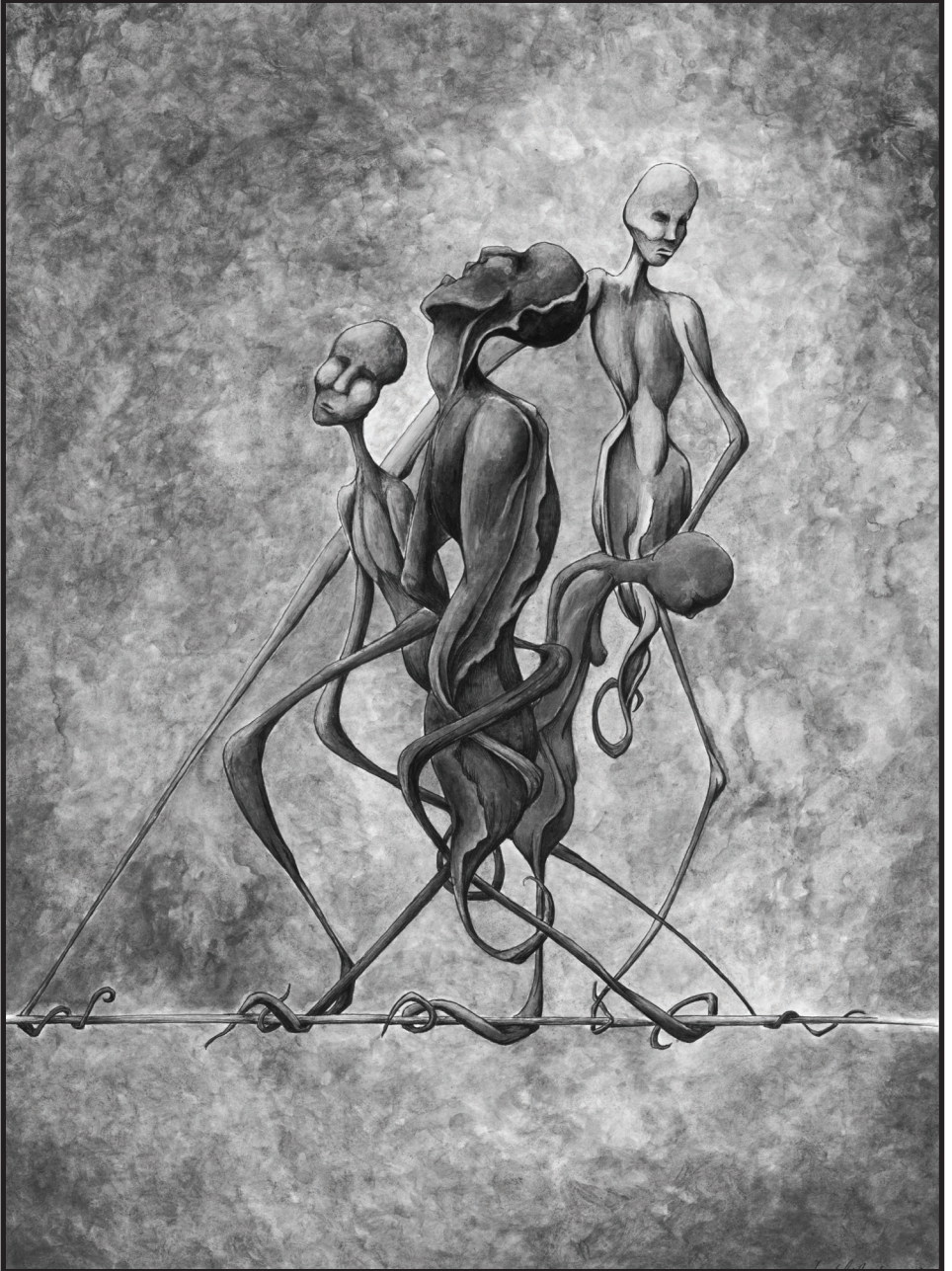


RED MOON MEDICINE SHOW PRESENTS:

VACANT RITUAL ASSEMBLY

AN OSR ZINE - ISSUE #6 - WINTER 2016



INTRODUCING

WELCOME TO THE NEW AND improved *Vacant Ritual Assembly*! If you're a veteran vacant ritualist, thanks for coming back. If this is your first issue, you've chosen a great place to start. It's been a whole year since the last issue so this is kinda the beginning of "volume two." VRA is basically a paper blog. The aim is to provide a platform for my unpolished-but-still-table-useful ideas. It's an idea incubator and a dream catcher. It's also a place for contributors to stretch out and try weird, experimental stuff.

VRA veterans will notice the fairly drastic change in physical format for this issue. I've decided to go print-on-demand with the zine for a variety of reasons. There are pros and cons, but one of the big pros is that I don't have to worry so much about the length of the issues. I can pretty much just let 'er rip. You can expect higher page counts from this point forward (this issue is more than *double* the page count of any previous issue). Aside from that, not much is changing. We'll continue to focus on useful/weird stuff for your OSR games (with a good chunk of material pulled from my own campaign prep), loads of artwork, and at least one interview per issue.

Til next time...

Reject ideologies.
Meditate.
Play rpgs.

CONTENTS

Grigoro's Wonders Untold (pgs 4-7) is a traveling medicine show full of lovably unscrupulous freaks and misfits.

From Dunnholt It Rises (pg 8-15) The multi-talented Kathryn Jenkins returns to VRA with a plague-ridden island adventure.

The Gallows on Heretic Hill (pgs 17-19) can serve as a respawn point for PCs, allowing more long term, story-oriented games without sacrificing *LotFP's* gloriously high lethality rate.

A Light in the Black (pgs 20-21) offers a heretical suicide squad faction for PCs to join, complete with secret headquarters.

Death Planted the Esther Tree (pgs 23-37) is a dark, mansion-crawl adventure by Kreg Mosier that ties into the *Driftwood Verses* setting.

The Grimsly Hill Cherubs (pgs 38-39) is a quick NPC profile/preview for my upcoming book *Undertow*.

The Lathnos Sugar Cane Crop (pgs 40-43) is the weirdest thing. A sickly-sweet encounter by Anxy P.

Emmy Allen: Of Wolves and Winter (pgs 44-51) is a conversation with Emmy Allen, author of *Wolf Packs and Winter Snow*.

IMPORTANT NOTE: I don't run paid advertisements in VRA. If there's an ad for something in here it's because I think it's cool.

EVANGELISM

COOL STUFF TO CHECK
OUT BEFORE YOU CROAK

MUSIC

Zaum, *Eidolon*- Victor Garrison on G+ introduced me to these guys. Really good, atmospheric doom.

PODCASTS

Full Metal RPG - I've only listened to a couple episodes, but I dig it and appreciate their taste in games.

RPG STUFF

Places of Textures and Color by horror/Rowdy Kobold - A collection of beautiful, unique dungeon maps. I keep these handy for impromptu dungeon delves.

***Detective Carnacki's Serial Killers of Vathak* by Jason Stoffa and Rick Hershey** - A collection of interesting serial killer NPCs.

ROAN Studio - Look these guys up on DriveThruRPG. Wonderful, inexpensive maps of interesting locations. Extremely useful!

LEGAL CRAP

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CAMPAIGN UPDATE

For the last year, I've been running a *LotFP* campaign in my *Driftwood Verses* setting, playtesting elements that will appear in that book. The campaign uses an experimental open table format that's worked pretty well (I plan to write about it in a future issue of *VRA*). Running games in a still-developing setting is always tricky because it's hard to develop a sense of consistency when I'm always changing little details. I've also run into a bit of a GMing rut and have run some fairly boring sessions. I'm currently trying to reevaluate my GMing techniques and get back to an acceptable level that's more consistently fun. I think I need to focus more on interesting NPCs and social interactions.

CREDITS

Writing and Design by

Clint Krause

Kathryn Jenkins (pgs 8-15)

Kreg Mosier (pgs 23-37)

Anxy P (pgs 40-43)

Illustrations by

Heather Gwinn (Cover)

Kathryn Jenkins (pgs 8-15)

Samantha Keene (pg 38)

Billy Longino (pgs 26-27)

Thomas Novosel (pg 23)

Anxy P (pg 41)

Sean Poppe (pg 4-5)

Karl Stjernberg (pg 17)

Interviewee

Emmy Allen

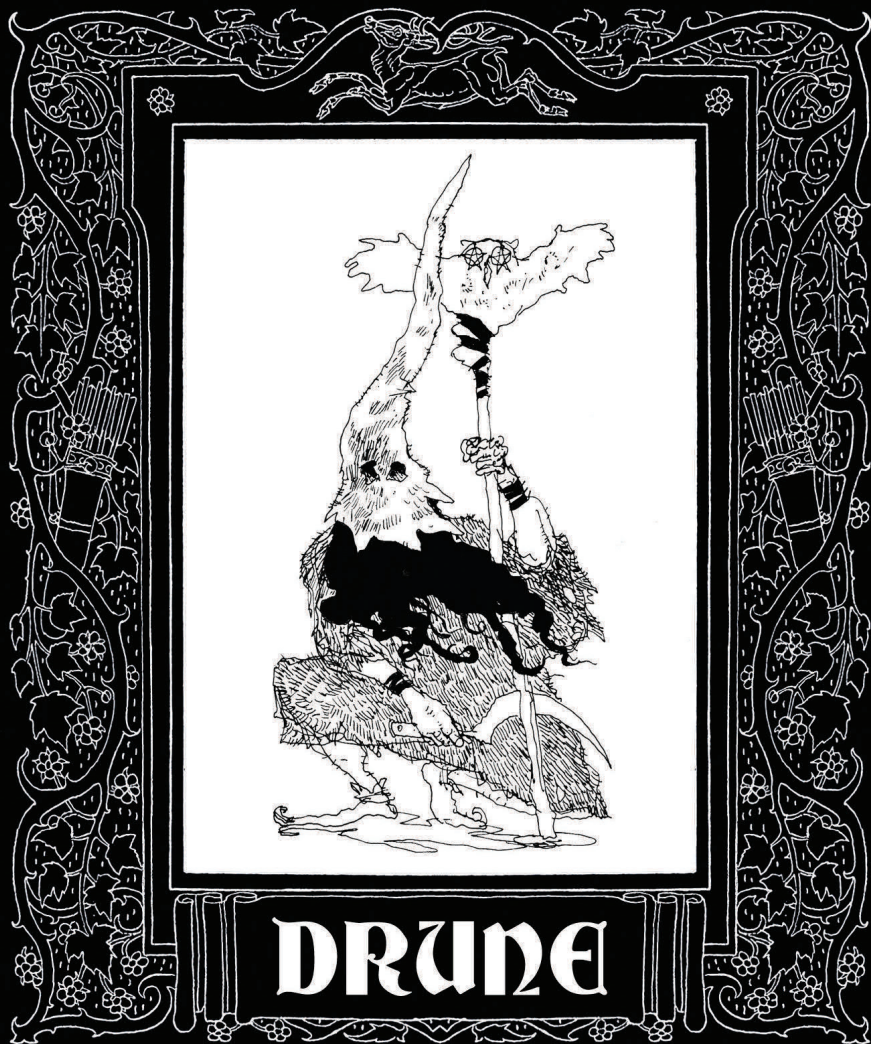
Published by

Red Moon Medicine Show

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Thanks also to Jack Shear for his conceptual work on *Rootmire*.

The Drune, a society of occult
weirdos living in the deeps of the High
Wold, inside the Ring of Chell.



DRUNE

WORMSKIN
WINTER 2017

GRIGORO'S WONDERS UNTOLD

A STRANGE TRAVELLING SHOW
by Clint Krause

GROWLER AND HOWLER

Gentle giants Growler and Howler were once individual orange yetis from the toxic weald of Para-Numa. Their bodies were merged by the spell of a sorcerista whom they still quest to destroy. They go wild for kabba nuts, which are difficult to find around here.

GRIGORO

A world-traveler from the cold, wooded valleys of Ghavanstaad, Grigoro was a windfreight messenger and a necromancer's apprentice before his artistic ambitions inspired the creation of the traveling show that he currently owns and operates. Grigoro seeks out wonders and oddities from across the known world and shares them village by village in hopes of somehow bringing light to the commoners' grimdark existence while also lining his purse with silver. On the surface he's a gregarious entertainer, but he's also a murderous occultist who has enslaved the ghost of his ex-wife.



BARON BICUSPID

A demon from the Fourth Abyss who, upon inhabiting the mortal realm for only a short time, found himself charmed by mortals and inspired to join their society. He is fascinated with social rituals such as tea time and gambling. He conducts himself at all times as a gentleman of leisure.

