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THE PEASANTS' FELL BARGAIN

A LEVEL 0 ADVENTURE BY
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We at Gaming Honors would like to thank our intrepid playtesters, the very first to sign the fell bargain: Rob Swanson (the module's first judge!), Ted Swanson, Pete Sawochka-Dalton, Adam Hammond, Will Buinicki, Jack Buinicki, Aiden Howell, Emmett Richter, Ian Smith, Kieth Carlson, Andrew Richter, Chris Iceman, N. Hayden Hodge, Shrikrishna Kapote, Alexander Kapote, Nick "Bootleg" Lau, Justin "MrProdigy" Brinkley, Dylan "Aldan" Foster, Meara MacGregor and Aidan MacGregor.

With special thanks to Adam Hammond, who simulated and analyzed the results of 10,000 game runs to ensure that the peasants have a chance to survive...but not too good a chance!

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THE PEASANTS' FELL BARGAIN

Adventure Overview: This is an adventure for 12–15 0-level characters. When it begins, players should believe it is a rescue operation. After fleeing from a surprise raid on their estate, the local nobleman and his wife come to the village pleading with the player-characters to save their son Michael, who they believe is hiding somewhere on the property. The Lord Stenorian is desperate, and he promises to make the peasants' wildest dreams come true if they recover his son safely.

What the players don't know is that they are being drawn into a deadly sibling rivalry. For generations, the head of the Stenorian clan has offered his youngest child to the demon Corvusloth in exchange for longevity, magical power, and earthly privilege. A Forget spell would erase the child from his mother's memory, and the sacrifice's surviving brothers, conveniently away at school during the ritual, simply obeyed their father. Upon turning 20, the oldest son (always named Henry) would begin his apprenticeship with his father, while his younger brother (always named Stuart), long abused and manipulated, remained silent and gave deference to the eldest in exchange for wealth and safety.

But no longer. As Lord Henry Stenorian the VII prepared to sacrifice his son Michael to the demon, the lord's younger brother Stuart, now a follower of the dark arts himself and tired of begging for scraps, launched a raid on the keep. Breaking through the catacombs deep below the estate, Stuart and his allies surprised his father (Henry VI) in the underground temple as he readied for the ceremony. Upstairs, the ruling Lord Stenorian was unable to find Michael and was forced to flee as Stuart's forces overpowered his men.

Stuart intends to sacrifice the boy to Corvusloth himself, wresting power over the family estate from his brother. The PCs are in a race against time: can they rescue Michael before Stuart commits his foul deed? Once they do, will they turn him over to his father as they promised, only to see the boy meet the same grisly end?

When they learn the truth, will they keep their half of the fell bargain?

ENCOUNTER TABLE

AREA	TYPE	ENCOUNTER
II.A.	C	Possessed Corpses (2)
II.B.	T/C	Infected Corpse
II.C.	C	Baleful Mastiffs (3)
II.D.	C	Cerberus Hydra
III.A.	T/C	Chandelier/Gremlin Acolytes (4)
III.B.	T	Strongbox
III.E.	C	Acolytes (3) and Mastiff
III.G.	T/C	Enchanted Armor
III.N.	T/C	Wooden Ravens (4)
III.O.	T	Mirror
IV.A.	C	Baleful Mastiffs (2)
IV.C.	C	Possessed Corpses (3)
	C	Acolytes (4)
	C	Stuart
	C	Henry
IV.	T	House Collapse

[C=Combat; T=Trap]

In setting up this adventure, reinforce the hardscrabble existence of the PCs. Players should understand that, in spite of the risk, the lord's offer has the potential to change their lives forever.



I. A BARGAIN OF FIRE AND BLOOD

For generations your village has lived and worked in the shadow of the Stenorian estate, which sits perched like an ancient bird of prey on a promontory at the edge of the mountains. You eked out a hard living through logging, mining, or planting the rocky Stenorian lands. Each year you made the three-mile trip up the steep, winding road to pay rent and tribute to the men-at-arms standing watch at the keep's gate.

If the Stenorian line was never beloved, neither was it hated. The family simply kept to itself, sending its sons to distant lands to study, marry, and return. Closed carriages came and went—no words exchanged, no greetings given. Resentment over the family's refusal to hire locals added fuel to strange tales swapped over cups in the tavern, stories to scare children with by the firelight.

Time wore on, and nothing changed.

Until tonight. The night of the Harvest Festival, in the year 1610.

At first it is only a flickering glow far off, like sunset. Then some of you spot flames shooting into the night sky from behind the distant grey walls. Townsfolk pour out of their homes and from the celebration in the Welkin's Cheek, the town pub, to point and stare. Tongues wag and gossips buzz.

In the midst of the commotion, a stately carriage comes careening down the street, the horse's mouth flecked with foam, eyes rolling in panic. It is limping heavily, a large wooden splinter protruding from a foreleg. The driver pulls to a halt before tumbling from his seat. The Stenorian coat-of-arms on his tunic, a tree with ravens perched on its branches, is besmirched with his lifeblood. Several of you rush to his side, but you are distracted by a cry as the carriage door bursts open. A lady in fine clothing, torn and scorched, clutches a blood-soaked man in a singed bathrobe.

She looks at you desperately.

"My child! Please save my child!"

The man in her lap struggles to sit up, staring at you with intense brown eyes. Though he seems exhausted, his voice exudes power and privilege. It is the Lord Stenorian.

"We had no warning. My men are slain, my father is missing, and I have nowhere else to turn. My son! My son Michael is still in there somewhere. Find him! Save him! Do this for me, and I will reward you beyond your wildest imaginings." His eyes burn with a frightening intensity. "Hear me. Return my boy to me, and ask what you will. I promise you shall have

it." These last words seem to echo inside your minds as visions of a new future for you and your family float before you.

The lord and lady are clearly upset, but they are surprisingly vague about their attackers. If the players ask, the pair say only that raiders somehow breached the keep by surprise. There was no alarm, and no one entered through the gates. They think the raiders numbered no more than a dozen, but they caught most of the guard sleeping or unawares, murdering a force nearly twice as strong. They fear the elder Lord Stenorian, Henry VI, is slain, but they aren't certain. He was nowhere to be found.

They are most troubled that they could not find their youngest son Michael in the chaos. They tell the PCs that the boy always liked playing hide and seek, and the lady believes Michael ran and hid somewhere on the grounds at the sound of the attack.

The truth is much more disturbing. Michael's devoted nurse suspected Lord Stenorian was planning something terrible, and earlier that evening she told the boy to hide until she could find a way to save him. This is why his father was unable to locate him during the raid. Stuart and his men will have found the boy by the time the players arrive, but the PCs should not know this.

If the players ask why someone would attack the keep, the nobles claim they have no idea. The Lady Stenorian is honestly unsure, and the Lord Stenorian lapses in and out of consciousness, making it difficult to learn more. If pressed, he will say only that perhaps the invaders seek the family's fortune. Lord Stenorian is a skilled liar, and he has kept his family's secret for years; the PCs will not be able to detect his deception. He and his wife will continually urge the players to set out immediately. Stenorian believes the intruders are still in the manor, as he claims they spoke of ransacking the place. Time is of the essence if the PCs are to find Michael before the raiders do.

Stenorian will continue to make promises, obliquely hinting that he possesses more than earthly power. If they ask why he doesn't save the child himself, he will answer that he was also caught by surprise, and, wounded as he is, he cannot practice his art. When he is recovered, however, he promises that the very elements will bend to his will.

He will bend them for the PCs if they return the boy to him. They need only name their wish.

FELL BARGAIN BOON RULES—

The concept of a “Devil’s bargain” is a staple of fiction and folklore going way back. To incorporate such a fell bargain into your adventures, with random (and potentially more dramatic!) results, after the players seal the deal, have them roll a d20. Be sure to track the results for each player, and keep the consequences of breaking the contract close to the vest. The players should know these are potentially grave without knowing the true impact. Whether the bargain is struck with a powerful wizard, a demon, or a patron, the penalties always outweigh the rewards.

Be sure players record their rolls on their character sheets. If the PCs break the fell bargain, they suffer the consequences described for each dice roll. A PC reduced to zero hit points as a result of losing a bonus to hit points will drop to the ground dead. They will have one opportunity to make a Luck check (see “Recovering the Body” in the DCC Core Rulebook, page 93) to see if they can survive the consequences of their dereliction.

THE FELL BARGAIN TABLE

1-5: Gain one hitpoint; this hit point is subtracted if the character breaks the contract.

6-7: Gain two hitpoints; hit points subtracted if character breaks contract.

8-12: Gain two hitpoints and a one-point bonus to a random ability score (excluding Luck). All points are lost if player breaks contract.

13-15: Gain two hitpoints and a two-point bonus to a random ability score (excluding Luck). Points are lost if player breaks contract, and one point is drained from that attribute.

16-17: Gain +2 Luck bonus. These points, plus one additional point of Luck, are lost if player breaks contract. PC will be treated as character with lowest luck regardless of number for one week of game time.

18-19: Gain +2 Luck bonus and a +2 bonus to a random ability score (excluding Luck). These points are lost if player breaks contract, along with two additional points. PC is cursed, and will be treated as the unluckiest member of the party unless they find a way to remove the curse.

20: Gain +2 Luck bonus and a +2 bonus to an ability score of the player’s choosing. All of these points are lost if the PC breaks the contract. Additionally, the PC must make a Luck check: if the character fails to roll below their Luck score, they lose two additional Luck points and fall unconscious for 1d6 minutes.

If you choose to drive up the cost of keeping the bargain even further—after all, a deal with the devil is never what it seems—have the players roll on the “Monkey’s Paw” table below. This is NOT recommended for The Peasants’ Fell Bargain, since here the bonuses are also offset by a built-in penalty. A player who bargained for greater strength, for example, may find their courage is shaken (The “Cowardly Lion” bargain). A player may wish for more luck: they may gain luck points, but each time they make a roll, the points of luck they gain are drained from a random player or players in the party. Judges can expand on or adapt the suggestions here for different settings or for different powerful creatures entering into the contract.

MONKEY’S PAW TABLE

1: (Strong but Slow) The PC gains +4 to Strength; however, the character is now so muscle-bound they have trouble moving: Dexterity drops 6 points.

2-4: (Seen but not Heard) The PC becomes stunningly attractive, and their Personality score soars to 18. However, they lose the ability to hear or speak).

5-6: (Drain on the Party) The PC gains one hit point for each member of the party; however, each hit point is taken from those party members.

7-8: (Cowardly Lion) The PC gains two points of Strength; however, they receive a -3 on Will saves.

9-10: (Unlucky Breaks) The PC gains one point of Luck for each member of the party; however, each point is taken from those party members.

11-12: (It Will Cost You) The PC rolls a 1d4 and gains that number of Luck points; however, the PC then subtracts that same number of points from a randomly determined ability score, determined with a d6 roll.

13-14: (Dance with the Devil) The PC gains a +3 Dexterity bonus; however, in combat, foes gain a +2 to hit bonus when attacking other PCs in the party.

15-17: (That Has to Hurt) The PC gains a +3 to hit bonus; however, the PC loses two Hit Points for each successful strike. These points can be regained normally.

18-19: (Fragile Egghead): The PC gains +4 to Intelligence and a +2 to Wisdom; however, they take a -3 to their Constitution and a -2 to Strength.

