

Fantasy Craft™



THE DARKEST HOUR



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INTRODUCTION

You hold in your hands the first adventure for *Fantasy Craft*. This product is geared to do two things. First, like any adventure, it hopefully shows everyone a good time. The action comes fast and furious, with great potential for heroics. Second, it showcases some of the things that set *Fantasy Craft* apart from other OGL adventure games, including a comprehensive skill system that supports any style of play, simple yet tactical combat rules, magic that refreshes at the rate of the story, scaling enemies, greater control of the action, and a distinctly cinematic flair.

The Darkest Hour is designed for a 4- to 5-hour convention-style timeslot, though it's equally useful in a home game, especially as the introduction to a new campaign.

The action initially takes place in the village of Andra, a quaint little community in a mountain valley known as Fels Cut. The town is mundane in nearly every respect. The villagers are god-fearing folk. They farm and work in nearby quarries, and generally live small, quiet lives.

Two other sites stand out in Fels Cut. First is a coaching inn, the Topsy Wyvern, which is five miles from the village on the other side of the valley. The local thoroughfare passes through the inn at the base of the area's tallest mountain before running through Andra and winding up the next ridgeline.

The second is a local graveyard, where a long-dead sorcerer and local hero named Paschel is buried. Paschel's tomb is the graveyard's centerpiece and his descendants in the village still bring flowers a few times each year.

Two days ago a corrupted knight entered the valley looking for the tomb. He avoided the inn and village, moving in the dead of night. He went by no name other than "Master" and he commanded a wicked rootwalker named Wiltweevil. Together they dream of conquest, establishing a kingdom that would spread over all the lands now tainted with virtue.

Master had no interest in Paschel but rather wanted something buried with the hero — a necromantic artifact called the Soul Star, which has the power to animate and control the dead. Paschel's party had wrested the artifact from the clutches of a demon — the beast that turned Master's heart to shadow — and they knew it couldn't be destroyed. They also knew no one was strong enough to withstand its twisted calling, so they buried with it Paschel, who'd given his life to secure it.

Master and Wiltweevil broke the tomb's ancient seals and found the Star. They used it to raise the harbinger of the dead, a monstrous thing called the Grave Wurm, and set it about its foul business. The Wurm consumed corpses and expelled a form of walking dead called 'raveners,' and through the Star Master controlled them all. He placed the first of the raveners in Wiltweevil's command and ordered them to scour the surrounding lands of all living humanoids.

Last night an adventuring party came to the Topsy Wyvern Inn, acting on behalf of the High Church of the Realm...

- Barald Rocobienne, a human sage, and leader of the troupe
- Sister Falthene, a human warrior-nun in the dedicated service of the High Church
- Engtas Whispermithorn, an elf tracker and expert archer
- Hertiger, a human crossbowman and mounted scout
- Hasafti Gurion, a dwarf wizard
- Ekrajmez, a saurian burglar

The High Church had charged the party with finding and capturing Master, who had been one of the noblest Soldiers of the Cross before his fall from grace. They tracked Master to the valley and Barald surmised from research that the villain might be after the Soul Star. The party rushed to the graveyard late last night, only to be waylaid by Master and his growing army of raveners, and faced with overwhelming odds they fell back to warn Andra. Master summoned Wiltweevil and ordered a full-scale assault on the village and grisly deaths for all the Church agents.

Ekrajmez was the first to fall, skewered by one of Wiltweevil's boughs before the party even reached Andra. The raveners chased the rest of the adventurers into the village and for the rest of the night and through the next day it became a brutal battlefield. Wiltweevil hung back, blending into the tree line to prevent anyone from leaving as the raveners tore the villagers to shreds.

A few survivors barricaded in houses. The biggest group included the adventurers, who fortified themselves in the mayor's home, a large two-story structure at the center of the village. However, it eventually became obvious that the building wasn't defensible, and just after nightfall the group made a break for the village church, which sits on open ground just outside Andra. Hertiger volunteered to ride to the Topsy Wyvern and get help, which would also create the diversion needed for the others to escape the mayor's house.

As is the way, the plan immediately went wrong. With the sun setting an unnaturally thick fog rolled in (due to the Master's use of the Soul Star), and with the night's new moon it dropped visibility to almost nil. The flight to the church was a confused mess. Hertiger made for the inn, raveners hotly pursuing him every step of the way. Barald was badly wounded in the attempted flight and Engtas stayed with him until the raveners broke through the remaining defenses at the mayor's House. Both were killed, leaving the raveners in Andra to focus entirely on the group heading for the church.

Raveners are much faster than typical zombies — in fact, they're much faster than typical humans — and the last two adventurers knew the enemy would reach them well before they reached safety. So they mounted a final stand, telling the remaining villagers to run for the church and never look back. Falthene and Hasafti valiantly faced the ravener horde, their last breaths taken when Wiltweevil joined the fray.



As the adventure begins, Wiltweevil has directed his ravener army to find the escaped villagers and scour the rest of the area for survivors (the villagers huddle in the church, which they've feverishly fortified against attack). Master continues to build his ravener army at the graveyard and Hertiger streaks through the night on a last ditch mission for help.

The Darkest Hour consists of three scenes...

SCENE ONE: A QUIET EVENING INTERRUPTED

En route through the area, the characters have just finished dinner at the Topsy Wyvern coaching inn. Hertiger breaks through the fog, offers a brief warning, and falls unconscious. The ravener army reaches the inn seconds later and lay siege to the building. The inn is overwhelmed far too quickly for its staff to properly secure the buildings, leaving the party to salvage the situation.

SCENE TWO: VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED

Hertiger's warning leads the party to Andra's church, where the survivors can explain what happened. They know Barald had more information about the ravener army but he was left back at the mayor's House. The village is crawling with ravener army collecting corpses for the Grave Wurm and the church survivors warn that the land itself may be turning against them (they're actually just noticing the tree line "change" every so often as Wiltweevil moves around). Assuming the party gets to Barald's body they can recover his journal, which points to Paschel's tomb and explains how to steal control of the ravener army from Master (by taking the Soul Star from him).

SCENE THREE: TO FACE THE FIEND

The action culminates in a fight to the death with Master and his Grave Wurm slave. While taxing and potentially corrupting (should any character try to use the Soul Star himself), the fight can be won, earning the party accolades from the Church (and Hertiger, if he lives).

ADVENTURE TIMING

Scene Two is far and away the most complicated (as Scenes One and Three consist mostly of direct confrontation with little lead-in and few plausible options beyond violence). You should keep this in mind and budget time accordingly. Scene One should be a fast, kinetic introduction and take no longer than a quarter of the overall play time. Half the playtime is probably required for Scene Two, leaving the remainder for the final battle with Master.

THE SOUL STAR

This fist-sized, multi-faceted amethyst is shaped like a four-pointed star and set in a silver medallion. Its origins have washed out over history but a few know its power. It can be used to summon the Grave Wurm, which animates the dead in service to the artifact's owner. Unfortunately, it does this by sapping the owner's strength of will — his Wisdom — which in turn makes it harder to resist the Star's influence. Eventually the owner becomes the owned, a slave to the Soul Star with no goals of his own except spreading its undeath across the whole of the world.

The adventuring sorcerer Paschel gave his life so his party could obtain the Soul Star and they buried it with him. So long as it remained out of living hands its threat was neutralized. Unfortunately, clues to the Star's location were passed down in local history, and eventually fell into the wrong hands — agents of a malevolent demon that corrupted Master. The Church-sponsored party sent to capture Master also found these clues and Barald the sage wrote of them in his journal (see page 20). This information may be of great help to the characters in the final battle against Master and the Grave Wurm.

MENACE

The Darkest Hour assumes a Menace of II (Routine) or III (Challenging), though you can easily adjust that if you like. Keep in mind that a higher or lower Menace will adjust the number of Dramatic scenes.

SLIDING DCS

To allow for play at any Threat Level, this adventure features sliding DCs (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 370).

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Bastian: One of six survivors holing up in the Andra church. He's the village cobbler and the survivors' *de facto* leader. A simple country man, Bastian just wants to see another dawn.

Brigit: One of six survivors holing up in the Andra church. She's Bastian's wife, a tough country woman, and the best fighter among the survivors. She and Bastian make a good couple, fighting together (and dying together as well, if need be). Brigit is also a descendant of Paschel, the storied hero of Andra. She makes regular trips to the tomb to pay her respects, so she can offer precise directions.



Brother Sevrin: One of six survivors holing up in the Andra church. He's the assistant to Andra's priest, and a recently ordained minister. This is his first assignment, so he's a shade unprepared as the survivors' ecclesiastical leader. His faith is shaken, but if the party can help him regain his confidence he can provide divine aid.

The Grave Wurm: A disgusting and bloated white worm the size of a horse-drawn wagon. It's a slave to the Soul Star, compelled to seek out and consume bodies, expelling them as ravens under control of the artifact's owner. As the adventure begins the Grave Wurm is still harvesting from the Andra graveyard.

