus on destroying the lectors, he feels it is his duty to get out and bring back a party that will obliterate this mansion and its evil occupants. He

will do his share of the fighting, but will not give his life so that others may escape.

Monsters

Dire Rats (8): CR 1/3; Small animal (3 ft. long); HD 1d8+1; hp 5; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 40 ft., climb 20 ft.; AC 15 (+1 size, +3 Dex, +1 natural); Atk +4 melee (1d4, bite); SA disease; SQ scent; AL N; SV Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +3; Str 10, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 4.

Skills and Feats: Climb +11, Hide +11, Hide +9, Move Silently +6; Weapon Finesse (bite).

SA – Disease (Ex): Filth fever (bite, Fortitude save (DC 12), incubation period 1d3 days; damage 1d3 temporary Dexterity and 1d3 temporary Constitution.)

Gelatinous Cube: CR 3; Huge ooze; HD 4d10+36; hp 69; Init -5 (Dex); Spd 15 ft.; AC 3 (-2 size, -5 Dex); Atk +1 melee (1d6+4, slam and 1d6, acid); SA engulf, paralysis, acid; SQ blindsight, ooze, transparent; AL N; SV Fort +5, Ref -4, Will -4; Str 10, Dex 1, Con 19, Int -, Wis 1, Cha 1.

Skills and Feats: None.

SA – Engulf (Ex): Although it moves slowly, a gelatinous cube can simply mow down Large or smaller creatures as a standard action. It cannot make a slam attack during a round in which it engulfs. The gelatinous cube merely has to move over the opponents, affecting as many as it can cover. Opponents can make opportunity attacks against the cube, but if they do so they are not entitled to a saving throw. Those who do not attempt opportunity attacks must succeed at a Reflex save (DC 13) or be engulfed; on a success, they are pushed back or aside (opponent’s choice) as the cube moves forward. Engulfed creatures are subject to the cube’s paralysis and acid, and are considered to be grappled and trapped within its body.

SA – Paralysis (Ex): Gelatinous cubes secrete an anesthetizing slime. A target hit by a cube’s melee or engulf attack must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 16) or be paralyzed for 3d6 rounds. The cube can automatically engulf a paralyzed opponent.

SA – Acid (Ex): A gelatinous cube’s acid does not harm metal or stone.

SQ – Blindsight (Ex): An ooze’s entire body is a primitive sensory organ that can ascertain prey by scent and vibration within 60 feet.

SQ – Ooze: Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and polymorphing. Not subject to critical hits.

SQ – Transparent (Ex): Gelatinous cubes are hard to see, even under ideal conditions, and it takes a successful Spot check (DC 15) to notice one. Creatures who fail to notice a cube and walk into it are automatically engulfed.

Jaggon: CR 10; Large Aberration; HD 12d8+48; hp 129; Init -1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft., burrow 20 ft.; AC 18 (+1 Dex, +8 natural, -1 size); Atk +13 melee (3d10+5, bite), and +11 melee (1d4+2, sting and poison); SA blindsight, horrific appearance, poison; SQ immunities, resistant to blows, tremorsense; AL NE; SV Fort +8, Ref +5, Will +7; Str 21, Dex 12, Con 19, Int 6, Wis 9, Cha 7.

Skills and Feats: Hide +7, Jump +8, Listen +8, Move Silently +10, Spot +8; Alertness, Multiattack.

SA - Horrific Appearance (Su): The sight of a jaggon is so revolting that anyone who sees one must make a Will save (DC 15), or be weakened suffering 1d6 points of temporary Strength damage. Those who succeed at the save cannot be affected by the same jaggon's horrific appearance for an entire day.

SA - Poison (Ex): Creatures struck by antennae must make a Fortitude save (DC 18) or experience vivid hallucinations (equivalent to the spell *confusion*) for 2d6 minutes.

SQ - Blindsight (Ex): With their antennae, jaggons can ascertain all foes within 60 ft. Beyond that distance, they are blind.

SQ - Immunities (Ex): Jaggons are immune to gaze attacks, visual effects, illusions, sonic attacks, sonic spells, and all other attack forms that rely on sight or sound. They are still susceptible to scent-based attacks.

SQ - Resistant to blows (Ex): Due to their thick, rubbery hide, and near lack of vital organs, physical attacks deal only half damage to jaggons.

SQ - Tremorsense (Ex): Jaggons can sense the location of anything moving within 60 ft. that is in contact with the ground.

Monstrous Centipede, Tiny (20): CR 1/8; Tiny Vermin; HD 1/4d8 (Vermin); hp 1; Init +2; Spd 20;

AC 14; Atk -3 base melee, +4 base ranged; +4 (1d3-5, Bite); SA: Poison (Ex); SQ: Vermin; AL N; SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +0; Str 1, Dex 15, Con 10, Int -, Wis 10, Cha 2.

Skills and Feats: Climb -1, Hide +14, Spot +4; Weapon Finesse.

SA - Poison (Ex): Fort DC 11, Initial and Secondary 1 Dex.

SQ - Vermin: Immune to mind-influencing effects.

Shrieker Fungus (2): CR 1; Medium Plant; HD 2d8+2 (Plant); hp 11; Init -5; Spd AC 13; Atk +1 base melee, +1 base ranged; SA: Shriek (Ex); SQ: Plant; AL N; SV Fort +4, Ref +0, Will -4; Str -, Dex -, Con 13, Int 1, Wis 2, Cha 1.

SA - Shriek (Ex): Movement within 10 feet cause to emit piercing shriek for 1d3 rounds.

SQ - Plant: Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and polymorphing. Not subject to critical hits.

Violet Fungus (4): CR 3; Medium Plant; HD 2d8+6; hp 19; Init -1; Spd 10; AC 13; Atk +3 melee (1d6+2, 4 Tentacles); SA: Poison (Ex); SQ: Plant; AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref -1, Will +0; Str 14, Dex 8, Con 16, Int 2, Wis 11, Cha -.

SA - Poison (Ex): Tentacle, Fort DC 14, Initial and Secondary - 1d4 temporary Strength and 1d4 temporary Constitution.

SQ - Plant: Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and polymorphing. Not subject to critical hits.

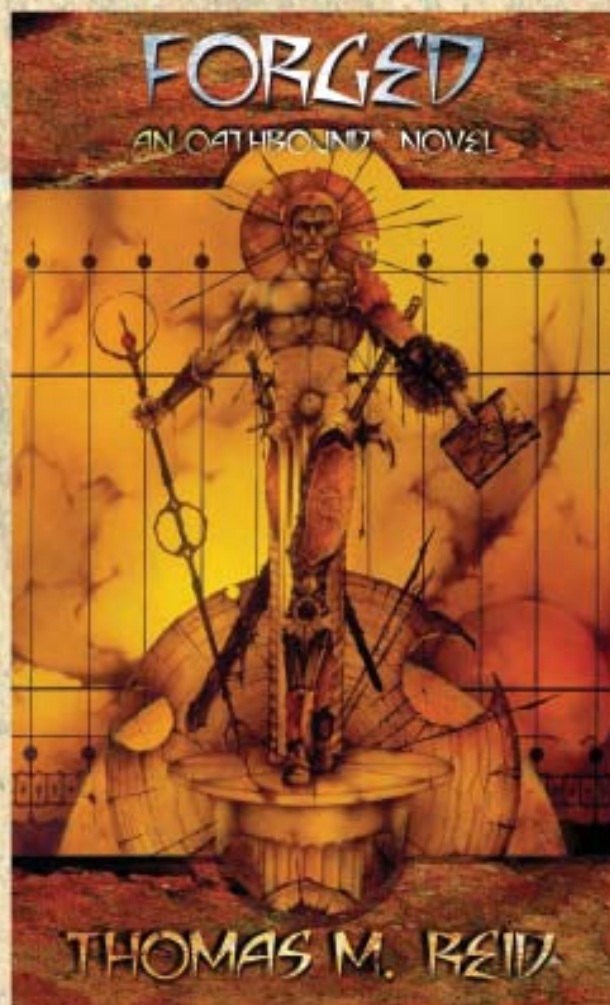
Get Bound

For visitors to the Forge, arriving has always been far easier than returning home. But the moment Lyrien Ves'tiral is ripped unwillingly from his homeland—from the woman he has pledged to protect—and deposited in this strange, rich tapestry of a world, he intends to escape. The only problem is, someone in the Forge has other plans for him.

Seeking both a means of escape and the identity of those who would prevent it, Lyrien quickly finds himself a pawn in the plots of some of the Forge's most conniving schemers.

As he struggles to disentangle himself from their subtle games, Ves'tiral becomes torn between a need to fulfill his duty back home and a growing bond with the mysterious, effusive world that is reshaping his very being, tempering him for a role that just might transform the land itself.

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Scenario 2 - Totem

An adventure for 17th level characters, wherein seemingly innocent remembrances of lost loved ones secretly open a doorway for a bloodthirsty devil.

Background

"Aunt" Anelie likes helping families in pain. She used to care for the ill with poultices and simple spells; but nothing could help those experiencing the ultimate pain, the loss of a loved one. A decade ago she found something in her mother's notes that would do just that. She found a ritual that allowed her to create totems to take away the grief of losing a loved one. While many are initially suspicious of the aged matron, eventually, most discover that she can indeed comfort them far more than anyone else, and hanging the unusual-looking totem in their home seems to be a small price to pay in order to continue that sense of comfort.

Unbeknownst to Aunt Anelie, she is merely the pawn of a great evil. The ritual she uses to create the totems does indeed ease suffering, but only as a byproduct. A family's grief seems to lessen because the spirit of their departed is *still there with them*. The ritual traps the newly departed spirit to the totem itself. Additionally, the totem and the spirit trapped within are now bound to the ritual's creator, a devil named Cernu'ba'donn. This vile pit fiend developed the ritual, then made sure that it was found by someone with just enough ability to perform it, but not enough to understand it. Aunt Anelie was that unfortunate individual.

Cernu'ba'donn's goal was to enter the Forge to harness its power and, if possible, destroy and take the place of one of the Seven. He would then use his nearly unlimited power to turn an entire domain of Penance into his personal vision of hell. The totems were his key to entering; with every totem Anelie created, a new soul was bound to the fiend. When he amassed 1,000, he would have the raw materials necessary to teleport his entire citadel to the Forge in any location he chooses.

Last week, Aunt Anelie created her thousandth totem and gave Cernu'ba'donn began the final phase of his plan to open a doorway into the Forge. Families are already being found slaughtered in their homes, and the only link appears to be the kind and matronly Aunt Anelie. The characters are drawn into this bewildering tangle of clues and must discover the dark truth behind the totems.

Synopsis

The characters become involved in this adventure to investigate the unusual circumstances surrounding the death of Samuel Viss. Whatever their initial purpose for becoming concerned with this murder, they soon learn that it is far more than a mundane killing. As the search progresses more gruesome murders occur. Soon, the few common aspects of each death begin to emerge from the eerie backdrop: that each of the dead had lost someone close to them; that each of the dead had visited Aunt Anelie; and that each of them had possessed one of her totems. These clues quickly lead them to Aunt Anelie, but once they arrive they do not encounter the serial killer that they seek.

Aunt Anelie is initially brusque with the characters – after all, she has only been trying to assuage peoples' grief and would never harm anyone. Once she realizes that the victims were all her customers and understands the painful deaths they must have suffered, she agrees to help. The fiend Cernu'ba'donn learns of these attempts to foil his plans and sets out to eliminate those who behind them, beginning with Aunt Anelie. Before her untimely demise, however, the matron is able to devise a clue that will help the characters destroy the fiendish threat.

The characters must then make a painful decision: destroy the totems, and therefore damn each of the 1,000 souls to eternal torment, or let the pit fiend into the Forge. The characters must simultaneously deal with a riotous mob stirred up by a local inquisitor. As powerful members of the community, attention turns to the characters to make the decision – destroy the totems and damn their loved ones, or attempt to slay one of the most powerful beings in the Abyss?

The Ritual

No matter what the characters decide to do, the result will probably not be what they expected. Cernu'ba'donn is, after all, a devil, and therefore a master of misdirection and deceit. The characters will eventually learn that he must harness 1,000 souls to enter the Forge; what they will not discover without clever and persistent research is that his ritual will have the most powerful result if he also sacrifices those souls through the destruction of their totems. Completing the ritual in this manner would allow him to not only enter the Forge, but also to bring his fortress and his minions with him and to designate their arrival in an unclaimed canton within Penance. He would instantly attain bloodlord status thanks to the population of devils he would control, would be

protected by the Queen's laws, and would be able to begin his conquest of the Forge . . . legitimately. Luckily for the citizens of Penance, he cannot complete the ritual in this manner himself; the souls must be both bound and destroyed on the plane he wishes to enter.

How to accomplish the totems' destruction without doing it himself? Why, by making the local populace terrified of them, of course. First draw attention to the totems with seemingly random and evil murders. Then leave difficult clues for the heroic defenders of Penance or the leaders of the riotous mob, either one, to follow. Trick them into thinking they've uncovered his weakness, then let them do the work: destroy the totems, thereby completing the ritual for him. If everything goes according to Cernu'ba'donn's plan, the righteous heroes of Penance won't stop to wonder why the devil drew attention to his totems in the first place.

On the other hand, careful and extremely moral characters might refuse to destroy the totems either because they uncover the secrets of Cernu'ba'donn's plan or because they realize that the spirits within would then be obliterated. The alternative is less ideal for the pit fiend but will do in a pinch: 666 hours (or 27 days) after the 1,000th soul is bound to a totem, Cernu'ba'donn will be able to teleport, alone, anywhere in Penance that he wishes. This would give him the flexibility and time to remain hidden while he amasses power and minions. Additionally, the souls bound to the totems would be consumed during the teleportation, their remains taking form as demonic creatures under Cernu'ba'donn's control.

Obviously, neither of these options is in the interest of the characters or the well being of the Forge. It is up to the heroes to decide which is the lesser of the two evils, or to find another alternative.

Character Hooks

There are several ways to involve the characters in this adventure beyond the classic motivations of bloodlord request, professional curiosity, or heroic obligation. GMs should feel free to use any of the ideas below, or one of their own devising, to put the characters in the middle of the tale.



Grief stricken: The characters themselves have recently lost a loved one (perhaps even an old party member) and seek to assuage their feelings of remorse and grief. They journey to Aunt Anelie in order to receive one of her totems and as a result become deeply embroiled in this twisted and bizarre adventure. GMs are encouraged to, if this hook is used, to make the decision of whether or not to destroy the totem towards the end of the adventure particularly personal.