20: (You Get What You Give): The PC can add +3 to any two ability scores; however, they must sacrifice 3 points from two other stats.

If the players are ready to agree to help, read the following:

Lord Stenorian reaches out to you. "Clasp my hands, my friends," he commands. "Let us strike a bargain. You shall be my champions. Return my boy safely to me, and you shall have your heart's desire." As you grasp his bloody fists, you feel a wave of power wash over you. Suddenly you feel stronger than you have ever been. Lord Stenorian collapses into his wife's arms, senseless.

Give one copy of "Handout A—The Contract" to each player. (See "**Handout A—The Contract**" on page 24). Explain these contracts are metaphors for the solemn pact they are entering. Ask the players to take a moment to write down what their characters most desire. Keep the completed contracts handy so you can refer to them later in the adventure. Provide a random boon to each PC who chooses the strike the bargain, using the Fell Bargain Table (See "**FELL BARGAIN BOON RULES—**" on page 5). You can speed this up by having all of the players roll for each of their characters at the same time, and then reading the boon for all characters with a particular result. **Do not share what happens if they break the contract, and make sure players record the dice roll boon for each character.** You will need to know this when it comes time for PCs to decide whether or not they will hold up their end of the bargain.

Of course, PCs may choose to decline the bargain, perhaps claiming virtue as its own reward in helping to find Michael. This is fine, but they will not receive any of the fell bargain bonuses.

Should the players elect to break their promise to Lord Stenorian at the climactic encounter in The Sanctum, they will suffer the consequences described in the "Fell Bargain Table." For more information, see "**C. The Sanctum**" on page 20.

Players may want to equip themselves before setting out, but keep the pressure on. The Lady Stenorian will continue weeping and beseeching them for help. In short, do what you can to make the players feel the urgency. They should go rushing off into the night, a hastily organized posse of would-be rescuers.

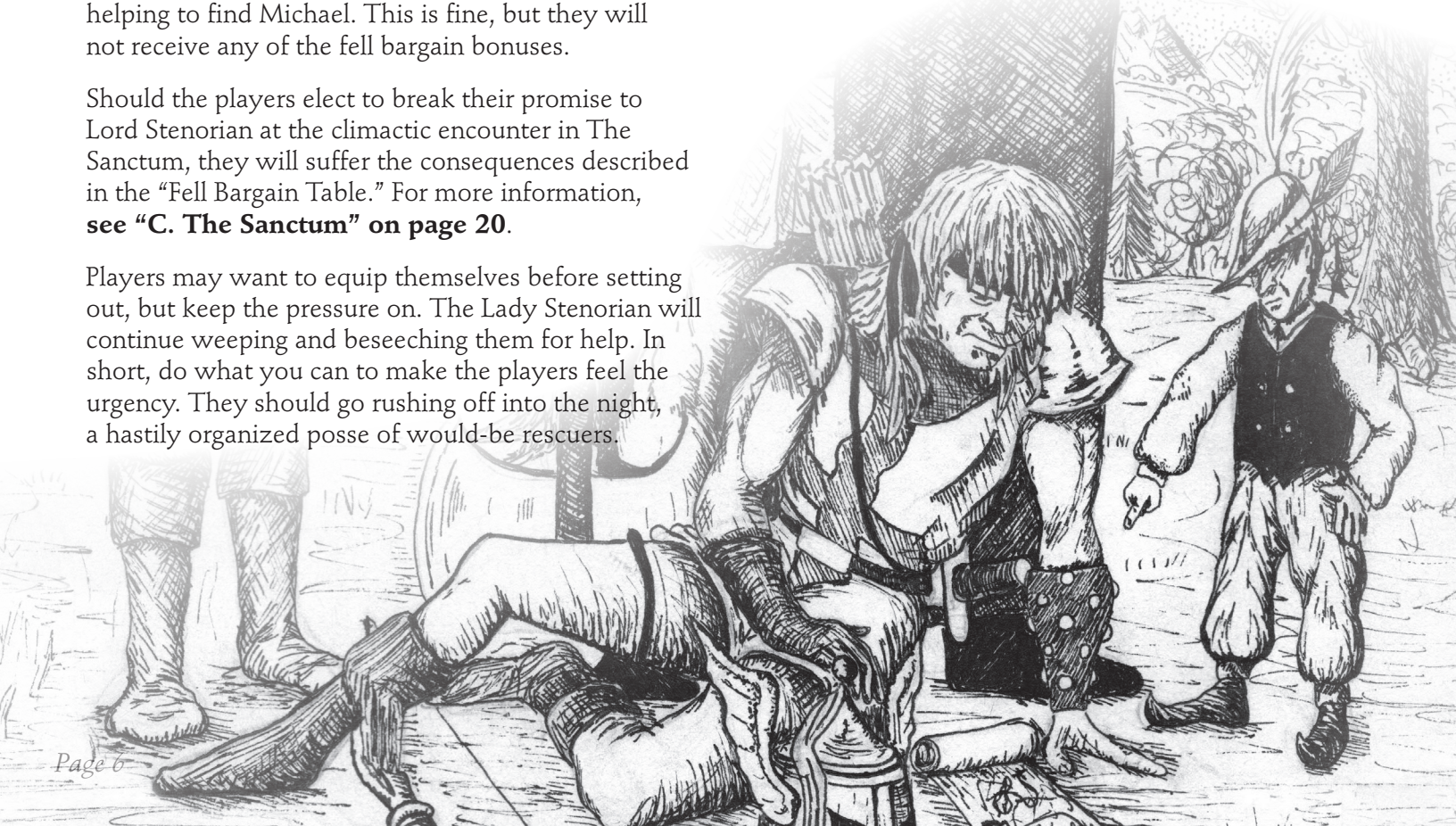
III. THE STENORIAN KEEP

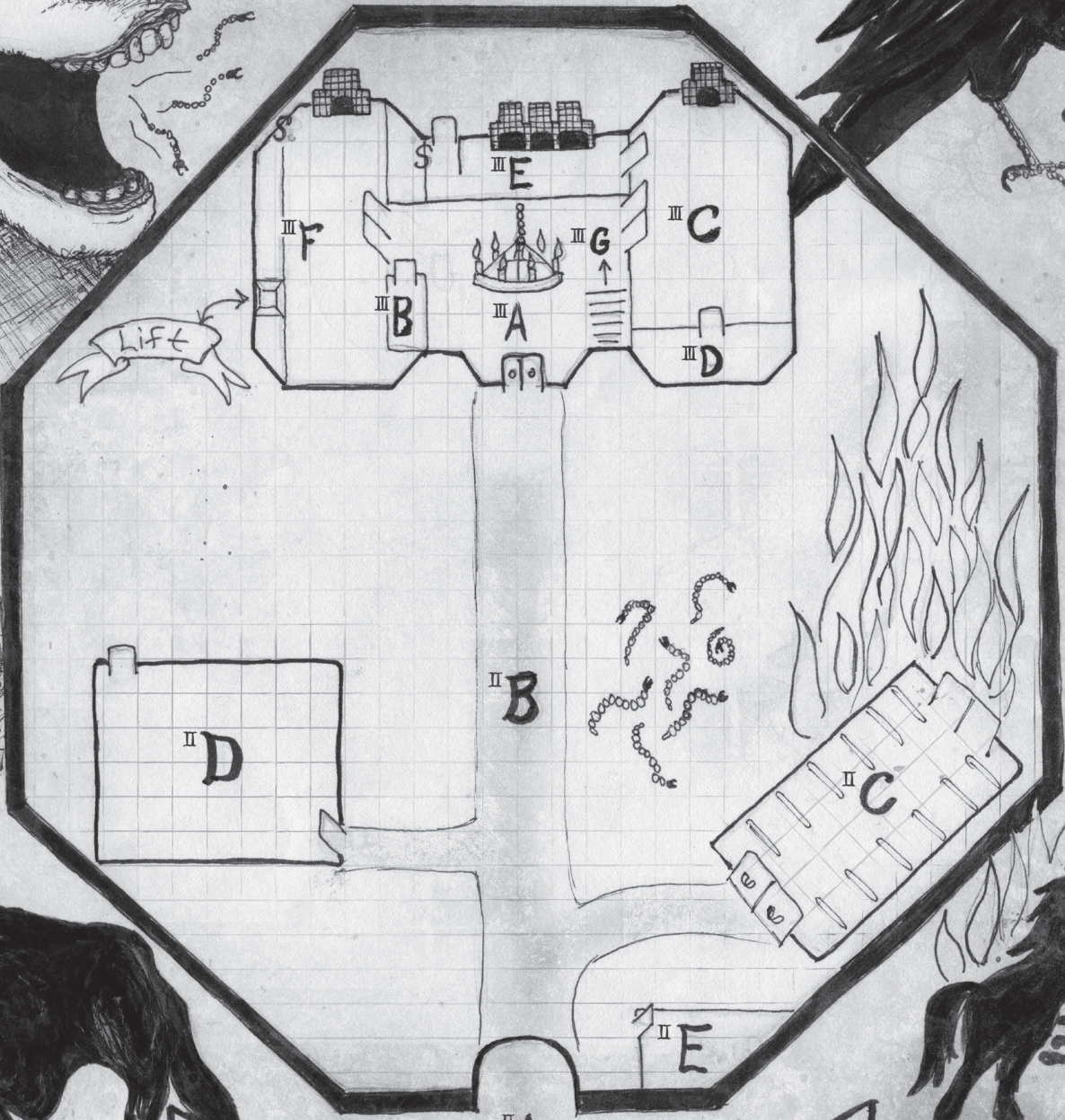
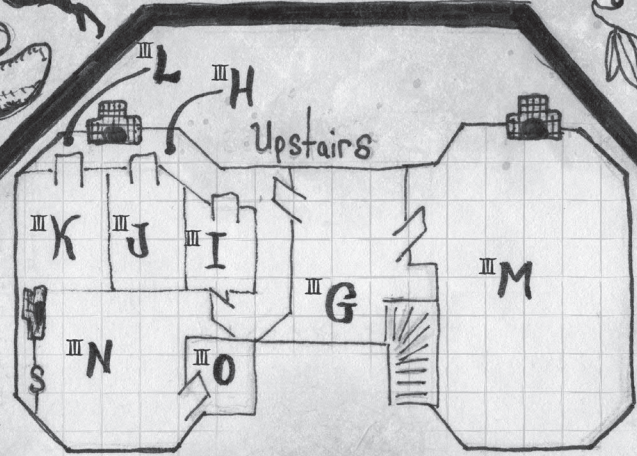
There is only one approach to the keep, a narrow, winding road leading to the ledge where the compound is perched, its back to a sheer cliff face. As the road nears the main gate, the drop-off on either side becomes increasingly dramatic and steep. One can only go forward or backward. The gray stone walls are nearly black with age, and they are almost fifteen feet tall. The roof of the manor house just peeks over the top of the wall.

A. THE GATE

Wounded while battling his brother, Lord Stenorian retreated to the courtyard. The lady's guard rushed her outside to a waiting carriage, and Lord Stenorian blasted the enemies blocking their retreat. The strength of his magic blasted the gate open, as well.