Hertiger: The last survivor of an adventuring party sent by the Church of the Realm to find and capture Master. He's a crossbowman by trade and has only a few conscious breaths left as he reaches the Topsy Wyvern. He uses them to explain that his friends and others are at the Andra church, and that they need immediate help. The ravens attack immediately, preventing further discussion, and by the time the fighting is done Hertiger is out for the duration.

Maja Weaver: One of six survivors holing up in the Andra church. She's a dwarf widow and Andra's weaver. She can offer several items to the party, drawn from the small stash of treasures left behind by her husband (who died before the ravener assault).

"Master": The villain of the adventure. His true name is never learned and he doesn't parlay with anyone long enough for introductions to be made. Once a righteous warrior in service to the Church of the Realm, Master was lost to the dark enticement of a depraved demon. The demon told him of the Soul Star, which he now wields. Master's megalomania is deep-seated and irreversible. The party's only recourse is to put him down before he stages a holocaust.

Theodor: One of six survivors holing up in the Andra church. He's 10 years old and helped Brother Sevrin and his superior as the church altar boy. His father was the town sheriff, who remained to defend it from the ravens. Theodor doesn't know if his parents still live and pleads with the characters to check when they head to the village. Sadly, the boy's father is indeed dead, though his mother lives and can offer the party a weapon left by Paschel's teammates in case the Soul Star should ever be used. The weapon was forged to destroy undead, including the ravens and the Grave Wurm. If you want to speed things up Theodor's mother can also show the characters a series of secret tunnels under the village, allowing (relatively) safe travel between locations other than the church and graveyard.

Wiltweevil: The Master's henchman and general of his undead army. Master has ordered Wiltweevil to use the first ravens to exterminate everyone in Andra and prepare the village as a staging ground for the next wave of devastation. Wiltweevil revels in gore, deriving sadistic glee from demolishing "flimsy sacks of blood and water." He attacks without mercy or scruples, referring to all but

himself and Master as "it." As the adventure begins, none of the church survivors have seen Wiltweevil, though they've noticed the tree line "shift" from time to time. They assume dark forces have taken hold in the area and are warping the landscape, and warn the characters not to trust the terrain.

Zerun: One of six survivors holing up in the Andra church. He's the town rat-catcher and knows a variety of ways to move around in Andra without being seen. He might also know about the tunnels under town.

SCENE 1: A QUIET EVENING INTERRUPTED

The Topsy Wyvern Inn, just after sundown

OBJECTIVES

- (Optional) Save Hertiger from imminent death
- Fight off the ravens

CHALLENGES

- Hertiger's wounds defy conventional healing techniques
- The ravens aren't like any undead the PCs have seen before

SYNOPSIS

Scene Type: Standard

GM Briefing: Play begins in the taproom of the Topsy Wyvern, where all is normal. The characters are given a brief chance to roleplay with the locals before Hertiger races into the courtyard, his horse ridden lame. It dies, pitching him onto the inn's porch just as the first sounds of ravener pursuit are heard through an approaching fog bank. The characters have a slim chance to save Hertiger but only if one or two of them do so during the first few rounds of combat. The resulting fight is the players' first taste of this adventure's undead, which are fast and chaotic rather than slow and lumbering. Once the undead are dispatched, the characters are left to decide how to proceed to the Andra church, where Hertiger's friends are barricaded.

Gear: The PCs begin the scene relaxing with much of their gear stored up in their rooms. All they have on their persons are their clothes, armor, incidentals, and pouch contents.

LOCATION

The Topsy Wyvern is a coaching inn, which differs from a regular inn in that it exists outside a population center, providing a self-sufficient place of lodging not dependent on a nearby village. The inn has a main building containing a taproom and several guest rooms (as well as some small servants' rooms), a staff building where the innkeeper and his family live, and an



expansive stable (with grooms' quarters attached and a small smithy for shoeing and tack). Palisade walls join all three buildings, creating an enclosed central courtyard, and this coupled with the lack of outward-facing ground floor windows means that the Topsy Wyvern can be fortified easily should the need arise. Unfortunately, the speed of the ravens' attack is more than any of the staff expect, leaving several points of entry open during the assault.

Ambiance: The air smells faintly of hay and animals (but at least they're clean). There's usually a fair volume of noise, from the whinny of horses and conversation of the grooms to the clinking of crockery and jovial conversation in the taproom. The whole place feels comfortable and welcoming.

Terrain: Indoors/settled

Cultural Interest: The Realm

ACTION

Begin the adventure by reading the following aloud.

Your party is enjoying the taproom of the Topsy Wyvern, a coaching inn at the base of a mountain on one side of Fels Cut, a narrow valley. The Topsy Wyvern lies five miles from the village of Andra, the largest local settlement. As a coaching inn, the Topsy Wyvern is largely self-sufficient and features a solid outer wall and stone construction characteristic of the buildings in an area with profitable quarries. Staff members are simple and clearly lead unremarkable lives, though the barmaid looks like she might be open to a little taste of adventure later this evening.

The sun has just set and you've just finished dinner, a hearty if unspectacular mutton stew accompanied by pleasantly dense hunks of bread.

The players can take a few minutes to introduce themselves and roleplay a bit, perhaps make a pass at the barmaid. Her name is Lizabet and she was raised at the inn. Her father was an adventurer who spent a loving night in the arms of her mother, also a barmaid. Sadly, she never met him, as he continued his quest the following day and never returned. Lizabet is a pretty young woman, shapely and fit, with dark curly hair and striking ice blue eyes. She's fascinated by adventurers and drawn to their rugged bad-boy nature. Tales of their journeys outside Fels Cut are especially interesting to her. She is, however, strong-willed and witty, and happily trades verbal and physical jabs with anyone.

Turning Lizabet's head is simple for any of the party so long as they treat her with respect — a successful Influence check (average DC) is all that's needed. If more than one character competes for her attention, an opposed Influence check is in order. Once smitten, Lizabet takes every opportunity to be near her crush, intimating that she might be free for the rest of the night once the last of the patrons are gone.

Lizabet remembers the previous group of adventurers well and may mention them, excited that the Topsy Wyvern is attracting such interesting visitors. Should the characters inquire, they can learn more about the party, including their names, species, classes, and perhaps a few particulars of your device.

When the roleplaying peters, read the following.

There's a commotion in the courtyard — a panicked horse and men shouting...

If the PCs immediately investigate, read the following.

A lathered horse hurtles toward the inn, collapsing several feet away and pitching its rider onto the porch at your feet. The rider is covered in dust, sweat, and blood, and his breathing is raspy and labored.

"Help them!" he croaks. "They're at the church in Andra. You have to help them — before they're found!"

The rider goes limp and his breathing shallows out. He's still alive but won't be for long.

In the distance you hear the sounds of hot pursuit, within a heavy fog bank that's rolling with unnatural speed toward the courtyard gate.

The rider is Hertiger, a member of the adventuring party that visited the inn last night. Lizabet can identify him. He's close to death from several claw and bite wounds and requires immediate attention if he's to survive. Stabilizing him is a Complex Medicine Task (3 Challenges, each taking 2 rounds with a tricky DC). Moving Hertiger before he's stable immediately kills him. Sadly, nothing can be done for his horse.

The wounds are as unnatural as the fog bank. They weep sickly green ichor and though fresh exhibit deep-rooted infection. Black tendrils visibly creep away from the wounds as veins wither and the surrounding muscle dies. No matter how high the characters' Medicine skill bonuses none of them have seen anything like this before, though with a successful Knowledge check (hard DC), for which Medicine grants synergy, the characters learn one thing: the wounds were inflicted by *humans*.

A second Knowledge check (easy DC) reveals from the Hertiger's gear that he's a military scout of some kind, probably a mounted archer. With a comfortable saddle, leather armor, a light crossbow, and a goat's-foot loading arm, he's kitted for speed and skirmishing rather than strength and staying power.

The courtyard gate is currently open. Two grooms rush to close it but it requires 3 full rounds for them to do so. The ravens arrive at the start of Round 3, so unless at least two characters immediately move to help them the undead push through the doors, killing the grooms and reaching the main building by the start of Round 4. If two characters help the gates close just as the fog bank reaches the inn's outer wall and the closest characters get their first glimpse of the ravens.



Figures rush through the fog, their motion frenzied. They move with inhuman speed, as if driven by unholy need. There are humans, dwarves, elves, pech, and others, but they all share the same signs — signs of death. Skin sloughs off the eldest of them and putrid rot clings to the rest. Their eyes are glassy yet they focus with single-minded clarity. They are here for nothing short of murder — and you're next.

The ravener can leap to the top of the walls and climb the rest of the way but it slows them down, keeping them from the main building until the start of Round 6. The characters can use the two extra rounds to stabilize Hertiger and summon the stable hands and other staff into the main building, or if they're callous they can start blockading doors and windows, leaving the hapless NPCs to distract half the ravener for 2 rounds.

A map of the inn is provided on page 22. Don't be afraid to take the combat all over the inn as the ravener spread out to kill everyone on the premises. Describe the action as a chaotic swirl. Barmaids shutter windows only to find ravener right behind them. Grooms try to keep panicking horses in their stable stalls only to be pinned down by ravener at the building's only entrance. Every time the action cools down in one place you should introduce a new problem somewhere else, perhaps two. Ratchet the tension to a fever pitch until you feel the need for the scene to wind down, at which point the characters can start winning without further incidents cropping up.

