

— BLEEDING EDGE ADVENTURE #3 —

Dirge of the Damned

- A D20 ADVENTURE FOR FOUR TO SIX CHARACTERS OF 3RD TO 5TH LEVEL -



By Rodney Thompson



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The following text is Open Gaming Content: All game mechanics in Acts One through Three, the entirety of the Appendix

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Introduction

All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players....

—William Shakespeare, *As you Like It*

There are few things more destructive than the pain of a spurned lover, especially when the dark taint of the occult is involved. *Dirge of the Damned* is a tale of shattered love and the wretched desperation that follows. Moreover, it is a story of madness and revenge set against the backdrop of a popular roadside inn known for its entertainment, where adventurers can learn to just what lengths a person will go to soothe their broken hearts. It is a tale of a man driven over the brink of sanity, and the hideous lengths he goes to in order to exact his vengeance on those that wronged him. And it's up to the heroes to stop him.

Adventure Background

The pitiful tale of Orlen the bard begins several years before the events of this adventure take place, though in the same location and with many of the same players. Some years ago, when Orlen was still a fresh-faced youth serving as an apprentice to the court bard of a local magistrate, his works of music, poetry, and drama gained him a reputation as a prodigy. From a young age, Orlen composed masterpieces that rivaled the work of the greatest bards of all time, and his mentor encouraged him to explore the depth of his talents. Magistrate Drearden would often host elaborate performances, inviting nobles and royalty from all corners of the land, allowing Orlen to display his talents to the world. Many times Orlen was tempted to leave by offers of gold and fame, but for years, he resisted leaving his mentor's service. What the magistrate saw as loyalty was, in fact, youthful obsession. The anchor that kept the young bard in the House of Drearden was not a love of the lord that had funded his education, but a fascination for the Magistrate's wife, Matilda.

A Growing Obsession

For years, Orlen allowed his childhood crush to grow into truly amorous infatuation, and many of Orlen's greatest works of poetry and music were dedicated to this woman. During this time, Orlen sought to expand his skill, poring over books in the Magistrate's great library and developing his own talents. Particularly fascinating to him were the Magistrate's collection of occult tomes, some of which contained dark secrets and hinted at greater power. In his growing desperation, Orlen delved into shadowy methods of influencing the minds and hearts of others, hoping somewhere within the library was the secret to making Matilda love him. Over time, Orlen grew bolder and more

reckless, and one day he finally overstepped his bounds and professed his affections to Matilda. Shocked by his confession, she fled to her husband in embarrassment and told him of Orlen's feelings. Enraged by the young bard's attempts to woo his beloved wife, Magistrate Drearden cast Orlen from his home and banished him forever from his domain. Spurned by the object of his infatuation and exiled from the home he had lived in most of his life, Orlen cursed the Magistrate and fled the land.

Orlen the Fugitive

Desperate and penniless, Orlen sought refuge in an abandoned opera house many miles outside the borders of Magistrate Drearden's domain. For months, he subsisted on the rats and small birds that infested the decrepit structure, wallowing in his own despair. Sickly and starving, Orlen was ready to succumb to death and had lost all but his most basic will to survive. It was during these dark days that fate intervened in Orlen's life as a troupe of traveling performers, seeking shelter from a frightful storm, decided to use the collapsing husk of the opera house as a place to rest and wait out the rain. It was here that Orlen met the leader of the acting troupe, Theomar Fivefaces, and forged what would prove to be a lasting and profitable relationship. Orlen agreed to write new plays for the acting troupe to perform, granting them the exclusive use of the prodigious bard's fantastic works, in exchange for their help in seeking revenge.

Theomar's Journeys

Theomar and his troupe traveled the world performing the "Lost Plays of Orlen," claiming to have been entrusted with a cache of the bard's unreleased plays before his supposed death. In exchange, Theomar's troupe sent back a portion of their earnings to fund Orlen's continued work and provide him with money to live. Additionally, from time to time Orlen would request the troupe obtain books, scrolls, and other texts dealing with the dark arts during their travels, continuing the research he began in the Magistrate's home. When not writing plays for the troupe, Orlen delved deeply into these forbidden tomes; during this time, what was left of his fragile sanity shattered, leaving him a wild-eyed husk of the bard he once had been. His plays became more macabre and horrific, but still the audiences flocked to Theomar's performances in droves. Orlen wrote, the players performed, and each day brought the mad bard closer to his goal.

Welcome to the Bleeding Edge

Green Ronin Publishing's Bleeding Edge Adventures are designed to provide challenging and entertaining scenarios that cater to the tastes and interests of the modern gamer. Within these adventures, GMs will find a wealth of material designed to take advantage of the intricacies of the d20 system and give you everything you need to create an exciting adventure experience.

Each adventure in the Bleeding Edge line is designed to be stand-alone, so you need not have them all to enjoy them. However, the series can also be linked together to provide a complete campaign.

Also, these adventures are specifically designed so they can be slotted into any campaign setting. Many of the locations used in the adventures are found in the larger World of Freeport, but if you do not use Freeport, you can make use of these adventures in other settings with little adaptation.

The Bleeding Edge Campaign

As part of the Bleeding Edge series, *Dirge of the Damned* is best run after the PCs have completed *Beyond the Towers*. Having explored the ancient ruin, the PCs are free to do as they like, but more than likely they will want to return to Silverus (or some other city) to spend their hard-earned coin.

Their return journey takes them back through the Narrowpass and likely through Staufenfendorf, where you may run further adventures to ensure the characters are of an appropriate level for this one. Once the characters are sufficiently prepared, they can head on to one of the Ivory Ports, and along the way, they chance upon a troupe of actors in trouble...



Orlen's Vengeance

Eventually, Orlen completed what he considers to be his magnum opus, the key to both his fame and his revenge. Hidden away in a set of scrolls pilfered from the burned-out ruins of a temple were descriptions of a devil that once plagued the land around a long-forgotten city. The scrolls contained descriptions of Abdezel, a devil who was able to lay charms over people with great skill. But, more important to Orlen's research was that the document also contained Abdezel's true name, written in an ancient dialect of Infernal. Using occult techniques he discovered in his studies, Orlen translated Abdezel's true name into musical mechanics and created a song that could force people to do things completely out of their nature. So powerful was this song, Orlen was able to make alterations to it to produce specific commands that only affected certain people. Orlen had found his means of revenge and the way to reclaim his forbidden love, Matilda.

Having made this discovery, Orlen recalled Theomar's acting troupe immediately to give them a new play and a new assignment. He dispatched the actors to a famous roadhouse known as the Golden Curtain, reputed for its history of performances by renowned bards and actors, to put on a play of Orlen's devising. Special invitations have been sent out to Magistrate Drearden and his wife, Matilda, ensuring it will be a performance that will go down in history.

Adventure Synopsis

The adventuring party comes across a troupe of traveling actors that have come under assault on their way to their next performance. Following the party's intervention, the actors request an escort to a local roadhouse known as the Golden Curtain. Arriving at the roadside inn, the actors immediately invite the party to a special viewing of their performance being given for the local magistrate, as thanks for their help in arriving at the inn safely.

The performance is both brilliant and inspiring, but its finale is the most action-packed part. At the conclusion of the play, the magistrate's wife attempts to kill him, but when stopped, she seems to have no memory of the events that just transpired. The party investigates the potential murder, and over the course of the next several days learns the magistrate and his wife have been targeted for revenge by the mad bard Orlen. Through a series of investigations, the acting troupe is revealed as the agents of Orlen's madness and a showdown ensues.

Following the trail left by the band of actors, the party approaches the abandoned opera house used by Orlen as a lair. After finding a way in and bypassing the bard's mad traps, the party confronts Orlen and discovers the secret behind his mind-bending music.

Using this Adventure

Dirge of the Damned is a d20 adventure for four to six characters of 2nd to 4th level. Over the course of the adventure, the characters should gain enough experience to reach 4th level. The adventure may be played by itself or as another chapter in the *Bleeding Edge* series.

Adapting *Dirge of the Damned*

The adventure's structure makes it easy to use in just about any campaign setting. You simply need an area of land near a large city. Change the names of characters and any details needed to fit your campaign needs.

Scaling the Adventure

Dirge of the Damned is designed for a party of four 3rd-level characters, but it may be run as is for parties of 2nd to 4th, with greater challenge for lower level characters and less challenge for higher level characters. To adapt this

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adventure for more powerful or less powerful groups, consider the following suggestions.

1st-level Parties

This adventure is extremely challenging for characters of first level, so unless you have eight characters, you will need to modify the encounters. You should give the characters more time to recover from the encounters and seed the adventure with *scrolls* and *potions of cure light wounds* to improve their chances.

In addition, make the following adjustments to the encounters in the adventure.

- Halve the number of wight krenshars that appear in **Part One: Attack on the Troupe's Caravan** and **Part One: Through the Devil's Grip**.
- Halve the number of dagger phantoms in **Part Two: Phantom Attack**.
- In **Part Three: Room O1**, reduce the damage of the collapsing staircase to 1d6 and remove the sonic burst trap altogether.
- Replace the gargyle in **Room O2**, with a small air elemental.
- Reduce the number of zombies in **Room O3** to four.
- Reduce the vargouilles in **Room O11** to one.
- Remove the glyph of warding trap in **Room O12**.
- Make Orlen crazier. Each round of combat, there's a 50% chance that he's confused.

- Reduce each member of the Vagabond Players to 2nd level, and Caesar to 4th-level (removing a level of rogue and bard).
- Replace Lugrek with a bugbear from the *MM*.

5th or Higher Level Parties

For parties of 5th level or higher, *Dirge of the Damned* should be far easier. Characters have access to potentially disastrous spells, such as *locate object*, *clairaudience/clairvoyance*, and *dispel magic*. Clerics should be able to handle the threat of undead far easier, removing the teeth from many of the encounters. The NPCs should be ready for these spells and make use of scrolls of *obscure object*, *nondetection*, and other sorcerous defenses to ensure they aren't found out too quickly.

In addition, make the following adjustments to the encounters in the adventure.

- Add two wight krenshars to each encounter in the forest.
- Advance the dread wight krenshar by 4 HD.
- Grant the dagger phantoms turn resistance +2.
- In Part Three, increase the damage of the collapsing staircase to 4d6.
- Add a second gargyle to **Room O2**.
- Add six zombies to **Room O3**.
- Advance the Madness Muse in **Room O9** to 8 Hit Dice.
- Add two vargouilles to **Room O11**.
- Orlen should be three levels higher than the party average. Add bard levels when making the adjustments.
- Most of the Vagabond Players should be one level higher than the party average. Theomar, Phelian, and Sarelde all advance in the rogue class, while Drango advances as an illusionist.
- Caesar should be three levels higher than the party average. Increase his CR by adding alternating levels of rogue and bard.
- For each level which the party's average exceeds 4th, add one level of rogue to Lugrek.

Preparation

To run this adventure, you need the *PHB*, *DMG*, and *MM*. Some of the creatures and rules presented in this adventure derive from Green Ronin's *Advanced Bestiary*. Monsters are presented here fully, so having this resource isn't necessary to enjoy this product, but having it can certainly enhance your games.

Getting Started

The adventure begins at some point when the adventuring party is traveling across the land, either between adventures or on their way to their next adventuring destination. The adventure should begin sometime when the party is not pressed for time; if the players feel the need to rush to their next destination, they might not be inclined to accept Theomar's invitation later in the first act and will bypass the adventure altogether. Try to begin the action during a slow point in the party's ongoing adventures, giving them a reason to stop long enough to become involved in the plot. Additionally, the adventure should begin some time when the party has the full use of all of their normal resources; the first few encounters in the adventure are more difficult than a 3rd-level character might usually face, and they will need all of their abilities at their disposal.

- Act One: Dinner and a Show -

As the adventure opens, Theomar's acting troupe travels down the road leading to the Golden Curtain roadhouse. However, they run into a bit of trouble. When the party arrives on the scene, they discover Theomar's caravan has come under attack from several wight krenshars. Following the party's intervention, the group travels to the Golden Curtain and invites the party to a private performance of their newest play.

Attack on the Troupe's Caravan (EL 5)

Lighting: Shadowy.

Sounds: A DC 5 Listen check reveals the standard sounds of a forest. Characters automatically hear the sounds of combat as they draw close to the encounter.

Read the following text aloud when the party arrives at the site of the attack.

A brisk wind whips up dust and debris on the ground, bringing the stench of blood and carrion with it. Up ahead, the sounds of hideous shrieks and splintering wood precede a frightening sight. Three black, catlike creatures stalk around a trio of carriages drawn by horses that shriek in protest but appear paralyzed by fear. The creatures padding around the caravan appear almost wolf-like, but are covered in black fur with gray spots, and their mouths are drawn back from their fleshy faces in a horrible grimace, exposing their razor-sharp teeth. The carriages look as though they were once beautiful and expensive, but they have been worn down by years of exposure to travel and weather, leaving the lacquer and paint flaked and faint. Huge chunks of wood and metal seem to have been torn from one of the carriages, while the other two have only suffered superficial damage. From within the vehicles come cries of fear, indicating at least a few people remain alive inside them.

Having been dispatched by the mad bard Orlen to a performance at the Golden Curtain, Theomar led his loyal band of actors in a caravan through a particularly dangerous stretch of woods long-reputed to be haunted. Heedless of any potential danger (and steeled by his experiences dealing with the occult on Orlen's behalf), Theomar pushed the caravan hard and made a serious mistake getting caught in the woods at sundown. As the sun disappeared beyond the horizon, the caravan fell under attack from creatures that sprung from within the forest. When the players arrive, the three carriages that make up the Vagabond Players' caravan are being assaulted from the outside by these creatures, leaving the actors huddling inside.

Creatures

Three wight krenshars emerged from the forest to attack the caravan. These horrors take immense pleasure in tormenting anyone who dares to pass through their territory at night, and are under directions from their pack leader to maim any trespassers and bring them back to their lair for torturing. When Theomar foolishly pushed the caravan into the forest at night, he drove them directly into the waiting claws of these wight krenshars, and the trap was sprung.

When the party approaches, the wight krenshars are too preoccupied instilling terror into the people inside the carriages to notice, and they take a -4 penalty to Spot and Listen checks. If the party calls out to the people inside the carriage, they shout back and beg for assistance immediately. Of course, doing so also alerts the creatures to the party's presence, but it allows the PCs to warn the traveling actors that help is on the way.

Wight Krenshar (3): 13 hp each, see **Appendix** for statistics.

Tactics

Once combat begins, the wight krenshars abandon the carriages and focus on defeating their new foes. Though they are wary of attackers, they also

see the potential of new prey and retaliate ferociously. In order to save the caravan, the party must kill, run off, or otherwise incapacitate all three monsters. If they fail to do so, the attacking creatures drag any unconscious or dying characters off to their lair, and then return to finish off the remains of the caravan.

The wight krenshars are sadistic and vile, reveling in the fear and anguish they instill in their enemies. They prefer to isolate individuals, separating them from others and then using their scare ability to frighten them. When enough of their prey have been sufficiently frightened, they use energy drain to strip away the target's abilities and eliminate any resistance. If a target resists both the scare effect and the energy drain, the wight krenshars attack as normal to slay their foes. Though they do enjoy terrorizing creatures, they are not so foolish as to override their instinct to survive.

Development

When the wight krenshars are driven off or killed, a cautious group of actors emerges from within the carriages to thank the PCs for their assistance. Among the actors are Phelian (who appears to be a young elven woman that shyly covers her face with a veil), Drango (a pale-skinned male gnome clad in a cloak dyed a number of bright colors), Caesar (a lithe male halfling that fidgets nervously with the beaded necklaces hanging from his neck), and Sarellda (an exotic-looking human woman whose smoldering gaze lingers for long periods on each party member). Leading the acting troupe is a dashing human male that introduces himself as Theomar, and though he insists that introductions of his troupe be left to safer times, he does add a hint of melodrama to his thanks. Right away, it should be obvious to the players that this acting troupe is both talented and overconfident.

After a great deal of thanks from all the caravan's members, Theomar requests their saviors accompany them down the rest of the road to their performance. He informs the party that their destination is on the far side of the forest. Theomar promises to pay for the party's food and lodging at a nearby roadhouse the following evening, assuring them first-class service unmatched for miles around.

Should the party require more convincing, he promises to give the party 10% of the money they make from the performance (though he does not expect to be paid anything, making it an empty promise). Furthermore, should the party show any reluctance, Sarellda attempts to sway any susceptible male members of the party, using her feminine charms in a most convincing fashion. If the party continues to resist providing help, both Caesar and Drango attempt to covertly use *charm person* on party members in obvious leadership positions, and if Caesar feels he can get away with it, he may also use a *suggestion* spell. However, these two will only use their spells if they absolutely must, preferring to let Theomar and Sarellda convince the party to help of their own free will.

Once the party agrees to accompany the Vagabond Players to the Golden Curtain, the actors return to their carriages and encourage the party to make haste. Theomar drives the front carriage, while Caesar and Drango follow with the other two. Phelian and Sarellda ride in Theomar's carriage, and any party members that do not have their own horses are invited to ride in the one driven by Caesar (the third is full of luggage and props).

Through the Devil's Grip (EL 6)

Lighting: Dark.

Sounds: None.