Eyewitnesses: The characters become involved because they are nearby when Samuel Viss is literally eaten alive. As material witnesses, they will undoubtedly be questioned by the bailiffs and could even become suspects. For those PCs that need an additional bit of prodding beyond threat of punishment, the bailiffs can announce that a hefty reward hangs in the balance for any who can assist with the more "challenging" aspects of the investigation.

Should either self-preservation or the reward be a major motivating factor for the party, GMs may wish to consider and plan for the party's reaction to the "big question" at the end of the mod: to destroy

the totems or face Cernu'ba'donn. If the party is particularly mercenary, they may not care one way or the other about damning 1,000 souls to eternal torture and servitude; but you can bet those souls will care, and revenge is a very strong motivator . . .

Pall bearers: Samuel Viss could easily be a close friend, family member, confidant, informant, or business associate of the characters and they feel that it is only right that they attend his last rites. While there, they pick up the whispered rumors that some foul sorcery had something to do with the man's sudden and horrific death and that somebody should do something about it; the characters become those "some bodies". Alternatively, the characters need not be personally involved with the man, but instead the bloodlord (or other powerful individual) with which they are affiliated was, and he sends the characters in his stead.

Similar circumstances: Perhaps the characters hear about Samuel Viss' death and it rings a bell; something they have recently seen, experienced, or investigated is strikingly similar. Seeking a possible connection and additional clues, or perhaps desiring to lend their recently gained expertise on the subject to the investigation, they quickly become embroiled in the strange events.

Arcane interest: The characters are interested in, for any number of reasons, the totems Aunt Anelie uses to draw the grief away from those she helps. Perhaps they desire to learn as much as they can about the totems and the ritual used to create them in order to lessen other emotions, like anger or fear or even happiness. Perhaps they desire to use the totems for a ritual or spell that they are researching, or they might even discover that the totems have something to do with traveling to and from other planes and wish to use them escape from the Forge.

Bug collectors: A local wizard, cleric, or druid is deeply interested in the weeping beetles that Aunt Anelie uses in her totem-creation rituals and sends the characters to fetch some. However, once the characters arrive, they quickly learn of the nefarious nature of the ritual (and possibly the beetles as well) and take it upon themselves to investigate further.

The Death of Samuel Viss

While the characters are assumed to arrive on the scene of Samuel Viss' death sometime after it has occurred (and because of the fact that it is treated as a crime scene) there is a certain amount of background information required to make this encounter run smoothly. GMs are advised to use the clue checklist featured within this section to make certain that they at least attempt to deliver as many of the hints as possible. In order to get the characters inter-

ested in the investigation, as well as prevent them from becoming frustrated with it, communicating the essential elements of the scene, and doing so clearly, is paramount.

Samuel Viss' twin brother, Sallous, was killed nearly a decade ago in a construction accident. Samuel took the untimely death of his brother poorly, and eventually visited Aunt Anelie, the local wisewoman, for herbs and medicines to ease his suffering and sleeplessness. He became the first recipient of one of Cernu'ba'donn's totems.

Soon after it was placed within his small, simple home, Samuel began to feel the grief seep from his soul and he slowly got better, returning to his normal daily activities. He came to cherish the totem as a keepsake of his beloved brother. Ten years later, fate came full circle. As Cernu'ba'donn felt the 1,000th soul to bind to him, he became able to control the totems and cast spells through them. The lawful but corrupt pit fiend decided that since Samuel was the first to purchase a totem, he should also be the first to be killed by one.

Cernu'ba'donn commanded the totem to use its *summon swarm* ability (see Appendix) while the man slept. The insects engulfed Samuel and slowly ate him alive. The man was awake and aware throughout but could not struggle or call out because of the paralyzing effect of the insects' venom. There is little doubt that it was a horrendous death. Once their ghastly task was complete, the insects literally vanished into the woodwork, leaving only a neatly stripped skeleton in their wake. While every insect that bit Samuel died, there were hundreds left over to carry away their fellows' remains with them into the walls.

As a result, the crime scene is remarkably bare and devoid of evidence and there are no witnesses whatsoever, as nothing out of the ordinary was seen or heard. Once the characters arrive at the scene, read the following to the players:

As you step into the simple but well kept one-room dwelling, an overpowering stench invades your nostrils. For no reason that you can discern, the scent suggests death. It is not the typical cloying smell of decaying flesh and gas-bloated organs; rather it is as if pure and abject fear had taken the form of an odor and is radiating from the walls and floors around you. All within the small home seems orderly and normal with the exception the complete skeleton on the small, rustic bed. It is lain out as in a pose of sleeping or resting. The bones gleam as if recently polished and the skull lies in a neatly formed depression on the straw-filled pillow. The only sound, other than your short, shallow breath-

ing, is the steady tap-tap of a fat, shiny fly trying to escape the confines of the room via its single, smoky glass window.

CLUE CHECKLIST

There are no witnesses to the murder. Neighbors and locals interviewed reveal nothing, Sense Motive checks (DC 20) show that they are hiding nothing, or if they are hiding something, it has little to do with Samuel's death. Further, Gather Information checks (DC 15) reveal that for the most part, Samuel was well liked by most folks, that he was a quiet fellow that mostly kept to himself (he was an artist) and that he had no known enemies or dealings with shady characters. Other than the extreme grief with which he responded to the death of his brother a few years back, no one can remember anything remarkable about him.

There is no sign of forced entry. Any Search checks (DC 20) reveal that the single door and window of the dwelling have seen nothing more than normal use. A Knowledge (Architecture) check (DC 15) denotes that no signs of recent repair exist on any of these portals either. However, a Search check of DC 30 reveals that the walls of the dwelling have an unusual feature – they are nearly, but not totally, hollow, almost as if they are honeycombed with very small passages. Any sort of demolition will reveal this to be the case, as the wooden walls (and even portions of the floor) are riddled with tiny tunnels, such as the kind used by wood boring insects. A subsequent Knowledge (Nature) check (DC 20) reveals that while wood boring insects are common in this area, an infestation of this magnitude would have likely been noticed long before it became this severe. Further, there would be a very likely chance of infestation in the nearby homes as well and if checked, there is no indication to be found in any of the surrounding dwellings.

The skeleton appears human and is totally intact. A Heal check (DC 20) reveals that either the skeleton was once a living being, or that the individual that placed it here had an inordinate amount of skill and knowledge about the body and its structure. Further, the bones seem to have been polished to a high sheen, not from buffing but rather from a more organic process. A Search check (DC 30) reveals minuscule scrapes and scours in the bones from the insects' mandibles, while a Search check (DC 35) reveals what appear to be a few dark specks on the skull. A subsequent Knowledge (Nature) check (DC 20) can confirm that these are, in fact parts of insects (a shred of a wing, a chip of a piece of exoskeleton, part of an antenna or leg, etc.).

Nothing seems to have been ransacked or out of place. A Search check (DC 10) brings to light the fact that at first glance, nothing seems to have been ransacked, misplaced, or stolen (apparently, Samuel was a very tidy individual). However, those that succeed at Wisdom check (DC 20) or a Spot check (DC 30) will notice that the strange, folksy looking, stick-cloth-and-straw figure hanging over the bed seems to stand out from the victim's other possessions. Despite even the closest examination, however, this particular totem remains completely inert, simply staring back at the characters with its beetle-shell eyes.

The results of any divination spells cast are cryptic at best. Essentially, they reveal that someone named Cernu'ba'donn forced someone named Sallous to kill Samuel. A *legend lore* or similar spell cast on the name "Cernu'ba'donn" reveal only vague references to a powerful outsider that should be closely watched and feared. Following up on the name Sallous with neighbors will quickly reveal that this was the name of Samuel's brother who was supposed to have died several years ago. One neighbor, a crotchety old frey named Curdle, is quite sure that Sallous is dead, having watched him be interred 10 years ago along with Samuel (of course, it will take a bribe of at least 500 gp and a Diplomacy check of DC 25 to get him to admit this, as interring the dead without a permit is a crime in Penance. See the sidebar "Things To Do In Penance When You're Dead" for more information).

Development: There is little else that can be gleaned from this encounter, with a couple of exceptions: general information about the totem and Sallous. If the characters ask the bailiffs or the locals about the totem, most of them can direct the PCs to Aunt Anelie as the maker of these "Weeping Beetle" totems. In fact, they can inform the characters on the general purpose of the totems, Aunt Anelie's affiliated history with them and provide them directions to her hovel, which lies only about one day's travel (on kithback) from Samuel's home.

If questions about Sallous are raised, things get a great deal more confusing for the characters. First, the characters must determine whom to ask about Sallous. They will not immediately know to ask Curdle about anything, and he does little but mutter and stare at the characters from his front porch. Gather Information checks (DC 20) will reveal "that old cat across the street has been here the longest." A Gather Information check of DC 25 will allow the characters to actually track down some of Samuel's old friends, who will be far more willing to help the characters than Curdle. Even they will require some prodding (Bluff or Diplomacy check DC 18) before divulging information; this DC will be lowered by 2 if the characters can assure the friends that they are

sad to hear about Samuel's death and are investigating his murder at least in part to make sure he is avenged. If successful in questioning these friends, the characters will learn some good news and some bad; they will learn the location of Sallous' body so that they can investigate it, but they will also discover that the location happens to be in a dangerous part of the Undercity.

GM Note: Due to the very nature of the investigation, the remainder of the adventure greatly depends on the choices the characters make and clues they decide to pursue. In order to account for this dynamically branching nature of the investigation, the following several encounters (up to, but not including "Facing the Devil") should be run in whatever order the GM, or the flow of play, determines. For ease in game play, each encounter, as written, assumes no prior knowledge of any other encounter. At the end of each encounter, a list of "Alternative Outcomes" are presented to aid the GM in running the event. They are based on information that the characters might have at the beginning of the encounter.

Visiting Aunt Anelie

It is crucial that at some point the characters visit Aunt Anelie. In fact, as the investigation proceeds, all signs begin to point to her. At worst she could become the prime suspect of the murders and at best she could be considered a valuable information source and witness.

Aunt Anelie lives in a tiny, humble hovel with only her hundreds of "Weeping Beetles" to keep her company. It is obvious to any who enter that the aged woman does little other than care for the beetles, meticulously craft cages for them to live in, and craft the totems for which she is known. Aunt Anelie herself is barely taller than four feet tall, and with

her frame stooped and bent from her advanced years.

The beetles themselves are utterly ordinary creatures. Their carapaces are a shiny black and their single unique characteristic is that they often make a tiny, "weeping" sound by emitting short bursts of air through openings in their thorax. While this gives these beetles their name, druids and sages agree that this is merely a mating or communicative call and provides no mystical or magic powers.

When the characters initially visit Aunt Anelie, read the following:

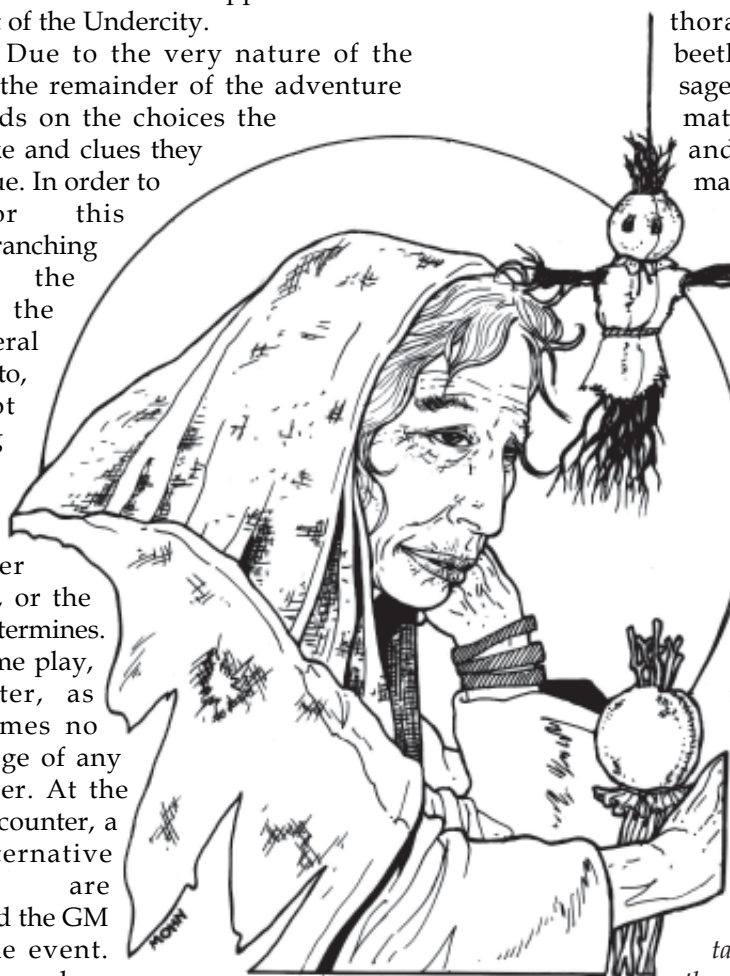
The tiny hovel in which Aunt Anelie resides looks as if it could easily collapse in the next big storm. Crafted from a patchwork collection of cast off parts and pieces of other structures, it is hobnailed together by a variety of means: ropes, nails, mortar, and mud. Upon entering, the interior strikes you as quite similar to the exterior: piles of miscellaneous and unidentifiable junk lying, standing, and even plastered to the walls – it is almost too much to take in at once. One common theme does scream forth from

the chaos, however: Aunt Anelie's her beetles and her totems.

Hanging from the low slung, sloping roof are hundreds of tiny, hand made cages – in each are a pair of strange looking beetles scurrying tirelessly. You occasionally detect a small sound, like a child's whispered weeping, emerging from the cages.

Between the beetle cages hang small, folksy looking totems, all in varying stages of completion. The totems are composed of sticks, straw, cloth, and hair, all sewn loosely together in a meticulous manner; some of the more complete totems possess pairs of blank, staring eyes made from the shells of the caged beetles.

Aunt Anelie, her back to you, stands before a massive, hand carved cupboard that looks like it has been handed down for generations. She is nearly doubled over working on yet another to-



tem, and does not look up but instead calls in a voice that sounds like a crow's croak. "Welcome, child. Have you come to rid your hearts of grief? Aunt Anelie can help you, that's for sure."

Aunt Anelie assumes that the characters have come to purchase one of her totems, and it takes some time before her aged and feeble mind can be coaxed out of its single-minded path and on to the subject at hand. However, once the characters are able to make Aunt Anelie understand what has happened, she expresses true remorse; it is obvious that she has seen far too much death in her years and would welcome a time without its presence.