The ravener are fast and strong enough to scramble up to the second floor, so even if the Topsy Wyvern staff are able to secure the ground floor before their arrival there's still plenty of opportunity for them to get into the building. Most of the NPCs are panicked anyway, making it difficult for the few who aren't to properly defend the inn. Unless the characters are quick on their feet and very lucky the scene likely plays out less like a siege scenario and more like a frenetic bloodbath (perhaps grinding down to a creepy guerilla horror scenario if it drags out long enough).

Here's a short list of ideas to get you started.

- An upended lantern starts a fire, perhaps across the only exit for several NPCs. The characters can save them, but only if they act fast and either put out the fire or find another way for the NPCs to escape. If left unchecked the fire spreads, potentially consuming the entire inn. Ravener rush through the fire to get at victims; they collapse a few rounds later but in the meantime they inflict an additional 1d6 fire damage with each attack.
- The horses get loose from the stable, rushing through the inn looking for a way out. Characters and NPCs in their way must make a successful Jump check (average DC) to avoid being trampled for 1d10 lethal damage.

- Seeing no other way into a blockaded location, a group of ravener burrow through the earth or floor. Call for a team Notice check (easy DC). With failure, the ravener gain a surprise round.
- The fog plays tricks with the characters' minds. When characters critically fail Notice or Search checks to see or hear something through the mist they sense something entirely different (e.g. ravener where they hear or see NPCs, or vice-versa).

Liberal award action dice to characters who risk themselves for others, who promote the action and enjoyment of the scene, and who offer creative ways to enhance play or solve problems. Leaping through the aforementioned fire to help the trapped NPCs is an excellent example, as is leaping onto one of the racing horses to calm it down (Train Animal check, DC 18). Taking charge and heroically directing a small group of NPCs to success in a skirmish against the ravener, kicking the legs out from under an ale keg to send it thundering toward the monsters, or just taking the time in battle to calm a terrified staff member — all of these actions and more are worthy of an action dice reward.

The fog creeps across the inn throughout this scene, fully covering the compound by Round 20. In the fog visibility drops to 1/2 normal (rounded down), which is both a boon (the ravener have just as much trouble seeing through the thick cloud as anyone else, though they can sense living characters by smell) and a burden (it keeps the characters from finding each other, as well as NPCs, and as mentioned it can distort perceptions). You're encouraged to use the fog to heighten the horror of the scene, keeping the characters off guard and unaware of their surroundings — including what may be lurking just out of sight. As it doesn't obey the laws of nature it can seep in around doors and creep up walls, leaving the characters to wonder whether it's a sentient monster. It isn't, and it can't harm the characters in any way, though their nerves may disagree.

The number of ravener is left to the needs of the combat. Given the size and scope of the coaching inn fights can erupt practically anywhere without notice, or the action can die down suddenly, leaving the party in eerie, apprehensive stillness as NPCs hide and ravener hunt. The scene should involve just enough quiet to make the characters jumpy, then plenty of running and screaming to cleanse the palette for the next go-around.

The ravener are blunt in their work. They're attracted to the nearest living targets and mindlessly split up to take on multiple enemies. They don't bother with cover, flanking, or other tactics unless the opportunity is obvious. They're faster than a normal human, though, and they can climb and jump better than most as well. They're bright enough to find new ways into buildings when they can't get through a barricade, and they play on fear and panic. They're mildly cunning, but also bloodthirsty and savage, and fight to the death with no regard to danger.



NPCs at the coaching inn aren't trained fighters but they're not helpless either. They use improvised weapons as they find them (*see their stat blocks for some examples*), and they try to be smart about keeping themselves alive and defending the inn (in that order). Use the NPCs to pace the action. When the characters are having too easy a time of it, introduce a wounded or terrified NPC for them to save (perhaps in the current fight, perhaps nearby). If a character gets into trouble and needs a break, a ravenner that's attacking him can savage a screaming bystander instead. Alternately, an NPC could get in a lucky shot and pull an enemy off the characters at a crucial moment. Lizabet is especially good for this; she grabs a wood axe almost immediately and takes her place next to whichever characters flirted with her most successfully. She's not the best fighter, but she's tenacious and feisty.

DIRECTION

Here are some questions you might be asked, and answers for you to offer.

Q: Why are we here?

A: You're adventurers — does it matter? Seriously, you're just passing through and stopped for the evening at the Topsy Wyvern, an inn you'd heard good things about.

Q: Have any of us been to Andra?

A: No. You were headed in that direction since you're passing through the valley but didn't expect to see it until you continued your journey tomorrow.

Q: Are the wounds on Hertiger and the horse consistent with these undead things?

A: Yes.

Q: Does anyone recognize the rider?

A: Yes. The rider is an adventurer named Hertiger, who visited the inn with five companions last night. Their party also included a human scholar, a human Church warrior-nun, a saurian, a dwarven wizard, and an elven archer. The staff recalls that the group was pleasant enough, didn't cause trouble, paid their bill, and were otherwise model guests. They didn't secure a room, racing into the night after talking to Lizabet. According to her, the last thing they talked about was Paschel, a local hero buried in the Andra graveyard.

Q: What time is it?

A: Early evening. The sun has just set.

Q: How long to get to Andra?

A: At a decent pace, just under two hours. Horse travel takes slightly less time unless you move fast (though you'd make quite a commotion in the process).

CAST

TIPSY WYVERN STAFF (STANDARD NPCs)

"Can I help you, good sir?"

Description: Inn staffers wear simple clothes, nothing fancy. They present themselves well in the sweat of a hard day's work. Nonetheless they smile like it's the first day of spring and greet every new customer like royalty.

Motivations: In the main, the staff at the Topsy Wyvern serves customers well and makes money doing it. They consider themselves prepared for trouble but the raveners give them much more than they bargain for.

Topsy Wyvern Staff (Medium Folk Walkers): Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init I; Atk II; Def III; Res IV; Health V; Comp II; Skills: Athletics III, Notice III, Ride III, Search III; Qualities: None

Attacks/Weapons: Improvised club (dmg 1d8 subdual (useless against undead), error 1–2, threat 20, qualities: none), hand axe (dmg 1d6 lethal, error 1–2, threat 20, qualities: AP 2, hurl, trip)

Gear: None

Treasure: None



RAVENERS (STANDARD NPCs, ADVERSARIES)

"Bleargghhiss!"

Description: These crazed undead creatures come in as many species, shapes, and sizes as adventurers. They wear the tattered remains of what they were buried in, scorched and brittle from exposure to the Grave Wurm's acidic stomach. The raveners frequently make savage bite attacks, causing their facial flesh to tear and their teeth to crack and splinter, leaving jagged maws where their mouths once were.

Motivations: Raveners are consumed with hatred for all living things, which they can sense by smell. They slay all living creatures that cross their paths with unnerving speed and ferocity, and when all their enemies are dead, they bring the remains of their victims back to the Andra graveyard so the Wurm can consume and convert them.



Notes: A ravener bite is truly dangerous. Its jagged teeth and ichor-infused maw cause terrible wounds that refuse to heal. Worse, a ravener can spit a wad of ichor and tooth fragments at nearby enemies, which accounts for their bite's increased Reach. Unlike a zombie, a ravener's condition isn't spread as an infection, though party members may not realize this when they first encounter the creatures.

Ravens (Medium Undead Folk Walkers — 65 XP): Str 12, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 6, Wis 6, Cha 6; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 40 ft. ground; Init VII; Atk V; Def III; Res V; Health III; Comp I; Skills: Athletics V; Qualities: *Devour, dread, feat (Wolf Pack Basics, Wolf Pack Mastery), monstrous defense I, light-sensitive*

Attacks/Weapons: Bite II (dmg 1d8+1 lethal, threat 17–20, qualities: *bleed, reach +2*), Slam I (dmg 1d6 lethal, threat 20)

Gear: None

Treasure: None

NEXT STEPS

With the fighting over, the characters can search Hertiger and find his journal (*see page 19*). He also carries a poorly stored ink pen (which is leaking though his pouch), a flint and steel, 16 silver pieces, and the armor and weapons mentioned in the Action section. The inn staff frown if the characters take Hertiger's gear while he still lives but they don't stop them. They're also less eager to offer gear from the inn stores, which can otherwise be used to equip the party if it plans to deal with the ravens.

The party has an obvious destination: the church in Andra. Time is clearly of the essence, and should the party delay ("Let's wait until dawn" or "Let's wait for some troops to get here"), the surviving inn staff assault them with pleas for immediate action. Many of them have family and friends in Andra, and all of them realize that more attacks are coming unless something is done.

Lizabet in particular will push. She's a little starry-eyed about the adventuring lifestyle and if the PCs don't bravely march off to Andra she becomes furious with them. She maligns their manhoods, calls them cowards, lays the death of the village at their feet, and worse. She's got plenty of spunk and more endurance, so she can and will keep the tirade up all night long if necessary. She knows what heroes are supposed to do here and she's not above making the party feel small for ignoring such an obvious need.

