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The Last Dance



AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTERS OF 4TH TO 6TH LEVEL.
BY CHRIS AYLOTT

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The Last Dance

Introduction: Invitation to the Dance.....3

Long ago, back in the last age of the world, there was a kingdom of men called Dayvos...

Chapter One: Meeting at the Crossroads.....5

*It was Midsummer's Eve, about five years ago.
Yes, the same time of year that the kingdom fell...*

Chapter Two: Pavane.....9

*It grew cold as we followed the jester through the woods.
Mist crept between the trees, and I thought I heard mail clinking
and the whisper of drawn blades...*

Chapter Three: Fugue.....19

*We crept out on the balcony and looked down at the dancers.
Whatever magic compelled them didn't seem to reach up here...*

Chapter Four: Volta.....32

*"Then dance, my boy. Dance as if all our lives depend on it!" And
with that I bit my lip hard and ran down the steps into the dance...*

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BY CHRIS AYLOTT

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DEDICATED TO DEB, my first and best reader.

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Invitation to the Dance

Long ago, back in the last age of the world, there was a kingdom of men called Dayvos. Now, these weren't men as we know them today — these were the High Men, seven feet tall and stern. Some people say they're just legends and myths, but I saw them with my own eyes that night. They looked like they could tame dragons.

The last king of Dayvos was named Mileas (MILL-ee-uhs), and he was unusually smart for a king. He learned what any sergeant can tell you, that most wars aren't worth fighting, and he made peace with the orcs of his time. That couldn't have been easy, because the orcs then were fiercer than today's orcs, just like the High Men were bigger than us. But Mileas sat down with a chieftain named Otusk, and they agreed that orcs and humans could live together. Mileas even worked it out so that his daughter, the Crown Princess Kylea, would marry Otusk's son.

That didn't sit too well with Kylea's brother, Prince Aster. He never liked his older sister in the first place — her destiny as the next ruler of Dayvos had a lot to do with that — and he didn't have any use for an orc that wasn't impaled on the end of his war-spear. So he and a few of his cronies decided to do something about both his problems.

The peace treaty was signed at an old hill-fort on Midsummer's Eve, and a ball was held that night to celebrate Kylea and Gragtor's engagement. That's when Aster made his move. He planned to murder his sister and frame the orcs for it. He'd be the new heir and win his father's favor by leading a war of revenge against the orcs.

The plan didn't work so well. Thanks to some bad luck, magic, and a couple of horrible mistakes, King Mileas and just about everybody else at the ball got killed. The kingdom collapsed and there were a couple of centuries of war and suffering before things settled down again. Somebody must think that play is funny, because people sure do keep acting it out.

But like I said, all that was an age ago. You wouldn't think it would have anything to do with a rattled

old soldier like me, but it did. And if you've got the time for another drink — thank you kindly — I'll tell you how ...

Adventure Overview

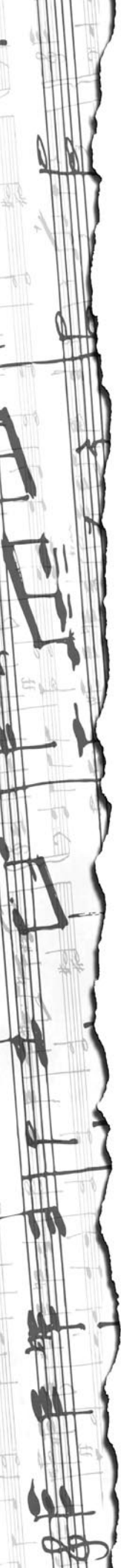
The Last Dance is a fantasy adventure for four to six characters. In this module, the PCs stumble into a magical reenactment of the downfall of a long-forgotten kingdom. Thousands of years ago, an ambitious prince plotted to murder his sister Kylea by magical means and blame a delegation of orcs who had just signed a peace treaty with his father, King Mileas. The plan went wrong, causing the death of the king, the orcs, and most of the land's nobility. The chaos that followed tore the kingdom apart. Now their corpses reappear from the mists of time to act out the tragedy, and the PCs are called upon to free them from their torment.

The adventure features some difficult opponents, and 5th- or 6th-level characters will find plenty to challenge them. A party of 4th-level characters will have to be at the top of its game to survive and triumph.

The most important problems must be solved by clever players, not beaten into submission by brawny characters. However, any party that goes into this adventure without a cleric or plenty of healing potions (preferably both) will get mangled. One or two magical weapons are also very useful.

ECHOES OF THE PAST

Prince Aster's plan was not simple, which is one reason it failed. He formed a conspiracy with several like-minded nobles, including a sorceress named Lady Dezaria. Using a rare magical gem as an amplifier for her magic, Dezaria would cast a spell



THE LAST DANCE

to distract the guests at the ball; the spell would force the entire crowd to dance while Aster completed his part of the plot.

At the same time, Aster would slip poison into Kylea's drink and his men would prepare to ambush the orcs. Aster would then propose a toast. Kylea would drink the poison, and Aster would blame the orcs. Dezaria could then incite the Davosians to frenzy, again using the gem to boost a second spell, and Aster's men would pounce on the orcs, ensuring a quick slaughter. A war would begin and Aster would become crown prince.

Dezaria overestimated her own skills. The enhanced dancing spell she was casting was at the edge of her ability and she lost control of it — although no one realized what was happening until too late. Meanwhile, Aster was careless. After putting the poison in a glass of wine and proposing a toast, he allowed the king to hand out the glasses.

The king drank from the poisoned glass and died, confusing and demoralizing his nobles. Aster's men couldn't get in position for the ambush, and the orcs put up a bloody fight. Because of Dezaria's uncontrolled spell, the few Davosians who survived the battle were unable to stop dancing and died of sheer exhaustion. After being deprived of its entire leadership in a single night, the kingdom collapsed into anarchy.

The magic that precipitated the disaster had another effect; it set off a series of mystical echoes, causing the assassination to be magically reenacted. For thousands of years, the revelers at King Mileas'

Midsummer's Eve Ball have replayed the events that led to their deaths. It is a dance of corpses, each one only somewhat aware of what has happened, each one forced to repeat its last hours over and over again.

Only one member of Mileas' court — a hapless jester named Frog — has a chance to break the spell. Frog stumbled on Prince Aster's plot a few hours before it happened, but was killed before he could warn anybody. His early death and his guilt over failing his king have given him a measure of freedom. He can't change what happened, but he can go look for somebody who can.

ENTER THE PCS

The adventure begins when the characters meet the jester Frog on the road, dressed as a beggar. After testing their goodwill and dancing ability, he uses pantomime to persuade them to follow him into the woods. He leads them to the fort where the Davosians and the orcs are still celebrating their new peace treaty.

Once the characters are at the ball, the dead can react to what they do. This gives the PCs a chance to change history and free the king's court from their suffering, but to do this they must figure out Prince Aster's plot and stop it. That won't be easy, especially after thousands of years of cultural drift have left an almost insurmountable communications barrier. If the characters can't save the king, though, they too will be trapped with the dead forever.

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Meeting at the Crossroads

It was Midsummer's Eve, about five years ago. Yes, the same time of the year as that kingdom fell, and I'm sure that had something to do with the magic we walked into. Perrin, that wizard you met — he and I were heading home with a young thief named Deaver after a quest for the Sardon Codex.

No, we didn't find it that time, but that's another story. Though you'd like the part about the werebear and the barrel of malmsey.

Anyway, we're still deep in the wilderness, following one of the old roads. I'm walking along listening to the crickets starting up and watching out for a rabbit for our supper. Perrin is stopping now and again to check out some old stones that he thinks might be ruins. Deaver has dashed on ahead to stretch his legs and scout a bit.

Suddenly Perrin and I hear a shout from up the road. Deaver comes running back towards us like ten demons are chasing him.

"Edgar! Perrin!" he yells. "There's a beggar rattling his cup by the road — but that beggar, he's dead!"

Beggar in the Woods

The Last Dance begins on Midsummer's Eve. The player characters are journeying through an old forest — why isn't important, though it is convenient if they are in a hurry. The adventure can also take place on an ordinary summer night or even during another season, but the magic that snares the adventurers is most easily explained if it happens on the anniversary of the fall of Dayvos.

It is a pleasant evening, warm but not uncomfortable. Breezes caress the travelers' faces, and they can hear crickets and frogs. A few late fireflies blink among the trees. It's a perfect night for rambling down a mossy path with good friends.

The party comes to an old crossroads, so overgrown that it is not much more than two intersecting paths and a tumbled-down stone cairn. Leaning against the cairn is what appears to be a beggar in a ratty old cloak, who rattles a tin cup at the characters as they approach.

There's no reason for a beggar to sit at a crossroads days away from the nearest town, a fact that should be obvious to most characters. Any character who makes a Spot check (DC 10) will notice two more worrisome facts: a little bit of forest-green cloth peeks out from under the "beggar's" cloak, and there is a deep and clearly fatal gash in his throat. If the party concludes they're about to be ambushed by undead forest bandits, that's their problem.

A Sense Motive check (DC 10) will reveal that the beggar is sitting in a relaxed position, and does not seem to be expecting a fight. However, he is keenly interested in what the party is doing.

Despite their bizarre condition, neither the beggar/jester Frog nor any of the other NPCs who the characters will meet are undead. They're just disturbingly active dead people.

Frog quietly watches the party's reactions, looking for signs of intelligence and generosity. He will be pleased if they give him some alms, but he hopes that the characters will be smart enough to realize there's something incongruous about his presence. If they are, the elated corpse will silently caper a little before proceeding to the next part of his test.

If the party threatens or attacks Frog, he will cower with unfeigned fear and disappointment. Hopefully the players will realize that this pathetic soul is no threat to them. If they do, a sincerely-pantomimed apology will restore the jester's hopes for their assistance, and he will attempt to enlist their aid.

Pantomime is necessary because of the communications problem caused by a thousand years and the well-placed gash across Frog's larynx (see the

Frog, the Murdered Jester

6th-Level Human Expert

CR5; SZ M (humanoid); HD 6d6; hp 21; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 12; Atk melee +4 (1d3 subdual, unarmed); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL CG; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +7; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 15, Cha 12

Skills: Bluff +3, Climb +4, Escape Artist +6, Gather Information +5, Jump +4, Listen +6, Move Silently +6, Perform +11, Profession (jester) +12, Sense Motive +5, Spot +6, Tumble +12

Feats: Alertness, Ambidexterity, Dodge

“Communications Breakdown” insert on page 8 for more on this). Frog shakes his head mournfully at any attempt at verbal communication on the PCs’ part, which sounds like babble to him, and it’s obvious to the PCs that he can’t speak due to his fatal neck wound.

If the characters continue to threaten Frog, he will flee back to the summer palace, drawing any characters who pursue him into the main plot of the adventure.

DANCING WITH FROG

Once he’s convinced of the characters’ good intentions, Frog throws off his cloak and tests their dancing ability. He knows that the most dangerous hazard in the ballroom is an out-of-control spell, and that dancing will be essential to get past the spell and save the king. Frog is desperate but not cruel, and he has no wish to draw a party of adventurers with two left feet to their deaths.

Frog’s dance has two purposes. He is testing the PCs to learn if they have the quick wits and light feet needed to help him. He’s also trying to give them a quick course in formal Davosian dance. He will present the basic maneuvers and encourage the party to imitate him.

He Bows left, Bows right, and mimes for the characters to repeat his action. He Twirls left and Twirls right. He Advances and Retreats. He Turns left and Turns right. Finally, he Advances, Leaps, Retreats, Twirls right and Leaps in the direction of the Twirl.



CHAPTER ONE: MEETING AT THE CROSSROADS

Each time he demonstrates a set of maneuvers, he stops for a moment and waits for the characters to imitate him.

With the basic steps out of the way, he tries to outline the underlying rules connecting the steps (See more on this on page 17). He Bows left and Twirls right. He Bows right and Twirls left. He Advances, Advances, Leaps, and Retreats. He Advances, Retreats, and Turns right. Finally, he Bows left, Turns left, Twirls left, Twirls left, Leaps to the left, and Retreats.

Following the basic steps isn't difficult, but doing so with some semblance of the elegant Davosian style is. Every foot must be placed in just the right place, and every part of the body must be in a particular posture. Frog moves from character to character, fussily adjusting their postures and showing them tiny mistakes they've made.

The best way to demonstrate these dance steps is simply to hop up from the gaming table and do it. If you can get the players up and attempting the steps while you (as Frog) go around repositioning and correcting them, so much the better!

Each PC who attempts to follow the dance steps should make a Perform check (DC 12). If at least one PC succeeds and shows some talent for the dance, Frog will clap his hands in delight and enlist the party's help. Frog explains the problem through pantomime: he staggers around in a dramatic recreation of the king's death by poison and then mimes a sinister villain rubbing his hands together. Finally, he makes imploring faces as the PCs as he gestures for them to follow him into the forest.

If none of the characters can dance, the jester will sigh and mournfully wave them on down the road. It is obvious from his expression that he's bitterly disappointed, and dreads returning into the forest. If the PCs want to help him, they'll have to talk — or mime — him into letting them risk their lives.