It is apparent that Aunt Anelie has no knowledge about these deaths and any Sense Motive checks (DC 20) confer that she has nothing to hide. Any rash accusations against the aged woman rile her ire and she becomes slightly defensive on the subject, at least for a while. She eventually offers to assist the characters, obviously wanting to help end the suffering that she has so long railed against. She tells the PCs that she has some helpful "rituals" and "meditations" that she must perform, but they must be done in private. She will patiently and truthfully answer any and all questions put to her (unless the situation is slightly different, at which point GMs should refer to "Alternative Outcomes" as listed below), but then will kindly ask the characters to depart and return on the morrow.

If a character happens to cast *detect magic* while in Aunt Anelie's hovel, the cupboard and a half dozen of the more finished totems radiate magic. If asked about the cupboard, Aunt Anelie will only state that it is her property, "an heirloom (which she pronounces "hair-lum") from my mother and her mother afore her..." she will not allow the characters access to it under any circumstances.

GM Note: GMs might want to vary the amount of time Aunt Anelie needs to complete the rituals and meditation, depending on which scenarios have already transpired and what sort of pacing they desire. Don't make the characters wait all night if the Cernu'ba'donn is due to arrive in 4 hours, for instance.

Alternative Outcomes

Characters describe Samuel's body or the unusual clues found within his home. Aunt Anelie seems all the more interested in performing her rituals and meditations to learn the truth.

Characters describe other deaths related to the totems: Aunt Anelie tries to hurry the characters along – she seems worried that something might be terribly wrong. A Sense Motive check (DC 20) does

not detect anything nefarious in her demeanor, just that she is scared and wants to be alone.

Characters suggest that the totems have something to do with the deaths: Aunt Anelie admits that this is possible, but that she must perform her rituals and meditations to be sure. If it is the case, she admits that time is of the essence to prevent more murders. She further adds that destroying the totems should end the threat, but is surprised that they are powerful enough to cause so much damage. She is unsure how the ritual that she performs on the totems could imbue them with that much power.

Characters admit that they have been "attacked" by one (or more) of the totems: Aunt Anelie will act completely surprised and a bit frightened; she will ask the characters to tell her in precise detail about the incident(s) and then tell them that they must leave, or they might be in danger. She whispers for them to come back when she is finished with her rituals and meditations and she will have additional information for them.

The Deadpit

If the characters elect to descend into the local Deadpit in search of clues about Sallous Viss, they soon find themselves thrust into a nightmarish landscape littered with the corpses of Penance's dead. A massive chasm measuring roughly 500 yards in circumference, located half within a canton and half within the wrack and covered by a thin layer of rebuilt city, this Deadpit spirals deep into the Undercity in a slowly collapsing combination of rope bridges and tunnels. Its walls and pathways are literally honeycombed with slowly decaying bodies. Deadpits are not Penance's top spots to visit.

Visiting the Deadpit it should make a striking and lasting impression upon the characters. Read the following to the players:

Long before you reach its edge, the foul stench of the Deadpit reaches out to smother you. The thick, nauseating smell seems palpable all around you, making you gag involuntarily and your eyes stream with bitter tears. Echoing cries of mourners, their voices magnified and carried aloft by the natural, giant amplifier in which they tread, reach your ears, sounding more like the unholy wailing of banshees or spirits than the living. The sounds drift past you from below and seem to hover near the ceiling, seeking egress into the city above.

Your hear the creaking of ropes as you near the edge and notice several grief stricken figures clothed in ragged, dark colored robes climbing the ancient, rickety rope and bone bridges out of

Things To Do In Penance When You're Dead

There's plenty of room in Penance, but most of it's in the wrong places: either in the lost Undercity or out in the wrack. Truly accessible space is constantly fought over by the bloodlords and their teeming masses, and therefore there's little room for the dead. Unless, of course, you can pay.

At the high end of the burial spectrum, the wealthy may have access to their church's mausoleums or to family burial chambers on their own property. At the lowest end are the folk who have to simply cart their loved ones' bodies to the edge of the plateau and dump them. Finally, most folk just pay the handful of silver it takes to have the bodies destroyed at the local crematorium. After all, this is the Forge, where beings focus on being alive, not being dead.

But there are those few aberrations in society who feel that they have to hang on to their loved ones and can't bear to see them go hurtling over the edge of the plateau, nor consumed by fire. Yet they can't afford to inter the bodies in outrageously expensive burial chambers, nor will most bloodlords allow bodies to be kept on private property nor amassed in any business or public area without appropriate permits . . . to do so would be to invite plague, poor sanitary conditions, and the occasional undead menace.

So those who believe strongly in burial are forced to go underground, so to speak. Throughout Penance there are Deadpits, pieces of the Undercity that are recently covered over but that the local bloodlord hasn't noticed yet or can't be bothered to patrol. They are, as with any part of the Undercity, filled with dangerous creatures, hard to navigate, and unstable. But it is there that the desperate go to bury their dead. Some say these Deadpits are only visited by those who are so miserable at losing their loved ones that they wish to join them; there are plenty of predators in such places, both living and dead. Others say that the bloodlords know about them, but keep them open as a source for corpses should they ever have need of an undead army.

the mammoth chasm now before you. Some are well-armed and look as if ready for trouble; others wear little more than rags. As they pass you, looking like strange, pale faced, and tattered black birds, you notice that one of them holds something familiar – one of the beetle-eyed totems said to be crafted by Aunt Anelie. A shiver runs down your spine, but you cannot tell if it is due to the glassy-eyed stare of the totem or the cold draft that has begun to stir in the Undercity about you.

The Deadpit: Overview

The Deadpit is a spiderweb of rope bridges, hastily and haphazardly strung together and patched over the years with whatever was handy at the time. Merely walking along these uneven, angled, and wobbly rope passageways requires frequent Balance checks (DC 15) and occasional mysterious gusts of wind from below will force characters on them to make Reflex saves (DC 20) or fall off.

Many of these bridges are well known by the locals to be thoroughly unstable, and yet no one will attempt to remove the unstable parts, for fear of bringing the entire interconnected tangle down upon their heads; they simply stay away from the unsound parts, taking circuitous paths to get where they need

to go. Detecting these unsteady portions requires a Spot check (DC 25), Search check (DC 15), or a Knowledge (Architecture) check (DC 15). Some GMs may elect to allow a Rope Use check (DC 15) as well to discern this information.

This knot of rope bridges exists for the sole purpose of providing a means to traverse the gulf of space between the hedging walls of the Deadpit itself, wherein the dead are interred. Their paths are occasionally interrupted and added to by debris and collapsed tunnels falling in from above, creating an unstable and confusing web. Most parties will simply elect to fly, but even then the bridges and tunnels will create obstacles and obscure their view, making travel difficult.

Tombs of various sizes, shapes, and types mar the sides of the Deadpit as far down as the eye can see. They range from well-crafted stone coffins set into deep depressions to crudely preserved bodies placed into simple, shallow holes. Thousands of creatures, from minor undead to gigantic vermin, scuttle about the walls in search of flesh whether living or dead.

Countless sets of wooden stairs and platforms, ropes, rope ladders and hanging scaffolds line the stone walls like vines on a rotten tree, obviously used

to aid in the creation process of these tombs. There are several locations scored deep into the rock walls where weary mourners can stop their journey to the bottom of the Deadpit, sit and rest for a while, and then continue. Many of these spots, as well, contain tunnels and passageways that wind back into the walls of the Deadpit, where new tombs are formed as well as into the pathways of the Undercity.

While the characters are exploring the Deadpit, the opportunities for encounters are plentiful. The high-level parties that this adventure is designed for will inevitably wade through most of the minor undead and scavengers here; simply describe those encounters in cinematic style, but do not let them pass by unnoticed. These hives of death are scattered throughout Penance, and the endless swarms of undead and dark creatures should promote a feeling of weariness, hopelessness, and a corrupt city being gnawed from the inside out. A few of the more challenging encounters below should be played out to give the PCs a chance to stretch their sword arms. Feel free to create appropriate backgrounds and specific settings for any such encounter.

GM Note: Fully 90% of the bodies the characters see within the Deadpit are host to Death's Bloom. GMs should see the entry in *Minions* for further details on this plant and its possible encounter and post-encounter applications.

Death's Bloom (varies): CR 1; hp1.

Deadpit Random Encounters

- Solitary advanced (12 HD) Allip
- 2-4 advanced (10 HD) Belkers
- 2-4 advanced (13 HD) Bodaks
- 2-5 advanced (9 HD) Carrion Crawlers
- Solitary advanced (12 HD) Choaker
- 7-12 advanced (10 HD) Cloakers
- 6-10 advanced (12 HD) Howlers
- 2-4 advanced (16 HD) Mohrgs
- 6-10 advanced (14 HD) Mummies
- 3 advanced (12 HD) Night Hags on advanced (10 HD) Nightmares
- Solitary advanced (12 HD) Black Pudding
- 6-11 advanced (9 HD) Shadows
- 6-15 advanced (6 HD) Skum
- 6-11 advanced (10 HD) Spectres
- 2-4 advanced (12 HD) Umber Hulks
- 12 Vampire Spawn
- 20 advanced (3 HD) Vargouilles
- 2-4 advanced (12 HD) Will-o'-Wisps
- 6-11 advanced (10 HD) Wraiths
- 2-5 colossal Zombies (at the bottom of the Deadpit)

The Search for Sallous

Cernu'ba'donn is watching the party via scrying and spies. If the characters have come this far, he worries that they may be clever enough to figure out his entire plan and prevent it. Once they investigate Sallous' body it will be a short jump to realizing that his spirit is trapped in the totem. Therefore, he has arranged for a surprise for the characters.

Even with directions from Samuel's friends, the characters soon find that it is a difficult task navigating the bewildering, three dimensional maze created by the Deadpit's rope bridges and tunnels. Further, since the vast majority of all who come here either do not plan to return (because they are dead) or they already know where the body they seek is interred (because they placed it there), there is little need for any sort of guide or overseer. Even with location and divination spells, it will be difficult to figure out how to choose the right path to take. That's where Oed comes in.

Oed is an old, leprous faust that lives within the Deadpit. He makes his living preying on the weak and the grief stricken, demanding "taxes" of those that come here to bury their dead before he allows them to pass unhindered. Mostly a creature of bluff and talk, Oed rarely harms anyone, but only because there is little need to do so. In this case, however, Oed is being well paid by Cernu'ba'donn to make sure the characters never find the body . . . and to ensure that the characters' bodies are never found, either. He knows that he can't take the party in a direct fight, but he knows the Deadpit better than any living creature. He plans to offer his services as a guide and collapse a large section of tunnel or rubble on the party when they least expect it, then finish off the survivors. Assume that he can lead the party into a collapsible area that is equivalent to a Crushing Wall Trap, which he will set off at the beginning of his ambush.

Trap: CR 10; no attack roll necessary (20d6); Reflex save (DC 20) avoids if in the front or back of the party; Search (DC 20); Disable Device (DC 25); Rafters of 3rd level or higher, as well as dwarves with at least 5 ranks in Knowledge (engineering) or anyone else with at least 8 ranks in Knowledge (engineering) may notice the trap with a Spot check (DC 30).

Let the party wander for a few hours, and deal with an encounter or two before encountering Oed. He will offer his services in exchange for magical items or scrolls (he does not want to be burdened with coins) worth at least 2,000 gp; the party will be able to haggle him down to 1,000 gp. Without Oed's assistance, the faust will be happy to point out, the search for Sallous' body could easily take up to 3d4 days.

Oed: Veiled Faust Rog9/Rafter3/ Assassin3, hp 80.

Whether or not they take Oed up on his “business proposition” or not, he will attempt to ambush them at some point during the search for the body. Assuming he fails, the party will eventually dig its way through a dizzying numbers of rotting corpses, ancient skeletons, silent tombs and slithering monstrosities to the final resting place of Sallous Viss. Both the description of the dead man and his burial place exactly match that given to the characters by Samuel Viss’ neighbors and all clues indicate that the fellow has not, in any way imaginable, recently been up and about killing folks. From the state of the body’s decomposition, it is apparent that Sallous has been dead for several years and he could not have been responsible, corporeally at least, for his brother’s death. Because his soul is bound, no form of communication or resurrection of Sallous is possible. Divination spells will reveal relevant information as to the location of the soul, and how it got there, as a GM determines appropriate.

A SLEW OF SWARMS

The day after the investigation begins with Samuel’s strange death, the characters should learn of some additional and equally disturbing deaths in the area. The occurrences of these subsequent deaths are completely optional, but it would be advisable to run at least one of the following scenarios in order to reinforce the clues gained earlier in the investigation, to drive home the horrific nature of these deaths and the individual orchestrating them, and to heighten the senses of fear and trepidation hopefully imparted upon the PCs. By this point in the adventure, much of what the characters have learned might still seem mostly happenstance and haphazard; these encounters can be used to help connect the dots, so to speak.

While it is perfectly viable for GMs to run all of these scenarios, they should keep in mind that this adventure’s pacing and its mood of slowly building suspense is crucial to its overall “creepiness”. With that in mind, GMs should strive to not bog their characters down with too much tedious investigation during play if they notice that the overall feel of the session is suffering. From this point on in the adventure, GMs are given complete leeway to determine which skills the PCs need to use and what DCs they must meet in order to gain required information; if the PCs are on the “right track,” there’s no need to give them additional help. If they don’t seem to be making the connections, however, make sure to ask for skill checks that the characters can succeed at. After all, Cernu’ba’donn is causing

the murders, and he wants the characters to follow his trail so his plan can come to fruition. For ease, a “Clue Summary” is provided at the end of each murder scene entry, so that GMs can have a checklist of sorts to make sure that characters are hopefully getting all of the required pieces of the puzzle.

THE SECOND MURDER

Dymara Stonebreath, a barked dwarf, is found dead, her mouth, nose and throat nearly ripped to shreds by her own bloody fingers. Dymara recently lost a co-worker, another dwarf by the name of Colys Longbeard in a freak mining accident; she also had visited Aunt Anelie within the last three months with the purpose of obtaining one of her totems.

Her death was actually caused by a massive swarm of insects flooding down her nose and mouth, suffocating her. The bailiffs, however, are calling this death a “freakish suicide”. Telltale signs of the actual reason for her death can be located by sharp-eyed PCs – crushed and blood-soaked insects can be discovered lining her swollen and bloody esophagus and nasal passages and the floor all around the dwarf’s corpse is marred by hundreds of small “greasy spots”. Apparently, the feisty dwarven lass managed to squish a large portion of her attackers before they killed her, but the devil-called vermin consumed their own dead before departing the scene. The totem in at this scene hangs above the Dymara’s doorway, facing inward, looking over the scene with its cold, beetle-shell eyes.

