



L'Ombre de La Rochelle

an un-official adventure for *All for One : Régime Diabolique*
by Alex Zalud

This is the first adventure for *All for One: Les Chevaux Noirs*, the un-official spin-off of *AfO: Régime Diabolique*. Therefore, it is assumed, that the PCs are members of the Black Riders – which means, they have had contact to the supernatural in the past.

The adventure can also be played with ordinary AfO-Characters. In this case, the GM has to get them into the affair a bit differently.

This adventure is scaled for experienced characters (meaning at least 3 Talents), so if you, as GM, want to run it with new characters, you will have to scale the adversaries down considerably.

In the course of this adventure, the PCs will learn something about the events at the siege of La Rochelle that lead to the forming of the Black Riders – especially the dreaded 'Dark Night'. As these events are not that far in the past, a PC could be a survivor of the 'Dark Night' himself. Some details have to be changed accordingly.

The adventure is set around March 11, 1636, eight years after the 'Dark Night', but it can be set at any time. The date just gives a special meaning to the events.

Les Chevaux Noirs

Desperate times call for desperate measures. In France, times seldom have been so desperate as now ...

History

The siege of La Rochelle could have been ended on March 13, 1628. A turncoat had revealed a secret passage into the city, and Cardinal Richelieu personally led 5.000 soldiers under the cover of night to break the defences. But their guide got lost in the marshlands north of the city and the troops were discovered at dawn. The besieged closed the breach in their defences and Richelieu had to withdraw. That is the official version.

The truth is a lot darker. Richelieu did indeed lead his troops into the marshlands, but there they were attacked by creatures of the night, foul beasts that killed and maimed nearly half of his troops. Their screams alerted the defenders of La Rochelle to their presence and they immediately opened fire on them – which killed another half of the survivors. Only about 1.000 men made it back alive that dark morning, some of whom later died from their wounds. They were immediately sworn to never reveal what happened that night, by threat of death.

It was two nights after this attack, that the Black Riders were founded – *Les Chevaux Noirs*. King Louis XIII, M. de Tréville, the Marquis de Toiras (the commander of the French troops) and Cardinal Richelieu, during a secret meeting, decided to form a small force of men, who could be entrusted with the most delicate and dangerous missions – to fight against supernatural forces.

Organization

Les chevaux noirs formally are a part of the *chevaux légers* regiment of light cavalry of the Royal Household. But this would only mean anything in the most unlikely case that the Black Riders would be sent into a war - a thing the troop is mostly unfit for.

While M. de Tréville is Captain of the King's (and Queen's) Musketeers (officially, he is just Lieutenant-Captain, as the King himself is Captain of his Musketeers), and therefore recruits men for this illustrious troop, he also secretly recruits for the Black Riders. Most of this recruits come from the ranks of his musketeers – those who encountered the forces of darkness during their missions for the King. But some are recruited out of their ordinary lives, after they too had an encounter with the supernatural.

The Lieutenant of the Black Riders is *Lieut. Vespasien de Saint-Claire*, one of the first to be recruited to the new Corps after La Rochelle.

The Black Riders are a most extraordinary military unit. Most of them can hold themselves in a fight, but not all of them are soldiers. There are scholars, surgeons, ex-monks, former burglars and highwaymen in the ranks of *Les Chevaux Noirs* – as there are men and women alike.

While the King's Musketeers have their headquarters in the Hôtel Tréville in *the Faubourg Saint Germain*, the headquarters of the Black Riders are located just outside the city walls, near *the S. Honóre* Gate in the *Faubourg S. Honóre*. The *Hôtel d'Vieve* is a walled estate, like many others in the

neighbourhood. The coming and going of Black Riders is the only sign that this is more than some minor nobles home.

Inside its walls, there are training grounds, a library and rooms for musketeers from abroad. As their missions often take them to distant parts of France (and sometimes even beyond her borders), there is a continual coming and going.

When a Black Rider enters service, he/she is given a new uniform, consisting of a black felt hat with a plume, whose colour serves as a sign of rank and a black cassock, embroidered with a silver cross with red *fleur-de-lis* on its ends. Even though most people do not even know about the Black Riders existence, the uniform serves to give them authority. The similarity with the uniform of the Cardinal's Guard is volitional – most civilians won't see the difference and most missions are therefore attributed to the Cardinal's Guard (which does sometimes not sit too well with the Riders).

Missions

The Black Riders have never been many. At the moment (1636) there are about 80 men on duty, including the officers. As their missions are always dangerous, their numbers fluctuate heavily, though.

The Black Riders operate on a very open basis. A net of informants across the whole of France reports anything strange to the headquarters in Paris. There, the incidents are evaluated and in case it looks like supernatural activity, a small unit is dispatched to investigate.

Sometimes, they are ordered by the King or the Cardinal on a specific mission, that's not always to do with the supernatural. These missions mostly make use of the special talents of the Black Riders, including infiltration, assassination and burglary.

Magick

Their missions are dangerous, their foes not always human – good cause for the Black Riders to being not too picky about their weapons. As they still have to obey the laws of state and church, they cannot just allow the use of witchcraft, though.

So, they adopt a policy of 'stretching explanations'. Alchemy is explained as being one of the 'new sciences' and the Corps is proud to have some very talented 'scientists' in their ranks. Generally, there are a lot of very gifted men and women serving as Black Riders, people that are able to outperform most ordinary masters. Some of those are a lot more gifted, sometimes to the brink of being able to work miracles. There are some comrades who have been known to show signs of 'true faith', having healed their wounded friends just by laying on hands and praying.

This policy only works so far. Sometimes, a musketeer goes too far for any explanation to work and has to be removed from the rooster. In many cases, this man just disappears, never to be seen in France again. There are rare cases, when a former Black Rider ends his life on a pyre, but these are always those that got seduced by the enemy anyway.

Personalities

Lieutenant Vespasien de Saint-Claire

A veteran of 53 years, Vespasien de Saint-Claire, Comte de Nemours, is one of the survivors of the 'Dark Night', as the survivors call the incident at La Rochelle. The night changed his life – in more than one regard.

He lost his left hand that night, cleanly bitten off by unearthly jaws, surviving only because of the sacrifice of one of his men and the administrations of the field medic, his most trusted friend, M. Garnier. A hand made of black steel sits on the stump, formed into a half-fist, which he uses quite deftly – as a tool and a weapon.

Haunted by nightmares, his personality changed also. The former gallant courtier became a grave officer, who only attends social events when ordered to. Most of the time he sifts through letters, informing him of unusual happenings in France and abroad. At other times, he hones his fencing skills with the best fencers of his corps.

Lieut. de Saint-Claire is a broad-shouldered, muscular man with salt-and-pepper hair and beard. His dark eyes have a haunted look at times, and he unconsciously drums with the fingers of his right hand on his steel left. He always wears clothes of a dark red, the colour of dried blood, over a white shirt. His rapier is a master-piece from Milano, a beautifully hilted blade from Passau, which is almost as feared as his dark moods.

Docteur Valère Garnier

Docteur ès médecin, M. Garnier could have risen high – but he preferred to learn the craft of a surgeon, a profession looked down upon by his scholarly brothers, and practice on the battlefield. His knowledge is vast, his talents many – as are the soldiers that owe him their lives.

The 'Dark Night' changed his life forever. While men were dying around him, he stood transfixed, his mind not able to comprehend what his eyes were seeing and his ears were hearing. He would have died that night, had it not been for Vespasien and another, nameless soldier, who protected him. Vespasien lost his left hand, the soldier was torn to pieces. But this brought Valère back to his senses and he could save his friend's life in return.

After the Black Riders had been formed and Vespasien had been appointed Lieutenant, he asked M. Garnier to join him as the corps surgeon. Valère gladly accepted, as his nightmares and the knowledge he had made his life difficult.

'*Le Docteur*', as he is called by the riders, is a man of 46 years, whose hair has turned completely white after La Rochelle. His dark moustache stands in sharp contrast on his gaunt face with deep-set eyes of a steely grey that always seem to look for danger in every corner.

He has learned to read the moods of Lieut. de Saint-Claire, whom he regards as a friend and not his officer, and often acts as intermediary between the musketeers and Vespasien. His usual demeanor is friendly, but somehow sad – unless he takes to drinking, when it becomes dark and gloomy.

Giovanni Battista Girolamo Montepergo

Born in 1594 in Ferrara, *Messer* Montepergo learned the craft of the swordcutler in Milano, the center of swordcutlery in Northern Italy. But this was not all he learned there – he also delved into the mystic arts of ancient texts, dating back to the times of Imperial Rome. As he opened his own shop, it soon was known for swords, that seemed to be perfectly matched to their users, feeling like a feather in one's hand.

This brought *Messer* Montepergo great wealth, but also the attention of the Holy Inquisition. His competitors whispered of witchcraft, strange rituals and swords, that lost their perfect balance over time. With the Dominicans closing in on him, *Messer* Montepergo saw no other option than to leave his homeland and flee.

He came to France, where the Inquisition has no real foothold and opened shop in Paris. Determined to keep a low profile, he crafted masterful swords, but without the mystical abilities. This lasted, until a minor noble demanded a blade of perfect balance for a duel and payed a generous sum in advance.

Messer Montepergo delivered, the noble killed his adversary, which just happened to be a courtier held in high regard by the King – and the humble swordcutler was once again the target of an investigation. This time, though, he came to the attention of the Black Riders and Lieut. Saint-Claire.

The Lieutenant made him an offer, he could not refuse: work as quartermaster for the Black Riders or die on the pyre. So, since 1630, *Messer* Montepergo works in his workshop in *Hôtel d'Vieuvre*, to keep the weapons of the *mousquetaires noirs* in shape. They say, he can work miracles on old and battered blades ...

Background

The Siege of La Rochelle (*Le Grand Siège de La Rochelle*) was a result of a war between the French royal forces of Louis XIII of France and the Huguenots of La Rochelle in 1627–28. The siege marked the apex of the tensions between the Catholics and the Protestants in France, and ended with a complete victory for King Louis XIII and the Catholics.

In the Edict of Nantes, Henry IV of France had given the Huguenots extensive rights. La Rochelle had become the stronghold of the French Huguenots, under its own governance. It was the centre of Huguenot seapower, and the strongest centre of resistance against the central government. La Rochelle was, at this time, the second or third largest city in France, with over 30,000 inhabitants.

The assassination of Henry IV in 1610, and the advent of Louis XIII under the regency of Marie de' Medici, marked a return to pro-Catholic politics and a weakening of the position of the Protestants. The Duke Henri de Rohan and his brother Soubise started to organize Protestant resistance from that time, ultimately exploding into a Huguenot rebellion. In 1621, Louis XIII besieged and captured *Saint-Jean d'Angély*, and a Blockade of La Rochelle was attempted in 1621-1622, ending with a stalemate and the Treaty of Montpellier.

Again, Rohan and Soubise would take arms in 1625, ending with the capture of the *Île de Ré* in 1625 by Louis XIII. After these events, Louis XIII wished to subdue the Huguenots, and Cardinal Richelieu declared the suppression of the Huguenot revolt the first priority of the kingdom.

Although a Protestant stronghold, *Île de Ré* had not directly joined the rebellion against the king. On *Ile de Ré*, the English under Buckingham tried to take the fortified city of *Saint-Martin* in the Siege of *Saint-Martin-de-Ré* (1627), but were repulsed after three months. Small French Royal boats managed to supply St Martin in spite of the English blockade. Buckingham ultimately ran out of money and support, and his army was weakened by diseases. After a last attack on Saint-Martin they were repulsed with heavy casualties, and left with their ships.

Meanwhile, in August 1627 Royal forces started to surround La Rochelle, with an army of 7,000 soldiers, 600 horses and 24 cannons, led by *Charles of Angoulême*. They started to reinforce fortifications at *Bongraine*, and at the Fort Louis.

On September 10, the first cannons shots were fired by La Rochelle against Royal troops at Fort Louis, starting the third Huguenot rebellion. La Rochelle was the greatest stronghold among the Huguenot cities of France, and the centre of Huguenot resistance. Cardinal Richelieu acted as the commander of the besieging troops (during those times when the King was absent).

Once hostilities started, French engineers isolated the city with entrenchments 12 kilometres long, fortified by 11 forts and 18 redoubts. The surrounding fortifications were totally completed in April 1628, manned with an army of 30,000.

They also built with 4,000 workmen a 1,400 metre long seawall, to block the seaward access to the city. The initial idea for blocking the channel leading to the harbour of La Rochelle in order to stop all supplies to the city came from the Italian engineer *Pompeo Targone*, but his structure was broken by the winter weather, before the idea was taken up by the Royal architect *Clément Metézeau* (also *Metzeau*), in November 1627. The wall was built on top of a foundation made of sunken hulks, filled with rubble. French artillery was used against English ships that tried to supply the city.

Meanwhile, in southern France, Henri de Rohan attempted to raise a rebellion in order to relieve La Rochelle, but in vain. Until February, some ships were able to go through the seawall under construction, but after March this became impossible. The city was completely blocked, with the only hope coming from a possible intervention of an English fleet.

Residents of La Rochelle had resisted for 14 months, under the leadership of the mayor Jean Guitton and with the gradually diminishing help from England. During the siege, the population of La Rochelle decreased from 27,000 to 5,000 due to casualties, famine, and disease.

Surrender was unconditional. By the terms of the Peace of *Alais*, the Huguenots lost their territorial, political and military rights, but retained the religious freedom granted by the Edict of Nantes. However, they were left at the mercy of the monarchy, unable to resist later when Louis XIV abolished the Edict of Nantes altogether and embarked on active persecution.

The Dark Night

On March 11th 1628, a traitor from La Rochelle offered to show the French troops an unguarded entrance into the city. After some discussion – as the Marquis de Toiras would not put his trust in a traitor – Cardinal Richelieu declared that he himself would lead troops under cover of night to the entrance.

Within one day, 5.000 men were assembled, who would try to break the defences of La Rochelle in the coming night. On March 12th, Richelieu led his men through the swamplands north of the city, guided by a local, who lost his way in the darkness and led the troops dangerously close to the city walls.

The defenders heard the nearing army and opened fire, killing them on the open field amidst the swamps. Only about 1.000 men made it back alive in the morning, many of whom died later. The defenders rejoiced and the Cardinal had to accept his defeat and the King's scorn.

The night is called the 'Dark Night' by survivors, who do not speak of it, which is strange, because veterans usually like to talk about the horrors of war, especially when drunk. Those that survived the 'Dark Night' do only talk when deep in their cups and what they tell, is regarded as the ravings of a drunkard by most.