If the PCs refuse to follow Frog into the forest, he becomes agitated and stands in their way. He tries to intimidate them into helping him, pushing them off the path and towards the forest. Since Frog is about as dangerous as his namesake, the attempt fails miserably. The characters can push past him and continue their journey if they choose. If they do, sigh heavily, put this adventure aside, and tell your players that you'll just have to run them through a good old randomly-generated dungeon crawl instead. Try not to smirk when the characters

suddenly change their minds and decide to help.

Once the party agrees to follow Frog, he gathers up his old cloak and leads them into the forest.

FROG'S MOTIVES

Frog is the third-best jester (out of four) in the king's court. He is a cheerful and gentle soul, good at capering and tumbling but lacking the cruel streak a great jester needs for his art. He has performed in King Mileas' court for over 15 years, and most of the courtiers dismiss him as innocuous. He is a humble servant who would do almost anything for his king and his country.

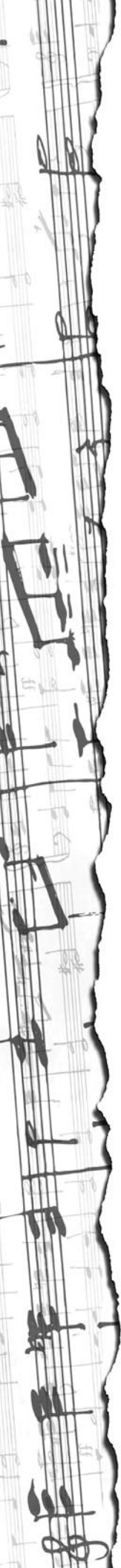
Frog had a chance to stop Prince Aster's plot before it happened. During the feast before the ball, he stopped by the kitchen to beg a snack for himself and a bit of buttermilk for his act. After settling in a quiet corner with a meat pie, he overheard a conversation outside the kitchen window. Two of Aster's co-conspirators met to exchange a vial of poison and instructions for its use.

Frog heard enough of the conversation to realize that the royal family was in danger. He crept away to warn them, but bad luck betrayed him. He stumbled, and the ringing of his jester's bells alerted the conspirators. They caught up with him outside the kitchen and cut his throat.

Frog does not know that Prince Aster is involved in the plot. He personally dislikes the Prince — who has a sharp wit, and usually gets more laughs than Frog does — but believes in the Prince's reputation as an upright and honorable soldier.

After the disaster of the assassination, Frog found himself reliving the last moments of his life. Everything about the scene — from the evil of the plot to his own incompetence — horrified him, and he discovered a steel in his heart that he had never known in life. Somehow, he broke his consciousness away from the scene and stumbled from the fort.

(Exactly how this worked is unclear. A skilled magical theorist would suggest that because Frog was dead during some of the crucial events, his position in time during those events was left undefined by the magic. A more practical theorist would suggest that all magics must contain the means for their own undoing, and that Frog's relative freedom is necessary to accomplish this. You can wave any questions away by suggesting the existence of those two theories.)



THE LAST DANCE

Once he had broken free, Frog sensed a connection between the assassination and the magical echoes that had continued his existence. He vowed to make up for his earlier failure, but discovered that he couldn't enter the castle. Guessing others might be able to go where he could not, he wandered through the formless mists surrounding the palace looking for help. Eventually, he found the crossroads and a worn traveling cloak. Hearing the player characters approaching he quickly thought up a plan to test their suitability, leading to the first encounter above.

One complication to Frog's plan is that the blade that killed him also ruined his larynx. He can't talk at all, though if he mouths words a skilled lip read-

er who understands his language might be able to figure out what he says. Fortunately, Frog can use his performance skills to communicate by gesture.

Frog is short and slight for his time, which means he is of average height and build for the characters' time. He is in his mid-thirties with thinning black hair and dark brown eyes. He has jowls and rubbery lips, but his legs are long and lean. He wears a forest-green jester's suit with pointed slippers, but the many bells that once adorned the suit have all been torn off. The bits and pieces of thread that still dangle from where the bells used to hang give him a ragged and forlorn appearance. He wears no weapon.

Communications Breakdown

One of the problems the players face in this adventure is communication. The elite of Davvos lived thousands of years ago, and their language bears only a faint resemblance to the Common tongue. The characters will be lucky to understand one word in a hundred.

Comprehend languages will allow a cleric, sorcerer, or wizard to understand what any Davvosian is saying. However, it will not allow the PC to speak or write Davvosian, making two-way conversations difficult. (None of the NPCs are able to cast *comprehend languages*.) GMs should also keep careful track of time when this spell is in play — it only lasts for 40 to 60 minutes.

5th-level wizards, 5th-level bards, and 6th-level sorcerers may have *tongues*. This solves the communications problem for the creature touched, but still only works for about an hour.

5th-level bards may also be able to *detect thoughts*. The spell automatically translates for the caster, but remember that the duration is short (5 to 6 minutes, with concentration required) and that the target gets a Will save. Telepathic contact may or may not prove useful — most of the people at the ball know nothing specific about the plot, and their thoughts are regularly interrupted by waves of dread and misery. The ones who do know about the plot will not want their minds read.

If the characters talk to the orcs, they will have a slightly easier time. Orcish is a simple language, and the ancient and modern versions are almost comprehensible to each other. Any character who speaks Orcish and makes an Intelligence check (DC 20) can communicate with the members of the orc delegation. Only a few of the Davvosians speak Orcish; King Mileas is the only one of the royals who does.

The characters may think to try Elvish, theorizing that the almost changeless Elves would have the same language in the previous age. However, neither the Davvosians nor the orcs recognize the language, nor do they seem to be aware of the existence of Elves. This historical mystery might be worth following up on in a future adventure.

Barring magical assistance, the characters must do most of their communicating with gestures and pantomime. As the Game Moderator, you should set the tone with enthusiastic miming and require the players to follow your example. Black outfits and white greasepaint are probably overdoing it, though.

Pavane

It grew cold as we followed the jester through the woods. Mist crept between the trees, and I thought I heard mail clinking and the whisper of drawn blades. I kept my hand on my sword and tried to watch in every direction. Deaver told me afterwards he heard whispers all around us. When I asked Perrin what he heard, he glowered and changed the subject.

After an hour, or perhaps more, we saw a light in the distance, and heard music. I took three more steps, and it was there, right in front of me, a palace like nothing I had ever seen.

We were on a hillside, and a fort stood in front of us. It was a squat, strong building, with blackened stones that hinted at old battles hard fought. A path ran round the building to an outside kitchen. There was a bustle of activity there, and we could smell meat roasting.

A thick oak door stood open in front of us. Firelight streamed from inside the fort, and I could see that the outer surface of the door was severe, rough-hewn, battered by weather and axe. But the inside was carved with intricate designs of animals and hunting scenes. I looked at them and pictured a mighty lord standing within his castle, admiring the carvings and listening to the wind and the barbarians howling outside.

The music was coming from the Great Hall on the other side of the door. Deaver and Perrin and I edged closer, peered in, and stood and stared for a long time at the people of Dayvos.

“Did you ever see the like?” asked Deaver.

“Nay,” I said, “not even in dreams.”

The jester must have been the sickly runt of his litter, for though he was our size he was by far the smallest man we saw that night. They towered a foot and more over us, and the slight ones were as muscled as ploughmen. There was a glow about them, and when one passed nearby it seemed like there was music playing somewhere beyond a hill.

If the men of Dayvos were so strange and terrible, then I tremble to think what the elves of that age

must have been like. Perhaps we were fortunate not to encounter them.

The jester led us to the doorway and faded away. He had a look of surprise on his face, as if he was not expecting to disappear. We could not help him; we were transfixed by the dancers.

We saw a stately procession circling the Great Hall, presenting themselves to the lords of the castle. We also saw that while the fool had differed in stature from his fellows, he shared a grim truth with them ...

Everyone in the hall was dead. They had sword wounds and axe cuts and burns. Some were unmarked, but their faces had the drawn look I once saw on a man who died of exhaustion during a forced march. At the high table, the king had the blackened face of a poisoned man.

Even in their deaths, they were beautiful. Even in their deaths, they danced. A strange compulsion rose from the floor into our feet as we stepped down into the hall. We joined the pavane and danced toward the king.

The Time-Lost Woods

So the characters follow Frog through the woods. It's dark and foggy. The trees seem to leap out of nowhere, and a snowy white owl swoops just over their heads. There's not much room on the trail, and the party has to walk single file.

The characters' sense of time becomes distorted. Some believe they have walked for minutes, while others think they have walked for hours. Sometimes the mist thins enough for them to see the stars, which are in different places each time the characters look at them.

THE LAST DANCE

Anyone casting a *detect magic* spell will sense strong magical forces all around, growing stronger as the characters move closer to the castle. Once the castle is visible, wizards and sorcerers feel the magic in the area as an almost physical force pressing upon them. It is an uncomfortable feeling, though it can be ignored after a minute or two.

The PCs hear eerie noises in the mist — soldiers moving in the bushes, battle noises, animal howls, dripping water, laughter, or brief passages of music. They hear whatever is most likely to make them nervous. Most of the time, each character will hear a completely different noise. These noises are phantoms from other times, but they may lure the characters off the path to investigate.

One sharp-eared adventurer hears a pattering noise above, as if something with many legs were moving in the branches. The noise recurs every time the characters move, and any PC who listens carefully can hear it.

Any character who looks up into the trees may roll a Spot check (DC 15) to catch a glimpse of long white legs skittering about on the branches.

The noise is being caused by a phase spider, which has wandered into the spell from the Ethereal Plane. It is trying to move quietly, but the eldritch mist is causing the faint noise of its claws to carry.

The spider is hungry, but it can't decide if it is hungry enough to risk attacking several creatures at once. If the characters adopt a strong defensive posture — weapons out, watching the surroundings for an ambush and covering each other's back — it wanders off in search of easier prey. If the characters separate from each other, it immediately pounces on an isolated character. If they simply continue to follow

Frog, the spider drops on the character bringing up the rear. It tries to kill its target with its poisoned bite and then drag the meal off into the mists.

After hearing and perhaps confronting the spider, the characters see a bright light in the distance. As they grow closer, they hear merry dance music, and the shape of a tall stone building suddenly appears in front of them.

This is a castle belonging to King Mileas, set on top of a high hill in the heart of an ancient forest. There are no mists within the clearing, and the characters can see the sky. The stars are unrecognizable.

Any character with an interest in stars or astronomy may make a Knowledge (arcana) check (DC 15). If he succeeds, he will recognize the stars of his own world, greatly shifted by the passage of time.

The hill-fort is a stone castle, built to watch over the frontier of the king's domain. It is old, and bears scars of battle damage from past wars. The main building is about 60 feet tall, with narrow windows and a flat roof. The large oak door in front of the characters is the only entrance.

Looking back, the characters can see that they are on a hillside — though they cannot remember climbing — with a trail running down into the woods. A few tent pavilions are nestled against the border of the woods, and small fires mark where men-at-arms are camped. Looking forward, they see a path running around the castle, which leads to a kitchen and a stable.

The PCs can hear music coming from the Great Hall within, and see occasional glimpses of people and brightly-colored fabrics.

The Phase Spider

Large Magical Beast

CR 5; SZ L; HD 5d10+15; hp 42; Init +7; Spd 40 ft., climb 20 feet; AC 15; Atk melee +7 (1d6+4, poison, bite); Face 10 ft. x 10 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA Ethereal Jaunt, Poison; AL N; SV Fort +7, Ref +7, Will +2; Str 17, Dex 17, Con 16, Int 7, Wis 13, Cha 10

Skills: Climb +12, Move Silently +11, Spot +9

Feats: Improved Initiative

Ethereal Jaunt (Su): Shifts from the Ethereal to the Material plane as a free action, shifts back again as a move-equivalent action.

Poison (Ex): Bite, Fortitude save (DC 15); initial and secondary damage 2d6 temporary Constitution

Strangers at the Door

If the party investigates the kitchen, proceed to its description in Chapter Three. If they go to the doorway, they are drawn into the events below.

Frog accompanies the characters as they approach the castle. As they draw close to the door, a surprised look crosses his face. His traveling cloak drops to the ground as he fades out of existence. He will not reappear unless and until the characters save his life outside the kitchen.

At the doorway, a small Entrance Hall leads into the Great Hall that dominates the first floor. Like most of the rooms in the castle, the Entrance Hall has a floor of carefully-polished oak planks. A table holds a vase full of small purple flowers. Banners hang on the walls by the door. The left banner is red with a golden dragon, and the right banner is green with a silver axe.

To the left of the main door, a spiral stairway leads down to the cellars and up through a mezzanine to the next floor of the castle.

As they look into the Great Hall, the characters will see over 70 guests dancing and talking at what is obviously a formal ball. They will immediately notice two surprising facts: many of the guests are orcs, and almost all of the guests have marks of violent death upon them. Most of the orcs have been stabbed with swords. Most of the humans have been hewn with axes.

The PCs can see a high table on the far end of the hall. There are three humans and two orcs at the table. These five are King Mileas, Crown Princess Kylea, Prince Aster, Otusk, and Gragtor.

KING MILEAS

King Mileas is a tall man in his early fifties. He has curly black hair and a thick beard, both of which are turning grey. He is beginning to stoop with age, but he is still agile and physically fit. He wears a bright red doublet with a golden dragon embroidered on it over black hose.