Though the forest is always dangerous at night, passage through a section of the forest known as the Devil's Grip is particularly troublesome. Before the

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party can safely escort the caravan out of the forest, they must pass through that section, where a few more wight krenshars await. Angered by the slaying of its brood, a dread wight krenshar leads four more of its best hunters to ambush the travelers at the Devil's Grip. However, the wight krenshars cannot leave the woods, so all the party needs to do is get the caravan safely through the stretch of road passing through the Devil's Grip and out of the forest on the other side.

The Devil's Grip is a stretch of the road that passes through a natural "tunnel" made from the canopy of the trees. In addition to being a disturbing passage for most travelers, it also serves as a favorite spot for ambushes (by highwaymen during the day, or the creatures of the forest at night). The Devil's Grip is a stretch of road roughly 600 feet long and 15 feet wide, and though it does not take long to pass through, it can be a very hazardous stretch.

As the party travels along, read the following aloud:

As the road continues through the forest, the trees grow closer and closer to the road, until up ahead it appears as though the trees form a solid wall to either side of the path. The forest's canopy is completely overgrown there, creating a tunnel through which the road passes on its way out of the forest. The dark trees groan heavily as the wind shakes the entire forest, and a sharp gust of wind causes the faux tunnel through the trees to moan as it passes through.

The wight krenshars lie in wait, using the trees in the Devil's Grip to hide their ambush (Spot DC 20 to notice, otherwise the monsters gain surprise). As soon as the caravan is inside the Devil's Grip, the wight krenshars attack. Theomar cries out that they must hurry on through to the other side in order to escape, claiming that the forest ends just on the other side of the tunnel.

The caravan's horses, of which there are two for each carriage, have a speed of 30 feet with the heavily-laden carriages attached, meaning they can move 60 feet per round. This requires 10 rounds of movement to pass from the very beginning of the Devil's Grip (where the encounter begins) to the very end.

During this time, the wight krenshars bring down horses to stall the caravan so they can reach the prey within. The party's job is to keep the wight krenshars from stopping the caravan and see it safely through to the other side. They need not slay all the wight krenshars in order to accomplish this goal; the creatures can't pass beyond the edge of the forest, so upon leaving this section of the road, the party and the caravan are safe.

The carriages are made of fine wood with leather and velvet on the interior. The wheels of the carriage have a hardness of 5 and 20 hit points; if one wheel is broken, the vehicle can continue to roll on the other three, but if two wheels are destroyed, the carriage drags the ground, forcing the horse to halt or be tripped. Each of the carriages has an AC of 8, though the wheels themselves have an AC of 10 for direct attacks.

If the party can keep all three carriages moving at full speed for 10 rounds, the caravan should pass out the other side of the Devil's Grip and into the safety of an open plain.

Wight Krenshar (4): hp 13 each, see **Appendix** for statistics.

Dread Wight Krenshar (1): hp 13, see **Appendix** for statistics.

Tactics

When the caravan moves into the Devil's Grip, 3 wight krenshars leap out in front of the caravan, the fourth attacks from the rear to panic the horses so the carriages collide, while the dread wight krenshar leaps onto the lead carriage. They also use their scare ability on all members of the party, as well as the troupe members and their horses (Will save modifier +2).

The wight krenshars, in between tangling and worrying the horses, hide under the carriages to emerge and deliver attacks, only to retreat back under the wagon on the next round. Once the krenshar kill off the horses, they turn their attention on the living creatures within. The wight krenshars are under the control of the dread wight krenshar and have no sense of self-preservation.

The dread wight krenshar, on the other hand, sees the greater threat and seeks the caravan's defenders. It climbs on the top of the carriages and attacks the defenders and drivers, using its considerable combat skills to overwhelm individual foes. The dread wight krenshar always seeks out the carriage that has the fewest visible riders atop it, using Jump and Climb with the intentions of slaying the driver to halt the horses. Though not significantly more intelligent than its counterparts, the dread wight krenshar does know the rider atop the carriage holds the key to stopping it and enjoying the feast of fear within.

Fighting on the carriages can be dangerous in and of itself. A character who falls from the carriage takes 1d6 points of nonlethal damage and those who fall under a carriage's wheels takes the nonlethal damage from the fall and 2d6 points of damage the vehicle. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Tumble check negates the nonlethal damage and those who succeed on a DC20 Tumble check avoid the damage from the wheels.

Ad-Hoc XP Award

If the party manages to escort the caravan out of the woods with no deaths, award experience for an EL 6 encounter (regardless of whether or not the wight krenshars are actually killed).

Development

Once the caravan makes it to the other side of the Devil's Grip, they exit the forest and emerge onto a rolling plain illuminated by a bright, full moon. Though a low fog covers the fields of grass to either side of the road, visibility is good and the party should have a good sense that they have reached safety. The wight krenshar pack does not pursue beyond the edge of the forest, falling back to its shelter once they realize the caravan is beyond their reach.

At this point, Theomar suggests the caravan find a place well away from the forest and make camp for the night. Since the PCs' resources will likely be somewhat depleted at this point, it should take little convincing on Theomar's part to get them to agree. A few miles from the forest, Theomar circles the

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carriages and he and his troupe quickly set up a comfortable camp. The young bard, Caesar, cooks a decent-tasting stew that the troupe readily shares with the party.

The Vagabond Players

At this point, the players are likely curious (or even suspicious) as to the means by which the caravan came under attack from the creatures in the forest. Once everyone is settled in and enjoying dinner, Theomar is more than happy to introduce his fellow actors by name and profession. Theomar Fivefaces is the leader of the Vagabond Players and the chief actor; the elf, Phelian, is a supporting actress (according to Theomar's introduction), while Sarelida is introduced as a singer and a dancer. Caesar, the company's minstrel, provides music and narration for the players, while the gnome, Drango, is introduced only as the group's prop master (though he seems to find the introduction amusing).

The party will likely have many questions for the players. Theomar is happy to share basic information about the acting troupe, though he is careful not to reveal too much about the source of their plays—or their current assignment. Additionally, Theomar obviously has a flair for the dramatic, and tends to steer questions away from sensitive subjects through verbose answers and dramatic flair. Below are some answers to common questions.

Who are you? “We are the Vagabond Players, and these misfits you see before you are the greatest actors and actresses in all the land. We travel from one place to the next, bringing the light of culture and the joy of theater to those whose lives would be otherwise dulled by monotony.”

What were those things that attacked us? “

Sadly, I do not know. That forest has long been rumored to be haunted, and I think we've just witnessed the origins of those rumors. There is a reason travelers are warned to stay out of the forest at night.”

So what were you doing in the forest at night? “

That would be my fault. I thought we would have enough daylight remaining to make it all the way through, but sadly, I was mistaken. I thought we could push on through the forest at dusk, and then, with a clear sky and a bright moon, travel at night to our destination.”

Where are you going/where are you coming from? “

We set out three days ago from a little village where we'd been performing, heading to a roadhouse known as the Golden Curtain, about a day's ride from here. I'm sure you've heard of it; it's ever so famous, and a grand place to visit. No doubt you were on your way there too!” (If you've run *Mansion of Shadows* and *Beyond the Towers*, the troupe just played in Staufendorf).

What's so special about the Golden Curtain? “

Why, it's only the most famous venue for traveling performers for 500 miles in any direction! Troupes such as my own have visited the Golden Curtain for years, giving performances that draw crowds from miles around. It is a favorite stopover for the more cultured members of society, and a place where many an actor has gained his fame.”

Why are you headed there? “

Tomorrow night we are scheduled to give an exclusive performance of our latest play for a local magistrate. The event is by invitation only, and the proprietor of the Golden Curtain has agreed to keep our arrival a secret. You see, this performance is for the magistrate and his entourage only, and to announce our arrival would draw far larger crowds than the roadhouse could normally handle.”

Who are you performing for? “

Oh, just a local nobleman that owns lands around here. Really no one special, sadly.”

Additionally, a DC 22 bardic knowledge or Knowledge (local) check reveals the Vagabond Players are reputed to be a talented, if eccentric, acting troupe made famous by their possession of a number of plays written by a bard that died young, at the height of his talent. Characters who succeed on a DC 30 bardic knowledge check know the writer's name is Orlen.

Once Theomar has satisfied the party's questions, he invites the PCs to be his special guests at the performance of his show. Though he is quite boastful and arrogant, his offer is in fact a great honor; if he is willing to include them in the audience, then he is putting them on the same level of honor as a magistrate. At the very least, the characters should be flattered, and since they will be staying at the roadhouse free of charge, they should have no reason not to accept. If they require convincing, Theomar does not push, though Sarelida does, in fact, hint she would be very pleased if they came and enjoyed her performance.

Like many actors, Theomar lets his pride get in the way of his good sense. Though the performance is a setup designed to exact Orlen's revenge on Magistrate Drearden, Theomar can't resist having a larger audience at what he thinks will be his greatest performance yet. Besides, by his understanding, Orlen's song that will spring the trap should be undetectable, so the more the merrier. The rest of the troupe is largely ignorant of Orlen's true plans (though they do have some idea), and they see no problem letting the party attend the performance.

The night passes uneventfully, and the following day the troupe sets out for, and arrives at, the Golden Curtain.

The Golden Curtain

The Golden Curtain is a beautiful, if old, roadside inn made famous by its performance hall and the people that have performed there. The Golden Curtain has played host to a number of famous bards, actors, singers, and other performers over the years, and people have come from far and wide to witness the performances there. Though the Golden Curtain is certainly not as fancy as the theaters and stages in major cities, it is a favorite resting place for traveling nobles and adventurers seeking to relax and enjoy the finest performances for miles around. While other inns and taverns might have a bard or storyteller for an evening, the Golden Curtain has excellent shows that are spoken of for months after the performance.

The exterior of the Golden Curtain was once elaborate to the point of being gaudy, but weather and age have dulled the building's images to make it seem beautifully antique. The Golden Curtain sits on a red brick foundation that rises up roughly four feet off the ground. The other three floors of the inn are built of darkened wood, warped and stained by weather but still sturdy despite the age. The building features a slanted roof that comes to a peak in the middle of the building, and the roof itself is covered in overlapping red clay tiles designed to allow water to run off in heavy rain.

The interior of the Golden Curtain is both clean and relatively well appointed. Though the inn is a roadhouse relatively far from any villages or towns, the owners and operators keep the establishment in top condition at all times, making it attractive to traveling nobles and wealthy merchants wishing to cool their heels for the night. The interior of the building boasts thick wooden doors reinforced to ensure quiet and privacy, and numerous carpets and rugs decorate the floors of the inn. Several works of art, donated by both visitors and performers alike, adorn the walls (though altogether they are worth no more than 500 gp and would be very difficult to steal and transport). Though the Golden Curtain gives off the appearance of wealth, for the most part the inn has little trouble with attacks by highwaymen or robberies; the roadhouse's hired armsmen keep the guests safe, and many criminals know that should any harm come to the inn or its inhabitants, the local magistrate would send a detachment of soldiers in swift reprisal.

The Golden Curtain is owned and operated by Cecilia Hardgrave, a lively woman who can be heard coming fifty feet away as her many rings and bracelets clatter against one another. Her husband, Boral, tends to the roadhouse's stables and oversees the maintenance of any horses belonging to guests of

- Act One: Dinner and a Show -

the inn. In addition, the Golden Curtain employs a single chef named Kakir (male dwarf expert 2), three serving girls/maids (female human commoner 1), two stableboys (male human commoner 1), and four armsmen (male half-orc warrior 3). Cecilia and her husband live in one of the rooms on the second floor (**Room G7-A**), while the remainder of the staff have sleeping quarters in a small cottage about 300 feet back from the road.

When the players arrive at the Golden Curtain, only a handful of patrons are currently staying at the inn. A wealthy merchant by the name of Faddin (male human expert 3), his assistant (male elf commoner 1), and his three caravan guards (male human warrior 1) are currently staying in one of the six-person bedrooms (**Room G10-C**). Two of the single rooms are occupied (**Rooms G9-E and G9-G**) by individual travelers (male human commoner 1), while a married couple (male and female gnome commoner 1) currently occupy a double-bedded room (**Room G8-C**). Drango and Caesar are given one of the four-person rooms (**Room G7-C**), while Sarelda and Phelian each get their own room (**Room G8-E and Room G8-D**, respectively), as does Theomar (**Room G8-F**). Besides these guests, the roadhouse is empty.

A successful DC 15 Knowledge (local) or bardic knowledge check reveals the roadhouse's reputation for excellent entertainment. Additionally, a DC 20 Knowledge (nobility and royalty) check reveals nobles often alter the course of their travels specifically to stay at the Golden Curtain, which provides entertainment while making nobles feel like they have rubbed elbows with the rustic travelers that they rule over.

Strong Wooden Doors: 2 in. thick; Hardness 5; hp 20; Break DC 25; Open Lock DC 25.

G1: The Common Room

The common room of the Golden Curtain is a clean and well-lit area that provides a communal place for guests to dine and drink. Read or paraphrase the following description aloud to the players upon entering the common room for the first time:

Immediately upon entering the front doors of the Golden Curtain, a welcoming and friendly sight greets your eyes. The common room of the inn is clean and warm, with a roaring fire burning in the fireplace and the soft light of dozens of oil lamps illuminating the room. The great pelt of a dire bear serves as a carpet for a large section of the room, and numerous mounted animal heads decorate the walls. A large bar dominates the rear corner of the room, stocked with kegs of ale and a considerable array of liquors, and a set of ascending stairs leads from the left side of the room up to the second floor. A set of swinging double doors to the right obviously leads to the kitchen, while another door can be seen in the left wall at the foot of the stairs.

G2 and G3: Private Dining Rooms

The Golden Curtain has a pair of private dining rooms used by large groups that wish to have a little peace and quiet while enjoying their meals. Typically, Cecilia charges customers 5 gp per guest for the use of a private dining room for the evening, which includes a grand meal and a selection of high-quality beverages, as well as the service of an individual serving girl for the evening. Read the following description aloud to the players upon entering one of the private dining rooms for the first time:

A large oak table dominates the center of this room, flanked on either side by a row of cushion-backed chairs and covered with a thin cotton tablecloth. Two candelabras sit on the dining table, their candles slowly burning and sending droplets of wax down the metal stand. Plates and cups have been arranged on the table in preparation for a feast, and a large and ornate tapestry covers one wall.

G4: Performance Hall

The greater part of the Golden Curtain's reputation comes from its performance hall. Originally designed as a large dining hall and ballroom,

the room was converted into a small theater once word of the amazing performances given at the roadhouse spread. Though the Vagabond Players are the intended performers for the evening, the performance hall has been empty for several days, as no performers have been staying at the inn. On any given night, however, traveling performers (including bards, actors, singers, and other entertainers) are always welcome to give shows in the performance hall, with the blessing of Cecilia and her husband. Thanks to the roadhouse's reputation, wealthy visitors are usually eager to see a performance, granting any bards (or other entertainers) a +4 circumstance bonus to any Perform checks made to earn money from a performance given in the Golden Curtain.

Read the following description aloud to the players upon entering the performance hall for the first time.

This large open room features a raised wooden stage set against the back wall and facing several rows of chairs. The stage features beautiful crimson velvet curtains that separate the front of the stage from the back. The audience seats sit on progressively taller wooden slats, creating a tiered seating arrangement similar to that seen in grander theaters. A few paintings, obviously scenes from famous plays, decorate the side walls, while a large harp and stool sit off to one side, intended for use in accompanying a performance. Oil lamps along the walls provide faint illumination for the audience, while much larger lanterns (their light amplified by glass lenses) cast bright light across most of the stage.

Upon the party's arrival, Theomar and his troupe begin setting up for their performance, decorating the stage and even going so far as to hang tapestries from the wall, all supposedly in the name of preparing for the show. They do not allow any other staff or patrons (including the party) to intrude on their preparations, demanding they be given the privacy they need to properly set the stage for what is sure to be an epic performance.

G5: Kitchen

The head cook, Kakir, keeps his kitchen in immaculate shape. A large iron stove rests next to a fireplace, sending its smoke out a tube and up through the chimney. Pots and pans dangle from hooks on the walls, and something is constantly cooking. In order to keep the kitchen so tidy, however, Kakir only allows Cecilia, Boral, and the three serving girls to enter the kitchen. Any attempts by the PCs to enter are met by threats and a disgruntled dwarf cook waving a wooden spoon menacingly at them.

Though eccentric, Kakir is also an excellent chef, and every night he creates meals that would be considered a delicacy in many cities. Even simple foods, such as stews or roasts, are spiced to perfection and served fresh to all visitors. Kakir may be a bit odd, but he has nothing to hide, and a search of the kitchen reveals only foodstuffs, spices, and cooking utensils.

G6: Storage

The storage room, attached to the kitchen, houses the bulk of the roadhouse's supplies. Kegs of ale are stacked up against the walls, while salted meats and preserved foods line the shelves and hang from the ceiling. In addition to food, the storage room also holds supplies for the guests, including linens and bed sheets, pitchers, water tubs, and other amenities. The room is kept dark and cool to help preserve foods, and no one is allowed into the storage room without permission.

G7: Four-Guest Rooms

The four-guest rooms are intended to house up to four people simultaneously. Though sometimes individual guests will room in these rooms with strangers (especially in times when the roadhouse is busy), these rooms are more often reserved for nobles and merchants traveling with family or aides. Each four-guest room features a double bed and two single beds, a chest of drawers, an animal-fur rug, a brass bathing tub (with a privacy screen), and a small table with two chairs.



G8: Double Bedrooms

The double bedrooms are not much larger than the single rooms and are occasionally rented out to individuals who just want a little more space. They include two single beds (pushed against opposite walls), a small table, and a chest of drawers. Each double bedroom has a woven rug on the floor and thick curtains that can be closed to block out light during the day.