Testimonial of Josselin Egrette

I had been assigned to the mineurs since December, digging and blowing up counter-tunnels day after day, when my unit was assigned to the Cardinal's troops for the night-assault. A traitor had revealed an unguarded entrance into the city, and we would have the honour of being the first soldiers to enter the heretic's city. Oh, joy!

Before packing up, we all heard Mass and I could see the same fear I felt on the faces of my comrades. Night-attacks are dangerous business, for the attackers and the defenders. You have to be very careful, because every shot and every blow may hit a comrade instead of the enemy, as long as it's dark.

Just after dusk, we set out across the northern swamps. In the darkness, we had to keep contact to the man in front of us, while trying not to slip on the wet ground. After I stumbled in our own tracks for the second time, I knew we were lost. The local guide had lost his bearings and we were going around in circles, somewhere near the northern wall!

But then, the first screams sounded in the dark. Mind me – not a shot rang out before that, not a call came from the sentries on the walls. We just heard death-screams piercing the night and the sound of ripping flesh and torn bone.

Then there were screams sounding from every direction and panic spread. The first arquebuses were fired, blades drawn and still those high-pitched screams pierced our ears, getting ever nearer. I drew a pistol from my belt, cold sweat running down my face.

Then the man beside me fell, screaming, and I could feel warm blood spray over my face. Panic struck me and I just pulled the trigger.

In the short light of the muzzle flash I saw my comrade, his throat torn out in a bloody gash and his eyes like two white marbles staring at me. And there was the creature, looking into the white flash of my pistol . . . and then the ball hit it straight in the head and it went dark again.

I don't really know what I did the next minutes, just that I grabbed my short sword and tried to keep them from me. I stumbled along in the dark, blind and deafened by the screams of the dying and those sharp, high wailing of the creatures killing us in the darkness.

Then the sentries on the walls fired a rocket and for a brief moment, I could see. Cap de Dieu, I wish to this day, that damned rocket wouldn't have been fired or I had closed my eyes!

They were everywhere among us, falling on us like wolves. Their forms were vaguely human, their bodies gaunt, with sagging skin. Their faces looked like grimaces of hate and hunger, long teeth snapping bones and rending flesh. But it was their eyes that were really making me piss myself – for they were just black marbles, shimmering in an evil light like polished steel . . .

They popped up out of the earth like unearthly mushrooms, and when one crashed up next to me, I slashed at it with my blade, hacking away till the ghastly thing was cut to pieces. Then all went black and I regained consciousness, when someone was shaking me.

There was cannon-fire from the walls, light in the sky and bodies all around. As I looked around, I saw what had shaken me awake – it was a fallen comrade that had crushed into my prone self, killed by a shrapnel through his head.

Those who could still stand turned to flee across the swamp, still harangued by the ghastly creatures that dragged them into the mud, gnawing at them while they still struggled. Some of them were cut to pieces by cannon-shot, but still others sprang up from the earth.

Then I saw the Cardinal, surrounded by men of his Guard, making his way across the plain. He just walked between the fallen and the creatures, unharmed by them or the shots from the walls, as if indeed the hand of God protected him. He seemed to have taken shelter in the ruins of an abandoned church, when the massacre started, but now had to risk his life to get out of cannon-range.

How I made it back alive, I still don't really know. But before we could even see a surgeon, we were sworn to never reveal anything of this night, by punishment of death. Since then, I have never spoken of it, not even amongst my comrades who survived that night too. But before I die, I want the truth to be known. After my death, this testimonial shall reveal the secret of the 'Dark Night'.

Josselin Egrette

Act 1: Un Testament du Mal

The first act starts with a gruesome murder and a very disturbing testimonial. If the PCs are Black Riders, they are ordered to investigate by Lieut. Saint-Claire, if they are Kings Musketeers, M. de Tréville will do this (or he will send them over to Lieut. Saint-Claire, if the GM wants to include the Black Riders in his game).

1st Scene: Death of a soldier

Josselin Egrette is a veteran of the Huguenot-wars, fighting for over ten years for the Catholic faith. He has seen a lot of horrible things on the battlefields of France, but nothing like that dread 'Dark Night' at the walls of La Rochelle.

Ever since, he has been plagued by nightmares and has turned to drinking to ease his suffering. Today, eight years after that night, he is a drunkard, living on alms and promises in the streets of Paris. But he has one thing left – the truth.

In one of his sober moments, he grabbed some cheap paper from a stall and with the help of a chicken-feather, soot and water, he scribbled down what shall be his testimonial, revealing everything he knows about the 'Dark Night'. He did not know he did sign his own death-warrant ...

On the morning of 11th March, his naked body is found nailed to the door of S. Eustache church. His skin has been cut from his flesh and is nailed to the wood, holding the body in the position of the Redeemer. His face has not been cut and the look of unimaginable horror on his face etches the image forever into the memory of those who are unlucky enough to walk by the church at dawn.

The murder soon is topic talk of the day in the streets of Paris. Talk of demons and witches abound, and soon someone speaks of Huguenots, as the body was nailed to a Catholic churches door. Fear and suppressed hatred smoulder, and it is only a matter of time, before someone does something very foolish ...

The circumstances of the murder bring it to the attention of higher authorities and the whole thing is dumped on Lieut. Saint-Claire's desk – marked as 'urgent'. Everybody knows that this one death may bring a second St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre upon Paris.

The PCs are summoned to Lieut. Saint-Claire's office in the upper level of the *Hôtel d'Veve*, where he sits behind his massive desk as usual, mustering them with a glance almost without looking up from his work.

"Messieurs, I have a most pressing task at hand, which requires your immediate action. A corpse has been found nailed to the door of S. Eustache this very morning, and the tongues are already wagging in every possible way. Come evening, we may well find ourselves in the middle of a murderous mob, out to kill some Huguenots.

I want you to investigate in this matter – and to do it quickly! Time is of the essence. Dismissed!"

The PCs do have only one start, the body itself. It is kept in a slaughterhouse near *Les Halles*, in a dark corner, given a wide berth by even the hardest butchers. The first glimpse on the corpse requires a WIL-roll (DIFF 3) to stop oneself from retching and vomiting.

Examining the corpse with *Craft: Medicine* (DIFF 2) reveals some very disturbing facts:

- 1 – 2 successes: The skin was cut with a very sharp blade, carefully folded back from the flesh and nailed to the wood with ordinary iron nails. A small puncture wound on the breast could be the lethal wound.
- 3 successes: There was no major blood vessel injured – the man could well have been alive while his skin was being cut from his muscles. His body has some very old scars, like that of an old soldier.
- 4 successes: Folded back over the flesh, some of the cuts form letters on the torso, reading *TRAITRE* – traitor.

Examining the corpse with *Investigation* (DIFF 2) reveals more mundane things.

- 1 – 2 successes: Fingernails and hair point to a man living off the streets and there is still a breath of strong liquor on the dead lips.
- 3 successes: His hands are calloused, but not like that of some workman, but more like that of man used to hold a sword.
- 4 successes: There are black markings on the left side of his face, etched into his skin. Those are often found on those who fire muskets, as tiny particles of powder burn itself into the skin.

How much information the PCs do get from the corpse – all they can say is, that this was maybe a veteran, living on the streets, who got bestially murdered.

2nd Scene: Rumble on the streets

While the PCs examine the body, tensions rise in the streets of Paris. The first Huguenots are assaulted by bullies, doors smeared with horse dung and the Cardinals Guard have to draw steel to cool some hot-heads.

The PCs can witness some of this, when they go about town, maybe when on their way to examine the crime scene. Already agitators are at work near S. Eustache, proclaiming that this murder of ‘an innocent man’ is another affront against the ‘true faith’, which must be answered in kind.



The Church of St Eustache, Paris (French: *L'église Saint-Eustache*) was built between 1532 and 1632. Situated at the entrance to Paris's ancient markets (*Les Halles*) and the beginning of *rue Montorgueil*, St Eustache's is considered a masterpiece of late Gothic architecture. Currently, work on the church is not completely

finished and a scaffold is erected at its south-east façade.

The name of the church refers to Saint Eustache, a Roman general of the second century AD who was burned, along with his family, for converting to Christianity.

It could therefore imply a certain symbolism to nail a corpse to this church's door (*Acad.: Religion* DIFF 2) – it could be interpreted as a symbol for a Huguenot-martyr or a pious Catholic that got killed for holding on to his faith (the last version being the one most popular on the streets at the moment).

The door itself has already been washed clean of blood, but a brown stain on the cobblestones remains, and a lot of people are gathered around, talking about the gruesome sight. Asking around (*Investigation* DIF 1) quickly gets the PCs the names of those who found the corpse in the morning – M. Neuvers, a baker and Mdme. Galinier, a woman who sells milk in the streets.

M. Neuvers is easy to find, as he uses his sudden popularity to sell his pies. He came to S. Eustache like every morning on his way to the street-corner, where he always hawks his pies and breads. The sight almost made him stain himself, he says. He cannot tell the PCs more, but insists, that the woman with the milk was there before him.

Mdme. Galinier is harder to find – she sold all of her milk already and left Paris for her small farm to the south of the city. Most women in the neighbourhood of S. Eustache can point the PCs to the little farm on the outskirts of the Faubourg Saint-Germain (*Investigation* DIFF 2), as they all buy their milk from her. Mdme. Galinier is the wife of a humble cattle-farmer and has sold the milk of their cows in the neighbourhood of S. Eustache for years. She was indeed the first person on the scene, but is deeply shocked. It requires some skill to get past her worried husband and her own fears to get her talking (*Empathy* DIFF 2).

"You see, it was just after sunrise, the streets were dark, as they are every day, when I enter the city. It's not safe in Paris in the dark, so I'm very careful on my way. But when I got to S. Eustache, I almost fainted ... The poor man! To be treated like this in death is a most horrible thought, it's against Gods will! And then this blasphemous papers ..."

Asked about the papers, she confesses that there were some papers nailed to the breast of the body – a sight she found so offending, she took them away, stuffing them in her bag, forgetting about them until now. She will hand them over to the PCs – it is the testimonial of Josselin Egrette.

3rd Scene: The testimonial of La Rochelle

Reading the testimonial requires an INT-roll (DIFF 2) or one on *Linguistics* (DIFF 1), as the script is very difficult to read, full of misspellings and stained by the blood of its writer. It is easier to transcribe and then read it.

Depending on the background of the PCs some of them could have fought at La Rochelle themselves, knowing that there was something wrong that night and every survivor was sworn to remain silent about what happened. If they are Black Riders, they know that the company was formed on 15th March, just

two days after the 'Dark Night', and that whatever happened there lead to the formation of their troop. Kings Musketeers do not know anything about this affair, but may have heard whispers of something terrible besides the cannon-fire.

The logical consequence would be to bring the testimonial to Lieut. Saint-Claire. He can be either found in his office or in the fencing hall, depending on the hour of the day. In either case, *Le Docteur* is also present.

Lieut. Saint-Claire takes the papers and his eyes fly over the text. His pale face seems to get white as a whitewashed wall, his eyes growing until it seems they will pop right out of his head. When he has finished, his right hand trembles and he hands the papers to Doc. Garnier, whose face shows another emotion: fear.

"You know what this text is? No?" Lieut. Saint-Claire asks. "It's a fuse, one that could light a bomb that would blow all of France to pieces. It's not about the testimonial itself – most people would not believe a single word – but that someone should kill because of it. Clearly he wants to tell the world the truth of that night, a truth we strove for so long to keep under lock and key."

"Vespasien, who would benefit from such a thing?" asks Le Docteur.

"I don't know. Maybe someone who wants to start an uprising in Paris, even a spy from Spain could profit from these revelations. Just to hint, that the devil really has his agents in France could provoke a panic we just can't cope with at the moment."

If the PCs ask Lieut. Saint-Claire, if the testimonial even tells the truth, he answers:

"It does, at least from the perspective of this soldier. We all had slightly different experiences that night ..."

He taps on his steel left hand.

If the PCs have discovered the letters carved into the skin of the dead soldier, they could ask themselves, why someone should call Egrette a traitor and nail his testimonial to his breast. Was he a traitor for writing the testimonial or did his murderer consider it treason to not publish it?

"I could imagine both, answers Doc. Garnier, but most of us survivors have tried to forget that night – we would certainly not like to see everything revealed. But some could feel different, feeling betrayed by those who keep the secret. Only the murderer will know for sure ..."

The problem of a public uprising in Paris still looms on the horizon ...

4th Scene: The masked agitator

This scene may or may not happen with the PCs present. In the evening, just as the light of the setting sun touches the façade of S. Eustache, a man appears just below the great glass window above the entrance. He is clothed all in black, wearing a mask over his face, and addresses the folk below him in a voice, that can strangely be heard by everyone.

“Good folk of Paris! The time has come to reveal the truth about what happened at La Rochelle! It is time to reveal what has been kept secret for too long! You have all been fooled – you have been left in the dark about the real threats to France, the ones already working inside her borders, like worms inside an apple!”

He begins to march up and down the scaffold, as if on a broad street, his hands behind his back, the eyes of his audience following him.

“This morning, I presented you with a witness, one of the many witnesses of that dreadful night, who knew the truth, but kept his mouth shut for fear of betraying his oath. But what kind of King asks of his soldiers an oath to keep secret such terrible things as happened on that fateful night eight years ago? What kind of government wants its subjects to remain blind to the terrible truth and continue a war, brother against brother? This great nation of France is foul, I say, rife with disease and treachery!”

The masked figure makes a dramatic stop and whirls around, raising his hands.

“That night, on the 12th of March, 1628, a great evil has been released upon Earth. With the sacrifice of a thousand good men a prison had been opened, a prison that had held a creature so foul, no trace of it should have been found at all. But the creature was set free and it feasted on our brothers in La Rochelle, killing them from within. It was the first step towards the Apocalypse, as it is laid down in the Revelations.”

The man looks upon his audience, where some stare with wide eyes and others make dismissive gestures.

“Oh, some of you won’t believe me, I know. But if you don’t believe me, mark my words: eight years have passed since that night, and now the creature gets hungry again. There will be death in the streets of La Rochelle again – and maybe even here in Paris!”

With that, the figure bows theatrically, leaps from the scaffold and disappears in a puff of smoke right in the air above the people.

If the PCs are present themselves they may try to stop the man from holding his speech – he has confessed to the murder of M. Egrette, after all. But this is easier said than done, as the man is high upon the scaffold and climbing it, seems suddenly a lot harder. Whenever someone climbs within three feet of the top, he finds himself suddenly down on the cobblestones again (a *Transportation*-spell). Projectiles and thrown objects land on the ground also.

If they want to follow the man or take him prisoner, he zips from one roof to another, running short distances along the rooftops, jumping over chimneys, sometimes mocking the PCs, as he stands at the edge, awaiting them and disappearing in a puff of smoke just before their outstretched hands.

