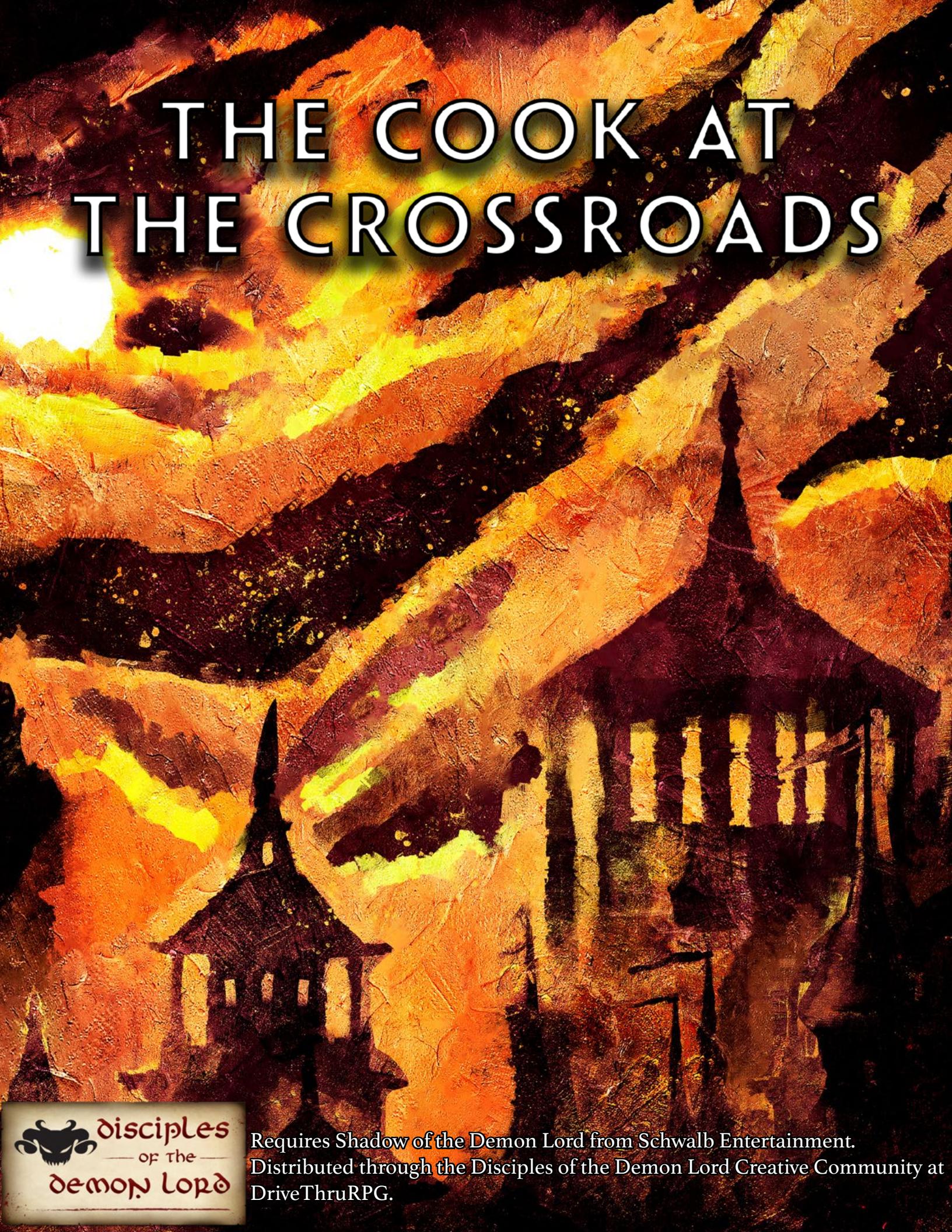


THE COOK AT THE CROSSROADS



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the inn at the crossroads



STARTING

The Inn at the Crossroads sits beside the intersection of two country roads. This rural lodge is visited by few, but those that do leave with a full belly and a rested soul. The smell of baked bread, the sound of laughter, and welcome cheer always greet those that pay their two shillings for a night of respite. Nothing bad ever happened here. Or did it?

The Cook at the Crossroads is a short adventure for Starting characters. This adventure is meant to turn an ordinary stop on the road into a deadly surprise. The Cook at the Crossroads can be used in any Shadow of the Demon Lord campaign, or as a one-shot adventure.

The garden is a mix of vibrant colors and a pair of young girls smile as they pluck vegetables from the dirt. Inside a middle-aged lady sits behind a long bar top and greets guests as they arrive. The player Characters find themselves the only guests here this day. The Inn at the Crossroads is run by a quaint family of four. Martha Eason keeps the inn in tip top shape, and she tends to any guests that choose to rest their weary bones here. Martha's husband, Earnest, cooks all the food. His favorite is rabbit stew, and soon the player Characters will also enjoy its savory tastes and smells. When not whipping up his favorite country cuisine, Earnest is fixing this and that around the inn, barn, and even privy.