G9: Single Bedrooms

The single bedrooms are small, efficient, and inexpensive. Each individual room features a single bed and a bedside table, with a woven rug on the floor. The single bedrooms are clean and well-kept, but offer only the barest amenities. Each room has a single oil lamp on the table, though guests can request additional candles for their rooms should they so need.

G10: Group Rooms

The group rooms are the largest and most lavish rooms in the Golden Curtain. Usually reserved for noblemen, extremely wealthy merchants, and other honored guests, the group rooms are designed to sleep up to six people comfortably. Each room has a large bed (that could sleep three, but is typically only used for two people) as well as four single beds. The entire floor is covered in animal-fur rugs, and beautiful velvet curtains line the walls, hiding the wooden planks behind and giving a greater sense of luxury. Each group room has a table that seats four, two chests of drawers, a full-length mirror, a brass bathing tub and privacy screen, and a small reading table.

G11: Stable Stalls

Since the Golden Curtain is a roadhouse, many visitors need a place to stable their horses and hitch their carriages. Individual horses are kept in the single stable stalls, each one with a hay-lined floor and a five-foot-high wooden divider separating it from the next stall.

G12: Large Stall

The large stalls in the stable are used to house teams of horses that are accustomed to staying together. Each large stall can house up to four horses, though often these stalls are used for cleaning and grooming an individual horse, giving the stableboys room to move around. The floors are lined with hay, and two large metal bars on either side of the swinging gate block entry into the large stalls.

G13: Stable Storage

The stable storage rooms are where all of the Golden Curtain's stable equipment is kept. Inside one will find tack, saddles, blankets, feed and feedbags, and small amounts of fresh fruit (used to reward horses for good behavior).

A Killer Performance (EL 2)

After the party arrives at the Golden Curtain, give them a chance to rest and recuperate before beginning the Vagabond Players' performance. In the late afternoon, the guests of honor arrive at the inn: Magistrate Hugo Drearden, his wife Matilda, and their decrepit court bard, Crenshaw. The inn's staff becomes frenzied with their arrival, and Cecilia herself sees to their every need. It is crucial to impress upon the players the importance of Magistrate Drearden, as it makes it easier for the party to agree to assist the magistrate later in the adventure. Serving girls dash up and down the stairs to help the magistrate and his entourage settle in (they are given one of the group rooms, G10-A), and they are doted upon at the expense of the other guests. Magistrate Drearden is the governor of all of the surrounding lands, including the land that the Golden Curtain sits on, and Cecilia does not want anything to happen to displease him.

Once the guests of honor have arrived and dinner is served, Caesar comes to fetch the party and bring them to the performance hall. If any of the PCs

What if Magistrate Drearden Dies?

Though the party should have their full resources by the time the performance takes place, there is still the small possibility they might fail to stabilize the magistrate before his hit points drop to -10. If this is the case, during **Act Two**, it is Crenshaw, the court bard, that begs the party to investigate what happened to cause Matilda to kill her husband. Orlen continues to torment Matilda as normal, and attacks and events that would normally be directed against Magistrate Drearden may instead be directed at Crenshaw. Still, it should not come to this point except under extreme circumstances.

are dressed in less than fine clothing (such as a noble's outfit), Caesar politely suggests that they change into something more appropriate for the occasion. If any party members refuse (or have no such clothing), then Caesar suggests that they seat themselves in the back, well out of sight of the guests of honor, and keep to themselves.

By the time the party arrives in the performance hall, Magistrate Drearden and his entourage have already been seated in the front row of the small theater. Hugo and Matilda Drearden have dressed in their finest, despite the fact there are no other attendees of their standing in the performance hall, and sit patiently waiting for the show to begin. However, the seeds of danger have already been planted: Caesar escorted the Drearden's down to the performance hall, and as he did so, he used Sleight of Hand to plant a dagger within the folds of Matilda Drearden's dress. Once the party is settled in, Theomar walks onto the stage, gives a short introduction, and then steps backstage as the play begins.

The play itself lasts for roughly two hours and is a tragic tale of lost love. The play is extremely well-written (a character can make a DC 15 Knowledge (history) or bardic knowledge check to recognize the play as one popularized many years ago), and the performance is lively and moving. Describe the performance to your players as a poignant tale that opens with a story of a spurned lover and ends with the death of all those involved, a tragedy in the greatest sense of the word. Any characters paying special attention to the magistrate and his wife may attempt a DC 20 Sense Motive check to notice the two shifting uncomfortably as the play goes on. The topic of the play seems to echo a bit too loudly in the minds of the Dreardens, and though they enjoy the performance, it certainly makes them uneasy.

At the end of the play, rather than ending immediately following the action, Sarellda (who plays the role of the heroine in the play) rises from her position and begins to sing. The song is eerily haunting and consists of no discernible words, just sounds and vocalizations. Her song goes on for no more than a minute, but while it lasts, it is as if time stands still. Even the most hard-hearted of characters are moved by the song, which sends chills through the audience upon its conclusion. Once Sarellda's song is done, read the following aloud to the players.

As the last lingering notes of Sarellda's song fade from the air, a silence falls over the room as all in attendance sit in awe. Mere moments later, the magistrate's wife, dressed in a beautiful white silk dress, rises from her seat, turns and walks to her husband's side, draws a dagger, and suddenly stabs it into her husband's chest. The inn's proprietor, seated two rows back, lets out a piercing shriek as she witnesses the stabbing. The magistrate's wife staggers backward as though stunned by the shrieking woman, looks down at her blood-soaked dress, and begins howling with anguish while staring wide-eyed at her bleeding husband.

With the stabbing of the magistrate, panic breaks out in the performance hall. Within four rounds, the inn's armsmen arrive to see what the commotion is all about, and if allowed to do so, they immediately restrain Matilda Drearden and drag her away from her husband. Though taken by surprise, the magistrate

is not quite dead yet. He has been reduced to -3 hit points, and though he has not died, he is slipping away as he bleeds to death. Any character can stabilize Magistrate Drearden through normal means, though no one else in the room seems to possess the skill to do so (or, if they do, they are refusing to step forward).

For her part, Matilda Drearden puts up no fight and, in fact, seems more aghast at her own actions than anyone else. She is shocked by the fact that she just stabbed her husband, and requires a successful DC 20 Diplomacy check to calm her down enough to get her to talk. Should a character succeed, she tells them that she has no memory of stabbing her husband. As far as she knows, one moment she was sitting and enjoying the show, and the next she was standing over the bloodied body of her husband, her hands covered in blood. A DC 17 Sense Motive check reveals she is telling the truth, at least as far as she knows.

Once the magistrate is stable, Cecilia immediately suggests he be taken to his room to rest and recover. She is far less concerned with Matilda Drearden's well-being, and orders her armsmen to seize her and lock her in the cellar until the magistrate awakens. The party should have a chance to intervene here, at least, and can convince Cecilia to at least confine her to a guest room (with a DC 18 Diplomacy check) or release Matilda into the party's care (with a DC 25 Diplomacy check).

Development

The Vagabond Players are not surprised by this turn of events, as indeed this was their mission all along. Orlen gave both the play and the song to Theomar and instructed Sarellda on how to give the final song's performance. Though only Theomar knew the exact outcome of the song, the rest of the Vagabond Players suspected something like this would happen. Yet all of them are actors to the core, and as such, they do their best to act shocked and appalled. Sarellda gapes in horror, while Phelian pretends to faint. The party may make Sense Motive checks (opposed by the Bluff checks of the actors) to sense their lack of shock, but the actors have rehearsed for this eventuality and gain a +4 circumstance bonus to their Bluff checks as a result. Be careful not to tip the actors' hands too much here; if the party becomes too suspicious of the acting troupe too quickly, they may be tempted to skip over much of the investigation that takes place during **Act Two**. A little suspicion is fine, and indeed, it is very likely the party will draw a connection between the performance and the attack.

Matilda is distraught over the events that have transpired and seems both confused and frightened. She willingly cooperates with anyone that attempts to treat her with respect, but any attempts to bully her (by using the Intimidate skill or making threats) frighten her to the point of incoherence. Should the party attempt to strong-arm her in any way, she reveals no information to them.

Ad-Hoc XP Award

If the party fails to stabilize the magistrate themselves, award only half experience for this encounter.

- Act Two: Unearthing a Plot -

Until the magistrate recovers from his wounds, the roadhouse is very quiet. Magistrate Drearden needs time to heal, and Matilda is held under house arrest until he awakens. Meanwhile, Theomar and his acting troupe must regroup and deal with the fact that their plan failed, thanks to the intervention of the party. Theomar uses the *parchment of sending* (see **New Item: Parchment of Sending**, page 19) that Orlen gave him to communicate to the mad bard what has transpired. Orlen had planned for such an outcome, however, and prepared a backup plan just in case. Theomar receives his instructions and begins to set events into motion that help exact Orlen's revenge on the magistrate and his wife.

Once Hugo Drearden awakens after recovering from his injuries, he summons the party to his chambers and begs them to find out what happened. He knows his wife would never harm him, and he believes there must be outside forces at work. Unfortunately, though he is recovering from his wounds, he does not feel up to the task of conducting an investigation himself, and tales of the party's bravery and cunning in rescuing the Vagabond Players on the road have convinced him of their merits. In addition to his gratitude, Drearden can offer the party a reward in the sum of 800 gp, as well as a letter that grants them free passage through all of the magistrate's lands.

If Matilda was imprisoned by Cecilia (either in the cellar or in a room) he orders her freed and brought to him immediately, where he then instructs her to answer any questions the party may have for her. Below are some answers to common questions that the party may want to ask.

False Leads

In all likelihood, the PCs will suspect the Vagabond Players and may swiftly turn their attention to them. To slow their progress, you should insert some red herrings, such as the ones that follow.

Bitter Merchant

The merchant staying here is a dealer of rare spices, herbs, and hard to attain substances. In his possession, he has the means to concoct terrifying poisons. Characters succeeding on a DC15 Search check of his possessions find an assortment of toxic substances, and those characters who also succeed on a DC 25 Craft (poisonmaking) check realize that these substances can have unexpected effects on the mind. Later, have one of the PCs overhear the man say, "...damned fat bastard still lives. If only I could..." and then fall silent as he realizes he's using his "outside voice." Evidently, the merchant once tried to avoid his taxes with a failed attempt at bribing the magistrate. Instead of getting away with tax evasion, the merchant wound up paying the taxes, a fine, and losing a great deal of his illicit merchandise.

Stolen Knife

A little snooping around reveals the knife was stolen from the kitchen. Small, sharp, and ideal for cutting small bones from meat, it was the perfect weapon. The cook noticed the missing knife, shortly after Caesar and Crenshaw had their meeting in the kitchen (see Caesar on page 27).

Crenshaw, at that time, was in the kitchen to borrow such a knife to sharpen his goose quills. He had misplaced his own and intended on writing a few letters prior to the play. After the encounter with Caesar, he forgot about the knife and left without it, which Caesar then stole.

What do you remember of the incident?

Nothing...well, almost nothing. I was enjoying the performance and began to get very sleepy towards the end. Next thing I know, I was waking up and found my hands covered in Hugo's blood. I saw the knife and nearly passed out again!"

Did you feel any differently before or after?

I felt very sleepy, and then afterward it was as though my thoughts were muddled. I couldn't think straight, and I couldn't really understand what had happened. Everyone was panicking and it scared me too."

Where did you get the dagger?

I don't usually carry a weapon. Why should I, when I have Hugo to protect me? I don't know where I got it from, and I don't remember picking it up on the way in."

Do you recognize the dagger?

Well, no, I can't say that I have seen it before."

Did you speak to anyone before the performance that could have influenced you?

"Just the serving girls while we were preparing our room, and briefly to the musician with the performers. He came and fetched us from our rooms when the performance began. He escorted us right to the performance hall."

Has anything like this ever happened to you before?

No. Never. I would never harm my dear husband." A DC 17 Sense Motive check reveals that this question makes Matilda uncomfortable; in truth, she has experienced such a sensation once before, when a young Orlen attempted to use a *suggestion* spell to convince her to leave her husband. Obviously she did not fall prey to the young bard's spell, but she recognizes the feeling even now, many years later. If persuaded (with a DC 25 Diplomacy check) or otherwise coerced into elaborating, she will only say the following: "Well, once before a young trickster attempted to put a spell on me, and it felt much like I felt upon waking during this incident. But that was many years ago, and I have not once fallen prey to such witchery! Not when my husband is involved."

Investigating the Golden Curtain Staff

One of the first places that the party will likely begin their investigation is by checking into the staff of the Golden Curtain. The innkeeper and her husband are more than happy to cooperate with the investigation and order all members of the staff to comply. Interviewing various members of the staff can reveal some information, but since they were all incidental to the plot, they yield few clues as to who the true culprit is.

Cecilia and Boral Hardgrave

The innkeeper and her husband are eager to assist in the investigation, as they not only want to ensure that they are cleared of suspicion but also make sure the magistrate knows they are law-abiding citizens. Cecilia suspects Matilda has become bored with her husband and seeks to kill him and claim his fortune for her own. With no heirs to the magistrate's estate, Matilda would indeed inherit the position and wealth of the magistrate's office, at least until she re-married. Cecilia believes her plan was to kill him here, and then, once he was dead, claim it was "evil magic" that compelled her to do so. Unfortunately, Cecilia has very little evidence to back up her suggestion, and her husband, Boral, is mostly unconvinced.

The two are inclined to answer all of the party's questions, though they know little beyond the walls of their roadhouse. Several weeks ago they were

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contacted by Theomar Fivefaces with a request that the roadhouse host a private performance of their newest play for Magistrate Drearden, and they readily agreed (having heard other travelers rave about the performance of the Vagabond Players in other cities). When the magistrate and his entourage arrived, Cecilia ordered her serving girls to see to their every comfort, as though it were a king or queen visiting and not just a local magistrate. Boral personally saw to the stabling and care of the magistrate's carriage and team of horses and was not even inside the building when the performance took place. One clue they can provide is that the Vagabond Players demanded total privacy in setting up for their show, something that no other performers have ever done and that Cecilia would not normally allow.

Kakir

The dwarf cook is curmudgeonly and only cooperates with the investigating party because his employer demands he do so. His gruff answers convey only the facts: he was in the kitchen during the performance, he does not know anything about the magistrate's entourage or the acting troupe, and he does not have any theories about what happened. A little coin will do wonders to improve his mood, and anyone offering him a bribe of at least 25 gp can convince him to delve a little deeper into his memory. He does recall one bit of information that may clue the party in to what is going on. Early in the morning following the attack on the magistrate, his court bard, Crenshaw, came down to the kitchen to obtain some breakfast for his master. While Kakir was preparing the food, Caesar (the acting troupe's bard) came into the kitchen to fetch his own breakfast. The two bards circled each other like cats, and even the elderly Crenshaw looked alert and ready to strike. After a moment, Caesar snatched up some bread and spiced wine and left, though the entire time his eyes never left Crenshaw's. The confrontation between the two was short, but even Kakir could sense the potential for violence there.

Serving Girls

The serving girls are frightened and skittish following the attack, perhaps even more so than Matilda Drearden. They know very little that is of use, and can relay no more of the story than Cecilia herself. They spent most of their day scurrying around trying to make the magistrate and his wife comfortable. They do mention they were snapped at by one of the actors (the gnome illusionist Drango, in fact) when they attempted to enter the performance hall during the setup. Additionally, if any of the characters succeed on a DC 23 Diplomacy check to calm the serving girls and get them to think more clearly about the events of the day, one of them reveals that she was made very uncomfortable by the staring of the young elven "actress" called Phelian, who watched the serving girl with almost wolfish interest.

Armsmen

The armsmen in the inn are on edge thanks to the attack on the magistrate. They have very little interest in helping with the investigation, and immediately become suspicious if anyone seems to ask too many questions. They have been tasked by the innkeeper to keep an eye out for any strange behavior, and even the investigation by the characters qualifies as strange to them. They are upset that they were forbidden to attend the performance where the magistrate was attacked, and so they have devoted themselves to making sure it doesn't happen again.

Investigating the Vagabond Players

Naturally, the Vagabond Players themselves should be high on the suspect list, and with good reason. However, thus far their involvement in the events

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that transpired should be ambiguous. No one noticed anything out of the ordinary, and indeed the only magic visible during the performance was a handful of illusions used for scenery and props. Still, the party will want to speak with the Vagabond Players, and their guilt should seem more likely (though not concrete).

Theomar Fivefaces

The leader of the troupe is “deeply concerned” for the life of the magistrate, or so he claims. If the party decides to interview him, he uses all of his acting skills to appear devastated by the outcome of the performance and incredibly worried for the magistrate’s health. That such a tragedy occurred after one of the troupe’s performances is hardly the kind of reception he’d hoped for, and he laments the poor magistrate’s wife’s involvement. In truth, Theomar is merely attempting to cover for his troupe’s involvement, and knows arousing the suspicions of the party would be incredibly dangerous and would hamper their ability to carry out Orlen’s backup plan. Theomar (falsely) pledges he will do everything in his power to see the mystery solved, and even offers his services in continuing the investigation; he can be quite persuasive and might be able to get the guilty party to reveal him or herself. If the party takes him up on this offer, he begins feeding the party false information as to the nature of his own investigations. Some sample lies that he might provide them include:

- One of the serving girls broke down under the weight of his charms and confessed she was sent by the magistrate’s wife to fetch her a knife from the roadhouse’s storage room.
- An armsman claims he heard a loud fight between Magistrate Drearden and his wife when they arrived, with threats being made by both parties.
- One of the stableboys claims to have seen Matilda and the magistrate’s court bard, Crenshaw, sneaking off to the stables for a romantic interlude prior to the performance.

