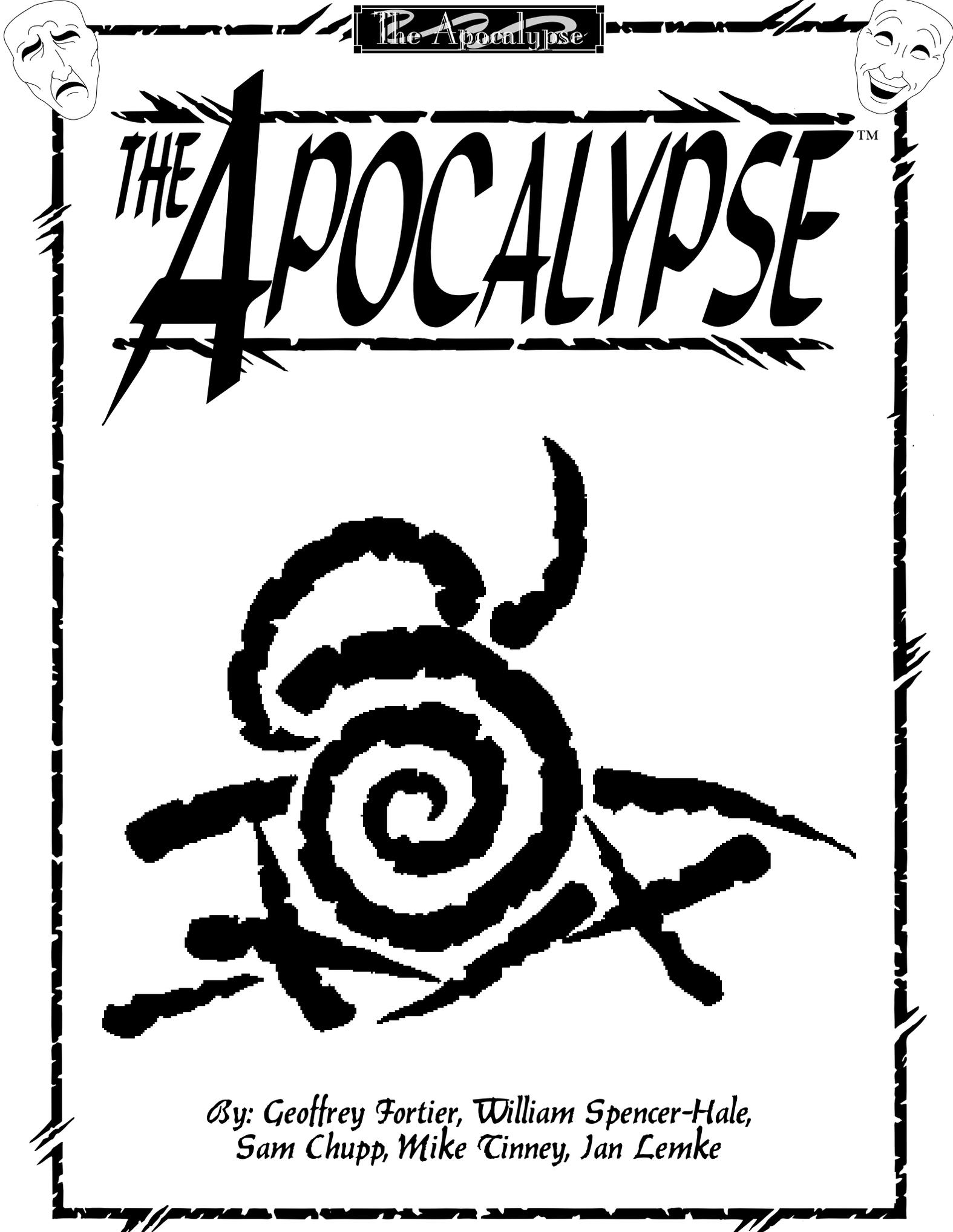


The Apocalypse



THE APOCALYPSE™



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1977



LEGENDS OF THE GAROU

Blood Dance

The night was darker than most. Shadows danced through the thick, gray fog like restless ghosts, moving through the darkness like spirits intent upon goals no mortal should know. The howling wind carried hollow, mournful whispers into the night. A chill breeze snaked about the forest and into the trees, causing the leaves to rustle as if in fear. The fire that burned in the small clearing added little comfort to the figures gathered there. Its crimson flames were delicate and pitiful against the formidable, penetrating silence of the night. It was a night for tales, tales of loss and horror, fear and death, nightmares and murder. It was a night to remember stories that were best forgotten.