If the PCs are not present, maybe their Lackeys are. S. Eustache is just across the street from *Les Halles*, and a Lackey could be shopping for his/her master, if not on an errand. As for the rest, the same things apply as for the PCs.

Even if nobody is present, the PCs can hear the whole story shortly afterwards, as Paris sums like a beehive with news like this. This even stems the growing tide of anti-Huguenot voices. Suddenly, there are more questions about what happened at La Rochelle and why so many Huguenots died in the city.

5th scene: A furious king

Bad news travel fast, and this one is no exception. It's just hours after the incident that the King is informed (by Richelieu) – and has one of his furious outbreaks. He immediately orders Lieut. Saint-Claire and the PCs to the Louvre, where he lets them wait in a small antechamber, before receiving them in a small office-chamber.

Louis XIII looks like an angel of wrath, as you fall to your knees in front of him. He doesn't even give you his hand to kiss, not even does he bid you rise, as he stamps furiously up and down in front of you.

"This is a scandal, an infamy! How can anybody dare to insult Us like this? Calling Us a liar in front of the people of Paris, declaring Us a conspirator and deceiver!"

He whirls round, looking upon you with eyes that seem to be filled with lightning.

"This is your fault, Saint-Claire! You should have found a scapegoat for the people to punish, even if it would not be the murderer of that man! But you let your men investigate, following clues that would lead them to the real murderer – to what avail? Now we have a self-declared Revelator, telling one of France's best kept secrets to the masses!"

He stares down at Lieut. Saint-Claire. "We formed your company to combat exactly this kind of threat, Saint-Claire!"

"Sire, there was not much of a chance to find the murderer in time, anyhow. My men did their best – nobody could have made better progress – but the plan was a very perfidious one. It was a trap and we fell for it, this I admit. Whoever this man is, he knows more than that which Egrette wrote in his testimonial, a lot more."

The King is still enraged, but seems at least to listen to the calm voice of the Lieutenant.

"If this man shall be stopped, we have to act differently than before. We have to find out, if what he says is true and make him look the fool. When nobody in La Rochelle dies, nobody will believe his ravings anymore – which means, that the secret is still safe."

Louis XIII takes a deep breath, turns around and slowly paces towards the gilded desk, where he seats himself on the edge. The manicured fingers of his right hand drum on the wood, while his left plays with a lock of hair.

“Bon, this sounds reasonable, Lieutenant. Send your men to La Rochelle – I want no mysterious deaths there, or at least I don’t want to hear about them in Paris! Let others search for this masked traitor here, so he cannot open his foolish mouth once more. You may leave now.”

With a deep bow, you leave the presence of the King as fast, as good manners allow.

Lieut. Saint-Claire is very quiet during the trip to *Hôtel d’Vieuvre*. He answers questions just with nods or headshakes, sometimes with just a shrug, seemingly lost in his own private thoughts.

When they arrive at the headquarters of *Les Chevaux Noirs*, he leads them immediately to his bureau.

“These are dire news, Messieurs. His majesty is furious and I understand totally well, why. We tried to keep the whole affair secret for eight years and began to hope, that finally it would be forgotten and the witnesses die of old age over time. But now that peaceful hope shattered.”

He begins to drum on his steel hand, looking into empty space.

“We still don’t know what caused these creatures to appear that night. Heck, we even don’t know what creatures we were attacked by! To this day, we haven’t found a clue on them – and we tried. They don’t seem to appear in any book on these things, nobody of us encountered them again ... Sometimes even I believe that the whole night was just a nightmare – at least until I look at my hand.”

He visibly straightens up.

“Be that as it may, you are to go to La Rochelle. If this lunatic is right, something will happen there soon, and you are to prevent this from getting out of hand. Prove him wrong, protect the people. Make your preparations, you’ll leave in the morning. Dismissed.”

Act 2: Sur la route de La Rochelle

The usual route from Paris to La Rochelle takes about ten days of hard riding. First stop is Pithiviers, followed by Orléans, Blois, Tours, Châtellerault, Poitiers, Niort and finally La Rochelle. The land is relatively flat, so riding is easy but the roads are in a very bad state at times. There are some companies of Swiss infantry under the command of German generals near Orléans while there have been reports of Spanish troops in the vicinity of Poitiers.

As almost everywhere in France these days, the roads are far from safe. The *Maréchaussée* does its best to keep bandits at bay, but is mostly outnumbered and sometimes just corrupt. Highwaymen are something to be expected on every journey through France these days.

But there are far more sinister things abroad, things that are not interested in your money or your belongings, things that drink your blood and feed on your very soul ...

1st scene: To Orléans

As the *Hôtel d'Yvree* is located just outside the city-gates, the PCs don't have to wait there in the morning. This gives them a head start, as every possible pursuer from within the city has to make his way through the gates which are blocked by peasants and traders entering Paris in the morning. But they have to take the ferry at *Porte Neuf* to cross the River *Seine*, if they do not want to enter the city.

Once on the other side, they can follow the River southward to *Le Coudray-Montceaux*, where they can take the road to Orléans. Riding through open farmland, they can speed up from here, galloping besides the road.

At noon they reach the outskirts of the forests of *Fontainebleau*. These woods are Royal Hunting-grounds, as the *Château Fontainebleau* is located almost in the middle of the forest. Other forests in France may be full of bandits and outlaws – but not the *Forêt de Fontainebleau*.

They can sleep at Pithiviers, a small settlement about half-way between Paris and Orléans. When they reach the local inn, they will already have ridden some 80 kilometres that day – they are tired, as are their horses. If necessary, they can change horses at the local stable.

The local inn is a large building, as there is a lot of traffic going between Orléans and Paris. When the PCs arrive, they can see three carriages in the yard and the stables are almost full. The guestroom is cramped, and the maid apologizes for having just a small table in the corner available for the gentlemen. At least food and wine are good, and the PCs can stretch their legs after the ride. There are no more rooms available, but the PCs may sleep in the hayloft above the stables.

Shortly after their arrival, a group of six men enters the inn. A successful roll on *Perception* (DIFF 3) alerts the PCs to searching looks – the men seem to be looking for someone. Seemingly satisfied, they walk up to the bar and order wine. They will leave after about an hour, if nothing prevents them.

The group can react in various ways. As they have nothing to prove that these men are indeed looking for them, they may just forget about them. They could try to talk to them, provoke them or start a brawl in another way. But they could also try to give them the slip ...

The hired swords

A group of twenty men has been despatched to follow the *chevaux noirs*. Their orders are to report where they are going and kill them somewhere on the road. After that, they shall get rid of the corpses and part, so that it's almost impossible to find a clue to the whereabouts of the Black Riders.

The leader of these men is called *Maléfice* ('Bewitched'), a gang leader in the Saint-Denis district of Paris. But he stays outside of Pithiviers, taking ten of his men already around the village to the road to Orléans. None of the men knows anything about their employer, only that they have all received 200 *Livres* in advance.

They do not want to start a fight at the inn if they can help it. The six men just have orders to make sure, the PCs are indeed in there, leaving before the Black Riders do and report to Maléfice, so an ambush can be laid on the road. Their four comrades wait outside as backup, should anything happen.

If the PCs start a fight, the six men will not settle for a brawl – they immediately draw steel, intending to end this here and now. The sound of combat will get the four men outside to enter in two turns after the fight breaks out.

These are experienced fighters, men who make their living by the sword. Should the players expect the usual sword-fodder, they will be disappointed. But the barroom is cramped, full of tables, chairs and people trying to stay out of the way.

Hired swords

Follower 1

Primary Attributes: Body 2, Dexterity 2, Strength 2, Charisma 2, Intelligence 2, Willpower 2

Secondary Attributes: Size 0, Move 4, Perception 4, Initiative 4, Defense 4, Stun 2, Health 4

Skills: Brawling 3, Firearms 4, Intimidation 4, Melee 4, Warfare 4

Talents: Savvy Fighter 1

Resources: None

Flaws: Callous (+1 Style point when he does something particularly selfish)

Weapons: Punch 3N, Rapier 6L, Pistol 7L

Depending on what happens at the inn, Maléfice may or may not be warned about the PCs actions. His normal plan is to lay in ambush some ten kilometres down the road to Orléans, where the road gets close to the bank of a shallow river. The ambushers will fire from the cover of the underbrush, trying to drive the PCs into the river, while using the advantage of higher ground.

North of Orléans are marshlands, where he will set a second ambush, if the first is avoided. Maléfice will use the land to his best advantage, driving the PCs into ponds and ditches if possible. If they prove too strong, he will use the same tactics to cover his retreat.

Maléfice

Ally 2

Archetype: Swordsman **Motivation:** Greed

Style: 1

Primary Attributes: Body 2, Dexterity 3, Strength 3, Charisma 3, Intelligence 2, Willpower 2

Secondary Attributes: Size 0, Move 6, Perception 4, Initiative 5, Defense 5 (9*), Stun 2, Health 4

Skills: Acrobatics 6, Brawl 5, Warfare 5, Fencing* 8, Intimidation 5

Resources: Fencing School 1 (Spanish Style +1 to Thrust and Slash; -1 to Disarm and Feint).

Talents: Flurry (May attack the same opponent twice at -2), Riposte (Can attack after making a successful Parry)

Flaw: Criminal (+1 Style point when his negative reputation causes problems)

Weapons: Punch 5N, Rapier 10L

*he wears a cuirass of blackened steel, providing him with a +4 defense on the torso

2nd scene: Orléans

Orléans is not only the second stop on the way to La Rochelle, it's also one of those locations, where France's history was decided. Here, the English were driven back by Joanne d'Arc in the Hundred Years War. The walls have since been enlarged two times and the city is still growing.

The city is one of the protestant centres in France – the cathedral is still under reconstruction from the assault of 1568, where it was burned down by Huguenot troops. The *Université de Orléans* is one of the foremost institutions for Law in France and one of its prominent students was John Calvin himself.



Orléans is one of the richest cities in France – the new houses of the bourgeoisie give ample testament to this. This makes it a target for some 1500 Swiss landsknechts under the command of a German general, which are camped some fifteen kilometres south of Orléans. As they cannot block the river *Loire*, and the only bridge is that of Orléans, their chances of taking the city are more than small, though.

Orléans is a bustling city, where merchants from far off come to trade their goods. The Loire provides one of the major waterways in France right at the doorstep of local merchants, so there is almost nothing that cannot be bought in Orléans – if one is willing to pay the sometimes exorbitant prices, that is.

Orléans is just like Paris – but far cleaner, though the river emits the same odour of faeces and fish as the Seine. On the docks, there is the same hectic activity as in Paris and hawkers and peddlers sell their

wares on the streets corners just like there. Everywhere, there seems to be commerce, from the market-stalls to the shops. Merchants from Paris rub elbows with traders from Marseille and London alike, and the streets resound with voices in a cacophony of different languages and dialects.

The PCs do not have time to go sightseeing, but if they want to do some shopping, let them. Orléans is a centre of commerce after all and if they need something special, this is the place to find it.

Depending on what they have done about Maléfice and his men, he may or may not be upon their trail. If he lost some men and is still alive, he will hire more here, keeping the PCs under surveillance if at all possible. If he is already dead, they are still under surveillance, but not visibly so.

Rooms can be rented in many inns in the city, from very cheap and dirty ones around the docks to expensive ones fit for nobility near the cathedral. There are also modest but clean rooms to be had near the *Université*.

From Orléans, smart players will continue on the river. The Loire is running fast with smelt-water, and there are barques aplenty to hire a passage on. Travelling on the river is safer, faster and a lot less tolling on horse and rider ... under normal circumstances.

3rd scene: On the Loire

The usual mode of transport on the Loire is the barque, a shallow-keeled boat with a single, foldable mast, built for carrying large quantities of goods. While horses can be tethered in the prow, passengers may travel beneath an awning, that's erected on the deck.

The barque is not a fast ship, built for carrying weight not speed, but going with the current, especially in the spring, it travels almost the same distance per day as a rider on land.



The river between Orléans and Bois is wide but full of shallows, making navigation difficult. On some sandbanks there can be seen the mouldering remains of barques that ran aground there.

Halfway to Blois, near the village of *Saint-Laurent-Nouan*, the river winds in a narrow loop, the current picking up speed, so it's especially demanding for the steersman to steer the boat away from the banks and some sandbanks that protrude out of the water. Here, the next ambush awaits the PCs.

The banks are covered in floodplain forest, providing ample cover for ten men armed with muskets – and a small mortar. A roll on *Perception* (DIFF 3) lets one catch a glimmer of metal through the sprouting foliage or a hint of dark clothes, before they open fire on the barque. The mortar may be slow and inaccurate, but one hit is enough to sink the boat!

The snipers are lying beneath the branches of bushes and sapling, which at this time of year do just provide half-cover. The railing of the barque provides half-cover for anyone kneeling behind it or full-cover for anyone lying prone. It takes almost five minutes for the barque to pass the snipers and get in and out of range for the muskets. Distance to the bank is between 15 and 30 meters.

Spice up the scene by letting the ambushers fire the mortar first, making the shot fall just short, showering the PCs with cold water and gravel, then opening musket fire. If the PCs just cower behind the railing and wait for the barque to carry them through, the steersman may get shot, making the boat go uncontrolled through the currents, getting ever closer to some sandbank or shallow. The mortar may also shoot dangerously close to the barque, forcing the PCs to do something about it.

Gunner

Follower 0

Primary Attributes: Body 1, Dexterity 1, Strength 2, Charisma 1, Intelligence 3, Willpower 1

Secondary Attributes: Size 0, Move 3, Perception 4, Initiative 4, Defense 2, Stun 1, Health 2

Skills: Academics: Mathematics 5, Gunnery 6

Talents/Resources: None

Flaws: Condescending (+1 Style point whenever he establishes his own superiority)

Weapons: Punch 0N

Snipers

Follower 1

Primary Attributes: Body 2, Dexterity 2, Strength 2, Charisma 2, Intelligence 2, Willpower 2

Secondary Attributes: Size 0, Move 4, Perception 4, Initiative 3, Defense 4, Stun 2, Health 4

Skills: Brawling 2, Firearms 6, Melee 5, Warfare 2

Talents: Accuracy 1 (negates -2 on Called Shot)

Resources: None

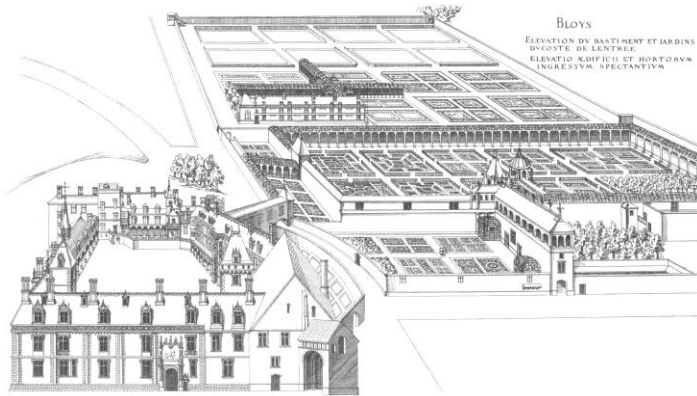
Flaws: Impulsive (+1 Style point whenever his impulsiveness gets him or his companions into serious trouble)

Weapons: Punch 2N, Matchlock musket 9L, Dagger 6L

After the ambush, the barque is damaged, the amount depending on the actions of the PCs. This may range from a few holes in the railing and mast to serious leakage. Depending on the damage, the boat may have to make immediate landfall or can go on to Blois, where the PCs can change boats.