- Drango, his gnome prop master, had to run Crenshaw off as he tried to sneak into the performance hall prior to the play.
- One of the serving girls helping unpack Magistrate Drearden’s luggage noticed a book on the occult in his belongings, and believes he may be practicing witchcraft.

Phelian

Though Phelian has been referred to thus far (both by Theomar and the serving girls) as an actress, in truth Phelian is a young elf male. Many of the provinces Theomar’s acting troupe travels to do not allow women to perform on the stage, so when Sarelda may not act due to the customs of their audience, Phelian plays the role of the female characters. He has remained in his guise as the “female” Phelian thus far in order to torment the magistrate (see “Investigating Magistrate Drearden” for more information on how he plans to accomplish this). If the players interview Phelian, he goes out of his way to maintain his female persona. Allow any players interacting with Phelian a Spot check, opposed by Phelian’s Disguise roll (he always takes 10 on this roll in the mornings in order to ensure a solid disguise).

Phelian pretends to be horrified by the attempt on the magistrate and supports the innkeeper’s suspicion that Matilda Drearden is to blame. However, Phelian truly does know very little about what transpired following the performance; his skills lie in deception and poison, and he would not recognize a magical charm even if he saw it. Phelian truly suspects it was Drango that was responsible for Matilda’s attempt on her husband’s wife. If Phelian is unmasked as a male, it breaks down his cover story and makes it difficult for him to continue lying. If a character succeeds on a DC 17 Intimidate check after unmasking Phelian, the elf tells the party that Drango is a wizard and may have had something to do with what happened. However, if his disguise passes inspection, Phelian reveals no information to the party and feigns total ignorance.

Sarelda

One of the few players to actually be nearly completely ignorant of the plot against the magistrate, Sarelda knows only that her troupe is involved with a frightening man named Orlen and he pulls Theomar’s strings. Sarelda does not even know it was her song that triggered Matilda Drearden’s actions; she thinks it was either Caesar or Drango that made it happen with magic, and Theomar has kept her in the dark about the true nature of her song lest she be too frightened to sing it. Though she knows better than to reveal such knowledge to the party, she does seem to welcome their investigations. In fact, Sarelda looks forward to the chance to speak to the party as an opportunity to hone her own acting skills.

If the party comes to ask her any questions, she answers their questions mostly honestly (especially since she knows nothing of how Matilda was coerced). She claims she has spent most of her days in her private carriage rehearsing (true), and she did not even enter the roadhouse until right at performance time (also true). She claims Caesar wrote the song she performed (false, and she knows it), and it took her many hours to perfect it (true). More than that, though, she attempts to seduce any susceptible party members with her smoky looks and feminine charms; she knows someone in her troupe is responsible for what happened, and having one of the investigators as a “close ally” would certainly make it easier to avoid suspicion. It is her hope that by having one of the investigating PCs wrapped around her finger, she can coerce that person into steering the investigation away from the Vagabond Players.

Caesar

The halfling bard, Caesar, is probably one of the most accessible members of the troupe, as he spends his time following the attempt on the magistrate practicing his music in the common room or outside, in front of the roadhouse. He seems amused if the characters come to investigate him, and cannot help but chuckle when they ask about his involvement. Caesar



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claims to be little more than a poor fool, a former court jester driven to a life on the road. He does not take any of the party's questions seriously and takes every opportunity to mock or confuse them. For example, if they ask him about escorting the magistrate and his wife to the performance, he is just as likely to blow off the question as "foolishness from uncivilized folk" as he is to mock the party by asking why they didn't escort the magistrate themselves. However, if they ask him about the song Sarelida performed, he claims she wrote it herself and he found it to be sentimental and overly melodramatic.

One subject does cause Caesar to lose his mocking air: the court bard, Crenshaw. It quickly becomes clear he has no love for Crenshaw, and questions about him immediately cause Caesar to become standoffish. He spits and calls Crenshaw a "washed-up old hack that wouldn't know music if it ran over him in a carriage" and refuses to speak further of him. A successful DC 20 Intimidate check or a 50 gp bribe accompanying a DC 18 Diplomacy check encourages Caesar to say Crenshaw is jealous of the Vagabond Players' success and has on many occasions attempted to defame them. Caesar also tells them Crenshaw has tried to claim that he wrote many of the plays they have performed, and their mutual disdain comes from disputes over the origins of the Vagabond Players' scripts.

Drango

The final member of the acting troupe is Drango, a gnome that provides illusions for the special effects of the Vagabond Players' performances. He is a quiet and secretive man and does not want to be disturbed, especially by nosy investigators. If anything, he is less friendly than Kakir, the cook, and goes out of his way to avoid people asking probing questions. Of all of the actors, Drango knows the most about the methods Orlen used to charm Matilda into attempting to murder her husband. He received orders from Orlen to prepare the performance hall ahead of time (see "Investigating the Performance Hall" below), and he is responsible for translating and transcribing any occult lore the troupe comes across. His desire to be left alone is part natural disgruntlement, part cover-up for the actors' guilt.

When questioned, Drango sticks to the same story regardless of how many times they ask him: he is merely the prop master and was too busy focusing on making sure the sets and special effects were in place to even notice Matilda's attack. He spends most of his days studying new stage techniques and cares little for what everyone else does. Of all the Vagabond Players, Drango is the smartest and uses his wits to cover up their involvement. He denies all knowledge of any plots or schemes, claiming to live with his nose in books, but a DC 22 Sense Motive check reveals that while technically he is telling the truth, he is using that truth to hide something. The only real clue the characters can take from interviewing Drango is that, when sufficiently convinced with a DC 20 Intimidate check or a DC 25 Diplomacy check, he admits much of his work consists of using magic and illusions to set the scenes for their performances. This should clue them in that he might be involved in the magical aspect of the plot, and links him to the amplification runes in the performance hall.

Investigating the Court Bard

At some point, the characters should be directed to interview Crenshaw, Magistrate Drearden's court bard and former mentor to Orlen, whether that be from Kakir's description of his animosity towards Caesar, Caesar's own admitted disdain of Crenshaw, or the care he gives to the magistrate during his recovery. At first, Crenshaw is reluctant to speak with the characters, not out of any deception but rather because he does not wish to be separated from the magistrate during the healing process. It quickly becomes obvious Crenshaw cares greatly for Hugo Drearden, and though he is quite old, he still seems to have his wits about him. Additionally, Crenshaw is a source of very valuable information that will help the party in their investigation, and they should discover quite a bit as to what is really going on with the magistrate and his wife.

Below are some common answers to questions the party may ask Crenshaw:

What do you do for the Dreardens?

"Once, he called me his court bard. Now, I'm little more than a glorified servant. Occasionally Matilda has me sing for her, or tell her a story, but those days are rare. Hugo Drearden is my provider and friend, though, and I will serve him in whatever capacity he needs."

Why did Matilda attack her husband?

"She didn't. At least, it wasn't her in her right mind. I don't care what that vile innkeeper says; Matilda loves her husband. There's foul play afoot, and someone is trying to make it look like she is to blame."

Do you have any ideas as to what caused the attack?

"There's only one thing I know of that can make a person behave like that, going against everything they think and believe: vile magic. I won't say I haven't dabbled in magic some in my days, but nothing this foul. To make a wife attempt to kill her beloved husband...that's both wicked and hateful. Only a twisted practitioner of the arts would conceive such a thing."

Why do you hate Caesar so much?

"That wretch? He and his actors have been parading around the country for years, claiming to be performing the Lost Plays of Orlen. Well, I knew Orlen, and if they are performing his plays, then I'm the king! Orlen didn't leave behind any plays when he died, of that you can be certain. These disgusting actors dishonor the memory of a great playwright by suckering in audiences using his name. It's despicable! Besides, I have a feeling that he planted the knife Matilda used on her before the performance, though of course I have no proof."

Who is Orlen?

"Ah, Orlen. My greatest pupil, and my greatest failure. Many years ago, when I was far more young and spry, Orlen was my apprentice. He lived with us in Magistrate Drearden's home. To say he was a prodigy is an understatement; by the time he was a teenager, his own works had far surpassed mine in quality and quantity. He could have been the greatest playwright of all time, and maybe he already was, even at such a young age. As you may know, youth and talent are often a recipe for foolishness, and Orlen made a great misstep with Magistrate Drearden: he attempted to steal Matilda from him and was driven out from his house. He died not long after, far before his time."

Could Orlen be involved in this?

"I don't see how, from beyond the grave. Though...well, it's hard to think he could still be alive after all this time. We never found his body, but he just vanished, never to be heard from again. If he is involved, he has waited a long time to make his presence known, and even then, the Orlen I knew would never wish any harm upon Matilda. Then again, the Orlen I knew may truly be dead."

These should be the first clues the party gains to what is really going on, and should confirm many of their suspicions about the Vagabond Players. Combined with the information they have gained thus far, this should shift their focus to the acting troupe, though as of yet, it is not quite enough to confirm their suspicions.

Investigating the Performance Hall (EL 3)

The scene of the crime should draw diligent investigators, and the performance hall has been left exactly as it was before the performance started. The performance hall was sealed off and remains guarded by an armsman at all times, much to the chagrin of the Vagabond Players, who wish to erase all

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evidence of their plot from the room. However, Cecilia gives the armsman orders to allow the PCs entrance into the performance hall as a part of their investigation. It has the musty smell of a place undisturbed since the attack, and the coppery smell of blood still lingers near the front of the room.

Most of the room, including the stage and props, are utterly unremarkable. A DC 20 Search or Spot check reveals there is more to the room than meets the eye, however. At three points throughout the room (on the wall to either side of the audience, and on the back wall of the room), tapestries have been hung hastily to cover what appear to be ornate glyphs burned into the wooden walls of the chamber. A *detect magic* spell reveals the glyphs as magical, and a DC 20 Spellcraft check reveals a faint evocation aura. They appear to be inactive at first glance; however, as soon as anyone speaks aloud near them, anyone still under the effects of a *detect magic* spell can see that the runes glow slightly brighter as that person speaks. The glyphs are obviously affected by sound, and a DC 20 bardic knowledge, Perform (oratory), or Perform (singing) check reveals that certain words, phrases, and tones seem to cause the glyphs to react more strongly than others.

Any character with ranks in Perform (oratory) or Perform (singing) may make a DC 18 check to correctly identify the sounds that fully activate the runes. Alternately, any character that makes a successful DC 18 Intelligence check recalls certain phrases from the performance that were often repeated, and by saying them, also activates the runes. Finally, a DC 20 Spellcraft check reveals the verbal components to activate the runes, allowing any spellcasting character to provide the verbal component as though casting the spell to activate the runes. The Spellcraft check also reveals the spell is intended to amplify the potency of magic, but since this spell was of Orlen's devising, it is unlikely they can recognize the spell itself.

Once activated, the glyphs glow brightly to anyone still under the effects of a *detect magic* spell, and beams of light streak out from each rune toward the stage. These beams of light (invisible to anyone not able to *detect magic* or *see invisible*) converge at a point off to one side of the stage—the exact spot Sarelde was standing when she performed her final song, immediately before the magistrate's wife rose to attack him. This is another major piece of the puzzle, and one that should point yet another finger toward the guild of the Vagabond Players.

Ad-Hoc XP Award

If the characters manage to figure out how to activate the glyphs in the performance hall, award experience as though they had overcome an EL 3 encounter.

Investigating Magistrate Drearden

At some point, the party may wish to go back and ask Magistrate Drearden some more questions about his ordeal. When the party arrives, however, they intervene at just the right moment to stop something very bad from happening. Waiting until he knew the magistrate would be alone, Phelian (in his guise as an actress) slipped into the room to poison the magistrate. Though Phelian pretends to seduce the magistrate (and it is at this point, with Phelian fawning over him, that the party enters), in truth he has become concerned the continued investigation might reveal their guilt and has decided to take matters into his own hands.

Without Theomar's knowledge, Phelian entered the magistrate's room under the premises of a tryst, but in truth, he just wanted to get close enough to poison his drink. When the party arrives to interrupt, Phelian knows he cannot continue and does everything in his power to get away. He pretends to be "embarrassed" to be caught canoodling with the magistrate and tries to slip away before he can be detained. The magistrate, for his part, does his best to resist Phelian's advances (not difficult, since Phelian is just playing a role to get close to the magistrate's cup), and demands the party get Phelian

away lest his wife think he was being unfaithful. Any character that makes a successful Search check (opposed by Phelian's Sleight of Hand check) finds the vial of poison tucked into his outfit. When this happens, Phelian claims that he merely brought an old elven folk remedy that aids in the healing process, claiming he had "no idea humans were so frail that it could be harmful." See Phelian's statistics in the **Appendix** for details.

Events

During the course of the investigation, several events take place that can be interspersed between the above scenes in order to keep the action moving along. These events take place in order (from 1 to 4), with the final event ending **Act Two** and sending the party on to the final showdown with Orlen. Use these events when the investigation slows, or to break up character interaction with a little action.

Event 1: Writing on the Wall

The first event takes place shortly after the investigation begins. Orlen, disappointed that his plan has failed, charges the illusionist Drango with delivering a message to the magistrate as he recovers. Orlen wants to make sure Drearden knows he is going to ruin his life, just like Drearden ruined his, and decides to send a frightening message by proxy. At some point when the common room is empty, either late at night or during mid-afternoon, Drango slips into the common area and uses a *silent image* spell to create the illusion of writing in blood across one wall of the room. The writing says, "I will take from you what you have taken from me: life, love, and livelihood. The hour of your torment is at hand." The words are repeated hundreds of times.

Drango slips out of the room and heads back to one of the acting troupe's carriages, maintaining his concentration while there to keep the *silent image* present. Shortly thereafter, a serving girl enters the common room, sees the message scrawled in "blood" on the wall, and screams for help. When the PCs (and many others) arrive, they have time to read the message before Drango lets his concentration lapse and the spell ends.

Event 2: Phantom Attack (EL 4)

When Theomar begins feeling the pressure of the investigation, or when the party seems a little too close to unearthing their involvement, he and Drango set into motion an event that has terrifying repercussions. Using a specially-enchanted knife that they obtained for Orlen long ago, called the *blade of walking death* (see **Appendix**), the two slip into the rooms of several of the miscellaneous patrons of the Golden Curtain (the guests in rooms G9-E, G9-G, and G8-C) and murder them in their sleep. The two do their best to remain unseen, and once they have killed all four guests, they return to their own rooms and pretend to be asleep. Mere minutes after their murder, several dagger phantoms rise from the corpses of the slain guests and attack the other patrons of the inn. Each phantom appears to be a hovering, vaguely-humanoid specter that drifts with outstretched arms across the floor. Though they resemble the forms of their original bodies, they have no distinguishable facial characteristics.

Dagger Phantoms (4): hp 13, see **Appendix** for statistics.

Tactics

The dagger phantoms are nearly mindless and wander the halls of the inn, attacking any living creature they come into contact with. The first people attacked raise enough of a racket to awaken any sleeping characters and alert them to danger. The dagger phantoms are driven only to slay the living, and they will attack relentlessly until stopped.

Development

Following the dagger phantom attack, the staff and other guests of the Golden Curtain are in an uproar. The serving girls are terrified, as is Cecilia, and her husband and the armsmen go from room to room making sure that no other phantoms are lurking and waiting to strike. The Vagabond

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Players melodramatically demand greater protection while they stay here, and Theomar makes it a point to say that he fears the Golden Curtain is a dangerous place for all patrons. Careful examination of the bodies with a *detect magic* spell reveals the remnants of faint necromancy magic, though the source of that magic remains hidden.

Treasure

Once the phantoms are defeated, the belongings of the murdered guests remain in their rooms, as even the armsmen are reluctant to enter the rooms of the dead. Each of the individual guests carries only the bare minimum to allow them to survive; each one has a traveler's outfit, a walking stick (quarterstaff), and roughly 35 gp worth of coins and jewels. The gnome couple has between them six noble's outfits, 100 gp worth of coins and jewels, and a +1 dagger. The belongings are sent to the deceased's kin, unless the PCs stake a claim. No one minds if the PCs destroyed the phantoms. Otherwise, the character(s) who claimed the belongings takes a -2 circumstance penalty to all Diplomacy checks made to interact with the other guests.

Event 3: Matilda's Last Song

When Orlen sent Theomar and his troupe to exact his revenge on Magistrate Drearden, he prepared a backup plan in case Sarelda's song failed for some reason. Once Theomar reports the original plan failed, he tells Theomar to wait a day or so before enacting the backup plan. Following the attack by the phantoms, Theomar finally decides it would be best to go ahead with it rather than wait, on the chance that the characters might intervene once more.

At some point during the investigation, when all of the characters are away from Matilda, read or paraphrase the following text.

From outside of the Golden Curtain, several cries of alarm rise above the normal sounds of the day. Outside, a group of people stands off to one side of the roadhouse, looking up in horror at the roof. Glancing upward, you see Matilda Drearden walking slowly along the center of the arch in the roof. Placing one foot directly in front of the other, she moves as if in a daze, while onlookers below shout for her to come no closer to the edge of the building. Heedless, and seemingly unaware of the danger, Matilda lightly steps to the edge and then keeps walking, plunging off the three-story building's roof toward the ground below.