Should the PCs persist the atmosphere in the inn turns toxic in a hurry. The staff grows cold, refusing to look the characters in the eye. The other barmaids try to comfort Lizabet, whose ranting can be heard everywhere in the main building. The innkeeper tries to be polite but it's clear he's lost his respect for the heroes. The grooms are sullen, even near the party's horses. Ultimately, the PCs may head for Andra just to salvage their egos.

The staff can describe Andra and even provide a map (*see page 23*). The other inn travelers are happy to ride out of the valley to warn of a possible undead outbreak but none of them are adventurers; they won't venture into the village with the party.

SCENE 2: VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED

The village of Andra, late at night

OBJECTIVES

- (Optional) Save the survivors at the church
- (Optional) Save Theodor's mother
- (Optional) Recover Barald Rocobienne's journal
- (Optional) Defeat Wiltweevil
- Proceed to the graveyard to confront Master

CHALLENGES

- The survivors are terrified and paranoid
- Andra is crawling with ravens and Wiltweevil lurks in the trees

SYNOPSIS

Scene Type: Standard

GM Briefing: Ideally this scene begins with the PCs getting into the church, where the surviving villagers fill them in on what's happened and direct them to the wrecked mayor's house to find the sage Barald Rocobienne. They sneak through the ravener-infested village and find Barald but he's already dead. Fortunately, his journal contains clues the party can use in the final battle with Master.

The party may also find the remains of Falthene and Hasafti, who gave their lives so the villagers could make it to the church without pursuit. The sheriff's wife, Frida, who is also the mother of one of the survivors (Theodor), hides in her home in Andra and may be rescued, perhaps offering the team much needed support. Neither of these encounters is necessary to continue the plot, however — the characters *could* simply skip Andra and head directly for the graveyard, though doing so would stake the odds heavily against them.

Gear: Anything carried out of Scene 1

LOCATION

The unnatural fog grows thicker as the characters approach Andra, dropping visibility to 1/4 standard (rounded down). The terrain dips en route, which would normally give the characters a bird's eye view of the sleepy community, but instead the party must be nearly upon the outermost buildings before they loom out of the fog. The picturesque cottages are hollow shadows stained and scarred by signs of battle. Doors and shutters lean drunkenly in their frames, bashed in or shattered in the attack. Tattered curtains billow listlessly in the night breeze. Bodies yet to be dragged off by the ravens hang limply out of windows or lie sprawled in the streets. The rest... gone.



Ambiance: All is quiet; there are no animals or other night noises. Smell is the characters' most powerful sense here and the charnel aftermath is crushing. The copper scent of freshly spilt blood blends with the sticky acid-mint flavor of the unearthly fog to leave the characters simultaneously queasy and lightheaded. There's a sense that you shouldn't sit still for too long, lest the very air crust around you. This place hates the living.

Terrain: Forest/jungle and indoors/settled

Cultural Interest: The Realm

ACTION

This scene involves the characters sneaking through and around Andra seeking clues to what's happening — and eventually ways to end the threat. The area is overrun with raveners and Wiltweevil lurks in the trees. Attracting the attention of even one adversary can be devastating, as the sounds of combat can attract more, and more, and...

It should be clear from the outset that the area is not safe, that those responsible for the carnage are probably still close. The bodies of men, women, and children — even animals — are still fresh (and many have not yet been dragged off). Tracks are chaotic and recent. The characters may ignore the signs, in which case they learn the hard way.

The first time the characters enter Andra, and each time they head out for a new location in the village, they may make a team Sneak check opposed by the raveners' Notice (using the *lowest* Sneak bonus among them). If they fail, or if they move without Sneaking, they attract 1d3 raveners. There's no surprise round — the raveners rush into sight and initiative is rolled normally.

If the raveners are slain quickly and quietly (in 3 rounds or less with no noise above typical swordplay), no more of them notice the party and the PCs may continue to their destination unmolested; otherwise, and additional 1d3 raveners enter the fray and the process repeats. If after 6 rounds the combat is still going it attracts Wiltweevil, who lurks just out of sight and watches with interest (note his low-light vision). The rootwalker also arrives if the party suffers a critical failure with any Sneak check.

Wiltweevil's reaction to the party depends on their performance in battle. If the characters do well he lets them continue, shadowing them through the area (they're worthy opponents and that intrigues him — at least, until they truly threaten Master's plans). Wiltweevil is bored with any party that struggles against the raveners and he emerges to rid the world of them. This may result in an early demise for Master's lieutenant (and/or one or more characters!), though you still have plenty of raveners to throw at the characters if you like.

At all times, strive to instill in the party a sense of imminent fright and danger. Ominous sounds from just out of sight and ghostly glimpses of things best left unseen are among the tools of the day. This is an excellent time to invoke stress damage (*see Fantasy Craft, page 211*).

GOING TO THE CHAPEL...

Though the church is the closest of Andra's structures to the coaching inn, the fog keeps the characters from spotting it easily. Finding the south road off the thoroughfare requires a successful Notice check (DC 15), though the party can circumvent the roll by keeping to the eastern side of the creek and heading south (the road becomes visible about halfway to the church, where it's closest to the water).

As the party approaches the church read the following.

The church is built of heavy stone blocks with a slate-tiled roof and was clearly meant to last. It's also highly defensible, with windows that are too narrow for any average human to squeeze through. The windows are still intact, though tightly shuttered from within. The open grass surrounding the structure shows few tracks. It hasn't been breached yet — perhaps it hasn't even been attacked...

To get into the church the characters must first acquire the attention of the survivors within. They could simply knock on a shutter or door, though this yields no response (the survivors don't dare reveal themselves, lest the newcomers be raveners... or worse). Following the knock with intelligible words, however — *that* gets the survivors' attention. "Who's there?" comes the whispered response.

Convincing the survivors to let the party into the church requires a bit of roleplay and an Impress check opposed by Resolve. The survivors are on a razor's edge, so the PCs suffer a -4 penalty, though this penalty is negated if they mention Hertiger by name.

Failure doesn't keep the characters out of the church but does cause the villagers to hesitate long enough that 1d3 raveners notice the discussion. They rush toward the church just as the villagers open the door to let the characters in and while the party *can* get inside and shut the door before the raveners get close enough to attack they may realize it's tactically unwise. Left to their own devices outside, the raveners beat on the doors and windows, clawing and growling, and draw 1d3 more after 10 minutes. Another 1d3 arrive every 10 minutes thereafter until the area is swarming with them.

Fortunately, fighting raveners *outside* the church is a great way to bond with the survivors. They grab their crossbows and find the nearest crevice to fire through, supporting the characters as best they can from behind cover. Best of all, the characters are welcomed into the church with open arms after the fight, and the villagers are that much more eager to help them in any way they can.

As brothers in arms or fellow survivors the characters enter the church to meet the last six Andra villagers: Bastian (formerly the village cobbler — now technically the mayor), Brigit



(Bastian's wife), Maja (a dwarven weaver), Brother Sevrin (the church acolyte — now the village priest, heavens preserve him), Theodor (the altar boy), and Zerun (the town rat catcher).

The survivors can help the characters in several ways. First, they can explain what happened to Hertiger's party.

"We were in the mayor's house and sister Falthene and Engtas said we needed to move. The house was too big, they said, and too open. So we agreed to take a chance and head here. Hertiger would ride like mad for the Topsy Wyvern while the rest of us made a break across town.

"The rest is sort of a blur. The sage hurt his leg before we got out of the house. The elf stayed with him and told us to keep running. We fought our way out of the village but as we got to the creek the deaders started to catch up. Hasafti and Sister Falthene held back to hold the line and we kept going. We made it but... Such a terrible price...

"A couple of us have been thinking we should head back and find the others, see if they're still alive. They deserve that much, and more. They saved us. Plus, that sage fella kept checking his journal like it was important. I think it might be. They said they were here for the Church and they seemed to know things about the deaders but... There are just so many of them. I don't know. We just don't know."

If the characters get to know the survivors personally, they may earn some additional support.

- **Brigit** is a descendant of Paschel and each year on the day the Church honored him for his valor she places a single orchid on the steps of his tomb. She can direct the party there, and can also point them to a small game trail leading up to a rise overlooking the graveyard.
- **Brother Sevrin** is a trained Priest and can cast spells — or he could, if his faith wasn't shaken by the day's events (including the death of his mentor, Father Karenus). Rousing Sevrin out of his fugue requires time, compassion, and not a little skill at reading and responding to deep human frailty. Church-related characters can use Impress to fill the void left by Father Karenus, inspiring Sevrin as a new makeshift mentor. Others can use Sense Motive to walk Sevrin through his feelings or Bluff to inspire him with stories of heroes who acted despite fear, re-igniting his sense of duty. In all cases the challenge is overcoming Sevrin's sense of doubt, so the character's skill check opposes his Resolve. Sevrin's healing spells are included with his stat block (*see page 14*).
- **Maja Weaver**, widow of a former adventurer, can direct characters to her home near the mayor's house, where she keeps a small stockpile of gear.