Sean O'Flaherty, known as Laughs-at-Blood by the Garou, stepped suddenly into the clearing, causing everyone gathered to start at the gnarled figure that stepped into the firelight. Many members of the sept regarded him with uncertainty because of his metis nature. Laughs-at-Blood chuckled quietly to himself as he allowed a smile to cross his pale, gaunt features. He loved a good horror story. He carelessly flicked an auburn lock from his face with a delicate, scarred hand and took his place in the center of the gathered circle. As a Fianna loremaster in the Sept of the Singing Sword, it was his place to tell stories and pass on tales to be remembered for all times. Telling tales was his passion in life. He enjoyed capturing and holding an audience's attention as he wove his stories. Laughs-at-Blood also had a hunger to be the center of attention— after all, he was Irish.

The gathered Garou glanced up at the loremaster as he gazed into the fire; his bright emerald eyes reflected the flickering flames. Despite the demanding presence of the Fianna Galliard, the circle maintained a vigilant watch, mindful of the creeping blackness of this haunted night. Something did not seem right. Those gathered this night were from all tribes. Even the Red Talons sat growling in the glow of the flames. This was a night for brothers and sisters, one where differences could be cast into the fire and all could be of one spirit. Come morning, when the sun would rise and the fire would be nothing more than a gray, smoldering memory, prejudices would be proudly plucked from the ashes and worn again like badges. Yet, in the darkness of this night, tomorrow did not exist.

Laughs-at-Blood cleared his throat and threw his hands into his pockets to keep them protected from the night's chill. He bowed his head solemnly and, in a hoarse whisper, began his tale...

"There are things in the shadows that writhe and hiss, spitting their contempt for our kind. They wait, ever so patiently, for one of our kind to be caught alone and unaware."

One of the gathered Garou, a Stargazer pup, stood at the edge of the clearing. She had risen from the circle and had taken a few steps into the darkness. As Laughs-at-Blood spoke these words, she quickly turned and rejoined the gathering. This time, she sat a little closer to the fire. Laughs-at-Blood smiled, turning his face from the child as he continued his tale.

"We all know of these beasts. The Wyrms and its brothers wish to destroy us. Only then will the Wyrms be



able to succeed in its foul plan. If this happens, then all is lost. We must be strong.

“Remember, though, that there is more to the Wyrms than its scheming, black minions. Aye, much more. The Wyrms are among us even as we speak, its tentacles moving silently between us. The Wyrms are everywhere.” The small crowd sat closer together, sharing glances with one another and casting their gaze into the dancing shadows of the night. “This is not a tale of the Wyrms we see. Instead, it is a story of the Wyrms we don’t see—the Wyrms that are able to live among us, tricking us into believing it is Garou and then dragging us into the night to eat our souls *one by ONE!*” The sudden shout sent a wave of horror into the souls of everyone gathered.

This time, Laughs-at-Blood did not smile.

“This tale is about those who take our form to spill our blood. This is a tale of the Skin Dancer.” All was quiet now. Even the owls and the crickets ceased their midnight symphony, as if they wished to hear the tale as well. Night cloaked the gathering, and the fire’s protection seemed small and insignificant by comparison.

“In the days of my youth, when I was no older than some of you, the Sept of the Singing Sword was stalked by one who disguised himself as one of us. To the Sept, he was known as Gloom... just Gloom. He only spoke when he was spoken to, preferring silence to any form of conversation. He had arrived from afar. In fact, no one knew of his origin. He had appeared at the sept one day

asking for shelter. As he was of the Changing Breed, we were obligated to comfort him. Little did anyone know, a deceiver had stepped into our lives, one who was intent upon dragging us all screaming into hell.

“I remember that as he walked into the sept, he did so with an arrogant stride. His black eyes surveyed everything with a quiet, purposeful evil. As he walked, his gaze caught mine, and, as I was just a pup, I ran to the elders, seeking safety in their company. Shrouded in his weathered cloak under a black hood, he was quite frightening to a child. For me, this was only the beginning of the terror.

“For those of you who may not have heard of Skin Dancers, let me explain. Skin Dancers are like people, I guess, except that they’ve been tainted by the Wyrms. This causes them to become evil, giving them the desire to destroy any who would oppose the Wyrms... mainly us. Humans become Skin Dancers through a horrific ritual involving Garou blood and the pelt of a slain werewolf. Exactly how this is done, I don’t know. I’m glad that I’ve never witnessed such a ritual, because if I did, I’m sure the rage would grip me and I would feast on the flesh of all involved. Hmmm, not a bad idea, really. Anyway, back to my point...