If the party takes no action (or has no ability to stop Matilda from falling), she plunges to the ground below and lands to the screams of the onlookers. If they do manage to slow or stop her fall, however, all is still for naught; before climbing onto the roof, Matilda slit her own wrists and was nearly dead when she took her leap. At this point, a DC 19 Listen check reveals the faint sound of music drifting through the air. This music comes from a music box set on the roof near a hatch (which leads to the third floor, granting access to the roof for repairs).

Characters who go to the roof find an ornate music box on the roof. When opened (as it is when they find it) the music box plays a very familiar tune: a modified version of the song Sarelda sang at the end of the troupe's performance. One of the serving girls witnessed Theomar giving the music box to Matilda, and overheard him saying that it would cheer her up during the distressing time she was going through. In truth, the music box was another twisted musical device sent by Orlen and designed to trigger Matilda's suicide. When Matilda opened the box, the music inside sent her into a similar trance-like state and encouraged her to take her own life. Orlen knew the only way he could truly take revenge on Magistrate Drearden now was to take from him what he took from Orlen: his wife.

When questioned, Theomar feigns innocence. He claims the music box was crafted by a master gnome tinkerer in the last city they visited, created specially as a gift to be given to Matilda Drearden following this exclusive performance. He claims the differences in the song come from the imperfections of machinery, and it was the closest they could get to Sarelda's performance. Additionally, if the characters take the music box to the performance hall



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and open it, any characters with *detect magic* active can see brightly glowing glyphs on the walls, shining converging rays at the stage (see **Investigating the Performance Hall** above).

Event 4: The Burning of the Golden Curtain (EL 6)

The final event takes place once the characters have accumulated enough clues or evidence to point to the troupe's involvement in the plot that killed Matilda Drearden and almost took her husband's life as well. If the party has any three of the following pieces of evidence against the Vagabond Players, Magistrate Drearden is willing to hear their case:

- Evidence or clues suggesting Caesar planted the knife on Matilda Drearden.
- Evidence or clues suggesting Phelian attempted to poison Magistrate Drearden.
- Evidence or clues suggesting the Vagabond Players are using plays written by Orlen especially for the troupe.
- Evidence or clues suggesting Drango was responsible for the illusion of writing in blood.
- Evidence or clues suggesting someone placed amplification runes on the walls of the performance hall, and they amplified the effects of Sarelda's song.
- Evidence or clues suggesting the music box causes the amplification runes in the performance hall to react.
- Evidence or clues suggesting the music box caused Matilda Drearden to kill herself.

- Evidence or clues suggesting Theomar and Drango murdered the guests that became phantoms.

When it becomes clear that the PCs have evidence against the Vagabond Players, Theomar makes his move to end the charade and make haste to escape. Before the characters have a chance to confront the acting troupe, Theomar has Phelian steal the body of Matilda Drearden and hide it within one of their carriages. Phelian takes Sarelda and leaves, bringing the body back to Orlen in the opera house, which lies several days' ride back the way they originally came.

With Phelian and Sarelda safely away, Theomar, Caesar, and Drango stay behind and commit the final act of violence against Magistrate Drearden and the Golden Curtain. The three rogue actors set several fires throughout the building, and within minutes, much of the Golden Curtain is ablaze. Read or paraphrase the following text.

Beginning subtly at first, and then growing more obvious by the moment, the smell of smoke alerts you to the fact that something is wrong. Moving into the hallway, you see clouds of smoke drifting along the ceiling. Shouts of panic rise from elsewhere in the roadhouse, and guests and staff alike move quickly to make it to an exit. The Golden Curtain is on fire, and it may be too late to save it.

All of the staff and guests in the Golden Curtain have just discovered the danger, and gather their belongings in preparation for a hasty flight. When the characters reach the common room (either leaving themselves, or escorting the first group of inhabitants out), they come across the true culprits. The three remaining members of the Vagabond Players wait for the PCs in the common room, determined to see that no one escapes alive. They fight the party to ensure no guests or staff escape to spread word of their guilt, and it is up to the adventurers to defeat them in order to allow an evacuation. Read or paraphrase the following text.

Louning almost lazily in the common room are three familiar faces. Drango, his pale skin covered in sweat, stands watching you from the far side of the room. Caesar's ever-sardonic smile still graces his lips, and he seems almost madly gleeful despite the inn burning around him. Leaning against the bar, however, is the lanky form of the lead actor, Theomar.

"I must admit, our performances must have been quite appalling for the likes of you to have caught on," Theomar says, shaking his head ruefully. "But, no matter. This final performance in the Golden Curtain has a captive audience, and we intend to keep it that way. If only you hadn't meddled, we might have been able to leave these fine people alive, but now they must burn to keep our secret and you with them."

The three draw weapons and ready them, placing themselves so that they block the exit to the roadhouse.

Theomar: hp 18; see **Appendix** for statistics.

Caesar: hp 21; see **Appendix** for statistics.

Drango: hp 14; see **Appendix** for statistics.

Tactics

The three actors have only one goal: keep anyone from escaping. They fight to kill the party, and they use every trick in their repertoires to attempt to stop people from escaping. Whenever possible, Caesar helps Theomar flank party members to allow the rogue to use his sneak attack. Drango prefers to stay back from the fight, aiding Theomar and Caesar with a few offensive spells and keeping himself away from the fight. When possible, the three actors incapacitate their enemies, because they believe a combatant that cannot move cannot flee.

Additionally, as combat progresses, the common room becomes a more and more dangerous place to fight. The following round-by-round description details changes to the combat environment. These changes take effect at the top of each round.



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Round 1: No special effects in place.

Round 2: Smoke drifts along the ceiling, and it becomes slightly harder to see. The smoke grants concealment, which carries with it a 20% miss chance to all attacks.

Round 3: No additional special effects in place.

Round 4: Burned timbers fall from the ceiling. All characters have a 10% chance of being struck by a falling piece of wood each round. If so, they take 1d4 points of fire damage and 1d4 points of bludgeoning damage unless they succeed on a DC 15 Reflex save.

Round 5: Heavy smoke begins to choke the room. See **Chapter Eight: Glossary** of the *DMG* for more information on heavy smoke effects.

Round 6: Burned timbers fall from the ceiling with greater frequency. All characters have a 20% chance of being struck by a falling piece of wood each round. If so, they take 1d4 points of fire damage and 1d4 points of bludgeoning damage unless they succeed on a DC 18 Reflex save.

Round 7: Flames begin to creep up the walls. All characters standing adjacent to any wall at the end of their turn take 1d4 points of fire damage from the burning wall.

Round 8: Burned timbers fall from the ceiling with yet greater frequency. All characters have a 30% chance of being struck by a falling piece of wood each round; If so, they take 1d4 points of fire damage and 1d4 points of bludgeoning damage unless they succeed on a DC 18 Reflex save.

Round 9: No additional special effects in place.

Round 10: The room becomes so hot that all characters within it risk being burned. Each round, all characters within the room automatically take 1d4 points of fire damage.

Development

When the three actors are defeated, the rest of the staff and guests can evacuate from the inn. Unfortunately, the fires were set with too much precision, and the Golden Curtain burns, taking with it all its history and the belongings left inside. Cecilia and the rest of the staff take refuge in the stables, while Boral takes a horse and begins riding hard for the next village to request aid. The staff is devastated, and the guests are shocked.

Magistrate Drearden, upon learning of the actors' treachery, immediately pays the party the agreed-upon sum and thanks them for revealing their true nature before even worse things could happen. Though he, too, is saddened by the destruction of the Golden Curtain, he begs the party to hunt down Orlen and retrieve the body of his wife for a proper burial. On the spot, he places a bounty on the heads of Orlen, Phelian, Sarelda, and any others that work in collusion with the insane bard. The bounty of 1,000 gp should be sufficient to motivate the party to continue their hunt, but if not, a DC 20 Diplomacy check can convince the magistrate to also provide them with pardons for any past crimes or, for law-abiding parties, a magisterial decree of the party's exaltation in these lands, granting the party a +2 circumstance bonus to all Diplomacy checks used on law-abiding citizens of Magistrate Drearden's domain for one year.

Any character that spends at least one hour reading the *parchment of sending* learns a great deal about the relationship between Orlen and the Vagabond Players. The parchment details many of the dealings between Orlen and Theomar, and includes the following information:

- Theomar and Orlen have been working together for many years. Orlen provides the actors with new plays, while Theomar sends back books of occult lore for Orlen to peruse.
- Orlen has been plotting his revenge on Magistrate Drearden for years. Recently, he discovered a means of transforming a simple song into an

New Item: Parchment of Sending

Frequently used by wizards traveling far from their homes, the *parchment of sending* is a useful item that allows for easy long-distance communication.

Description

A *parchment of sending* is actually two items, both constructed at the same time and keyed to one another. Each half of a *parchment of sending* is a long roll of parchment, similar to a scroll, but several hundred feet long and wrapped around fine wooden rollers. The *parchment of sending's* surface is always smooth and clean, and never shows signs of age or wear, maintaining a clean cream color for all time.

Activation

The *parchment of sending* can be activated by simply writing on the next empty space on either of the two rolls.

Effect

Whenever a person writes anything on an empty space of either half of a *parchment of sending*, the same writing appears in the exact same space on its counterpart. Thus, two people could communicate over long distances simply by taking turns writing on the next available space of the half of the *parchment of sending* in their possession. Additionally, messages written on the *parchment of sending* do not fade and cannot be erased except by destroying the item, making it useful for long-term record keeping. A *parchment of sending* can hold the equivalent of 200 *sending* spells worth of text.

Aura/Caster Level: Moderate Evocation; CL 9th.

Construction: Craft Wondrous Item, *sending*; Cost 6,000 gp, 480 XP; 6 days.

Weight: 1 lb (each half).

Price: 12,000 gp.

enchantment so powerful that the person it is attuned to can almost never resist it.

- Orlen is clearly mad. His writings are scarcely legible scribbles, as though he were only barely able to keep his sanity together enough to communicate. His words are nearly unreadable and are often interspersed with dark or grisly quotes.
- Orlen has been operating out of an abandoned opera house several days' ride from the Golden Curtain. Enough details are included about its locale that a DC 15 Knowledge (local) check should point the party right to it. Otherwise, characters with the Track feat may attempt to follow Phelian and Sarelda's carriage back to the opera house.

Armed with this information, it should be a simple matter for the players to track down Orlen and bring the mad bard to justice.

Treasure

In addition to the items the three Vagabond Players have on them when defeated, in the remaining carriage the PCs will find Drango's spellbook, 300 gp worth of gold, gems, and jewelry, and the *parchment of sending* (see sidebar) that Theomar uses to communicate with Orlen while on the road.

Ad-Hoc XP Award

If the PCs evacuate the guests before round 9, grant them additional XP as if they had defeated a CR 5 opponent.

- Act Three: Orlen's Opera House -

The trip from the burned-out remains of the Golden Curtain to the abandoned opera house where Orlen lies in wait takes roughly four days, moving at a good clip. Phelian and Sarellda have several hours' head start on the heroes, plus they are much more familiar with the terrain, and so they arrive at the opera house in plenty of time to rest and recover. The road travels most of the way from the Golden Curtain to the opera house, though near the end of the trip, the party must travel down a dirt trail that looks to be very seldom used.

The opera house is in the center of a dead village, a ruined community destroyed by some calamity, ages ago. If there were survivors, they have all left, and the signs of their inhabitation have been all but erased. The only intact structure here is the opera house, though its possible for other things to lurk in the rubble.

When the party arrives at Orlen's opera house, read or paraphrase the following text.

The dirt path pushes through a dense copse of trees before emerging into a clearing. Surrounding it are twisted trees whose branches hang low, with foliage that seems to choke the sky. In the midst of the clearing lie the ruins of an abandoned opera house, once grand and beautiful, but now little more than a shell of its former glory. Though damaged and in poor repair, the building does show some signs of inhabitation. A familiar-looking carriage, belonging to the Vagabond Players, rests off to one side. Few natural sounds emanate from the clearing, though the occasional cry of ravens pierces the eerie silence.

Strong Wooden Doors: 2 in. thick; Hardness 5; HP 20; Break DC 25; Open Lock DC 25. Unless otherwise noted, none of the doors in the opera house are locked.

O1: Antechamber (EL 2 and 3)

What once served as a lobby and antechamber for the building has now become Orlen's first line of defense against intruders. Two large, ornate oak doors act as the main entrance to the opera house, locked to prevent any intrusion. During its heyday, these doors would be opened wide to allow visitors entrance to the theater. These doors are now trapped to ward off unwanted visitors. Read or paraphrase the following text.

The thick, musty smell within the room gives the impression that the room is seldom used or traveled. Thick, red velvet carpet once covered the entire floor but has now been reduced to shreds and ragged patches. Double doors stand on the far wall, one set near each end of the rectangular room. On the far left side of the room, a spiral staircase ascends through the ceiling, though its counterpart on the right side of the room seems to have been destroyed.

In addition to the poisoned key trap on the main exterior entrance doors, the room is rigged with two other traps intended to halt the progress of interlopers before they can get too far. The standing staircase on the left side of the room has been rigged to collapse if any Small or larger creature attempts to ascend them. Additionally, a pressure plate in front of the doors to the right side of the room triggers a burst of sonic energy that lances out from the door itself.

Enriching the Horror

One way to expand this adventure is to add encounters in the ghost town. As written, the PCs are expected to move through the ruins and enter the opera house. But if you like, it need not be the only intact structure. The village could hold zombies, ghouls, or worse. You can also use the village as the foundation for future adventures of your own design.

Traps

Three traps ward this room.

POISONED KEY TRAP CR 2

Search DC 22; **Type** Mechanical; **Reset** Repair

Init —

Trigger Touch

Melee poisoned needle +17 (1 plus poison)

Target Character triggering the trap

Effect DC 14 Fortitude, initial damage 1 Con, secondary damage unconsciousness

Disarm Disable Device DC 17

COLLAPSING STAIRS CR 2

Search DC 20; **Type** Mechanical; **Reset** No reset

Trigger Location

Target One creature

Effect The character who triggers the trap takes 2d6 points of damage as the stairs collapse. A DC 20 Reflex save halves this damage.

Disarm Disable Device DC —

SONIC BURST TRAP CR 3

Search DC 26; **Type** Magical; **Reset** Automatic Reset (1 minute)

Trigger Location

Target One creature

Effect The character that triggers the trap takes 5d4 points of sonic damage. A DC 11 Reflex save halves this damage.

Disarm Disable Device DC 26

O2: Audience Seats & Balcony (EL 4)

The seating area for the opera house has seen better days, and currently hosts a gargoyle that has claimed the auditorium as his domain. Read or paraphrase the following text when the characters enter the audience seating area.

Two long, sloping aisles travel from the back of the room down to the stage and grow farther apart the deeper they go into the large chamber. The ceiling, some 50 feet tall, is cracked and full of holes where chunks of debris have fallen out, allowing faint light in from outside. Broken seats, once meant to hold an audience of opera viewers, litter the room. A few intact seats remain, but most are rotted through or splintered as though from some violent attack. Faded and torn paintings, which once likely depicted famous performers, hang limply from tattered hangers. A wooden balcony forms a U-shape around the back and sides of the room, roughly 10 feet up from the floor, though large sections of the balcony have fallen away, giving a view of the rotting ceiling even from below. The room slopes downward slightly to a large stage, and sconces with torches that burned out long ago line the walls.

The room is only barely lit by the holes in the ceiling, providing the equivalent of bright moonlight in illumination. Though the aisles are mostly clear, the seating areas are considered to be difficult terrain, reducing all ground movement by half.

Creatures

The balcony above also houses the nest of a gargoyle that has staked a claim on the auditorium, guarding it against even Orlen himself. Thus far, the mad bard has allowed the gargoyle to roost in the auditorium, using it to guard against intruders (though it does occasionally interfere with his ability to view his own twisted stage shows).

Gargoyle: hp 37, see MM for statistics.

- Act Three: Orlen's Opera House -

Tactics

The gargoyle prefers to separate individual prey from any companions it might have, finishing one off before moving on to the next. When the characters enter the room, the gargoyle singles out the lightest party member—preferring Small creatures that it can carry off with ease. If it manages to snatch up a character, it flees to the safety and cover of the balcony to slay its catch. If successful, it repeats these tactics until all opponents are killed. The gargoyle has little to fear from arrows or crossbow bolts thanks to its damage reduction, so any characters that snipe at the gargoyle using such weapons are ignored and saved for last.

Treasure

Anyone climbing into the balcony and making a DC 13 Search check discovers the skeletal remains of a halfling treasure hunter that fell prey to the gargoyle's territorial nature. On the skeleton are the tattered remains of adventurer's clothing, a suit of studded leather armor, a masterwork short sword, an *amulet of natural armor +1*, and a pouch containing roughly 80 gp worth of coins.

O3: Stage (EL 3)

The stage in the auditorium is home to a grisly play performed by some of Orlen's best "actors," corpses pilfered from nearby graveyards and gruesomely animated. When the players first approach the stage, but before the step up onto it, read or paraphrase the following text.

At the base of the audience chamber is a wide stage, running the width of the room and standing about six feet up off the ground. Stairs on either side of the stage lead from the aisle up onto its wooden surface. The stage is dark, and a thick green curtain hangs down to split the front stage from the back.

When the characters finally step up onto the stage, it activates a performance by zombie actors, giving a rendition of one of Orlen's own works. Read or paraphrase the following text when the characters step onto the stage.