Mileas is a visionary dedicated to bringing about a new way of life for his people. His intellect and will have allowed him to overcome a lifetime of prejudice to build a bridge of understanding with the orcs. He

is an able judge of character (with one exception — he can only think the best of his own family), and will quickly realize that the PCs represent hope for himself and the other souls trapped at the ball.

Mileas has no combat statistics, since he is unlikely to find himself in direct conflict with the player characters. He was once an able soldier, but he has spent years practicing law and diplomacy. He's no match for even a mid-level fighter.

Mileas' death wound is the purple-black mottling of poison. He carries 50 platinum pieces and an emerald brooch set in gold worth 600 gp.

CROWN PRINCESS KYLEA

Crown Princess Kylea is a serious young woman training to rule a kingdom. She is pretty but not exceptionally so, with long dark hair and a slightly pointed chin. She wears a red silk dress with a gold flame motif on the sleeves.

As the crown princess, Kylea believes her job is to learn everything she can about the land she will rule. She listens more than she talks, and defers to her father when her royal opinion is asked. She sees most of her life in terms of duty, and attends to those duties with an understated enthusiasm. She does not laugh often.

Kylea has not yet developed an opinion of her fiancé Gragtor. She does not find him particularly attractive, but he is refreshingly honest and straightforward. She considers him a good match and somebody she would like to know better.

Kylea needs no combat statistics for this adventure. She has little combat ability, though she can be quite resourceful in a pinch. Kylea's death wounds are the telltale bruises of strangulation.

Kylea wears a bracelet of friends.

PRINCE ASTER

Prince Aster is an average man. He can fight with a sword, and he knows the right things to say in court. He's actually quite witty, in a mean way. He dresses well, and he's second in line to rule the land.

"Second" is his curse. Prince Aster has never been the best at anything. His talents are modest, and he

Prince Aster

8th-Level Human Aristocrat

CR 7; SZ M (humanoid); HD 8d8+8; hp 48; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 14; Atk melee +11/+6 (1d6+3, 18–20/X2, magical rapier); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL NE; SV Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +7; Str 13, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 13

Skills: Appraise +2, Bluff +11, Diplomacy +6, Gather Information +6, Innuendo +5, Perform +4, Listen +5, Ride +7, Search +6, Spot +5

Feats: Expertise, Weapon Focus (rapier), Weapon Finesse (rapier)

Possessions: +2 defending rapier, +2 ring of protection

lacks the drive to make the most of them. He dabbles, tries things out, picks up the harp in spring and leaves it gathering dust in summer. He devises grand schemes in the middle of the night, dreams of his own brilliance shining forth, and abandons them in the gray dawn. It is worse when he doesn't abandon them, for whenever he attempts a great deed he trips himself up with foolish mistakes.

Bad enough to be mediocre in an age of legends. It is worse to be a prince, to have wealth, comfort, and the respect of others, and to know that if you were not the son of the king you would be nobody at all. He feels like an empty shell made of inheritance. He has nothing to be proud of in his past, and nothing to expect from his future.

It maddens him. He is obsessed with making something of himself, of doing something important. "If I were king," he tells himself in the middle of the night, "things would be different. I would matter." But he cannot be king as long as his sister lives.

The solution is obvious to him. If he eliminates Kylea and starts a new war with the orcs, he can cover himself with glory on the battlefield. It is another one of his middle-of-the-night fantasies, but this dream he didn't discard in the morning.

As always, he is his own worst enemy. He has struck a deal with Lady Dezaria, a sorceress with ambitions to equal his own. He has obtained a *moonstone*, a gem with the power to focus and amplify magic, and given it to Dezaria (see its description on page 21). She is to use it to keep the nobles dancing at the Midsummer Ball, and later to manipulate their reactions to Kylea's death, causing violence to come to a boil before anyone can calm things down.

Aster has never considered that Dezaria is not as skilled as she claims to be, and that she might not be able to control the *moonstone*.

When the player characters arrive at the palace, Aster is trapped in a hell of his own making, continually repeating his last, fatal mistake. He is doomed to react to the characters as he would in life, to try to counter any threat they pose to his plot. But if they look in his eyes, they may see that he hopes they will defeat him, ending the spell and consigning him to oblivion.

Like others of his kind, Aster is seven feet tall and muscular. He has blue eyes and a ponytail of black hair. He wears a fine blue doublet and black hose. His death wound is an axe blow from Gragtor.

OTUSK, THE ORC CHIEFTAIN

Otusk is an orc who is losing his teeth. He was once the most fearsome warrior of his tribe, but he can feel those days slipping away from him like a leaf floating down a flooded river. He has gained wisdom with age and grown tired of war. He is ready to step down and let his son Gragtor bring glory to his bloodline.

Otusk doesn't think much of humans — in his mind, they're best roasted with garlic and a bit of mint sauce — but Mileas' deal appeals to him. He's tired of burning the dead after every battle, and he believes Gragtor can win even greater glory as a prince of humans and orcs than as just a chief of orcs.

Otusk is slightly bowed by age, but is still almost eight feet tall. Like most orcs, he has green skin, big floppy ears, and large fangs curving up from his mouth. Unlike other orcs, Otusk's fangs are yellowed with age, and he chews carefully as if they pain him. (They do.) Otusk's death wound is a rapier thrust over his heart. He wears leather armor, but has left his battleaxe in his tent as a symbol of peace.

Otusk does carry his *lion's shield*, though.

GRAGTOR

Gragtor is not a complicated orc. He's a brave warrior, comfortable in his hairy green skin and loyal to his father Otusk. If Otusk wants to fight the humans,

CHAPTER TWO: PAVANE

Gragtor will lead the charge with enthusiasm. If Otusk wants to make peace and marry his son to the humans' princess, Gragtor is okay with that too. (He thinks Kylea is cute, if a bit dainty and fragile.)

Gragtor is less aware of his death than most of the people at the ball, but he feels a sense of dread hanging over him. When the characters arrive, he decides they are probably the source of his worry. He considers himself the protector of his tribe and the humans who are joining it, and will challenge the PCs if he perceives that they pose a threat to anybody attending the ball.

Gragtor is over eight feet tall and almost five feet wide. He is dressed in his finest leather armor, and

keeps his favorite greataxe nearby at all times. His body is covered with sword wounds — it took four of the king's soldiers to bring him down in the battle after the king was poisoned.

The Processional

As the PCs take in the scene, the musicians strike up a stately pavane dance. The guests form a processional and pass in review in front of the royal family at the high table. The characters suddenly feel an almost irresistible compulsion to join the dance.

Gragtor

8th-Level Orc Barbarian

CR 8; SZ L (humanoid); HD 8d12+32; hp 88; Init +2; Spd 40 ft.; AC 13; Atk melee +14/+9 (2d10+10, X3, huge greataxe); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SQ: Barbarian Abilities, Darkvision 60 ft., Light Sensitivity; AL CN; SV Fort +10, Ref +4, Will +3; Str 24, Dex 14, Con 18, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 15

Skills: Climb +12, Handle Animal +7, Intimidate +12, Jump +12, Listen +6, Ride +7, Spot +3, Swim +12, Wilderness Lore +11

Feats: Power Attack, Cleave, Great Cleave

Barbarian Abilities: Rage 3/day; Fast Movement, Uncanny Dodge

Darkvision (Ex): Orcs can see in the dark up to 60 ft. Darkvision is black and white only, but otherwise like normal sight, and orcs can function fine with no light at all.

Light Sensitivity (Ex): Orcs suffer a –1 penalty to attack rolls in bright sunlight or within the radius of a *daylight* spell.

Possessions: *torc of missile deflection*

NEW MAGIC ITEM:

Torc of Missile Deflection

When worn around the neck, this bronze collar provides the equivalent of one-half cover (+4 AC) against ranged weapons.

Caster Level: 8th; **Prerequisites:** Craft Wondrous Item, *protection from missiles*, *shield*; **Market Price:** 10,000 gp; **Weight:** —

Each player must make a Will save (DC 27) or join the processional. Any character thus affected must follow the steps of the pavane in a slow circuit around the courtyard. He may speak and gesture as he likes, but the course of his feet is set.

Characters who succeed at the save may remain at the doorway, and may even attempt to extricate their friends with magic or equipment. If they enter the Great Hall for any reason, however, they must make another Will save every round.

Each player may also make a Sense Motive check (DC 15) to notice that the guests are greeting each other and acting as if they are encountering each other for the first time.

As the pavane begins, the lanterns suddenly burn a little brighter. It is as if the ball has just begun, even though when the characters arrived the ball seemed to have been going on for hours.

If they are part of the dance, the characters slowly circle the room with the other guest and pass in review in front of the royal family. Each courtier bows or curtsies while passing in front of the king, and the king raises his glass in response. The characters are expected to present the same courtesy; if they do not, his expression will harden and he will assume the worst of the party in any situation requiring him to make a decision.

If the characters do make the appropriate bows and curtsies, they may make a Sense Motive checks (DC 15) to see a gleam of wild hope appear in the king's eyes. Characters may also make a Spot check (DC 12).

THE LAST DANCE

Those who succeed notice one of the following facts:

- The older man wears the crown of a sovereign, as well as displaying the easy charisma of an experienced king. The three humans are obviously father, daughter, and son. The father appears to be in his sixties, the daughter in her thirties, and the son in his late twenties.
- The older orc on the dais wears the regalia of a chief. He seems to be the father of the younger orc.
- The humans and orcs are uneasy with each other. They constantly check each other's position and demeanor.
- The glances exchanged between the human princess and the younger orc are curious rather than suspicious, though.
- The human prince seems to be angry about something.

The musicians finish playing the pavane and segue into a merry dance. The characters' bodies continue dancing; their feet weave through the steps as if

they've danced in this style before, but the dance seems to go on endlessly. After a few minutes, the PCs may suspect that something is wrong. Their suspicion is confirmed when several characters see a "stutter" in time. A woman flips her gown and tosses her hair; a man raises his wineglass to her. Midway through his gesture, time seems to slip back and repeat for a few seconds.

If the PCs continue dancing without seeking an escape, they quickly become fatigued. It's obvious that while the musicians and the other dancers may continue forever, the characters cannot. There doesn't seem to be any way to escape, however. The characters are caught in the middle of the crowd, buffeted back and forth when they move against the motion of the dancers, and the effort of dancing makes it impossible to concentrate on spells or to get out useful equipment.

The characters are mired in a magical trap. If they discover the means of escape (see the "Dancing the Night Away" trap insert), the party is free to explore the rest of the castle (see Chapter Three).



NEW MAGICAL TRAP:

Dancing the Night Away (CR 4)

NOTE: This is an extremely complicated trap — read it carefully before using it!

Once it becomes clear that the characters are trapped in the music, each PC should make a Spot check (DC 10). Any player who succeeds notices that the other dancers seem to be able to thread their way through the crowd quite freely. If you know the right steps, apparently, it's easy to get to the edge of the dancers; this might be a way of escaping the influence of the music.

To escape, the characters must correctly complete the three dance sequences described below. They will have to discover the correct sequence of steps through trial and error; this is done by trying out the six different possible moves — Advance, Bow, Leap, Retreat, Turn, and Twirl — and seeing which one fits into the pattern of the dance. The PCs get as many tries as they like until one of them completes the entire sequence in order, when the music then changes to the next sequence. This process will be much easier if they remember the steps Frog showed them in Chapter One, deduce the basic rules behind the steps, and pay attention to what happens when they guess wrong ...

The magic of the dance provides some assistance in this guessing game. Every time a character hits upon the correct next step, he will feel a resonance of power in the room around him. However, every time the character attempts the wrong step he feels a sting of magical backlash and must start the sequence over. In game terms, a PC who guesses an incorrect step suffers subdual damage depending on what kind of step he attempted:

- If the character is moving in the right direction but makes the wrong move, he takes only one point of subdual damage.
- If the character makes the right move in the wrong direction, he again takes only one point of subdual damage.

- If the character makes the wrong move in the wrong direction, he takes two points of subdual damage.
- If the PC tries a step that doesn't follow the rules of the dance as explained below — for example, a Twirl in the same direction as the Bow before it, or three Advances in a row — the character takes two points of subdual damage.
- If the PC tries to make a move that is not one of the six basic steps, the character takes three points of subdual damage.

The puzzle can be solved without a single die roll, but if the players get stumped their characters may attempt to guess the next step by making a Perform roll (DC 15). Again, they can make as many of these rolls as they like until one of the party members successfully completes the sequence, when the music then changes. Any character who fails the roll attempts an incorrect step and suffers two points of subdual damage. The GM should specify the incorrect step the character takes, making sure it is both the wrong kind of step and in the wrong direction, which then deals two points of subdual damage. This provides the players with a clue so that they can figure out the correct move.

The characters' original observation that they might be able to escape by moving to the edge of the dancers isn't completely correct. The PCs will actually escape by dancing forward in time to a point when the music isn't playing — each time the characters complete a sequence, time skips ahead to the next dance until they reach the point when the guests have all killed each other. Since the PCs have no way of evaluating their unusual situation, however, their incorrect conclusion will lead them to the real solution.

Failure, however, can be indirectly lethal. Any character reduced to 0 hit points or fewer will fall unconscious. If all the characters fall unconscious, the time loop will play itself out around them. The characters will not die, but

they will wake up in the dark among the dead nobles, with only one hit point and the carrion crawler from the cellars drooling over them (see page 28 for stats). The resulting battle is likely to be short and deadly.