TANSY

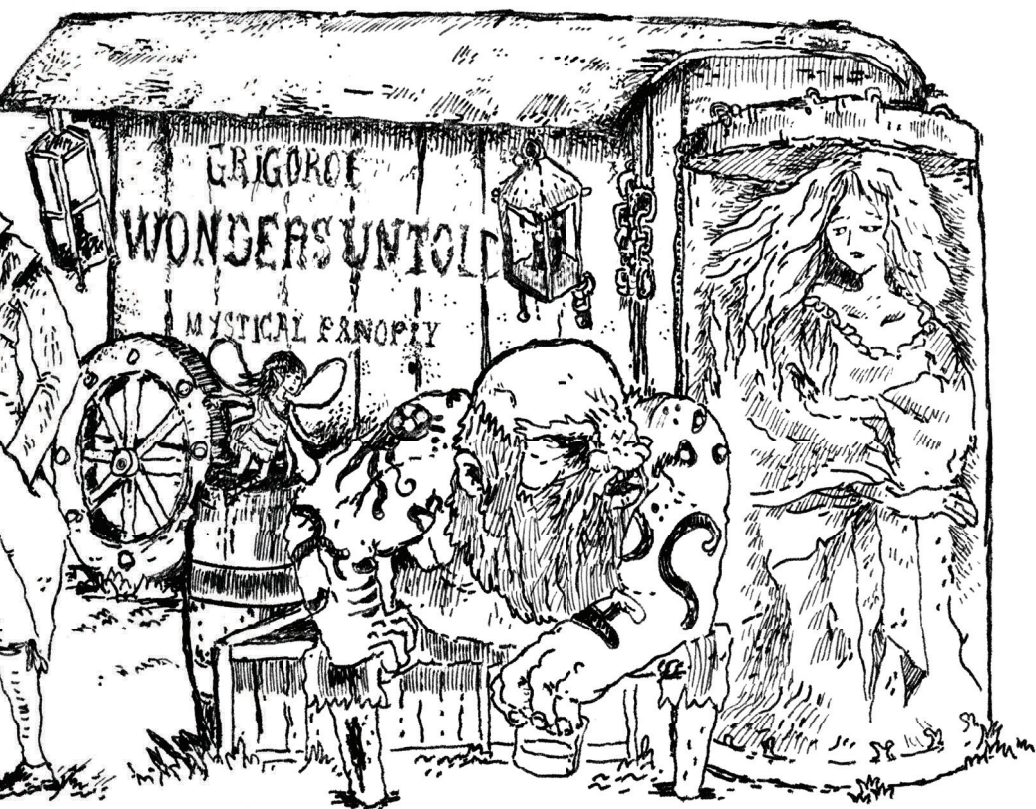
A bubbly, four-armed fairy, searching for her lost sister, Saffron. She performs magic and aerial acrobatics in Grigoro's show in return for his protection from the Holtstein Fairysnatcher Company who stole away her sister ten years ago.

GREMBLY

A tattooed sailor-dwarf who rode the sludge tides of Walfismeer on a pirate frigate until both of his legs were shorn off by the horn of a great whale as it ploughed through his ship. His magic tattoos allow him to walk on water.

RESURRECTION MARY

The melancholy spirit of Grigoro's deceased wife, Mary Hatchet, who he peppered with magic missiles after catching her cheating. Mary is now bound inside a glass reliquary laden with sigils of imprisonment, forced to live on eternal display as an oddity for Grigoro's profit. She cannot speak unless someone casts *Speak with Dead*. She just floats there looking sad.



THE CAST

GROWLER AND HOWLER

AC 16, **Mov** 120', **HD** 8, **HP** 32,
2x hamfist d10/d10, **Morale** 8

Special: If G&H hit with both hamfists they lift their victim aloft and begin to argue about what to do next. This argument will last 1d3 rounds, during which time neither G&H nor their victim can act (except to attempt escape). The victim can escape by making a successful save vs. paralyze. After the argument, G&H decide to throw the victim down and stomp them for an additional 2d10 damage. The victim can save vs. breath weapon for half damage.

GRIGORO

AC 14, **Mov** 120', **HD** 7, **HP** 28,
angelbone dagger d4 (double
damage to undead and demons),
Morale 9

Spells: *Detect Magic* 1/day,
Magic Aura 1/day, *Magic Missile*
1/day, *Detect Invisible* 1/day,
Locate Object 1/day, *Speak With*
Animals 1/day, *Detect Illusion* 1/
day, *Speak With Dead* 1/day
Charm Monster 1/day

BARON BISCUSPID

AC 14, **Mov** 120', **HD** 5, **HP** 20,
bite 2d8 (on natural 20 victim is
swallowed whole regardless of
relative size), **Morale** 11

Spells: *Detect Invisible* at will,
Dimension Door at will, *Haste* at
will (only on self)

TANSY

AC 22, **Mov** 240' flying, **HD** 1, **HP** 4,
bite 1d2, **Morale** 10

Spells: *Confusion* 1/day, *Detect*
Lie at will, *Enthrall* 1/day, *Faerie*
Fire at will

GREMBLY

AC 14, **Mov** 60', **HD** 4, **HP** 16,
savate kick d6 (on a natural 20
attack again), **Morale** 10

Special: Three of Grembly's
numerous tattoos are hexmarks
(see *VRA#1*) allowing him to cast
Water Breathing 1/day and *Water*
Walk 2/day.

RESURRECTION MARY

AC 18, **Mov** 90' flying, **HD** 4, **HP** 16,
no physical attacks, **Morale** 4

Special: Immune to nonmagical
weapons. Mary's magical
imprisonment prevents her from
using her ghostly powers, but if she
is released from her reliquary she
can attempt to possess the body
of a living creature once per day.
The victim gets a save vs. magic
to resist. If the save is failed, Mary
takes control of the victim's body
until she decides to relinquish it
or until an exorcism is performed.
If given an opportunity she will
immediately possess Grigoro and
exact her revenge by ruining his
life from the inside.

THE SHOW BEGINS

Admittance to *WONDERS UNTOLD* costs 1sp for adults and 25cp for children. The show begins at dusk each night. The acts take place on a small wooden stage inside a torchlit tent erected behind Grigoro's wagon. After the crowd files in, the show begins:

Grigoro emerges from behind a curtain and introduces each act in a boistrous manner.

Growler and Howler walk around the stage for a few minutes just being a two-headed orange yeti. The crowd gasps in amazement.

Grembly brings a large tub of water onstage and proceeds to walk across the surface of the water with his two peg legs. He then submerges himself and "holds his breath" (casts *Water Breathing*) underwater for five minutes. The crowd is tense, fearing they're witnessing a drowning, but burst into applause when he emerges unharmed.

Next, Resurrection Mary's reliquary is wheeled onstage and the crowd is formed into a line to see her up close. She just floats in a melancholy daze. The crowd are lost in wonderment and disbelief.

Grigoro now produces a fiddle and plays a lighthearted jig while Baron Bicuspid takes the stage and proceeds to devour numerous mundane objects of increasingly ludicrous size. He closes by eating Growler and Howler in one bite.

(He spits them out backstage afterward.) The entire thing is played for laughs. The crowd is whipped into a gutbusting reverie.

Tansy closes the show with a wild aerial acrobatics routine. She flits around like a tiny comet and casts *Enthrall* on the crowd. After the big finish, she passes the hat (by fluttering around the crowd with one) and compels the *enthralled* crowd to express their amazement monetarily, which they generally do, emptying their purses with great enthusiasm.

SOUVENIRS AND ODDITIES

Grigoro hawks baubles to the crowd as they file out. Among other things, he sells:

Fairy Cake (10sp/piece). When ingested, the subject is forced to dance uncontrollably for one turn (10 minutes).

Browntownies (10sp/brownie) A sumptuous brownie. When ingested, the subject is cursed with a sudden bout of explosive diarrhea that lasts one turn (10 minutes).

Slither Sticks (5sp/stick) Until the sun rises, this simple stick will transform into a harmless snake whenever it is placed on the ground. When picked up, it transforms back into a stick. By morning the magic has worn off.

Accurate Maps (40sp/map) From the group's extensive travels.

FROM DUNNHOLT IT RISES

A GRIM ISLAND ADVENTURE
by Kathryn Jenkins

DUNNHOLT IS A MISERABLE ISLAND off the coast of Scotland. It used to be a grand fort and bustling harbour until it fell into ruin and became a simple waystation for ships. A recent outbreak of plague on the mainland has given Dunnholt new purpose as a quarantine for plague victims. Ships still use Dunnholt to rest, restock, offload goods and exchange shipments as long as no “victims” leave. However, recently ships leaving Dunnholt take with them strange boxes which do not appear on the manifests. Captains are paid off to carry the crates by “The Good Doctor.”

“The Good Doctor” overseeing Dunnholt is convinced the island is a god and by spreading plague believes the decay will feed the god and allow it to rise up and consume the world. The doctor has been manufacturing plague rats and sending them out to towns along the coast. He has concocted the plague from the “blood” of Dunnholt island. The “island” is a great alien parasite that has buried itself in the crust of the world. It feeds on the decay of bodies on its surface. The doctor has enlisted the

help of the witches who lurk in the forests to create the plague rats. They have always used the blood of the island to power their dark, demonic rituals.

However, the once organised process has fallen apart as the Good Doctor has lost his mind, the witches are double crossing him and the island is left overrun by rats and monsters. Despite this, the Good Doctor is still working on a way to help his god rise.

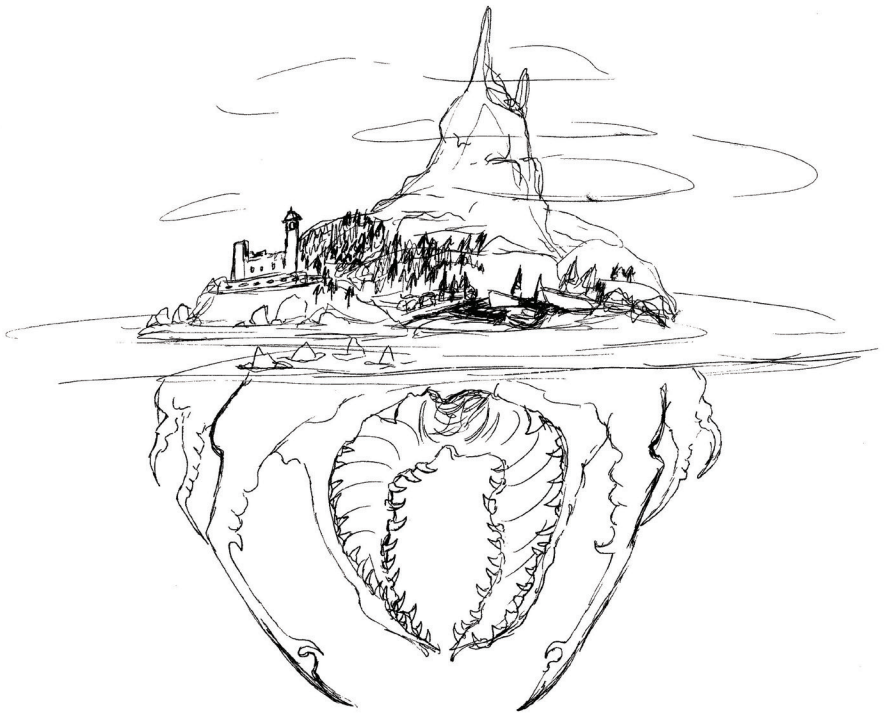
AN INCENTIVE

When your adventurers arrive at Duncladach, a large harbour town, to escort plague victims to Dunnholt, the weekly boat to collect new victims hasn't arrived on time and no ships from Dunnholt have been seen for days.

Suddenly, a large ship looms from the coastal fog. It speeds towards the docks. The ship crashes into the docks destroying other vessels and beaching itself against the local tavern.

The crew are riddled with black, pus filled tumours. They are dead from the crash or covered in tiny bites. Crates in the ship's belly lie open with a slimy coating inside. They do not appear on the manifest. Black rats slip in and out of the shadows of the ship.

The captain is dead in his quarters. He clutches in his hand a burned letter. It says “. . . from Dunnholt, it rises . . .”



DUNNHOLT'S GIFT

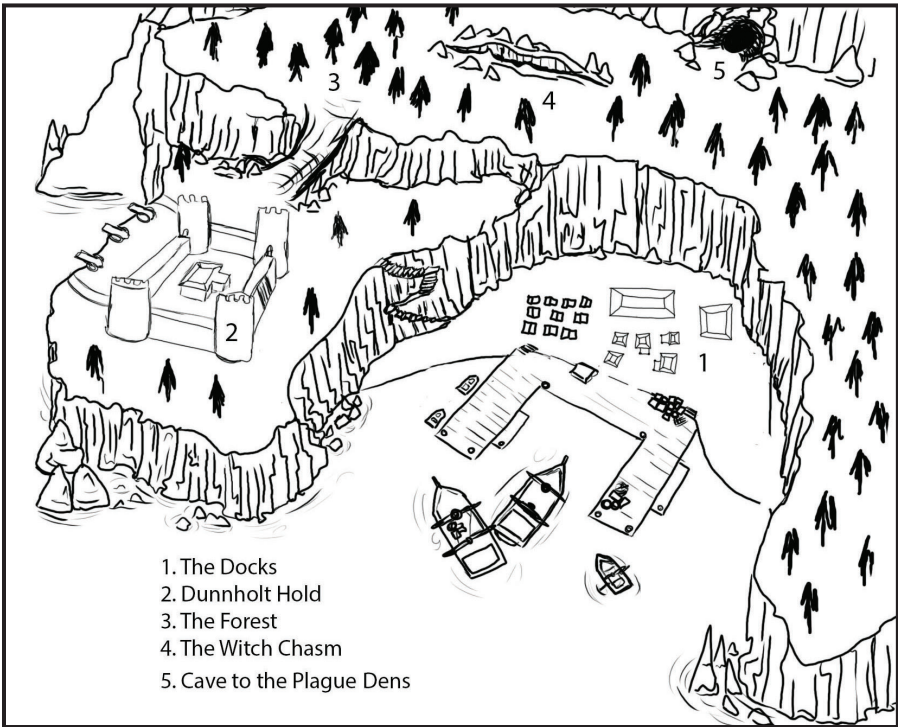
A contagious, degenerative disease that eats away at the victim's health and eventually turns them into a tumour-riddled wretch.

Symptoms can include: huge, weeping, black tumours which protrude from the armpit, neck, face, groin and back. Oozing blood from all orifices. Coughing blood. Gangrene of appendages, lips and eyelids. Fevers which cause violent hallucinations and vomiting. Slurred speech and confusion

Victim must save vs. poison every hour. If the roll fails, he or she suffers -1d4 CON and -1d4 permanent HP. At 0 CON the victim can no longer function, has great tumorous growths all over his or her body, and wishes to infect all nearby.

RUMORS (d6)

1. Victims sent to Dunnholt are burned alive when they arrive.
2. The island was first inhabited thousands of years ago by cursed nomads.
3. Ship captains who leave Dunnholt are doppelgangers.
4. There is a labyrinth beneath the island surface.
5. A giant rat lives in a cave on the island and lures children into the cave with his magic flute.
6. The island belongs to a coven of witches who practice human sacrifice.