The mountains are giant shadows looming over you as you travel the steep narrow road to the Stenorian keep. Darkness plunges into a deep chasm on either side of the ten-foot wide lane. Ahead a flickering light is visible over the smooth stone walls and through the heavy doors yawning open before you. One hangs loose on its massive hinges, as if it was blasted from the inside. The sound of crackling fire drifts on the wind, and every now and again you can hear what sounds like someone screaming coming from somewhere inside. Two figures stagger out of the keep and shuffle down the road towards you.





Stenorian Manor

L.H.



Upon breaching the keep, Stuart summoned minor demonic spirits to possess the bodies of some of the fallen men-at-arms, increasing the size of his force. Two that pursued the lord and lady at the moment of their frantic escape still wait at the gate, left behind to stop precisely this kind of rescue. At first glance, the players may mistake them for survivors, coming to them for help, but the sight of their gaping wounds and their coal-black eyes will soon make the truth apparent. As they shamle forward to engage the PCs, both let out an otherworldly scream, their mouths distending unnaturally until their chins meet their chest. This is a surprise round: **DC 15 Will save** or the PCs leading the party take -2 on all actions for 1d3 rounds. This is the players' first clue that their mission will be even more complicated than they expected.

A note to judges: Because of the fell bargain, the PCs are tougher than ordinary peasants. To involve more PCs in battle—and put more of them in jeopardy!—, be sure to give each foe its own initiative roll and place in the order.

POSSESSED CORPSES (2): Init +0; +0 Slam (2) melee (1d4+1); AC 13; HD 1d8; hp 7 each; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0; AL C; SP Undead Traits; Horrifying Scream (DC 15 Will or -2 on all actions for 1d3 rounds). The guardsmen's studded leather armor is damaged but serviceable, and each wears a dagger on his belt. Roll 1d3: One of the two corpses will be either an elf, dwarf, or halfling.

Players wishing to scale the wall rather than enter through the main gate will find it exceedingly difficult. The walls are nearly smooth, requiring a **DC 12 Strength check** to climb: this check must be made twice: once after 5 feet, and again near the top, at 15 feet. Players who fail the check will take falling damage (**see page 96 in the DCC rulebook**), and they must succeed on a **DC 10 Reflex save** to avoid plummeting off the road leading to the gate. The use of a grappling hook reduces the **DC to 5**.

B. THE COURTYARD

There are four buildings making up the estate's compound: the gatehouse, the stables, the barracks, and the manor house. Players may wish to go straight to the manor house. If they do, they will miss the opportunity to arm themselves in the barracks. You can encourage them to explore the forbidding structure: sometime after the party deals with the body in the center of the grounds, or after they investigate the stables, they hear a blood-curdling scream from the barracks, a final victim meeting a terrible end.

The courtyard is littered with bodies in various states of dress, ranging from armored soldiers to footmen and ladies-in-waiting in nightclothes. A fire burns at one end of the stables, and the neighing of panicked horses carries over the crackling flames. A large, flat-roofed brick building to the south sits in darkness. Near the center of the courtyard, one body writhes on the ground, curled in a fetal position.

A close inspection of the bodies reveals that many were killed with conventional weapons. Some, however, have wounds no weapon could have made, their flesh torn to ribbons. Three bodies lie in a heap near the door to the manor house. Players inspecting the pile of bones and flesh will soon realize these unfortunate victims were turned inside out. These were the Lord Stenorian's most loyal guards, fighting a desperate rear action to help him escape. The spell that ravaged their bodies was meant for their master, a particularly cruel blow from his brother.

Good Samaritans learn to their dismay that the body writhing in the center is not actually alive, but has instead been infested by a small swarm of demonic larvae. The swarm will burst from the body when it is touched and attempt to burrow into the skin of those in a ten-foot radius. **DC 10 Reflex save** to avoid. Characters who fail take 1 point of damage and must make a **DC 10 Fortitude save** to avoid being infested. If they fail, chances of survival are slim. Characters can amputate the affected limb (which will work, but they will take 1d6+1 damage and must make a **DC 15 Fortitude save** or lapse into unconsciousness for 1d8 minutes), or they can attempt to burn the larvae out. (**DC 15 Fortitude save** to stay conscious and 1d3 damage.) The larvae can only survive 3 rounds without a host, or they may be killed by fire.

Infested characters will soon be possessed by the demon spawn. In less than a minute (approximately five rounds), the PC can make a last **DC 10 Will save**. If they make it, they can choose to run from the keep and plunge off the cliff's edge. Otherwise, they will perish and attack their companions as a Possessed Corpse.

POSSESSED CORPSE: Init +0; Slam +0 (2) melee (1d4+1); AC 13; HD 1d10; hp 9; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0; AL C; SP Undead Traits; Horrifying Scream (DC 15 Will or -2 on all actions for 1d3 rounds).

Players who successfully run the risk of investigating the bodies in the yard will find 1d3 sets of usable leather armor and 1d3 short swords.

C. THE STABLES

Several horses are still alive inside the stables, which Stuart's forces set alight in an attempt to stop his brother from escaping. The rescue party may possess tender-hearted types hoping to free any surviving animals, or to put those suffering out of their misery. If this is the case, they will sadly learn that no good deed goes unpunished.

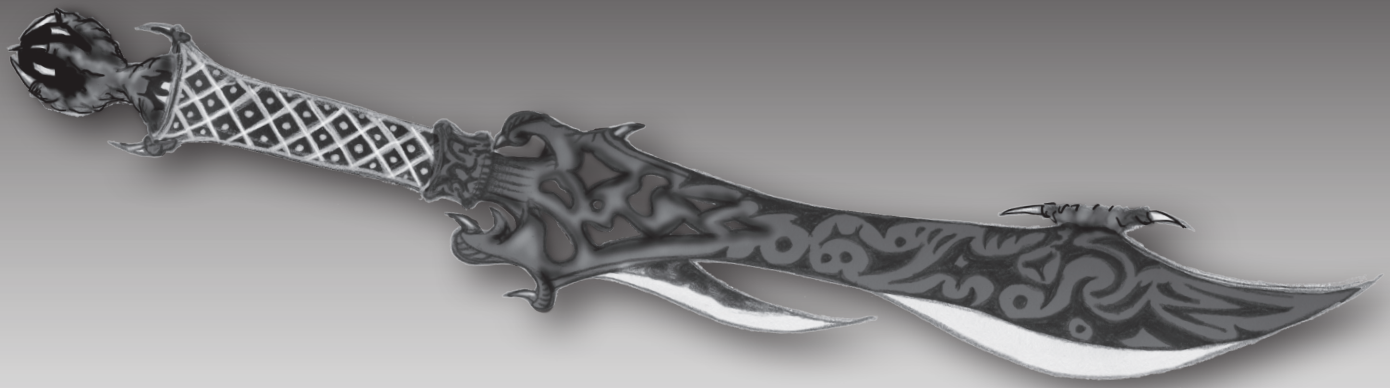
It is difficult to breathe in the smoke-filled stables, although the flames cast enough light to see by. In a couple of pens near the door, horses are frantically pounding the ground with their hooves, kicking the gates, and neighing loudly. Much fainter sounds come from other pens where the animals have been nearly overcome by smoke. The door to the pen on the east of the entrance is standing open. Inside, hunched over a stallion's body, three hellish black hounds, nearly as large as bears, are feeding on the equine corpse. The beasts look up at you, eyes burning red with malice, razor sharp teeth and lips dripping with blood and gore. Then they spring.

Baleful Mastiffs (3): Init +3; +0 bite melee (1d6); AC 13; HD 1d10; hp 9; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +0; AL C; SP Howl (DC 15 Will save or -2 on all actions for 1d3 rounds).

D. THE BARRACKS

The barracks is a squat, windowless stone building. A Stenorian coat-of-arms hangs on the solid oaken door. Inside the PCs will find a true horror show. Several of Stenorian's men were murdered in their beds, their bodies left to bleed out in their blankets. When at last the alarm was raised after a light sleeper awakened, the battle in the darkness was fierce. The surprised men-at-arms never had a chance, however, because Stuart focused some of his most powerful magic here to summon a cerberus hydra, a multi-tentacled monstrosity with a canine body and three dog-headed tentacles sprouting from its neck. It now lies curled up in the shadows, slowly devouring one of its victims alive until the moment the PCs enter the room.

As you open the door to the barracks, the stink of panic and death assaults your senses. The sight is grotesque. In the beds nearest the door, you can see the bodies of soldiers killed in their sleep. Blood pools on the bedsheets. The scene is different further in the room. Here you can see that men awakened and tried to mount a defense. A terrifying form rises from the shadows, dropping the body of a whimpering, dying man to the floor.



The cerberus hydra will attack the moment the PCs enter. As it emerges, the PCs can see its suffering victim, the flesh torn away from its body in long thin strips by the rows of razor-sharp teeth that fills the creature's multiple jaws. Ordered to kill everything in the room, the creature will not pursue PCs out of the barracks.

Each time the cerberus hydra takes five points of damage, one of its heads falls limp. However, **after every three PC attacks, the creature regains five hit points and the head reanimates or regrows.** Burning the body or injured head after every five points of damage, or after the creature has been reduced to zero hit points, stops the regeneration.

CERBERUS HYDRA: Init +1; +1 bite (3) melee (1d6); AC 11; HD 2d10; hp 16; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +0; AL C SP: Regeneration (+5 hitpoints every three PC attacks).

Inside the barracks PCs can find one longsword in a scabbard hanging on the wall near the captain's bunk along with a chainmail shirt, and 1d6 short swords either lying with bodies or tucked in with guard uniforms. There are also 1d6 sets of leather armor. Depending on the party, the judge may roll to determine if any of this armor is made for dwarves or halflings.

E. THE GATEHOUSE

The gatehouse appears to be empty, the defenders dead in the courtyard. A careful search will reveal three sets of rations, a deck of cards, seven copper pieces, and a hidden bottle of ale.

A crude wooden table sits in the center of the spartan room, its surface strewn with playing cards and copper pieces. The table is surrounded by four chairs: two have been pushed back, while the other two lie on their backs.

III. THE MANOR HOUSE

Henry was bathing in blood in the master washroom upstairs, part of his macabre preparation for the sacrificial ritual, when his brother attacked and slew their father deep below ground in the catacombs. Unable to find Michael in the chaos that followed, Henry battled Stuart and his forces on the ground floor as Lady Stenorian's servants bundled her out the door to the waiting carriage. Once the lord and lady were gone, the invaders proceeded to kill the survivors and search the keep until Michael was found upstairs hiding in the bottom of his older brother's wardrobe.

The only other ground-floor entrance to the manor house is a kitchen door around the back. This door is locked and requires a **DC 17 Strength check** to open. After two attempts, the door will burst open and the acolytes and hound in the kitchen attack. (See **"E. Kitchen"** on page 13).

The Stenorian manor should evoke every gothic tale dating back to Poe. Its regal exterior hides a multitude of horrors, and the reverberations of the eldritch battle that took place here still shake it to the foundations. Strange noises, creaking floors, sudden gusts of wind, are all par for the course. The judge should feel free to do whatever possible to heighten the creepiness.

Once his brother escaped, Stuart knew Henry would send some kind of force to find Michael and prevent him from doing the ritual himself, so he has stationed several acolytes and minor demons throughout the house to confound such a rescue. Some of the most dangerous threats, however, are Lord Stenorian's remaining defenses.