THE FIRST DANCE SEQUENCE

During the first dance, the music is bright and cheerful, sparkling with invitation. The dance is energetic — each dancer bowing to partners and showing off their best Twirls and Leaps.

The first sequence ends when a character performs the following sequence of steps:

Bow left, Twirl right, Advance, Advance, Leap, Retreat.

Each step takes about four bars of a chorus, and the characters will hear enough of each chorus that they can anticipate its end. You should warn the characters when they are eight bars (i.e. two moves) from the end of a sequence. When a character is four bars (or one move) away from completing the sequence, the resonance grows very powerful, and the character feels like he is on the edge of something.

THE SECOND DANCE SEQUENCE

When a character completes the first sequence, the light in the room changes. The lights burn a little dimmer as their fuel is consumed. An orc and a human argue and nearly come to blows, but their companions separate them and drag them away into the crowd.

The music shifts to a new song. This one is slower, more reflective. The dancers seem to withdraw into themselves, dancing backwards in a meditative posture.

The shift to the second dance sequence creates a magical backlash similar to the ones experienced when the characters attempt an incorrect step. Each character who did not complete the first sequence of dance steps takes 1d6 subdual damage.

Clever players may guess that if their characters complete the sequences at the same time,

they will avoid the backlash damage. This is correct. They may complete steps simultaneously simply by declaring that they will do so.

The second sequence ends when a character performs the following steps:

Bow left, Bow right, Twirl left, Turn right, Retreat, Turn right, Retreat

As in the first sequence, the characters are aware when they are two moves and one move away from completing the steps.

THE THIRD DANCE SEQUENCE

Again, the light in the room grows dimmer. There are shadows everywhere. The music picks up the pace again, becoming almost frenzied. The dancers leap and spin with desperate looks on their faces.

A woman in a sleeveless yellow gown dances past the characters; this is Lady Dezaria, the sorcerer who plotted with Prince Aster. Her left hand is badly burned, and she is muttering to herself (see her description on page 21).

The magical backlash occurs again. Each character who did not complete the second sequence takes 1d6+1 subdual damage.

This dance ends when a character performs the following sequence:

Twirl left, Twirl right, Twirl right, Leap, Retreat, Twirl left, Turn right, Advance, Advance, Leap

As in the previous sequences, the characters are aware when they are two moves and one move away from completion.

When the third sequence is completed, all the lanterns go out and the music stops. The darkness continues, and it is very quiet. When the PCs strike a light, they find bodies lying all around them. All the guests have killed each other.

Each character who did not complete the third sequence takes 1d6+2 subdual damage. If all the players spontaneously decide to get up from the table and dance through the end of the sequence together — hey, it happened

in the playtest! — give them 100 experience points each for sheer style.

After escaping the dance, the party is free to explore the rest of the castle (see Chapter Three). Once the PCs step back into the Entrance Hall, the Great Hall resets and the characters observe the guests dancing once again. Characters who linger for more than one round in the Entrance Hall after the Great Hall resets will have to make a Will save (DC 27) or join the dancers again.

The Rules of the Dance

Davosian formal dance combines six basic movements with a few strict rules for how they can be used in sequence. It was a traditional style in King Mileas' day, and the people of his court are experts. Even the orcs dance well enough that they can use its variations to move almost freely around the dance floor.

The PCs will find the style difficult, especially since Frog can only give them a brief introduction. However, even the clumsiest dancers can master the basic rules.

During the scene in Chapter One, the characters simply follow Frog's jig. The jester has chosen his sequence to demonstrate the moves available, so the PCs should be able to make some deductions about how the style works. In Chapter Two, the characters must master enough of the dance style to escape the time loop they are in and explore the rest of the castle. The dance scene in Chapter Four is the most difficult: the characters must use what they've learned to fight their way across the dance floor and save the king.

The six basic moves are:

Advance — The dancer advances five or ten feet. Advancing is a move-equivalent action. A character may only Advance twice before using another maneuver.

Bows — The Davosians show respect to their fellow dancers with deep bows and curtses. Bows can be made to the left or to the right.

Any PC making a Bow move gains a +1 circumstance bonus to his next die roll. Any PC making two Bow moves in a row gains a +2 circumstance bonus to his next action.

A Bow is a move-equivalent action. A character may only Bow twice — once in each direction — before making another maneuver. Any character who Twirls after a Bow must Twirl in the opposite direction to the Bow.

Leap — The character makes a showy leap across the dance floor. The Leap may be forward, to the right, or to the left. The traditional Leap is about ten feet, but characters wishing to Leap further may do so according to the standard rules for Jump checks.

Leaping is a move-equivalent action. A character may only Leap once, and must Retreat after making the Leap. They may take another action (such as an attack) before Retreating.

Retreat — The dancer retreats five feet. Retreating is a move-equivalent action. A character may only Retreat once before using another maneuver. The next maneuver must not be an Advance or a Leap.

Turn — The dancer turns 90 degrees to the left or the right. This allows the character to change direction before making other maneuvers. Any character who Twirls after a Turn must Twirl in the opposite direction to the Turn.

Turning is a free action. However, it provokes an Attack of Opportunity while in combat. A character may make only one Turn before using another maneuver.

Twirl — The dancer spins 360 degrees and moves five feet to the left or right. Any character who Twirls after a Turn or a Bow must Twirl in the opposite direction to the Turn or the Bow.

A Twirl is a move-equivalent action. A character may Twirl up to three times before attempting another Maneuver. Any character who Leaps immediately after a Twirl must Leap in the direction of the Twirl.

FIREBALL COMING ONLINE!

Some players may decide that the best way to handle this castle full of dead people is to kill everybody in it. If so, the resulting fight sequence will use the same combat-while-dancing rules described in Chapter Four. The Game Moderator should use about twenty of the nobles described as “Aster’s Minions” on page 34, then add Gragtor and Aster after a couple of rounds. The rest of the guests are scenery — they may run about and scream a little, but they are no threat to the PCs and are easily dispatched with a single blow.

Since the PCs will still be trying to figure out how to fight while dancing, and 22 angry fighters are no laughing matter at the best of times, the “hack them all and let the gods sort them out” approach will probably go poorly. So be it. In the unlikely event that they manage to kill everyone in the Great Hall without getting killed themselves, the characters will find themselves still dancing amid a roomful of inert corpses. The music continues unchanged even if the characters kill the musicians in the balcony.

The room will “reset” once the characters escape and leave it. When they return, all the nobles will be

dancing again. The humans and orcs in the hall will retain a vague memory of what happened earlier, and will treat the PCs with the greatest suspicion. Any hostile act — and most of the characters’ actions in Chapter Four can be interpreted as hostile — will prompt another all-out attack from the king’s men and the orc warriors.

Whether they attack the dancers or not, the PCs — assuming they’ve survived — find themselves surrounded by dead nobles at the end of the scene. The natural reaction of many players in this situation is to check the bodies for loot. Let them do it. Give them a suitably ridiculous reward — 20,000 gold pieces worth of coins and jewels isn’t a bad start, and you can throw in more if they’re not satisfied. Give them whatever ridiculously high-powered artifacts you like. Let them grieve.

Then, as soon as the party leaves the Great Hall with their great haul, the room “resets.” The guests begin dancing and all the treasure the players have gathered vanishes, along with any bonuses or gains they may have gotten by using the treasure. Such are the ways of magic.



Fugue

We crept out on the balcony and looked down at the dancers. Whatever magic compelled them didn't seem to reach up here, which was good — my knees were still sore from the jumping around we did while we were trapped in the dance. The musicians on the balcony ignored us.

"This gets us nowhere," Perrin said. "Let's see if we can learn anything further up the stairs." Then we noticed the being leaning on the balcony railing next to us.

It was usually male and human, but its face constantly changed, and its hair grew long and short and changed colors. It turned to us, and for a moment I was looking into a mirror of my own face.

"Are you the cause of this magic?" Perrin asked.

The thing replied, "Actually, I'm more of an effect. But isn't it glorious?"

The Eldritch Castle

After the characters escape or avoid the pavane, they have an opportunity to explore the rest of the castle. Doing so is an unsettling experience. The light changes from room to room — some rooms are flooded with full daylight, while others are dark or moonlit. No matter what light streams in from the windows, however, the characters can see nothing but gray mist outside.

Any events the PCs see in and around the castle will repeat if they leave and return. Any human or orc inhabitants that the party kills will also reappear unharmed if the characters leave and return. (The manavore and the carrion crawler from pages 24 and 28 will not reappear, nor will any player characters who are killed during this adventure. These monsters and the PCs arrived after Dezaria's spell was cast, and are not renewed by it.)

The party may want to flee this eldritch place. Whether they succeed or not depends on whether you're feeling merciful. The mists are confusing — the PCs could wander within them for days, only to find that they have circled around and returned to the castle.

Alternatively, they could return to the crossroads and their original path, or wander into a completely new situation. The mists could connect to anywhere, even another plane or another time. It's up to you.

MAIN FLOOR: THE PUBLIC ROOMS

ENTRY HALL

When they escape the dance sequence in Chapter Two, the characters will find themselves back in the Entrance Hall. From here, they can go outside to the kitchen, up to the mezzanine, or down to the basement.

As they retreat from the dance floor, have each player make a Spot check (DC 15). Successful PCs will notice a movement on the spiral staircase as they walk into the Entrance Hall from the Great Hall. If they stop a moment to listen, they'll hear a slithering noise as something goes down the stairs to the cellar.

This is the carrion crawler that the characters will encounter in the cellar. It wandered into the spell some time ago and became trapped. It stays alive by eating the dead bodies of the guests after each repetition of the death of King Mileas (see stats on page 38). The PCs return to the Entrance Hall just as the creature is checking to see if there is a meal available in the Great Hall, and it retreats back to the basement just in time to avoid being seen.

If the PCs stop in the Entrance Hall to decide where to go, the dance music begins again. When they look back at the Great Hall, it is earlier in the

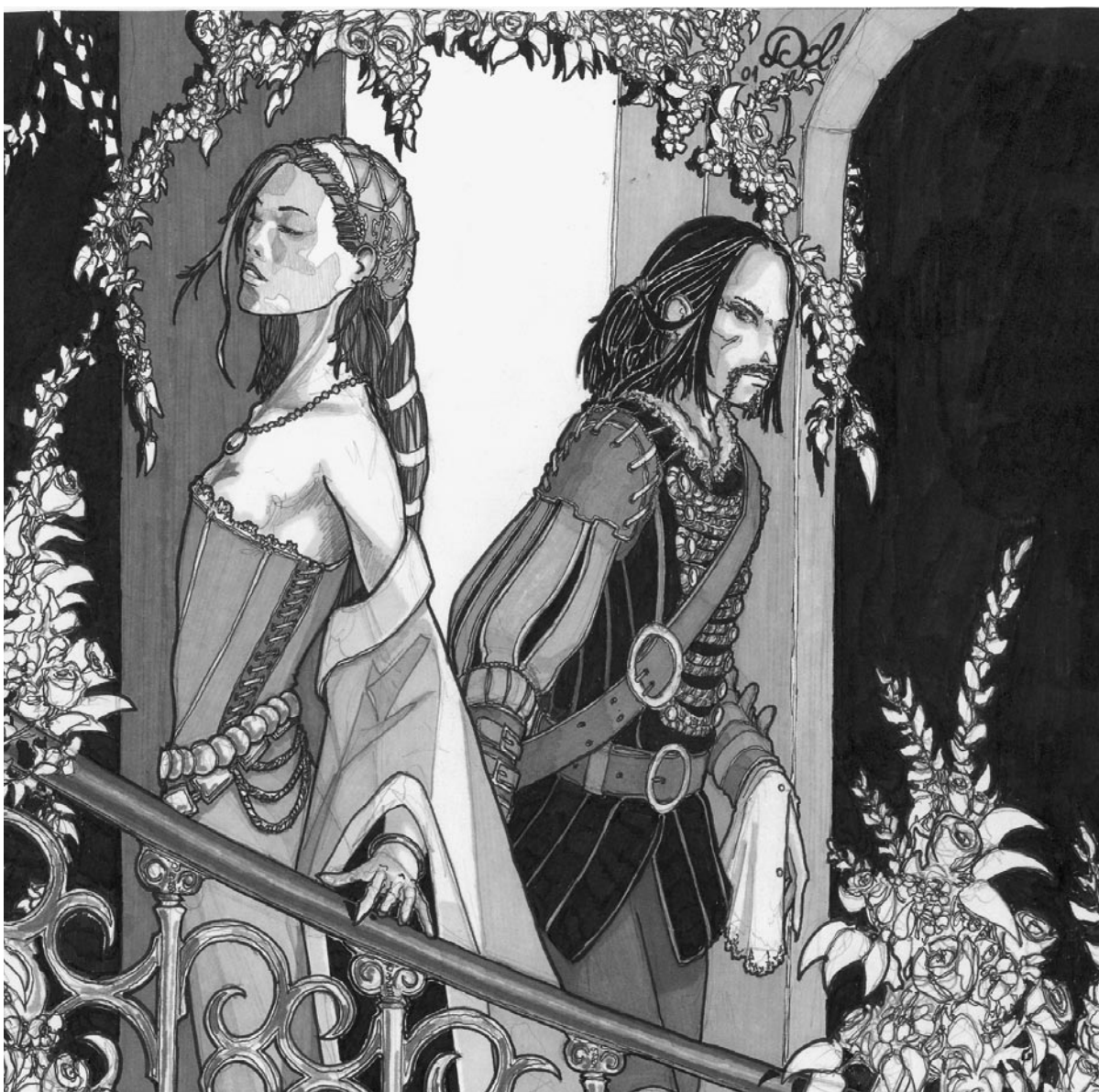
THE LAST DANCE

evening again and the guests are dancing. (The characters will only experience the processional when they first enter the castle; when they return to the Entrance Hall they will usually see the guests dancing in the Great Hall.)