1. The Docks
2. Dunnholt Hold
3. The Forest
4. The Witch Chasm
5. Cave to the Plague Dens

THE ISLAND

A fortified castle sits on a huge cliff. A great, gnarled forest stretches out over the island which rises up out of the sea like a mountain. The docks squat on a bleak coast with ships floating in the harbour.

THE DOCKS

The docks are rickety, ill maintained and lead to low wooden shacks. It is eerily deserted. The remaining vessels are ghost ships, with no signs of the crew. Occasionally they drift too close, their great bulks scrape into each other and their masts and sails tangle. Except for the sound of the waves and the creak of docked vessels, no other sounds emit from the harbour. There are no birds.

Rats are the only visible signs of life; they appear to be watching the adventurers.

Plague victims have been squatting here. They have erected makeshift tents. There is an abandoned warehouse which was converted into an infirmary. It is filled with decaying corpses.

One of the corpses is the body of a sailor. His corpse is two weeks old. He has the first signs of a the plague but it's clear he died from bludgeoning. He clutches a parchment in his hand which details a disclosure not to open the crates being loaded onto his ships. He has not signed it and seems to have torn it in two. The letter is signed "*The Good Doctor.*"

Yearning Ones inhabit the docks. They will stalk the adventurers before attacking. Anytime the adventurers make too much noise they have a 3 in 6 chance of being attacked by d4 Yearning Ones.

YEARNING ONE

A weak, contorted human covered in great black sores which weep a thick black pus. Their teeth are rotted and their tongues flop from their gaping jaws, riddled with oozing cysts. They cough and hack, attempting to reach out for any form of human kindness, a touch, an embrace, a kiss.

AC 12, Mov 120', HD 1, HP 4, lover's kiss d6 (victim must succeed at a save vs. poison or contract *Dunnholt's Gift*), **Morale 6**

1. Tables are set out like packing stations. Several crates have been broken open from the inside out. Something has clawed its way out of the box. The inside is coated in black tar. If touched, make a save vs. poison or contract *Dunnholt's Gift*.

2. A young man dressed as a plague doctor huddles in the corner of a communal canteen. He has pulled off his mask and he is dying. He clutches something to his chest and whispers to it. He will babble about following the orders of "The Good Doctor" and "Don't go down, don't go down." He is clutching baby plague rats. He will not voluntarily move, resigned to dying. He will tell the adventurers the way to the plague den eventually but refuse to go down.

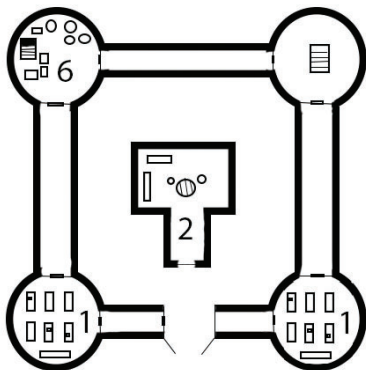
DUNNHOLT HOLD

Dunnholt Hold is an old fort turned warehouse and refuge for plague victims. The victims were put to work packing boxes here. The storerooms are now empty and many of the boxes have been shattered.

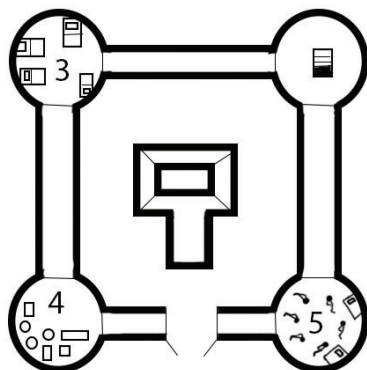
DYING DOCTOR

AC 12, Mov nil, HD 1, HP 1, no attacks, **Morale 2**

Special: Anyone who makes physical contact must succeed at a save vs. poison or contract *Dunnholt's Gift*.



Ground Floor



First Floor

3. A nursery for ill babies and their mothers. Small, badly crafted beds and cradles lie in ruins. Tumours are growing on the toys and beds. A cradle nearby stirs. A blanket stained with blood quivers. There is a **plague rat** in the bed beneath the sheet eating human flesh.

PLAGUE RAT

AC 14, Mov 120', HD 1, HP 2, bite d2 (victim must succeed at a save vs. poison or contract *Dunnholt's Gift*), **Morale 3**

4. An **anthropomorphic rat** is eating viscera in a dark room. It clutches a flute in its hands. It will not attack the adventurers. It will chitter and is unable to speak. It will exchange the flute for a taste of blood. The adventurer who gives their blood will enter a contract. They have unintentionally promised the rat their first born child. It will come to collect if the adventurer survives.

RAT FLUTIST

AC 16, Mov 120', HD 1, HP 4, 2x claw+bite d4/d4/d6, **Morale 8**

Rat Flute: Summons 1d4 Plague Rats when played (once per day). User must make a successful save vs. magic or contract *Dunnholt's Gift*.

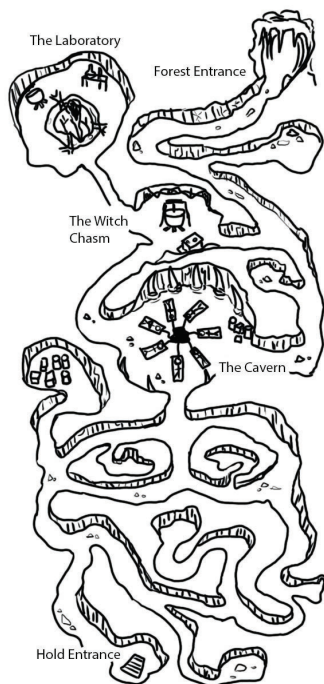
5. A room filled with straw beds. Rags of small childish clothes and toy dolls are abandoned. In the centre of the room lies a ring of six child skeletons. A faint sound can be heard which grows over time, eventually it is clearly the sound of children singing the nursery

rhyme "Ring a Ring o' Roses." If the adventurers stay here, the skeletons eventually grow flesh and veins, rise up and form ghostly children who sing and dance in a circle. They sneeze at the end of the song and collapse into dust as skeletons. The cycle repeats forever until the adventurers leave.

6. A trapdoor behind a large number of crates containing vials and strange medical equipment leads to the plague dens.

THE PLAGUE DENS

These are a series of labyrinthine caverns which stretch for miles below Dunnholt island. Entrances can be found in the forest or in a storeroom in Dunnholt Hold. The rock is fleshy and wet. It smells like decay.





THE CAVERN

The cavern is vast. Living plague victims lie on stone altars. Their innards have been scooped out and fat pregnant rats have been placed inside them to feed and gestate. The victims have tubes shoved down their throats and are fed a thick, black sludge which gives the rats the plague to carry. The baby rats explode out from the plague victims upon birth. They were placed into crates to be loaded onto ships by Yearning Ones. Packing has stopped and the victims have been left to die.

1d4 **Demonic Rats** roam the cavern at any given time.

DEMONIC RAT

AC 14, **Mov** 120', **HD** 2, **HP** 4, bite d4, **Morale** 3

Special: Ruptures upon death, birthing d6 Plague Rats.

THE WITCH CHASM

The witch chasm sits in the middle of Dunnholt forest. The chasm is a dark slit in the earth, and tunnels lead here from the plague dens. It is the domain of the witches who assist the Good Doctor. They disagree with his plan to wake up the island. They wish to keep using its blood as a resource for their spells.

The chasm is filled with old silks and a collection of bizarre stolen furniture. The sky is visible blocked by the occasional rocky overhang.

There is a dark stone altar covered in entrails and infant bones in the chasm centre.

Three **witches** inhabit the cavern, asleep during the day and casting rituals at night.

They will bargain with the players, ask them to ignore what they see in exchange for dark cosmic power. They will ask the players to kill the Good Doctor, now a nuisance, and eat the heart of the island. If the players eat the heart (see the laboratory) they will be impregnated with the offspring of a new island which will take years to grow inside them. Eventually, they will be split apart as the newborn island creature crawls out and plants itself somewhere off the coast of England. The witches will not tell them this, only that the adventurer will be immune to disease. If they agree to eat the heart, the witches will stop the plague and provide a cure (although the cure will have similarly deadly side effects).

If the adventurers do not accept, the witches will attack.

THREE TERRIBLE WITCHES

AC 14, **Mov** 120', **HD** 3, **HP** 12, wicked dagger d4, **Morale** 9

Special: A witch's HD increases by 1 HD if a sister witch is killed in her view.

Spells: *Magic Missile* 1/day, *Sleep* 1/day, *Stinking Cloud* 1/day, *Summon* 1/day

THE LABORATORY

The witch chasm and plague den lead to the laboratory at the heart of the island. **The Good Doctor** resides here.

There is an undulating, fleshy mass in the centre of a small cavern. It is dark green and slick with slime. In the centre of the mass is a wound where the flesh has been staked back. It is filled with the viscous black tar that is being fed to victims in the plague dens. This where the Good Doctor is creating his plague. There is a combination of ritual items and crude laboratory equipment scattered around the room.

If the adventurers choose to destroy the heart they will kill the island. Its final death throes will create a seismic event that destroys all nearby coastal towns. It will uproot itself and burrow down into the ocean floor creating tidal waves and leaving a great maelstrom in its place. The players will not have long to figure out a way off of the island before it sinks.

Alternatively, they can eat the heart as instructed by the witches or the players can choose to leave the heart alone and flee. The blood in the heart will be worth significant coin to the right buyer.

THE GOOD DOCTOR

The Good Doctor has lost his mind. He succeeded in spreading the plague, however, in his experimentation with the island's blood he has become a monster.

The Good Doctor plans on trying to wake the island by pumping its heart with new concoctions. The witches deliberately foil his creations so they do not lose the source of their power. The witches want death and decay, not armageddon. These failures have enraged the doctor and made him hostile to all living things.

The Good Doctor is a contorted mass of tumours. He is dressed as a plague doctor in black robes and his masked beak has grown into his flesh. His head, shoulders and back are a mass of thick tumours. The tumours on his body pulse and

shiver when he moves. He walks hunched, a great protrusion of slimy growths on his back. His tongue hangs out, slathering, and his breath is rancid. His voice is garbled and he babbles false science whilst covered in blackened tar. His mouth has contorted, the beak is layered with sharp teeth and stretched hideously into a hooked shape that can rake flesh from bones.

He will try to protect the heart and is too mad to be reasoned with.

THE GOOD DOCTOR

AC 14, **Mov** 120', **HD** 3, **HP** 28, short sword d6 or bite d8 (victim must succeed at a save vs. poison or contract *Dunnholt's Gift*), **Morale** 12

Spells: *Plague Touch* (save vs. magic or contract *Dunnholt's Gift* on touch) 1/day, *Summon Demonic Rat* (stats on pg 13) 1/day



Dungeon Solitaire

Labyrinth of Souls



TAROT CARD GAME

by MATTHEW LOWES

Illustrated by JOSEPHE VANDEL

Complete Rulebook

and Exclusively Illustrated

Labyrinth of Souls Tarot Deck

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matthewlowes.com/games

THE GALLOWS ON HERETIC HILL

A CAMPAIGN HUB
by Clint Krause

*"Father I know that you've witnessed
a darkness in me. 'Twas spawned in
shadows of the old gallows tree."*

- The Black Dahlia Murder,
Necropolis

ON A LONE, WILD HILL IN A desolate stretch of the king's country, among weed-choked ruins and the bone dust of a thousand forgotten lives, the recently dead jolt to life in choking terror as the hangman bids them back to the mortal plane.

WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

Heretic Hill was once the meeting place of a cult of apostate clerics who defied the Synod's precepts and sparked an inquisition. The heretics were ultimately hung on this hill, granting it its admonitory name. Before they were hung, the angel Adriel placed a powerful curse upon the heretics, a curse that would deny them their eternal rest so that they may serve the church in penance forever. Thus, the Noosefriars were formed, a secret order of undead agents that still serves the church from the shadows to this day. The Noosefriars are used by the church as a deniable asset, an elite suicide squad whose undead status allows them access to places the more reputable clergy cannot go.



THE HANGMAN'S ERRAND

Penitent Jack is the masked, gravel-voiced caretaker of the gallows on Heretic Hill. His yellow smile and rotting folds of flesh betray his curse of undeath. "Jack" is a disgraced cleric who betrayed the Synod during the inquisition. He was forced to hang his apostate allies, then sentenced to execution by lustration (being drowned in holy water). After his death, his body was ritually reanimated to serve as a secret pawn of the Noosefriars, forcing him to live as the eternal attendant of the gallows even as his body slowly rots. He remembers little of his previous life and has a simple, confused demeanor that demands equal parts unease and pity.

Jack's job is to provide nooses for agents of the Noosefriars to wear and to keep the gallows stocked with fresh corpses for those agents to inhabit when they die. Player characters might gain access to the gallows by becoming agents of the Noosefriars or by gaining the favor of a corrupt clergyman who knows the secret of Heretic Hill.

If Penitent Jack is killed, the gallows curse ends forever. The wandering dead that roam the graveyard will not attack him.

PENITENT JACK

AC 14, Mov 120', HD 6, HP 24, bite d4 + save vs. poison or contract a random disease OR noose (treat as garotte), **Morale 10**

THE GALLOWS CURSE

The gallows work like this: anyone who dies while wearing a noose tied by the hangman, Penitent Jack, will awaken in a new body dangling from the gallows on Heretic Hill.

This new body happens to be whatever new character the player creates to replace the one that died. The character generally retains his or her previous name and sense of identity (although that's ultimately up to the player).

The new character also retains 50% of the previous character's XP and, importantly, retains any information possessed in his or her previous incarnation.

Any character who has been reborn at the gallows counts as being undead for the purposes of turning and other magical effects.