“For a while, all was quiet, and the stranger kept to himself. Life at the sept went on as usual. We accepted the stranger into the fold, despite his odd ways. Of course, we had no idea of the darkness that was in his soul, only



that he was a bit aloof. No one spoke to him, and he kept to himself. After a while, it was as if he was not even there. That was our greatest mistake.

“In the months that followed, horrible things began to happen. The first to fall to this villain was a pup no older than some of you. She had ventured into the forest alone, as we often do, only this time she did not return. The next day, concerned members of the sept gathered and called a hunt to find the missing child. Unfortunately, they did.

“What was left of her was nauseating. She had been ripped open from neck to navel. Her entrails had been spread around the small clearing that her body was found in. She had been completely skinned. Her muscles and tissue were naked to the morning sun, and they glistened with blood. Although I was too young to hunt with the adults—I had yet to reach the age of my Rite of Passage—I can still imagine how she would have looked on that morning. At times, those images still haunt my dreams.”

Laughs-at-Blood stepped from the circle and into the darkness of the night. For many long moments, he stared into the night, his thoughts unknown to all. The moon illuminated his face, and a tear could be seen making a purposeful trek down his face. Laughs-at-Blood stared into the face of Luna and whispered something that no one else could hear. He then angrily wiped the moisture from his face and stepped back into the circle. His face was devoid of emotion.

“Her name was Rolls-in-Clover,” Laughs-at-Blood continued, “and she was my Song-Sister. We had made

our vow of the song when we were very young, as the Fianna do. It was the first time that I had felt the rage rise within me. I remember the bittersweet taste of it in the back of my throat as I howled my sadness at her loss. Yet, since I was not old enough and was not considered an adult to the sept, I could do nothing to avenge her. I could only mourn.”

Laughs-at-Blood bit his lip hard as he stared into ground. A small trickle of blood, a shiny, crimson trail of despair ran down his chin as he remembered. This was a tale that was difficult to repeat, but one that had to be told.

“The Ahroun called together a war party to hunt down and destroy this minion of the Wyrms that waited just outside our door. Gloom, silent and sullen as always, joined the war party with the other warriors. Little did anyone know that the killer was among their ranks. They went into the woods, howling and screaming their rage into the sky until, at last, the sept was silent. Only the very old and the very young remained behind.

“The hunt was useless, of course. There were no monsters lurking in the forest. As the warriors hunted their imaginary horrors and those who remained at the sept surrendered to sleep, Gloom slipped quietly away from the war party and made his way back to the sept. Quickly, he crept about the sept, avoiding the light of the moon as he stalked his next victim.

“Outside my hut, I heard the soft sounds of feet scraping lightly on the ground. The sound mixed with





the other noises of the night and filled my heart with terror.

“Remember, I was but a child, and monsters were very real to me. Yet this time, the terror was not my imagination. This time, the terror was but a heartbeat away.

“The door opened slowly, and through the moonlit crack, I spied a pair of sinister red eyes in the darkness. Without hesitation, Gloom entered my small room and quickly closed the door behind him, blocking my escape and leaving me isolated from the rest of the sept. A wicked grin crossed his face as he looked down on me. He stood silently at the door, crouched as if he was waiting to strike. From the folds of his weathered black cloak, he pulled a long knife. Its blade gleamed with silver in the moonlight, and the edge measured at least a foot in length.” Laughs-at-Blood pulled a knife from his belt, holding it above his head and displaying it to all. He then lowered it and began to slowly walk around the fire as he continued his tale.

“I tried to scream, but before I could, Gloom pounced upon me and smothered my face with his huge hand. I struggled beneath his grip, but to no avail. He was three times my size, and he used his weight to pin me to the ground. I remember the glint of the moonlight on the blade as he raised it above his head, preparing to thrust it into my bowels. I could only watch in terror as he did so. Above me, the monster paused and smiled, relishing in the terror he instilled in me.

“As the blade began its descent, the noise from the returning war party filled the clearing. When the sounds reached his ears, he stopped. The blade hovered just inches from its mark. I bit into his hand, catching him off-guard, and he swiftly retrieved his hand from my face. Knowing this to be my only chance, I screamed at the top of my lungs, warning the war party of my danger. Gloom paused for a moment, glaring at me in pure hatred before releasing me and bounding for the door. Before he reached his goal, the door burst open, and the war party rushed into my small hut and came to my rescue.