- **Theodor**, a 10-year old altar boy, has been at the church since the initial attack and worries for his parents. If he learns that the characters are heading back to the village he pleads with them to look for "my da," adding that, "He's the sheriff." Theodor's father is in fact dead, his body already dragged off to the graveyard, but his mother is hiding in their home next door to the mayor's house. If rescued, she can gift the characters with an undead-slaying weapon Paschel's party forged just in case the Soul Star was ever unearthed. If the situation is dire, you may also use her to inform the characters about a series of secret tunnels under the village.
- **Zerun** is Andra's rat catcher and can help the characters get around town without being spotted. Using his advice the team gains a +2 bonus with all Sneak checks made to avoid the raveners. He may also know about the tunnels.

If the adventure is running long or you want to simplify the narrative, feel free to exclude some or all these NPCs.

At this point the characters may have several options: head to the mayor's house or Maja's stockpile; search for the rest of the first adventuring party, or the sheriff and his wife; head to Paschel's tomb; and/or evacuate the survivors, who are split on all options save the last (which they all agree is a bad idea). They can be won over without a skill check, but only after plenty of resistance. They fear the raveners but worse, they fear the land itself is turning against them. "The trees..." they warn, "they move." Brigit and Maja, who've spent the most time on watch, can point at parts of the tree line they swear were different before. They can't explain it and everything looks fine now.

In truth, they spotted Wiltweevil playing one of his games, lurking in wait for some unlucky villagers to approach the church. If the party has already fought the rootwalker they can perhaps put the survivors' minds to rest on the topic, especially if they claim to have killed the wretched general.

THE FALLEN PAIR

Again, the characters must make a team Sneak check as they move through Andra. If Zerun has revealed his secrets about the town's less traveled paths they gain a +2 bonus with this check. (The tunnels lead to many places in Andra but the church is not among them.)

Sister Falthene and Hasafti died at the creek along the most direct route from the church to Andra, though for the sake of the story you can place their bodies anywhere between the locations. Assuming the creek location the pair lies in a foot of slowly running water, surrounded by what's left of the half dozen raveners they took down before they died.

Sister Falthene was a tall, striking brunette clad in chainmail with a Church Guard tabard. She carried a beautiful, ornately adorned and filigreed broadsword that now lies in the water beside her. She was brought down by a vast array of tearing and gaping wounds, having lost too much blood to continue.



Hasafti the dwarf wizard is identifiable only by his squat stature and mage's robes. His head has been ripped from his body and lies a dozen feet away. Many of his bones have been broken, as though he was savagely beaten with something extremely large and heavy (Wiltweevil's feeder boughs).

The scene is disgusting and more than enough to prompt stress damage (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 211).

While distasteful, searching the bodies yields some gear and clues as to what's going on in town. In addition to Falthene's broadsword (dmg 1d10 lethal, error 1, threat 20, qualities: massive) and Hasafti's spellcasting components, there's a sturdy metal drinking flask labeled with the dwarven script for "comfort." It's filled with a single dose of a sweet-smelling healing potion (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 163). Hasafti's corpse also clutches in its hand a hunk of what appears to be black tree bark, though none of the nearby trees match the color.

Patches of semi-dry earth are available should the party wish to bury the bodies in makeshift graves. While you may wish to roll a few dice or even ask the players for Sneak checks to be cruel, there's no chance the ravener find the characters while they're performing this remarkably compassionate act.

THE MAYOR'S HOUSE AND THE TREE IN THE SQUARE

Again, the characters must make a team Sneak check as they move through Andra. If Zerun has revealed his secrets about the town's less traveled paths they gain a +2 bonus with this check. (The tunnels lead to many places in Andra but the church is not among them.)

The mayor's house faces the town square, which places it directly in the area of highest ravener concentration. On Wiltweevil's orders the zombies still stalk Andra's streets and houses looking for survivors.

As the party approaches or passes the town square (which they must do no matter how they come to the house), read the following.

The mayor's house, which faces onto the enormous town square, is a wreck. Its windows are all torn open and the barricades on the doors have been breached. No fewer than a dozen bodies litter the ground around the building — some villagers, some raveners. The area was clearly the scene of a pitched battle but it's quiet now.

There's no need to explore the mayor's house, as Engtas and Barald are found in the first room the party enters. They made their last stand in the room, unable to escape with the others. Their corpses lie amongst eight pin-cushioned raveners stapled to the walls and cluttering the floor. The room is a bloody mess — Engtas' throat is torn out and Barald is gutted — which is enough for additional stress damage (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 211).

Barald's haversack contains his journal and reading through the last few entries yields a player handout (see page 19–21). This is the best information the party can gain about the challenges facing them in Scene 3.

Unless the characters have already dispatched Wiltweevil, he arrives while they're in the mayor's house. He may be shadowing them, in which case he lurks outside until they emerge. Either way, he decides he's had enough fun with them and prepares to put them down once and for all. He attempts to move to a position from which he can pounce on the party as they leave the area — perhaps an empty patch of grass in the town square, where he can sit still and hopefully be mistaken for a tree the party failed to notice on its way into Andra. For this Wiltweevil makes a Sneak check opposed by a team Notice or Search check, as appropriate. This can result in a truly creepy situation if the party wins this check, with one of them spotting a tree that wasn't there before (stress damage). With failure they don't notice until they're headed to their next destination, with Wiltweevil benefiting from a surprise round.

The ravener know better than to interrupt Wiltweevil, so they steer clear of the combat, though some hiss at the party from nearby buildings. If Wiltweevil falls, however, a mob of ambitious ravener moves to avenge him. Victory against the mob keeps the rest of the ravener at bay; they're possessed of enough reasoning to know better.

Fleeing Wiltweevil results in a foot chase, the winner determined by the best two out of three opposed team Athletics checks (unless the party adopts an "every man for himself" approach, in which case the action may get as complicated as you prefer). Any chase through the fog immediately becomes a frenzied, blind dive into the unknown. You can highlight this with unexpected obstacles like buildings, wagons, bodies, trees, boulders, and other things that must be leapt or clambered over. Sudden drop-offs and steep inclines occasionally change the pace of the party's flight and you can ask the players for quick descriptions when the characters reach them. Though obstacles and terrain don't apply any modifiers to the chase — both sides have to deal with them equally — they're the best way to spice the rolls up with a little description.

Sadly, there's no opportunity to busy the heroes in the mayor's house (or anyone else in town) — not until after the adventure, at least.

OTHER LOCATIONS IN ANDRA

Again, the characters must make a team Sneak check as they move through Andra. If Zerun has revealed his secrets about the town's less traveled paths they gain a +2 bonus with this check. (The tunnels lead to many places in Andra but the church is not among them.)

Maja Weaver's house stands next door to the mayor's. It's a simple single-story affair that was largely spared from the fighting because it was unoccupied when the ravener arrived. The



stockpile is located in the basement, beneath a pile of firewood. It consists of any 3 non-magical items the party might want (within reason and with your approval). Thankfully the house is empty, though if you're feeling devious you might play the scene up as a potential trap (e.g. describing very recent ravener tracks through the building, having a cat or other small animal knock objects over in adjacent rooms, and the like).

The sheriff's house is located where the road from the Topsy Wyvern enters Andra, a short walk away from the mayor's house and out of line of sight from the town square. Theodor's mother, Frida, is hiding in the attic, hoping the ravener near the house will leave soon so she can go looking for her son. One of the fiercest battles in the village was fought right outside the building and the ravener have only just started to drag the many corpses away. Frida nearly gave herself away when they took her husband. The sight of his mangled body trailing through the dirt like that... He taught her well, though, and she kept her calm, clutching the hooded lantern she'd taken with her into the attic like the very lifeline it is.

Should the party come close enough to the house for Frida to see them, she lights the lantern and tilts the attic window open far enough to point the light in their direction. Both the ravener and the party make Notice checks (DC 15) to spot the light, and if the ravener see it they leave the corpses and head for the house. There are a dozen of them — more than enough for to challenge the party — and they do their best to swarm a couple targets rather than spread out. Saving Frida could prove difficult, but it's also quite rewarding.

Recognizing the threat of the Soul Star, Paschel's party specially commissioned a magic broadsword with an increased threat range when used against undead (18–20). Better yet, when the wielder scores a critical hit against an undead creature using the sword, all other undead within 30 ft. are struck with holy light, suffering 1d10 divine damage. The weapon is called 'Spirit' and its existence has been a secret shared by every mayor and sheriff of Andra since Paschel was buried. No one else was supposed to learn of it, but Theodor's father respected Frida too much to keep secrets from her. Perhaps in the grand scheme of things this was the work of some beneficent power — or just a fluke of good fortune. Either way, Frida happily retrieves the weapon from its hiding place and gives it to the characters if they liberate her.

If the characters also mention that Theodor is alive at the church, Frida declares she's heading there immediately. Letting her go on her own is an option, though not the most heroic one; a less callous party sees that she's reunited with her boy before heading elsewhere. The players may worry that they're on a clock, which is a valid fear and one you shouldn't dismiss, but the reality is that Scene 3 unfolds the same way regardless.

DIRECTION

Here are some questions that might be asked of the church survivors, and their answers.

Q: What do you know about the other adventuring party?