Once a character is reborn on the gallows, Penitent Jack will cut them down and place a shortened noose around their neck to assure they will return to the gallows again upon death. If the noose is lost or destroyed, the character will not respawn at the gallows.



THE GRAVEYARD

Heretic Hill is surrounded in all directions by an expansive, ancient graveyard that precedes the construction of the gallows by hundreds of years. The unholy influence of the gallows curse has leaked into the disrupted graves and cracked vaults and causes the vengeful dead to rise when the moon is right (and it is often right).

PASSAGES OF THE DAMNED

The graveyard contains multiple entrances to the Ghoulish Market (see VRA#1).

THE BOUNTY OF THE GRAVE

Many of the tombs on Heretic Hill have been disturbed or eroded away, their ancient contents scattered about the grounds. A successful search here reveals one item from the grave loot table.

For each turn (10 minutes) spent searching the graveyard, there is a 1 in 6 chance of an encounter with 2d6 Wandering Dead.

WANDERING DEAD

AC 14, **Mov** 60', **HD** 2, **HP** 8, bite d4, **Morale** 4

TOMB SHROOMS

These long-stemmed fungi often grow upon the gravestones on Heretic Hill. Anyone who eats one rolls a d10. On an even result, they recover HP equal to the number rolled. On an odd result, they take damage equal to the number rolled.

GRAVE LOOT (D20)

1. Notable epitaph. A clue?
2. 3d6 x 10 silver pieces
3. Wooden holy symbol
4. Length of rusted chain (25')
5. Strange, inhuman skeleton
6. Rotted leather armor (AC 13)
7. Rusted chainmail (AC 15)
8. Rusted platemail (AC 17)
9. Rusted Shield (+1 AC)
10. Old rope (50')
11. Random cleric scroll
12. Random magic-user scroll
13. d4 Tomb Shrooms
14. Tattered treasure map
15. Spellbook (1d6 1st lvl spells)
16. Rusty minor weapon (d4)
17. Rusty small weapon (d6)
18. Rusty medium weapon (d8)
19. Rusty great weapon (d10)
20. Random magic item

IN MY CAMPAIGN

I haven't used this idea yet, but I plan to keep it up my sleeve as an option for certain types of games. The whole idea is to create an interesting in-world justification for players to retain some XP and meta-game knowledge after the death of their character. This way you can maintain the high lethality inherent in a *LotFP* campaign without having to restart with a completely clean slate every time. This is useful for games that are more focused around long term quests and plots. I intend to toggle access to the gallows on or off depending on the style of campaign I'm running at any given time, but I like the idea that it exists in my campaign world regardless.

A LIGHT IN THE BLACK

A NEW HERETICAL FACTION
by Clint Krause

THE NOOSEFRIARS ARE A SECRET order of heretical agents forced to serve the Synod as penance for their crimes against the angels. The order is used as a deniable asset by the Synod, charged with missions that are considered too dangerous or too damnable to be undertaken by the clergy or their holy order of paladins. The Noosefriars operate in complete secrecy. It is said that Lector Kristoph Shryne holds the black leash of the Noosefriars, directing their operations from a secret vault beneath the ancient catacombs of Thraetia.

For the most part, agents of the Noosefriars are free to roam the world and pursue their own interests. The order does not dictate their every move. But when their services are required, agents are expected to make themselves available immediately.

Lector Shryne has little patience for wayward operatives and will not hesitate to unleash the Knives of Heaven's Debt if things get out of hand. The "Knives" are an elite order of holy assassins dedicated to policing the Synod's internal factions, including the Noosefriars.



The Sepulcher is the hidden sanctuary of the Noosefriars, a place for operatives to rest and outfit themselves after returning from the gallows on Heretic Hill. It sits directly adjacent to the hill, a convenient spot for recovery. Draw out the map for your players so they don't know about the secret locations unless they search for them.

THE NOOSEFRIARS

Joining the Noosefriars grants +250 bonus XP.

DUTIES

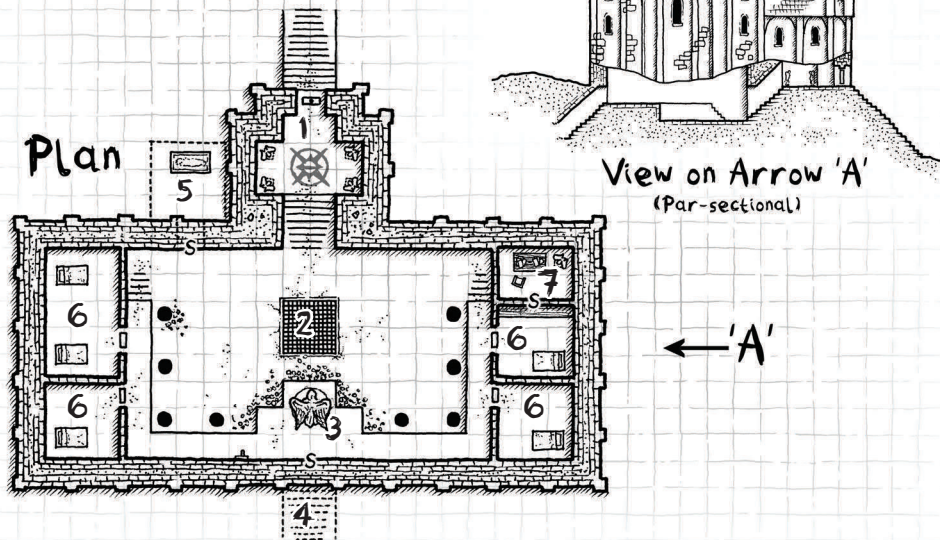
Go on church-related missions when called. Perform all directives without protest or hesitation.

BENEFITS

Noosefriars members each receive a noose from the gallows on Heretic Hill. While wearing it, their souls switch bodies upon death rather than traveling to the astral plane (see the previous article for details). Members also gain access to the Sepulcher, a secret headquarters located in the graveyard on Heretic Hill.

The Sepulcher

1 square : 5 feet



1. ENTRANCE

The doors of the Sepulcher will only open for agents of the Noosefriars.

2. THE PIT OF THE RAPTURAN

The Rapturan is a terrible angelic beast with swords for teeth. It dwells in this pit and eats magic items. Each time the PCs feed it a magic item, roll 1d6: 1-3: No Effect 4: PC is *Blessed* for 6 points, 5: PC gains +1 max HP, 6: PC gains +1 to an ability score of his or her choice. A lever on the wall opens the pit.

3. BLESSED STATUE OF ADRIEL

The angel Adriel in a triumphant pose surrounded by prayer candles. Anyone who kisses it is instantly healed to full HP.

4. SECRET STAIR

Concealed behind a secret door, this stairway leads deep below the earth to the Ghoul Market (VRA#1).

5. SECRET TOMB OF VICTOR SAINT

Victor Saint was the paladin who oversaw the operation of the original Noosefriars. His remains reside here in a stone sarcophagus along with his blessed sword, *Angelclaw* (+3 long sword, +5 vs. demons and undead).

6. AGENTS' QUARTERS

Simple beds and shelves.

7. SECRET OCCULT LIBRARY

Contains a spellbook that has whatever new spells the referee wants to add to the game.

BENEATH

The Inverted Church

"I've never seen anything like this on an RPG level and I think it's fucking rad."

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DEATH PLANTED THE ESTHER TREE

A ROOTMIRE MANSION CRAWL
by Kreg Mosier

THE RELECROIX FAMILY ARE merchants, an occupation passed down through six generations near as can be remembered. They have lived in their familial home since the town was founded. A well-to-do if clannish people, relations among outsiders are relatively unheard of. Relationships are leverage, and usually decided upon by the elders of the family in order to facilitate the merger of families and business interests.

The Relecroix family consisted of:

Beauregard "Beau" Relecroix: The elder head of the household of Relecroix Manor and owner of Relecroix Imports.

Mary Anne Relecroix: Wife and mother. Deceased (allegedly due to a tragic accident).

Ethan Relecroix: 20-year-old only son. Destined to take over the family business.

Esther Relecroix: 17-year-old daughter, currently promised to the son of a wealthy merchant from Gigenstad. Largely ignored since Mary Anne's death. Taken to befriending the vassal house servants of the mansion who she has been dressing up as play companions since her childhood.



THE TRUTH

No one has seen the family in months. Beauregard has been away on a business trip, buying and selling trade goods, as he is wont to do. Esther is rarely seen in town, and when she is, only accompanied by her father or brother quickly ushering her from place to place. Ethan has been known to carouse about the Rootmire taverns and hound pits though he has not been seen of late.

Upon his recent return to the manor, Beauregard was greeted first by a deluge of rain that stung and burned exposed skin within a mile of his home, and was then physically, forcibly repelled by unseen forces, ejected from the manor grounds after several attempts to enter. He is now deathly afraid for his son's life. This concern does not extend to his daughter's life.

This then is where our intrepid explorers enter the picture, at a smokey, darkened guest-house located along the docks in Rootmire...

Beauregard Relecroix will call the group over and buy them drinks. He explains that he requires the services of a group such as the PCs: sellswords who aren't local and probably just passing through. He requires discretion, such that no word of himself or his family should pass their lips in public.

Beauregard and the rest of the Relecroix men have brought back hundreds of trinkets and priceless collectibles from their travels abroad over many generations, most to sell, and some very few to keep. A gnarled but rather nondescript ebonwood staff is the cause of this current calamity.

One year ago, while engaged in a heated argument that began in mid afternoon and would continue into the night, Beauregard Relecroix, in the heat of the moment, struck his wife Mary Anne with enough force to knock her off of her feet and down the main stairwell in the manor's great hall. A doctor was summoned, but alas, Mary Anne Relecroix would die within days. The official cause of death was from swelling on her brain caused by an accidental fall down the stairs, as reported by Beauregard, who was the only witness to the late night event. Or so he thought...

Unbeknownst to either of her parents, Esther had heard the sounds of her parents disputation and snuck out of her room to observe from the balcony near the stairwell. She witnessed the entirety of the event and was distraught, but dared not confront her father for fear of her own safety. Her sadness quickly turned to rage at which time the ebonwood staff began calling to her, promising her freedom from the pain and sadness, and more importantly... revenge.



Relecroix Merchant's Mark

Neither her brother or father noticed her periodic absence from the home in the next few weeks. Esther told her friends the vassals to tirelessly dig round the clock, into the wine cellar deep beneath the mansion. The staff has given her immense power in the few weeks she has kept it, but at terrible cost: Esther has been transformed into a massive ebonwood tree with an insatiable hunger for blood. This final transformation began when her father left on business three months prior and has neared completion.

The Esther Tree is so large that its giant bough and branches have burst through the foundation of the home and cellars below, up through the ballroom above into the second floor observation balcony, and partially through the roof.

The vassals Esther once had as playmates as a child are now the Esther Tree's pawns, who she has twisted for her own malevolent purposes. They seek travelers, the poor and destitute, or those they suspect will not be missed, to bring back to the mansion (alive if possible) to be sacrificed to the tree,

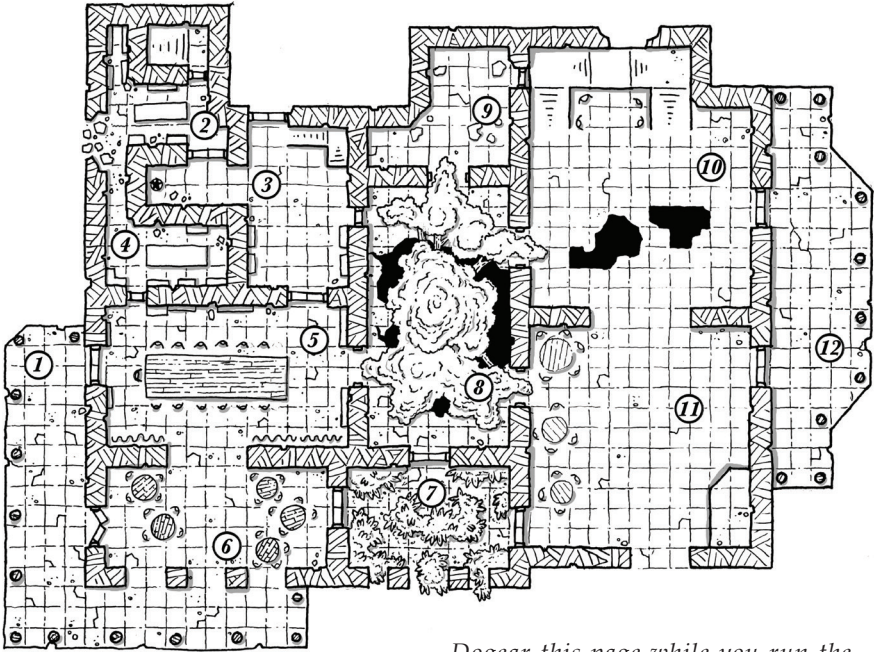
giving it more and more power. This has already occurred six times, and on the seventh the tree will grow even stronger and begin infecting the surrounding countryside. The only way to end the infection is total destruction of the Esther tree, which will kill (what's left of) Esther as well. If allowed to run its course, the infection will animate hundreds if not thousands of limbones and thicketmen from the surrounding swamp and forest, all under control of the Esther Tree.

The Esther Tree has caused the area around Relecroix Mansion to fall into a perpetual state of magical semidarkness, low rumbling thunder, and rain. Upon setting foot onto the property, the change in weather is jarring and obviously unnatural. The rain picks up with the wind every few minutes to bear down on anyone unfortunate enough to be exposed. After each consecutive hour the characters must begin making saves vs. poison or suffer 1d3 hit points of damage per hour as the rain permeates their skin, burning and stinging exposed flesh.

Even from inside the mansion, the humidity and moisture will have a 1 in 6 chance of causing torches to extinguish one round after lighting. Magical flame is not affected in the same way.