Clue Summary: Obviously, the connection to Aunt Anelie and the totem should be noted by the PCs, however, the presence of the crushed insects within Dymara’s throat and nose as well as the “greasy spots” at this murder scene should strengthen the initial suspicion spawned by the “insect parts” found around and underneath the skeleton of Samuel Viss or in the other murders.

THE THIRD MURDER

Gayomard of the Gray Quill, a quiet, bookish human sorcerer is found burned to a crisp in his own home. Several years ago, Gayomard’s parents passed away (of natural causes) and to alleviate his grief, he purchased two totems from Aunt Anelie. Having forgotten about the totems long ago, Gayomard was taken totally by surprise when two massive insect swarms descended upon him from his closet (where the totems were stored). Reacting instinctively, Gayomard tried to destroy his attackers with a burning hands spell, and set his book- and scroll-filled house ablaze as a result.

The insects that were not incinerated in the initial blast attacked the sorcerer, who fell victim to a *hold*

person cast by Cernu'ba'donn through one of the totems, leaving his half-eaten and burnt corpse standing like an ash statue amongst the smoking ruins of his home. His face is frozen in a horrific charred mask of fear and his arms are raised as if blocking an unseen attacker.

The totems were completely undamaged by the flames despite being in the midst of the fire. This should be an initial hint to the PCs that they will need to research other methods if they wish to destroy the totems. In fact, any damage-dealing or destructive divine spell cast by a non-evil spellcaster will affect the totems, from as lowly as a *shatter* or *sound burst* to as dramatic as a *flame strike*.

Clue Summary: Again, the link to Aunt Anelie and her totems should be strengthened at this murder scene. In fact, it should be even further emphasized by the fact that the only thing that was unscathed by the blaze was the totems. While the fire at this scene removed all traces of the insects, it is fairly obvious that fire alone was not responsible for all of the damage caused to Gayomard's corpse. Further, the evidence of some form of spell casting (as the *hold person* spell will remain for some time until its duration lapses) should add an entirely new and bewildering aspect to the investigation.

The Fourth Murder

The horrible scene at Lady Kumare's home is enough to shatter the heart of even the most cold-blooded stone giant. Lady Kumare, a dover noble well known in and around the city of Penance, is found dead in the same room as her infant child. The mother appears untouched, but the child is little more than a desiccated shell, drained of all fluids and internal organs.

Both deaths were caused by an *insect swarm* cast by Cernu'ba'donn, but only one was in a direct fashion, the other was completely unexpected and indirect. A swarm of spiders (as well as other insects that feed primarily upon the bodily liquids of their prey) descended upon the newborn, drawing all of her precious fluids from her as she slept. The foul creatures were long gone by the time the mother awoke from her nightly slumber and came in to check on the child. Seeing her baby in this truly dreadful state, Lady Kumare died instantly, her heart shocked into silence and stillness.

Lady Kumare had recently lost one of her two twins in childbirth; to ease both her and the perceived suffering of her baby girl, she purchased nearly a score of totems from Aunt Anelie and hung them in the child's room over her crib. Of special note with this particular murder, an Ort witness named Dolyup, who resides beneath the Kumare residence, in the Undercity, noted a frighteningly

inordinate number of huge spiders dropping out of the ceiling, and scurrying down the walls sometime in the wee hours of the morning.

Clue Summary: The presence of several totems at this murder scene should be a clarion call to the characters to pay a visit to Aunt Anelie, if they have not already done so by this point. Additionally, characters examining the corpse of the child may note the numerous tiny welts from the spider bites.

Tying Up Loose Ends

There are, of course, several spells or magical devices the characters could use during the course of the investigation to speed things along considerably. Spells like *speak with dead* or *resurrection* could dramatically shorten the amount of investigation required by the characters. If the PCs decide to raise Samuel or any of the other victims from the dead, be sure to have them give an account in agonizing detail of their painful death.

There is little doubt that the ranting of a recently deceased man about being eaten alive by a mass of swarming bugs will do little more than reinforce and supplement the skin-shivering eeriness required for the adventure. Even if the victims (or their bodies) are somehow spoken with, there is little more information that they can give the characters than the characters can discover for themselves by gathering and piecing together all of the various clues left for them.

One important note, however, is that due to both the mysterious ritual used to bind an individual to a totem and the infernal, foul magics used by Cernu'ba'donn to then bond all of the totems together, spells such as *raise dead* and *resurrection* are ineffective on individuals bound to the totems (such as Sallous, Gayomard's parents, etc).

The Plot Thickens

Once GMs feel that the characters have sufficiently covered the bases and are ready to propel them into the next phase of the adventure, they should either hear from (or initially visit) Aunt Anelie. If the PCs are making a return trip to the aged woman, then please proceed with this encounter. However, if this is their first meeting with Aunt Anelie, the encounter should play out as presented previously.

Once the characters return to Aunt Anelie's residence, they are met with something wholly unexpected - Aunt Anelie is dead, lying half eaten in a pool of her own blood and entrails. Upon their entry, read the following aloud:

The all-too-familiar, tangy scent of blood assails your nostrils as you shove open the door. Something impedes the door's ability to open, something piled on the far side, but you finally heave it inward. Your mind reels in horror and disgust as you see what preventing the door from opening fully – Aunt Anelie's body, half consumed, lying in a pool of her own viscera and lifeblood. Her still dead eyes stare up at you and you notice that a large hunk of her scalp is bare and bloody; her blood and organs stick to your feet...

Other than this horrific and nauseating detail, the tiny hovel is precisely as it was upon their earlier visit except that the beetles are all gone. Search checks will reveal that large portions of the beetles lost antennae, legs, and other portions of their anatomies escaping from their custom made cages. A Knowledge (Nature) check can confirm any suspicions that this is abnormal behavior for insects of any kind.

Anyone paying particular attention to what is left of Aunt Anelie's body may make a Search check to note two perplexing details: in her left hand, Aunt Anelie has a huge mass of hair torn from her own head and her right hand, stained dark brown with dried and spattered blood, lies beside three letters badly scrawled on the floor. A Decipher Script check is required to make out the letters, which are written together in the form of a word, are "lum". Putting these two clues together provides not only the location of some valuable information, but also the word which allows one to access its hidden location – "heirloom".

If the characters spoke at any length with Aunt Anelie previously then they will likely deduce that her heirloom cupboard is the source of the information. The cupboard itself is magical (mostly protective spells against age, wear, and damage) and trapped against any not of Anelie's bloodline with a *forbiddance* spell; all that is needed to bypass the spell (if it is not disabled) is speaking the word "heirloom" just before opening it.

Trap: CR 10; *Greater Glyph of Warding: forbiddance*; only those of chaotic neutral alignment may access the cupboard or affect its contents; caster level 16.

Once the characters gain access to the cupboard, they find several ancient and well kept books, all dealing with subjects pertaining to herbal remedies, the duties of midwives, spiritual growth through the administration of potions and poultices, as well as a book of rituals which claim to bleed away or infuse certain emotions into individuals. While it is apparent that the books are normally kept neatly stored, they are all scattered hither and yon without any rhyme or reason. The ritual book lies atop the

haphazard pile and a Search check within this well read and dog-eared book will reveal a hastily scrawled note from Aunt Anelie in the inside cover. A Decipher Script check is required to read it and confirms that it was recently written. The note contains the following message:

far worse than I had feared...sacred mothers help me...if I would have only known, I would never have given so many...the totems are a doorway to evil and death...please forgive me sacred mothers, I only wanted to help...destroying the totems the only way to free the souls and close his doorway...but the doorway is open...its already open....

why...why...why...why was I such a fool??? my dear sacred mothers, why...why did I not see? why did I give so many?? what has IT done...what has it done to them...what has it done to my poor people, my totems, my beetles...my...beetles....sacred mothers...my beetles....

To any reading the message, judging from the handwriting, it is apparent that the message ended abruptly. Of course, Anelie's understanding of the text is incomplete. Characters that read the tome and use appropriate bardic lore checks, divination spells, or Knowledge (arcana) checks will realize that destroying the totems will not actually free the souls, but will destroy them completely. They will also learn, if given time, several alternatives that can be used to deal with the menace.

But that will have to wait, for while the characters are reading the note from Aunt Anelie, Cernu'ba'donn, through one of the dozen totems hanging from her ceiling, uses *create undead* to animate the aged matron's half-eaten body as an advanced (10 HD) wraith. Cernu'ba'donn then casts the following spells on the body, hopefully without the PCs becoming aware of it: *magic circle against good*, *improved invisibility*, *unholy aura* and *desecrate*. The wraith then attacks, gaining surprise on the unsuspecting characters.

Once combat is joined, the wraith that was once Aunt Anelie continues to attack until totally destroyed and Cernu'ba'donn continues to throw spells each round, each time alternating from which totem the spell originates.

Totem (12): CR 2, immune to most normal attacks and spells, against divine spells of 2nd level or higher they have a hardness of 2 and 4 hp.

Tactics: Cernu'ba'donn can only use one totem at a time for focusing his spell-like abilities. However, he can (and does) move his focus from totem to totem as a free action, and will use a different totem every round. His tactics at this point vary; if he believes the characters will take Aunt Anelie's note at face value and begin hunting down

and destroying totems, he will attack them to harm but not to kill (or at least not kill all of them), simply providing incentive for them to carry on and having a bit of fun as well. If, on the other hand, the characters seem intent of scrutinizing the book and doing further research, he will attack with all of his available resources. He will start off with a *creeping doom* spell in hopes of killing the characters and destroying all evidence that way. After that, he will focus on various damage causing abilities like *summon swarm* in conjunction with *hold person*. He will focus his strongest efforts on the character holding the book that contains the ritual. If the characters create a lasting flame source with one of their spells, he will immediately use *pyrotechnics* to attempt to destroy the book. If the characters cannot figure out how to destroy the totems or refuse to do so, escape is always an option: Cernu'ba'donn cannot harm them after they move beyond the range of his spells.

GM Note: It is completely conceivable that the characters are unable to piece together the puzzle left for them by the dying Aunt Anelie. If this is the case, then an alternate method for delivering the same information would be to allow the characters to perform a Search check of her hovel. Success in this search reveals a secret compartment located beneath one of the floorboards; within this compartment are two scrolls, with the following spells: *protection from evil* x 2, *aid*, *holy aura*, *mass heal*, *speak with dead* x 2, *consecrate*. With these scrolls in hand, they should be able to speak with the body of Aunt Anelie, which can tell them the same information (and possibly a little more) as that to be gleaned from the cupboard.

Alternatively, some GMs may wish for the characters to unlock the puzzle of the cupboard and find the scrolls, which is perfectly acceptable as well.

Anelie's Tomes

It will take a character an entire day to find the relevant information within Aunt Anelie's family tomes. They contain a maddening variety of herbal cures, folklore, spellcasting rituals, and family history. A Knowledge (religion) or Knowledge (arcana) check (DC 25) will reveal how the basic totem-binding ritual works and the consequences to the souls trapped within if the totems are destroyed. It will additionally take a Knowledge (planes) or bardic lore check (DC 30) to unearth the truth behind the ritual as it is explained in the adventure introduction. Finally, characters may try to find an alternative to the two options presented. Difficult Knowledge checks (DC 35) on the appropriate subjects, bardic lore checks,

and powerful divinations will reveal that there are indeed two less heinous but equally dangerous options.

The first, and probably safest option for the characters but most immediately dangerous for the citizens of Penance, is to use the link between the totems and Cernu'ba'donn to draw him and his fortress into the city of Penance into a canton of their choosing. The ritual requires both an arcane caster and a divine caster, each of which must devote a 7th level spell slot to the ritual. It has a preparation time of 1 day and a casting time of 1 hour. If they were to choose a canton that is currently held by a living bloodlord, Cernu'ba'donn would have to overcome that bloodlord by force of arms to gain bloodlord status and come under the protective laws of the Queen. Meanwhile, the adventurers and whatever allies they could muster might be able to destroy the pit fiend. The down side to this option is that Cernu'ba'donn would feel the ritual pulling him to Forge as soon as it began, and would perform a counter-ritual that would drag his fortress and thousands of his minions along with him to the Forge. Even if an army were amassed to fight those minions, the lives of thousands of everyday citizens would probably be swept up in the conflict.

The second option, which would be the most dangerous for the PCs but the least dangerous for their friends and fellow residents of Penance, would be to use the link between the totems and Cernu'ba'donn to travel to his plane and kill there. They would be on his home turf and in an alien environment where magic and the laws of reality might not exist the way they expect . . . but there would be no collateral damage to innocents, and they would have the advantage of surprise. The travel ritual also requires a day of preparation and 1 hour to cast, though it only requires 6th level spell slots from both an arcane and a divine caster.

Both options use the totems as a material component, and must therefore be done within 50' of one of the totems. GMs should use their discretion when determining how Cernu'ba'donn would respond to the rituals they are using, what sorts of offensive spells he might cast to disrupt them, if any, and what effect the PC's defenses (placing the totem in a secure container, making sure it is silenced or protected from scrying, surrounding it with an antimagic field, etc.) would have on his ability to do so.

The Fires of Damnation

During the time that the characters have conducted their investigation, a similar one has been underway, conducted by the tyrannical and haughty inquisitor



New from Bastion Press

BAS-1013; July 14th

Torn Asunder: Critical Hits provides a wealth of information for those seeking to infuse their campaigns with a more realistic combat system that provides devastating combat possibilities. Don't just beat your opponents into submission, tear them limb from limb!

Requires the use of the *Dungeons & Dragons Player's Handbook*, 3.5 Edition, as published by Wizards of the Coast.



BAS-1014; August

Oathbound: Arena represents a new entry point into the *Oathbound* campaign world. Far from the bustling city streets of the city of Penance, heroes find themselves in a sea of red sand, where blood-thirsty Warlords lead armies as they quest for gold and power.

Requires the use of the *Dungeons & Dragons Player's Handbook*, 3.5 Edition, as published by Wizards of the Coast.

For visitors to the Forge, arriving has always been far easier than returning home. But the moment Lyrien Ves'tiral is ripped unwillingly from his homeland – from the woman he has pledged to protect – and deposited in this strange, rich tapestry of a world, he intends to escape. The only problem is, someone in the Forge has other plans for him.

Forged is the first novel for the *Oathbound* setting, unveiling a tableau of the domains of the Forge that is rich as well as vast. Discover this unique setting and its enigmatic inhabitants through the eyes of a traveler struggling to find both himself and his way home – and being forever changed by it.



BAS-9000; July



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Dalmott Raa. Dalmott Raa is a severely thin picker, with a neck that seems far too long for his skinny frame and an odd-looking, oval shaped head (even for a picker). Small, beady eyes, a thin, and a slit for a mouth complete his visage. One would think that an individual that was so unfortunate looking could have little long lasting effect on people. Sadly, however, this is not the case.