Dezaria's spell continues to exert an attractive force on PCs who return to the Entrance Hall. Each character who spends more than one round in the hall must make a Will save (DC 27). Characters who fail the save join the dancers in the Great Hall again, and must dance through the three sequences described in Chapter Two to escape.

It is easy to walk from the stair to the main entrance or to travel between the cellar and the mezzanine in one round. Only characters who linger in the Entrance Hall risk being drawn into Dezaria's spell.

The third time the characters pass through the Entrance Hall — their initial entrance into the castle being the first time, and leaving the Great Hall the second — they see a man entering from the outer door as Lady Dezaria, the woman from the third dance sequence, leaves the Great Hall. The man is Alexander, one of Frog's murderers, and he is in a hurry (see his stats on page 30). Alexander and Lady Dezaria do not speak or make eye contact as they pass each other. He



CHAPTER THREE: FUGUE

continues into the Great Hall. She walks up the spiral stair. Both disappear as soon as they leave the Entrance Hall. The Davosians do not acknowledge or interact with the PCs in any way; they simply walk past and vanish.

PCs making a Spot check DC 12 notice that Alexander passes Lady Dezaria a small vial when they pass.

Lady Dezaria

Lady Dezaria fel Panayas is a light-hearted young woman with an easy laugh who will stop at nothing to get what she wants. She holds a small fief deep in the mountains of Dayvos, but has not visited it in five years. The court is her true domain, and she has built great influence with her talent for flirtations, trade agreements, and alliances.

It doesn't hurt that she's a sorceress. She wears glammers like fine gowns, and adds a spice of danger to her reputation by subtly boasting of her magical prowess. The court suspects (correctly) that she uses her magic for an advantage

Lady Dezaria

8th-Level Human Sorcerer

CR 8; SZ M (humanoid); HD 8d4+24; hp 48; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 12; Atk melee +5 (1d4+1, 19–20 X 2, dagger); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA Spells; AL N; SV Fort +5, Ref +4, Will +6; Str 13, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 16, Wis 11, Cha 18

Skills: Alchemy +4, Bluff +8, Concentration +14, Diplomacy +10, Innuendo +4, Perform +3, Sense Motive +6, Spellcraft +16

Feats: Skill Focus (Spellcraft), Silent Spell, Still Spell

Spells: (6/7/7/6/4)

0 Level — *resistance, detect poison, daze, light, dancing lights, mending, prestidigitation, read magic*

1st Level — *change self, color spray, message, charm person, ray of enfeeblement*

2nd Level — *Tasha's hideous laughter, hypnotic pattern, invisibility*

3rd Level — *lightning bolt, hold person*

4th Level — *polymorph self*

Possessions: Dezaria carries the *moonstone* and a scroll with very ancient versions of *Otto's irresistible dance* and *suggestion*, the two spells she intends to enhance using the *moonstone* as an amplifier.

NEW MINOR ARTIFACT:

Moonstone

A *moonstone* is an extremely rare gem. When used correctly, it amplifies the effects of an arcane spell. A spell that normally affects one character instead affects every character within an area of 10 feet times the caster's level, and the DC of saving throws against the spell is increased by 10.

A *moonstone* is a near priceless tool for a skilled wizard or sorcerer, and wars have been fought over them. However, they are extremely dangerous and difficult to use. Casting a spell through the stone requires a Spellcraft check (DC 30). Using the stone also adds 10 to the DC of any Spellcraft or Concentration checks made during the casting of the spell. If any check is failed, the mage loses control of the amplified spell. The resulting disaster is usually powerful enough to level a small town, and the Game Moderator is encouraged to be fiendish in describing the twisted effects of the miscast spell.

Moonstones are usually about the size and shape of an egg. They are milky white, with small flecks of gold visible within them. They are extremely fragile (0 hardness and 1 hit point) and sensitive to light. Strong sunlight or its equivalent will discolor the stone and render it useless in less than a minute. *Moonstones* cannot be created by any method known to mortals; they must be discovered and mined.

Caster Level: 19th; *Market Price:* at least 500,000 gp; *Weight:* —

THE LAST DANCE

in her political deals, but nobody has ever been able to prove that she cast a spell on them.

Dezaria is ambitious, but even she was surprised when Aster took her into his confidence and offered to make her his queen. It was too good an opportunity to refuse, and she quickly convinced herself that she could control the *moonstone* Aster promised to provide. She was wrong.

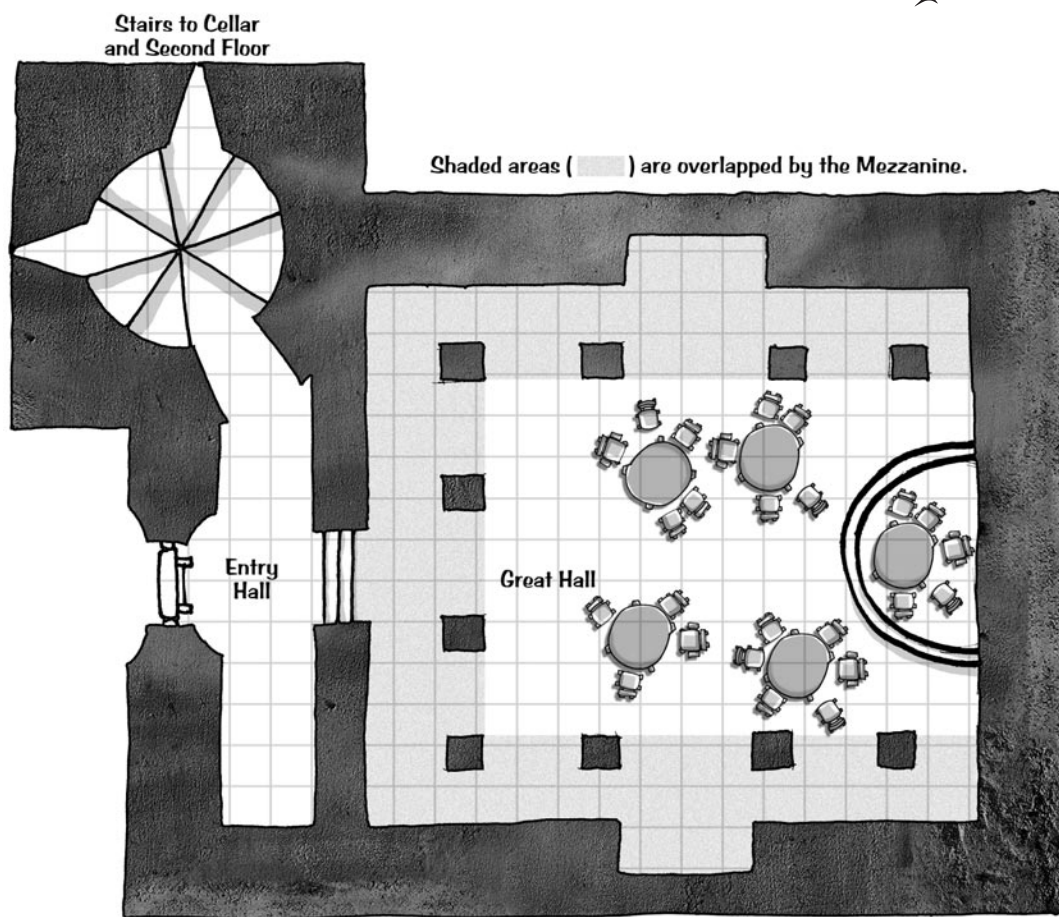
Even after her death, Dezaria believes she can take control of the stone. She clutches it in her blackened hand, feeding power into it and perpetuating the echo effect. This takes most of her strength, and she is unlikely to use the stone to enhance a spell in combat.

She has no desire to attack the characters, but will defend herself vigorously. Her favorite form to *polymorph* into is a brown bear.

Dezaria is relatively short for her people, at about 6' 2". Her body is slim and willowy, and she has auburn hair piled up in an elaborate style. She wears a shimmering, sleeveless yellow gown. The only visible signs of her death are her pale skin and sunken eyes, but her left hand and arm are burned from fingers to elbow.

DAYVOS CASTLE

Main Floor and Mezzanine Map





THE GREAT HALL

This large room occupies almost the entire ground floor. It is lit by decorative lanterns with colorful shades. Tables and chairs are scattered around the edges of the room, and the dancers fill the large, open space in its center.

Despite the crowd, the air in the room is cool. The stone walls and floor are icy to the touch. This is a side effect of Dezaria's spell, which draws in and uses the heat energy in the room.

A balcony runs around north, south, and west sides of the room, supported by wooden pillars at intervals of ten feet. On the east side is a raised platform bearing the king's table. The king, his family, Gragtor and Otusk can usually be found here, though they take occasional turns around the dance floor.

Any character who enters the Great Hall must make a Will save (DC 27) at the beginning of every round. If a PC fails the save, then he must dance through the three sequences described in Chapter Two to escape. During the climax in Chapter Four, of course, the characters will want to use combat maneuvers instead — see page 35 for details.

THE MEZZANINE

If the characters go up the stair from the Entrance Hall, they arrive at a mezzanine with a balcony that looks out over the Great Hall. (This is the balcony described in the hall itself.)

On the west end of the balcony, five musicians armed with lutes and fiddles play merry tunes. The characters cannot interact with these musicians — they are lost in the spell, and even killing them or breaking their instruments will not stop the music. However, the dance enchantment doesn't seem to affect the characters up here, or on the staircase to the mezzanine.

THE LAST DANCE

A manavore leans over the railing on the south side and watches the dancers below. It constantly shifts in appearance, taking on the faces and rich costumes of the nobles. As the characters approach, it turns to them and begins mimicking the appearance of any PC it interacts with.

Any wizard may make a Knowledge (arcana) check (DC 15) to recognize the manavore. If she succeeds, she knows the facts listed in the creature description about its origins and abilities. A non-wizard character may also attempt the check, but will only know that the creature is a manavore and that mages are frightened of it.

The manavore is able to communicate with the PCs, and will offer to trade information. It is a secretive creature, but is willing to explain how the castle is a mystical echo of events in the far past. It

also knows which sections of the castle are safe from the music's magical pull.

The manavore may also be persuaded to describe how everybody died. Its version of the story is that the king was poisoned, apparently by the orcs, and that the humans and orcs all killed each other. In return for this information, the manavore wants to know what the characters are doing here and what their plans are.

It has no interest in ending the spell, and will not give up any information that might help the characters do so. If the PCs become belligerent, the manavore will attack, paying particular attention to vulnerable arcane spellcasters. It will also attack if it sees the characters taking action to break the spell. (This complication is certain to happen if the PCs leave the creature alive until the climax in Chapter Four; it will get involved if it sees its interests threatened.) If out-

NEW MONSTER:

Manavore

	Medium Outsider (Incorporeal)	Feats:	Improved Initiative
Hit Dice:	8d8+8 (28 hp)	Climate/Terrain:	Any land or underground
Initiative:	+6 (+2 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)	Organization:	Always solitary
Speed:	30 ft. flying (perfect)	Challenge Rating:	6
AC:	15 (+2 Dex, +3 deflection)	Treasure:	None
Attacks:	Unbinding	Alignment:	Always chaotic neutral
Damage:	1d8 (arcane spellcasters suffer <i>enervation</i> , see below)	Advancement:	5-7 HD (Medium), 8-12 HD (Large), 13-16 HD (Huge)
Face/Reach:	5 ft. x 5 ft.		
Special Attacks:	Unbinding, Spell-like Abilities		
Special Qualities:	Incorporeal, Spell Resistance 14		
Saves:	Fort +6, Ref +6, Will +4		
Abilities:	Str —, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 16		
Skills:	Bluff +7, Hide +10, Intuit Direction +8, Knowledge (arcane) +9, Sense Motive +8		

A manavore is an eddy in the flow of magic that has attained life and sentience. It sustains itself and grows by absorbing more magic. Manavores are not evil, but they regard powerful mages as a tasty food source. They also feed on powerful spells, and their slow absorption of energy from a spell can change its effect or cause it to collapse. Most wizards and sorcerers have good reason to consider them a deadly menace.

Manavores have no fixed form, and usually copy the appearance of any creature they interact with. (It's easy to tell the difference

matched, the manavore will flee upwards through the ceiling and attempt to ambush the characters later in the lords' rooms above. The manavore is relatively weak if it goes toe-to-toe with the PCs, so strategy is its emphasis over straight combat.

SECOND FLOOR: THE LORDS' ROOMS

The lords' rooms are up the spiral staircase from the mezzanine. These rooms are usually occupied by the officers in charge of the hill-fort (the enlisted men sleep in the Great Hall below), but they have been cleared out for the temporary residence of the king and his children. The rooms are simple, but comfortable.