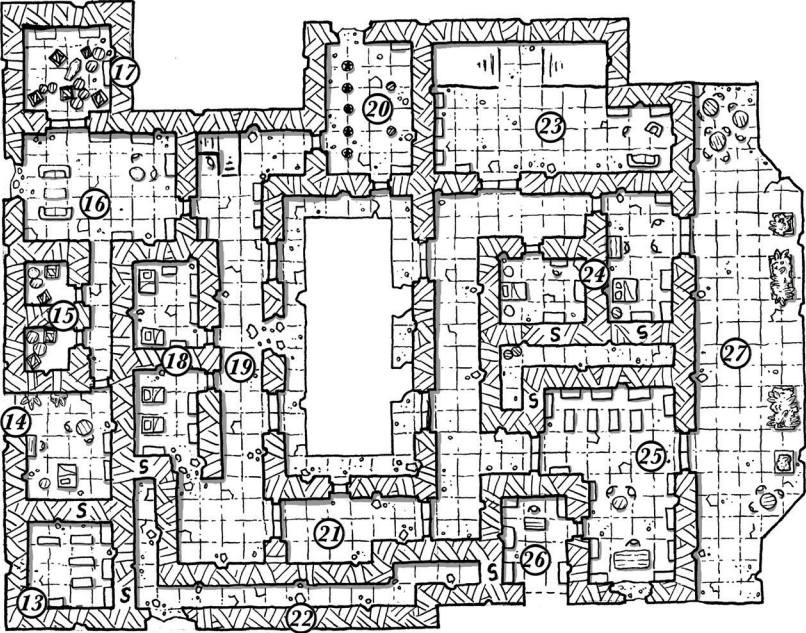
If the Esther Tree is destroyed, the rain will stop immediately, the black clouds will disperse, and a clear sky will be revealed.

FIRST FLOOR

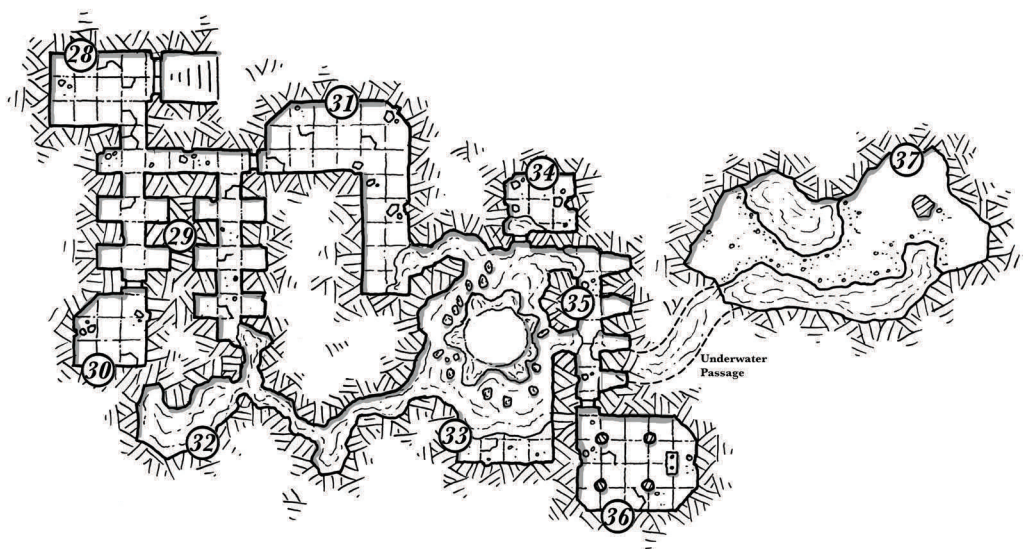


Dogear this page while you run the adventure so you can easily flip back to reference stuff.

SECOND FLOOR



CELLAR



BESTIARY

LIMBONES

Animated twig entities made of broken branches, briars, and brambles.

AC 13, Mov 120', HD 1, HP 6, claw d2, **Morale 8**

Special: Susceptible to fire. Can "see" in darkness.

THICKETMEN

Human-shaped bundles of branches, covered in giant thorned vines. Love to hug.

AC 14, Mov 120', HD 3, HP 15, spines d4, **Morale 8**

Special: Anyone who hits a thicketman in melee suffers 1 damage from spines. Susceptible to fire. Can "see" in darkness.

VASSALS

Vassals are stunted, vat born, albino slaves bred to serve as laborers, servants, and test subjects. They are spawned nameless, identified instead by three-digit numbers branded into their foreheads. Numbers 442 through 450 are owned by the Relecroix family. Vassals from the "400s batch" are generally regarded as the best strain for domestic household tasks.

AC 12, Mov 120', HD 2, HP 12, damage as weapon, **Morale 4**

Esther dressed up her vassals when she was alive, giving them discreet identities. In the mansion, all vassals wear a costume to indicate their function as well as porcelain masks painted to fit their "occupation."

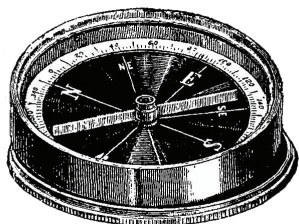
FIRST FLOOR

1. WEST EXTERIOR VERANDA

Overtured potted plants, broken columns, and blown leaves cover most of what was once a very nice covered outdoor area. Several topiaries are also in varying states of overgrowth and two have been covered in roots that erupted from the flagstones that make up the floor of the veranda. While most of the topiary resemble various natural animal shapes, two are vaguely human in shape: one stares at the sky, arms outstretched, while another is on hands and knees and staring at the ground, as if waiting for something. The latter is actually a **Thicketman**, who will leap at anyone who comes within ten feet of his location.

2. MAIN KITCHEN/STAIRS TO CELLAR

The west wall of this once fancy kitchen has collapsed, smashed in as if by a battering ram. The upper northwest corner holds a pantry, complete with (mostly) unspoiled dry foodstuffs. If the PCs investigate, they will find rat droppings and small tracks, as well as two medium-sized house rats that appear to have been bitten in half. There is no blood on the floor or bodies themselves. Stairs through a door to the north lead down to the wine cellar (area 28).



3. SMOKING LOUNGE

Large cabinets here display curios and collectibles from all manner of locales and times. Two high backed red leather chairs sit on either side of a small table with ashtrays and a pipe stand. Two ornately carved matching scrimshaw pipes resembling whales (worth 100sp each) rest in the holder. The numerous curios and baubles in the cases are of varying worth:

Polished stone vase with dragon etching (750sp), leather shoes w/ bronze buckles and small bells (250sp), polished stone scroll case (1250sp), glass bell jar with pickled horned fetus (fake; 0sp), ceramic mask decorated with blue glass shards (1,000sp), stone sundial with mother of pearl squid inlay (1,500sp), gold-plated sextant with bone and gold filigree map case (5,000sp), rose quartz marlin statue (1,250sp).

At the far west corner of the room set back into the wall is the bust of a sea captain, but the face is worn down from age, so no identifying marks remain. Around his neck is an **antique mariner's pocket compass** on a brass chain (150sp apparent worth*). Magical. Decorated with wind illustration and symbols. Will keep good wind at a mariner's back no matter the actual weather conditions. **HOWEVER**, this item will **ONLY** work for a "true mariner," as judged by the item. The compass must be bathed in 3-4 ounces of guzzle (booze) per day in order to function. (*Actual value is 3,000sp.)

4. FOOD PREPARATION ROOM

This room holds a long stand-up table with no chairs. There are several broken branches and white powder (flour) sprinkled on the table and covering the floor. There are three small buffets along the south wall and a china cabinet on the north wall. Broken china and twisted metal utensils litter the floor. There is also a linen-covered table in the southwest corner.

There is an abrupt wood-on-wood slamming sound as soon as the PCs get near the south door, or the north hallway entrance.

Four **Limbones** armed with cutlery have made a fort beneath the linen table, and will leap to attack anyone who approaches the center table.

5. BANQUET ROOM

This is a very large and formal banquet hall with a gigantic feasting table and chairs in the center of the room. **Vassal 442**, dressed in a maid's outfit, will be found here, straightening up table arrangements until encountered by the PCs.

6. DINING ROOM

This large dining area would traditionally serve as overflow from the banquet hall or be arranged in a more intimate manner for smaller family functions. On the south wall are tapestries depicting merchants travelling across a large map, complete with trailing caravan loaded with trade goods. A door to the west leads out to area 1, the west veranda. The doors are open, but not completely, as if pushed by

the wind. There are trails of broken branches, leaves, and outdoor detritus scattered about the floor, leading out the west door.

7. RECEIVING ROOM

Traditionally, guests would be seen to this area to await the arrival of the subject of their visit. Today, however, it is as if nature has reclaimed the area. What appear to have been simple indoor plants are now a sprawling tangled mass of vegetation. PCs studying the area will find pieces of broken ceramic pots in several places around the base of the mass of plants, indicating that they were burst from within. Two **Thicketmen** will be here constructing **Limbones** from the growth. Two are complete, one is half constructed; none are animate unless combined with ebonwood hearts).

8. BALLROOM

An incredible sight meets the PCs here as the trunk of a massive, dark tree has seemingly erupted from below the mansion, travelling the full height of what was once a large ballroom and bursting through the ceiling above. Characters brave enough to stand near the edge can see dark sky overhead, the tree having burst through the second floor then through the roof. Rain falls from the hole creating the illusion of an arboreal rainforest in the center of the mansion. Only darkness can be seen below as the rainwater winds its way down the tree.

Area 8 continued overleaf

Vassal 450, in a black suit with a rapier at his side, is here near the entrance to area 9 and will walk swiftly toward the PCs and attack.

9. LIBRARY/STUDY

This was apparently a small library or study from the looks of it, partially due to the bookshelves on the wall, and partly from the hundreds if not thousands of torn pages that litter the floor. Two **Thicketmen** are crouched over a pile of books near the door to the stairwell landing, slowly pulling pages out of each one. Unless surprised, they will notice the PCs and move to attack immediately.

10. GREAT HALL/PRIMARY STAIRS

The floor sags toward the center of this once beautiful room and it appears that many of the furnishings have fallen through the two openings in the center. Every step into the room produces creaks and groans from the floor. Hugging the walls is the best solution as walking anywhere near the center of the room will require a DEX check. Unlucky characters will fall twenty feet into area 10 of the cellar level below.

11. GRAND FOYER

The giant grandfather clock here is stuck on 10:15, yet continues in vain to attempt progress from this position, making a “tick-tick-tick” noise. Family paintings glower down almost menacingly from the walls. One prominently displayed painting of what appears to have been a male subject is torn apart, with only a bit of the chest

remaining in what is left of the canvas. This area is otherwise empty.

12. EAST EXTERIOR VERANDA

The veranda is a large wrap-around patio and garden, now covered in wet, fallen leaves, and moreso resembling a giant compost pile. There is nothing here, but attempted entry to the ground level through the doors to areas 10 or 11 will alert any creatures in the area due to the loud, squeaky doors.

SECOND FLOOR

NOTE: All rooms on the second floor have pull-chains near the interior door frame. These chains play bells in room 1, which will alert the vassals that someone needs assistance... or in the case of the PCs, to be murdered or sacrificed to the Esther Tree. Convenient! Within one round of pulling the chain, any vassals left in room 1 will move via the secret hallways and crawlspaces to whichever room the chain was pulled in.

13. BUTLER’S CHAMBERS

This room is only accessible via the secret doors from the north and east. There are eight cots set up around the room. There are several bells of varying sizes on the west wall. If inspected, each bell produces a subtly different tone than the next. The differing sounds correspond to the various rooms throughout the mansion, activated by a pull cord located in each room. Ideally the vassals would move themselves around the house as needed,

forever at the beck and call of the family. The following **Vassals** will be in this location, awaiting an order. They are either lying motionless on a cot or standing and staring into space.

Vassal 443 is dressed in a butler's outfit with a white towel over his left arm and a butcher knife clutched in his right hand.

Vassal 444 is dressed in a chef's outfit, wielding a rolling pin.

Vassal 445 is in a maid's outfit, holding a fire poker.

Vassal 446 wears a chef's outfit and holds a cleaver.

14. MASTER BEDROOM

The large window here has been blown out from the inside and the wind will sweep past upon opening the door. Inside is a queen-sized bed, dressers with clothing (men's clothes in one, women's in another), a small desk and chair, and a larger sitting table. This room appears largely unused and unmolested with a fine layer of yellow pollen and dust covering most everything.

15. CHANGING ROOMS

These two rooms are identical, the northern one being for a woman and the one below for a man. They each contain matching wardrobes and several boxes of clothing. There is a full-length mirror on the south wall of each. The rooms appear completely untouched. Characters wishing to abscond with fine clothing may believe themselves

to have found the motherload, but the room is otherwise empty. Enterprising clothiers may be able to steal up to 1,500sp in fine dress clothing if so inclined.

16. SITTING ROOM

This is a sitting room for the mother and father, complete with small paintings of family and one large portrait of the entire family standing on one of the house's several verandas. It obviously presents a more idyllic family in repose, where all members have fairly neutral expressions except the young female (Esther) whose lips almost tease up into a small grin.

There are several dressers here, most with clothing, accessories, or small baubles. Thieves will find the following:

Six whalebone hairpins with semi-precious stones (15sp each), a book, *Buttons and Bows: A Haberdashers Tale* (very rare, self published; 750sp), antique jewelry of exquisite workmanship (1,500sp total).

17. FAMILY STORAGE

Large crates and boxes, most likely used as storage for the family. This room is mostly empty beyond personal effects. Mostly, except for the 4 **Limbones** inside the crates, looking for "valuables" (shiny objects). If the PCs are quiet, it is possible to catch the Limbones unawares. Otherwise, they will fight to their deaths.

18. CHILDREN'S BEDROOMS

The room to the north looks like a well maintained young man's room with trophy heads, furs, and books detailing the art of business studies: factoring, supply, and demand. The room is spartan, almost to the point of looking like an artificial setting.