Read the following as the PCs approach the front door:

Like the keep's gate, the front doors of the manor house bear the scars of a hasty and violent retreat. They are splintered and charred, and the body of a footman lies on the front steps, his fine clothes still smoldering. The smell of roasted flesh is rich and cloying. A surprising amount of light shines from inside the manor.

A. THE FOYER

While the PCs are on a mission and sure to be fixated on their goal, remind them that no peasant from the village has ever set foot inside Stenorian manor before: they are truly entering a place of privilege like none they have ever known. The awe they experience accounts for why they may not notice the trap waiting for them.

The grand entryway is well lit by wall lanterns set in golden sconces that burn with a supernaturally bright glow. Their light casts unwavering orange pools on the gleaming black marble floor. An ornate chandelier adorned with several burning candles hangs high overhead. A dark oak staircase with a polished and intricately carved banister winds upward to a majestic balcony overlooking the foyer. Two sets of double doors stand on the right and left sides of the room, along with what appears to be a door to an antechamber. You have never seen such opulence.

Chandelier Trap: A tiny malevolent gremlin sits perched near the top of the chandelier. He is well hidden, and it will take a **DC 15 Intelligence check** to spot him before he springs his trap. **Only the first PC who enters the room should be given this opportunity.** The gremlin has green reptilian skin and large yellow eyes. His fingers end in long, sharpened claws. Once at least five of the PCs have entered the foyer, the creature will snap the chain suspending the heavy chandelier, sending the fixture crashing to the floor. **DC 10 Reflex save** to avoid the trap, 1d4 damage to those unlucky enough to fail the save.

The gremlin will remain for three rounds after springing the trap, causing whatever havoc it can before returning to the nether realms. For example, there is a side table at the top of the stairs, and the gremlin will throw candle holders and other decorative items from the table.

CHANDELIER TRAP: Ref DC 10; 1d4 damage.

GREMLIN: Init +2; +0 melee claws (2) (1d3-1); AC 8; HD 1d6; hp 3; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +0; AL C.



For the last several years, Stuart has been recruiting acolytes, doling out dribs and drabs of arcane knowledge with the promise of infinite power. These zealots have long since abandoned human scruples, and they are prepared to die, and kill, for their master. Four acolytes have been gorging themselves in the Dining Room (C), and they enter the foyer a round after the chandelier falls.

Four men in crimson robes adorned with an image of a hound's head, burst from the double doors on the right. They clutch wine goblets, turkey legs, and wicked-looking curved knives. The one in front smiles at you with teeth carved into points. "The Master told us someone would come. You're late!"

If the PCs attempt to question who these men are or what they want, they will reply only with variations of the following: "The hound shall feast on the raven tonight, and we shall all become as gods!" There will be little time for conversation, however, as the acolytes have been ordered to kill any strangers who enter.

ACOLYTES (4): Init +0; +0 melee dagger (1d4); AC 10; HD 1d8; hp 8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will -1; AL C.

B. ANTECHAMBER

A series of hooks lines one wall in this small room, while the other features a number of bureaus and wardrobes for storing the cloaks and traveling apparel of visitors. Two exquisitely upholstered benches are thoughtfully placed near the door to allow guests to change out of their travel boots.

The furthest wardrobe has a false panel in the back containing a small cache of traveling supplies: 6d6 gp in a small pouch, 1d6 sets of traveling rations, a dagger and short sword forged from black iron, and a small locked strongbox, **DC 16** to pick lock (**DC 12** with thieves tools) or **DC 12 Strength check** to smash the box open. Should the PCs either fail the lockpick check or smash the box, a small cloud of poisonous dust is released, **DC 12 Fortitude save** or 1d3 poison. The box contains 20 pp.

C. DINING ROOM

A long oak table flanked by high-backed upholstered chairs rests in the center of this paneled room. Several mirrors line the walls, multiplying the twinkling lights of candles burning brightly in the center of the table. The table is strewn with food and wine bottles, the remnants of the invaders' feast. At the north end of the room is a majestic fireplace, a closed door to its left. On the south end of the room is another closed door.

D. THE ELDER LORD STENORIAN'S BEDROOM

Once the latest Henry has been inaugurated into the mysteries of the family's power, his father cedes control of the manor, spending his remaining years at ease, often traveling. Henry the VI recently returned for the ritual, and he was preparing for Michael's sacrifice when Stuart surprised him. He now lies dead in the catacombs, murdered by his vengeful younger son.

The door to his bedroom is locked. **DC 12 Intelligence check** to pick the lock (**DC 8** with thieves tools), or **DC 15 Strength check** to force it open.

This lavish bedroom features a luxurious red carpet accented by a large white bearskin rug. It lies in front of a comfortable-looking leather chair set beside the fireplace. A pipe rests in an ashtray on a short marble pedestal. In the center of a room stands a four-poster bed with lifelike carvings of ravens in flight, and a large wardrobe stands against the far wall.

The wardrobe contains well-tailored clothing of the finest fabric. A tailor or haberdasher will recognize the fine garments are worth 150 gp. There is a small portable writing desk on a shelf inside the wardrobe. It contains quills, a bottle of ink, a wax seal stamp, and some parchment. There is also a folded letter bearing a broken Stenorian seal.

Dear Father,

The boy's birthday approaches. Everything has been prepared as you instructed, and we eagerly await your return.

Virtutem Sacrificiorum,

Henry



E. KITCHEN

The kitchen is well stocked with food and cooking supplies. Behind a set of shelves in the pantry, PCs can find a secret door on a **DC 12 Intelligence check**. This leads to a short hidden passage that allows someone to look through the false eyes of the painting in the parlor.

A huge fireplace dominates almost one entire wall, a bank of fire heating a row of cast-iron pots hanging from metal rods. The dull roar of the flames fills the room where long butcher-block tables sit littered with pots, pans, and baskets full of fruits and vegetables. Two men in crimson robes are slowly flaying a corpse on one of the tables, feeding curling strips of flesh to an enormous dog-like creature crouching next to them. At sight of you, it lets out a deafening howl, like wind rushing through a deep tunnel.

The baleful mastiff's baying has a fear-inducing effect: **DC 15 Will save** or characters take -2 on all actions for 1d3 rounds. Characters who previously made the save in the stable are immune.

If players enter the house through the back kitchen door, the four acolytes feasting in the Dining Room will be alerted and join this fight after two rounds. Players can find 1d6 butcher knives and cleavers in this room.

BALEFUL MASTIFF: Init +3; +0 bite melee (1d6); AC 13; HD 1d10; hp 9; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +0; AL C; SP Howl (DC 15 Will save or -2 on all actions for 1d3 rounds).

ACOLYTES (3): Init +0; +0 melee dagger (1d4); AC 10; HD 1d8; hp 8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will -1; AL C.



F. PARLOR

The Lords Stenorian have used this room for generations to harvest unsuspecting victims, and they have constructed a variety of traps over the years. The liquor in the cabinets is imported and expensive, and the glassware is worth 20 gp.

Ornate wallpaper featuring entwined vines and tree branches hangs in this room, along with life-like trophies and family portraits. Embers burn in a warm hearth flanked by gleaming tools. Crystal decanters and glasses gleam behind the doors of liquor cabinets, and overstuffed chairs and couches surround an impressive bearskin rug.

A careful search may reveal some disturbing secrets, although these traps are well constructed and well hidden. Share the following based upon the PCs' Intelligence checks:

DC 12: One of the paintings has false eyes, allowing someone to spy on the room unobserved.

DC 15: One of the chairs has recently been reupholstered. A close inspection reveals a short spring-loaded blade hidden in the chair, positioned to stab the unsuspecting victim in the lower back. The hardwood floor beneath the chair is noticeably darker, showing the wear of repeated scrubblings.

DC 18: A slight creak in the floor near another chair reveals the seat is bolted to a swinging trap door. When triggered, the trap door opens, pitching the chair's occupant down a dark chute. It is impossible to tell from here, but the chute is 200 feet long, and opens into a locked cell in the Exsanguination Chamber (**See "A. Exsanguination Chamber" on page 19**).

DC 20: Pulling one of the tools next to the fireplace will reveal a secret door. A long dark passage yawns beyond it.

The secret passage leads to a shaft down to the catacombs below. There is a complex pulley system to raise and lower a small platform. There is also a ladder that goes upward to the Master Bedroom, and a door leading outside of the manor. Lord Stenorian uses the platform to transport incapacitated victims to the Exsanguination Chamber. (**See "A. Exsanguination Chamber" on page 19**). A **DC 12 Intelligence check** will show that the floors here are also worn smooth from repeated scrubbing. Refer to **"IV. THE CATACOMBS" on page 19** should players choose to descend.

G. STAIRCASE AND UPPER HALL

The grand staircase winds upward to a large passageway, brightly lit by enchanted sconces.

Read the following if the characters ascend the stairs:

A rich red carpet runs the length of the paneled hall. Portraits of the men of the Stenorian family hang in a line of succession along the length of the wall, as well as tapestries bearing the family coat of arms. Two of the portraits have been repeatedly slashed, rendering the faces unrecognizable. Just inside the hall, before the first door on the right, a suit of armor gripping a halberd stands at attention in a small alcove.

The suit of armor is only visible once the players are at the top of the stairs, and it serves as a line of defense for the family: anyone attempting to come upstairs who is not an approved servant or family member will be waylaid—violently—by the enchanted armor. Unfortunately for Lord Stenorian, his brother Stuart had no problem passing.

The armor will attack the moment the PCs enter the hallway.

ENCHANTED ARMOR: Init +0; +0 melee halberd (1d10); AC 15; HD 1d12; hp 10; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2, Ref +0, Will +0; AL N; SP Immune to critical hits, mind-affecting spells.

Perceptive PCs examining the surviving portraits will notice a striking family resemblance. If they pause to read the brass nameplates fastened to the frames, they will also see the men have always been named Henry and Stuart, and that someone (Stuart) has destroyed the painting of Henry Stenorian the VI, and Henry Stenorian the VII.

H. HALLWAY

Lying in the hallway in front of the doors to the children's bedrooms is the body of a woman, wearing the dress of a domestic servant. Her neck is twisted at an unnatural angle. This is Michael's devoted nurse, who died trying to rescue the boy from his family's clutches. She is holding a small dagger, and there is a bag of chocolates in her pocket.

I. HENRY VIII'S BEDROOM

While Henry VIII, the youngest Henry, has not yet learned his family's terrible secret, his father and grandfather have groomed him his entire life to take over the estate. He is currently away at school, and a search of the room reveals his clothing and personal effects are gone. The books on his shelves range from history to finance.

In the center of this room sits a large bed with four intricately carved posts depicting the winding branches of trees, each with the figure of a raven at the top. There is also a desk and chair near the fireplace, and a stately wardrobe stands against the wall. A large bookcase sags under the weight of numerous heavy tomes.

J. STUART'S BEDROOM

Like his uncle and every Stuart before him, the second oldest boy, while not entirely neglected, is given little encouragement to improve himself. At school, he enjoys skipping his classes to go hunting and drinking instead. When at home, he has taken to sneaking out to gamble with some of the guards. Players searching the room will find a broken bottle of ale hidden in the bottom of the wardrobe, smashed during the struggle when the older Stuart found his nephew Michael hiding here. The younger Stuart is currently away at school, so his clothing and personal effects are gone.