A: Bastian says, "There were five. The sage Barald Rocobienne was their leader. There was a woodland scout named Hertiger, an elven archer named Engtas Whisperthorn, the soldier-nun Sister Falthene, and a dwarven wizard named Hasafti Gurion. They arrived just after the ravener — not a second too soon, I might add. They did their best to save us but... There were just too many. Too many..."

Q: What do you know about Paschel?

A: Brigit says, "He was an ancestor of mine, a bunch of generations ago. My family always taught that he was a wizard who went into the world and did good. When he retired here, he had enough money to build this church and he made sure it was built to last. He had a little chest, just a couple feet across, and his Will ordered it to be buried with him. Nobody knows what was in it but there've been treasure stories ever since."

Q: How did Hertiger find a horse to ride to the Topsy Wyvern?

A: Maja says, "The Mayor's house had an attached stable. Hertiger found the horse when we were barricading the place. It was a magnificent animal, and well behaved, too. The mayor must have paid top dollar for it."

Q: Where's the village priest?

A: Theodor the altar boy says, "He died. He was tryin' to help people and the deaders killed him. Sevrin's the priest now but he hasn't said much for a while. He just kind of sits there."

Q: The church is on the edge of town. Why haven't you fled?

A: Zerun says, "Cuz there's sommat in the trees, I says. The deaders done bewitched 'em, the trees. There was people what tried to get a-runnin' when the deaders first attacked. Some came back out of the forest sayin' there was ghosts and other such things in there. Others didna come back a-tall. There's sommat *evil* in the trees, I says. We're safer here behind good stone."





CAST

ANDRA VILLAGERS (STANDARD NPCs)

"Did you hear something?"

Description: Before the ravener attack the people of Andra were warm, welcoming, well groomed, and a bunch of other "Ws" that set them apart from your garden-variety villagers. They lived comfortable lives and extended that pleasure to all who visited. Many came to join them, settling in to retire like Paschel's party of old. Today, however, the PCs find Andra under siege by an evil its people can't even fathom and it shows in their beleaguered appearance. The few survivors wear the same clothes they put on yesterday morning. They cling to the things they were holding when the monsters came, seeking solace in the familiar. They're like phantoms in their own home.

Motivations: The survivors are tired, battered, and paranoid. They still wear comfortable clothes but they're shredded almost beyond recognition. Beneath dirt and blood their sullen faces betray abject defeat. Andra's children wait to die. Still, the light of life burns deep in them and if the characters offer them even a glimmer of hope they latch on with both hands.

Andra Villagers (Medium Folk Walkers): Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init I; Atk II; Def III; Res IV; Health V; Comp IV; Skills: None; Qualities: None

Attacks/Weapons: Shortsword (dmg 1d8 lethal, threat 19–20, qualities: *keen 4*), light crossbow with 10 standard bolts (dmg 1d6 lethal, threat 19–20, range 50 ft. × 6, qualities: *AP 4, load 5, poisonous*)

Gear: None

Treasure: None

Two of the villagers stand out from the rest.

- Brigit is a tougher fighter than the rest, with an Attack Grade of IV and a Defense Grade of V. She also has an axe (dmg 1d10 lethal, threat 20, qualities: *AP 4*).
- Brother Sevrin has the Spellcasting Signature Skill (Grade III) and the Bless, Cure Wounds I, and True Strike I spells (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 228).

RAVENERS (STANDARD NPCs, ADVERSARIES)

"Bleargghhiss!"

Description: These crazed undead creatures come in as many species, shapes, and sizes as adventurers. They wear the tattered remains of what they were buried in, scorched and brittle from exposure to the Grave Wurm's acidic stomach. The raveners frequently make savage bite attacks, causing their facial flesh to tear and their teeth to crack and splinter, leaving jagged maws where their mouths once were.

Motivations: Ravens are consumed with hatred for all living things, which they can sense by smell. They slay all living creature that cross their paths with unnerving speed and ferocity, and when all their enemies are dead, they bring the remains of their victims back to the Andra graveyard so the Wurm can consume and convert them.

Notes: A ravener bite is truly dangerous. Its jagged teeth and ichor-infused maw cause terrible wounds that refuse to heal. Worse, a ravener can spit a wad of ichor and tooth fragments at nearby enemies, which accounts for their bite's increased Reach. Unlike a zombie, a ravener's condition isn't spread as an infection, though party members may not realize this when they first encounter the creatures.

Ravens (Medium Undead Folk Walkers — 65 XP): Str 12, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 6, Wis 6, Cha 6; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 40 ft. ground; Init VII; Atk V; Def III; Res V; Health III; Comp I; Skills: Athletics V; Qualities: *Devour, dread, feat (Wolf Pack Basics, Wolf Pack Mastery), monstrous defense I, light-sensitive*

Attacks/Weapons: Bite II (dmg 1d8+1 lethal, threat 17–20, qualities: *bleed, reach +2*), Slam I (dmg 1d6 lethal, threat 20)

Gear: None

Treasure: None

WILTWEEVIL (SPECIAL NPC, ADVERSARY)

"I'll gut you like a fish, you flimsy sack of blood and water!"

Description: Except for the hide of Ekrajmez the saurian, which dangles high in his branches like a horrible hat, Wiltweevil looks just like a natural tree — though perhaps an elder one with scarred bark. Wiltweevil keeps the seams of his face closed most of the time, only cracking them to watch where he's moving and stare down opponents in battle. Wiltweevil excels in war primarily due to his ability to outthink the enemy. His amber eyes glisten with keen wit.

Motivations: Wiltweevil long ago parted ways with reality. Long traveled with Master and accustomed to victory, he believes he's unstoppable. This leads to him to view all others but Master as 'things,' mere obstacles to be torn down at a whim. Wiltweevil feels no remorse for the countless lakes of blood he's spilt, nor the awful future Master plans for the world. He's content with the constant opportunities provided to toy with Master's foes. Wiltweevil's favorite tactic is to sow fear and discord in the enemy's ranks, reveling as they break down. In forest terrain like this, he frequently plants his feet and sits still; when he's lucky, the enemy is blind enough to make camp under his branches.

Notes: Wiltweevil prefers to ambush opponents and usually opens with a Slam attack, plowing his boughs into both sides of a victim (this is just one attack — the fact that he's using two branches is just flavor). When fighting more than one opponent, he Grapples one and uses it as a Screaming Club on the others (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 220).



Wiltweevil (Large Plant Walker — 130 XP): Str 22, Dex 14, Con 18, Int 18, Wis 16, Cha 12; SZ L (2×2, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init IV; Atk VI; Def VI; Res V; Health VIII; Comp II; Skills: Athletics IV, Blend VI, Resolve VI, Sneak VI, Tactics VI; Qualities: *Achilles heel (fire)*, *chameleon II (forest/jungle)*, *damage reduction 2*, *darkvision I*, *feat (Ambush Basics, Two-Hit Combo)*, *rend*

Attacks/Weapons: Slam III (dmg 2d8+6 lethal, threat 19–20, qualities: *grab, trip*)

Gear: Grotesque saurian-skin hat

Treasure: 1G, 1T

NEXT STEPS

Eventually the party will decide to head for Paschel's tomb. Scene 3 begins as they leave Andra.

SCENE 3: TO FACE THE FIEND

Paschel's Tomb, a few hours to just before dawn

OBJECTIVES

- Kill or capture Master
- Defeat the Grave Wurm

CHALLENGES

- The arrival of Master brings on a Dramatic Scene
- Master's no slouch and the Grave Wurm is downright nightmarish
- Master knows the Soul Star's weakness and fights tooth and nail to keep the artifact in his possession
- Those pesky ravener's just keep coming!

SYNOPSIS

Scene Type: Standard (but becomes Dramatic when Master arrives)

GM Briefing: As the characters arrive at the graveyard Master is in Paschel's tomb and the Grave Wurm is burrowing beneath the headstones, swallowing a couple previously buried bodies. The only enemies on the field are a small group of ravener's dragging corpses from Andra to Paschel's tomb so the Wurm can convert them. The characters can attack the ravener's and likely defeat them easily, though Master and the Wurm notice the fighting and use it to their advantage. Waiting until the Wurm surfaces is the sounder plan, allowing the party to potentially catch the beast by surprise.

Master arrives late to the combat unless the party sneaks directly into Paschel's tomb (unlikely — remember that the tunnels can't take them there). Should the characters manage this feat anyway, the Grave Wurm bashes its way in though the

subterranean walls (a slow process, though exciting). Defeating Master is tough but if the party can steal the Soul Star from him he loses control of the Wurm and the ravener's, evening the fight significantly.

Gear: Anything carried out of Scene 2

LOCATION

The tomb is grandiose for a village as small as Andra, carved directly into the mountainside and adorned with sculptures of Paschel and his fellow adventurers. It's the graveyard's centerpiece, typically visible from anywhere close. In the fog it looms over the area like the home of a judgmental god.

Ambiance: The tomb's stone portal is breached, shards of it scattered about the entrance, which is a pitch-black pit. The scent of freshly dug earth is powerful here, as is visual evidence of the Grave Wurm's tunneling. The air is deathly still and the fog billows thickest and most pungent everywhere in the area.