If the north bedroom was spartan, the south bedroom is the exact opposite: flower petals, mostly fresh, cover the floor like a carpet. Gloam lichen (bioluminescent moss) covers the walls, giving the room a surreal glow. Lying on the bed is an antique porcelain baby doll, with wood bark lying around it arranged to form wings. The doll has been somewhat damaged, but appears to have been stuffed with sticks, twigs, and mud to reform into a near if (somewhat distended) human form.

Beyond the peculiar nature of the display, the room is otherwise a simple and understated young woman's room, complete with vanity, wardrobe, and a lounging couch. There is nothing of real value here.

19. CORRIDOR

There is a 1 in 6 chance that 1d4 **Limbones** will be scuttling around the hallway looking for shiny objects or awaiting commands from the Esther Tree.

20. MAP ROOM

This room is has two large map drawers (one each in the north and south) that contain maps of the surrounding territories. The

quality of the maps range from fair to excellent and an enterprising robber could make up to 2,500sp selling them to the right parties.

There are five miniature pillars carved from stone, all of the same design: three goddess-like figures standing on a large clam shell, each holding a large jug resting on their shoulders. On what would be the capital (top) of the column rest four maps, each depicting a detailed illustration of the city of Rootmire and surrounding parishes along the Missing River. The fifth column has no such map, but instead has a long rectangular bone map case sitting on top. This case contains map to the resting place of "Dunnigan's Fleet," the purported "Thieves of the Blighted Gulf" responsible for absconding with millions of gold from various capers and cons. If real (referee's call), the map is absolutely priceless.

21. MUSIC ROOM

This chamber was used by Esther as a child, when her parents forced her to take up the harp. After endless protests, Beauregard finally sold the instrument to the bardic college in Gigenstad and so the room sits empty and silent.

22. VASSALS' SECRET CORRIDOR

This is a secret crawlspace normally used by the vassals to quickly access the east and west portions of the house. One such exit opens into Esther's room, which she would frequently use to play with her friends. Besides the stench, not much else occupies this space.

23. SECOND FLOOR LANDING

There is a 1 in 6 chance of 1d3 **Limbones** being at this location, pulling stuffing out of the chairs in the east corner and making small stuffing mounds.

24. TWIN GUEST ROOMS

These large and stately bedrooms appear to be for guests. Small personal wash basins sit on desks, empty chests and dressers line the walls, and pristine made beds round out the contents. These two rooms are otherwise empty and nondescript, except for the room closest to the conservatory (area 27). Each PC will have a 1 in 6 (2 in 6 if non-human) chance of noticing that the secret vassal entrance on the south wall is ever so slightly cracked open. There is nothing in the servant corridor except for the smell of urine.

25. FATHER'S LIBRARY

A fire has gutted most of this room. It seems to have started in the center of the room and radiated outward, never reaching the doors or windows. A large pile of ashes and burnt wood sits in the middle of the floor. A **Thicketman** crouches over it, rubbing its hands through the ash. It will attack as soon as it notices the PCs.

Inside the pile of ash, at the very bottom, is a unscathed, shiny red stone, resembling polished marble. This is a *firestone*, used by mariners to provide warmth in the bitter cold and driving rain they often face at sea. The stone is held between the user's closed cupped hands as they

blow into them as if making a bird call. The stone will glow slightly and produce enough heat to warm the user when kept close, though it must be moved from pocket to pocket to avoid burns. This one appears to have malfunctioned, either by accident or not, and has a small hairline fissure along one side. On each use, there is a 1 in 6 chance of the firestone spiking in temperature, causing material such as cloth, paper or very thin wood to catch fire. It will last for 1d3 additional uses before it explodes on the next usage for 1d6 hp in fire damage.

26. FATHER'S STUDY

The door to this room is locked and will require a key, which unfortunately Beauregard still has on his person. The door has an alarm such that a failed lockpicking attempt will trigger a series of very loud bells to chime at one second intervals from inside the room until deactivated by the key or by destroying the device. This will attract any **Limbones**, **Thicketmen**, or **Vassals** in the surrounding area to investigate. The device is mounted above the bookcase on the north side of the door. In the event that simple destruction is the order of the day, a successful *Open Doors* roll will allow entry, but set off the alarm mentioned previously. Inside, the room looks pristine, especially in contrast to the rest of the mansion. The only exception is what appears to have been a beautiful stained glass window, now lying in colorful ruin on the floor to the south.

Area 26 continued overleaf

There is a desk with drawers, paperwork, and correspondence (all dry, business-related bills of lading, travel documents, financial logbooks, etc). Long-term analysis indicates the breadth of Beauregard's dealings and business acumen, but nothing more. There is a stone head that appears to have been broken off of a sculpture, which was more than likely hurled through the broken window.

The bookcases are completely full, loaded with ledger after ledger of transaction logs, dating back at least one entire generation, and probably more.

If anyone thinks to look UNDER the desk, they will find an exquisite masterwork dagger with a bone handle and mother of pearl inlay (500sp) in a hold-out sheath beneath the main drawer.

27. CONSERVATORY

This once beautiful gilded frame conservatory is now a wasteland of menacing shards of shattered glass. Almost every window around the perimeter appears to have been smashed and the few pieces left hanging are reminiscent of nothing so much as a huge menacing grin of sharp broken teeth. There will be 1d3 **Limbones** here playing with glass, which they seem fascinated by. If they are not surprised, they will ram glass slivers into their hands and attack the PCs. If surprised, they will arm themselves in this way the following round. The glass will allow the Limbones do damage as a dagger (1d4).

WINE CELLAR

NOTE: Unless otherwise mentioned, this entire area is completely dark, the exception being the luminescent gloam lichen on the walls of the alcoves in area 35 and surrounding the Esther Tree itself in area 33.

28. WINE CELLAR ENTRANCE

At the very foot of the stairs leading down into this area is a lump lying on the floor. Closer inspection reveals this lump to be the lower half of fetid corpse, still in the throes of decomposition. The taugth skin crawls with undulating masses of maggots and other insects or vermin. The body appears to have been bitten in half. All PCs entering or exiting this area must make a save vs. poison each time they enter, or fall violently ill, relieving themselves of the contents of their stomachs. The addition of vomit mixes with the stench of death and decay in a most unfavorable manner, piling stench upon stench to create a symphony of rank odor.

29. WINE STORAGE ALCOVES

Within each nook are large wine barrels, some full, some empty and smashed, their contents covering the floor. The smell of rot is strangely strong here, though no corpses are in view. **HOWEVER**, several bodies of the Esther Tree's victims have been stored inside wine casks by the vassals and thicketmen then resealed. If anyone tastes the wine or opens a cask, make a secret d6 roll. On a result of 1-3, no corpse is present in the cask and the wine tastes fine if slightly old. On a 4-6,

a body has been hidden in the barrel. The wine has a slightly sour taste and will call for a secret save vs. poison. If the save is failed, the PC who imbibed will become violently ill within 24 hours and incapacitated by a flu-like sickness causing body and joint pain, fevers, projectile vomiting, and diarrhea that will last for a week. The symptoms will slowly fade, effectively acting like the worst bout of food poisoning ever imagined: terrible and debilitating, but not deadly. The affected character will not heal ANY hit point damage during the week of sickness.

30. CARPENTRY ROOM

Here piles of wood slats and steel rings for making wine barrels lay unused. There are mallets, wedges, and large bath troughs on the ground, presumably for soaking wood to bend and shape. The room is otherwise empty.

NOTE FOR AREAS 31-35

The areas here are flooded with almost three feet of water where shown on the map, all caused by water leaking in from the excavation of this area by the vassals. There are several spots along the walls that have been filled in with mud and stone, but water still ever so slightly seeps through the cracks, leaking down the wall in almost unnoticeable rivulets.

31. DECANTING ROOM

This room would normally be where wine barrels are brought to be checked for quality, and for bottling. Instead, it appears more

like a horrifying charnel house. The remains of at least a dozen individuals are here: limbs, heads, and torsos impaled by hooks like sides of meat, hanging from chains in the ceiling. Open casks have corpses shoved inside at awkward angles and one lies on a prep table with a oversized cleaver planted in its chest.

The PCs may begin to realize that the wine might not be as fine if a vintage as they had first imagined... and anyone who has the realization will be incapacitated for 1d3 rounds while involuntarily emptying the contents of their stomachs.

32. UNDEAD MIRE DRAGON LAIR

This area appears more like a pond than a room. Flooding has left three feet of dark, brackish water and the floor slopes slowly down toward the back (west end) of the area. The rear area (again, the larger west end) of the cave has a lantern that has been lit and attached to a pole on a floating raft-like platform in a slapdash manner using random pieces of rope, twine, or other castoff. It resembles a lashed together pile of trash, but is vaguely reminiscent of a floating diving platform... or a weird wooden angler fish.

As unfortunate and terrible for the PCs as it may sound, for some reason a fairly good-sized mire dragon made its way into the sublevels of the mansion, possibly due to root extrusion from Esther's root system piercing the bayou water table. *Area 32 continued overleaf*

The mire dragon has contracted *Ebonwood Rot*, but instead of seeking purchase in the ground, a root system covers the entire beast, creating an up-armored mostly-dead-but-undead mire dragon that obeys the telepathic thoughts of the Esther Tree. OH, also it can walk upright and use weapons. DAMN.

UNDEAD MIRE DRAGON

The swamps surrounding Rootmire are crawling with black-scaled reptilian beasts known as mire dragons. They stalk the shallows for blood and meat. When they find it, they consume it with saw-toothed zeal. This one is extra tough because of its unholy ebonwood mutations.

AC 18, **Mov** 120', **HD** 7, **HP** 28, bite d8, **Morale** 8

Special: Successful melee attackers suffer 1HP damage from spiny thorns. Susceptible to fire.

EBONWOOD ROT

Skin pierced by ebonwood will become infected with *Ebonwood Rot*. Within one day the infection will spread and the victim's skin will take on a dark, bark-like appearance (+2 to AC, -1 to fire-based saves). Within a week, the victim's bones and joints will become stiff and painful, reducing movement by ½. The following week will find an untreated victim rooted in place, marking their transformation into an Ebonwood tree within days. At this point, the only way to heal the victim is via *Neutralize Poison* and *Cure Disease* spells cast simultaneously.

33. THE ESTHER TREE

Three **Vassals** are assembled here around the base of their hateful arboreal master:

Vassal 447 dressed in a black robe with mortar board, holding a slate with chalk and a battle axe.

Vassal 448 in a frumpy dress and shawl, wielding a hand axe.

Vassal 449 wears a beautiful dress and a golden jeweled tiara (200sp). She wields a shortbow called *Quiver Lass*.

Quiver Lass: Esther's magical **+1 short bow**. When the string is drawn an arrow materializes, providing endless ammunition. *Quiver Lass* telepathically informs the user about how they are doing, offering words of encouragement or correction in a soft feminine voice (hence the +1 bonus to hit and dmg).

THE ESTHER TREE

Corrupt soul transformed by ebonwood into demonic tree. Hates all life.

AC 16, **Mov** 0', **HD** 10, **HP** 55, lashing branches (see below), **Morale** 12

Special: Anyone within melee range will be automatically lashed by branches for 1d4 damage. Victim must save vs. poison or become infected by *Ebonwood Rot*. Susceptible to fire. Rooted in spot, so no movement. Can see in darkness.

Spells: *Charm Person* 1/day.

TWIST: The Esther Tree will use its *Charm Person* spell and communicate with the perceived leader of the group in an attempt to persuade them to bring it Beaugard Relecroix alive, to be sacrificed by the vassals and become the seventh victim. As part of the spell, the tree will push visions of what Esther saw, framing her as the victim in the tragedy, deserving of revenge against a man who at best cared very little for her, and at worst emotionally and physically abused her and her mother for years. The tree promises Esther's release upon the death of the seventh victim (a lie), and wealth beyond measure, plus whatever they want from the mansion (also lies... it will use whatever vassals and limbones are left to waylay the party and consume them as well, were they to accept this devil's bargain!)

34. MINION CONSTRUCTION ROOM

Here is where the magic happens... or at least where the Esther Tree's minions are assembled by vassals. Piles of sticks and branches fill the floor and a small cleared area is ringed with strange rune-like scratches. Lying in the center of this circle is an unmoving **Thicketman** with an open chest cavity, as if awaiting contents. Hidden among the branches are two **Limbones** who will watch the PCs intently, only attacking if disturbed, or if a showdown occurs in area 33.

35. SAPLING ALCOVES

This long corridor has several small alcoves cut into the walls, spaced roughly every ten feet or so. In

each alcove is a single **Thicketman**, standing as if on guard. The first two will animate and attack the PCs when they approach. The very bottom alcove is empty. A pool of water here in the second-to-last alcove is actually access to an underground river channel that leads to area 37.

36. EBON GOD WORSHIP ROOM

Upon an altar made of mud and sticks lies the disinterred and desiccated body of Esther's mother, Mary Anne Relecroix. She lies on her back as if sleeping, clutching a black staff between her hands. Her body appears almost mummified, preserved to some degree by the peat in the swamps, around which she was no doubt once interred.

Any **Vassals** left alive, plus a **Thicketman** and 1d4 **Limbones** will fight to their deaths defending the **Ebonwood Staff**.

The Ebonwood Staff: poisons its owner with *Ebonwood Rot*, which will begin their slow and terrible transformation into a tree. See *Ebonwood Rot* (page 36) for details. The only other thing the staff will offer its owner is the ability to cast *Charm Person*, once per day, no matter their class.

37. SINKHOLE CAVERN

This dark cavern appears to be the result of underground digging that created a sort of sinkhole beneath area 10 above (and the reason the floor is caving in). Light trickles in from the broken floorboards above.