This room features a large bed with carved ravens. The walls are covered with a variety of hunting trophies. Some feature frightening horned creatures like nothing you've ever seen. A wardrobe stands in the corner, its door hanging open.

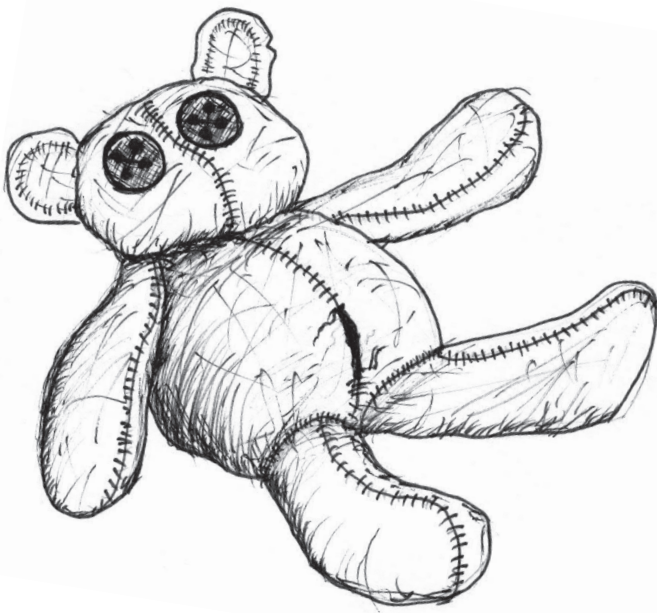
K. MICHAEL'S BEDROOM

While Michael's physical well-being has been closely guarded, he is otherwise completely ignored by his father and grandfather, an attitude adopted by his older brothers, as well. Only his mother and his sympathetic nurse show the unfortunate boy any affection, usually in secret.

This small bedroom is strikingly spartan compared the rest of the manor. A small bed, its headboard adorned with engravings of ravens, rests against the wall near the fireplace. The walls are bare, and the only other furniture is a small wardrobe.

PCs searching the wardrobe will find a small boy's clothing. At the bottom is a sad, misshapen stuffed animal his nurse made for him. Upon inspection, PCs discover a small opening stuffed with papers. This is Michael's diary.

There are several sheets of paper stuffed in the toy, covered with clumsy drawings and occasionally a childish, shaky scrawl. While many pages are illegible, you can make out some sentences here and there. (Give players "Handout B—Michael's Secret Diary" on page 25.)



Father is taking Henry and Stuart to the city today. Mother says he might take me too! [This is crossed out angrily.]

Why does Father hate me?? Nurse says he's just busy, but I know she's lying.

I turned nine today. Nurse brought me a chocolate after bedtime. Father and Grandfather are gone again. I don't care.

Stuart and Henry left for school today. I'm glad. They're mean. Nurse says now we can play together more. She's so nice.

My birthday is tomorrow, but something's wrong. Nurse came to me right after dinner. She said that when everyone is sleeping, I must hide in Stuart's room and stay there until she comes to get me. I'm scared.

L. SERVANTS' STAIRCASE

Although it isn't hidden, there is a discreet panel on the ceiling at the end of the hallway with an inset pull handle. This lowers a staircase leading to the servants' quarters. Here is an opportunity for the players to replenish their ranks if necessary. If the PCs lower the staircase, or the judge determines it is important new PCs enter the adventure, frightened servants will descend, looking around nervously and asking, "Is it over? Are they gone?" At the sound of battle downstairs, they hid in their quarters. Michael is extremely well liked by these servants, and when they learn he is missing and in danger, they will readily agree to join in the search.

Note that Lord Stenorian kept his evil activities secret from all but his closest servants and guards, so these characters have no particular knowledge of the estate other than the public spaces, although many suspect the existence of secret passageways based on surprise comings and goings.

M. THE LIBRARY

This impressive room contains a full two stories of bookshelves lining the walls. Iron ladders are hooked to a rod that runs the width of the shelves. Well-oiled casters allow them to slide almost silently. Large windows overlook the courtyard, where you can see the stables now fully engulfed in flames. There is a large desk and overturned chair next to an enormous fireplace, as well as another table piled with books and flanked by reading chairs. Drawers from the desk hang open, and paper litters the floor. On one wall is a large tapestry featuring the Stenorian family tree. Burned into the rich fabric is the word "Lies!" On the far side of the library, one of the shelves seems damaged.

Players inspecting the large family tree carefully (see "**Handout C—Stenorian Family Tree Tapestry**" on page 26) will likely notice the long lifespan of each Henry, as well as the progressively shorter lifespans of the Stuarts (as each generation of Stuarts has become more discontent and dissipated). They will also notice that daughters never live long, an ominous sign of how the Lords Stenorian have valued and treated their offspring.

Players searching the papers near the desk will find a couple of items of interest. First, they will find several letters from the older Stuart. Letters from roughly ten years ago feature superficial greetings followed by frequent requests for more money. Then there is a gap of several years. The last letter, dated six months earlier, is crumpled, as if it had been clenched in anger. It reads as follows:

Henry,

Only now do I see what fools our father and grandfather have been. Corvusloth is not one of the Old Ones. He is merely a pretender, a lackey, just like you are, brother. My eyes are open, and I will no longer beg for table scraps. Out of duty to our mother, I give you this one chance. Renounce your title. Give me the young one, leave Stenorian Manor, and never return.

Do not doubt my power, brother, nor the power of the One I serve. This is your only warning.

~Stuart

Next to an overturned drawer, players will find a rolled parchment. It is another Stenorian family tree, but it is markedly different from the one that hangs on the wall (See “**Handout D—Stenorian Family Tree Parchment**” on page 27). In each generation, there is one more Stenorian child listed than appears in the public document. Lord Henry and Stuart had a younger brother, Michael. Their father and uncle also had a younger brother, also named Michael. This goes on down generations.

Upon inspecting the damaged bookshelf, players will discover that it once concealed a secret compartment. In its center is an elaborately carved stand, now empty. This is where the dagger used in the ritual was kept.



N. MASTER BEDROOM

An enormous four-poster bed with elaborately carved posts mounted by wooden ravens dominates this room. There are several oaken wardrobes standing against the southern and western walls. On the northern wall is a large fireplace flanked by wingback chairs. A trail of bloody footprints leads from a doorway on the far side of the room to the hall entrance.

The sound of his brother’s invasion disturbed Henry Stenorian in his chilling preparations for the ritual—bathing in blood—and he dashed from the washroom in his robe, leaving the bloody footprints. The ravens on the bedposts are a security feature, and they will immediately sound an alarm and attack anyone entering the room who is not an approved servant or member of the Stenorian family by blood or marriage.

The warm glow of a fire in the hearth suddenly fills the room as you enter. As its light falls upon you, the heads of the wooden ravens all swivel in your direction. They give a hideous cry before launching off the bedposts to attack.

WOODEN RAVENS (4): Init +1; +0 melee bite (1d4-1); AC 13; HD 1d8; hp 6; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +0; AL N; SP Immune critical hits, mind-affecting spells. The ravens will not pursue the characters beyond the room.

A careful search of the room will reveal that one of the wardrobes has a false back (**DC 10**). Behind it is a secret passage leading to a ladder which descends to the platform and pulley system (see “**F. Parlor**” on page 13). There is also a secret door on the ground floor leading out of the manor house, allowing Lord Stenorian to leave the house unseen.

There are two casement windows that open from the inside. Stenorian used these to dispatch the wooden ravens to carry messages when necessary.

O. WASHROOM

This smaller room has exquisite tiled floors and walls. A large claw-foot tub rests in the center, and a marble washing basin rests nearby on a side table. The tub appears to be full of blood, with puddles spattering the floor around it and bloody footprints leading to the bedroom. A large mirror dominates one wall, and facing it sit his- and her- dressing tables, each with several drawers. One of the drawers is not entirely shut.



One of the floor tiles near the bathtub has been removed, revealing a gruesome contraption. There is a large copper tank attached to a rubber hose, just long enough to reach the tub, along with a bellows to pump fluid from the tank. Although the tank is now empty, the strong odor and staining make it apparent this tank is normally filled with blood. The Lord Stenorian bathes in blood each year when the moon is full, and before the sacrifice. This perverse ritual actually conveys no special benefit and is not required for the ceremony. It has simply been passed down from father to son as the Stenorian family became more and more corrupted.

A search of Lady Stenorian's dressing table finds little of interest. There is a silver comb and brush set (25 gp), as well as a complete set of make-up (5 gp).

At first glance, nothing seems out of the ordinary at the Lord's table: there is a straight razor (2 gp), silver comb and brush (25 gp), and a variety of lotions and colognes (5 gp).

However, a careful search (**DC 10**) of the open drawer reveals a false bottom: within lies a small ceremonial dagger, its handle and blade covered with runes in an unknown language (5 gp). Next to it rests a small handheld mirror, its frame covered with similar runes. The reflecting surface is coal black, swallowing ambient light. However, PCs cutting

themselves with the dagger and bleeding onto the mirror will suddenly bring its surface to life. The injured character's greatest desire will appear.

If the judge wants to ensure that a player sees a vision in the mirror, then the dagger will leap in the PC's hand, nicking the PC before they have a chance to react. **DC 15 Reflex save** to drop the dagger.

As if angry at being held by a stranger, the dagger leaps in your hand like a snared bird, nicking you and spilling a drop of blood that is drawn unerringly to the mirror. The obsidian surface suddenly begins to swirl with colors, visible only to you.

Share what happens next only with the player: First, refer to "**The Contract**" to determine what the player wrote down for this character at the start of the adventure, and then describe that character's desire in detail. (If it is a newly introduced PC, one of the house servants, describe more generic riches.) Then, tell the player that the view in the mirror shifts to reveal a subterranean temple. A young boy stands chained to a stone obelisk on a raised platform. Beside him stands a man in a crimson robe, a more ornate version of those worn by the acolytes on the ground floor of the manor. His hood is lowered, revealing a man who is almost the mirror image of Lord Stenorian, only younger. If the PC inspected the paintings in the hallway, he will recognize the man as Stuart. Below the platform, there are four hooded acolytes standing in front of small altars. The acolytes are carefully tending to small braziers on these altars. At the foot of the stairs leading to the platform lies a decapitated body.

Finally, the judge can take this opportunity to seed the next adventure by including a vision of a map leading to a treasure trove, or another person in danger—whatever might work best as a foundation for the campaign. A vision of a distant keep in the mountains could stand in for Stuart's home if the judge chooses to continue the story of the Stenorians.

This mirror can only be used twice per day, and Lord Stenorian already used it once. If a second PC attempts to use the mirror, it begins to draw blood from the PC's wound at a frightening rate, causing 1 hp of damage per round. The PC will find it nearly impossible to drop the mirror. **DC 15 Will save** to release the mirror. If the PC fails, survival is questionable: the hand holding the mirror can be severed at the wrist (1d4 damage, **Fortitude DC 15** to remain conscious), or the mirror can be destroyed. It has a Hardness of 12, and 4 hit points.