The truly evil picker exudes some sort of perverted and powerful charisma from his very pores, drawing simple-minded people to his side like moths to a flame. He is a master of doublespeak and fabrication and is somehow able to twist every situation to his favor. Dalmott was a rogue and a scoundrel for a long time, haunting Penance's streets, stripping those he encountered of their valuables, their pride, and often much more. That was, at least, until Dalmott found religion.

Dalmott's chosen patron is Hillengall, Lord of Peaks and Valleys. The god's teachings consist of a bewildering collection of teachings on fate, punishment, and rewards, all of which Dalmott use to turn any situation to his benefit. Dalmott saw immediately that a high-ranking position within the church and an unquestioning flock of his own was precisely what he needed to set himself up for life. In no time at all, Dalmott had just that: a temple of his own creation. He became its first and foremost inquisitor, converting all available souls for their own good.

Dalmott's motivations are many: wealth, glory, power, and in fact a true devotion to his deity; granted, that devotion exists merely in the hopes that he himself will be rewarded, but it is earnest nonetheless. So when he heard the tales of the totem murders, he quickly grasped at them for many reasons. On the one hand he wishes to retain his power of his flock, and knows that it wanes without some impending "valley" or threat to keep them afraid. On the other, he sees a true threat to his flock from these grisly attacks and entertains images of himself as the savior of his people from the murders. Finally, he believes that this may be a test from Hillengall and wishes to face it head-on.

Through his contacts and his clergy, Dalmott learned that the totems were somehow involved with the deaths. He was quick to make the logical connections and denounce the items, calling them the work of evil and dark powers. It was not long before the temple filled with the rumblings of a riot. Dalmott now leads his fanatical followers from house to house, calling for all totems "to be cast into brimstone and flame and purged from the face of the Forge forever more!" He and his followers will have already collected several dozen of the totems by the time the PCs hear of the mob.

The mob and characters may interact in any number of ways, depending on the approach the characters have decided to take. If they are researching the totems, the mob will surround the library or establishment the characters are in and demand that they turn over any writings on the material. If they already plan to destroy the totems, the mob will demand that the characters help them, and accuse the characters of collecting them for their own nefarious purposes. If the characters have spread the word that the totems must not be destroyed, the mob will opine that the characters are the evil behind them and must be killed or tortured. Finally, if the characters are performing the ritual to bring the pit fiend into the forge or to travel there themselves, the mob will assault them beginning in the first hour to attempt to stop it.

Dalmott Raa: Foul Picker, Rog2/Clr4/Inquisitor10, CR 16, hp: 60.

Dalmott's Lieutenants: 10 4th lvl Clerics of Hillengall

Dalmott's Mob: 120 1st level commoners

Development: Dalmott already has the crowd in a state of enrapture. He has used all of his Inquisitor prestige class abilities (see *Oathbound*, p. 52) to "program" his mob toward violent ends, including creating martyrs.

Facing the Devil

The characters' choices throughout the adventure will inevitably lead them to an ultimate decision regarding the totems and Cernu'ba'donn. Their choices may lead to them facing the devil himself, something he does not desire but is prepared to deal with, or they might actually help the pit fiend in his designs and end up facing only a minor threat as their "reward."

Conclusion 1: Playing into the Devil's Hands

Path A: Inaction

Whether the characters actively prevent the totems from being destroyed or simply do not finish their investigation in time, some of the totems survive. Cernu'ba'donn's ritual reaches completion, and he teleports into the Forge on the 666th hour since the bonding of the 1,000th soul. There is neither fanfare nor warning associated with the event, and no scrying or divination spell will reveal the location of the fiend. However, sometime after the teleportation, the characters will begin hearing rumors of attacks and even assassination attempts by unknown de-

monic assailants. Soon after they will be attacked themselves by the creatures: a group of Totembound (see NPC statistics), 1 for each PC, sent by Cernu'ba'donn. The attack will occur while the characters are resting, if possible; if not, while they are weakened from a previous fight. The encounter is a punishment from Cernu'ba'donn for foiling his optimal plan and a "reward" for assisting in his secondary one. The characters have proven themselves powerful, capable, and most importantly, easily manipulated. Such a group would make ideal servants for a devil. It is all the warning they will receive that Cernu'ba'donn has entered the Forge and may have plans for them . . .

Path B: Destruction

If the characters decide to round up and destroy all of the totems, or simply do not prevent Dalmott from doing so, you may "fast forward" through the actual destruction process. If the PCs are doing it, describe the time-consuming, tiring, and down-to-the-last-minute challenge in making sure they are all accounted for, fighting off Cernu'ba'donn's spells and attacks (half-hearted ones, of course, though the PCs would not know that) from the totems themselves, and finally destroying the last hoard of them en masse. Describe the appropriate howling of pain as the souls are destroyed, the supposed angry raving from Cernu'ba'donn (Sense Motive checks might be appropriate), the flash of bright light as the magic is released . . . and then silence. Let the characters rejoice in their success for several moments. Then, tell them they hear screams . . . and laughter.

Assuming the PCs are in Penance at the time, they will be able to see Cernu'ba'donn's hive-like fortress quite clearly, towering over the ruins of the nearest unclaimed canton. Swarms of devils already circle above the skies about it, creating an impenetrable wall of sentries. Most importantly, of course, are the humanoid figures flying, charging, and chewing their way outward from the canton in a gigantic ring of death. They are the after-effects of the ritual, the remains of the souls that were destroyed along with the totems. And they are angry. While Cernu'ba'donn and his devils are official citizens of Penance and will remain safely law-abiding in their new canton, the Totembound are soulless abyssal monstrosities that are out of his control, constructs more than anything else, that plan to reave, rape, and kill anything in their way. For some reason, large bands of them seem particularly interested in the characters. The PCs will have one round to prepare before the wave of Totembound hits them; assume that they face a new group (1 for each PC) every minute until they have faced 5 such groups or they escape. Meanwhile, the other 900-odd Totembound

kill thousands and lay waste to countless cantons throughout Penance.

Bloodlords and citizens throughout Penance will swear vengeance upon the new devil bloodlord, but with their armies and probably champions destroyed by the Totembound attack, most will be in no position to challenge him for some time. Neither will appealing to the Queen accomplish much, as he has broken none of her laws. Unable to take out their grief and anger on the devil himself, who knows what would happen if the PCs were linked to the devil's arrival . . .

Conclusion 2: Refusing to Play the Game

Path A: Drawing the Devil

The characters may decide that they need to stop the pit fiend's plans, but that they cannot do so on their own. In this case, summoning the devil to the Forge in a place of their choosing is probably the best option. The only limitation to the location is that it must be somewhere within the city of Penance (because Penance was the location of the original binding of the souls). It is up to the characters to choose whether it be somewhere in the Undercity, in the wrack, or even in an occupied canton; if the latter, it is also up to the character whether or not to inform the bloodlord that Cernu'ba'donn is coming. Wherever they choose, the characters must spend both the full day of preparation and the full hour of casting in that location.

Once the summoning is complete, read the following (with changes as necessary depending on location):

As the dark ritual is completed, a single drop of blood runs out of the totem before you. When it hits the ground, it seems to spread out not as blood, but a small growth of veins. The veins grow at a phenomenal pace, spreading outward and taking root in the ground as a small round pod starts to emerge from their center. Abruptly, the pod bursts forth in size. While the truth is that it is growing more rapidly than is physically possible, you feel instead as if you are being rushed forward toward an immense sphere that has always been here, waiting for some threshold to be crossed. Everything surrounding it is battered and destroyed as the sphere grows.

The characters need to make a Reflex save (DC 20) to avoid being smashed between the pod and their surroundings (such as wagons, walls, and other structures) as the pod grows to enormous

proportions. Anyone failing takes 10d6 points of bludgeoning damage, -1d6 for every 10 feet away from the totem they were when the ritual was completed.

As suddenly as it began, the pod stops growing after it reaches a towering height. Before you is a sphere nearly 200 feet in height floating above the ground, its bulk apparently supported by the vein-like growths reaching up to it from the ground below. The sphere's surface is hive-like, filled with hundreds of swollen pustules. Upon closer examination, it can be seen that within each of the inflamed growths a humanoid being writhes, trapped.

Neighboring buildings lie demolished, as crowds of people flee through the streets to avoid this horrific, nightmarish structure.

Because of his prior warning, Cernu'ba'donn will have surrounded his fortress with thousands of his minions. Assume that the characters have full concealment from the remains of whatever structures were destroyed in the pod's growth. From their hiding spot they will see a full retinue of devils, everything from lemurs to gelugons, roaming the land and air within a hundred yard radius around the fortress. What occurs next depends on the plans the characters have made. If they've mustered allies to help them fight the pit fiend, assume an all-out battle begins between the characters' allies and the devils. The fight should allow the characters to proceed unseen to Cernu'ba'donn's sphere. When they get there, proceed to Entering the Hive, below.

Path B: Paying the Devil his Due

If the characters use the ritual to travel to Cernu'ba'donn's plane, they will arrive just outside the fiend's lair. From the moment they arrive, they will have exactly ten minutes before they are pulled back by the strong bindings that the Forge has upon all who dwell there. The following alterations to magic will be in effect:

- All spells with the good, healing, and chaos descriptor are cast at a -2 caster level.
- Spontaneous healing spells (converting other spells to healing spells) require a Concentration check (DC 30).
- All chaotic or good beings take 1 point of negative energy damage each round they are on the plane; beings that are both chaotic and good take 2 points of negative energy damage each round.

For each Knowledge (planes) check (DC 25) the PCs make before traveling to the plane, they will learn of one effect, starting with the 10 minute time limit.

The PCs appear in a cleft in the ground, hidden from view of passing devils. Once they have a chance to orient themselves and take in the area around them, read the following:

You stand in a small depression in the middle of a vast landscape consisting of mounds of blood-red moss and small depressions like yours that resemble gigantic burst pustules on the flesh of the land. The ground itself is comprised of a yielding substance that resembles flesh, blood, and plasma, though beneath that you can hear and feel the cracking of what sounds like piles of insect exoskeletons. The sky is a sickly yellow with a spattering of gray storm clouds that appear in the shapes of shifting faces caught in the throes of pure agony. In the far distance, you see hordes of pallid, pathetic creatures consuming what limbs, heads, and organs they can tear from their companions. The sounds of their feasting and their screams are all too clear.

Your destination is impossible to miss. The vast plain is broken only by a sphere nearly 200 feet in height, floating above the ground, apparently supported by vein-like growths reaching up to it from the ground below. The sphere's surface is hive-like, with hundreds of swollen pustules filling its surface. It appears there is a humanoid being trapped inside each of the inflamed growths.

If the characters keep to the cover of the mounds of moss and the depressions, as well as take at least minor measures to disguise themselves (cover themselves in blood or moss to blend in, use invisibility or disguise spells, etc) they should be able to get to the sphere undetected. If they are otherwise brazen or idiotic, they will manage to attract the attention of the devils and destroy their only advantage in this situation: surprise. In such a case, let the characters get within 200 feet of the sphere through sheer luck and surprise before the devils are alerted. At that point, they will be assaulted by 4 cornugons, followed the next round by 2 gelugons and 2 erinyes, followed the next round by 4 hellcats and 4 barbazus. If they don't get the message that they are overmatched and need to get to the sphere immediately, feel free to overwhelm them with devils. Assuming they manage to reach the sphere, whether by sneaking or fighting their way through, proceed to Entering the Hive, below. If they were attacked in the process, Cernu'ba'donn and his minions will begin the combat with any possible preparatory spells already cast.

Final Battle

Entering the Hive

The characters can climb the veins that support the sphere (which contain flowing blood and pus) quite easily within just a few moments (Climb DC 15). Upon closer examination of the pustules lining the outside of the sphere, they will be able to see a humanoid in each one, their faces and bodies seemingly comprised of a riot of insects. The first one they encounter, assuming they start at the bottom, presses its face against the wall of its prison and says in a wailing voice of desperation, "Samuel!"

Canny PCs will realize that these are the souls that are bound to the totems, and this one in particular is Samuel's long-dead brother, Sallous. If the characters respond to the trapped soul, it will continue to rave madly at them until they call it by name. Once they've done so, they will be able to have an at least somewhat sane conversation with it. It will seem very intent on describing the decade of terror and pain it has endured and will constantly demand rescue. A Diplomacy check (DC 30) followed by an explanation that they are here to destroy its tormentor, Cernu'ba'donn, and avenge its brother Samuel, will calm the soul sufficiently that it will "invite" the characters through its pustule. While it cannot escape, it can allow others to pass through without Cernu'ba'donn being alerted.

This encounter tests the PCs' patience and wisdom. They will need to use up valuable time speaking to Sallous to enter the hive undetected; however, if they do not stop and speak with him, they will have to cut their way through his or another pustule to gain entrance. Doing so will pit them against the pustule's resident Totembound (see NPC statistics) as well as alert Cernu'ba'donn and his minions of the intruders and give them a full round to prepare for the assault.

Cutting through or piercing any of these pustules is a standard acting and is quite easy with any weapon. Opening a pustule will reveal an ovoid interior approximately 10 feet in diameter. The resident Totembound will immediately attack anyone attempting to gain entrance if they have not been invited. Although the Totembound attacks, it is apparent in what remains of its face that there is no malice, but merely demonic compulsion. These poor souls have no choice in what they are doing, but retain enough of their consciousness to suffer the horror of their condition and their actions.

Creatures: Totembound - CR 12, hp 144.

Tactics: The Totembound will first unleash its *insect swarm* attack. After that it will attack with its poisonous claws and bite focusing on a single

opponent at a time. The Totembound will not leave the pustule willingly. Cernu'ba'donn needs and binds them there to maintain his connection to the totems. Each one that is destroyed or removed weakens, but does not break, his connection with the Forge.

Development: Cernu'ba'donn will know the moment someone enters his lair - even the outer shell. He will immediately send his lemures and cornugons in that direction to meet them once they enter the inner sanctum. Cutting through the other side of the pustule to enter the inner sanctum is also easily accomplished as a standard action.