The spiral staircase leads to another small Entrance Hall. A sturdy wooden door leads into the common room to the north. It is closed but unlocked.

While each of the rooms on this floor is out of synch with the others, and different rooms are experiencing different times of day, each room "resets" less often than the other areas in and around the castle. They will not reset before the adventure ends. This means that any changes the characters make on this floor will persist, and that any events that happen here will not repeat. It also means that if the characters find and take treasure from the rooms, they can keep it. It will not disappear from their possession, nor will it reappear in the rooms.

between the two creatures, since the manavore's appearance constantly makes small, unnatural shifts and changes.) They also have no language of their own, though their *tongues* ability allows them to speak with almost any intelligent creature.

While they avoid combat, manavores can be a deadly foe. They are very difficult to hit once they turn invisible (any character trying to hit an invisible manavore with a corporeal weapon must roll twice against a 50% miss chance), and they can use their Unbinding attack to quickly neutralize arcane spellcasters.

Unbinding (Su): The manavore's Unbinding attack causes damage by absorbing magic. All creatures have some magical potential within them, and the disruption this attack causes does 1d8 damage. Arcane spellcasters are much more closely bound to the mana within them, and suffer a much more powerful effect in addition to the normal damage. When a manavore strikes an arcane spellcaster, the spellcaster suffers *enervation* as if it were cast by an 8th-level sorcerer.

Because the manavore is incorporeal, its Unbinding attack ignores natural armor, armor, and shields, though deflection bonuses and force effects work normally against it.

Spell-like Abilities (Sp): The manavore can use the following at will: *dispel magic*, *improved invisibility*, *tongues*. These spells are as the spells cast by an 8th-level sorcerer.

Incorporeal: The manavore can be harmed only by incorporeal creatures, +1 or better magic weapons, spells, spell-like abilities, or supernatural abilities. When hit by spell or magic weapons, it has a 50% chance to ignore damage from a corporeal source. The manavore can pass through solid objects and ignores natural armor, armor, and shields. It also cannot be detected with Listen checks if it doesn't want to be.

Spell Resistance: To determine if a spell or spell-like ability works on the manavore, the spellcaster must make a level check (1d20+caster level). If the result equals or exceeds a DC of 14 the spell works normally, but the manavore is still allowed a saving throw.

THE LAST DANCE

THE COMMON ROOM

The residents of the floor spend their spare time here. A table and several chairs are arranged in front of the unlit fireplace. A small loom sits on the west end of the room. Late afternoon light slants in from the window above it.

There are three doors to the bedrooms on the north side of the room. The two doors on the east side lead to a small but clean privy and a chapel.

THE CHAPEL

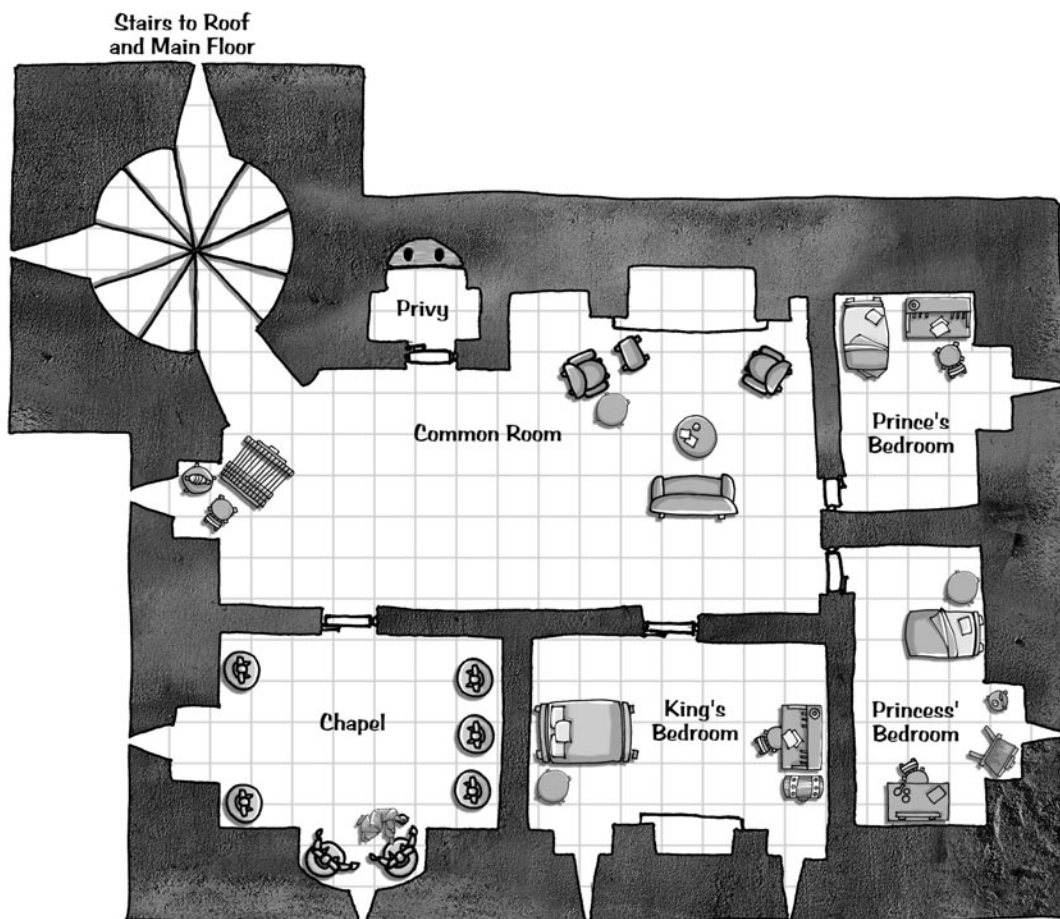
The chapel is a pretty little room. There are woven prayer mats on the floor, and windows on the east and south sides. Morning light shines in through the east window.

The peace of the room is broken, however, by the smear of fresh blood running from the door to one of the seven small shrines scattered around the room. A recently-killed priest lies on the floor in front of the shrine, his right hand clutched around a pen and a leather-bound book.

The body is that of King Mileas' confessor. He is lying in front of the Shrine of Memory, an important part of Davosian belief, and has scrawled his last thoughts into the shrine's remembrance book.

If the characters have used magic to gain the ability to read Davosian, they may make a Decipher Script check (DC 10) to understand the priest's last scrawled testimony. "Everything has gone horribly wrong," it says. "We were all caught up in the

DAYVOS CASTLE *Second Floor Map*



CHAPTER THREE: FUGUE

dancing, but the prince leapt up shouting treachery and the king collapsed. The swords and axes came out, but we couldn't stop dancing, even as we cut each other to bits. We died for hours. Prince Aster said the orcs had murdered his father, but I saw their chieftain's face and he was as shocked as we were."

If the characters cannot read Davosian, there is a small chance they may be able to decipher this passage. To do so requires a Decipher Script check of DC 30.

A beautifully-woven prayer mat sits in front of each shrine. One has been ruined by the cleric's blood, but the six remaining mats would fetch 200 gold pieces each if sold to a discerning merchant with an interest in art.

PRINCE ASTER'S ROOM

As the characters approach this room, the door swings open. A beautiful woman in a sleeveless yellow gown walks out, turns back for a moment to say something, and walks through the common room to the spiral staircase. She takes no notice of the PCs and vanishes as soon as she sets foot on the stair.

The woman is Dezaria, of course, just after she met to plot with Prince Aster. If the characters can understand Davosian, they overhear her saying, "You know what to do with the night-drops. Now make sure your men are standing away from the dance floor when the moment comes."

When they get to the door, they see a deserted room with nothing in it but an empty desk, a traveling case, and an unmade bed. The case is full of expensive silk clothes. The window on the west side of the room is dark.

KING MILEAS' ROOM

This bedroom is larger and more comfortable than the other two. It has its own fireplace, and there is a well-worn bearskin rug next to the large and comfortable bed. The desk is covered with paperwork, with a rather large scroll teetering on top.

If the PCs examine the scroll, they will see that it appears to be the draft of a legal document, possibly a treaty. There are notations and corrections all over it in three different hands. Most of the notations are in a thin, shaky handwriting. There are also occasional additions in a fine cursive, but many of the notations are printed in a blocky, crude style that suggests that whoever wrote them doesn't write very often.

If the characters can read Davosian, they will quickly discover that the scroll is indeed the draft of a peace treaty between orcs and humans. There are enough names and informal comments to deduce that the shaky handwriting is the king's, the fine cursive belongs to the crown princess, and that the orc chieftain printed the block letters.

There is a locked strongbox under the king's bed. The lock can be picked with an Open Locks check (DC 20), but it is trapped with a poison needle. Finding it requires a Search check (DC 20), and removing it requires a Disable Device check (DC 25).

If the character fails the Disable Device check, the needle is sprung and embeds itself in the character's hand. The needle can penetrate leather gloves, but not gauntlets. If the needle penetrates, the poison causes severe nausea and blurred vision (which wears off in a few hours). The PC must make a Fortitude check (DC 16) or suffer 1d6+1 points of Dexterity score damage (the secondary damage is the same as this primary damage). The Dexterity damage heals over several days, barring magical healing.

The strongbox contains clothes, rings, and bracelets worth a total of 200 gold pieces, and a small bag with 50 platinum pieces in it. At the bottom of the box is a collection of amateurish landscape sketches and watercolors.

The draft of the treaty might be immensely valuable to a scholar of ancient history. Proving its authenticity would be difficult, however, since it has been preserved perfectly by the magic around it and is too "new" for a document of its age.

THE LAST DANCE

PRINCESS KYLEA'S ROOM

This otherwise plain room has a cheerful quilt on the bed. The wardrobe in the corner is filled with colorful dresses. Some painting supplies are stashed at the bottom of the wardrobe, and there is an easel by the window with a half-finished sketch of Gragtor on it. Any character with an interest in art notices that this sketch is not by the same artist who did the landscapes in the king's strongbox.

THE ROOF

The roof of the castle is flat and uninteresting. Two small shelters allow guards to keep out of the rain and wind while still keeping watch on the surrounding countryside.

It is night on the roof, and the stars are out. However, a thick mist rings the castle. Nothing is visible beyond about 100 feet.

If the characters look down on the west side of the castle, they see the wooden roof of the kitchen. Two men are quietly conversing outside it. As the characters watch, something startles them. A moment later, Frog runs out the rear door of the kitchen, and the two men pursue him.

One of the men suddenly doubles his speed, easily catching up with Frog. He trips the jester and stabs him in the back with his short sword. The other man catches up, seizes the jester's head, and cuts his throat. After looking around for witnesses, the two men roll the body under a cart. The man who cut Frog's throat saunters down towards a cook fire and is soon lost in the mist. The man who stabbed the jester walks past the kitchen and into the castle.

If the characters have already been to the kitchen, then they see themselves doing whatever they did there. They can even interact with the scene below — if a well-shot crossbow bolt or a spell would change previous events, it does. This could save Frog, hinder his assassins, or even restore a character to life. (If the formerly dead character is a PC, then he should reappear among the rest of the party up on the battlements, probably looking very confused.)

The PCs may climb down to the ground from the roof. Any character who does so vanishes after climbing down about ten feet, and reappears at the

beginning of the scene below. If the entire party climbs down from the roof, they all appear on the ground at the beginning of the next scene. They may then find themselves dodging their own spells and missiles fired from above!

THE CELLARS

The cellars are dank, full of cold, moist air. The spiral staircase leads down to two large rooms dug out of the dirt beneath the castle. It's dark, and medium-sized creatures will find the ceiling too close for comfort. There is an awful smell in the room, as if there were something large and dead in it.

Boxes, barrels, and jars are scattered around both rooms. Most hold basic supplies and foodstuffs for the castle. The supplies are all in good condition, but there is nothing valuable. There is a cistern in

The Very Hungry Carrion Crawler

Huge Aberration

CR 6; HD 5d8+20; hp 42; Init +1; Spd 30 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 18 (−2 size, +1 Dex, +9 natural armor); Atk melee +5 (paralysis, 8 tentacles), +2 melee (1d6+5, bite); Face 5 ft. x 10 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA Paralysis; SQ Scent; AL N; SV Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +6; Str 22, Dex 13, Con 18, Int 1, Wis 15, Cha 6

Skills: Climb +14, Listen +8, Spot +8

Feats: Alertness

Paralysis (Ex): Those hit by a carrion crawler's tentacle attack must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 13) or be paralyzed for 2d6 minutes.

Scent (Ex): The carrion crawler can detect opponents within 30 feet by sense of smell. The crawler can take a partial action to note the direction of the scent, and if it moves within 5 feet of the source it can pinpoint that source. Creatures tracking by scent ignore the effects of surface conditions and poor visibility.

CHAPTER THREE: FUGUE

the back of the cellar and several oak barrels of good wine.

A huge carrion crawler is hiding in the second room, just beyond the connecting passageway. It hasn't eaten in quite a while, a situation it intends to do something about. It is the source of the awful smell, which becomes much stronger as the characters approach the connecting passageway.