4th scene: Blois

Blois has become known for two things: the Huguenot uprisings in 1562 and 1567 and the assassination of the *Comte de Guise* in 1588. Add the fact that Maria de Medici was exiled in the *Château Blois* between 1617 and 19, and one may well understand why the town has become a synonym for treason and murder.



The town itself is nothing special, being a halfway point between Tours and Orléans. Traffic on the Loire stops here for the night and the local traders make their profit on temporary bin location for those wares that have to be safely stored on land.

Besides, Blois is surrounded by forests, and therefore sells large amounts of wood up

and down the river. Even without the court making it its holiday-location, Blois prospers.

For the PCs, the town is just a resting place on their journey. Depending on how they survived the ambushes, they may have to rest here more than a night and recover. There are some surgeons and doctors in town, if they need medical attention.

Inns are cheaper than in Orléans, but mostly offer better service – the advantages of a smaller town. Choice of wares is somewhat smaller, as most traders sell their wares in Orléans, where the prices are better and more merchants to sell to.

Contrary to the popular image of the town, the PCs can get some peaceful rest here. Their enemies have other plans for them than to risk public exposure by attacking them in town.

5th scene: On the way to Tours

South of Blois, the river narrows and straightens, running quickly towards Tours. The lay of the land does not give itself to an ambush like the one north of Blois, so it looks a lot safer here and the PCs may relax a bit.

The land gently flows past and in the afternoon, Amboise comes into view. In this town, Leonardo daVinci resided, and his house is still there.

Just south of Amboise, there are some small islands in the river, sandbanks where trees have grown. The barques have to navigate around them, carefully avoiding the shallows around them. Here, the next trap is set for the PCs.

As their barque slowly turns around one of those islands, seven armed men break from the cover of the underbrush and rush towards the boat. They wade through the shallow water and climb the railing, brandishing rapiers and cutlasses.

But these men are not human – they are Revenants, rotting corpses of soldiers that have been animated by foul magick. They move somehow strange, more like some marionette than a human, but nevertheless dangerously fast and precise, as they attack the PCs.

Greater Revenant

Violent death sometimes lets a soul remain inside its dead body, clinging to the flesh so strongly, that it can even slow down the decay. But death does not let itself be fooled and a soul has to pay a price for clinging to life that strong. The price is insanity, a deformation of everything that made the living human.

Greater Revenants are Undead, humans that have been violently killed and not been buried with the appropriate rites. Most of them rise from mass graves at battlefields, many of them trying to reach their former family – possessed by the wish to see them again but bringing them only death.

But the curse of the Revenant can also be transferred by dark magick and demons, locking the soul of the victim in his or her body and making them rise out of their grave.

The Revenants soul clings to his mortal shell so strongly it cannot be killed by normal means. The body has to be destroyed – hacking it to pieces or burning it – before the soul can finally be freed to be judged by Higher Powers. Even headless, the body still moves and fights blindly.

Greater Revenants

Ally 3

Archetype: Demon **Motivation:** Survival

Primary Attributes: Body 3, Dexterity 4, Strength 3, Charisma 4, Intelligence 2, Willpower 2

Secondary Attributes: Size 0, Move 7, Perception 4, Initiative 6, Defense 7, Stun 3, Health 5

Skills: Brawling 9, Intimidation 9, Melee 8, Athletics 9, Stealth 9

Talents: Flurry (May attack the same opponent twice by making a Total Attack with a –2 penalty on each attack roll), Keen Sense (+4 to smell-based Perception rolls), Hard to Kill *

Resources: None

Flaw: Dead (Cannot communicate)

Weapons: Rapier/Cutlass 10L, Fist 9N

*) Greater Revenants can only be killed when literally hacked to pieces or burnt. Every L-damage is treated as N and can be regenerated like a normal wound. N-damage is not counted at all. They are susceptible to fire, though, and fire-damage is doubled and counts as L.

The steersman will jump into the river, when he sees the creatures for what they are, so the barque slowly floats towards the island, where it lands with a soft 'thud'.

This scene provides ample opportunity for heroic and cinematic deeds. The Revenants are nasty opponents, having high Defense and attacking with Flurry, so the PCs are challenged to fight with their wits than just with their rapiers.

If they do not burn all of the bodies at once, they may find a letter in a pocket on one of the Revenants (*Investigation* DIFF 2). It's written in elegant letters, though it's hard to read as it has been subject to the elements for quite a long time.

Chers Antoine

Mon ami, mon amour! Every day that God makes I pray for your safe return. It is just not fair, that you have to risk life and limb for our king in a war against our own brothers - even if they are heretics and will burn in Hell's fire one day. I hope you are still in good health. Take good care and return to me soon, my love! I send you a thousand kisses and all my love!

Yours

21st February, 1628

Marlene

It does not require a roll on *Academics: History* to put the letter into its place. The Revenant has been a soldier at La Rochelle it seems, and this may be the final letter he received ...

6th scene: From Tours to Poitiers

It depends on the results of the fight against the Revenants, how and when the PCs reach Tours, the former Royal Residence. The city is still a centre of commerce, especially for silk and satin, which has been sponsored by Charles I.

The cathedral of Tours, Saint Gatian, is one of the architectural wonders of France, its north and south tower climbing to 70 meters height. 1562 devastated by Huguenots, the cathedral has since been restored to former glory, lacking the portal statues (which shall never be restored).

Still existing is the Basilica Saint-Martin de Tours, where Saint Martin is said to rest. Pious PCs may wish to pay this holy place a visit.

Tours is a city with its own dangers, being an important trading post for cloth and information alike. Merchants and spies from all nations of Europe gather here to exchange their respective wares. The PCs may well find some fellow *chevaux noirs* in the city, which are on their own secret missions.

For this adventure, Tours is just another waypoint, where the PCs may rest and buy supplies for their journey to Poitiers. They have to leave the river now, saddling up and taking to the road again. Their next waypoint is *Châtellerault*.

Châtellerault is famous for its blade-smiths, making a centre of commerce for those trading in knives and swords. If one of the PCs is in need (or want) of a new blade, this is the place to buy – nowhere in France will he get better quality for a better price.

After Châtellerault comes *Poitiers*, a town with another important university and capital of the *Poitou*. Every PC that has fought at La Rochelle knows Poitiers. Most soldiers caroused here for a night while his unit rested here.

7th scene: Niort

It's a long day-ride from Poitiers to *Niort* and the town that beacons at the end of this long day is one that holds no friendship for servants of France and the king. Niort is infamous for the massacre of 1588, when Huguenot forces took the town and the streets ran red with the blood of Catholics. In 1627, the streets ran red with the blood of Huguenots, as Royal troops took the town. But to this day, peace in Niort is forced, not embraced.

There is just one thing in favour of Niort – the *Liqueur Angélique*, strong liquor made from *angelica*. Angelica has been cultivated around Niort for centuries, as it is a strong healing-herb for everything concerning the belly, be it too much food or cramps. In higher doses, the extract is poisonous, though.

The PCs will reach the town at dusk, sore and tired from a long ride. The gates may even be already closed, so they have to explain themselves to the guards. The town is dark, only a few lanterns are lit in the streets and light only occasionally spills from a window. It is not easy to find an inn in the dark, so the PCs have to roll for *Investigation* (DIFF 2) to find one of the signs that point to an inn.

They turn a corner, finding themselves in a dark alley. Let them roll *Perception* (DIFF 1) to catch the scent of decay on the night breeze. It's the only warning they get, before being attacked by four Revenants, one barring the alley before them, one behind and two leaping from the roofs of the buildings to the left and right. Remember to take the darkness into account and the fact that Revenants see in the dark like cats.

Greater Revenants

Ally 3

Archetype: Demon **Motivation:** Survival

Primary Attributes: Body 3, Dexterity 4, Strength 3, Charisma 4, Intelligence 2, Willpower 2

Secondary Attributes: Size 0, Move 7, Perception 4, Initiative 6, Defense 7, Stun 3, Health 5

Skills: Brawling 9, Intimidation 9, Melee 8, Athletics 9, Stealth 9

Talents: Flurry (May attack the same opponent twice by making a Total Attack with a –2 penalty on each attack roll), Keen Sense (+4 to smell-based Perception rolls), Hard to Kill *

Resources: None

Flaw: Dead (Cannot communicate)

Weapons: Rapier/Cutlass 10L, Fist 9N

*) Greater Revenants can only be killed when literally hacked to pieces or burnt. Every L-damage is treated as N and can be regenerated like a normal wound. N-damage is not counted at all. They are susceptible to fire, though, and fire-damage is doubled and counts as L.

Note: This fight is especially dangerous for the PCs. Revenants are powerful opponents and the darkness favours them strongly. If the group has magicians, it gets a bit easier, but still, four Revenants are a match for a group of six experienced PCs – if your group is smaller, reduce the number of opponents.

After this fight, the PCs may search the clothes of the Revenants, but burning the bodies may prove difficult, because fire is the one thing that wakes every town. A roll in *Investigation* (DIFF 3) shows, that the clothes are long out of fashion, looking like having lain in the earth for years. The weapons of the Revenants bear the markings of the Royal Army one even has the year of production on it: 1627. The dead could also have fought at La Rochelle ...

Now they can move on to an inn and get some medical help, if needed. Most of all, they can rest for the night, even if they may want to put on a watch.

8th scene: The way to La Rochelle

East of Niort they PCs enter the marshlands that stretch all the way to the coast and La Rochelle. The road is sometimes made of wooden planks, as it crosses swamps and small streams. A drizzling sets in, just after the group has lost sight of Niort, growing into a soaking rain after one hour on the road.

The PCs will probably be soaking wet when they reach *Courcon*, a village on the road, around noon. The local inn is small but fortified, the hearth holds a blazing fire and on a spit a lamb is turning. There are just a few travellers here, as the road is almost abandoned in this weather.

Let the PCs roll *Resistance* against DIFF 2 – everyone failing this roll catches a cold. It begins in the evening with sneezing and a running nose, implying a -1 to every roll. In the night, a mild fever starts with headaches in the morning, raising the modifier to -2. Until a Recovery-roll is made or *Craft: Medicine* is successfully applied, this modifier persists, the patient suffering from fever, sneezing, watering eyes, etc.

As they take their lunch, the door opens and another group of travellers enters, hanging their wet cloaks and hats near the hearth. They are dressed in uniforms of the Cardinals Guards their leader is a weasel-like man of medium age. In a high pitched voice he demands food and wine for his men.

The man is Corp. Jaques Vallombreux, a man that's known to almost every former musketeer (*Streetwise* DIFF 1) and most Black Riders (*Streetwise* DIFF 3). He is infamous for his sadistic nature, a man the Cardinal likes to send on missions that require ruthlessness rather than brains. His appearance here forebodes nothing good.

He is accompanied by seven men, hardened veterans by the look of them. The rapiers at their sides look well used and the pistols in their belts are in prime order. As they look the PCs over, some of them sneer, while others look indifferent. If the PCs wear their uniforms, Vallombreux tells his comrades in a voice, loud enough to be overheard by the PCs:

"You see, men, there are many companies in the Royal Household. Most of them are soldiers that fight bravely for France and the king, may God bless him! But then, there are those that are paid with taxes and don't do anything at all – they just ride around, looking dangerous and secretive and tell everybody that it's none of their business what they do. To me, they are just foppish cowards, dressed up as soldiers!"

This is an excellent moment for Motivations to kick in (and Style Points to be handed out). The insult is given in a way that is provocative but has to be understood as such – or not. It can be ignored without any loss of face, but Vallombreux will find this very disappointing.

"You see, men, some people just wear uniforms to look good. They don't wear it with honour like we do. But we are the Cardinals men, aren't we?"

This is a more direct insult but still can be ignored, if so desired. Vallombreux is used to this kind of provocations subtle insults that make his target lose his temper and get him to draw steel. After that, the Cardinals Guard can either arrest or kill his opponent.

Should a fight break out, Vallombreux tries to command his men, instead of risking his life.

Cardinals Guards

Follower 1

Primary Attributes: Body 3, Dexterity 2, Strength 3, Charisma 1, Intelligence 1, Willpower 1

Secondary Attributes: Size 0, Move 4, Perception 2, Initiative 3, Defense 4, Stun 2, Health 6

Skills: Firearms 3, Melee 6, Brawling 2

Talents: Riposte (Can attack after making a successful Parry)

Resources: None

Flaws: Overconfident (+1 Style point when he is forced to ask for help or when his bravado gets him in over his head)

Weapons: Punch 2N, Rapier 8L, Wheellock pistol 6L

Corp. Jaques Vallombreux

Ally 2

Archetype: Soldier **Motivation:** Greed

Style: 1

Primary Attributes: Body 2, Dexterity 2, Strength 2, Charisma 3, Intelligence 3, Willpower 3

Secondary Attributes: Size 0, Initiative 5, Move 4, Defense 4 [8]*, Perception 6, Stun 2, Health 5

Skills: Diplomacy 3, *Leadership* 4, Firearms 4, Intimidation 5, *Orders* 6, Brawling 2, Melee 5, Ride 4, Warfare 6

Talents: All for One (provides a +2 bonus to all fight-related rolls to an ally adjacent to him)

Resources: Rank 1 (Corporal; +2 Social bonus)

Flaw: Sadistic (+1 Style point when he can cause pain or is hindered to)

Weapons: Punch 2N, Rapier 7L, Wheellock pistol 7L

* he wears a plate cuirass, giving him +4 armour on the torso

The second part of the journey to La Rochelle depends on the actions at the inn. If the PCs have left the Cardinals Guards without a fight, they will leave shortly after them, following the same road. It is possible, that the PCs will lay in ambush for them (which is rather dishonourable but smart). The bodies can be disposed of in some swamp nearby.