Inside the Hive

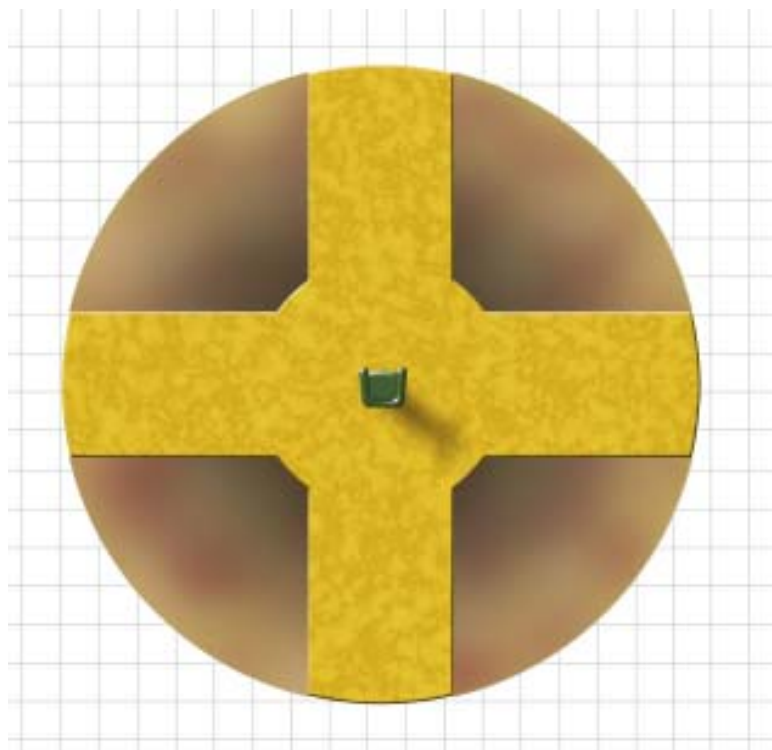
The interior of the sphere is open, vast, and dripping. The sphere here is somewhat less than 100 feet in radius, with the same swollen pustules lining the inside. Thick veins cover the skin of the interior, circulating blood up from a deep pool in the bottom of the sphere to the top, where it drips down in a constant crimson drizzle.

A web of walkways composed of bloody, rotted flesh lie horizontally on a fairly level access to meet in a center platform. Countless beetles, ants, centipedes, and other insects crawl through the fleshy pathways, darting in and out of blackened holes rotted and eaten into them. Reaching up from the pool of blood is a long shaft of the same porous flesh that pierces the center platform, and ends in a fleshy throne about 10 feet above the platform. Sitting upon the throne is the most purely evil being you've ever seen. Its bat-like wings folded about it like a cloak, covered in the dripping blood and crawling insects that are the lifeblood of this hellish plane, it stands suddenly and peers intently about it. Cernu'ba'donn knows that you're here.

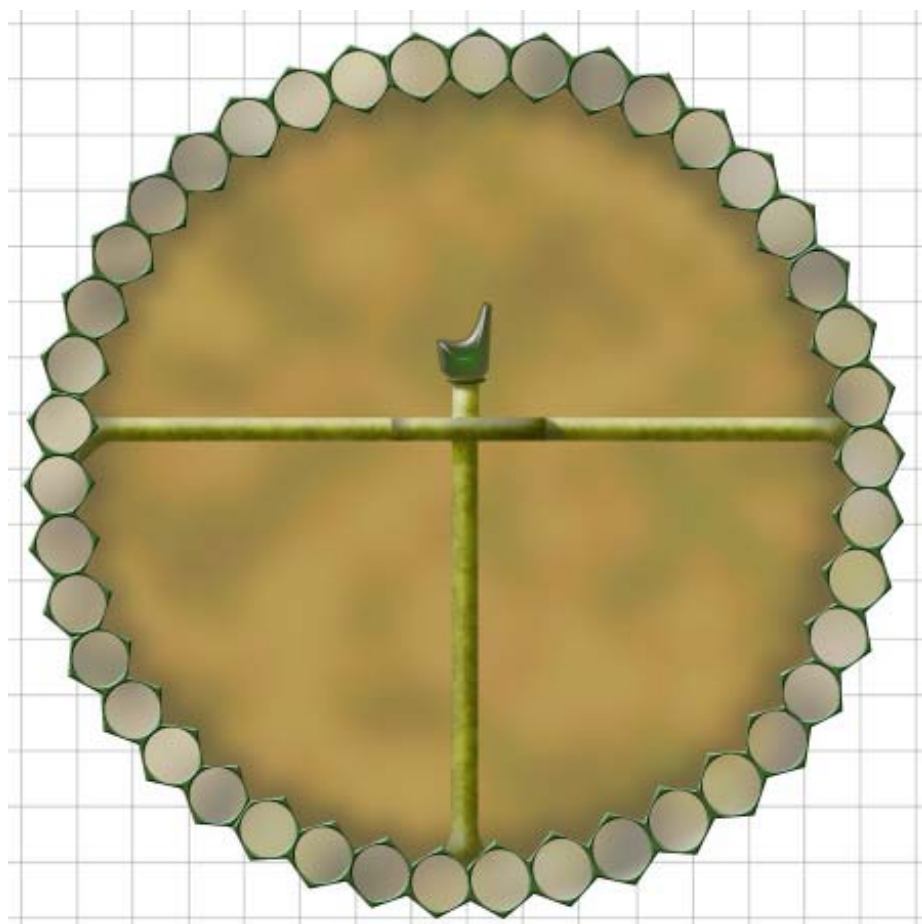
If the characters cut their way through one of the pustules, Cernu'ba'donn and his minions have taken whatever preparatory measures they can and will have moved towards the area the characters will enter from. If they negotiated their way through, the first three PCs that enter the inner sanctum will have free partial actions as a surprise round before Cernu'ba'donn and his minions realize they are there. The web-like walkways provide at least half cover to the surprised devils.

Due to the blood and the uneven surface of the walkways, moving at anything more than half speed on them requires a Balance check (DC 15 for moving across a slippery uneven floor - each move action requires a separate check). A successful check allows the character to move at normal speed. Attempting a charge or double move incurs a -5 penalty on the

Top View of the Hive



Side View of Hive



check. Failing by 4 or less means the character has used up that move action and has not gone anywhere. Failing by 5 to 9 means the character falls prone where she stood. Failing by more than that amount means the character has slipped off of the walkway and fallen to the pool of blood below. Thankfully, the bloody pool is not deep and the character can climb out quite easily; she will, however, have to deal with regaining her footing on the walkways while being attacked by a mob of lemures that gladly leap down to assault her. Climbing the sides of the sphere is fairly easy (DC 10) thanks to the abundance of thick veins to act as footholds and handholds.

Creatures: Cernu'ba'donn is lounging inside the sphere with his personal retinue of guards (or food, depending on his mood):

Cernu'ba'donn: CR 16, hp 152

Gelugon: CR 13, hp 144

Cornugon (2): CR 10, hp 106, 106 (one with a *ring of force shield*)

Lemures (13): CR 1, hp 9

Tactics: Cernu'ba'donn will instruct his minions to charge into combat while he and the gelugon hang back and cast bolstering spells on themselves. The dim-witted lemures will be the first to attack, herded forward by the cornugons like cattle. Once the lemures engage the characters in combat, the cornugons will not hesitate to get into the action as well. After prepping themselves, the gelugon and Cernu'ba'donn will attack from a distance with their spell-like abilities. Other than the lemures, the devils are willing to coordinate summoning other devils, so that, for example, one cornugon protects the other while it summons reinforcements. The gelugon and Cernu'ba'donn will coordinate their summoning as well. All devils will attempt to summon the most powerful fiend possible.

Cernu'ba'donn and the gelugon are not afraid of unleashing area of effect spells that will harm lemures as well. They will try to avoid the cornugons - only because they are a more suitable buffer, but will include them in the area as well. If the characters take the fight to Cernu'ba'donn or destroy the cornugons, Cernu'ba'donn will gladly meet them in melee with his +3 *huge unholy keen spiked chain*. Cernu'ba'donn has faced enough would-be heroes to know that their weapons tend to be the focus of their magical and offensive power, and so generally uses his spiked chain to disarm them as they come through his 20 foot reach. If a weapon should fall, it has a 50% chance to land on a walkway and a 50% chance to fall into the pool of blood at the bottom of the sphere.

Cernu'ba'donn will call for reinforcements from outside the sphere throughout the fight, but the Totembound forming the walls of the sphere will pre-

vent any from entering. Whether the PCs negotiated with them or not, they recognize that their tormentor is being threatened, and will do their best to make sure no devils can come to his aid. Because his sphere is his source of power, he will not retreat, preferring instead to fight to the death with the logical assumption that his minions will soon breach the sphere and come to his aid. His organized and evil mind simply cannot comprehend the force of will that the tormented and extremely chaotic Totembound bring to bear when keeping the devils from doing so.

Treasure: In addition to the devils' individual possessions, the pool of blood contains 500 pp, 760 gp, a carved bone statuette (50 gp), a ceremonial electrum dagger with a star ruby in the pommel (1600 gp), a solid gold idol (10 lb.)(1000 gp), potions of *blur*, *clairaudience/clairvoyance*, *hiding*, and *spiderclimb*, a +3 buckler, a +4 *warhammer of disruption*, a *scroll of holy word*, a *gem of brightness*, a *staff of woodlands* (42 charges remaining), *boots of levitation* (with a pair of humanoid feet still in them), and the following gems: amber (100 gp), black pearl (500 gp), bloodstones (50 gp x 2), red tears (1,000 gp), and white pearls (100 gp x 3).

Conclusion

With (hopefully) the death of Cernu'ba'donn, the souls of the totembound are released to their appropriate afterlife.

As Cernu'ba'donn dies, you see in every swollen node of the shell, the creature trapped within flails about for several moments as if electrocuted. They beat against the sides of their cells wildly before suddenly bursting into a swarm of insects. The insects quickly dissolve into dust, leaving nothing behind. You feel an immense wave of warmth flow through you, almost knocking you off balance. An almost electric charge dances across your skin as a thousand souls that were trapped are instantly released for their eternal rest. The sphere begins to deflate around you, and you are buried in torrents of blood and pus. When you can finally clear the film from your eyes, you find yourself standing in a pool of the stuff just outside the Hub Tavern. What bits of Cernu'ba'donn's fortress that traveled with you to the Forge quickly drains away into the Undercity. The sun shines on several bewildered and disgusted faces as a crowd gathers to stare at the grisly sight your party makes. As the last of the blood drains away, you see that it was not all that followed you back: beneath it was a pile of riches and items, now revealed. Granted, you're not being given a hero's welcome, and few are aware that you saved thousands of souls, both dead and living, from an existence of abyssal torment. But no one is trying to kill

you, you've got a pile of treasure for your troubles, and the Hub Tavern stands before you, eager to accept its prodigal adventurers home.

Totembound Soul

Medium-size Outsider (Evil, Chaotic)

Hit Dice: 12d10 (114 hp)

Initiative: +3 (Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

AC: 23 (+3 Dex, +10 natural)

Attacks: 2 claws +13 melee, bite +11 melee

Damage: claws 2d8+7, bite 3d6+3 and poison

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

Special Attacks: Energy Drain, *Insect Swarm*, Poison, Soul Exchange

Special Qualities: Devil or Demon Qualities, Damage Reduction 20/+2

Saves: Fort +5, Ref +7, Will +11

Abilities: Str 25, Dex 17, Con —, Int 6, Wis 14, Cha 8

Skills: Climb +12, Jump +12, Listen +10, Move Silently +10, Spot +10.

Feats: Blind-Fight, Cleave, Multiattack, Power Attack

Climate/Terrain: Any

Organization: Varies

Challenge Rating: 10

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always chaotic evil

Advancement: 13-17 HD (Medium), 18-24 HD (Large), 25-30 HD (Huge).

When a dearly loved family member or friend dies, it is possible to ease the grief of those left behind by creating a special totem that has, at its core, a single Weeping Beetle. With this totem representing the dearly departed, the grief is magically eased. However, there is far more to this ritual than most are aware.

The deceased being's soul becomes bound to a powerful outsider named during the ritual that creates the totem. Part of the soul becomes trapped within the totem while the rest resides on its master's home plane. If encountered there or if certain factors of the ritual are completed, the soul may take on solid form. Such creatures, called Totembounds, may be mindless servants, compelled intelligent beings, or ravaging monsters, depending on the conditions under which they were bound and the details of the ritual. All of them, however, are driven insane by their binding.

Totembound appear roughly as they did in life. Their flesh is grey and flaky and composes a shell less than an inch thick that crumbles under hard enough blows. Their eyes and mouths are gaping, empty sockets. In the case of Cernu'ba'donn's Totembounds, looking into those sockets would reveal swarms of transparent, writhing insects within. These insects are the remains of the Totembound's



soul; the creature can spew forth swarms of these as a spell-like ability. Other masters might have more of a penchant for flame, frost, acid, mud, etc.

If reduced to 0 hp, the Totembound crumbles to dust and reforms 24 hours later in its master's lair. The only way to permanently destroy a Totembound is to destroy its master, which will set the trapped spirits free to proceed to the afterlife they deserve.

Combat

Energy Drain (Su): Creatures struck by the claw attacks of a Totembound must make a Fortitude save (DC 16) or suffer 2 negative levels.

Insect Swarm (Sp): This spell-like ability functions as *creeping doom* but is only ¼ of the size - inflicting 250 hp of damage and covering a 10' by 10' area. The swarm lasts for 5 minutes.

Poison (Ex): Totembounds that succeed at a bite attack attempt to breathe their dark innards into the victim. This "poison" inflicts 1d8 Dex and 1d6 Str as initial and secondary damage (Fort save DC 17 negates).

Soul Exchange (Su): If a Totembound kills a creature, what remains of its soul will filter into the new body within 1d4 rounds. Upon completion, the victim's body will be healed to 1 hp and the Totembound, now in a new body and thinking itself free, will probably attempt to flee. Unfortunately, the soul is neither coherent nor healthy enough to continue to exist without its master. The body slowly

withers and collapses into dust in 1d6 hours, the remains of the soul that inhabit disappearing into oblivion. The victim whose body was stolen takes the place of the old Totembound, forming for the first time in its master's lair 24 hours after its death.

Statistics for NPCs

Cernu'ba'donn: Male Pit Fiend; CR 16; Large Outsider (Evil, Lawful); HD 13d8+65; hp 152; Init +1; Spd 40 ft., fly 60 ft. (average); AC 31; Atk +22/+17/+12 melee (2d6 + 10 [18-20], +3 *huge keen unholy spiked chain*) and +14 melee (1d4+3, 2 wings) and +14 melee (2d6+3, bite) and +14 melee (2d4+3, tail), or +19 melee (1d6+7, 2 claws) and +14 melee (1d4+3, 2 wings) and +14 melee (2d6+3, bite) and +14 melee (2d4+3, tail); SA: Fear aura, spell-like abilities, improved grab, constrict, summon devils; SQ: devil qualities, DR 25/+2, SR 28, regeneration 5; AL LE; SV Fort +13, Ref +9, Will +12; Str 25, Dex 14, Con 21, Int 20, Wis 18, Cha 16.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +17, Climb +20, Concentration +19, Disguise +17, Hide +4, Jump +19, Knowledge (arcana) +20, Listen +20, Move Silently +17, Search +21, Spellcraft +21, Spot +20; Combat Reflexes, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (spiked chain), Improved Critical (spiked chain), Improved Initiative.