IV. THE CATACOMBS

The Catacombs can only be reached via a lift that descends 200 feet down a roughly hewn vertical shaft to the caverns below. For generations Lord Stenorian and his most trusted men have used this lift to carry victims to be bled dry for Stenorian's annual bath, and to transport firewood for the ritual. On a **DC 10 Intelligence check**, PCs will find a number of footprints leading to and from the platform. Some of these seem bloody, but it is not human blood. The blood is actually that of the scarlack creature that Stuart and his men slew in order to access the catacombs.

The handle for the pulley system turns smoothly and silently, the elaborate system of counterweights hidden somewhere above allowing you to lower the platform into the darkness with ease.

The platform can only hold four people at a time, and it ordinarily takes five rounds to lower it carefully, and five rounds to raise it back to the top. Players testing the carrying capacity by overloading the platform will need to make a **DC 15 Strength check** to keep it from hurtling downward at a breakneck pace, causing 1d6 points of damage to those crashing to the bottom. On a **DC 12 Strength check**, the platform can be raised in two rounds. The platform can make the descent in two rounds if the players descend precipitously. Players opting for the rapid journey will need to make a **DC 10 Reflex save** or fall prone when the platform reaches the bottom, taking 1d3 damage. Make this option available to subsequent groups of PCs when the following encounter begins.

The platform touches the rocky bottom of the shaft with a whisper. You are in a small passageway. As you step off the platform, you hear sounds of movement around the corner.

Two of Stuart's enormous mastiffs have been devouring the body of a prisoner in the next chamber. At the sound of the platform reaching the bottom, they will race to attack the PCs.

BALEFUL MASTIFFS (2): Init +3; +0 bite melee (1d6); AC 13; HD 1d10; hp 9; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +0; AL C; SP Howl (DC 15 Will save or -2 on all actions for 1d3 rounds).

A. EXSANGUINATION CHAMBER

This is where the Lords Stenorian harvest the blood they use for their dark rituals. It is also another opportunity for players to replenish their ranks if necessary before the final battle: Stenorian preys on peasants from distant villages, brought to the estate in closed carriages, or on passing travellers and traders

(using the traps already described in "**F. Parlor**" on page 13). These unfortunate souls (as needed) are locked inside three of the cells. **DC 12 Intelligence check** to open with thieves tools, **DC 15** without. **DC 20** from inside the cell. (Use this check should players enter via the chute from the Parlor.) Depending on the number of characters necessary, the judge should describe them as being in various states of health and vitality from repeatedly being drained of blood.

Magical torches reveal a ghastly scene of murderous efficiency. The rock walls of this cavern contrast sharply with the three steel tables adorned with leather straps resting in the middle of the room. The tables do not sit level, but rather are raked at a sharp angle, their lowered ends almost meeting in a triangle over a large copper basin resting in a cavity in the floor. Cells line the far wall. Another door on the far end leads out of the chamber. The floor is covered with a confusion of bloody footprints leading from that door. The far cage is open, a savaged corpse lying on the floor.

B. THE SCARLACK LAIR

For years, the Stenorians never worried about disposing of their victims. They simply dragged the drained bodies into this chamber and threw them into this large pit. Scarlacks nest below the estate. These creatures are blind cave dwellers, pale, fleshy blobs with enormous mouths full of razor sharp teeth. The adult scarlack that lived in the tunnels, fat and lazy from easy meals, did little more than shuffle from its lair to consume the corpses. Stuart and his followers found their way here through underground passageways, killed the scarlack, and entered the keep in secret.

SCARLACK (deceased): Init -3; 0 bite melee (1d10); AC 7; HD 3d10; hp 20; MV 15'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +3, Ref -1, Will +0; AL N SP: DR 5 piercing/slashing.

The larger chamber ("**C. The Sanctum**" on page 20) should beckon to the players, so they may not venture in to explore this cave. If they pause to look, they will see bloody footprints leading only away from this location. This should dissuade players from descending into the pit to look for Michael.

This cave is pitch black—read the following description if characters have a light source:

The stench in this cavern is almost unbearable. Other than the roughly hewn doorway, this cave is completely natural. In the center is a large pit. The floor, walls, and ceilings are covered with bits of flesh, bone, and blood, as if a large creature was blown apart.

The pit drops 30 feet, and PCs must make a **DC 10 Strength check** to climb to the bottom. PCs failing the check will take falling damage. The tunnel system leading from here can be used as a possible escape route for creative—or desperate—players at the end of this adventure (see **“C. The Sanctum” on page 20**), and it may serve as a jumping off point for future adventures. Should the PCs journey down into the pit, read the following:

The air here is thick and putrid, stinking of death and waste. Bones litter the floor and snap beneath your feet. A tunnel leads out of the pit, stretching into inky, silent darkness.

It is up to the judge to decide what happens if players descend into these passages: one tunnel might lead to a cave in the hills just outside of the village, while another might lead further into the mountains. One might even eventually lead players back to where Stuart launched his raid: perhaps this is the temple where he and his followers practiced their dark arts.

To get the PCs back on track if they begin exploring this underground maze, let them make a listen check to hear a distant cry from Michael.

C. THE SANCTUM

Torchlight flickers and reflects from crystalline formations and blood-red stalactites hanging from the high ceiling of this large cavern, giving it the semblance of an enormous cathedral. Stone steps lead to a platform on the far end, where a sobbing boy is chained to a tall black obelisk at the center of an engraved rune. At the foot of the stairs lies a headless body in a robe. The head rests a few feet away, unseeing eyes gazing at you. It is the oldest Henry Stenorian.

Stuart Stenorian stands on the platform, uttering an incantation over a black ceremonial blade. His shoulders sag, and his face is drawn and tight. On the floor of the cavern, four acolytes chant in unison as they tend to fires at small altars. At sight of you, the boy starts screaming, “Help me! Please! Help!” Stuart and the acolytes glance up at you, but then they refocus their attention on their rituals. However, three figures in bloody robes, the Stenorian family crest still visible, begin shuffling towards you.

Stuart is nearly exhausted from the strain of driving out his brother, and this final ritual is taxing him to his very limit. Due to the complexity of the ceremony, Stuart and his men have no choice but to ignore the players, counting instead on the possessed bodies of Henry Stenorian’s followers to protect them while they complete the ceremony. As combat begins, the acolytes will simply focus on the ritual, even as they are cut down.

POSSESSED CORPSES (3): Init +0; Slam (2) +0 melee (1d4+1); AC 13; HD 1d10; hp 9 each; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0; AL C; SP Undead Traits; Horrifying Scream (DC 15 Will or -2 on all actions for 1d3 rounds).

When either two of the corpses or two of the acolytes have fallen, or if he is threatened by the approach of a PC, Stuart will stop what he is doing and address the players. Refer to the contracts for details regarding their desires. For new PCs, Stuart will promise to restore the freed prisoners or servants to their homes (or maybe even offer them employment in his own house at a considerable wage!):

“Hold, you fools! You meddle with forces you cannot possibly comprehend. What possible concern is this of yours? What has Henry ever done for you?” The man closes his eyes a moment and then turns to each of you. “What has my brother promised you? That... [Here the judge should refer to the contract and repeat back to the PCs what they asked for; for example, “That you would own your own blacksmith’s shop?”] “Ridiculous! He has no such powers. I, on the other hand, can bring you all that you desire and more. You have seen what I can do. Stand with me, and I will finish what I have started, and then you will all get your reward. Oppose me, and you will surely perish.”

A variety of things can play out here, according to how players react. It may be that some of the players will turn on each other. Whatever they choose, be sure to press them to justify their response in terms of alignment and family history. Assuming that at least some of the characters keep their pledge to rescue the boy, the severely weakened Stuart and his remaining followers will have no choice but to join the battle against the PCs. Their main priority will be to keep the PCs away from Michael. Should a PC reach the boy, they will find the bonds holding him seemingly impossible to break.

STUART: Init +0; dagger +0 melee (1d4 +1 Luck drain); AC 13; HD 5d6; hp 17; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +3; AL C; SP Color Spray spell (2): see page 135 in the DCC rulebook.

ACOLYTES (2-4): Init +0; +0 melee dagger (1d4); AC 10; HD 1d8; hp 8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will -1; AL C.



The endgame will play out slightly differently depending on the PCs' choices; however, the result for each scenario is the same: Stuart falls moments before Henry arrives, and the demon Corvusloth will arrive and consider Stuart the Stenorian sacrifice, bestowing its evil blessing upon Michael and giving the boy the opportunity to turn on his cruel father.

1) **If the players throw in with Stuart and allow him to continue the ritual, read the following:**

As Stuart returns to the platform, a familiar voice rings through the cavern. "Hold, traitor! You caught me off guard once, but now you will pay!" It is Henry Stenorian, gaunt and swaying slightly in the doorway. A bolt of lightning shoots from his hand, striking Stuart in the chest. The younger Stenorian brother crumples to the floor. Henry turns to you. "And now I will deal with you lying peasant scum! We had a bargain." A wave of weakness washes over you as the new strength you once possessed suddenly disappears.

Players who have turned on Henry will lose the bonuses they gained earlier and suffer the consequences described in "Fell Bargain Table." If a PC is reduced to zero hit points as a result of losing a bonus to hit points, they will drop to the ground dead. They will have one opportunity to make a Luck roll (see **"Recovering the Body" in the DCC rulebook, page 93**) to see if the fates shine on them. Otherwise, they will pay the ultimate price for their perfidy.

2) **Should the players fight Stuart and defeat him, read the following:**

As you rush to release the boy, you are surprised by a familiar voice. It is Henry Stenorian, gaunt and swaying slightly in the doorway. "You have done well, my friends, and you will be rewarded. Go now, and leave the boy to me. I will see to him."

HENRY STENORIAN: Init +2; longsword +3 melee (1d8); AC 14; HD 5d6; hp 12 (still down from total of 28); MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +5; AL C; SP Lightning Bolt spell (2) see pages 222-223 in the DCC rulebook.

The players are now faced with another choice. Tell them they have 30 seconds to decide: they should turn their character sheets over and write down whether or not they intend to obey Lord Stenorian and return Michael to him, or defend the boy. They cannot discuss this with one another, nor can they finesse the decision. The binding nature of their supernatural contract means Lord Stenorian will know their intentions the moment they are made.

When they have all written their intentions, ask who has chosen to defend Michael. Once again, it is possible some will want to keep their bargain with Lord Stenorian and that they will turn on one another. They may instead all band together to oppose Henry. Read the following, directed at those who have chosen to stand against him:

Lord Stenorian glares at you with incandescent anger. His voice shaking with barely suppressed rage, he says in a low, menacing voice, "We had a bargain." A wave of weakness washes over you as the new strength you once possessed suddenly disappears.