THE KITCHEN

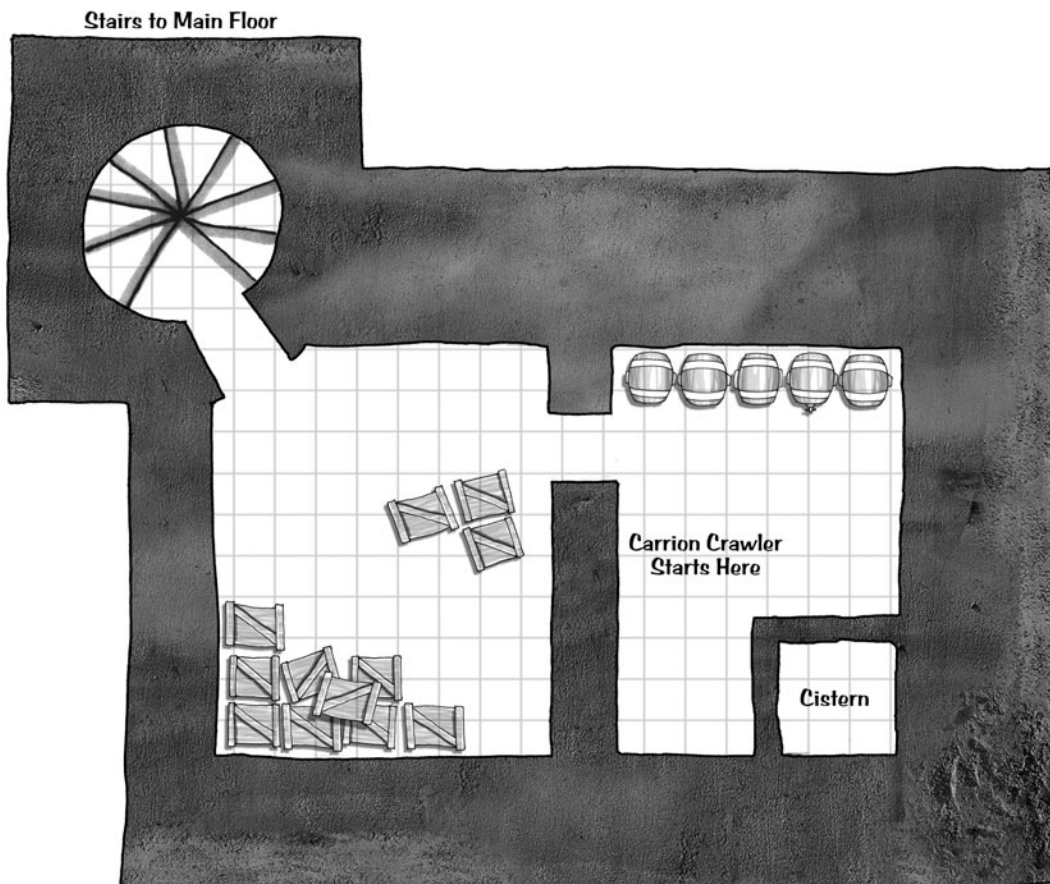
The kitchen is a simple wooden building next to the castle. It contains nothing of interest — there are pots, pans, roasting meats, and cooks, but nothing relevant to the adventure. The stables behind the kitchen are equally irrelevant, though the horses are quite impressive.

Any PC who looks up at the roof will see the party looking back down. The experience may be a bit unnerving, especially if the character who looked can't see herself among the party. (Maybe she's simply a couple of steps too far back to be visible. Or maybe she's not there at all.)

As the party approaches the kitchen, they see two men conversing outside the building. A jingle and a clattering noise comes from inside, and the men turn and look in a nearby window. They don't like what they see, and walk quickly towards the back of the building. The shorter man mutters a spell to himself.

Moments later, Frog bursts out the back door of the kitchen and tries to run behind the castle. The two men chase him. The smaller man runs twice as fast as a normal human, and quickly

DAYVOS CASTLE *Cellar Map*



THE LAST DANCE

catches up with Frog. He trips the jester and stabs him in the back.

At this point, the PCs probably go into combat. They may attempt to save Frog's life (he's not quite dead yet!) and kill or capture his attackers. The larger man — a warrior named Timos — will fight as long as necessary to cover his associate's escape, and then flee. The smaller man, a wizard/thief named Alexander, will fight only so long as the odds look good. When the battle turns against him, he will use his speed and tumbling skills to escape and deliver a small vial of poison to Dezaria in the Entrance Hall.

Timos and Alexander are thugs who know very little about Prince Aster's plot. They have guessed what's in the vial and suspect that it's going to be used to spoil the new peace treaty with the orcs. Their only role in the plot is to get the vial to Dezaria, though, and they know better than to ask questions about anything else.

Most likely, Alexander will escape into the castle, and the party will follow him. If the party saves Frog by preventing Timos from cutting the jester's throat, he will be able to accompany them into the castle. If possible, he should provide a small but significant amount of help during the final battle.

If the PCs choose not to follow Alexander as he flees the scene, any arcane spellcasters in the group will feel a rush of magic power building up. It feels like the water rushing out to sea just before a huge wave hits. If the characters have saved Frog from being killed, he becomes extremely agitated. One way or another, the PCs should figure out that the assassination is about to happen.

If Alexander falls during the fight, then Timos will try to get the vial and escape. If the PCs stop both Alexander and Timos from escaping, then they can take possession of the vial of poison if they think to search the bodies. This changes



Alexander

4th-Level Human Rogue/2nd-Level Wizard

CR 6; SZ M (humanoid); HD 4d6+2d4+6; hp 25; Init +9; Spd 30 ft.; AC 15 (Dex); Atk melee +9 (1d6+2, short sword); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SA Rogue Abilities, Spells; AL NE; SV Fort +4, Ref +11, Will +6; Str 14, Dex 20, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 14

Skills: Concentration +7, Escape Artist +12, Gather Information +6, Disable Device +8, Hide +12, Spot +7, Listen +7, Move Silently +6, Tumble +12, Jump +9, Climb +9

Feats: Expertise, Improved Trip, Weapon Finesse (short sword), Improved Initiative

Rogue Abilities: +2d6 Sneak Attack, Evasion, Uncanny Dodge

Spells: (4/2)

0 Level — *daze*, *detect magic*, *flare*, *mage hand*

1st Level — *mage armor*, *expeditious retreat*

Tactics: When combat begins, Alexander has already cast *expeditious retreat* on himself. He will cast *mage armor* at the first opportunity, then try to flank and disable opponents with his sneak attack. Surviving and escaping are his top priorities.

Possessions: *cloak of resistance* +2, *potion of cure moderate wounds*, 15 gold pieces

Timos

4th-Level Human Fighter

CR 4; SZ M (humanoid); HD 4d10+8; hp 39; Init +5; AC 18 (+2 *chain mail*, Dex); Atk melee +7 (1d8+3, 19-20 X2, longsword); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL N; SV Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +1; Str 16, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 11, Wis 10, Cha 9

Skills: Spot +3, Jump +9, Climb +7

Feats: Improved Initiative, Combat Reflexes, Toughness X3

Possessions: +2 *chain mail*, 10 gold pieces

the echoed history — it is now impossible for the conspirators to poison the king — but it complicates the plot instead of stopping it. A new sequence of events takes place:

- Lady Dezaria goes into the Entrance Hall to meet Alexander, but he isn't there. Puzzled, she goes out of the castle and heads toward the kitchen. She comes around the corner just in time to see the PCs capture or kill Alexander and Timos. She immediately flees back to the castle, slowing the PCs down with a distracting spell if necessary.
- Once she gets around the corner, the unsteady flow of time causes the characters to lose several crucial minutes returning to the castle. Dezaria has time to alert Aster, who thinks of a backup plan — one that will still go horribly wrong and cause everybody's death.
- Dezaria still distracts the crowd with her dancing spell, which she promptly loses control of. Meanwhile, Aster takes advantage of the distraction to surprise and kill an orc guest, setting loose the bloodshed. The PCs arrive on the scene just in time to fight their way through the Aster's men and stop the disaster from happening.

Another option if both Alexander and Timos are defeated is for Dezaria to arrive in the Entrance Hall, find that Alexander hasn't shown up, and turn invisible so that she can sneak up to the kitchen and retrieve the vial of poison from his corpse. This will only work if the PCs have been too busy to search Alexander's body and take the vial. Fortunately, Dezaria has several spells that make excellent distractions. But remember that Dezaria's survival is more important to the plot than the poison; don't get her killed trying to retrieve the bottle.

Volta

“There!” Deaver cried, pointing across the ballroom. “Did you see that?”

I nodded. That rat of a prince had strolled past the table, slapped the orc on the shoulder, and poured the vial into a wineglass with his other hand. Nobody noticed, and the king would never hear us shouting across the room over the music.

“There’s no help for it,” I said. “We’ve got to get across the room before the king raises that glass.”

“How? As soon as we step on the dance floor the magic will seize us!”

“Then dance, my boy. Dance as if all our lives depend on it!” And with that I bit my lip hard and ran down the steps into the dance.

The Plot Unfolds

After exploring the castle, the characters should have seen and heard enough to guess the basic facts of the assassination. They may not have all the details, but they should have figured out that the orcs aren’t responsible, that the prince is, and that the lady in the yellow dress is involved.

The most natural way to uncover these clues is for the characters to have explored the upper floors of the castle, gone out to the kitchen, and then returned to the entrance. If the characters have done this, then it is easy to segue into the climactic fight scene below. As soon as the characters come into the Entrance Hall again, they see the events described below and must leap into action.

If the characters went to the kitchen before exploring the upper rooms, the pace of the adventure changes a bit. If you want to wrap things up quickly, then you can go right into the big fight — the PCs see Dezaria take the vial

from Alexander, but she goes back into the ball instead of up the stairs. She passes the vial to the prince and then takes up her position in the corner, starting the events described below. This keeps the action moving, but may leave the players feeling like the story ended too quickly, and that they never fully understood the situation they were in.

Letting them explore the upper rooms first may lead to a more satisfying ending. If this is what you want to do, then the PCs should see a normal dance scene when they return from the kitchen. If they haven’t seen Dezaria receive the vial and go up the stairs yet, then that event happens. (This event should entice them upstairs for further investigation.) As the PCs explore the upper rooms, the arcane spellcasters among them should feel a sense of foreboding as the level of magic in the area rises like a tide.

As soon as you feel the characters have seen enough upstairs, the magic of the castle reaches a peak that even the magically inept can sense. Something important is obviously about to happen downstairs. As soon as the characters get back to the Entrance Hall, the events below occur.

The lights are low, and here and there couples have slipped off into the shadows to whisper promises and kiss. The musicians are playing a merry tune, and laughing dancers circle the hall. Kylea and Gragtor are among them.

Mileas, Aster, and Otusk are on the dais, talking. After a moment, Aster leaves the other two and walks down to the dance floor. He calls to Kylea and Gragtor, but has to get within a few feet of them before they hear him. They exchange a few words, and Aster walks back towards the dais.

Meanwhile, the king has picked up several wine glasses. He hands one to Otusk, and one to Aster. He picks up two other glasses and waits as Kylea and Gragtor approach the dais. There is one more glass next to him.



The PCs may make a Spot check (DC 10). Each character who succeeds notices one of the following facts:

- As he walked down from the dais, Aster poured a few drops of something into one of the glasses.
- The woman in the yellow dress is standing in the northwest corner. She is reading from a small magical scroll. She seems to be having difficulty with the spell — she is speaking slowly but stumbling over the words, and there is a disturbing glow spilling out from her clenched left hand.
- Four Davosian nobles have suddenly left the dance floor. They are taking up positions along the sides of the room near some of the orcs. They seem to be studying the floor, looking for particular spots to stand.
- Aster's step faltered as he returned to the dais and saw the king handing out the glasses. He may have been expecting to do that himself.

CAUTIOUS OBSERVERS

Kylea and Gragtor are only a few steps from the dais. If the characters do nothing, they walk over to the king, who hands them their glasses. Then he raises his own glass, makes a toast, and drinks. Moments later, he begins choking.

As the king gasps for air, Lady Dezaria botches her spell. (She's about thirty seconds behind schedule, having been slowed down because she didn't practice the unfamiliar words of the scroll enough.) The room erupts into chaos, and the characters are drawn in to die with the rest. They have failed, and are doomed to repeat their last actions over and over again with the Davosians.

FORCING THE ISSUE

However, if the PCs decide that they can change events through force, they face different problems; the characters can't stop the music, and it is too loud for them to have any hope of attracting the king's attention from the Entrance Hall. They may be able to use magic or even a well-placed arrow to get him a message, though making the message comprehensible is itself a difficult problem.

Firing weapons at the king is a terrible idea, and rushing in with weapons drawn isn't much better. If either happens, the humans and the orcs decide that they have been betrayed. Arguments begin and quickly escalate to violence, causing the catastrophe the PCs are trying to prevent. Aster adds to the confusion with contradictory cries of "Invasion!" and "Betrayal!" He gathers

his men and enlists Gragtor in an attack on the PCs. During the fight, he looks for an opportunity to betray and kill the orc, but the opportunity is unlikely to appear before Gragtor takes a few wounds while slaughtering several of the characters.

GO WITH THE FLOW

The characters have two options. They can dive into the dance and make their way to the king in time to save him, or — if they've eliminated the threat of the manavore, and are quick-witted enough to think of it — they can race up to the balcony and get much closer to the king before having to deal with the dancing spell. (If the manavore hasn't been destroyed, it does its best to prevent the characters from moving freely on the balcony.)