SA - Spell-Like Abilities: At will — *animate dead*, *blasphemy*, *charm person*, *contagion*, *create undead*, *desecrate*, *detect good*, *detect magic*, *dispel magic*, *hold person*, *improved invisibility*, *insect plague*, *magic circle against good*, *major image*, *polymorph self*, *pyrotechnics*, *suggestion*, *summon swarm*, *teleport without error* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), *unholy aura*, and *unhallow*; 1/day- *creeping doom*, and *symbol* (any). These abilities are as the spells cast by a 17th-level sorcerer (save DC 13 + spell level). Once per year a pit fiend can use *wish* as the spell cast by a 20th-level sorcerer.

SA - Fear Aura (Su): As a free action, a pit fiend can create an aura of fear in a 20-foot radius. It is otherwise identical with fear cast by a 15th-level sorcerer (save DC 19). If the save is successful, that creature cannot be affected again by that pit fiend's fear aura for one day. Other devils are immune to the aura.

SA - Poison (Ex): Bite, Fortitude save (DC 21); initial damage 1d6 temporary Constitution, secondary damage death.

SA - Disease (Su): Even if an affected creature saves against the poison, it must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 14) or be infected with a vile disease called devil chills (incubation period 1d4 days, damage 1d4 points of temporary Strength).

SA - Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, the pit fiend must hit a Medium-size or smaller opponent with its tail slap attack. If it gets a hold, it can constrict.

SA - Constrict (Ex): A pit fiend deals 2d4+10 points of damage with a successful grapple check against Medium-size or smaller creatures.

SA - Summon Devil (Sp): Twice per day a pit fiend can automatically summon two lemures, osyluths, or barbazus, or one erinyes, cornugon, or gelugon.

SQ - Immunities (Ex): Devils are immune to fire and poison.

SQ - Regeneration (Ex): Pit fiends take normal damage from holy and blessed weapons of at least +3 -enchantment.

SQ - Resistances (Ex): Devils have cold and acid resistance 20.

SQ - See in Darkness (Su): All devils can see perfectly in darkness of any kind, even that created by deeper darkness spells.

SQ - Telepathy (Su): Devils (except lemures) can communicate telepathically with any creature within 100 feet that has a language.

Possessions: +3 *huge keen unholy spiked chain*, boots of speed.

Dalmott Raa: Male Foul Picker; Rog2/Clr4/Inquisitor 10; CR 16; Small humanoid (reptilian); HD 2d6+ 14d8 - 16; hp 52; Init +0; Spd 20 ft.; AC 18 (+3 natural, +2 Divine Knowledge, +1 Size); Atk +14/+9/+4 melee (1d6 +1, masterwork sickle); SQ - *detect magic*, enhanced memory; AL LE; SV Fort +11, Ref +14, Will +21; Str 12, Dex 10, Con 9, Int 18, Wis 17, Cha 24.

Skills and Feats: Appraise +9, Bluff +23, Concentrate +12, Diplomacy +32, Disguise +12, Escape Artist +5, Gather Information +26, Hide +16, Intimidate +26, Knowledge (religion) +21, Listen +8, Move Silently + 5, Open Lock +5, Pick Pocket +5, Search +9, Sense Motive +18, Spot +8, Use Magic Device +10; Combat Casting, Iron Will, Leadership, Spell Focus (Enchantment), Spell Penetration.

Gifts: Charm.

SQ-Detect Magic (Sp): A picker can *detect magic*, as the spell, at will. This works as if cast by a wizard of level equal to the picker's hit dice.

SQ - Enhanced Memory (Ex): A picker can recall with great precision every detail that it knows about any object of interest that it has seen, heard of, or read about. This only applies to items; its memory is normal in regards to everything else.

Domains: Luck, Protection.

Spells Prepared (Clr 6/7/6/6/4/4/3): 0 - Detect Magic x2, Detect Poison, Light, Purify Food and Drink x2; 1st - Bane, Cause Fear, Sanctuary (d), Doom, Obscuring Mist, Protection from Good, Random Action; 2nd - Calm Emotions, Desecrate, Enthrall, Hold Person, Aid (d), Silence; 3rd - Animate

Dead, Bestow Curse, Blindness/Deafness, Invisibility Purge, Protection from Elements (d), Remove Blindness/Deafness; 4th - Air Walk, Freedom of Movement (d), Inflict Critical Wounds, Tongues; 5th - Spell Resistance (d), Greater Command, Mark of Justice, Summon Monster V; 6th - Greater Dispelling, Mislead (d), Word of Recall.

Devil, Cornugon (2): CR 10; Large Outsider (Evil, Lawful); HD 11d8+33 (Outsider); hp 106; Init +1; Spd 20ft., Fly, Average 50 ft.; AC 25; Atk +15/+10/+10 (1d4+5, 2 Claws; 1d4+2, Bite; 1d3+2, Tail); or +15/+10 (1d4+5, Bite; 1d3+2, Tail); SA: Spell-like abilities, Fear aura, Stun, Wound, Summon devils; SQ: Damage reduction, Regeneration, Resistance: Spell, Resistance: Acid, Resistance: Cold, Immunity: Fire, Immunity: Poison, See in darkness, Telepathy; AL LE; SV Fort +10, Ref +8, Will +9; Str 21, Dex 12, Con 17, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 14.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +14, Climb +16, Concentration +15, Hide +7, Listen +14, Move Silently +14, Search +14, Sense Motive +14, Spot +14; Cleave, Power Attack, Sunder.

SA - Spell-Like Abilities: At will: *animate dead*, *charm person*, *desecrate*, *detect good*, *detect magic*, *detect thoughts*, *dispel chaos*, *dispel good*, *magic circle against good*, *major image*, *produce flame*, *pyrotechnics*, *suggestion*, and *teleport without error* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only); 3/day-*fireball* and *lightning bolt*; 1/day-*wall of fire*. These abilities are as the spells cast by a 12th-level sorcerer (save DC 12 + spell level).

SA - Fear Aura (Su): As a free action, a cornugon can create an aura of fear in a 5-foot radius. It is otherwise identical with *fear* cast by a 12th-level sorcerer (save DC 17). If the save is successful, that creature cannot be affected again by that cornugon's fear aura for one day. Other devils are immune to the aura.

SA - Stun (Su): Whenever a cornugon hits with a whip attack, the opponent must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 17) or be stunned for 1d4 rounds.

SA - Wound (Su): A hit from a cornugon's tail attack causes a bleeding wound. The injured creature loses 2 additional hit points each round until the wound is bound (a DC 10 Heal check) or the creature dies.

SA - Summon devil (Sp): Once per day a cornugon can attempt to summon 2d10 lemures or 1d6 barbazus with a 50% chance of success, 1d6 hamatulas with a 35% chance of success, or another cornugon with a 20% chance of success.

SQ - Immunities (Ex): Devils are immune to fire and poison.

SQ - Regeneration (Ex): Cornugons take normal damage from acid, and from holy and blessed weapons of at least +2 enchantment.

SQ - Resistances (Ex): Devils have cold and acid resistance 20.

SQ - See in Darkness (Su): All devils can see perfectly in darkness of any kind, even that created by deeper darkness spells.

SQ - Telepathy (Su): Devils (except lemures) can communicate telepathically with any creature within 100 feet that has a language.

Devil, Gelugon: CR 13; Large Outsider (Evil, Lawful); HD 12d8+60; hp 141; Init +1; Spd 40; AC 28; Atk +17/+12/+12 (1d8+6, 2 Claws; 2d4+3, Bite; 3d4+3, Tail); or +17/+12 (2d4+6, Bite; 3d4+3, Tail); SA: Spell-like abilities, Fear aura, Cold, Summon devils; SQ: Damage reduction, Regeneration, Resistance: Acid, Resistance: Cold, Resistance: Spell, Immunity: Fire, Immunity: Poison, See in darkness, Telepathy; AL LE; SV Fort +13, Ref +9, Will +14; Str 23, Dex 13, Con 21, Int 22, Wis 22, Cha 16.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +16, Climb +20, Concentration +20, Disguise +17, Jump +19, Knowledge (arcana) +20, Listen +22, Move Silently +16, Search +20, Sense Motive +20, Spellcraft +20, Spot +22; Alertness, Cleave, Dodge, Power Attack.

SA - Spell-Like Abilities: At will-*animate dead*, *charm monster*, *cone of cold*, *desecrate*, *detect good*, *detect magic*, *fly*, *magic circle against good*, *major image*, *polymorph self*, *suggestion*, *teleport without error* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), *unholy aura*, and *wall of ice*. These abilities are as the spells cast by a 13th-level sorcerer (save DC 13 + spell level).

SA - Fear Aura (Su): As a free action, a gelugon can create an aura of fear in a 10-foot radius. It is otherwise identical with *fear* cast by a 13th-level sorcerer (save DC 19). If the save is successful, that creature cannot be affected again by that gelugon's fear aura for one day. Other devils are immune to the aura.

SA - Cold (Su): A hit from a gelugon's tail or spear attack induces numbing cold. The opponent must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 21) or be affected as though by a slow spell for 1d6 rounds.

SA - Summon Devil (Sp): Once per day a gelugon can attempt to summon 2d10 lemures or 1d6 barbazus with a 50% chance of success, 2d4 osyluths or 1d6 hamatulas with a 35% chance of success, or another gelugon with a 20% chance of success.

SQ - Immunities (Ex): Devils are immune to fire and poison.

SQ - Regeneration (Ex): Gelugons take normal damage from holy and blessed weapons of at least +2 enchantment.

SQ - Resistances (Ex): Devils have cold and acid resistance 20.

SQ - See in Darkness (Su): All devils can see perfectly in darkness of any kind, even that created by deeper darkness spells.

SQ - Telepathy (Su): Devils (except lemures) can communicate telepathically with any creature within 100 feet that has a language.

Devil, Lemure (13): CR 1; Medium Outsider (Evil, Lawful); HD 2d8; hp 9; Init +0; Spd 20; AC 13; Atk +2 base melee, +2 base ranged; +2 (1d3, 2 Claws); SQ: Damage reduction, Resistance: Spell, Mindless, Immunity: Fire, Immunity: Poison, Resistance: Acid, Resistance: Cold, See in darkness; AL LE; SV Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +3; Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int —, Wis 11, Cha 5.

SQ - Immunities (Ex): Devils are immune to fire and poison.

SQ - Mindless (Ex): Lemures are immune to all mind-influencing effects.

SQ - Resistances (Ex): Devils have cold and acid resistance 20.

SQ - See in Darkness (Su): All devils can see perfectly in darkness of any kind, even that created by deeper darkness spells.

Oed: Male Metabolized Faust; Rog9/Rafter3/Assassin3; CR 18; Medium-size Humanoid; HD 9d6+3d8+3d6+45; hp 119; Init +11; Spd 80 ft; AC 28 (+8 Dex, +6 natural, +2 *studded leather of shadowy silent moves*); Atk +22/+18/+13 melee (1d6+8, +4 *short sword*), or +19/+15/+10 ranged (1d8+6, +2 *masterwork mighty comp longbow*), or +14/+14 (1d8+4, claws), +9 (2d4+2 bite); SQ: darkvision, scent, evasion, uncanny dodge, sneak attack 7d6, death attack (DC 13), spells, poison use, +7 save vs. poison, extra partial action; AL NE; SV Fort +10, Ref +25, Will +8; Str 18, Dex 27, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 14.

Skills and Feats: Appraise +2, Balance +18, Bluff +22, Climb +4, Craft (maps) +4, Disable Device +12, Hide +38, Innuendo +5, Intimidate +6, Intuit Direction +4, Jump +34, Knowledge (arcane) +4, Listen +5, Move Silent +32, Open Lock +14, Pick Pocket +12, Read Lips +4, Search +4, Spot +5, Tumble +21, Use Magic Device +7; Dodge, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Quickdraw, Spring Attack, Weapon Finesse (short sword).

Possessions: +4 *short sword*, +2 *masterwork might comp longbow*, *ring of jumping*, *ring of feather falling*; *bag of holding* (Bag 3), +2 *studded leather of shadowy silent moves*, *cloak of resistance* +3, *potion of cure serious wounds*, *potion of improved invisibility*, *potion of gaseous form*, *scroll of dimension door*, two gems worth 600 gp each.

Wraith of Aunt Anelie (base): CR 5, double xp; Medium Undead; HD 10d12 (Undead); hp 64; Init +7; Spd 30 ft., fly 60 ft. (good); AC 15 (+3 Dex, +2 deflection); Atk Incorporeal touch +8 melee (1d4 and 1d6 permanent Con drain); SA: Con drain, create spawn; SQ: Undead, incorporeal, +2 turn resistance, unnatural aura, daylight powerlessness; AL LE; SV Fort +3, Ref +6, Will +9; Str —, Dex 16, Con —, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 15.

Skills and Feats: Hide +11, Intimidate +10, Intuit Direction +6, Listen +17, Search +10, Sense Motive +8, Spot +17; Alertness, Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Weapon Focus: (incorporeal touch).

SA - Constitution Drain (Su): Living creatures hit by a wraith's incorporeal touch attack must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 14) or suffer 1d6 points of permanent Constitution drain.

SA - Create Spawn (Su): Any humanoid slain by a wraith becomes a wraith in 1d4 rounds. Spawn are under the command of the wraith that created them and remain enslaved until its death. They do not possess any of the abilities they had in life.

SQ - Unnatural Aura (Su): Both wild and domesticated animals can sense the unnatural presence of a wraith at a distance of 30 feet. They will not willingly approach nearer than that and panic if forced to do so; they remain panicked as long as they are within that range.

SQ - Undead: Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and disease. Not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

SQ - Incorporeal: Can be harmed only by other incorporeal creatures, +1 or better magic weapons, or magic, with a 50% chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source. Can pass through solid objects at will, and own attacks pass through armor. Always moves silently.

SQ - Daylight Powerlessness (Ex): Wraiths are utterly powerless in natural sunlight (not merely a daylight spell) and flee from it.