If they fought the Cardinals Guards, they tread on thin ice. They may be Black Riders, but attacking the Cardinals servants is dangerous. Killing them is a capital offense, punishable by death – so they either have to disable them without killing them, or they have to get rid of the bodies and make sure that any witnesses hold their tongues.

If they let them live and go on their way, Vallombreux can be used to hamper the investigations of the PCs. He has his own orders (to keep the PCs under surveillance and throw them off any track they may follow) and will try to follow them. It could lead to some interesting complications later in the story, if the Cardinal's Guards are 'on the loose'.

Whatever the PCs do about Vallombreux and his men, the rain continues to fall, making the rest of the day as unpleasant as the first half. The horses are soon covered in mud and the clothes wet and cold. Even waxed cloaks won't hold off the water forever and as they finally reach the gates of La Rochelle, the PCs are sore, wet and tired.

Act 3: La peste des anciens

This is what the LORD says: 'About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. Every firstborn in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn of the slave girl, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt—worse than there has ever been or ever will be again.'

— Exodus 11:4–6

La Rochelle for some of the PCs may be a kind of Déjà vu. Depending on their background, they could well have fought there themselves and may even recall the suffering they witnessed after the city surrendered. Hunger is a cruel weapon and one that has been employed all too often in recent history. Stories about the Siege of Paris in 1590 are still told in the taverns, about mothers that ate their dead infants and *landsknechts* that roasted children and maidens on a spit in the *Cemeterie des Saints Innocentes*.

The real siege of La Rochelle began in January 1628, when Louis XIII arrived with 30.000 soldiers and began to build a dike to fire on the English ships that were bringing in supplies for the city. In spring, the city already had a death-toll much larger than would have seemed reasonable. Every day, hundreds of people died in the streets of La Rochelle. On 27th of October, the city capitulated.

Some of the Catholic force asked themselves, how hunger could have set in so fast and so hard, but were silenced by those grateful to leave the damned place. Those who walked the streets of La Rochelle after the surrender do not speak much of what they saw there. It brings back memories of bodies, rotting in beds, half-eaten limbs on tables and hungry eyes that seemed to follow the sack of bread as much as those bearing it.

It all began in that dreaded 'Dark Night', when the sacrifice of 4.000 men opened the prison of an entity that is spoken of in ancient and forbidden texts just as *Dominus Fame*, the *Lord of Hunger* ...

1st scene: La Rochelle



The walls of La Rochelle could not keep the Catholic forces out in the end, but they held to this day. Eight years after the siege, the city is a bustling harbour town, where ships from the Americas bring in products of the colonies.

Many Huguenots are leaving for the New World, hoping for a life without the repressions of faith they face in France. Those that have already settled there hold strong ties to their hometown and send their goods to loyal merchants in La Rochelle.

The streets are narrow, the half-timbered houses leaning into the streets. But the cobbled streets are almost clean and the breeze brings in the salty aroma of the sea that washes all the scents of human nature away.



As is typical for a harbour, there are a lot of cheap dockside taverns and inns that offer unclean beds and watered wine. Farther inland are more stately inns, where nobles may reside, if they do not take up lodgings with some acquaintance. The PCs will not have trouble finding something to their liking.

A warm hearth, a meal and some good wine work wonders and the more daring of them could even get a hot bathtub arranged for them – although it is considered unhealthy by most doctors. Those daring souls get a +2 bonus on the *Resistance*-roll against cold.

They can even start their investigation right away, asking their questions at their inn or some tavern. The whole investigation can be handled with a *Group Extended Action* with a Difficulty of 20. Suggested skills are *Investigation*, *Diplomacy*, *Empathy*, *Intimidation*, *Streetwise* and *Con*, every roll representing one hour of work.

Information:

- Since the 15th of March, there have been mysterious deaths. First, a beggar was found dead on the streets, starved to death. Then an old couple was found dead in their flat, the next day a father found his wife and his two infant daughters dead in their beds. Four late-night carousers were found haggard and dead in an alley the next morning. Since then, every day there are people found dead, obviously starved to death – and the numbers are rising.
- The doctors claim, a wasting disease is killing all those people – but what kind of disease this could be, they cannot say.
- Rumours whisper of the Plague that is killing all those people, but those that have seen the bodies claim that they show no sign of the Black Death.
- Veterans of the siege tell stories of a Black Man, that walked the streets of La Rochelle in the time of the siege each night and in every house at which door he stopped, someone died that night.
- People speak of a monk that walks the streets at night, stopping before doors or looking at people. In the morning, these people are found dead.
- The dead are buried in the *Faubourg S. Eloy*, outside the city-walls. While some of the relatives protested, the city-council decided, that their deaths were strange enough to warrant such measures.
- Rumours, told in dark corners of dockside taverns, tell of grave-robbers that have opened the graves of the deceased in the night.

Depending on the way of investigation the players propose, the GM should keep some information. If the PCs do not go to dockside taverns, they will hear nothing about the grave-robbers, for example.

2nd scene: The ruin in the swamp

Players that are used to investigative adventures may easily think about taking a look at the scene of the 'Dark Night'. The swampland north of the city is still a region of ill repute most people give a wide berth when possible (and will tell everybody to do the same, when asked). This part of the marshes is said to be haunted by the ghosts of the fallen.

By day, there is nothing to fear, besides the bogs and the mire, where a horse may break a leg or a man fall down. There are not even deep swamps here, where one could drown.

A roll an *Investigation* (DIFF 3) brings up some evidence of the siege – a rusty dagger, a broken arquebuse, some dried and cracked leather, etc. Some pieces look like they were broken in a fight, but nothing more.

About a quarter-mile from the northern wall, there are the ruins of an old chapel. Judging from the remains, this was a very old building, probably dating back to the early middle ages (*Academics: History* DIFF 2). There is just half of a wall still standing and some knee-high parts of the rest. The stone floor is cracked and an alder tree has sprouted near the northern wall, just beside the baptistery.

Investigation: Search (DIFF 3) brings up something strange. The baptistery seems to have been moved – scratches on the floor are already weathered and hard to see. The baptistery is made of stone and weighs about a ton, so the PCs will have to be inventive, if they want to move it again. On top of the baptistery, there is a thin cavity, where something seems to have been removed.

Beneath the baptistery is a hole in the floor, narrow but wide enough for a slim man or a woman to pass through. It leads into a low chamber of stone that seems to be blackened and cracked by fire. It requires some work to scratch off some soot, but underneath are mystical sigils, cabbalistic symbols, a practitioner of Theurgy easily recognizes as wards. Practitioners of other Traditions need to make an *Intelligence*-roll (DIFF 3) to recognize the wards for what they are. A roll on *Academics: Occult* (DIFF 3) gives the same result.

It takes about an hour to scratch off enough soot from the walls to see a pattern of wards – a pattern, a roll on *Academics: Occult* (DIFF 3) or *Intelligence* (DIFF 2) for any magickal Tradition identifies as a spell of warding. Something should be kept locked up here, something dangerous and powerful, as the wards are themselves really powerful.

If the PCs indeed take their time to scratch off the soot to look at what is beneath it, they will not stay unnoticed for long. Let every PC that is not in the chamber below make a *Perception*-roll (DIFF 1) to notice an unnatural fog rise from the swamps. The fog rises slowly, so at first may not even be regarded as unnatural. But it rises fast and gets denser by the minute, so after ten minutes, the ruin is covered in a thick, grey mist that reduces sight to three metres and dampens any sound.

After three more minutes, a *Perception*-roll (DIFF 2) shows shadows moving in the mists outside the ruin, shadows that are slowly closing in. As the shadows draw nearer, there are sounds, a slurping and gibbering, disgusting and frightening. Every PC hearing this is required to make a *Courage*-roll against DIFF 3.

Then, the first demons leap out of the fog, attacking the PCs. There is one demon per PC plus one attacking them.

Hunger demon



In the pits of Hell, there are a multitude of demons, serving a multitude of lords. *Famine* is one of the four Apocalyptic Riders, depicted by Albrecht Dürer in his famous illustrations of John's Revelations. But he is also one of the many archdukes of Hell and commands legions of demons.

Hunger Demons are his most lowly subjects, creatures that possess starving humans and take hold of their bodies while they starve to death. Even if the possessed gets enough to eat, the Hunger Demon consumes his flesh, until he withers away.

After the mortal soul has fled, the hunger demon takes total possession of the body, animating it with dark energy. The flesh withers away, leaving a sack of skin that is covering bones and sinews. The teeth sharpen and long nails sprout from claw-like

fingers. Their eyes are like grey marbles, reflecting the light like some dull but polished stone.

In this state, the Hunger Demon can stay for centuries, waiting until he is called upon by a commander – the dreaded Hunger Lords ...

Hunger Demons luckily are susceptible to normal weapons. They are bound to their dead bodies, until the body is finally destroyed. Cold iron however, does double damage against them, as it is capable of severing the tie between demon and body.

Every human slain by a Hunger Demon has a 50% chance of rising out of the grave as a *Greater Revenant*.

Hunger Demon

Archetype: Demon **Motivation:** Duty

Primary Attributes: Body 2, Dexterity 2, Strength 3, Intelligence 2, Charisma 0, Willpower 3

Secondary Attributes: Size 0, Move 5, Initiative 4, Perception 5, Stun 2, Defense 4, Health 5*

Skills: Brawl 5, Empathy 4, Intimidation 6*, Stealth 4

Talents: Fearsome (Temporarily frighten opponents), * Skill Aptitude (+2 Intimidation rating)

Resources: None

Flaw: Bestial (Character cannot communicate or use tools)

Weapons: Claws 6L, Teeth 7L

* The Hunger Demon cannot fall unconscious and is not hampered by wounds.

3rd scene: The Lord of Hunger

Anybody walking the streets of La Rochelle in the night has a chance of meeting a strange monk, clad in a dark grey habit. At closer range, the fabric looks shabby and has mould stains all over it. The hood hides the face of the stranger, though sometimes it seems, as though there is a glimmer of glittering eyes coming from the shadows.

This is the *Dominus Fame*, the Hunger Lord, a lieutenant among the armies of Hell. He commands the Hunger Demons, the foot-soldiers of Famine. Locked away under the ruins of the old chapel, imprisoned by holy wards, written on the walls of his prison cell, he awaited the moment when the spell would be broken. Centuries went by, but for a demon, time means nothing.

Finally, one of the lords of Hell himself – Belphégor – opened his prison and set him free. His mission was to bring La Rochelle to its knees, and this he did. But now, eight years after his release, he walks the streets of La Rochelle again ...

If the PCs meet him, he will try to avoid them, fighting only if they corner him (which could easily end with the death of one of them). He will even show them his face to scare them off, while he disappears in the night.

From the behaviour of the demon it should be clear, that he has a mission – one that does not include killing servants of France.

Dominus Fame

A Lord of Hunger is a demon that walks in the flesh. He is one of the lieutenants of Famine, one of the Apocalyptic Riders and an archduke of Hell. Wherever there is starvation on earth a *Dominus Fame* is most certainly present, harvesting the souls of the starving.

But he never acts without orders. Whenever one of these creatures appears, there is a pact, wherein a certain number of deaths are required, a number that follows the rule of 'one more each night'. After the demon has killed the required number of people, he is free to harvest one more soul – that of a king.

This is his most fearsome power – the *Power of Starvation*. The *Dominus Fame* 'sees' the energy of life, even through walls and closed doors and when he sees even a flicker of hunger, he may grab this energy, pulling it from the victim's body, making the human waste away with hunger in minutes.

He appears as a human, clad in a dark grey monk's habit, the hood always pulled deep into the face. If he ever shows his face, the observer needs to make a *Courage*-roll (DIFF 4) or flee screaming, for it is a gaunt visage, skin hanging loose over the bone and eyes fallen deep into the skull. In those black eyes hunger glitters, a hunger for live itself. The thin lips are formed into a cruel smirk, making the face all the more horrible.

The body beneath the robes is a starved husk, looking more like a mummy than something human. The arms are thin as the bones beneath, the fingers more like claws, ending in sharp nails. Its strength is unearthly, nevertheless.

Dominus Fame

Archetype: Demon **Motivation:** Survival

Style: 1

Primary Attributes: Body 2, Dexterity 3, Strength 8, Charisma 0, Intelligence 2, Willpower 3

Secondary Attributes: Size 0, Move 6, Perception 5, Initiative 5, Defense 6, Stun 2, Health 10*

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Intimidation 5, Survival 4, Stealth 4

Talents: Power of Starvation, Fearsome (Temporarily frighten opponents), Unarmed Parry (Can block Melee attacks with his bare hands at no penalty)

Resources: None

Flaw: Callous (+1 Style Point, whenever his behaviour causes trouble)

Weapons: Claws 13L

* The Dominus fame cannot be harmed by mundane weapons, cannot fall unconscious and is not hampered by wounds.

The Power of Starvation

Unique

Prerequisite: Demon Archetype

This Talent enables a demon to see the hunger in every living human. This is not necessarily limited to physical hunger but may also be anything a human can hunger for (love, money, fame, etc.). Once the demon finds a trace of such hunger, he can lodge its mental claws there and pull the soul from its mortal shell.

Benefit: As an attack-action, the demon can initiate a mind-attack by attacking the victim with his combined WIL and Intimidation rating. The victim may defend itself with its WIL. Every success the demon has over the defence, translates into one point of non-lethal damage. Should the victim die from the prolonged attack, its soul is pulled from its body.

Normal: A demon cannot initiate a mind-attack.

Advanced: The demon may take this Talent up to three times, each time giving it a bonus of +2 to the attack.

4th scene: Research

Until the PCs have found the chapel and the Hunger Demons, research is almost impossible. They may try to follow some rumours, but the chapel in the swamps is the only hard fact further research may be built upon. The town-chronicles are kept in the *Hôtel de Ville* and access is limited. But uniforms open doors here, and if the PCs show up with *fleur-de-lis* on their tabards, they are immediately shown to the *Keeper of the Seal*, the head of the city-archives.

Chev. Baptiste de Gruyenne is a man of 63 years, most of which he has spent in the service of La Rochelle. He is one of the few Huguenots that kept their positions after the siege – mostly, because no one would take over his work. His office is dusty, filled to the brink with books, papers and maps, so the big desk can hardly be seen beneath it. Chev. de Gruyenne himself is almost lost in the mess, a small, haggard man whose head is covered in thin, white hair. Watery blue eyes blink behind glasses, made of clear crystal and held in a dark frame on the large nose.

“The chapel in the swamps, you say? I think, I remember that there was indeed such a thing, back when I was very young ... But it was a ruin, if I remember correctly. We were playing there ... even if it was forbidden ... ah, there were such lovely frogs in a pond nearby ...” His thoughts drift off into the past, as it seems.