Terrain: Indoors/settled

Cultural Interest: The Realm

ACTION

The characters may arrive directly from town or use the game trail to get an idea what's going on ahead of time. Either way read the following aloud.

Andra's cemetery occupies a narrow band of land about 60 feet deep and 300 feet wide, stretching along the base of a mountain a mile outside the village. Its centerpiece is an impressive tomb cut directly into the mountainside and decorated with life-size sculptures of an adventuring party. The tomb's entrance has been shattered, pieces of its stone door littering the area. No light is visible from within; indeed, it almost seems like the tomb is consuming light from around it.

The ground is uneven everywhere in the cemetery — shallow depressions and small mounds are everywhere. The air is deathly still and the fog billows thicker than anywhere you've been before.

Through the mist you catch sight of a half dozen undead dragging bodies toward the tomb. They seem to have arrived from Andra.

If the PCs enter the graveyard directly, add the following.

The smell of fresh earth is strong here. The dead have been busy...

The game trail is too far from the cemetery to fire arrows, but surprising the ravener's is simple — they're focused on the task at hand and distracted by Master and the Grave Wurm being so close. This translates to a +2 bonus with the party's Sneak check, which may grant a surprise round.



The Grave Wurm notices any fighting immediately and burrows in that direction. It erupts under the center of the fight at the start of Round 2, forcing everyone within 5 ft. to make a Balance check (DC 18). Any who fail, including ravens, suffer 1d6 lethal damage and become *sprawled* in the nearest undisturbed and unoccupied squares. As the fight continues the Wurm acts on single-minded impulse, trying to grab and swallow each closest living being in turn.

Unless the characters sneak into the tomb, Master emerges at the start of the round after the Wurm arrives, spreading his arms and bellowing, "Enough!" The Grave Wurm and the ravens all freeze and even the fog seems to freeze in mid-air. Master addresses the party that's dared to enter "his domain." The conversation may unfold something like this.

Master: "Bow, for you are in the presence of greatness."

Player Characters: "Yeah... Who are you again?"

M: (with an evil smirk) "You may call me Master."

PCs: "Um ... What are you doing here?"

M: "Laying the foundation of my reign. You will swear your fealty to me. *Now.*"

PCs: "The rootwalker one of yours?"

M: "Wiltweevil is the captain of my army. You will speak of him with respect. Now kneel!"

PCs: "I don't think so. How about—"

M: "Cease your prattle! All I wish to hear from you are oaths of fealty!"

PCs: "Bite me."

M: "Enough insolence! Die!"

Master's end of the conversation is driven by one thing — sating his insatiable ego. Characters who stroke him may well be kept alive (for a while), but the whole group must swear fealty to avoid renewed fighting. In the unlikely event that the party acquiesces, he demands to know who they are, where they've come from, and what they can offer him. To their benefit he's even more vulnerable to praise while engaged and the party might be able to learn a thing or two about his plan in the process. This option can fill in blanks left by careless or impetuous play earlier in the adventure (heading directly to the tomb, for instance, or failing to find Barald's journal), but it's fraught with danger. Master's people skills are a little erratic; he could decide at any

time that the PCs are lying, or have lied, in which case they must pay the price for their bitter betrayal. Even if the party manages to satisfy his twisted logic, he's not about to just lay it all out for them. All sensitive inquiries, like those about the Sun Star, the Grave Wurm, and Master's weaknesses ("our weaknesses" would work better) must be framed as questions from concerned subjects rather than interested adventurers. Otherwise the whole ruse falls apart and the fighting sparks up again, this time with more fury than ever.

The final combat is intense, with Master, the Grave Wurm, and any remaining ravens assaulting the characters at once. Three additional ravens are brewing inside the Wurm and arrive on Rounds 3, 5, and 7, dripping with rank ooze and hungry for their first kills. Any characters killed and swallowed by the Wurm (or swallowed live, only to die in its gullet) may also come back, should the combat continue for long enough.

Remain mindful of the fight's pacing. The onus is on you to make this a suitably climactic battle and if things are going too easily for the party you may want to consider adding a few more ravens. Sinkholes can open under characters, caused by the Wurm's tunneling, and the fog can be used to confuse and obscure the fight, perhaps even splitting it into smaller combats as needed. These last two options can also be used to *help* the characters if needed (sinkholes opening under enemies or the fog obscuring the PCs or their actions).

All opponents fight to the death — Master is undaunted, assured of his ultimate victory no matter the odds, and so long as he wears the Soul Star the Wurm and ravens follow his lead. This is his true weakness — if the characters can remove the Star from Master, he loses control of all its creations. A foolhardy character may even try to *use* the stolen artifact, though doing so places him in mortal jeopardy (*see below*).

Alas, separating Master from the Soul Star is no easy feat. It's buckled to his chest and a character must apply 2 Handle Item Grapple Benefits to remove it (one to unbuckle the Star and another to pull it free). The characters may come up with an alternate plan and you should consider anything they propose, especially if it's fun for everyone.

The Soul Star goes dormant when not worn, in which case the ravens go inert and the Grave Wurm becomes *enraged*. This may result in the Grave Wurm attacking Master. If the characters avoid the ensuing fight, you can just make an opposed attack check to determine the winner (describing the action with appropriate flair, of course). The loser is killed and the winner's vitality drops to 1/2 the previous total (rounded down). With any luck dispatching the winner becomes a trivial exercise.

USING THE SOUL STAR

The Soul Star has no intelligence, though its corrupting influence compels the owner to perform actions that may make the artifact appear intelligent. When a character first dons the item, and at the end of each week he wears it thereafter, he must



make a Will save (DC 10 + 1 per full week the item has been worn). With failure, the character's Wisdom is impaired by 1 and he becomes irrationally protective of the item, going so far as to attack anyone who attempts to take it from him, until he succeeds with a future Will save. Should the character's Wisdom drop to 0 while he wears the item, he loses conscious control and becomes obsessed with creating new ravener — even if that means finding corpses the old-fashioned way.

The Soul Star becomes dormant when not worn. Should the Grave Wurm still live when this happens it becomes *enraged* and remains so until it's slain or the Soul Star is worn again. While *enraged*, the Wurm considers all living beings targets — even the Soul Star's former wearer.

While the Soul Star is dormant, ravener become inert.

PASCHEL'S CHEST

Should the characters investigate Paschel's tomb, they find the remains of a middle-aged human and a small metal chest containing 2 Treasure Rolls (1C, 1M).

CAST

RAVENERS (STANDARD NPCs, ADVERSARIES)

"Bleargghhiss!"

Description: These crazed undead creatures come in as many species, shapes, and sizes as adventurers. They wear the tattered remains of what they were buried in, scorched and brittle from exposure to the Grave Wurm's acidic stomach. The ravener frequently make savage bite attacks, causing their facial flesh to tear and their teeth to crack and splinter, leaving jagged maws where their mouths once were.

Motivations: Ravener are consumed with hatred for all living things, which they can sense by smell. They slay all living creature that cross their paths with unnerving speed and ferocity, and when all their enemies are dead, they bring the remains of their victims back to the Andra graveyard so the Wurm can consume and convert them.

Notes: A ravener bite is truly dangerous. Its jagged teeth and ichor-infused maw cause terrible wounds that refuse to heal. Worse, a ravener can spit a wad of ichor and tooth fragments at nearby enemies, which accounts for their bite's increased Reach. Unlike a zombie, a ravener's condition isn't spread as an infection, though party members may not realize this when they first encounter the creatures.

Ravener (Medium Undead Folk Walkers — 65 XP): Str 12, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 6, Wis 6, Cha 6; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 40 ft. ground; Init VII; Atk V; Def III; Res V; Health III; Comp I; Skills: Athletics V; Qualities: *Devour, dread, feat (Wolf Pack Basics, Wolf Pack Mastery), monstrous defense I, light-sensitive*

Attacks/Weapons: Bite II (dmg 1d8+1 lethal, threat 17–20, qualities: *bleed, reach +2*), Slam I (dmg 1d6 lethal, threat 20)

Gear: None

Treasure: None

THE GRAVE WURM (STANDARD NPC, ADVERSARY)

"<wet huffing breathing>"

Description: This bloated white worm is the size of a horse and wagon, with grotesque purple veins shot through the tissue beneath its semi-transparent skin. It has no eyes nor grasping limbs; the only feature breaking its freakish exterior is its horrifying mouth, a circle of gripping teeth wide enough to consume a man whole. The stench that rises from this awful cavity can bring even the fiercest warrior to his knees.

Motivations: The Grave Wurm exists to serve the Soul Star's owner. It has no true will of its own, being a creation of ancient evil forces made flesh.

The Grave Wurm (Huge Beast Undead Burrower — 94 XP): Str 18, Dex 10, Con 15, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 8; SZ M (4×4, Reach 2); Spd 30 ft. burrow; Init I; Atk V; Def VIII; Res VIII; Health VI; Comp I; Skills: Athletics V; Qualities: *Blindsight, condition immunity (baffled, stunned), damage reduction 3, death throes (divine damage), dread, tough 3*

Attacks/Weapons: Swallow III (dmg 4d8 divine, threat —, qualities: none; notes: grapple benefit — when a character dies in the Grave Wurm's gullet, or the Grave Wurm swallows a corpse, the beast's vile digestive tract takes over, converting the victim into a ravener; the process takes 5 rounds, after which the new ravener is unceremoniously expelled from the Wurm's posterior; the Wurm can process up to 6 victims at a time)

Gear: None

Treasure: 1A, 3T

MASTER (SPECIAL NPC, ADVERSARY)

"I will rule from the heavens to the seas! None shall stand before me!"