THE GRIMSLY HILL CHERUBS

SOME MURDEROUS CHILDREN
by Clint Krause

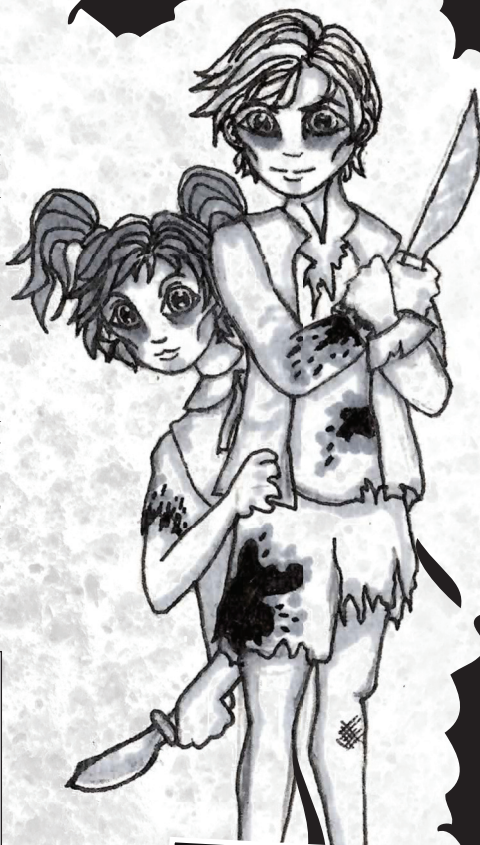
DON'T GO TO GRIMSLY HILL," they say, "the children there have knives." It's true that most Grimsly Hill children between the ages of eight and twelve have dreamt of the Quiet City. It's true that most of them have murdered their parents. It's true that they roam the neighborhood as a nocturnal gang. It's true that they descend like savage dogs onto anyone foolish enough to go a-walking. It's most certainly true that the constables refuse to cross Borrow Street after the sun goes down and the few remaining residents bar their doors and stay away from their windows.

GRIMSLY HILL CHERUB

AC 12, Mov 120', HD 1, HP 2,
knife d4, **Morale** 8

Special: Inside the Grimsly Hill neighborhood a cherub can spend a round raising a hue and cry to summon 1d6 additional cherubs from their homes. The new cherubs arrive the same round. Only one cherub can use this ability each round. The total number of cherubs cannot exceed 24.

*The cherubs are just a small taste of the horrors that await your players in **Undertow**, book two of **The Driftwood Verses**. Coming soon from **Red Moon Medicine Show!***



BY THE KNIVES OF
THIS NIGHT

MY JUSTICE WILL
RISE IN BLOOD

I WILL TAKE AS
THIS WORLD HAS
TAKEN FROM ME

I WILL KILL YOU ALL

U

PAPA LATHMOS' SUGAR CANE CROP

A HYPERGLYCEMIC NIGHTMARE
by Anxy P

THE SUGAR CANE SHAKES WITHOUT breeze as you waddle or tromp towards its edges, like thousands of rattlesnakes in a rain storm. The stalks are striped in a violent black camouflage, harkening back to creatures of poison and concealment. But it's only a sugar cane plot, a field held up by humidity and sweat, for that is where sugar grows. Sticky, melting in dizzying lines of splintering shoots with leaves of gently swaying green. The sugar cane dance and for this harvest their laborious companions are long dead, muscle and bone worked to the grave. But they were given no graves. They were left to become the people of sugar.

Old people. Black-skinned. Subsist in a slow sludge of dehydration and sweet-smelling rot. They speak dreams through the holes of their rotting teeth, tapping canes to dirt as you pass. Something like hosts to this place, something like guardians. Through their toothy decay, they chatter a language too "dripping" to be understood. It comes out in great globs of drool and if their eyes move, you wouldn't know. But there will be a sugar cane elder at every quarter mile around the crop's perimeter.

Spending more than five minutes within the presence of an elder or within fifteen feet of the sugar cane's edge means that a save vs. magic must be made. Failing this save means that the party member will begin to sway, then creep closer to the crop's edge. The character must make a second save the following round or they are considered to have *entered* into the sugar cane.

For the unaffected, this will appear as a perceptual phenomenon in which those "swallowed" will seem to simply sway into the cane as slow-dancing phantoms. Attempting to restrain any affected individual will immediately require a save vs. magic to avoid being pulled into the sugar-cane as well.

Only one incident may be rolled for those entering the crop. As soon as the event is resolved, the area is considered to have returned to its normal state, allowing those inside to leave at will.

Upon entering the crop, a leering sugar elder with yellowed eyes will smile as they pass you, exiting the cane field. Trading places, if you will. And through syrupy hazes, the elder will speak a dream to you as (s)he drools into cupped hands. Pouring it over your head. It is warm and simple.

Roll a d4 for Sugar Cane Crop Occurrence:

1. *“For once, a god saw me performing my labor, saw my hands bleed in the act. And after great silence and shifting of dirt. It laughed and, without any silence, I laughed too.”*

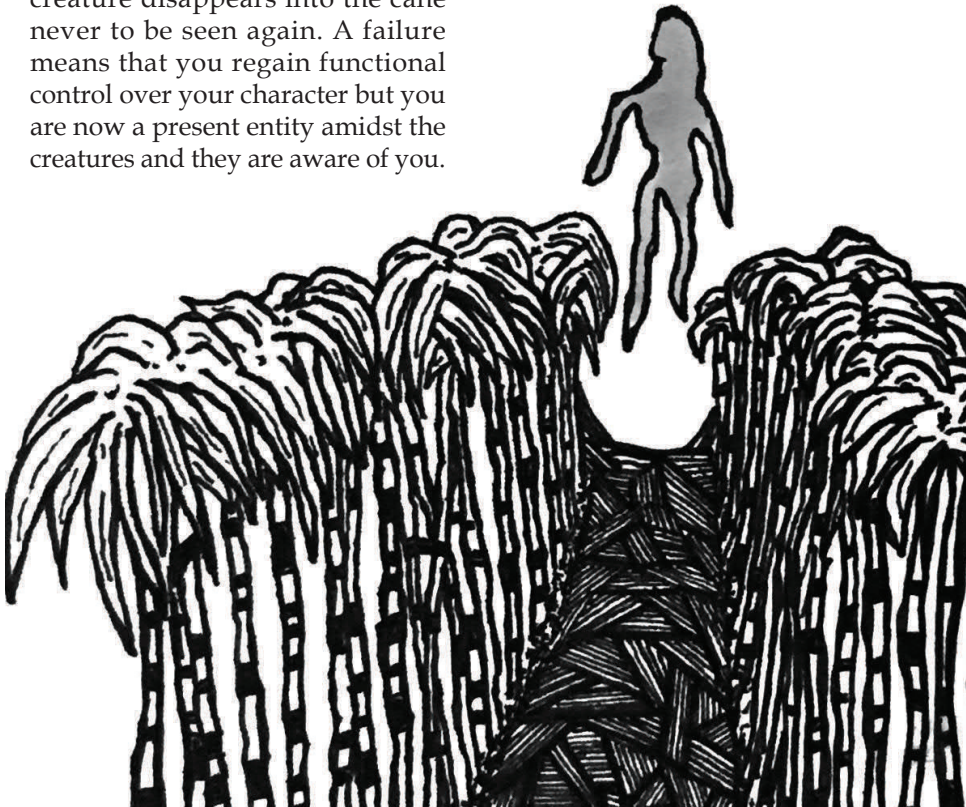
Twenty feet ahead, following a path of pressed grass between the rows of sugar cane, lies a clearing.

Within this clearing is a **creature composed of six, melding bodies**. All of which are laughing while attempting to harvest the cane around them. They bleed profusely. You must now make a save vs. magic. A successful roll means that you sway along the perimeter of the clearing, simply observing the sad, sticky abomination failing at its task for d2 rounds. After that the creature disappears into the cane never to be seen again. A failure means that you regain functional control over your character but you are now a present entity amidst the creatures and they are aware of you.

STICKY WORKERS

AC 12, **Mov** 0', **HD** 2, **HP** nil, 6x dismember d8 or sugar cane toss d6 (range 15'), **Morale** 12

Special: When a sticky worker causes damage, it will begin laughing. Each round, another worker will begin laughing until all have dominated the area with a cacophony of glee. Roll a save vs. paralyze. If successful, you may continue fighting. There is no fleeing this combat. If failed, you slump into a fetal position and begin laughing uncontrollably for d4 rounds. At the end of the duration, the area becomes empty, the workers having apparently disappeared. Behind you is a small path between the rows of sugar cane leading out of the crop.



2. “Gravitas my love. I long to mate as the fireflies do. Such beauty. But they would never take me. Never, for Man does not glow. Man is the rusting of pests.”

Twenty feet ahead, following a path of pressed grass between the rows of sugar cane, lies a clearing.

Within this clearing, fireflies have begun to mate with one another. There are hundreds and it is beautiful. The ground in this open area is soggy and covered in tiny white crystals. In fact, as you look around... everything is crystalline, even your body. As the lights of the insects increase in brightness, so does the presence of white crystals, now caking the area at a rapid rate. Covering your feet, legs, torso, arms, neck. Make a save vs. paralyze. A success means that the sugar crystals melt away, turning the area into a warm, syrupy swamp, and you begin to sink into the sweet mire. Make strength checks as you may but it does not matter. You sink and fall into a sugar cane field, on a path of pressed grass, between the rows of cane, and twenty feet ahead lays a clearing. The exit is behind you. A failed save means the crystals fully engulf the area (including you), hardening for d2 rounds then crumbling away into large chunks of sugar, crushing beneath footfalls. You take d4 charisma damage and will feel ugly for 24 hours. At this point, the area will become overrun with **Sugarcane Smut**, a fungus which blackens the area while the

fireflies slowly evacuate. The cane stalks transform into long, black, fungal whips. They want to punish you for your ugliness.

SMUT WHIPS

AC 16, **Mov** 0', **HD** 1, **HP** nil, 10x whip 1 dmg, **Morale** 12

Special: If more than two attacks hit during a combat round then the third will require a save vs. poison. If failed then a coating of soft, pustule-filled black fungus will grow over an affected area of the victim. There will be d20 spore pockets on the area. It is up to the referee as to when they pop. When this occurs, the spores cover a forward spraying distance of 5', infecting whatever organic material they touch and thus perpetuating the cycle, forever, unless destroyed with fire.

3. “I wonder upon splinters, foreign objects entering my flesh, finding home in this body. Over time they leave as do all visitors. So why should I long to pry them out?”

Twenty feet ahead, following a path of pressed grass between the rows of sugar cane, lies a clearing.

Within this clearing rests a large pile of broken cane stalks, roughly 15' in diameter. As you sway uncontrollably towards the mass of detritus, a clear but quiet weeping can be heard emanating from within the pile. It grows louder until it is the only thing able to be heard.

Save vs. magic as a nude, black-skinned man levitates upward as the cane crumbles then rises with him, his skinned punctured with hundreds of tiny cane shoots, like syringes. As he rises, fluids begin to drip from the ends of the shoots, turning the man into a fountain of sugar and blood. The clearing floor quickly fills with the liquid, the sugar cane acting as a radial wall containing the pool. It reeks of dirty coins and fruit. As you watch helplessly, swaying to the dance, the area inevitably fills to your chest. Make a save vs. paralyze. A successful roll means that you regain mobility and self control. Swimming and then climbing through the hole will lead you to a dark place, some kind of crude containment. In fact, you are inside a mound of broken sugar cane stalks. Escape is rather simple.

Failing the save means that you endure a strange experience in which the liquid begins to quickly enter every available orifice, expanding you to the size of the clearing. You shrink back to normal size after d6 rounds. Take damage equal to rounds rolled. The same amount of blood and sugar still remains within, as if you were a Mary Poppins bag filled with a hyperglycemic pool. If you are stabbed, impaled, or punctured within two days of the event then a pressure-washer-strength jettison of blood and glucose will come rushing out of the wound causing 2 points of damage to whomever is directly in front of the wound.

4. "There was a dining table. Beautiful. Chairs circling its entirety. I sat upon one. Alone. The seat was of caning. Perhaps well-made at one point. The exposed, square-headed nails drove deep into my thighs and ass as the caning gave way to my weight. Crucifying me to my station. But I was given such delicious food. I could not, would not, leave that table for many years."

Twenty feet ahead, following a path of pressed grass between the rows of sugar cane, lies a clearing.

Within this clearing rests a table that could seat about twelve people. Perhaps made of tiger oak. I'm not sure. The caned seats of all the surrounding chairs appear to be broken. There is food present: black pudding, blood sausage, and bowls of custard. Save vs. magic. Success means that the chairs become occupied with sugar-elders. They will tell you that you are not invited, one by one, while sugar-cane shoots begin to grow from within them until the area is filled with the plant, pushing you out from the crop and back to the outer edge. A failure means that the sugar elders offer you a chair, which causes d4 puncture damage from exposed nails in the ruined seat. They will feed you by the spoonful, causing them to pass out. You will awaken at the crop's edge within d4 rounds. Only blood and sugar will satiate hunger for d4 weeks.

EMMY ALLEN: Of Wolves and Winter

AN INTERVIEW

by Clint Krause with Emmy Allen

I LEARNED OF EMMY ALLEN'S *WOLF Packs and Winter Snow* through Patrick Stuart's blog, *False Machine*, where he reviewed it. I thought the whole thing was very interesting and had a lot of ideas that may be usable for *LotFP*.

CK: What's your gaming background?

EA: So, I started out playing *D&D 3.5*, like a lot of people my age did, and kind of assumed that was what all gaming was like. When I went to university, suddenly I found all these different games and tried a bit of everything. The ones that really stuck with me were a pretty varied bunch; I play a hell of a lot of *World of Darkness* games, and some more weird indie stuff like *Lacuna* and *Don't Rest Your Head*, along with fairly regular OSR stuff. I don't tend to play stuff like *D&D 3.5* so much anymore; there's just so much STUFF to read, you know? That said, something like *Vamp* is also stupidly complicated, but I keep playing because I love the setting. I'm also a pretty keen LARPer. There's some really cool games in the UK that I'm involved with.