“Ah, yes, you were asking? Oh, the chapel ... maybe there’s something in the chronicles before 1500 ... Let me show you the books you may want to take a look at.”

He leads the PCs to the archive, a large, gloomy room, full of books and papers. Dust rises, as they enter and everything is covered in a thin layer of grey dust. Chev. de Gruyenne shows them a shelf full of ancient looking books, their binding sometimes cracked and written in a variety of hands, mostly in Latin.

Every PC that can read Latin just has to make a roll on *Investigation: Research* (DIFF 3) to find some relevant passages in the chronicles. Those not schooled in the scholastic languages first have to succeed with a roll on *Linguistics* (DIFF 4) to puzzle out the information on similarity to French alone.

- **1 – 2 successes:** The chapel is first mentioned in 1426, but seems to have been there since times forgotten. It was dedicated to *S. Christopherus*, the guardian against famine.
- **3 – 4 successes:** The chapel of *S. Christophe* was kept by a local noble, whose family owned the swampland surrounding it. Sometime around 1480, the family seems to have sold the land to the city of La Rochelle, but was still paying for the upkeep of the chapel.
- **5 – 6 successes:** The chapel of *S. Christophe* was the family chapel to the *Laincourts* up until 1492, when the last of their branch in the area died. Until that time, all of their weddings took place and funeral masses were held there. In 1496, the chapel was struck by lightning and burned down to the ground.

Investigating the ownership of the chapel or its upkeep is a separate roll on *Investigation: Research* (DIFF 2). The PCs have to look through contracts that date back to well before 1300, following different leads up until the present day.

- **1 – 2 successes:** The chapel was kept by the *Laincourts* until 1492, when it was sold to some Albert de Brionne, who seems to have been some bastard of the Laincourt family head at that time. After the chapel burned down, nobody paid for it anymore, though the ownership seems to have been inherited in the *Brionne*-family until now.
- **3 – 4 successes:** The Brionnes are acknowledged as being descendents of the Laincourts, Albert de Brionne being a bastard son of Robert de Laincourt. The chapel was given to them as a sign of trust and was kept by them until it was struck by lightning in 1496. As the chapel-grounds were never sold, they are still property of the Brionnes, their current family-head being *Hugo de Brionne*, Quartermaster to the city of La Rochelle.
- **5 – 6 successes:** Hugo de Brionne still holds ownership over the chapel-grounds, though his family does not pay for its upkeep anymore. The testament of his father commits him to never sell the property and inherit it to his oldest son.

Maybe they want to investigate the Hunger Demons (or even the Dominus Fame if they have met him). Such knowledge of course is harder to obtain. Books on occult topics are kept under lock and key at best, most of them having been burned after the fall of the city in 1628 (at least, that is the official version – most of them have been taken away by Richelieus men), but some are still available.

The best address for this is the *Commende of St-Léonard-des-Chaumes*, about 7 km east of La Rochelle. The former abbey was destroyed by Huguenots of La Rochelle and made into a commandery, an abbey where the abbot is appointed by the King. It is a shadow of its former self, much of the outer wall is just ruins, overgrown by ivy. But the library still stands and here the PCs may find books that deal with demons and demonic possession. Chev. de Gruyenne could point the PCs in this direction, if they ask carefully.

At the moment, there is no abbot assigned to St-Léonard-des-Chaumes. Prior Vincent leads the fifteen monks and it is not hard to convince him to use the library (a donation of some 50 *livres* is sufficient). The books are still in good condition, though neglected, as there are just not enough brothers to tend to them.

A roll on *Investigation: Research* (DIFF 3) and some three hours work generates some useful information.

- **1 – 2 successes:** *Woe to you that are filled, for you shall hunger (Luke vi. 25) - The enemies of God shall suffer hunger like dogs (Ps. Iviii.).* – Unending hunger awaits those that have committed the sin of gluttony in life. They will serve Famine, the Pale Rider in the third circle of Hell.
- **3 – 4 successes:** *“And hunger withered away his flesh, and his eyes turned bleak as marble ...”* – In the third circle of Hell, Famine rules over the souls of the gluttons, turning them into demons of Gluttony and Hunger alike. When a mortal is possessed by a Hunger Demon, he withers away, but will not die, turning into a being of insatiable hunger for life itself.

- **5 – 6 successes:** Hunger Demons are demons that possess a human, killing him through starvation and turning him into a being of insatiable hunger for life. They serve Famine, the Pale Rider of the Apocalypse, and are commanded by powerful entities known as *Domine Fame*, the Hunger Lords.

5th Scene: The keeper of the seal

Hugo de Brionne, the quartermaster of La Rochelle, formally still owns the chapel-grounds. It is relatively easy to visit him, as his station demands constant contact to a variety of people. A uniform quickly opens his door.

The head of the Brionne-family is a heavy-built man of 53 years, his face red under the unruly black hair, small, blue eyes looking out under bushy brows. His belly flows like a waterfall over his belt, and his fingers look like small but thick sausages on his broad hands. His attire is that of a nobleman, though he lacks the finesse required of a courtier.

Asked about the chapel, his face darkens.

“You may excuse me, but this is family-business. I don’t usually talk about these matters to strangers.”

If the PCs bring their authority to bear and/or use some *Diplomacy* (DIFF 4), he softens up considerably.

“I have to apologize for my behaviour, but this chapel is a burden upon my family since we took over from the Laincourts. It is a kind of family-curse, you see, something we seldom talk about. When it burned down, forty years ago, my father hoped that his responsibility had ended. He was wrong.”

M. de Brionne invites the PCs to his *Hôtel* in the evening, as he does not want to talk about these matters in his office. They are to call upon him at 7 p.m.

Hôtel de Brionne is a stately building, not really large but in good order. The servants are well fed and wear clean clothes and when the PCs arrive, they are treated as honoured guests. M. de Brionne awaits them in his study, a small but comfortable room with a bookshelf, a desk and a small table with wooden chairs.

After some small-talk, he rises and begins to walk up and down the room, his hands nervously opening and closing.

“You see, this chapel is said to have been built by Carolus Magnus himself. The Laincourts always held it as something to connect them to the first Frankish king, but in truth it was a burden they relieved themselves quickly from, as the opportunity presented itself. In 1492, the Laincourts sold the chapel and the surrounding swamps for one golden coin to Albert de Brionne, the bastard son of Guilbert de Laincourt, who died soon after.”

He took from his father not only the worthless land but also the responsibility for the chapel – and the thing that was kept there. You see, the Laincourts saw themselves as the ‘Keepers of the Seal’.”

He turns to the bookshelf and takes an old tome from there, opening it before the PCs on the table. On the open pages is an illustration of two strange things. One seems to be a kind of Christopher-medal, about the size of a man’s hand, the other a strange key.

“The medal is the Seal, which sat right atop the baptistery the key opened the chamber beneath it. Both are now lost, the Seal since the night the chapel burned down, the key since before the siege. You see some strange coincidences there?”

He turns some pages, written in a small and precise script, opening another illustration before the PCs. It shows some kind of monk, driven into a chamber in the ground by a knight in armour, holding before him a skeleton hand.

“This is Pierre de Laincourt, the knight, who imprisoned the Lord of Hunger that had killed thousands of people in the area in 1315 A.D., beneath the chapel. It was one of the greatest famines in the history of Poitou. The knight had transported the relics of S. Christophe from Toledo to S. Denis and on his way he came across the unholy messenger of famine. Using the hand of the Saint, he drove back the demon and imprisoned it beneath the chapel of S. Christophe.”

He again turns to the bookshelf, taking a small key from a chain around his neck and opening a small compartment. From this, he takes a slender casket, which he places on the table before the PCs, throwing open the lid. There, bedded on blood-red velvet, lies a dagger, with a hilt wrought of silver and a blade of pure glass. Inside the blade is a single bone.

“The Laincourts knew the day would come, when the demon once more would roam free. For this day, this dagger was made – its blade contains a finger-bone of S. Christophe, from the very hand that drove it into imprisonment.”

It is this moment, when the small window bursts, and a Greater Revenant swings into the room, followed by a Hunger Demon. While the demon attacks the PCs, the undead soldier runs his sword into the fat belly of M. de Brionne, grabs the dagger and jumps out through the window again.

Yes, this is a ‘scripted scene’, but this does not necessarily mean the players are to sit idly by. The PCs are seated in a small room by a table, when the Revenant crashes through the window, immediately stabbing M. de Brionne and taking the dagger. They are surprised, so only the Danger Sense Talent could give someone the opportunity to act before the next turn.

The Hunger Demon follows just behind the Revenant, immediately attacking the PC nearest to the window, therefore opening the way out. Now, the PCs are no longer surprised – but they need time to draw their weapons, using something as improvised weapon, etc. Tackling a Greater Revenant or a Hunger Demon barehanded is not a smart idea, but they could try.

Remember, the plan is for the Revenant to jump out of the window with the dagger and disappear in the dark streets of La Rochelle. He will not try to kill a PC – this is the job of the Hunger Demon – but fight off anyone who stands between him and the window.

Greater Revenant

Ally 3

Archetype: Demon **Motivation:** Survival

Primary Attributes: Body 3, Dexterity 4, Strength 3, Charisma 4, Intelligence 2, Willpower 2

Secondary Attributes: Size 0, Move 7, Perception 4, Initiative 6, Defense 7, Stun 3, Health 5

Skills: Brawling 9, Intimidation 9, Melee 8, Athletics 9, Stealth 9

Talents: Flurry (May attack the same opponent twice by making a Total Attack with a –2 penalty on each attack roll), Keen Sense (+4 to smell-based Perception rolls), Hard to Kill *

Resources: None

Flaw: Dead (Cannot communicate)

Weapons: Cutlass 10L, Fist 9N

*) Greater Revenants can only be killed when literally hacked to pieces or burnt. Every L-damage is treated as N and can be regenerated like a normal wound. N-damage is not counted at all. They are susceptible to fire, though, and fire-damage is doubled and counts as L.

Hunger Demon

Archetype: Demon **Motivation:** Duty

Primary Attributes: Body 2, Dexterity 2, Strength 3, Intelligence 2, Charisma 0, Willpower 3

Secondary Attributes: Size 0, Move 5, Initiative 4, Perception 5, Stun 2, Defense 4, Health 5*

Skills: Brawl 5, Empathy 4, Intimidation 6*, Stealth 4

Talents: Fearsome (Temporarily frighten opponents), * Skill Aptitude (+2 Intimidation rating)

Resources: None

Flaw: Bestial (Character cannot communicate or use tools)

Weapons: Claws 6L, Teeth 7L

* The Hunger Demon cannot fall unconscious and is not hampered by wounds.

Trying to follow the Revenant is a rather useless business – it is fast and will not tire. Even if a PC can keep up with the undead, he will have to face the creature alone. A very nasty GM could give the Revenant support by another Hunger Demon or Revenant, which should suffice to throw the PC off its track.

M. de Brionne is fatally wounded his breath comes in short puffs, blood flowing freely from his belly. Short of magick, nothing will save his life anymore. With his dying breath, he whispers into the ear of the nearest PC:

“... have to get the dagger back ... ‘fore it reaches Paris ... will kill 66 people here ...”

It is possible, that some players already did some math before and recognized the pattern in the killings. Every day, one more is killed than the night before. It began with a beggar, the next night, two died, then three, four, and so on. It depends on the actions of the PCs, how many days have passed since the 13th and therefore, how many people have already died.

The Dominus fame will kill 66 people in La Rochelle, before he moves on towards Paris – a fact, M. de Brionne discovered only today and which brought death upon him.

6th scene: The hourglass of death

There are two ways for the PCs to learn about the things, M. de Brionne found out. They either save his life (by using magick, which could prove dangerous in the end) or they sift through the tome on the table – the Chronicles of the Seal, at it is entitled.

The book contains the whole story of the imprisonment of the Dominus fame, everything related to the chapel, like ownership, taxes, etc. But it also contains information about the demon itself.

In the year of the Lord, 1315, there was a terrible hunger in all of the Poitou, after the crops withered on the fields in summer and snow fell so thick in winter, it reached a man's breast. Then, there was freezing in May, which caused the crops to rot in the fields before they where even knee-high. Only the richest men could afford food this year and one of two people died that year of hunger.

But it was not only lack of food that caused people to die. Some people died suddenly, losing all of their substance over night and lying dead in their beds in the morning. And at night, after dark, the messenger of death was seen, walking the streets of every town and village, and when his arm pointed at a home, there would be death in the morning.

It was to this sorrowful place that Pierre de Laincourt returned to, the lands of his family since Carolus Magnus. He escorted the remains of S. Christophe from Toledo in Castille to the cathedral of S. Denis north of Paris.

When he heard the tales about the messenger of death, he went to his confessor, a man wise in the ways of the supernatural and the demons of hell, who immediately recognized the workings of a Lord of Hunger, a higher servant of Satan. He told Pierre de Laincourt, that only the relics of S. Christophe would be able to harm this creature of hell.

So, the courageous knight took the hand of the saint and went out into the streets at night, where he met the demon. Even his terrible gaze did not make him falter, and with the hand of S. Christophe, who guards us against famine, he drove the demon back, out of the town and into the swamps.

There stood a small wayside-chapel, a humble shrine to S. Christophe, where the confessor with the help of some of the good people of La Rochelle had built a prison-cell in the ground, strengthened by wards of faith. It was there, the valiant knight imprisoned the foul demon, sealing the chamber.

After Pierre de Laincourt had left for S. Denis, he made the people build a new chapel above the chamber, placing the baptistery on top of it. And never again where the people of Poitou befallen by such a terrible suffering as in this year.

A Lord of Hunger, it is written, serves the Pale Rider of the Apocalypse, Famine. His is the Power of Starvation, by which he can see every hunger a mortal soul hides, be it the hunger for food or that for power. It is here, that he drives his claws into the very soul, ripping it out of the flesh. The victim feels an insatiable hunger and, as much as he may eat, withers and dies in only one night.

Its gaze is terrible to behold and many a brave man has fled in terror before the empty eyes the demon hides beneath a monk's habit. For it always appears as a man of the cloth when it walks upon the Earth.

But a Lord of Hunger, a Deminus fame, never appears alone. He is always accompanied by his loyal servants the Hunger Demons. Riding the husks of dead men, they serve as his army, spreading death and destruction. Those they kill sometimes rise again as blasphemous creatures with the power of death in their veins. Revenants that prey upon the living.

With his unholy entourage, a Deminus fame savages a certain region, until he himself has killed a certain number of people. By all accounts this number is given to him by a Prince of Hell, either Famine or some other demon so foul, it holds power in Hell. This number may not be any number - it has to follow certain mathematical rules for he has to kill each night one mortal more than the night before.