“Several members of the sept grabbed Gloom and held him captive while the leader, Sings-of-Death, questioned me about what had happened. I told him everything as the tears ran down my face. I shook uncontrollably in fear. Once I had completed my story, Sings-of-Death stood and approached Gloom, meeting him eye to eye in the darkness.

“Sings-of-Death reached down and wrenched the dagger from Gloom’s hand, breaking his wrist and filling my room with screams of pain. I could only smile. He then commanded the others to release him so that Gloom would have the opportunity to defend himself. It is not the way of the Garou to destroy a defenseless opponent. For many long moments, they stood face to face, each glaring into the eyes of the other, before Sings-of-Death lost his patience with the coward. He thrust the blade into the coward’s gut, twisting the knife so as to open a

wound large enough for the villain's intestines to spill out onto the floor. Again, I could only smile."

As Laughs-at-Blood told the story, he used the knife to show his anger, cutting and thrusting at the night air to demonstrate how Sings-of-Death disemboweled Gloom so many years ago. The gathering sat quietly in awe as he did so, rejoicing in the slaying of one so evil.

"However, Sings-of-Death did not kill Gloom— that was an honorable way for warriors to die, and this beast did not deserve such honor. Instead, he removed the knife and threw it onto the floor. Gloom slumped to the floor with a look of pain and horror etched on his face, the look men have when they know they are about to die. Sings-of-Death took me by the hand and began to lead me from the room, but I told him that I wanted to watch. I wanted to appreciate the death of the one who murdered my Song-Sister. Sings-of-Death allowed me to stay, but sent the other members of the war party from the room. As they left, they spit upon him and cursed him one by one, asking Gaia to dispose of such garbage accordingly. Within moments, all that remained in the darkened room were Sings-of-Death, the dying coward, and myself.

"I watched him as his breathing became short and labored. I knew that it wouldn't be long until death overtook him and only his lifeless shell remained as a reminder. I approached him carefully, retrieving the blade from the floor and placing the cold steel against his throat. I knew that the only thing worse than not being allowed to die in battle was to be slain by a child, a mere pup with no warrior's skills. I looked to Sings-of-Death. He nodded his approval, knowing my intentions, and allowed me to reap my revenge on the beast.

"I did not wish to slay him quickly, as I was sure that he did not allow Rolls-in-Clover a merciful or an honorable death. On the circle of floor around where he lay, I began the Blood Dance, the dance of frenzy before battle. Granted, it was choppy and unpracticed. I was only a child, but the dance exclaimed the dishonor of his death. Sings-of-Death sat back against the wall and waited.

"Once my dance was complete, I lunged at the deceiver, plunging his own dagger into the hollow of his throat and twisting it violently. For a few seconds, he gurgled and blood spewed forth from the wound as he fought for breath. It was to no avail. After a few moments, he slumped silently and died on the cold floor. I wiped the tears from my eyes and left the room, leaving behind a warm corpse, a proud sept leader and the last step of my youth. At that moment, I became an adult. My Rite of Passage followed soon after that night.

"It was this knife that took the life of my beloved sister and later wrenched the last breath from her murderer. I will carry this blade for the rest of my life, and, when death finally takes me to Gaia, I will give it to Rolls-in-Clover to show that her death was avenged."

Laughs-at-Blood contemplated the blade as moonlight glistened off its lethal, silver surface. He then tucked it back into his belt and stepped outside the gathering.

"Always remember," Laughs-at-Blood said as he made his way into the forest and away from the gathering, "that the Wyrms are everywhere. It does not only dwell in the big corporations, and it does not always make itself known. Sometimes it is a subtle evil that stalks in darkness. Sometimes the Wyrms live among us, disguising its true self. Sometimes the Wyrms live in our own hearts." With these words, Laughs-at-Blood turned and walked into the depths of the forest, disappearing from view and becoming one with the night.

Around the fire, the remaining Garou sat silently for many long moments, listening to the sounds of the night and reflecting on the events of the evening. Each one in turn left the circle, returning to the forest and pondering thoughts known only to them. Before long, all that remained was the smoldering embers of the fire and a wispy trail of smoke that lifted from the coals to mingle with the mist-shrouded darkness. In the forest, all was quiet.