Description: Master is an imposing figure, standing well over 6 ft. tall and covered shoulder to toe in black lacquered plates with a fiery red, sable-trimmed cloak billowing behind. He goes without a helmet, inviting discourse during battle, and he pins his hair back with a regal silver circlet so his view of the battlefield is never obstructed. Master's piercing eyes flare with imperious arrogance, all the more when he aims them down the bridge of his patrician nose. He is every inch the model of a dark and sinister king, forged for a life of unforgiving rule.

Motivations: The Soul Star is the perfect vehicle for Master's greatest desire: bloody, apocalyptic conquest. Every life taken and every soul corrupted is another glory in his impending legacy of doom — one from which he might spare the characters, should they swear fealty to him.



Master (Medium Folk Walker — 132 XP): Str 18, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 12; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 20 ft. ground (including armor); Init V; Atk VII; Def V; Res X; Health VIII; Comp VI; Skills: Athletics VII, Intimidate IX, Resolve VIII, Survival V, Tactics VII; Qualities: *Class ability (Paladin: stand in judgment I, take heart), dramatic entrance, feat (Glint of Madness, Misdirection Basics), frenzy II*

Attacks/Weapons: Zweihander (dmg 1d12 lethal, threat 19–20 (18–20 vs. special characters), qualities: *guard +1, massive*)

Gear: Partial plate armor with light fittings (DR 5, Resist Blunt 1, DP –4, ACP –4, Speed –10 ft., Disguise obvious), Soul Star

Treasure: 1A, 1C, 1M

NEXT STEPS

Ideally, the characters contain the Soul Star, slay the Grave Wurm, and either capture or kill Master. The King's troops follow the next day, cleansing the valley of raveners and helping to rebuild Andra. Peace returns to Fels Cut and in time its reputation heals. It's much longer before the valley's population returns to normal but assuming the church survivors escape there's a solid foundation for the future. If saved, Frida may take up her husband's mantle, enforcing law in the area. If Brother Sevrin's faith is restored, he may wind up Andra's priest in the next few years, offering a unique insight unavailable to many people of the cloth. Bastian's role as leader in the crisis awakens a powerful need to serve and he steps up as Andra's next mayor. One day, Theodor follows in his footsteps.

Zerun? He catches rats for years to come. Some folks realize their potential early.

Barald's journal mentions the Church's interest in Master and the Soul Star, and locals who spoke to the adventurers heard the same. If the characters fulfill this quest, they make powerful allies in the clergy and receive invitations to take on more missions for the church, which you can use as a springboard for greater adventure.

REWARDS AND PENALTIES

Don't forget to add XP for adversaries (listed in their stat blocks).

SCENE 1: A QUIET EVENING INTERRUPTED

A. Turning Lizabet's head	25 XP
A. Stabilizing Hertiger	50 XP
A. Saving few (25% or less) of the NPCs needing help	25 XP
B. Saving most (26–75%) of the NPCs needing help	50 XP
C. Saving all of the NPCs needing help	75 XP

SCENE 2: VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED

A. Earning the Andra survivors' trust	25 XP
A. Getting to know the Andra survivors personally	25 XP
B. Helping Brother Sevrin overcome his fugue	50 XP
A. Burying Falthene and Hasafti	25 XP
A. Recovering Barald's journal	50 XP
A. Rescuing Frida	50 XP
B. Reuniting Frida with Theodor	75 XP

SCENE 3: TO FACE THE FIEND

A. Defeating Master by using the Soul Star	75 XP
B. Defeating Master without using the Soul Star	150 XP



THE TRAVELING JOURNAL OF HERTIGER

Only the first couple pages of the journal are filled. The entries aren't dated and the handwriting is inexpert. The journal itself seems fairly new.

Barald told me I'd do well to keep a record of my travels, so I bought this book to write them in.

We're off to a village called Andra in Fels Cut. The Church contacted Barald through Sister Falthene and set us up with a nice little tomb-robbing job. Of course, it's the Church, so they call it reclamation or something. A wizard named Paschel died out there and he supposedly took some holy relics to the grave. Now the Church wants them back.

We leave in the morning. Tonight we're staying at a nice inn called the Topsy Wyvern. There's a good-looking barmaid here I may have to double back for. It's been a while.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JOURNAL OF BARALD ROCOBIENNE

As regards one Paschel, an alleged wizard of dubious note:

Paschel was, according to the tax rosters of Valespire, an "adventuring wizard." This appellation is not borne out by examination of the Mage's Guild rosters, which never list Paschel with a rank higher than apprentice. That he may have been a tale-spinner, however, is neither here nor there. The point stands — he went into the world, returned with a chest of treasures, lived a fine "retirement" in his home village where he was regarded as a local hero, and had his chest entombed with him.

This chest is the sticking point. While the Church of course believes Paschel may possess one or several holy relics (and why the Church cannot keep track of its sacred property continues to boggle the mind), he had one adventure that continues to bear note.

The only apparent mention of Paschel beyond official rosters of the tax and guild-membership variety (hardly a promising sign for an "adventuring wizard" seeking to lead a life of renown) lies in the story circulated in a coastal town called Hondel. This town, it would seem, was suddenly and unexpectedly invaded by a horde of the undead, and subsequently saved by an adventuring company including a bold but naïve wizard named "Passle." The company to which he belonged fought off the horde and recovered from its leader an item named in the legend (for the story is generations old) the Soul Stone. This item is never mentioned in any further histories of the area and indeed is mentioned in regional texts as "lost to us." Given Paschel's apparent proximity to the Soul Stone, and its subsequent disappearance, one is given to wonder whether his fingers were perhaps stickier than his reputation.

Paschel appears to have been brave but unable to think a problem through to its end. It plausibly follows that he kept the Soul Stone (along with holy relics the Church couldn't keep their hands on, and whatever other treasures large or small would fit in his alleged chest) for bragging rights or some other mundane purpose. If this is the case, his village could be sitting on an artifact of extreme power and the Church would rightly wish to see his chest removed and returned to Valespire for safekeeping.

Perhaps the Churchmen aren't the fools I thought. Not entirely.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JOURNAL OF BARALD ROCOBIENNE

On the Soul Stone:

According to Guichard, what the villagers of Hondel called the Soul Stone is in fact called the Soul Star. It is a fist-sized amethyst cut into a four-pointed star, set in a silver medallion conforming to the gem's shape. The medallion is apparently rung for a chain or ribbon or other band, though such an addition would not be part of the item itself. Guichard notes that the reverse of the medallion is featureless and that this has led scoundrels to create fakes, knowing it would be harder to reveal their fraud.

On the power of the thing Guichard is vague and I suspect he has no real experience with it. Montoni, however, describes plainly an experience with the Soul Star and while his writings smack of tenuous sanity his discussion of a great white worm in service to the Soul Star cannot be entirely discounted. Apparently this worm creates ravaging undead fiends of both speed and cunning — not the best news, as this is borne out in the legend from Hondel.

Tarant's writings support the white worm as well, naming it the Grave Wurm (the spelling is likely more a product of Tarant's time but I note it here on the chance it will prove useful). Tarant describes the monster as an immense scavenging beast whose bodily processes create fodder for the Soul Star's necromantic magicks. Further information is not forthcoming, though the obvious conclusion is grotesque almost beyond contemplation.

Fortunately, Tarant's notes also include a faint glimmer of hope for containing the Soul Star, should such a need arise (and I hope to the heavens that it does not, and that this errand is entirely as it seems). Tarant draws comparisons from the Grave Wurm's power over the dead and concludes that the Soul Star may ironically require a tie to the living.



EXCERPTS FROM THE JOURNAL OF BARALD ROCOBIENNE

On the last page, in a hurried hand:

We are besieged.

I have seized a moment to organize my thoughts before fully displaying them to my companions, who are too consumed with fighting off the creatures in the streets to listen to my mental meanderings — they need something simple, and I must first simplify the concepts to myself. Tarant's discussions of the artifact drawing reason from its wielder (like a lamprey draws life force from a shark) quickly grow mind-numbingly esoteric but the principal point bears note: The Soul Star may well need to be possessed to work its magic, which leads to an obvious weakness...

The undead in Andra do not spawn from mere death. We've been watching for Ekrajmez' animated corpse but have yet to see it among the attackers, nor have we seen any disquiet corpses. We have, however, seen the undead dragging some corpses away — perhaps to the graveyard. If we survive this assault, the graveyard must be our next destination.

I believe what we are seeing here is the Soul Star's corruption of the one called "Master," whom the Church sent us to capture. They forbade us from recounting our mission and I am tempting my soul in writing this, but I feel death is all too close and should we fail someone must take up the charge. Together or apart the Master and the Soul Star must be returned to the Church. Only they have the facility to deal with this permanently.







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