Wraith of Aunt Anelie (all spells active): CR 12; Medium Undead; HD 10d12 (Undead); hp 74; Init +7; Spd 30 ft., fly 60 ft. (good); AC 17 (+3 Dex, +4 deflection); Atk Incorporeal touch +9 melee (1d4+1 and 1d6 permanent Con drain); SA: Con drain, create spawn; SQ: Undead, incorporeal, +5 turn resistance, unnatural aura, daylight powerlessness, SR, *improved invisibility*; AL LE; SV Fort +8, Ref +11, Will +14; Str —, Dex 16, Con —, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 15.

Skills and Feats: Hide +11, Intimidate +10, Intuit Direction +6, Listen +17, Search +10, Sense Motive +8, Spot +17; Alertness, Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Weapon Focus: (incorporeal touch).

SA - Constitution Drain (Su): Living creatures hit by a wraith's incorporeal touch attack must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 14) or suffer 1d6 points of permanent Constitution drain.

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SQ – Undead: Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and disease. Not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage.

SQ – Incorporeal: Can be harmed only by other incorporeal creatures, +1 or better magic weapons, or magic, with a 50% chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source. Can pass through solid objects at will, and own attacks pass through armor. Always moves silently.

SQ – +5 Turn Resistance: Combined effect of natural turn resistance the *desecrate* effect.

SQ – Daylight Powerlessness (Ex): Wraiths are utterly powerless in natural sunlight (not merely a daylight spell) and flee from it.

SQ – Spell Resistance: SR 25 against good spells and spell cast by good creatures.

SQ – Strength Damage: Any successful melee attack against the wraith causes the attacker to receive 1d6 points of temporary strength damage (Fortitude save DC 21 negates).

SQ – Improved Invisibility: All attacks against wraith have 50% miss chance, all attacks by wraith gain +2 to hit, all enemies lose their Dexterity bonus (if positive) to AC.

Further Adventures - A Coven of Ideas

This section presents thirteen suggestions for further horror-themed adventures in the world of the Forge. These ideas are just that, ideas; the GM should feel free to add, drop, or change any element as his whim dictates.

The Orphanage of the Exiles

The Lost City of Penance is well known as the refuge of the outcasts of society. Populated with exiles, miscreants, social abominations and far worse, it is a place where few seeds dare tread. A year ago, a large section of the wrack was obliterated in a massive fire – good riddance to those it killed, many said. Few in Penance mourned the huge death toll in the Lost City that day.

One in Penance mourned, however, and still does – a monk in the Great Archive by the name of Thymtoff has become haunted by dreams of the

dying children in the Cofferdam Orphanage, which was burned to the ground in the great fire. The Cofferdam had long been an institution within the Lost City (it had existed nearly 500 years before the fire) as a home to the outcast and forgotten children of Penance – the waifs of the exiles, the abandoned of the miscreants, and the forgotten of the social abominations. These ghostly children now plague the dreams of Thymtoff, and they are beginning to plague the dreams of others. Other monks within the Great Archive have begun suffering, and whatever foul vapor infests the Archive seems to be spreading to the wrack as well.

The characters, seeking a valuable piece of information from the Archive, learn of this situation when the monks, sleep deprived, simply cannot help them find what they seek. Only by helping the monks rid themselves of these tormenting nightmares can they help themselves. The answers can only be uncovered at the nightmares' source – the ruins of the Cofferdam. There, the characters will uncover horrible secrets about the orphanage and its proprietors. Will they be able to escape with this important knowledge or will they fall prey to the lonely and vengeful spirits that reside there? It is said that children can be so cruel . . .

The Flesh Gatherers

Throughout the streets of Penance gangs of frey with strangely marked and dyed pelts, seeming no more than hoodlums, are savagely attacking random citizens. They appear from the shadows of alleys and deserted buildings to descend upon unwary individuals. The oddity is that they never rob these victims or even set out to kill them, but always cut a body part off of the victim and then vanish into the darkness as quickly as they appeared. Sometimes it is a finger they claim, sometimes a foot, or ear, and unfortunately the occasional head. They always seem to know which "piece" of the victim they want when they attack.

Behind this madness are the insane arcane experiments of a frey shaman known only as WhiteEye, called thusly for his cataract-filled blind eyes. Apparently, WhiteEye is intent on assembling an army flesh golems built from the still-living flesh of these victims. The frey shaman believes that not only will the golems be even more potent than those normally created, but that they will also give him control over those whose flesh they bear. While this seems like the babble of one who has lost his wits, those wounded by the frey are starting to have strange dreams of doing things they would normally never do; while in his fitful sleep, WhiteEye has prophetic dreams that tell him the race and body

part that his gang must gather next. His insanity will eventually lead him to produce a golem that will incorporate his own brain, the “perfect” immortal body with which to lead his armies.

The Empty City

A teleport attempt interacts strangely with the weave of reality that makes up the Forge and deposits the characters into what seems to be Penance, but is entirely abandoned. Every street, both in the unclaimed and claimed territories, is utterly vacant. Even the citadel of Queen Israfel seems oddly quiet with the ever-present bridge golems missing.

The reason for this is completely up to the GM. Perhaps it is a parallel version of the Forge created for some insidious arcane reason. Perhaps a powerful mage, extra-planar creature, or even deity, needs this “perfect model” of the city in order to gain control over it. The characters, because they have inadvertently stumbled upon it, must now be eliminated.

Alternatively, it may be the far future after the citadels have been unlocked, the imprisoned god freed eons ago. With their god free and their oaths broken, the Black Flock had no reason to remain or to pull fresh beings into the Forge. Without the power of the Seven and the unnamed god to keep their world alive, the residents lived short hopeless lives and the entire population died off, neither food nor magic nor energy left to keep their world going. The plane is left empty, but the characters must find a way to return home.

Or perhaps everything is perfectly normal, and the problem lies with the characters. They may be “out of phase” in some unusual “bordering plane”. However, they are not alone here and have caught the attention of the locals, a race of hideous creatures that reside in this plane and stalk those in the normal world.

Plague of the Penitent

A small bloodhold has been plagued with a terrible disease that appears to have a 100% mortality rate. Those infected progress rapidly through phases of intense pain caused by horrifying larva-filled boils. Whether it is merciful or not, the victims are driven insane before they succumb to the disease and so far magic has not revealed the cause of the disease nor been able to stop its steady advance.

Panic begins to spread and the characters are sent in to keep the peace (and do a little investigating before the disease spreads to their home bloodhold). Many begin to believe that the disease is a curse from the gods and only the impure are infected. As with

all fanatical religious beliefs, however, the definition of impure continues to shift as even the pious become infected.

Neighboring bloodlords take a more practical than theological interest in the plague: they want it to remain in its current bloodhold at all costs. Banding together, they seal off the area both physically and magically in hopes that the disease will run its course like any other plague. Unfortunately, the few peacekeepers, including the characters, are quarantined as well. Somehow, they must now survive the plague and as well as tension that is growing into outright anarchy.

Bloodlord Thrall

A powerful bloodlord has become the thrall of a vampiric psionic savant known as DarkThought. Now the nightmarish creature pulls the strings of the bloodhold, giving orders that border on breaking the Queen’s laws. All throughout the bloodhold, people begin disappearing and no one seems to be asking any questions.

As agents of a neighboring bloodlord or alongside of a force of bailiffs, the characters are asked to investigate these strange occurrences and locate the missing individuals. As they journey into the bloodhold, they find that all within it seem to shun the light and prefer to talk with them at night. Additionally, every man, woman, and child seems obsessed with a new drink that has taken the populace by storm. Strong smelling and vicious, it is repulsive to the characters, until they happen to try it – at which point they too begin to change.

Exactly what is happening is up to the GM to decide, but it is safe to say that a vampiric community, or some would even call it an army, is growing within Penance. Whether the vampire simply seeks a few cantons to remake in its own image or desires something far grander is unknown.

Brotherhood of the Bane

A cunning group of lycanthropes of several breeds have come together under the name the Brotherhood of the Bane. Their goal is to take over Penance and make it their capital; their method of attack is twofold.

First, they begin causing a rash of murders in such a manner as to incriminate certain individuals that have taken the Focus of the Beast. The bodies from these murders disappear shortly afterward. The Brotherhood is actually not killing them, but rather attacking, infecting them with lycanthropy and then causing them to appear dead for a short period through alchemical means. As soon as it’s safe,

agents of the Brotherhood sneak back, retrieve their new recruits, and take them to a safehouse to “re-educate them” until their transformation is complete.

Secondly, they have begun making dark pacts with some choice abyssal lords, promising the undying servitude of their growing gang of minions if assistance will be given in their ultimate battle. It is only after their dark army has grown to epic proportions that the battle can begin: the Brotherhood of the Bane wishes to fight Israfel herself. With an entire city of their brothers at their side, backed by the might of the Abyss, how can they lose?

Curse of the Decaying Flesh

The characters are sent to collect treasure from an ancient tomb deep in the Undercity. Once they return victorious and give the agreed-upon portion to whomever sent them, they begin having serious problems - their extremities seem to be decaying away before their eyes. Their finger and ear tips are slowly withering and turning to dust. They soon learn (from nightmares, investigation, and so on) that there was a curse on the tomb that can only be lifted by gathering all of the items they took (or perhaps one particularly powerful item) and returning them to their original locations.

However, the individual who sent them had prior knowledge of the curse and the threat it would pose to those who raided the tomb. He has now vanished and has sold off a large number of the items. The characters must track down the belongings and get them back by any means possible (often from the owners who either refuse to give up their newly gained treasures or are only willing to sell them at an exorbitantly steep price). All the while the characters are slowly and painfully deteriorating.

March of the Beasts

Word has traveled across the plains to the city of Penance of a horde of massive undead creatures that are destroying village after village, town after town across the domain. The horde is composed of gargantuan animals and creatures that have become zombies, ghouls, and wights. Nothing has yet slowed their dread advance. A vast swath of devastation, disease and undeath marks their path; they are headed straight for Penance.

Whether these mind-boggling creatures are directed by some fell necromancer, or are mindlessly running rampant, gathering together only out of some deep seated herding instinct is not known. What is known is that every being they come in contact with contracts a foul disease or becomes an

undead abomination themselves. The bloodlords of Penance begin to fear that if the horde of undead creatures does not trample the city to the ground that the aftershocks of disease and the undead host will decimate it for sure.

The characters are sent as an advance scouting party that must try to deduce the origins of and perhaps a solution to this foul threat before more communities (Penance among them) are wiped from the face of the world.

Rain of Blood

Soothsayers and prophets across the city of Penance begin declaring that the end of the world is near. Much like they have since the city’s founding, the citizens of Penance simply ignore them - until the sky turns black and the rain begins.

A constant rain of warm blood begins and shows no sign of ending - the warm rain collects and slowly begins to rise, threatening to flood homes and businesses. Before long, the Wellspring itself becomes tinged with crimson and it is then that the creatures begin to rise. Creatures that defy mortal description, composed of pure blood, erupt from the bloody liquid and drag people down to their dooms. There is no sign of the kidnapped victims, and even giants are being pulled down into pools of blood no deeper than a child’s bath, vanishing without a trace.

Panic erupts throughout the city and no one knows the reason for the never-ending blood rain. Has some powerful wizard cast a curse upon the entire city? Is Israfel or one of the avatars angry and out to destroy them all? Is this an invasion of some unknown creature from the depths of hell? Whatever the cause, only the mightiest of heroes can begin to explore the cause let alone have a hope of stopping the flood of blood.

Restless Spirits

During the course of their adventuring, the characters must destroy an enormously powerful artifact (it could be the scepter of the necromancer ruler of an Undercity cult, the phylactery of a lich-lord, or the clockwork heart of some mind-bogglingly complex dread siege engine). Doing so results in a massive explosion of divine and/or arcane energy that utterly destroys the artifact, but also literally blasts the characters’ spirits right out of their bodies (alternatively, it could also completely destroy their bodies as well).

As ghosts, the characters soon learn that they have only a finite amount of time before they must either merge with the great beyond (and whatever destiny awaits them) or return to the material world

and reclaim their lives there; they soon discover, however, that only children or animals can see them and these individuals are typically frightened of them. Now they must either track down their physical remains (or if their bodies were destroyed, discover some way to reform them) and enter into them before their time literally runs out.

The Thirteen

A cabal of evil beings informally known as the Thirteen have acquired several cantons and established themselves as their bloodlords. Not coincidentally, each of their domains is positioned upon a particular magical nexus. The Thirteen plan on carrying out an enormously complex and formidable ritual that will conjoin the powers of the nexuses and the life energy of the 13,000 innocent residents of their cantons, unleashing a terrible evil upon the Forge.

Whether it is a plot to create a massive portal to a nightmarish realm and plunge the entire city into incarnate chaos, or a plan to use the ritual to cover the Forge in darkness and place an unnamed god of absolute evil upon a throne formed from the Sevens' bones, there is only one thing that is for certain – it will spell doom for Penance and the Forge as it is currently known. Unless, of course, the characters can unravel the conundrum of the Thirteen and undo their abominable plot.

The Brood

Pets, livestock, familiars and animals of all kinds are disappearing. There seems to be little rhyme or reason to the disappearances but soon thereafter, a rash of attacks by unusual beasts begins to plague Penance. Eyewitnesses and victims describe the feral attackers as “normal critters all stuck together and with their body parts switched.”

Investigation by the characters soon uncovers that the nightmare brood of creatures is only the tip

of the proverbial iceberg. An insane cult of half-breed and abomination wizards, sorcerers, priests, and druids have taken it upon themselves to re-craft the world in their own likenesses; too long has the world been ruled by the weaker, “chaste ones”, now is the time for the stronger creatures, or the Taint, as they call it, to rule. The characters soon learn that this cabal has amassed an entire army beneath the streets of Penance – an army of horrific, twisted creatures that are bent on revenge for their former mistreatment and hungering for the taste of blood.

The Mist

An unusually thick mist settles over the city of Penance, penetrating even into the most well built structures with its cold, clammy fingers. At first it is merely a nuisance and a novelty. Slowly, as the weeks pass and there seems to be no sign of the mist departing, it begins to have another effect altogether.

Folks begin to board themselves up in their homes, refusing to go to work, or even to the market in fear of the omnipresent mist and the “foul vapors” that swirl within its cold, wet confines. Before long the entire city grinds to an oppressive halt, and Penance, whether it knows it or not, falls under siege by an enemy it cannot face. Starvation and disease, coupled with the apathetic and superstitious behavior of the inhabitants, threaten to consume all within weeks.

A mysterious “benefactor of the city” calls in the characters and equips them with unusual breathing devices of an ancient and powerful design and asks them to find the source of the mist and vanquish it utterly. However, once the mist detects the actions of the characters, it begins to defend itself, striking with thousands of invisible hands and mouths. The characters have marked themselves as threats and now find themselves surrounded by an enemy the size of a city. They must find its weakness or perish within it.

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