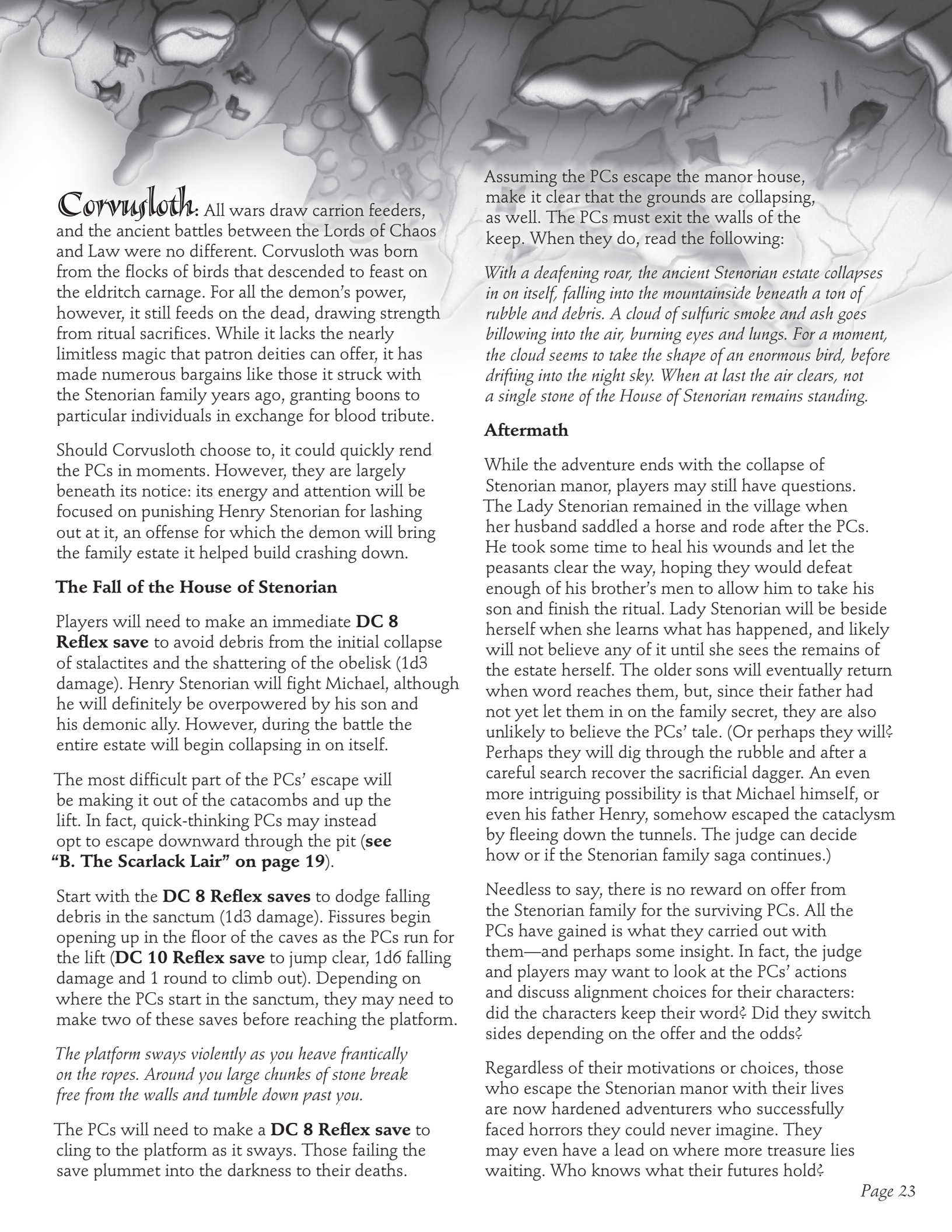
Again, any player breaking the bargain with Henry loses the bonus gained at the beginning of the adventure as described above and in the "Fell Bargain Table."

While it is unlikely, perhaps they all join with Henry, making way for him to approach the platform.

In any of these cases, the combat with Henry should last no more than a round, and before he actually reaches the platform, the following happens:

A deep, low rumbling fills the cavern, shaking you to the bone. A moment later, there is a flash of bright red light, and then a towering figure appears on the platform. It is so massive it has to stoop within the chamber. The beast has a giant raven's head, jet black. Multiple tentacles ending in blind, gasping beaks, like those of baby birds, spring from massive shoulders. Several of them plunge into Stuart's body, ripping and tearing the flesh. In an instant there is nothing left but a tangle of bone and torn muscle. A deafening, shrieking voice, like the cry of thousands of crows, reverberates off of the walls. "A son of Stenorian is sacrificed. The pact is honored." For a moment the tentacles sway in the air, then one of the largest affixes itself to the boy's face.

"No!" Lord Stenorian shrieks, his face twisted in rage. He rushes forward, lightning blasting from his fingers at the boy and splashing over the demon. The creature roars and rises to its full height, sending stalactites crashing to the ground. Suddenly another voice pierces the crashing din: "Father, you've been very, very, bad." Shards of black stone fly through the air in a choking cloud of smoke as the pillar where Michael Stenorian was chained explodes. The ground begins shaking violently as searing beams of energy shoot between Michael, his father, and the massive raven creature.



Corvusloth. All wars draw carrion feeders, and the ancient battles between the Lords of Chaos and Law were no different. Corvusloth was born from the flocks of birds that descended to feast on the eldritch carnage. For all the demon's power, however, it still feeds on the dead, drawing strength from ritual sacrifices. While it lacks the nearly limitless magic that patron deities can offer, it has made numerous bargains like those it struck with the Stenorian family years ago, granting boons to particular individuals in exchange for blood tribute.

Should Corvusloth choose to, it could quickly rend the PCs in moments. However, they are largely beneath its notice: its energy and attention will be focused on punishing Henry Stenorian for lashing out at it, an offense for which the demon will bring the family estate it helped build crashing down.

The Fall of the House of Stenorian

Players will need to make an immediate **DC 8 Reflex save** to avoid debris from the initial collapse of stalactites and the shattering of the obelisk (1d3 damage). Henry Stenorian will fight Michael, although he will definitely be overpowered by his son and his demonic ally. However, during the battle the entire estate will begin collapsing in on itself.

The most difficult part of the PCs' escape will be making it out of the catacombs and up the lift. In fact, quick-thinking PCs may instead opt to escape downward through the pit (**see "B. The Scarlack Lair" on page 19**).

Start with the **DC 8 Reflex saves** to dodge falling debris in the sanctum (1d3 damage). Fissures begin opening up in the floor of the caves as the PCs run for the lift (**DC 10 Reflex save** to jump clear, 1d6 falling damage and 1 round to climb out). Depending on where the PCs start in the sanctum, they may need to make two of these saves before reaching the platform.

The platform sways violently as you heave frantically on the ropes. Around you large chunks of stone break free from the walls and tumble down past you.

The PCs will need to make a **DC 8 Reflex save** to cling to the platform as it sways. Those failing the save plummet into the darkness to their deaths.

Assuming the PCs escape the manor house, make it clear that the grounds are collapsing, as well. The PCs must exit the walls of the keep. When they do, read the following:

With a deafening roar, the ancient Stenorian estate collapses in on itself, falling into the mountainside beneath a ton of rubble and debris. A cloud of sulfuric smoke and ash goes billowing into the air, burning eyes and lungs. For a moment, the cloud seems to take the shape of an enormous bird, before drifting into the night sky. When at last the air clears, not a single stone of the House of Stenorian remains standing.

Aftermath

While the adventure ends with the collapse of Stenorian manor, players may still have questions. The Lady Stenorian remained in the village when her husband saddled a horse and rode after the PCs. He took some time to heal his wounds and let the peasants clear the way, hoping they would defeat enough of his brother's men to allow him to take his son and finish the ritual. Lady Stenorian will be beside herself when she learns what has happened, and likely will not believe any of it until she sees the remains of the estate herself. The older sons will eventually return when word reaches them, but, since their father had not yet let them in on the family secret, they are also unlikely to believe the PCs' tale. (Or perhaps they will? Perhaps they will dig through the rubble and after a careful search recover the sacrificial dagger. An even more intriguing possibility is that Michael himself, or even his father Henry, somehow escaped the cataclysm by fleeing down the tunnels. The judge can decide how or if the Stenorian family saga continues.)

Needless to say, there is no reward on offer from the Stenorian family for the surviving PCs. All the PCs have gained is what they carried out with them—and perhaps some insight. In fact, the judge and players may want to look at the PCs' actions and discuss alignment choices for their characters: did the characters keep their word? Did they switch sides depending on the offer and the odds?

Regardless of their motivations or choices, those who escape the Stenorian manor with their lives are now hardened adventurers who successfully faced horrors they could never imagine. They may even have a lead on where more treasure lies waiting. Who knows what their futures hold?



I, _____, do solemnly pledge to do all in my power to restore the Lord Stenorian's son to him safely. In return for this invaluable service, the Lord Stenorian will repay my courage by granting the following boon:

Should I fail to fulfill my duty through cowardice or treachery, I will receive just recompense for my dereliction.



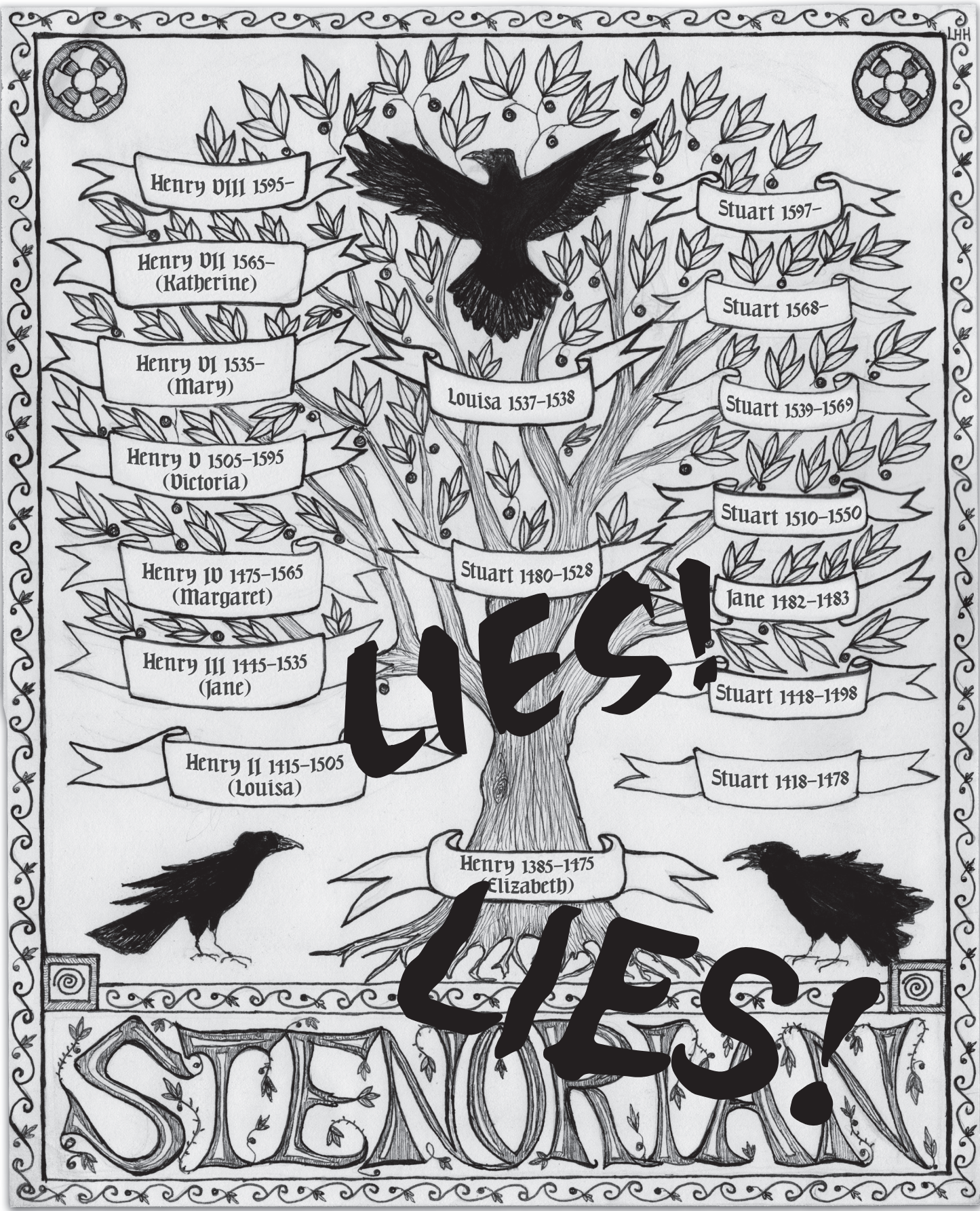
Father is taking Henry and Stuart to the city today. Mother says he might take me too!