Earnest and Martha's two twin daughters are as sweet as pie, and help both their mother and father in any tasks they are set to. The teenagers are happy to sing a song and dance a jig for entertainment while visitors rest from the long road behind them. The player Characters find the family extremely inviting, friendly, and good natured. There is not one ounce of malice in their bones.

The player Characters should be given the famous country reception. They are treated like kings and queens and every hospitality is given. The Eason family are extremely kindly and take pride in treating people well. They are affable and well natured. Unfortunately, there is a secret that they are not aware of that soon will come to light.



SCENE I

Goodnight Weary Traveler

The day turns into night and the guests are shown to their rooms. There are two rooms that each have three beds each. The rooms are slightly cramped, but the smell of flowers on the windowsill and pleasant décor make up for the minor inconvenience. The Easons leave the sleeping arrangements entirely up to the player Characters. Martha indicates to "ring the bell" for anything the guests might need. Each room has a small bell that guests can rattle to signal down the hallway.

When the guests take to their beds one of them finds the straw mattress quite lumpy and uncomfortable. The discomfort is such that sleeping on this bed is impossible, and further investigation easily concludes that rocks have been mixed in with the straw. It does not seem that this could be by accident. There are nine rocks of various shapes and sizes, but each has a red letter painted upon one side. In time it is not a difficult puzzle to solve, but doing so quickly will require a successful **Intellect challenge roll** with 1 bane. Player Characters can easily work together on this task to solve the puzzle. The rocks spell out "In the barn" when correctly understood. There are two options for the player Characters here. They may either go to Scene II: Going to the Barn, or Scene III: I'm Comfortable in my Bed.

Talking to the Easons will provide no real benefit. Martha will apologize profusely about the rocks and look mortified. Any **Intellect challenge rolls** are made with 1 boon. Those that succeed are sure any member of the family is telling the truth. The Easons will happily take the player Characters to the barn if they wish. This satisfies Going to the Barn. If asked about the barn the Easons state they keep supplies there, as well as some livestock, including Earnest's famous rabbits.



SCENE II

Going to the Barn

The player Characters may wish to investigate the barn. They may either go straight to the barn, or speak to the Eason family which will happily take them there. The barn appears to be like any other. There are bails of hay, lofts, pens, supplies, and equipment inside. Nothing appears out of the ordinary at first. The player Characters will find it unlocked. Anyone with any way to detect magic realizes that one of the pens in the back has magical properties. Regardless if the player Characters can sense magic, they will hear the sounds of rabbits in that pen. If Earnest is there, he wants to show off his prized hares and will direct the player Characters to the pen in question.

In the pen the player Characters see a dozen rabbits all happily unaware of their eventual fate. The pen is surrounded by a wire cage to keep them inside. An **Intellect challenge roll** with 1 bane does make it seem the cage is very sturdy for simple rabbits.

Behind an Illusion

The rabbits are displayed with the spell Glamer. Player Characters may discern the illusion as normal against the Cook's Power score. Those that have abilities that allow them to see through illusions immediately do so.

For those able to break the illusion the rabbits are not rabbits at all, but instead people. They are bound at the wrists and feet with rope. Each is screaming for help. If the player Characters begin to rescue the rabbits and Earnest is there, he will begin complaining and asking what the player Characters are doing. After a few moments any member of the Eason family will begin screaming and running toward the exit in a panic.

Nothing to See Here

There seems to be nothing amiss in the barn that the player Characters can find other than the overly strong fencing. It appears Earnest is very protective of his prized ingredients. The Game Master should make it clear that the player Characters find nothing of interest. However, as they make their way out the doors out are closed and latched shut.

Soup's On!

In either case the Cook reveals itself. The Cook is the real caretaker of the inn. The Cook is a fey master of illusion and domination. The creature enjoys capturing mortals and feeding them to each other in its stews. The fey's motivation is completely alien and unable to be rationalized by mortals of this plane. The Cook disguises itself as Earnest while cooking the stew, but otherwise stays hidden in the barn while waiting for a new herd of guests to fall into its trap. It will attack immediately.

If the player Characters quickly solved the rock riddle earlier, the Cook is unable to surprise the player Characters. Otherwise it attempts to do so. If the player Characters were able to see through the illusion, the Cook makes its **Agility challenge roll** with 1 bane.

If the Cook defeats the player Characters it will capture them in the "rabbit pen". The Game Master is encouraged to use this as a setup to the player Characters attempted escape, or the narration of their terrible deaths in the middle of a tasty stew. In the case of the player Characters proving victorious, they find an enchanted item, determined randomly, as well as a huge stash of goods left behind by dead travelers worth $1d6 \times 100$ gold coins. The captives offer their thanks, as well as payment of $5d20$ silver coins.

THE COOK

DIFFICULTY 30

Size 1 Fey Abomination

Perception 12 (+2)

Defense 10; **Health** 25

Strength 9 (-1), **Agility** 10, **Intellect** 14 (+4), **Will** 14 (+4)

Immune damage from disease; charmed, diseased.