Dancing in Combat

When engaging in combat in the Great Hall, the PCs do not have to follow particular sequences of steps as they did in the previous dance scene, but they must use the dance maneuvers given on page 15 and below for all movement. If they can't make their move into a dance step, they can't do it. Any character attempting an "illegal" maneuver takes one or two points of subdual damage, just like the dance scene in Chapter Two.

Characters may mix dance actions and other actions during this combat sequence. However, they must make at least one dance maneuver each turn. Characters may attack normally as a standard action while dancing. They may also take free actions without making a check. Any other action requires a Concentration check (DC 12).

Aster, Dezaria, and their four co-conspirators are caught in the dance spell as well, but keeping track of their individual maneuvers would slow down what should be a fast-paced fight scene. It is assumed that they have enough skill to perform whatever complex

combination of maneuvers they need to get where they want to go. Aster and Dezaria may move up to 30 feet as a move-equivalent action each round, while the nobles may each move up to 20 feet as a move-equivalent action each round.

SPECIAL MANEUVERS

Any PC with at least one rank of Perform skill may also attempt the following special maneuvers:

Combination — The character may make a Perform check (DC 15) to attempt two maneuvers as one move-equivalent action. The movement sequence must still follow the normal rules — for instance, a Twirl must still be in the opposite direction to the Bow that preceded it, and the character must still Retreat after a Leap.

Flourish — By making a Perform check (DC 20) during a maneuver, the dancer shows off his best moves and gains a +2 circumstance bonus to his next die roll. The character may "hold" the bonus and perform additional

CHAPTER FOUR: VOLTA

As in previous chapters, the characters must make a Will save (DC 27) when they enter the Great Hall or the Entrance Hall. If they succeed, they may move normally, but they must make another Will save every round. If they fail, they are compelled to dance.

They can still move around the room by using the Davosian dance steps. The “Dancing in Combat” section below provides further details.

There are three ways to warn the king. If they get within 20 feet of him, they can shout over the music and attract his attention. If they can knock over the glasses — a levitation spell or similar tactic might be useful here, if the caster can get close enough — or create a similar disturbance, the king will look around to see who is responsi-

ble. And if the characters get into a fight with Aster’s men on the dance floor, it will certainly attract the king’s attention.

The PCs may attempt to shoot the king’s glass out of his hand. It is a small object, though, and the king still has speedy reflexes. The glass is AC 22, and any hit will either smash the glass or force the king to drop it onto a hard wooden floor.

The characters have four rounds to get the king’s attention — at the end of the fourth round, the king drinks the poison and their fate is sealed. The following events happen in those four rounds:

Round 1: Dezaria stumbles while reading her spell and botches it, burning her left hand. The spell does what it was supposed

Flourishes to gain additional bonuses. These bonuses stack, and are used the next time the character makes a die roll that is not a Flourish. The dancer loses any “held” bonus if he fails any of the additional Flourish rolls. A Flourish is a free action, but it may only be performed once per round.

In theory, the conspirators could use Bows and Flourishes to gain bonuses to their die rolls. In practice, they probably shouldn’t — it makes the players’ use of the maneuvers a little less special. However, feel free to use the maneuvers if doing so would add a little spice to the fight scene or show the players that the special moves exist.

SHOVING

Before the fight begins, Aster’s minions are likely to try to push and shove the PCs, preventing them from reaching the king. The characters may push back, or they may try to grab the nobles and Twirl them out of the way. This confrontation is a move-equivalent action for the character who initiates it, and it

is resolved with an opposed check (as described below).

The character initiating the confrontation picks a target character who she is trying to move. The target character chooses whether or not to resist. (Resisting is not an action.) If the initiating character is pushing or shoving the target, then both characters make a Strength roll. If the initiating character is using a dance move to pull the target into a different location, then both characters make a Dexterity roll. Each character adds +1 to the roll for every ally who is no more than five feet away. The higher roll wins the confrontation.

If the initiating character wins, she completes whatever move she was attempting and pushes or pulls the target five feet in any direction. If the target wins, the attempt fails and the initiating character wastes her action.

THE LAST DANCE

to do too well — it fragments time and compels the guests to dance for all eternity. Meanwhile, Aster notices the characters and concludes that they are a threat to the successful execution of his plan. He gives a hand-signal to the four nobles (see Aster's Minions on page 34) who are working with him, who dance towards the PCs.

Round 2: Kylea and Gragtor reach the dais. The king hands them glasses of wine.

Round 3: The king raises his own glass. The four Davosian nobles try to slow the PCs down or push them back to the Entrance Hall without attracting the king's attention. They push and shove, but do not initiate combat.

Round 4: The king makes his toast: "Too long the hills have rung with the sound of steel swords. To the music of peace, may it play forever!" At the end of the round, he drinks.

As soon as the characters get the king's attention, he sets his glass down and calls for a halt to the music. He is very surprised when the musicians and dancers are unable to stop.

If the characters can communicate to the king — either through words or gesture — that his glass is poisoned, the king confirms their claim by using a spell to check for poison. (He's no mage, but he has picked up a few useful cantrips over the years.) He is shocked to learn that they are

telling the truth, and presses the characters for more details.

If the characters communicate that Prince Aster is responsible, the thwarted prince flies into a rage and attacks them. Unless they are already dead or incapacitated, his fellow conspirators also attack. Dezaria attempts to sneak out through the Entrance Hall, but she defends herself if anyone tries to stop her.

The Final Battle

Most of the other Davosian nobles and orcs are trapped in the dance spell. They may be able to provide a distraction or a small amount of assistance if the PCs find themselves at a serious disadvantage, but they are unable to be of much help. If they are really outmatched, Gragtor can wade into the fight. He is a clumsy dancer, though, and is only able to move 10 feet per round.

Aster is a vicious and tricky foe. He has a lifetime of experience with the Davosian dancing style, which gives him a significant mobility advantage. He will use that and any dirty trick he can think of to bring the PCs down. Aster will not surrender, though he may try to escape if he is badly hurt and has an opportunity to flee.

Aster's Minions (4)

3rd-Level Human Fighters

CR 3; SZ M (humanoid); HD 3d10+3; hp 24 each; Init +5; AC 14 (studded leather, Dex); Atk melee +7 (1d6+3, 19-20 X2, short sword); Face 5 ft. x 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; AL N; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +1; Str 16, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 12

Skills: Spot +4, Jump +7, Climb +7

Feats: Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (short sword), Dodge

These four nobles are virtually identical: young, hot-blooded, and not too bright. They leap into the fight with enthusiasm, but surrender quickly when they realize they are outclassed.

In the unlikely event that the PCs fight the orcs, these statistics can do emergency double-duty as orc warriors. Simply switch the short swords for greataxes: melee +7 (1d12+4, X3, greataxe)

His co-conspirators are not nearly as skilled as Aster is, but they are dangerous enough to keep the party busy for a few rounds. The four nobles will throw down their weapons and beg mercy if they are injured and obviously losing.

Dezaria is dangerous because the feedback from her spell has driven her almost mad with pain and fear. She only wants to escape, but if she feels threatened she lashes out with complete disregard for anyone's safety. She may damage structural supports, kill innocent bystanders, or even blast her comrades if they're between her and her real target — the door. She will not surrender.

During this battle, the PCs must maneuver according to the dance rules described on page 35 and in the "Dancing in Combat" insert. If the battle goes well for the party, the lights in the room begin to brighten. When the last foe falls, the room is ablaze with light. If the battle goes poorly for the PCs, the lights dim, going out when the last player character falls. (The cycle of events then repeats, with the PCs doomed to forever repeat their last actions. It is not a happy ending.)

FALSE ACCUSATIONS

It's possible that the PCs will not accuse Aster, either because they haven't figured out his connection to the plot or because they don't want to take the risk of implicating the king's son. The king will want to know who is responsible for the poison, however, and is shrewd enough to see through any pretense of ignorance.

If the PCs accuse Dezaria, she will attempt to escape. She will fight furiously if intercepted. Aster will not defend her, nor will he order his minions to defend her. If it looks like she will be captured alive, he may leap in to "assist" and strike her down with a well-placed rapier thrust.

If the PCs are so foolish as to accuse the orcs, Aster will shout for justice to be done and attack Gragtor. The battle between the humans and the orcs begins almost exactly as before (see page 36). If the PCs are lucky, they may be able to escape the hall and flee into the mists. If they are not lucky, Gragtor or one of the dozens of orcs in the room cuts them to pieces.

Justice and Rewards

If the PCs triumph, Dezaria's spell is finally broken. A warm light shines throughout the hall, and the king and all his guests are healed. The arcane spellcasters of the party will feel the energies of the spell fading away.

If Aster, Dezaria, or their co-conspirators are captured alive, King Mileas pronounces an immediate sentence upon them. The four noble minions are banished from the kingdom, and led away in chains. Aster and Dezaria are sentenced to death — Mileas borrows Gragtor's axe and strikes their heads off himself. In justice as in most other things, the Davosians are stern and unyielding.

Afterward, Mileas, Kylea, Gragtor, and Otusk present the party with tokens of their gratitude. Each one gives a gift of a valued possession. Their faces are grave, unsmiling, but sincerely thankful.

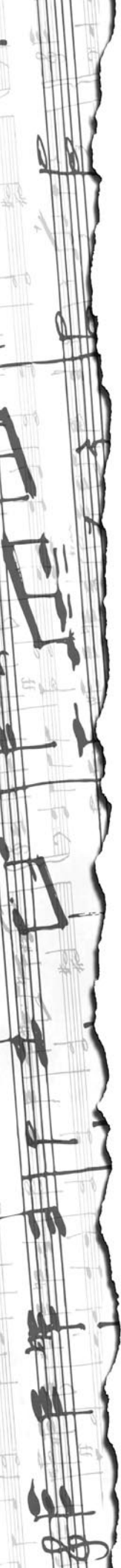
Mileas presents the characters a bag of 50 platinum pieces and an emerald brooch set in gold, which is worth 3000 gold pieces. (If Aster's treachery has been revealed, the king also gives away the Prince's *+2 defending rapier* and *ring of protection +2*.) Kylea gives a *bracelet of friends* from her wrist. Gragtor gives his *torc of missile deflection*. Finally, Otusk presents his *lion's shield* to the most valiant member of the party.

If the characters took the bag of platinum pieces from Mileas' rooms, they will notice that the bag and coins are exactly identical to the gift they have just received. This paradox need not be resolved.

If the *moonstone* survives the battle — this is unlikely, since simply being dropped on the floor will smash it — a character can retrieve it and keep it. If the PCs use it, they will almost certainly regret it, but the results may provide weeks of future plots.

FAREWELLS AND RETURNS

After the gifts are presented, Mileas bows deeply and thanks the party again. If the party saved Frog, the king nods to him. The jester steps forward out of the crowd and leads the PCs to the Entrance Hall.



THE LAST DANCE

He pauses there, and the entire company of guests bows twice to the party. Then Frog leads the characters back into the mists. He carries the battered old traveling cloak with him.

After a timeless interval, they emerge at the crossroads. It's a beautiful summer morning. Frog bows one last time in thanks, and then drops the traveling cloak on the road. He winks to the characters, turns sharply on his heel, and walks back into the forest. He fades away as he reaches the trees.

If the PCs failed to save Frog, the party must find its own way through the mists after being shown the door by another of the king's jesters. Fortunately, this is easy, and the characters arrive at the crossroads without incident.

Before long, a talkative farmer rides by on a wagon. He offers a lift to the next town, and mentions that he is looking forward to the Midsummer's Eve celebration that night. The characters have somehow gained a day while lost in the mists around the castle — in about twelve hours, their earlier selves will arrive at the crossroads and meet Frog.

As the PCs continue their journey, they notice small purple flowers scattered through the forest. Nobody in the party has ever seen these before except on the table in the castle, but if they ask the farmer about them, they will learn that the flowers are known as "Divos Blooms" and are common throughout the land. The flowers are one of several small changes in history.

The characters may wonder what happened to the Davosians. To find out, they must locate a well-stocked library or a private collection of historical texts. After several hours of poring through dusty old books, they will learn that the

kingdom of Dayvos prospered for over 300 years after the reign of King Mileas, then faded quietly away into the mists of history. Queen Kylea and Prince Consort Gragtor became renowned as wise and just rulers, and many good deeds great and small were done in their names.

All seems to have ended well. There's just one worrisome footnote — one that refers to a motley group of adventurers who appeared out of nowhere to do battle with a great dragon ... but that is a tale for another time.

ALTERNATE ENDING: FREEDOM AT LAST

The conclusion above makes a slight alteration in history — an ancient and obscure kingdom lasts longer than it did before. You may not want to make this change to your campaign world, or you may be uncomfortable with a magical reversal of cause and effect. If that's the case, here's another possibility:

Instead of changing the original history by fixing its echo, the characters simply free the trapped souls in the castle. King Mileas and the other royals still present their gifts. Then they thank the characters, and slowly fade away. The guests and the castle itself fade with the royals back into the mists.

If the PCs rescue Frog, he remains with them long enough to lead them back to the crossroads and say good-bye. Then he too fades away. History remains as it was, though you can still slip in the heretofore unknown Divos blooms. After all, what's the point of magic if you can't leave a few mysteries behind?