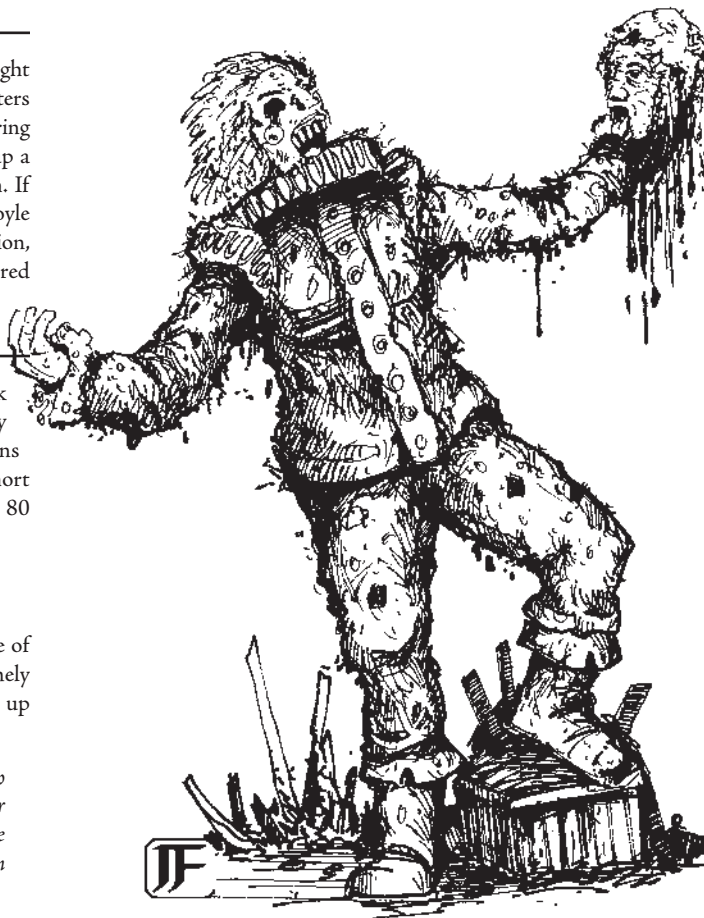
As the aging boards of the opera house floor creak beneath your feet, you ascend to the stage, footsteps echoing through the large room. Without warning, the seemingly lifeless stage becomes a flurry of activity. Oil lamps at the edge of the stage, previously dormant, burst to life as flames flicker within their glass cases, casting dancing illumination over the stage. The heavy green curtain pulls back to both sides, revealing a horrifying sight. Six human corpses, each in varying states of decay, stand posed as though in the middle of a display. Within seconds of the curtain receding, the corpses animate and begin to make jerky motions. Though their heads loll without the spark of life to keep them upright, the corpses seem to speak of their own accord.

Over the next few moments, these animated corpses enact a scene, obviously taken from one of the insane bard's plays, stumbling across the stage in a horrific pantomime. Worms crawl from the eye sockets of one of the "actresses" just as her character seems to fret about her appearance. The scene lasts for no more than a minute, at which point the corpses seem to lose all direction and begin to wander.

Orlen set up this macabre show for his own amusement, his insanity driving him to pilfer corpses from nearby villages to put in his show. He used his studies of the occult to create low-level undead using *animate dead* and then gave them "lines" to perform with *magic mouth*. However, Orlen's capacity to create and control the dead is limited to a few one-use items brought to him by the Vagabond Players, and as such, he has had to make do with just these six human zombies.

Creatures

The undead actors are programmed to perform the scene (as they did when the characters arrived) and then await instructions from their "director," Orlen.



However, without him around to give them stage directions, the zombies wander aimlessly.

Human Commoner Zombies (6): hp 16 each, see MM for statistics.

Tactics

The zombies are content to wander about in a mockery of life. If attacked, the zombies are ruthless, surging to assault the closest living creature.

Treasure

Each of the zombies wears a relatively new noble's outfit, which could be stripped from them if any party members are willing to touch the rotting corpses. Additionally, the female corpses are wearing small amounts of jewelry, totaling 25 gp in value when combined.

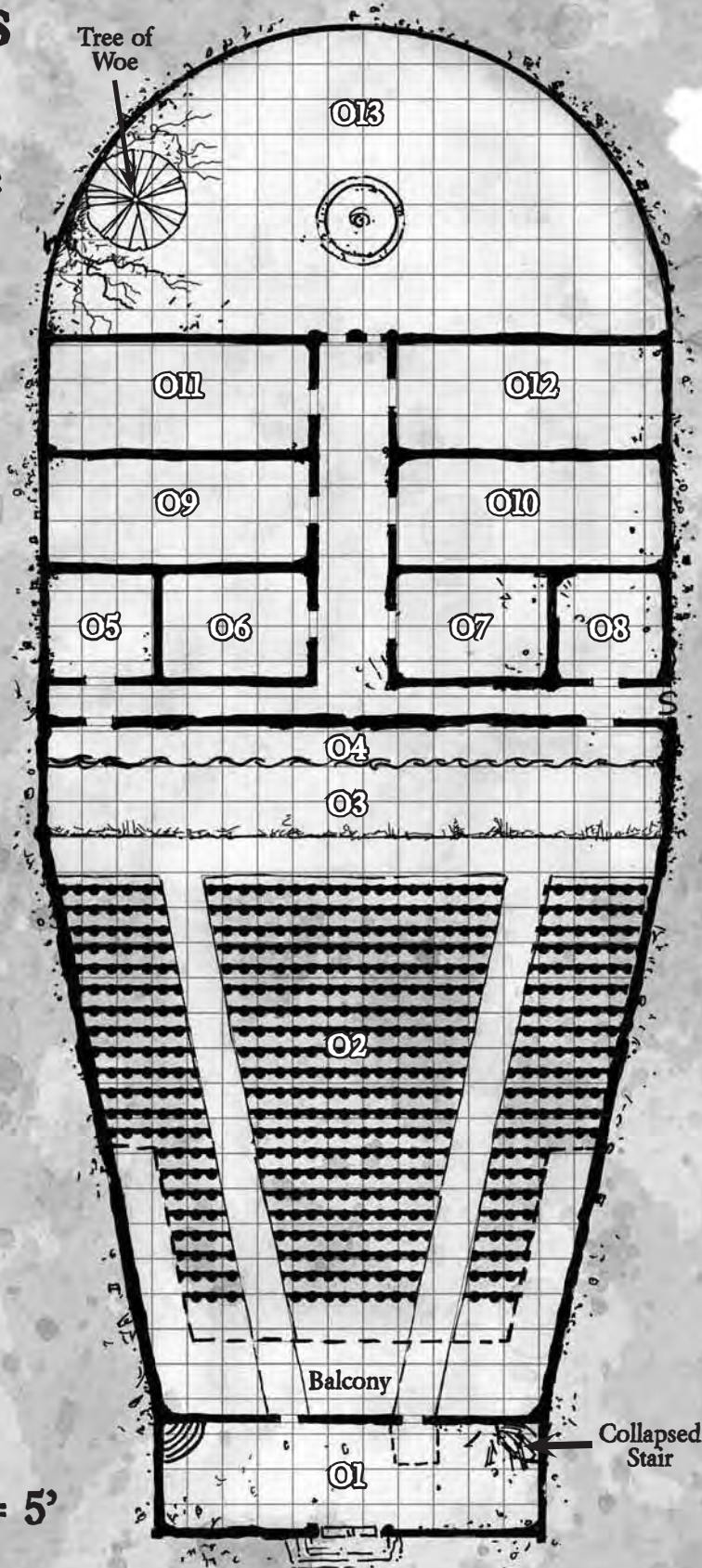
O4: Backstage Area

Behind the backdrop for Orlen's zombie play are the remains of the backstage area. Though most of the props and set pieces once belonging to the opera house were long ago stolen or destroyed, a few scattered remnants can be found here and there. Sandbags attached to ropes still dangle precariously from the ceiling here, a wind stirring them up and giving the backstage area a false sense of activity. A single door at either end of the back wall leads to the hallway in the rear of the opera house.

O5: Dressing Room 1

A sad sight greets the characters upon entering this dressing room. The corpse of Matilda Drearden sits in a makeup chair, eyes closed as though she were an actress sleeping before a performance. She has been made-up as though she were about to go on stage, placed and decorated with almost loving care. Unlike the rest of the rooms in this decrepit opera house, this dressing room

Orlen's Opera House



1 square = 5'



- Act Three: Orlen's Opera House -

looks almost as nice as it did in the building's heyday. Candles glow softly throughout the room, bathing the entire space in flickering light, and the light scent of flowers permeates the room. It should be obvious Orlen prepared this room especially for Matilda, and he obviously has gone beyond the ability to differentiate his memories of her from the reality of her death.

Any character that uses *detect magic* while in the room immediately sees a slightly disturbing sight. Scrawled along the walls in invisible, magical writing are love poems professing Orlen's affection for Matilda Drearden. The writings literally cover the entire room, leaving no surface clean of his mad ramblings. More disturbing, however, is the fact that each and every poem or profession of his love includes a date; a quick scan of the room reveals the oldest ones date nearly ten years back, with dates ranging from then up to mere weeks ago. Clearly, he has been plotting to steal her back for some time, and the room is a testament to his persistence and madness.

O6: Dressing Room 2 (EL 2)

The adjacent dressing room is nothing like the one holding Matilda Drearden's corpse. Phelian, the elf actor that fled with Sarelda, claimed this room as his private sanctum. None of the care has been given to ensure comfort here; he has merely holed up in paranoia and is planning on escaping the mad bard as soon as he feels it is safe. When the characters arrive, read the following aloud:

This room is a mess, with broken furniture scattered about and dust and grime clinging to every surface. It was once a private dressing room for opera house performers, that much is certain; a shattered mirror lines one wall, and a bench designed to hold make-up and costumes sits in front of it. What comfort the room might have once offered is long gone, however, as the ravages of time have reduced it to little more than a holding place for scrap.

On the far side of the room, a wild-eyed male elf, with skin so pale it almost seems chalky, brandishes a rapier that appears to drip some green liquid. "I won't be taken alive," he says in a raspy voice, "The world is not done with me yet!"

If the party did not unmask Phelian as a man in Act II, allow them a DC 16 Spot check to recognize the man in the room as Phelian.

Creatures

Following his return to the opera house, Phelian was witness to some of Orlen's most psychotic actions; not only did he witness the obsessive care Orlen gave to Matilda's corpse, he also was present for Sarelda's grisly death (see **Room O11** for more details). At this point, he knows he is not safe in Orlen's opera house, and fears the characters have come to kill or imprison him.

Phelian: hp 14, see **Appendix** for statistics.

Tactics

Phelian may be paranoid and frightened, but he is no fool. He fights almost completely defensively, waiting for an opportunity to slice an opponent with his rapier. When he retreated to his dressing room, Phelian laced the blade of his rapier with incapacitating poison and hopes to take down the characters and escape. If things look grim, he forces his way out of the room, but otherwise he uses the total defense action, or readies actions to attack only when threatened, in order to save his skin for as long as possible. If it looks as though the party intends to bring him in alive, he kills himself by falling on his sword, though he only does this as an absolute last resort.

Development

If the party manages to capture Phelian alive and prevent him from killing himself, he wails and rants in an attempt to alert others to his capture. It is his hope that he can either escape or get himself killed. Captivity for Phelian would drive him insane, and he knows this. He begs to be released, attempting every possible avenue of subterfuge, lying, bribing, or threatening to avoid capture. The only thing he fears more is Orlen's madness, and he will not do anything that brings him into contact with the insane bard or his minions.

Treasure

Phelian's personal belongings are meager, though he does have a few items of value. In addition to his +1 rapier, Phelian also has an extensive collection of poisons and antitoxins (worth approximately 200 gp to the right buyer). He has several changes of clothes scattered throughout the room, and carries roughly 50 gp worth of coin and jewels in his belt pouch.

O7: Dressing Room 3 (EL 6)

Note: This is an extremely challenging encounter. If the PCs are weak, injured, or short of party members, either skip the fight or remove Lurgrek's gaze ability.

This dressing room is identical to Phelian's, even including the shattered mirror and fragmented furniture scattered throughout the room. However, this room acts as the personal quarters to one of Orlen's most frightening allies. Lurgrek is a horrific creature out of nightmare; part bugbear, part basilisk, he shares all of the most frightening qualities of each creature. Lurgrek is a huge, hulking humanoid creature with scaly purple skin and long, narrow spines for hair. His face resembles that of a basilisk's head, though his muscular body shows his obvious bugbear heritage. Orlen hired the basilisk as a physical guardian of the opera house, and he does his job extremely well. Lurgrek feels no camaraderie or friendship with Orlen, and just does as the mad bard asks because he is paid well.

Creatures

When the characters arrive at the opera house, there is a 50% chance that Lurgrek is in his chambers, a 30% chance that he is patrolling the halls in the rear part of the opera house, and a 20% chance that he is walking the grounds outside of the building. A secret door just down the hall from Lurgrek's room grants him (and Orlen) access to the rear of the opera house without having to pass through the main auditorium. A DC 27 Search check reveals the secret door, which may be opened by pushing the door in and to the side.

Lurgrek, Basilisk: hp 39, see **Appendix** for statistics.

Tactics

Lurgrek knows his own strengths and weaknesses, and goes out of his way to exploit them. He attempts to use his petrifying gaze on any obvious spellcasters right from the beginning; his best chance for success is to aim his gaze at a character with a low Fortitude save, and Lurgrek has fought enough enemies to know spellcasters are usually unable to resist the transformation. Failing that, Lurgrek wades in with his morningstar, dealing crushing blows to any lightly armored foes. He does his best to avoid obvious fighters and warriors, instead preferring to pick off the weaker enemies before moving on to the stronger. When faced with a heavily armed or armored opponent, he uses his shield and fights defensively, attempting to use his gaze attack on other targets while still defending himself.

Treasure

Lurgrek is well equipped, having been given many gifts by Orlen to ensure his continued loyalty. Other than his personal possessions, Lurgrek possesses no outwardly visible wealth and no money or gems of any kind.

O8: Collapsed Dressing Room

The ceiling of this dressing room has collapsed, filling the entire room with debris. The door will not open inward due to the piles of wood and brick inside.

O9: Composition Room (EL 3)

When Orlen took over the opera house, he converted a large storage room into a place where he could compose his great works without being disturbed. Clearing out all the rot and debris, Orlen transformed the sagging room by wheeling in a piano salvaged from another storage room and putting in a desk where he could work. When the characters arrive in this room, read or paraphrase the following text.

- Act Three: Orlen's Opera House -

This long room appears to have been cleared of all debris. Sitting in the center of the room is a large, standing piano, with several candelabras resting on its top, their candles providing faint illumination for the room. A desk sits off to one side of the room, covered in melted candles and stacks of books and papers. A quill and inkwell rest on the desk, and a small section has been cleared out for writing.

This is where Orlen does most of his composing, whether creating new songs and operas or simply writing plays for Theomar and his troupe to perform. Unfortunately, he is no longer the only person using this room. When Orlen began composing once more, after making the bargain with Theomar, he poured every ounce of his creativity and madness into his works. Over time, his insanity and extreme efforts yielded unexpected results. Slowly, a dark specter took form in this room, born of every shred of madness and energy that Orlen expended. The result was a creature known as a madness muse, a disturbing manifestation of all of the darkness within Orlen's creations.

Creatures

The madness muse is a slender but tall creature, vaguely humanoid in shape but with distorted limbs covered in moist gray skin. The madness muse's body is completely hairless, but its face is a nightmarish twisting of a human's; the face of the madness muse is covered in eyes and mouths, scattered around haphazardly and all animated, spewing gibberish while the eyes roll.

Madness Muse: hp 37, see **Appendix** for statistics.

Tactics

The madness muse is a nearly mindless being, serving only as the inspiration for the shadowy dreams Orlen puts onto paper. Out of instinct, it lashes out at anyone but Orlen who enters the room, attempting to corrupt their minds just as the corruption of Orlen's mind created the madness muse.

Treasure

The piano itself is well made, but slightly damaged, and could bring as much as 400 gp from the right buyer (assuming the party finds a way to transport it). The rough works that Orlen has left on the table would fetch a decent price from a collector that appreciated the original works of the mad bard, and are valued at roughly 200 gp total.

O10: Collapsed Storage Room

The ceiling of this storage room has collapsed, filling the entire room with debris. The door will not open inward, due to the piles of wood and brick inside.

O11: Vargouilles Nest (EL 5)

One of the opera house's large storage rooms has been converted into a nest for a group of evil vargouilles that leech off the effects of Orlen's madness. Inside the room, a grisly sight awaits intrepid party members. Read or paraphrase the following text when the characters enter the room.

This room reeks of death, the coppery smell of blood and the stench of decay heavy in the air. Inside, the walls have been blackened and the ceiling sags heavily, as though threatening to collapse. Rotting vegetation can be seen everywhere in the room, and stacks of what appear to be logs from fallen trees line the back half of the room. Dead animal carcasses litter the grass-covered floor, and a dark red bloodstain covers much of one side of the room.

Lying in a heap up against one side wall is the bloodied form of a human woman. Her entire side appears to have been ripped out, and her skin bears visible evidence of bite marks.