CK: What's cool about the LARPs?

EA: So, there's one I played in recently, *Odyssey*, that's based on a sort of pulpy, "Ray Harryhausen" version of classical mythology. So it's a big mish-mash of greek heroes and roman gladiators and efreeti and minotaurs and stuff. About 300 players. You had this world that, on the surface, seemed fairly self-explanatory but as you dug deeper into it you found more and more weird stuff, with huge primordial titans as a fundamental part of the world's metaphysics. The way that this greater setting was slowly drip-fed to the playerbase was really neat, you'd get hints here and there and ideas would ripple through the playerbase as people put the pieces together to work out what was going on.

Taking all these icons from old mythology, and presenting them in these new contexts, is something that really worked for me. When we started to realise (for example) how all the different cultures had a goddess of love and passion (such as Isis, Cybele, Aphrodite, Astarte and others), and a consort who was a wounded god (such as Adonis, Osiris, Attis and others), and how those were part of a greater whole... it just really came together nicely.

One thing I love with larp is how in the big games, the story isn't focused on a few PCs; they're all just individual characters existing in a larger world.

You get anywhere between 200 and 2,000 players in a field, and as plotlines are introduced they swirl around different groups of PCs and develop in ways you wouldn't expect. You get this very organic, emergent story that's driven by the players, but not centred on them.

CK: What kind of techniques do the organizers use to drip feed the setting? Also, is this a boffer thing?

EA: Yeah, it's boffer stuff. That said, a lot of the gameplay isn't focussed on the combat, and you get other systems (and sometimes neat little mini-games) for other stuff like healing and magic.

You get a lot of different techniques to get plot and information out. Often, there are IC things - divination spells, drugs that give you visions, that sort of thing - that let a player fish for information. And on top of this, you get NPCs with bits of information and agendas to push. This takes two big forms. Sometimes you'll have NPCs go up to the PCs with something like "Pan Cultists kidnapped our babies," and then maybe the players go and track down the Pan cultists or whatever. You get little linear quests fed into the game that way, and even if players don't go on that quest you still learn something about what's going on in the world.

And then, on top of that, there are big set-piece encounters; things like audiences with a god or a titan, where you tend to get a reasonable



amount of exposition-dump, along with the god having their own demands and agendas.

But, the big thing is that any plot like this is bigger than the NPCs involved. For example, we had an audience with Mars, where he told the roman priesthood that Saturn (who up until that point had been a silent hooded figure in the Mars audiences) was actually the Carthaginian god Baal, and that the two of them wanted to have Rome and Carthage elect a single ruler and conquer the world. They even named the guy who they wanted in charge. Because Rome was staunchly republican at that point, the political conflict that audience caused was still going several events later, and the religious ties between Rome and Carthage also got very interesting. Really, it's all about giving the players ways to make the game interesting for themselves.

CK: Ok, so you wrote an OSR game, *Wolf Packs and Winter Snow*. What's the story behind that?

EA: I've always enjoyed tinkering around with rules systems. I'd been playing in a few different OSR games, and read various blogs about the different systems out there, so it made sense to start jotting down the house-rules I'd use if I was going to run my own campaign. A lot of the very early stuff, like the flesh & grit system I use, the skill lists, the way I do armour and encumbrance and stuff, the various magic systems... all this is in a word document on my laptop.

After a while, though, I wanted something to tie it all together, and a distinct identity to my rules. There's a whole lot of medieval fantasy games and settings out there and I figured that the ice age was something not really explored that much. So I altered some stuff and began putting things together into something resembling an actual game, and it just kind of spiralled from there.

Really, though, I never went into this intending to make a "product," you know? I was writing as a sort of creative exercise for my own amusement. I posted a few bits from what I was making on various forums (/tg/'s OSR thread mostly) and people seemed to like it, so from there I figured I might as well put it all together into something that you can actually download and play.

And then I went a bit overboard and actually sold print versions and stuff. But that was never the initial plan, it just sort of happened.

CK: What were the most direct influences on *WP&WS*?

EA: Rules-wise? It's based on the skeleton of *LotFP*, with bits added from various places. The thieves-guild stuff from *ACKS* formed the basis for the tribes, flesh and grit came from *Last Gasp Grimoire*, and various other ideas filtered in from all over the place. On top of this, the magical fuckups were strongly *Warhammer* inspired. Like a lot of OSR writers, I'm pretty omnivorous in terms of influences, so there's

probably WAY more stuff that filtered through my brain from various places and made their way into the game.

One big thing that I really liked was the idea of randomly generating the world as you go; the idea is that there's enough stuff in the GM's sections of the book to run the game without any prep ahead of time. Whilst your players are rolling up characters, you sketch out a map and a few sites of interest, and then there's tables to fill in the details as you explore.

In terms of the setting, there's a decent chunk of the "*LotFP* assumed universe" in there, with the tentacle monsters from other dimensions and stuff. The weirdness from stuff like *Hellboy* was a big influence, too, and on top of that I wanted a game that you could easily houserule to be pretty historically accurate, so I did a decent amount of research on stuff like paleoarcheology.

CK: What appeals to you about OSR-style writing/gaming?

EA: So, on the one hand, there's the rules side of things. There's this wonderful elegant simplicity to the games that I really like. Every rule is there because it needs to be, and serves a purpose. Because the basic set-up (six stats, hit dice, saving throws, AC) is going to be very familiar to people, it's that much more flexible. It becomes almost a lingua franca for gaming; when you open a rulebook and see those structures, you immediately have

some base context and you can see very clearly the design choices that were made. You can tinker with the system in all sorts of different ways because it's both minimalist enough and well enough understood.

On top of that, there's then a particular aesthetic to a lot of OSR stuff that appeals to me. You take the player characters as the player's avatars, and they represent the familiar. They're what we understand, what we're comfortable with. And then, as you enter an adventure site, they're contrasted to (and tested to the brink of destruction by) this sense of something huge and ancient and strange. A good OSR adventure, I think, takes these little symbols of the familiar and subjects them to the awe and terror of something totally alien and dwarfing. (A lot of settings use old ruins for this, *WP&WS* mostly uses the primeval wilderness).

I think *Deep Carbon Observatory* is the best example I've read of it, but it's common to all the best systems, modules and supplements I've come across.

Going back to the first point, I think the familiar rules structure really helps with that, actually. After a certain amount of experience with this sort of gaming (or with *D&D* at all), the concepts of things like fighters and clerics become the 'normal'. These people are (or should be, in my view) from the more mundane parts of the setting; they're often medieval peasants and

knights, and with out cultural background we can grok that pretty easily. Rolling up a character ties us into that, and establishes what our familiar world is. So that heightens the sense of alien-ness when the PCs encounter something weird.

I think something can definitely be lost if you don't establish that divide between the familiar and the weird. If you can /play/ as a vampire, suddenly encountering vampires isn't as scary, you know?

CK: What's a typical writing session like for you?

EA: The writing process is kinda tricky for me. I'm really bad at focusing for long periods of time, so normally I'll have my laptop on with the file for whatever I'm working on open, or if I'm away from my computer I'll have a notebook with me. Whenever inspiration strikes, I'll get whatever it was down in a sudden rush of creativity, that might last up to an hour.

Inspiration's actually pretty easy to find, though. I take part in various forums, I read blogs, I read new game content. Not restricted to OSR stuff, either; I read a LOT of *World of Darkness* stuff, and the way setting and mechanics intertwine together has seeped from that into *Wolfpacks*. The more ideas you expose yourself to, the greater the pool of ideas you can draw on to recombine and mash together into something to call your own.

The much bigger task is editing. I'll periodically sit down for a few hours to get what I've written to make sense, and gel with the rest of the stuff I've written. It's a process of fine-tuning and tinkering. For this, I find it very important to be relaxed, so knowing that I won't be interrupted matters. I'll normally have music on, but something low-key and not distracting. I've found a lot of doom metal has the right feel for this sort of thing, actually; it's got the stark, dark atmosphere that I want in my games, and it's chilled out enough to keep me in the right headspace.

I think the great thing for me is that I write primarily for my own satisfaction; I never plan on getting paid for it, I don't have a boss breathing down my neck. There's no pressure, and if I hit a block I can let something lie fallow for a while and come back to it. I think if I was slaving over a hot typewriter eight hours a day or something, the quality of my work would suffer. Certainly, the fact that a lot of OSR content is produced by (very talented!) amateurs and independant writers helps with the quality and originality of the content that you don't get in products made by big companies, which always seems very mass-produced.

CK: How long did it take you to produce *Wolf Packs*? Were there any major challenges along the way?

EA: It took about a year to get from the first ideas to a hard copy available for sale. A lot of that time was spent refining things, adding polish, and putting it into a format that was reasonably attractive.

A big problem was that I have basically no background in graphic design or book layout or anything. So I was teaching myself as I go how to use the various programs I used to put the PDF together. I do think it shows, as well; the book's not up to the standard I would have wanted visually, but there's not a lot I can do about that than to do better next time.

CK: Does that mean you have more projects planned? If so, can you talk about it/them?

EA: So, I have two things I'm currently working on, and a couple more things planned.

Right now, I'm putting together a 'deluxe hardback' version of *WP&WS*. The idea is to use the best print quality DrivethruRPG does, and fix all the little layout problems in the current version. Oh, and actual illustrations; I've been harvesting wikimedia commons (and some other sources) for public-domain images with the visual style I want, and plan on having a few full-page illustrations to complement the silhouettes.

On top of this, I'm gonna put some extra content in the hardback book; mostly more examples of dangers (such as traps and fungal spores),

monster stats and sample NPCs. I'm putting together a system so that mystics worshipping the same patrons get largely the same spells, so you can build up actual cults. There's also a sixth optional class I've been tinkering with; a Neanderthal apothecary. The idea is that neanderthals are incapable of casting spells (this is somewhat supported by the lack of archaeological evidence* that Neanderthals made art) - instead their magic is practised in the form of brewing potions. All this content will, as well as being in the hardback book, also be put up as a free download so you get access to it if you bought the paperback book.

I'm also working on a module at the moment: there's an old serpent-folk astronomy centre buried under the polar ice-cap. It's basically a dungeon crawl, with loads of old magi-tech as traps and treasure, malfunctioning golems/robots, and the chance for PCs to end up building nuclear weapons.

Other stuff that's just vaporware at the moment are a couple more modules. One is gonna be event-driven, with a cult trying to take over the local woods in service of their bizarre god. It features giant prophet-foetuses that exude amber from their skin, super-strong warrior-babies that crawl into battle dragging amber sacrificial daggers, and brainwashed brood-mother adults that regurgitate honey to feed the sacred infants.

The other is going to be for higher-level parties and focus on setting up a huge network of ley lines and monuments across the landscape. It's still only a vague idea, but I'm thinking of throwing in stuff about terraforming and accessing parallel worlds and so on as a goal for when you hit the really high level play and have a coalition of huge tribes you lead and easy access to lots of 8th-rank spells. But this stuff is still very much just ideas still, I've not really started writing them up at all.

*For reference, they recently found some markings scratched on a cave wall that looks like they were deliberately put there at the time neanderthals were inhabiting that cave system. If it actually *was* neanderthals that put them there, and if so why - and why we've not seen stuff like this before - has caused a lot of debate among experts, because it's the first time we've seen any neanderthal creations that seem to be purely ornamental in nature.

CK: Any notable stories from your own games of *WP&WS*?

EA: One of the moments that really captures what the game is about is when one of my players (playing a mystic) tried to alter *Floating Disk* to make a bridge across a canyon. She messed up the roll to alter it, magical backlash happened, and a swarm of flying scorpions crawled out of her clothing and started hovering around her. A couple of people got stung by them before somebody thought to get a net,

which was then followed by the realization "wait, we can eat these things."

We've had the players getting stalked by a huge bat-thing at night, and instead of fighting it or fleeing, deciding to offer it food to keep it busy. One thing leads to another, and they ended up with a pet monster. They call it Bat-Friend.

They found a fountain that gives trippy visions (and tweaks your attributes depending on the vision you saw), and the roleplay from that was really sweet: one of the party (playing a little kid) saw a horrific vision of Morlocks being sacrificed by the Serpent Folk, and then the Morlock herself saw a vision of the afterlife with all her dead family. The conversation the two had afterwards was really rather heartwarming.

It's little moments like that which really bring the game to life for me more than the "epic" stories.

The party's mutant managed to sneak-attack a basilisk and kill it in one hit, but that's mostly just lucky dice rolls; what I find more interesting is when the players engage with the world in ways that unexpectedly add to the game's immersion.

CK: In a perfect world what would be the state of *WP&WS* in five years?

EA: In a lot of ways, my ideal model is something like what James Raggi's got with *LotFP*.

The game's got a second, more polished edition out, but it's very much the same thing. He's got a well established brand with a very consistent feel across the various rulebooks, modules and settings; you know what tone and gameplay you're getting with one of his modules. I think that's a good position for a creator to be in.

So, stuff I'd want to have out is as follows:

A 2nd edition of the core book, ideally in hardback and with better illustrations and graphic design, and the various typos cleaned up.

A few 'big' modules with either complex events to inflict on the players, or else fairly in depth locations to explore.

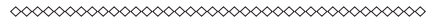
A few smaller adventure books, which are basically a collection of mini-adventures and encounters to slot into a campaign.

A book that follows the template of *Unearthed Arcana*, so a collection of optional rules, extra bits and bobs and setting details.

Lastly, I'd want to include the core book, an adventure book, the *Unearthed Arcana*-like, character sheets and dice in a boxed set. Everything you need to start playing the game, really.

But really, I'm much more interested in this stuff as a creative exercise than a solid business. If writing ever started feeling like

work rather than a hobby, I'd probably stop doing it, so in five years time I'll probably just have released whatever happens to have inspired me and got itself written.



Check out Emmy's blog at dyingstylishly.blogspot.com

Wolf Packs and Winter Snow is available at drivethrurpg.com



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