Shadow sight You see into areas obscured by shadows as if those were lit.

Spell Defense You take half damage from spells and you make any challenge roll to resist a spell with 1 boon. A creature attacking you with a spell makes the attack roll with 1 bane.

Iron Vulnerability You are impaired while you are in contact with iron. In addition, if you touch or are touched by an object made of iron, you lose Spell Defense for as long as you remain in contact with the object and for 1 minute afterward.

ATTACK OPTIONS

Claws (Melee) ($1d6+1$), finesse

MAGIC

Power 3

Illusion clamor (4), disguise (4), figment (2), thimblerig (2), vertigo (2), glamor (1), phantasm (1)

Shadow wall of darkness (4), nightfall blade (4), darksight (2), darkness (2), shadow dart (2), shadow monster (1)

TALENTS & ABILITIES

Cantrip See Magician

Counterspell See Magician

Spell Recovery See Magician

Sense Magic See Magician



SCENE III

I'm Comfortable in my Bed

Less heroic player Characters may avoid the barn all together. If player Characters decide to avoid exploring the barn they should not be forced to do so. Never force the player Characters into actions they do not wish to take. The night should pass without incident and the next day the wonderful smell of Earnest's breakfast wafts into the bedrooms. The player Characters are greeted by Martha and the twins setting up for the meal. Any discussion of the barn will trigger Martha to ask the player Characters if they want to go see it. She has no qualms about taking them there. If this happens, switch to Scene II: Going to the Barn.

After breakfast Martha and the girls will begin cleaning up. She indicates that she will return momentarily before the player Characters depart to settle the bill, say their goodbyes, etc. However, Martha never returns. In the meantime, Earnest arrives and asks if the player Characters were happy with their meal. A successful **Intellect challenge roll** with 1 bane will make it obvious that Earnest is oblivious to any conversation Martha had with the player Characters. He asks again if the player Characters want to see the rabbits in the barn. If the player Characters continue to avoid the barn, Earnest will finally grow angry and depart.

Less Chewy Ingredients Required

If the player Characters force a confrontation with Earnest he will try to flee back to the barn. The player Characters may impede his path by making a successful Strength challenge roll with 1 bane. Otherwise Earnest is able to return to the barn. If the player Characters follow him, go to Scene II: Going to the Barn.

If Earnest is stopped from reaching the barn, he begins yammering in a strange language and the Cook finally reveals itself. The Cook breaks from the illusion and attacks the player Characters immediately. The fey says something about needing more rabbits as it assaults the player Characters then and there.

Avoiding the barn and forcing this confrontation here is helpful for the player Characters. The Cook makes all rolls with 1 bane. If the player Characters are defeated, they are taken hostage and placed in the "rabbit pen". The Game Master may use this for the start of an adventure where the player Characters attempt to escape, or narrate their horrible end while being cooked for the next guests that walk through the door.

Goodbye

The player Characters say their goodbyes to Martha and the twins. She apologizes that Earnest is busy in the barn, but says that he sends his best. The player Characters have avoided the barn, and although they may have some suspicions, the truth of the situation eludes them. Not far from the inn the player Characters hear someone calling after them. They quickly notice one of the twins waving frantically in their direction.

"Sirs! Madams! Please help me! My father says you need to come to the barn or else he will hurt my sister! Please come! I do not know what has gotten into him."

A successful **Intellect challenge roll** will confirm she is not lying. The player Characters may choose to return to help, and if so, go to Scene II: Going to the Barn. If not, the player Characters may finally walk away from the Inn at the Crossroads. The Cook is angered that these special rabbits got away. It may continue to hunt them after they have departed. The Game Master may use this for further encounters with fey creatures that attempt to return the player Characters as ingredients for the Cook's special stew.

Aftermath

The Game Master may want to punish the player Characters immediately if they care so little about the family. Give 1 Corruption to all player Characters. The girl will give over a silver bracelet for the player Characters to remember her by. This occurs only if the player Characters choose not to help. Later a posse will come across the player Characters and explain they found almost a dozen dead bodies at the Inn at the Crossroads. They have found no one else nearby for days. The player Characters may have signed a ledger at the inn with their names, or the Game Master can simply have these men be over-eager. They will try to search the player Characters and will find the bracelet which matches the bracelet of the opposite twin exactly.

The group will immediately and without hesitation attempt to kill the player Characters in retribution for the dead family and guests. Use this scene only if the Game Master believes there should be a conflict if the player Characters allow the family to suffer on their own. Use a mob of Patrollers for this encounter.

The Eason family are dominated completely and have no choice but to obey the will of the fey. The fey is unable to have them commit violence, but they will help the Cook in any other way. After the Cook is defeated the spell breaks and the family continues to be completely unaware of anything untoward that has happened. Some player Characters may take pity on the Easons while others may not.



The cook at the crossroads