When the number is reached, he has to leave the area - and do, what is his ultimate assignment: kill a king.

Last night, something terrible happened. I could feel the seal break, feel the power of evil rise from its prison, where my ancestors had kept it for so long. But I could also feel the unholy power emanating from the papist troops that have finally shut in our town.

I ran to the walls just to hear the cries of the poor souls that were torn to pieces in the darkness below. All I could do was to alert the guards to their suffering and let them open fire - at least, some of them may have the chance to escape and for the others, it is a cleaner death than at the hands of those that I could see in the fleeting light of musket fire.

God help us for the Lord of Hunger once more walks our streets at night. I do not know what number of deaths it is assigned for now, but I pray that it will not finish its work. For I fear for the worst, if the king should indeed fall prey to this most terrible of evils...

All this opens some more questions. What kept the Dominus fame from killing the king eight years ago? Why is it killing again? And most important: How can they get the dagger back?

7th scene: Buried business

Without the dagger, the future of France is at stake, for the Hunger Lord could go to Paris and kill the King. If M. de Brionne was right, the assigned number is 66, sixty-six souls that have to suffer for the contract to be fulfilled. When the last of the sixty-six is dead, the Dominus fame is free to kill a king – and M. de Brionne seems to have thought, that this king would be Louis XIII.

As stated above, it depends on the actual date how much time the PCs have at hand. Each night, the Hunger Lord will reap one more soul than the night before, adding to the assigned total.

If they left Paris on the 12th of March and where travelling ten days, they reached La Rochelle on the 22nd. Depending on their actions, it could now be the 23rd or 24th. This means (simple mathematics), that the total is now 36 or 45. So, they have two or three nights left.

Finding the dagger is like searching for a needle in a haystack – but it is a lot easier to find the thief. The Revenant may be a formidable opponent, but he is also a stinking corpse, a frightening sight for everybody.

The players can handle the investigations with an Extended Group Action with a necessary total of 15 successes. Appropriate skills are Investigation, Diplomacy, Streetwise, Con, Intimidation and Empathy.

- **Basic success:** A night-watchman was assaulted by someone he describes as “stinkin’ like a rottin’ corpse” in the Faubourg S. Eloy. It seems, the stranger ran into him, leaving him sprawling on the ground while running on.
- **2 – 3 successes:** Hearing the ruckus on the street, a woman looked out of her bedroom window under the roof and saw the stranger run at top-speed towards the cemetery.
- **4 – 5 successes:** Some people living in the Faubourg report strange noises coming from the cemetery since the first victims of the strange disease have been buried there. Most suspect grave-robbers to disturb the rest of the dead in the night, as there are some graves that have been found opened in the morning.

Visiting the cemetery during day-time is a clever choice. It is a humble cemetery around the small church of S. Eloy. Some gravestones rise up from the earth, but mostly it is just wooden crosses that mark the last resting places of the deceased.

The victims of the “disease” have been buried along the eastern wall, their graves marked only by wooden posts with a stylized snake burnt into it. It is the symbol of Asclepius, the patron of medicine. All of the graves are freshly dug, but two look, as though they have been recently opened again.

Near the church, a tomb houses the remains of the Brionne family. It is a stone building, looking like a small house, built of bricks, with a rusty iron door. Normally, the door is locked, but strangely enough, it swings open, when pushed. Stairs lead down into the ground, in a niche near the door stands an oil lamp and a firebox.

Someone has a very black sense of humour, because it is the tomb of the guardians that the servants of the Hunger Lord have chosen to occupy. The stairs lead into a small chamber, where stone coffins rest along the walls. It takes a roll on Investigation (DIFF 2) to see the traces of recent disturbances on two of the coffins.

In the middle of the chamber lie three corpses, obviously those that have died by starvation. When the PCs enter the tomb, those corpses begin to move, slowly rising up from the ground – as Zombies.

Zombies

Archetype: Everyman **Motivation:** Duty

Primary Attributes: Body 2, Dexterity 0, Strength 2, Charisma 0, Intelligence 0, Willpower 2

Secondary Attributes: Size 0, Move 2, Perception 2, Initiative 0, Defense 2, Stun N/A, Health 0*

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 5, Melee 5, Stealth 4

Talents: High Pain Tolerance (Ignore 2 wound penalties)

Resources: None

Flaw: Bestial (Character cannot communicate or use tools)

Weapons: Bite 5L, Punch 5N

** Zombies are immune to nonlethal damage and cannot be stunned.*

When the PCs fight the Zombies, the two Revenants stir in their coffins, opening the heavy lids and climbing out (which takes them 2 turns). One of the two is the one who stole the dagger (though it is rather unlikely that any PC will recognize it).

Greater Revenant

Ally 3

Archetype: Demon **Motivation:** Survival

Primary Attributes: Body 3, Dexterity 4, Strength 3, Charisma 4, Intelligence 2, Willpower 2

Secondary Attributes: Size 0, Move 7, Perception 4, Initiative 6, Defense 7, Stun 3, Health 5

Skills: Brawling 9, Intimidation 9, Melee 8, Athletics 9, Stealth 9

Talents: Flurry (May attack the same opponent twice by making a Total Attack with a –2 penalty on each attack roll), Keen Sense (+4 to smell-based Perception rolls), Hard to Kill *

Resources: None

Flaw: Dead (Cannot communicate)

Weapons: Cutlass 10L, Fist 9N

*) Greater Revenants can only be killed when literally hacked to pieces or burnt. Every L-damage is treated as N and can be regenerated like a normal wound. N-damage is not counted at all. They are susceptible to fire, though, and fire-damage is doubled and counts as L.

After they have taken care of the undead, the PCs can search the coffins, where they find the dagger. With the weapon in their hands, they now at least stand a chance of ending the curse of La Rochelle ...

8th scene: Hunting a demon

By now, the PCs should have killed most of the undead following of the Dominus Fame (keep track of any left-overs, as these can possibly support their master in the fight to come). It is time to go hunting for the Hunger Lord himself.

The demon only comes out at night – during daytime, he rests beneath the ground, in some cellar. It is a fruitless try to search for his resting place.

At night, he wanders the streets of La Rochelle, searching for his prey. It is not so easy for him as it was during the siege to find victims. Most people are well-fed, but there are enough that hunger for something, even if it is not food.

Let the players plan how they are going to find the Hunger Lord. When they do, stage the fight like a final scene, though it is not.

The Dominus Fame will first and foremost try to stay ‘alive’. When he sees the dagger, he will immediately try to flee. But he still has awesome powers and it should not be easy for the PCs to actually apply the dagger.

The dagger finally is able to harm him (1L), but it still has to hit.

Dominus Fame

Archetype: Demon **Motivation:** Survival

Style: 1

Primary Attributes: Body 2, Dexterity 3, Strength 8, Charisma 0, Intelligence 2, Willpower 3

Secondary Attributes: Size 0, Move 6, Perception 5, Initiative 5, Defense 6, Stun 2, Health 10*

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Intimidation 5, Survival 4, Stealth 4

Talents: Power of Starvation, Fearsome (Temporarily frighten opponents), Unarmed Parry (Can block Melee attacks with his bare hands at no penalty)

Resources: None

Flaw: Callous (+1 Style Point, whenever his behaviour causes trouble)

Weapons: Claws 13L

* The Dominus fame cannot be harmed by mundane weapons, cannot fall unconscious and is not hampered by wounds.

If the Dominus Fame is brought to below Zero Health by the dagger, his form begins to crumble, his robes seem to rapidly age and his flesh turns to dust. Every hit from now on makes his flesh crumble, until his body finally explodes into dust that is blown away by a gust of wind.

The demon has been sent back to Hell – but there are still questions to be answered ...

Act 4: L'Ombre de La Rochelle

The immediate danger for the King has been dealt with, but there are still a lot of unanswered questions. Who was the masked agitator in Paris and why did Josselin Egrette have to die? Why did the Hunger Lord not kill the King in 1628 and who set him free? What stopped his killing for eight years and why did it start again? What were Vallombreux and the Cardinal's Guards doing in the area?

The answers to these questions are not to be found in La Rochelle – they await the PCs in Paris. It is a strange story indeed that has transpired, to bring it all up to this point ...

On July 8th 1617, *Leonora Galigai* was beheaded at the *Place Grave*, her limbs cut from her body and burnt to ashes at the pyre. This was the end of the dominance of the Italian camarilla at the Louvre, and the rise of young Louis XIII to be the real ruler of France.

Her husband, *Concino Concini*, had been shot to death after his arrest on April 24th of the same year, right on the bridge to the Louvre. His body was hastily buried, but defiled by Parisians nevertheless. Their marriage had been childless – officially.

Leonora was known to suffer from a mysterious illness that produced crying-fits and bouts of asphyxiation, which caused her to spend most of her time in her rooms, surrounded by strange healing-stones, herbs and occult paraphernalia. At least that was, what she told the world ...

In 1605, four years after her marriage, Leonora gave birth to a boy – conceived during a blasphemous Sabbath. Nobody knew about her pregnancy – nobody save her husband and the King's mother, that is – and so the child could be raised in secret.

The boy was raised in a monastery in Lorraine, isolated from his parents and the court. But the monks there are not pious men – they are Satan's minions. They raised the boy to be a loyal subject to Satan, nourishing his considerable talents. When he turned 21, he was sent into the care of Cardinal Richelieu.

Though he knows his real name – Isaac Concini – the son of the Jewish witch Leonora Galigai now goes by the name of *Chevalier Loup Joseph de Haute-Forêt*. He is one of Richelieu's most trusted assassins, a man with an angel's face and a devil's heart.

In 1628 Chev. de Haute-Forêt was part of the Cardinal's retinue at La Rochelle. He knew about the plan, his master had on that fateful night, but was despatched to do other work. In the years to come, he would often hunt down those soldiers who just could not hold their tongues.

It was he, who found the hiding-place of the Dominus Fame in the end. With this, Richelieu began a new plan to end the old one. All he needed was another veteran who would like to tell his tale – and his servant delivered M. Egrette.

After Chev. de Haute-Forêt played with the old soldier and arranged his body, he took the role of the agitator, trying to spread fear and mistrust. When the King would die, the people should look to the

Cardinal for deliverance. This plan thwarted by the *chevaux noirs*, both he and his master are not really amused.

1st scene: Return to Paris

The return of the Black Riders to Paris goes unnoticed but for two parties – the *chevaux noirs* and their enemies. Lieut. de Saint-Claire hears their report with his usual stoic face then briefs them on what has transpired since their leaving.

“We have not been idle since you left for La Rochelle. While you were fighting your way south, we lost three good Riders here in Paris. By all accounts, there are already Revenants here in the city, though they seem to await orders. Our comrades have stumbled upon them while investigating the agitator and possible murderer of S. Eustache.

As I said, two of them lost their lives and one is still missing. You may have ended one threat for the King, but that’s not all. Maybe if you could find our missing comrade, this would set you on the right track.”

The missing comrade is Corp. Anne-Heloise Roquelaire. She and her two men were charged with the investigation on the agitator. The two men were found dead in an alley three days after the PCs left Paris, their bodies mutilated and defiled. The Corporal seems to have disappeared and for now is listed as MIA.

Le Docteur himself has observed the bodies and can tell the PCs everything he found. The dead have already been buried in the cemetery of S. Honoré (observing all possible rules to lay them to eternal rest).

“They seemed to have been in a violent fight. There where wounds all over their bodies, minor cuts mostly, but also a broken jaw and a smashed ribcage. What killed them obviously was a thrust through the chest, though. Their killers didn’t stop after they were dead – they hacked at the dead bodies, mutilating them in a most horrible way. And there were pieces of flesh missing, like someone started feeding on them.”

They were found in a narrow alley near *Les Halles*, but the last report of Corp. Roquelaire said that they were going to follow a lead on *Île de la Cité*.

2nd Scene: The missing comrade

Luckily for the PCs, Corp. Roquelaire is pedantic, when it comes to reports. She wrote daily reports to inform Lieut. de Saint-Claire of her investigations – and he keeps those filed away.

March 13th – Given orders to investigate in case of the deceased Josselin Egrette and the masked agitator at S. Eustache. M. Schomberg and M. Pommery are asking questions in the vicinity of *Les Halles*. I want to have a look at the church myself – the report of our comrades sounds a bit fantastic to me.

March 15th – M. Schomberg has a lead on a mysterious man that appeared “out of thin air” in a backyard. The witness saw him walk down towards the *Seine*, a hawker remembers the gentlemen buying some sweetmeats and crossing *Pont Neuf*. Investigations at the church brought nothing new but the witnesses seem to support the report of our comrades.

March 16th – It seems, we have attracted unwanted attention. Almost got arrested by Cardinals Men on some made-up accusation. Almost had to fight them but M. Schomberg’s “talents” prevented them from pursuing the thing to far. There seems to be more to this ... Almost lost track of the mysterious gentlemen but found a lead to a *Hôtel* near *Notre Dame*.

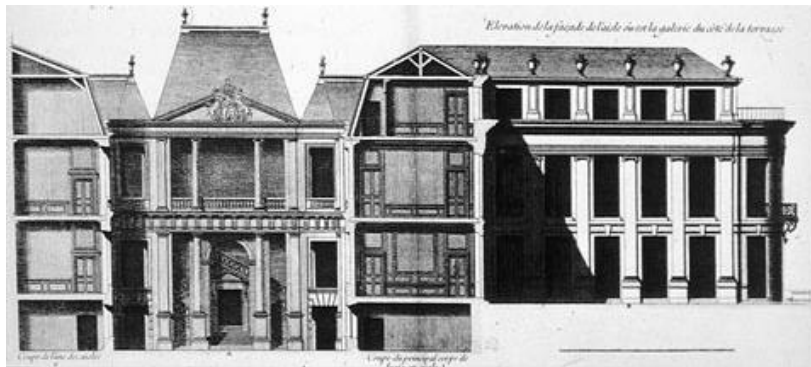
March 18th – The trail is hot again. M. Pommery had the *Hôtel de Mouraux* under surveillance and saw a gentleman that could well be our man leaving in an unmarked coach. He followed it to an alley near the *Louvre*, where the man entered through a narrow backdoor of a tavern. He left about an hour later and returned to *Hôtel de Mouraux*.

March 20th – We are blown! This may well be my last report. Last night, M. Pommery has been assaulted by a thing back from the grave, but not the usual shambling undead, but a quick and witty warrior that almost got him. Tonight, we will try to enter *Hôtel de Mouraux* and see if we find evidence that the mysterious gentlemen (whose name we still could not find out!) has something to do with the murder of M. Egrette.