Three vargouilles currently inhabit this room, though originally there was only one. When Orlen first discovered Abdezel's true name and was working on translating it into music, a rogue vargouille took notice and traveled to the

Material Plane to investigate. Sensing Orlen's madness, and the depravity that he was wont to partake in, the vargouille lingered around the opera house and began providing subtle hints that aided Orlen in his task. Over time, as Orlen perfected his dark works, he rewarded the vargouille by having the Vagabond Players kidnap people that would not be missed, bringing them back for the creature to feast upon. The vargouille used its kiss ability to transform two of its victims into vargouilles, but their latest victim was not so lucky.

When Phelian and Sarelda returned from the Golden Curtain, Sarelda saw that Orlen was beyond coherence and knew that their lives might be in danger. As she does with many men, Sarelda attempted to use her feminine charms to coax Orlen into abandoning the opera house and his frightening pursuits. Unfortunately for her, Orlen only has eyes for the corpse of Matilda Drearden, and he rebuffed her and grew angry. Decrying her as a harlot, he ordered Phelian to feed Sarelda to the vargouilles, which he did, out of fear. The vargouilles devoured her slowly and painfully, while her screams echoed through the halls, driving Phelian to the edge of madness himself.

Creatures

The vargouilles attack as soon as the PCs enter this room.

Vargouilles (3): hp 5 each, see *MM* for statistics.

Tactics

The vargouilles are bloodthirsty and utterly evil, but with an entire party full of adventurers they know that they have more than enough food to subsist on. As such, they do their best to turn at least half of the party into vargouilles using their kiss ability, leaving the other half to be killed and devoured.

Treasure

Among the refuse are the remains of several humans, though only Sarelda's body has anything of value on it. All of her personal possessions, as described in the **Appendix**, are here.

O12: Library (EL 4)

Orlen stores all of his belongings in a single chamber, which he refers to as his library. In truth, this room is little more than a collection of desks and the remains of chairs and tables, all stacked high with books, scrolls, and parchments. Melted candles and empty oil lamps litter the room, and there seems to be almost no organization to the materials within. The disorder is a clear sign of Orlen's insanity, as there is no pattern or reason to the layout of the library. Orlen had the room warded with a *glyph of warding* in order to keep others from discovering his secrets.

GLYPH OF warding (BLAST)

CR 4

Search DC 28; **Type** Magical; **Reset** No reset

Trigger Proximity

Targets all creatures within 5 feet

Effect 2d8 points of acid damage, DC 14 Reflex for half

Disarm Disable Device DC 28

Any character that spends at least one hour perusing the papers and books within can get a solid idea of what, exactly, Orlen has been doing. They discover the origins of the song that manipulated Matilda Drearden (including the bard's discovery of Abdezel's true name) and Orlen's entire history, as well as clues to the depths of Orlen's insanity. Additionally, the other *parchment of sending* (keyed to the one Theomar carried) rests within this chamber.

O13: Ballroom (EL 6)

At the end of the opera house is a great ballroom. Once used to host parties and functions for those attending the opera, it now serves as Orlen's sanctuary and the site of a wedding ceremony for a lunatic. When the characters arrive in this room, read or paraphrase the following text.

- Act Three: Orlen's Opera House -

This large chamber would once have been grand and beautiful, but now it is in shambles. Rising to a height of over 40 feet tall, this room is a half-dome once covered by a series of glass windows, completely transparent to the outside. Now all but a few panes of glass are gone, leaving just a curved skeleton of metal where the ballroom's windows once hung. In the center of the room, a chipped stone fountain rises up 10 feet into the air, with a pool of stagnant water standing in its basin.

A hulking black tree dominates the left side of this great chamber. Stretching up and out the top of the half-dome ceiling, this dark tree seems to have burst forth from the ground underneath the opera house floor, its 20-foot diameter trunk covered in black bark. Its limbs droop down, with hanging leaves and moss almost touching the floor. The tree has a sickly look about it, and though it seems large and strong, the tree seems possessed of some sort of dangerous malady.

To the right side of the room, a much different sight can be seen. Several tables have been set up, and decorations have been strung from parts of the window framework. Though dirty and ragged, the decorations are clearly similar to those used when celebrating a wedding, and the man standing next to them seems almost blissful. Short and wearing tattered, moth-eaten black clothing, the pale-faced man can be none other than Orlen. His sunken eyes gleam with a hint of madness, and his oily black hair stands up at all angles as though he just finished trying to yank it out.

"Ah! Guests! Guests for the wedding! How perfect!" he cries out, wheeling around to look at you. "So good of you to come. Matilda did not think we would get the invitations to you in time, but here you are. She will be most pleased. Come, join me in celebrating. Tonight, Matilda and I wed, and tomorrow we leave for our honeymoon."

Orlen has completely deteriorated, believing he and a still-living Matilda are to be wed. Having exacted his revenge upon Magistrate Drearden, the last shreds of his sanity have fled. It takes no more than the slightest aggressive move on behalf of the adventurers—casting a spell, drawing a weapon, or even reaching to pull an object out of a pack—to cause Orlen to go on the offensive.

Creatures

The enormous black tree on the left side of the chamber is yet another product of Orlen's insanity. When the mad bard first fled to this opera house, it stood empty and ravaged by the weather. He first sought shelter here in the ballroom, and lay huddled on the floor next to a small, sprouting tree. His tears of despair fell upon this sapling, and his torment flowed out into the plant like sunlight on a healthy tree. The tree grew at an enormous rate, drinking in Orlen's madness and depression and growing strong and vile at the same time. This sapling, whose roots were wetted by the lunatic bard's tears, grew into a dangerous source of evil magic, a Tree of Woe.

The Tree of Woe emits bursts of despair, torment, and wickedness that flow out into the room. Every three rounds (beginning on the first round of combat), all non-evil characters within 50 feet of the Tree of Woe must make a DC 14 Will save or become shaken for three rounds. Also, once every three rounds, it can release a burst of torment, forcing all good-aligned creatures to make DC 14 Will saves or become sickened for three rounds. Additionally, any spells with the evil descriptor are cast as though one level higher while within 50 feet of the Tree of Woe.

Orlen: hp 18, see **Appendix** for statistics.

Tree of Woe: hardness 5, hp 28.

Tactics

Orlen has no regard for his own life, and indeed, it is unlikely he even understands the concept of mortal danger any longer. He does anything he can to defeat the players, whom he sees as trying to ruin his happy day. Orlen starts by casting summon monster II from his wand, and once his minion appears, he uses spells (since he has very little in the way of true combat prowess) and



his wand of hold person to keep his enemies at bay. He always maneuvers his opponents close to the Tree of Woe to take advantage of its despair pulses.

Orlen fights to the death.

Treasure

Though most of Orlen's most valuable possessions are elsewhere, he does have a few items of interest. In addition to the items he carries on his person, the decorations he has set out for the wedding might fetch 50 gp from the right buyer, especially the silver dining utensils. Also, Orlen has a "wedding gift" for Matilda sitting on one of the tables: a *ring of protection* +1, that he planned to use as her wedding ring. It sits in a small ring box on the table, and is easily visible.

Concluding the Adventure

With Orlen dead and the body of Matilda Drearden recovered, Magistrate Drearden is more than happy to give the characters their promised bounty. Additionally, the magistrate orders the opera house be razed to the ground, and invites the PCs to watch as the den of evil goes up in smoke.

If any of the members of the Vagabond Players escaped (or were let go, as may have been the case for Phelian), they could show up later as adversaries seeking revenge for ruining their fame and fortune. Any bards that obtained the last few plays and songs written by Orlen may wish to keep them for themselves; when performing Orlen's last pieces, the bard gains a +2 circumstance bonus to any Perform checks made using those works. Finally, the heroes likely have a good ally in the form of Magistrate Drearden, who, without his wife, might choose to act as a patron to the party, or at least offer them refuge in his manor should they need it.

- Appendix: Collected Statistics -

This Appendix collects statistics, magic items, and all the other new mechanics presented in *Dirge of the Damned*.

Nonplayer Characters

The following NPCs are featured in this adventure.

MAGISTRATE HUGO DREARDEN	CR 5
Male human aristocrat 6 LG Medium humanoid Init +0; Senses Listen +2, Spot +2 Languages Common, Elven	
AC 10, touch 10, flat-footed 10 (+0 Dex) hp 27 (6 HD) Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +9	
Spd 30 ft. (6 squares) Melee mwk rapier +5 (1d6/18–20) or Melee dagger +4 (1d4/19–20) Base Atk +4; Grp +4	
Abilities Str 10, Dex 11, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 15, Cha 13 Feats Great Fortitude, Iron Will, Negotiator ^B , Leadership Skills Appraise +6, Bluff +7, Diplomacy +18, Disguise +1 (+3 acting), Gather Information +9, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (local) +9, Knowledge (nobility) +9, Listen +2, Sense Motive +9, Spot +2 Possessions masterwork rapier, dagger, noble's outfit, signet ring, 60 gp	
MATILDA DREARDEN	CR 1
Female human aristocrat 2 LG Medium humanoid Init +1; Senses Listen +1, Spot +1 Languages Common, Elven	
AC 11, touch 11, flat-footed 10 (+1 Dex) hp 7 (2 HD) Fort –1, Ref +1, Will +4	
Spd 30 ft. (6 squares) Melee unarmed strike +0 (1d3–1 nonlethal) Base Atk +1; Grp +0	
Abilities Str 8, Dex 12, Con 8, Int 13, Wis 12, Cha 15 Feats Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Skill Focus (Sense Motive) ^B Skills Bluff +7, Diplomacy +16, Disguise +2 (+4 acting), Gather Information +4, Intimidate +4, Knowledge (local) +6, Knowledge (nobility) +5, Listen +1, Perform (dance) +7, Sense Motive +9, Spot +1 Possessions noble's outfit, belt pouch with 120 gp, signet ring, jewelry worth 250 gp	
ORLEN THE MAD BARD	CR 6
Male human bard 6 CE Medium humanoid Init +2; Senses Listen –1, Spot –1 Languages Common, Draconic, Elven, Infernal	
AC 17, touch 13, flat-footed 15; Dodge (+2 Dex, +3 armor, +1 deflection, +1 natural) hp 18 (6 HD) Fort +1, Ref +7, Will +4	
Spd 30 ft. (6 squares) Melee mwk rapier +7 (1d6/18–20) Base Atk +4; Grp +4	

Special Actions bardic music (*suggestion* DC 17, inspire competence, inspire courage +1, *fascinate* 2 targets, countersong)
Combat Gear wand of false life (5 charges), wand of hold person (5 charges), wand of summon monster II (5 charges)

Bard Spells Known (CL 6th):

2nd (3/day)—*hypnotic pattern* (DC 16), *scare* (DC 16), *suggestion* (DC 17)
1st (4/day)—*cause fear* (DC 15), *charm person* (DC 16), *lesser confusion* (DC 16), *sleep* (DC 16)
0 (3/day)—*daze* (DC 15), *detect magic*, *ghost sound* (DC 14), *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*, *read magic*

Abilities Str 10, Dex 14, Con 9, Int 16, Wis 8, Cha 18

SQ bardic knowledge +9

Feats Combat Casting, Dodge^B, Spell Focus (enchantment), Weapon Finesse

Skills Bluff +13, Concentration +8, Decipher Script +7, Diplomacy +8, Disguise +4 (+6 acting), Hide +7, Intimidate +6, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Knowledge (the planes) +8, Listen –1, Move Silently +6, Perform (acting) +13, Perform (keyboards) +13, Perform (stringed instruments) +13, Perform (wind instruments) +13, Sense Motive +4, Spellcraft +9, Spot –1, Survival –1 (+1 on other planes)

Possessions masterwork studded leather armor, masterwork rapier, ring of protection +1, amulet of natural armor +1, entertainer's outfit

THEOMAR FIVEFACES

CR 4

Male human rogue 4
CN Medium humanoid

Init +2; **Senses** Listen +2, Spot +5

Languages Common

AC 15, touch 12, flat-footed 15; uncanny dodge (+2 Dex, +3 armor)

Resist evasion

hp 18 (4 HD)

Fort +2, **Ref** +6, **Will** +3

Spd 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee short sword +4 (1d6+1/19–20)

Melee blade of walking death +5 (1d4+2/×3)

Ranged dagger +5 (1d4+1/19–20)

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +4

Atk Options sneak attack +2d6

Abilities Str 12, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 16

SQ trap sense +1, trapfinding

Feats Persuasive^B, Skill Focus (Bluff), Skill Focus (Disguise)

Skills Bluff +15, Diplomacy +14, Disguise +13 (+15 acting), Gather Information +7, Hide +7, Intimidate +14, Listen +2, Move Silently +7, Perform (acting) +10, Sense Motive +9, Sleight of Hand +6, Spot +5, Tumble +4

Possessions masterwork studded leather, short sword, dagger, blade of walking death, disguise kit, entertainer's outfit, 20 gp

DAGGER PHANTOM

CR 1

CE Medium undead (incorporeal)

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +2, Spot +1

Languages —

AC 12, touch 12, flat-footed 11 (+1 Dex, +1 deflection)

Miss Chance 50% corporeal attacks

hp 13 (2 HD)

Immune undead immunities

Fort +0, **Ref** +1, **Will** +2

Weakness daylight powerlessness

New Item: Blade of Walking Death

A wicked weapon used by necromancers to advance their dark arts, the *blade of walking death* creates undead from those killed by it.

Description

A *blade of walking death* is a small punching dagger with a long, narrow blade and a plain silver hilt. Typically, etchings on the blade depict images of death, such as skulls or bones, and the handle is capped with a black opal.

Activation

The *blade of walking death* can be activated by casting any spell (as a swift action) into the weapon in any round in which the *blade of walking death* is used to deliver a killing blow. The spell cast into the *blade of walking death* does not have its normal effect, and instead, the energy is absorbed and channeled to power the weapon's special effect. The spellcaster must be able to touch the blade in order to channel a spell into it. When not used in this way, the weapon functions as a +1 *punching dagger*.

Effect

Whenever a character channels a spell into the *blade of walking death* in a round in which the weapon was used to deliver a killing blow, the *blade of walking death* transforms a part of the victim's spirit into a dagger phantom (see following). The dagger phantom exists for 10 minutes per level of the spell cast into it (casting a 0-level spell into the weapon produces no effect), after which it vanishes.

Aura/Caster Level: Strong necromancy; CL 14th.

Construction: Craft Magic Arms and Armor; animate dead; 2,155 gp; 173 XP; 3 days.

Weight: 1 lb

Price: 4,310 gp.

Spd fly 20 ft. (poor) Melee touch +2 (1d4 plus grave chill) Base Atk +1; Grp — Atk Options grave chill
Abilities Str —, Dex 13, Con —, Int 1, Wis 8, Cha 4 SQ tortured existence Feats Weapon Focus (touch) Skills Listen +2, Spot +1 Grave Chill (Su) Creatures struck by a dagger phantom's touch attack must succeed on a DC 8 Fortitude save or become <i>slowed</i> for 1 round. Tortured Existence (Ex) Dagger phantoms may only remain on the material plane for 10 minutes per spell level invested in their creation before they dissolve, forever destroyed. Characters who become phantoms and whose spirits are destroyed may only be raised by a <i>miracle</i> , <i>true resurrection</i> , or <i>wish</i> spell.