Why does Father hate me?? Nurse says he's just busy, but I know she's lying.

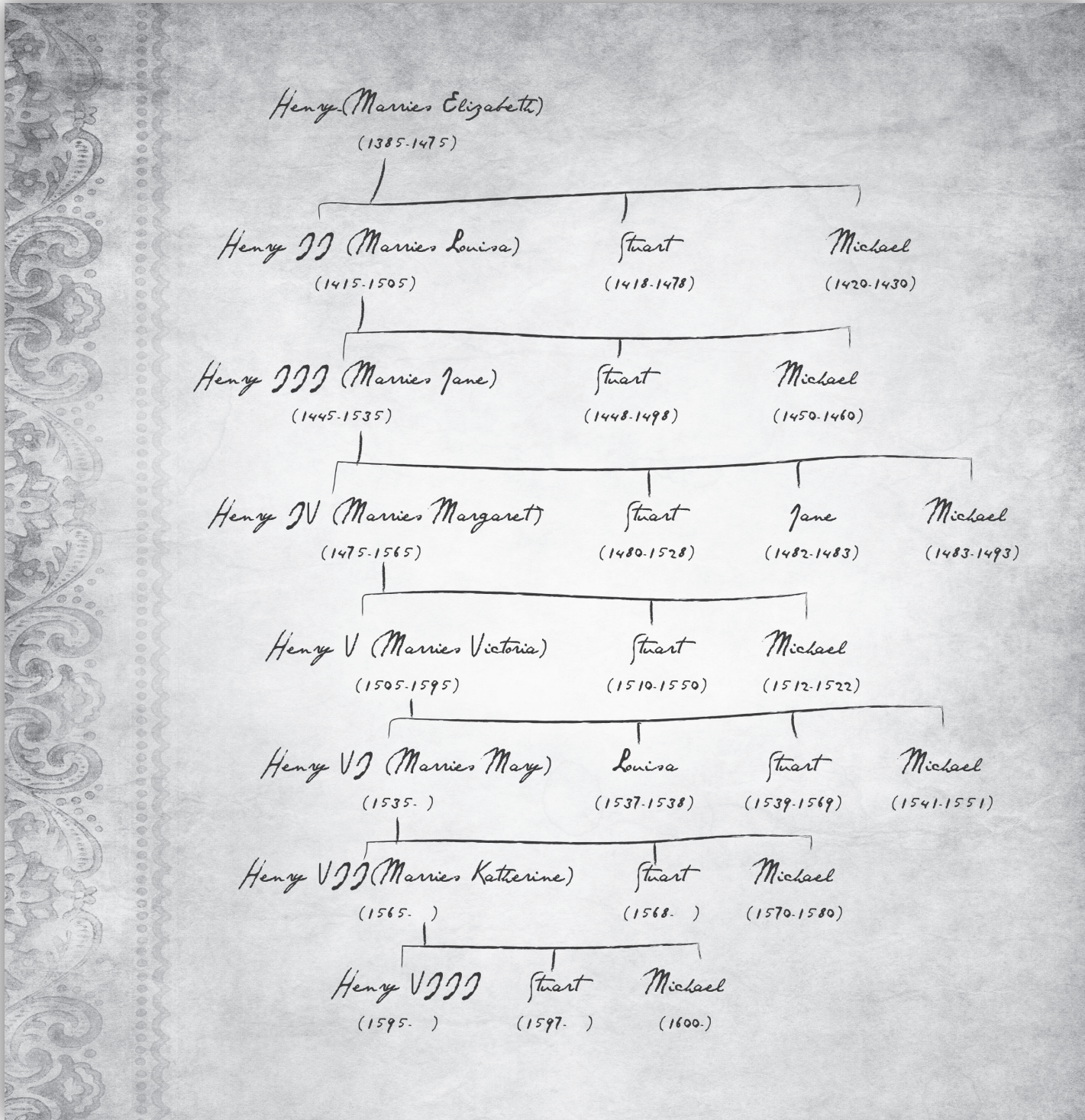
I turned nine today. Nurse brought me a chocolate after bedtime. Father and Grandfather are gone again. I don't care.

Stuart and Henry left for school today. I'm glad. They're mean. Nurse says now we can play together more. She's so nice.

My birthday is tomorrow, but something's wrong. Nurse came to me right after dinner. She said that when everyone is sleeping, I must hide in Stuart's room and stay there until she comes to get me. I'm scared.



Handout C—Stenorians Family Tree Tapestry



Handout D—Stenorian Family Tree Parchment

CUT OUT THESE
RECTANGLES
TO HELP KEEP TRACK OF
COMBAT INITIATIVE ORDER.

Initiative Order: _____

II A. The Gate on page 6

POSSESSED CORPSES (2): Init +0; +0 Slam (2) melee (1d4+1); AC 13; HD 1d8; hp 7 each; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0; AL C; SP Undead Traits; Horrifying Scream (DC 15 Will or -2 on all actions for 1d3 rounds).

Initiative Order: _____

II B. The Courtyard on page 8

POSSESSED CORPSE: Init +0; Slam +0 (2) melee (1d4+1); AC 13; HD 1d10; hp 9; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0; AL C; SP Undead Traits; Horrifying Scream (DC 15 Will or -2 on all actions for 1d3 rounds).

Initiative Order: _____

II C. The Stables on page 9

Baleful Mastiffs (3): Init +3; +0 bite melee (1d6); AC 13; HD 1d10; hp 9; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +0; AL C; SP Howl (DC 15 Will save or -2 on all actions for 1d3 rounds).

Initiative Order: _____

II D. The Barracks on page 9

CERBERUS HYDRA: Init +1; +1 bite (3) melee (1d6); AC 11; HD 2d10; hp 16; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +0; AL C SP: Regeneration (+5 hitpoints every three character turns).

Initiative Order: _____

III A. The Foyer on page 11

GREMLIN: Init +2; +0 melee claws (2) (1d3-1); AC 8; HD 1d6; hp 3; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +0; AL C.

Initiative Order: _____

III A. The Foyer on page 11

ACOLYTES (4): Init +0; +0 melee dagger (1d4); AC 10; HD 1d8; hp 8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will -1; AL C.

Initiative Order: _____

III E. Kitchen on page 13

BALEFUL MASTIFF: Init +3; +0 bite melee (1d6); AC 13; HD 1d10; hp 9; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +0; AL C; SP Howl (DC 15 Will save or -2 on all actions for 1d3 rounds).

Initiative Order: _____

III E. Kitchen on page 13

ACOLYTES (3): Init +0; +0 melee dagger (1d4); AC 10; HD 1d8; hp 8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will -1; AL C.

Initiative Order: _____

III G. Staircase and Upper Hall on page 14

ENCHANTED ARMOR: Init +0; +0 melee halberd (1d10); AC 15; HD 1d12; hp 10; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2, Ref +0, Will +0; AL N; SP Immune to critical hits, mind-affecting spells.

Initiative Order: _____

III N. Master Bedroom on page 16

WOODEN RAVENS (4): Init +1; +0 melee bite (1d4-1); AC 13; HD 1d8; hp 6; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +0; AL N; SP Immune critical hits, mind-affecting spells. The ravens will not pursue the characters beyond the room.

Initiative Order: _____

IV A. Exsanguination Chamber on page 19

BALEFUL MASTIFFS (2): Init +3; +0 bite melee (1d6); AC 13; HD 1d10; hp 9; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +0; AL C; SP Howl (DC 15 Will save or -2 on all actions for 1d3 rounds).

Initiative Order: _____

IV C. The Sanctum on page 20

POSSESSED CORPSES (3): Init +0; Slam (2) +0 melee (1d4+1); AC 13; HD 1d10; hp 9 each; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0; AL C; SP Undead Traits; Horrifying Scream (DC 15 Will or -2 on all actions for 1d3 rounds).

Initiative Order: _____

IV C. The Sanctum on page 20

STUART: Init +0; dagger +0 melee (1d4 +1 Luck drain); AC 13; HD 5d6; hp 17; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +3; AL C; SP Color Spray spell (2): see page 135 in the DCC rulebook.

Initiative Order: _____

IV C. The Sanctum on page 20

ACOLYTES (2-4): Init +0; +0 melee dagger (1d4); AC 10; HD 1d8; hp 8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will -1; AL C.

Initiative Order: _____

IV C. The Sanctum on page 20

HENRY: Init +2; longsword +3 melee (1d8); AC 14; HD 5d6; hp 12 (still down from total of 28); MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +5; AL C; SP Lightning Bolt spell (2) see pages 222-223 in the DCC rulebook.

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Be it known that in the year two thousand and eighteen, the individuals below did bravely become Blood-Oath Signatories, pledging their hard-earned treasure to bring The Peasants' Fell Bargain to the world of mortals. Their names shall stand here as a record of their faith and trust, until the paper on which they are printed crumbles to dust.

Joseph Goodman
Jeffrey Olesky
Joel Mattson
Big Al
Jason Lillie
Neeter the Halfling Assassin
Matthias Weeks
M.L.Nusbaum
josh clark
Noah Gweek Gribko
Brother Tom
Matthew R. Krempski,
Discordian Plenipotentiary
Mark Maloney
Diogo "Old Skull" Nogueira
Chris Ellis
kevmot333
Merf the best older sister Brozik
Frank Romero
Jason Rasmussen
Mark Green
Geraldo Macedo
Joseph Bridgette Wray
Chris Zank
Jo-Herman Haugholt
Russell Mirabelli
Adam "Grotonomus the Gruesome"
Grotjohn
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Ed of Fannyside
James 'The Great Old One' Burke
David Bresson
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Michael Jones
K. Nelson
Kevin A Swartz, MD
Jeff Scifert
Craig Denham
Kate 'Mom loves me best' Polera
Erik Talvola
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Sir Real
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Grimzal Battlehorn
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Erik Gradine
D.W. Beyer
Brent Michael Rose
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Harrison Cross
Akseli Pulkkinen
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Johnny F. Normal
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Marc "Belares" Mitscher
Byron K Henderson
Wes Baker
Bobby James Brown
Oliver D. Dickerson III
Shrikrishna "Big Dickness" Kapote
Bryant T. S. Biek
Chase Street
Bones Carreras
Jack Condon
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