This was approximately a fortnight ago, if the PCs are not too far off the timeline by now. M. Pommery and M. Schomberg have been found on the 22nd in an alley, equally near *Les Halles* and *S. Eustache*. There is no trace of Corp. Roquelaire since her last report.

The only real lead they have is the *Hôtel de Mouraux* – which already seems to have been the undoing of two *chevaux noirs*.

3rd scene: Hôtel de Mouraux



The *Hôtel de Mouraux* is located with its back towards the Seine on the northern side of *Île de la Cité*. As many other noble houses in the city, it is an old building – three separate buildings that is, closed towards the street by a tall wall and a strong gate.

The building to the east houses the stables, the hayloft, wood-shed and small rooms for the grooms. The building on the west-side is the servants-wing, including the kitchens. On the north-side, its back against the Seine stands the main building. On the western side of the servants-wing, there lies a small, but well-tended garden with herbs and vegetables, enclosed by a fifteen foot wall with rusty iron spikes on the top.

It is a dark and gloomy house, the main building rising to two stories height, dark stone walls topped by slate roofs and adorned with ghastly gargoyles that stare down on any stranger passing by. It has a bad reputation in the neighbourhood (Investigation DIFF 3).

The house is guarded at all times. By day, there are ten men at arms patrolling the house and yard, two men standing at the gate. At night, there are five men on watch, one at the gate the others on patrol. Additionally, three hounds are set loose in the garden at night – beasts that have already killed two would-be-burglars.

The small house opposite the gate is a needlers shop – on the outside. In truth, it serves as quarters for three men at arms that guard the *Hôtel*, jumping into the fray, if the gate is attacked. They also have muskets in the upper room, so they can even snipe at attackers from the windows.

All of the above information can be gathered in the neighbourhood (Investigation: Interview DIFF 3, Streetwise: Rumours DIFF 2). Additionally, getting on friendly terms with the servant staff of neighbouring houses can produce a heap of information on the noble who lives in the *Hôtel de Mouraux*.

By applying Streetwise (DIFF 3) or Diplomacy (DIFF 2), the PCs may gather some or all of the following informations:

- The name of the owner is Chevalier de Haute-Forêt.
- He came to Paris some years ago, apparently from Lorraine.
- He is a cruel master, who often has his servants flogged, even for minor errors.
- He uses a carriage without any arms – strange for a noble in Paris.
- He seems to be out of favour at court, because he never goes to the Louvre. But he often visits the Palais Cardinal.
- He is a very pious man who often locks himself up in a private chapel for hours on end.
- He is always accompanied by two bodyguards, men that scare anybody who comes near them. They never speak a word and their eyes have a far-away look.

The servants like to talk about *Hôtel de Mouraux* and its owner, because they fear both the house and its inhabitant. Chev. de Haute-Forêt is a mysterious man, who seldom shows his face out in the open, always keeping the curtains on his carriage closed. His private guards are bullies who like to shove the servants around, even forcing themselves on the girls.

It's open to the players how they want to proceed from here. They have to enter the Hôtel de Mouraux at some point, but how they try to do this, is up to them.

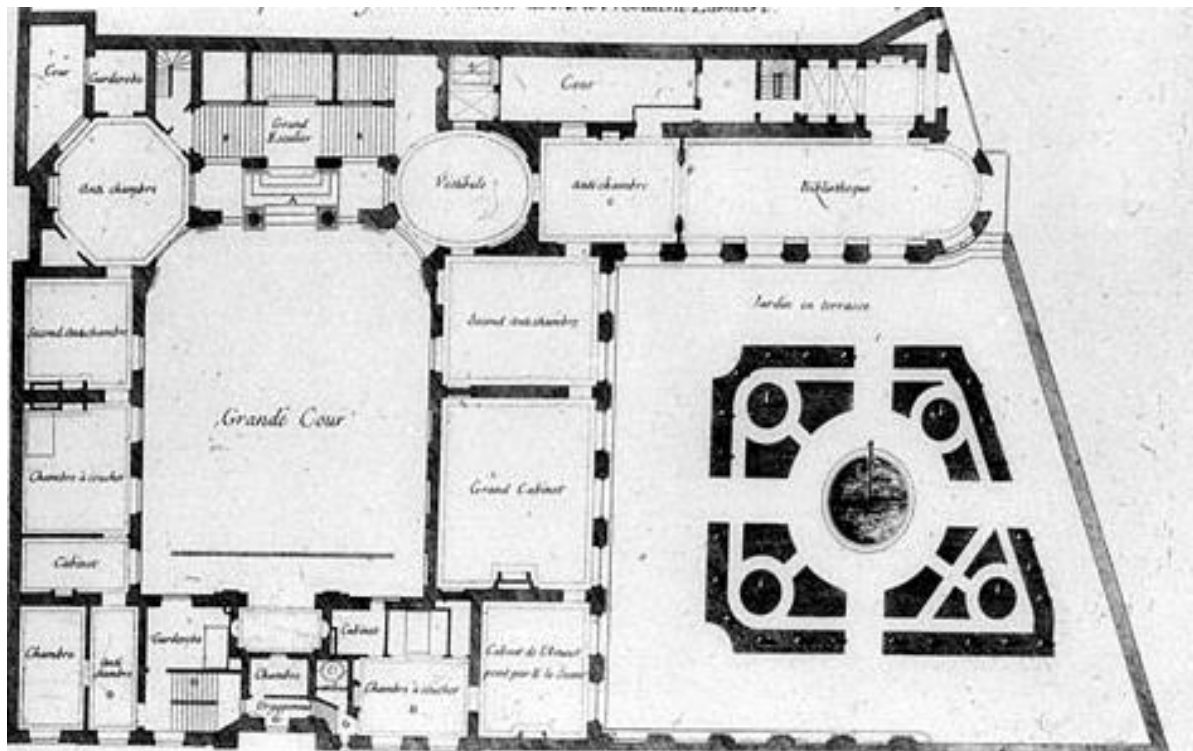
4th scene: To the rescue

Corp. Roquelaire is kept prisoner in the basement of Hôtel de Mouraux, in a secret part of the basement that is, that can only be reached by a secret stairway from the private chapel. Her hands and feet are locked in rusty shackles, chained to the damp wall in room without even a small opening besides the strong oaken door.

Kept in absolute darkness, raped and beaten, she borders on the edge of death. Once per day Chev. de Haute-Forêt himself forces some soup down her throat, mixed with strange herbs that keep her in a stupor for the rest of the day. Lying naked in her own excrements, she drifts between sleep and the horrors of her imprisonment.

To get to her, the Black Riders have to enter the Hôtel de Mouraux, make their way to the private chapel, find the secret door behind the altar and go down to the secret dungeons. There they have to force open the door to her prison cell and open the iron cuffs that bind her. Then, they have to transport the almost lifeless woman into safety ...

How hard all this shall be, depends on you, the GM. The Hôtel is large and with all its corridors and rooms almost a labyrinth. The guards may be not much of an obstacle for *chevaux noirs* that have overcome a Dominus Fame, but they are not the only dangers here.



There are two less risky ways of entering the Hôtel: coming through the garden or from the roof. At night, the hounds roam the garden, but they can be dealt with more or less easily (poison, magick, a thrown knife, etc.). The easiest way into the house is through the library – there is no guard here, as nobody has overcome the hounds until now. The door is barred, but the bar can be opened rather easily (Larceny: Lockpicking DIFF 2).

The roof is also not guarded. There are two small trapdoors that lead into the attic. Both are barred, but the bars are old and rusty and can be forced open with a simple roll on Strength (DIFF 2). This produces a loud noise, though, that will alert the guards on the second floor.

There is absolutely no way the PCs can talk themselves into the building. Chev. de Haute-Forêt never invites visitors and the servants are not allowed to see strangers on the *Hôtel*-grounds. Even the guards have to meet their mistresses outside the house.

Another possible idea could be to kidnap the Chevalier and force him to lead them to his prisoner. This course of action is extremely dangerous, though. Chev. de Haute-Forêt is a noble, if just a minor one, so any attack is considered high-treason and even the King would not save the PCs from the consequences. Additionally, the Chevalier is not one to be trifled with – he is a most dangerous opponent, ruthless and competent with magick and steel.

Guards

Follower 1

Primary Attributes: Body 3, Dexterity 2, Strength 3, Charisma 1, Intelligence 1, Willpower 1

Secondary Attributes: Size 0, Move 4, Perception 2, Initiative 3, Defense 4, Stun 2, Health 6

Skills: Firearms 3, Melee 6, Brawling 2

Talents: Riposte (Can attack after making a successful Parry)

Resources: None

Flaws: Overconfident (+1 Style point when he is forced to ask for help or when his bravado gets him in over his head)

Weapons: Punch 2N, Rapier 8L, Wheellock pistol 6L

Guard hound

Primary Attributes: Body 1, Dexterity 3, Strength 1, Charisma 0, Intelligence 0, Willpower 4

Secondary Attributes: Size 0, Move 5 (Run 10), Perception 4, Initiative 3, Defense 5, Stun 1, Health 4

Skills: Brawl 6, Survival 8

Talents: None

Weapons: Bite 9L

5th scene: Crossing swords with evil

In the *Hôtel de Mouraux*, this adventure reaches its climax. While the PCs may be focused on rescuing Corp. Roquelaire - and her knowledge - Chev. de Haute-Forêt has his own orders. With the Dominus Fame destroyed, he is to set the B-plan in motion.

When the PCs enter the house, he is packing up to go to the Spanish Netherlands. In his travelling chest, kept in a hidden compartment (Investigation: Search, DIFF 4), he has maps and papers, detailing the logistics of a military campaign. Strangely, there is no mention of any soldiers, or food for them.

Besides his personal house-guard, the Chevalier is accompanied at all times by two bodyguards, men who scare the servants – and are Greater Revenants in reality. As he is extremely paranoid, he always has a defensive Transportation-spell active.

If the PCs raise an alarm, he immediately sends one of his two undead bodyguards to settle the matter, while he himself prepares a spell that will transport him to a hut on the southern bank of the Seine. If the PCs get anywhere near him, he vanishes into thin air, making good his escape from his safe-house, while his second Revenant is ordered to kill Corp. Roquelaire.

There is – of course – always the possibility that the PCs somehow negate his magick. Chev. de Haute-Forêt is an accomplished fencer who will prove challenging to any Black Rider. But his first move will be to turn his attackers around, offering them money and rank (which he could indeed provide) – all the while working to put some distance between his attackers and himself.

The final should be staged dramatically, possibly making the PCs choose between killing their enemy or saving their comrade. Ideally, Chev. de Haute-Forêt survives, but if the PCs manage to kill him, let them. His name in this adventure is false, so the character can be easily replaced.

If he manages to take his papers with him, he may lose at least one, so the players get a hint on what lurks ahead for Paris. If he has to flee without his *portefeuille*, they have a lot to read and consider ...

Greater Revenant

Ally 3

Archetype: Demon **Motivation:** Survival

Primary Attributes: Body 3, Dexterity 4, Strength 3, Charisma 4, Intelligence 2, Willpower 2

Secondary Attributes: Size 0, Move 7, Perception 4, Initiative 6, Defense 7, Stun 3, Health 5

Skills: Brawling 9, Intimidation 9, Melee 8, Athletics 9, Stealth 9

Talents: Flurry (May attack the same opponent twice by making a Total Attack with a –2 penalty on each attack roll), Keen Sense (+4 to smell-based Perception rolls), Hard to Kill *

Resources: None

Flaw: Dead (Cannot communicate)

Weapons: Cutlass 10L, Fist 9N

*) Greater Revenants can only be killed when literally hacked to pieces or burnt. Every L-damage is treated as N and can be regenerated like a normal wound. N-damage is not counted at all. They are susceptible to fire, though, and fire-damage is doubled and counts as L.

Chevalier Loup Joseph de Haute-Forêt

Archetype: Soldier **Motivation:** Duty

Style: 3

Primary Attributes: Body 3, Dexterity 2, Strength 2, Charisma 2, Intelligence 4, Willpower 2

Secondary Attributes: Size 0, Initiative 6, Move 4, Defense 7*(15***), Perception 6, Stun 3, Health 5

Skills: Academics: Religion 6, Acrobatics 4, Athletics 4, Empathy 6, Fencing: Fiorentina 8**, Linguistics 5, Performance 4, Streetwise 4, Magick: *Transportation* 5, Magick: *Necromancy* 4

Talents: ** Calculated Attack (Uses Intelligence as Base Attribute for Fencing)

* Calculated Defense (Uses Intelligence instead of Dexterity when calculating his Active Defense and Defense ratings)

Magickal Aptitude (Theurgy)

Resources: Contacts 1 (Clergy; +2 bonus)

Flaw: Sadistic (+1 Style point when he causes pain or makes another one do so), Paranoid (+1 Style point if he correctly assumes an attack or intrigue)

Weapons: Punch 0N, Rapier 10L

*** Every morning, he casts *Deflect Attack* with a duration of 1 day on himself, so the spell is active through all of the day and night.

Deflect Attack

Transportation, Touch, 1 day, +8 Defense

This spell shrouds the caster in an invisible force-field that deflects any incoming attack by bending space around the caster. Melee and missile attacks do not hit, they just miss by inches.

6th scene: Aftermath and Foreboding

If the PCs manage to rescue Corp. Roquelaire, she will survive – but she will never be a Black Rider again. There are things that even a hardened mind cannot cope with, and of these Corp. Roquelaire has definitely had enough. It takes a lot to even get her talking (Empathy DIFF 4), but the things she still does not tell make her tale all the more horrible.

In the leather *portefeuille*, the PCs find answers to a lot of their questions. In 1628, about 4000 soldiers were sacrificed to release the Dominus Fame from his prison under the chapel (though it is never mentioned by whom!). About half of these men were consumed right at the spot, their souls sucked into Hell. The other half became imbued with unholy energy, raising them as Revenants.

As the Dominus Fame was driven into hiding, the original plan failed and was abandoned. Eight years later, Chev. de Haute-Forêt was despatched to find the demon again and finish the plan. When he found the Dominus Fame, he also found the hiding place of the Revenants and prepared the second part of the plan: sending them to the Spanish Netherlands to form a small army of undead soldiers.

A roll on Warfare: Strategy (DIFF 1) suffices to know, that an army like this could be the undoing of France as well as Spain, depending on which side it would be employed. As the PCs have ample knowledge about the Revenants, they know quite well what an army of these creatures could do.

But there is more. In the papers (even if it is just one sheet, if they could not stop the Chev. de Haute-Forêt from taking the rest with him) there is mentioned a “Grail” ...

If the GM wants to run this adventure as a stand-alone affair, he can just leave out the information in the papers, or having them contain only answers to questions the PCs did not solve until now. Otherwise, the story continues in *Le Graal des ténèbres* ...