PHELIAN	CR 4
Male elf rogue 4 CN Medium humanoid Init +3; Senses low-light vision; Listen +9, Spot +4 Languages Common, Elven	
AC 16, touch 13, flat-footed 16; uncanny dodge (+3 Dex, +3 armor) hp 14 (4 HD) Resist evasion Immune sleep Fort +1, Ref +7, Will +3 (+5 against enchantments)	
Spd 30 ft. (6 squares) Melee +1 rapier +5 (1d6+2/18–20) Ranged dagger +6 (1d4+1/19–20) Base Atk +3; Grp +4 Atk Options poison (black adder venom, DC 11, initial and secondary damage 1d6 Con), sneak attack +2d6 Combat Gear dose of black adder venom	
Abilities Str 12, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 15 SQ able to notice secret or concealed doors, trap sense +1, trapfinding	

Feats Skill Focus (Bluff), Skill Focus (Disguise) Skills Bluff +12, Diplomacy +5, Disguise +12 (+14 acting), Gather Information +5, Hide +7, Intimidate +9, Listen +9, Move Silently +7, Perform (acting) +9, Search +2, Sense Motive +4, Sleight of Hand +9, Spot +4, Tumble +4 Possessions combat gear plus studded leather armor, +1 rapier, dagger, disguise kit, noble's outfit, 10 gp
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SARELDA	CR 4
Female human rogue 4 CN Medium humanoid Init +2; Senses Listen +7, Spot +5 Languages Common, Elven	
AC 15, touch 12, flat-footed 13; uncanny dodge (+2 Dex, +3 armor) hp 14 (4 HD) Resist evasion Fort +1, Ref +6, Will +3	
Spd 30 ft. (6 squares) Melee dagger +3 (1d4/19–20) Base Atk +3; Grp +3 Atk Options sneak attack +2d6	
Abilities Str 10, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 15, Cha 18 SQ trap sense +1, trapfinding Feats Persuasive ^B , Skill Focus (Bluff), Skill Focus (Perform: acting) Skills Bluff +16, Diplomacy +15, Disguise +11 (+13 acting), Gather Information +9, Hide +6, Intimidate +13, Listen +7, Move Silently +6, Perform (acting) +14, Sense Motive +7, Sleight of Hand +9, Spot +5, Tumble +4 Possessions studded leather, dagger, <i>cloak of Charisma</i> +2, 50 gp in coins and gaudy jewelry	

CAESAR	CR 6
Male halfling rogue 3/bard 3 CN Small humanoid Init +2; Senses Listen +4, Spot +2 Languages Common, Elven, Halfling	

- Appendix: Collected Statistics -

AC 17, touch 13, flat-footed 15; Dodge (+1 size, +2 Dex, +3 armor, +1 natural) hp 21 (6 HD) Resist evasion Fort +3, Ref +9, Will +7 (+9 against fear)
Spd 20 ft. (4 squares) Melee mwk dagger +6 (1d3/19–20) Ranged throwing dagger +8 (1d3/19–20) Base Atk +4; Grp +0 Atk Options sneak attack +2d6 Special Actions bardic music (inspire competence, inspire courage +1, fascinate 1 target, countersong)
Bard Spells Known (CL 3rd): 1st (2/day)— <i>charm person</i> (DC 14), <i>expeditious retreat</i> , <i>silent image</i> 0 (3/day)— <i>daze</i> (DC 13), <i>detect magic</i> , <i>flare</i> , <i>ghost sound</i> (DC 12), <i>lullaby</i> (DC 13), <i>read magic</i>
Abilities Str 10, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 15 SQ bardic knowledge +4, trap sense +1, trapfinding Feats Dodge, Skill Focus (Bluff), Spell Focus (enchantment) Skills Bluff +14, Climb +2, Diplomacy +4, Disguise +8 (+10 acting), Gather Information +11, Hide +15, Intimidate +4, Jump +2, Listen +4, Move Silently +13, Perform (acting) +11, Perform (stringed instruments) +11, Sleight of Hand +13, Spot +2, Use Magic Device +8 Possessions masterwork studded leather, masterwork daggers, 4 throwing daggers, <i>amulet of natural armor</i> +1, <i>mandolin of sounding</i> (as <i>pipes of sounding</i>), entertainer's outfit, 17 gp in coins

DRANGO	CR 4
Male gnome illusionist 4 CN Small humanoid Init +6; Senses low-light vision; Listen +3, Spot +1 Languages Common, Draconic, Dwarven, Goblin, Gnome	
AC 14, touch 13, flat-footed 12; +4 against giants (+1 size, +2 Dex, +1 armor) hp 14 (4 HD) Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +5 (+7 against illusions)	
Spd 20 ft. (4 squares) Melee quarterstaff +2 (1d4–1) Ranged mwk light crossbow +6 (1d6/19–20) Base Atk +2; Grp –3 Atk Options +1 on attacks against kobolds and goblinoids Combat Gear <i>feather token</i> (fan), <i>potion of cure light wounds</i> , <i>wand of silent image</i>	
Illusionist Spells Prepared (CL 4th): 2nd— <i>blur</i> , <i>flaming sphere</i> (DC 15), <i>invisibility</i> , <i>mirror image</i> 1st— <i>color spray</i> (DC 16) (×2), <i>mage armor</i> , <i>magic missile</i> , <i>shield</i> 0— <i>acid splash</i> (ranged touch +5), <i>flare</i> (DC 13), <i>ghost sound</i> (DC 15), <i>mage hand</i> , <i>message</i>	
Spell-like Abilities (CL 1st): 1/day— <i>dancing lights</i> , <i>ghost sound</i> (DC 10), <i>prestidigitation</i> , <i>speak with animals</i> (burrowing mammals, 1 minute)	
Abilities Str 8, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 13, Cha 10 SQ familiar (none) Feats Improved Initiative, Scribe Scroll ^B , Spell Focus (illusion) Skills Appraise +3 (+5 Craft), Concentration +8, Craft (alchemy) +12, Decipher Script +10, Hide +6, Knowledge (arcana) +10, Listen +3, Spellcraft +12, Spot +1 Possessions combat gear plus quarterstaff, masterwork light crossbow with 10 bolts, <i>bracers of armor</i> +1 Spellbook all prepared plus 0—all cantrips except for enchantment and necromancy; 1st— <i>charm person</i> , <i>comprehend languages</i> , <i>disguise self</i>	

CECILIA HARGRAVE	CR 3
Female human expert 4 NG Medium humanoid Init +0; Senses Listen +9, Spot +7 Languages Common	
AC 10, touch 10, flat-footed 10 (+0 Dex) hp 14 (4 HD) Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +9	
Spd 30 ft. (6 squares) Melee unarmed strike +4 (1d3+1 nonlethal) Base Atk +3; Grp +4	
Abilities Str 12, Dex 11, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 16, Cha 14 Feats Iron Will ^B , Negotiator, Persuasive Skills Bluff +9, Diplomacy +13, Disguise +2 (+4 acting), Gather Information +9, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (local) +4, Listen +9, Search +3, Sense Motive +12, Sleight of Hand +6, Spot +7 Possessions artisan's outfit, 10 sp	

Monster Statistics

The following new monsters are used in *Dirge of the Damned*.

DREAD WIGHT KRENSHAR	CR 3
LE Medium undead (augmented magical beast) Init +4; Senses blindsense 60 ft., darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent; Listen +2, Spot +2 Languages —	
AC 21, touch 14, flat-footed 17 (+4 Dex, +7 natural) hp 13 (2 HD) Immune undead immunities Fort +3, Ref +7, Will +2	
Spd 40 ft. (8 squares) Melee bite +3 (1d6+1 plus energy drain) and Melee 2 claws +1 (1d4) Base Atk +2; Grp +3 Atk Options energy drain Special Actions command wights, create spawn, scare	
Abilities Str 13, Dex 18, Con —, Int 8, Wis 14, Cha 17 SQ turn resistance +4 Feats Multiattack, Track ^B Skills Hide +4, Jump +10, Listen +2, Move Silently +12, Spot +2	
Energy Drain (Su) A creature struck by a dread wight krenshar's bite attack gains one negative level. The DC is 14 for the Fortitude save to remove a negative level. The save DC is Charisma-based. For each such negative level bestowed, the dread wight krenshar gains 5 temporary hit points.	
Command Wights (Su) A dread wight krenshar may automatically command all normal wights within 30 feet as a free action.	
Create Spawn (Su) Any creature killed by a dread wight krenshar's energy drain ability rises as a dread wight in 1d4 rounds.	
Scare (Ex or Su) As a standard action, a krenshar can pull the skin back from its head, revealing the musculature and bony structures of its skull. This alone is usually sufficient to scare away foes (treat as an Intimidate check with a +5 bonus).	
Combining this scare ability with a loud screech produces an unsettling effect that works like a <i>scare</i> spell from a 3rd-level caster (Will DC 15 partial). A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected again by the same krenshar's scare ability for 24 hours. The shriek does not affect other krenshars. This is a supernatural, sonic, mind-affecting, fear effect. The save DC is Charisma-based.	

- Appendix: Collected Statistics -

Skills: Wight krenshars have a +4 racial bonus on Jump checks and a +8 bonus on Move Silently checks.

WIGHT KRENSHAR

CR 1

LE Medium undead (augmented magical beast)

Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent; **Listen** +2, **Spot** +2

Languages —

AC 20, **touch** 13, **flat-footed** 17 (+3 Dex, +7 natural)

hp 13 (2 HD)

Immune undead immunities

Fort +3, **Ref** +6, **Will** +2

Spd 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee bite +3 (1d6+1 plus energy drain) and

Melee 2 claws +1 (1d4)

Base Atk +2; **Grp** +3

Atk Options energy drain

Special Actions create spawn, scare

Abilities Str 13, Dex 16, Con —, Int 6, Wis 14, Cha 17

Feats Multiattack, Track^B

Skills Hide +3, Jump +10, Listen +2, Move Silently +11, Spot +2

Energy Drain (Su) A creature struck by a wight krenshar's bite attack gains one negative level. The DC is 14 for the Fortitude save to remove a negative level. The save DC is Charisma-based. For each such negative level bestowed, the wight krenshar gains 5 temporary hit points.

Create Spawn (Su) Any creature killed by a wight krenshar's energy drain ability rises as a wight in 1d4 rounds.

Scare (Ex or Su) As a standard action, a krenshar can pull the skin back from its head, revealing the musculature and bony structures of its skull. This alone is usually sufficient to scare away foes (treat as an Intimidate check with a +5 bonus).

Combining this scare ability with a loud screech produces an unsettling effect that works like a *scare* spell from a 3rd-level caster (Will DC 15 partial). A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected again by the same krenshar's scare ability for 24 hours. The shriek does not affect other krenshars. This is a supernatural, sonic, mind-affecting, fear effect. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Skills: Wight krenshars have a +4 racial bonus on Jump checks and a +8 bonus on Move Silently checks.

LURGREG

CR 5

Male basilbear (amalgam* basilisk/bugbear)

NE Medium aberration (augmented humanoid)

Init +0; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; **Listen** +4, **Spot** +4

Languages Common, Goblin

*This template is described in *Green Ronin's Advanced Bestiary*

AC 20, **touch** 10, **flat-footed** 20 (+0 Dex, +3 armor, +2 shield, +5 natural)

hp 39 (6 HD)

Fort +7, **Ref** +3, **Will** +6

Spd 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee bite +6 (1d8+2) or

Melee +1 *morningstar* +8 (1d8+3)

Ranged javelin +4 (1d6+2)

Base Atk +4; **Grp** +4

Special Actions petrifying gaze

Combat Gear 2 potions of cure moderate wounds

Abilities Str 15, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 6, Wis 11, Cha 10

Feats Alertness, Great Fortitude, Weapon Focus (*morningstar*)

Skills Climb +3, Hide +4*, Listen +4, Move Silently +6, Spot +4

Possessions combat gear plus masterwork studded leather, heavy wooden shield, +1 *morningstar*, *cloak of resistance* +1



Petrifying Gaze (Su) Turn to stone permanently, range 30 feet; Fortitude DC 13 negates. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Skills: *Lugrek gains a +4 racial bonus to Hide checks made in natural settings.

Madness Muse

This tall creature has the shape of a humanoid, but its limbs are twisted and its skin drips with moisture. Its face is a nightmarish mess of eyes and mouths, scattered haphazardly about its head.

MADNESS MUSE

CR 3

Always CE Medium aberration

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; **Listen** +2, **Spot** +2

Languages Common

AC 14, **touch** 12, **flat-footed** 12 (+2 Dex, +2 natural)

hp 37 (5 HD)

Fort +4, **Ref** +3, **Will** +2

Spd 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee slam +4 (1d4+1 plus madness touch)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +4

Atk Options madness touch

Spell-like Abilities (CL 7th):

At will—*disguise self*

3/day—*charm monster* (DC 15), *touch of idiocy* (melee touch +4)

Abilities Str 12, Dex 14, Con 17, Int 10, Wis 6, Cha 13

Feats Ability Focus (madness touch), Improved Initiative

Skills Bluff +9, Diplomacy +3, Disguise +1 (+3 acting), Intimidate +3, Listen +2, Spot +2

- Appendix: Collected Statistics -



Madness Touch (Su) Whenever the madness muse hits an opponent with a slam attack, the opponent must succeed on a DC 15 Will save or become confused for 5 rounds. The save DC is Charisma-based.

The madness muse is a foul creature that feeds on the insanity it invokes.

Tactics

Although every bit as mad as its victims, a madness muse is a subtle creature, with no stomach for battle. Instead, it carefully selects its victim, watching from afar. Once it finds suitable prey, it conceals its disturbing visage with a *disguise self* spell, altering its appearance so that it appears as an attractive young woman or man. With the disguise in place, the madness muse targets its foe with a *charm monster* spell to allow it to get close. Henceforth, it spends its time caressing and stroking its victim, inspiring the confusion of insanity.

Encounters

Madness muses are solitary creatures and have little cause to interact with others of their kind, but most of these creatures are encountered with their victims, who are artists, poets, and visionaries. To their victims, the madness muse is a source of inspiration, and their victims fight to protect their companion.

Ecology

Strange creatures with stranger diets, madness muses are a race bred from the twisted mind of the Unspeakable One. They have one purpose, to consume the thoughts and imagination of mortals. Drawn to the most creative types, they pretend to be lovers or friends to get close. Once their victim accepts them, they use their madness touch to fill the individual's mind with strange and wonderful visions, on which the muse psychically feeds.

Physical Characteristics

A typical madness muse stands just under seven feet tall and weighs 150 pounds. Thin and spindly, it has the general shape of a humanoid. Its moist grey skin continually drips, leaving puddles of its slime wherever it goes, and those who have felt the madness muse's caress are covered in the stuff, whether they realize it or not. The most horrifying aspect of these strange creatures is their faces. Oblong, they scarcely resemble a human's, having numerous eyes and sucking orifices arranged seemingly at random.

Society

Madness muses are solitary creatures. They despise their own kind, seeing them as threats, for those on whom the muses feast are rare and highly sought by these aberrations. The only time two madness muses can tolerate each other's presence is during the rare, and disturbing, couplings, in which the two beings fuse their bodies for several hours. At the end of this time, they separate once more, but instead of two madness muses, there are three.

These creatures are deeply interested in the cultures of humanoid races, particularly in the arts. They may spend hours picking apart a painting, or humming, in a tuneless way, a song they've heard. They ape dance moves, stumble through poetry, and generally mangle whatever catches their interest. Always, the madness muse destroys the creation, through their efforts to reproduce it or their curious interest to see how it was made.

Treasure

Madness muses have treasure appropriate for their challenge rating. They invest their 900 gp in goods and art objects, but these items are always damaged in some way, reducing their individual value by half.

Advanced Madness Muses

Over time, madness muses advance with each mortal they've fed upon, consuming the insanity and using the energy from the act to become more powerful. Madness muses can have anywhere between 5 and 15 HD, though they are never larger than Medium creatures.

Madness Muse Lore

Characters with ranks in Knowledge (dungeoneering) can learn more about madness muses.

DC	Result
15	This creature is a madness muse, a vile aberration that feeds on the imagination of other creatures.
20	Madness muses are hard to spot because they can conceal their true forms behind a magical mask.
25	To get close to their victims, madness muses employ powerful enchantment magic. Worse, their touch inspires insanity and confusion, and they can erode the mind with the slightest caress.

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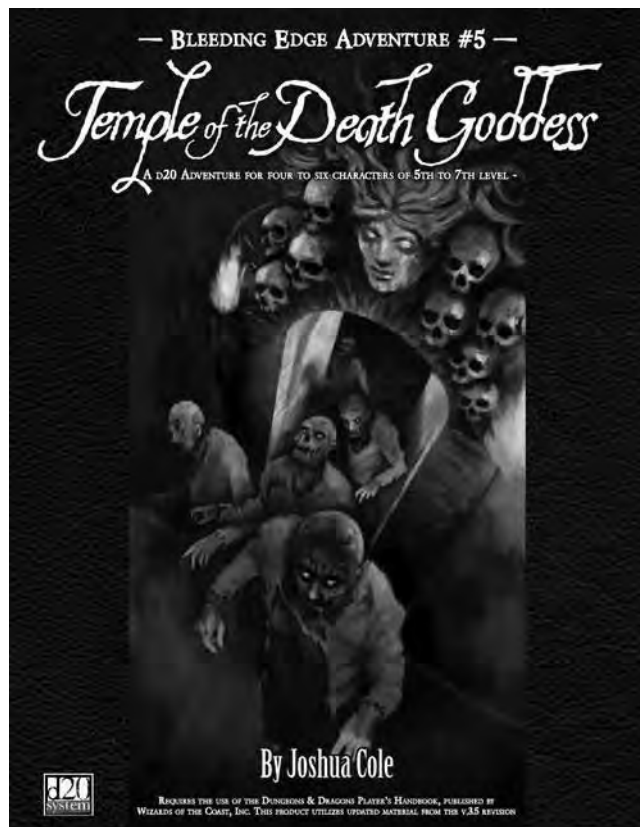
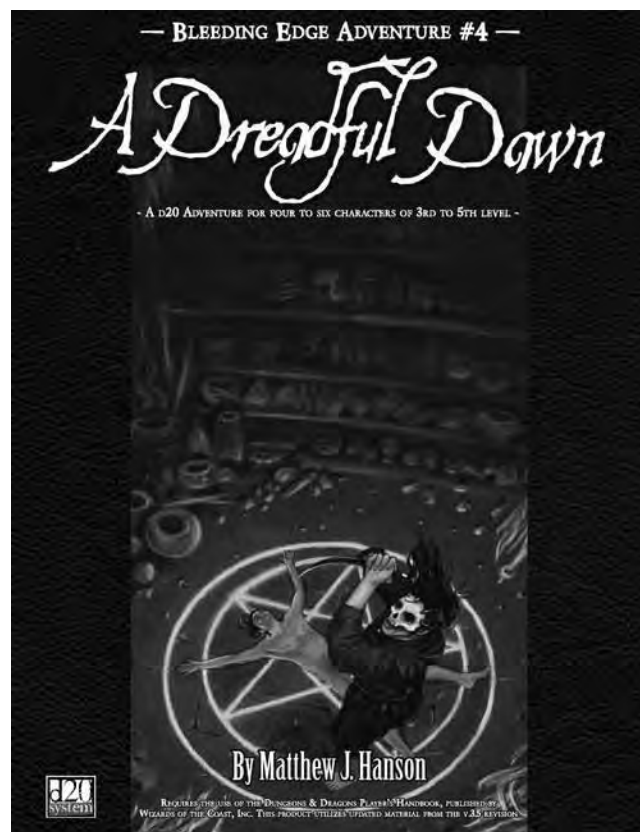
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